

The Cultural and Technical Importance of Hogarth in the History of Artistic Forms

1. Hogarth's methods and moral purpose

1. From the "Grand Manner" to the "modern moral subject": Hogarth and the hierarchy of genres in painting.

a) History painting as the pictorial equivalent of the epic in classical genres-

Hogarth was never trained as a painter. He was married with the daughter of his master Thornhill, who decorated the cupola of St.Paul's cathedral. Thornhill was the only native artist who obtained a distinction in the "Grand Manner" (noble history or military paintings) which was at the top of the hierarchy of genres as far as painting was concerned. This genre had the same position as the epic in literature which was considered as the noblest literary genre (Milton's *Paradise Lost*). Both the "Grand Manner" and the epic have the same characters. They both refer to classical mythology, even when they describe contemporary events. The "Grand Manner" contemporary figures (States men, Generals...) were described in the same way as Virgile...

[cf. Thornhill's *Allegory of the Protestant Succession* (p20.Hogarth, David Bindman)]

All other genres were situated below, and the great historic paintings were the aim of each painter as it was the path of the Royal preference and patronage.

But Hogarth had no talent in this genre as he had no classical culture. As a matter of fact, a sticcess in this genre required a culture and education in the classical manner. However, he defied the best masters by painting huge mural paintings just to show that he was able to do better than Italian painters (Hogarth was xenophobic, especially against France).

b) The idealised portrait of the court tradition as opposed to the realistic portrait favoured by the middle classes:

Portrait painting described men, not actions. It was another way of getting the Royal preference. The portrait were idealised in so far as they were turning the characters into heroes in the way of classical heroes. They weren't suppose to represent the man, but the function, the image, the dignity of the religions or political situation. In the end, all the great men seem to look alike. These portrait described the status, not the private person. They all seemed to be changeable. A good illustration of this is the *Kit Kat Club* (Political Club: each member had his portrait painted by G.Kneller [cf.*English Painting*, W.Gaunt, p53]. They all look alike, but they differ by an emblem which represents their status.

This also corresponds to an artistic code which wasn't Hogarth's strong point. Moreover, these portraits implied official commission (contract) and he hadn't the relations that were, necessary. He could paint likeness for families, but they didn't represent the status. He represented the people as they were. He did many portraits, but familiar portraits of bourgeois audience [cf. *Captain Thomas Coram* (p169, Hogarth, Bindman)].

c) Idealised landscapes and seascapes: nature as *natura naturans* rather than *naturata*:

Underneath, was the idealised landscape or seascape paintings illustrated by French painters such as Poussin. Imaginary landscapes with hardly no human figures, except tiny ones (point of view of God and his glorious creation untainted by man). This type of painting had nothing to do with the Dutch outdoor and indoor paintings, showing men in their everyday occupations. These men were usually from the lower class and were not idealised. It's the kind of genre which corresponds to the comedy (describing people as they were supposed to be).

d) Hogarth's endeavours to challenge the traditional system of genres in favour of his moral series, or what Fielding describes as his "comic history painting":

Hogarth's problem was that, because of his origins, he had no place in this traditional hierarchy of the noble genres. He repeatedly attempted to vindicate the lower genres in the face of tradition, in order to obtain a status for such low genres: For example, the "conversation piece" (more Dutch than English), representing people in their everyday surroundings (snapshots of a happy family not in a static attitude), and his engraved series had no place in the hierarchy of genres, in the classical system. Hogarth's position in the 1720's is exactly similar to that of the new novelists such as Fielding, Richardson ... These authors were busy to vindicate these novels in the classical tradition of literary genres. In Fielding's 'Preface' to *Joseph Andrews*, he defines his novel as a comic epic in prose: his epic is not in verse but in prose, not tragic but comic ... but it still is an epic. He defines Hogarth series of engravings as "comic history paintings". Hogarth was attempting, with the same vindication dignity, what Fielding in literature was attempting to do [cf. chapter.VI Hogarth]. Hogarth never took up to this definition of Fielding. He was not a theoretician, but he was conscious of the novelty of his art. He talked of his "uncommon way of painting". He used such phrases as "modern moral subjects" rather than Fielding's definition. The stress on moral brings Hogarth closer to Richardson than to Fielding. He vindicates a place in the hierarchy of genres between the "Grand Manner" of the epic and the grotesque, the lowest in the hierarchy.

e) A dialogue between Fielding and Hogarth: 'The ' Preface' to *Joseph Andrews* and Hogarth's "Characters and Caricaturas":

[cf. chapter.VI Hogarth The print 39, p31 was a subscription ticket to *Marriage~a-la-Mode* (When he wanted to launch a project, he looked for subscribers to get the money he needed). The reference to *Joseph Andrews* is in the caption and in the legend. If you look at the faces, who are supposed to describe the inner life of individuals, they are not the same you can see on the bottom line. Two of them are more delimited than others, they are facing each other. Contemporary customers could recognise Hogarth's and Fielding's familiar nose. They are

characters and not caricatures. Fielding is also referred to in 9. In fact, there is a strict analogy between the novelty of the novel and the modernity of Hogarth's Progresses and characters. He meant that they have the same narrative and moral structure than Fielding's and Richardson's novels.

2. Breaking the Codes : The Rhetorics of Hogarth's Manner

a) *Emblematizing* : Hogarth's graphic puzzles and the tradition of allegories and emblems. The Puritan tradition, the tradition of emblem books, also his own father's didactic devices. Explanatory poems provided below the prints, and embedded objects within the print itself :

Emblematizing defines Hogarth's taste for pictures embedded within the main picture (objects, things which play a part in the whole). The reader is invited to recognize the significance of emblems which provide a number of elements in a puzzle. This taste for emblems was meant to help the uneducated readers to understand what the book they had in hands was about (it started with the Bible). Moreover, Hogarth was trained as a silver engraver which is a highly technical trade which implied knowledge with the alphabet of emblems. he had to engrave coat of arms, motto... It was a kind of silent code made to be deciphered. This specialisation accounts for Hogarth's taste for Rococo ornaments and elaborate details (each of which is likely to have a significance).

In order to understand and interpret these emblems, one has to be careful with the details that have a part to play in the significance. It is also a highly pedagogical system of mnemonic : Hogarth's father wrote teaching manuals full of mnemonic devices.

Hogarth also accompanies his prints with small poems in verse, and of poor quality when provided by himself, which are in a caption and help the reader to make the meaning of a picture, more explicit (this especially in his early works). The best examples, stress a connotation of the main meaning as a metaphorical interpretation, left to the reader to analyse.

b) The parodic subversion of the "Grand Manner". Illustrations for *Hudibras*: Hogarth's talent for the mock-heroic. The high style parodied in its themes and structures:

Hogarth started as an illustrator of Samuel Butler's *Hudibras* which is a burlesque, a description in heroic terms of low subjects, a satire of the Puritans. The poem was so popular that it gave its name "Hudibrastic" to octosyllabic couplets with comic rhymes. *Hudibras* was an English Don Quixote, a Presbyterian knight, who set out on horseback with his sectarian squire Ralpho. Don Quixote was a foundation of the parody in medieval romances. Hogarth did a series of large scale parodic illustrations for it. At the same time, he vindicates his place in a national tradition thanks to literary models and Swift in particular. he also makes an allusion to Shakespeare, Milton, and Swift in particular, *Gulielmus Hogarth* where the three books are of the three authors. Many effects can only be understood as parodic allusions to the grand style, in the choice of themes and in the prevailing themes of corruption and degeneracy of the modern age, to be opposed to the mobility of former, ages. This theme, of corruption is the favourite of satirists in verse, It is possible to find subverted traces of the "Grand Manner" in Hogarth's.

c) Stage effects and dramatization, The influence of the stage on Hogarth : type and motifs, the

spatial organization of the picture, the pervading theme of illusion:

Hogarth's engravings are theatrical (he was a theatre goer). One of his early theme is theatre [cf .A Just View of the British Stage]. One of his most famous is The Beggar's Opera which was a great success, a famous play, a kind of operette illustrated by parodic songs. This scene is significant because it describes a scene on the stage but at the same time, in prison. It's a fusion of two of Hogarth's main themes: the prison and the stage. Most engravers provide stage light effects, but also themes and characters. Such themes as theatrical illusions: role playing, hypocrisy of modern society... are precisely Hogarth's favourite devices. For him, everybody plays a role. Beer street Gin Lane can be seen as outdoor scenes which can be analysed as dumb shows i.e silent stage-like, representation of a social scene.

d) From book illustrations to the narrative -series How to read Hogarth? Hogarth and the "rise of the novel". Similar association of "entertainment" and "instruction", and the same anti-heroic (or anti-romance) position. The novel and Hogarth narrative series: When you read a novel by Fielding, there are some codes, themes... It's the same for Hogarth: there are some codes in order to decipher the proliferating allegorical puns. Both Fielding and Hogarth deal with contemporary England, They describe the world of their readers, the world of 1740's 50's in London. Hogarth's work can be seen as iconotext (picture + text).

The most sensational aspect of Hogarth's work is his tendency to group his works in narrative series (progresses: Rake's Progress ; A Harlot's Progress...) which tell a story with, usually, a catastrophic end. The reading of an individual plate can never abstain from looking at the others in the series. He very often uses prolepsis which is a kind of forward warning that suggests what is going to happen later.

Ex: The Harlot's Progress

The basket with the dead goose is a present the girl from the country has taken to her relation in town (one can read on the label: "For my Lofting Cosen in Tems stret in London"). It is significant as there is an echo between the girl and the goose. If we follow the line of the girl's glance, it points to the goose: she contemplates her future fate without recognising it. It's a silent warning for the reader. Moreover, goose is a slang word for a young girl who is silly. The goose is the emblem of the fate. If we extend the glance line, on the left. We meet a church man who looks on the other way, turning his back to her. He is unconcerned by what is happening. He allows his horse to cause an accident which is an allegorical expression of the girl's fall (the fall of the basket). In fact, she comes from the country of Edenic innocence to London, place of corruption. Moreover, the line establishes a connection between the church man and the girl, that should have taken place.: the parson's duty as opposed to his non concern of the girl's needs.

It is a social discourse of the lack of concern of the church, more interested in its own welfare, than in the one of its parishioners.

The man who is coming out of the house and looking at the girl was a well known figure, in London. He has recognized a prey, also a kind of preview of what is going to take place.

Hogarth usually tended to group his series in progresses or in different time of the day, in terms of pairs which could be chronological (before/after) or statio (Beer street/Gin Lane)
Hogarth's work is not a collection autonomous progresses or series of series, but makes a whole in which the same topics are being discussed, in terms of additions and contrasts. There is one whole discourse: London ways of the world.