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Henry Fielding and William Hogarth, the correspondences of the arts

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INTRODUCTION

William Hogarth (1697-1764) began his career as an engraver of satirical prints and a painter of conversation pieces. In the 1730s he started on the three progresses for which he became famous: *A Harlot's Progress* (1730-32), *A Rake's Progress* (1734-35) and *Marriage à la Mode* (1742-45). He called them "modern moral Subjects" and "a Field unbroke up in any Country or any Age."¹ Henry Fielding (1707-54) became well-known in the 1730s as a writer of burlesques, satirical plays, and comedies of manners; in the 1740s he began writing the novels on which his fame rests: *Joseph Andrews* (1742), *Tom Jones* (1749) and *Amelia* (1751). He called them "comic Epic-Poems in Prose," and "this kind of Writing, which I do not remember to have seen hitherto attempted in our Language."²

Both Hogarth and Fielding claimed that they were attempting something entirely new, and their attempts seem analogous: both are true to nature, topical, ironic and moralistic; both the progresses and the novels are full of verbal puns and stylistic parody. There are cross-references too: Fielding defined his art in terms of the art of the painter, directing the reader to Hogarth and linking his own "comic epic" to Hogarth's productions by calling them "comic history paintings."³ Hogarth returned the compliment in the subscription ticket⁴ to *Marriage à la Mode* where he directed his "readers" to Fielding: "For a farther Explanation of the Difference Betwixt *Character & Caricatura* See ye Preface to Joh Andrews."⁵ From the 1740s onward, Fielding frequently alluded to Hogarth, defending both himself and the painter against the charge of "lowness". In *Amelia*, for instance, the house of the good Dr. Harrison is furnished with "no one thing in it that may not be absolutely necessary,

1. "Autobiographical Notes," Burke, p. 216.

2. "Preface," *JA*, pp. 4 and 3.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

4. Most of Hogarth's prints were sold by subscription. Subscribers had to pay half of the price on subscription; the "subscription ticket" was their receipt (the remaining half was paid when the prints were delivered). Hogarth sold most of his paintings by auction, and some in a lottery.

5. The subscription ticket *Characters and Caricaturas* was given to subscribers to *Marriage à la Mode* in April 1743; for a description of it, see below, pp. 45-46. Hogarth refers to Fielding's remarks on the difference between "character" and "caricatura" in the Preface, *JA*, p. 6.

except books, and the prints of Mr. *Hogarth*, whom he calls a moral Painter."⁶ In his revision of *Amelia* Fielding emphasized even more strongly the moral content of Hogarth's works by changing "Painter" to "Satirist."

Not only are there parallels and cross-references in their works, the careers of Hogarth and Fielding seem to have had much in common. Thus both were staunch Whigs and active in legal and social reform. Fielding was magistrate of Bow Street, Chairman of the Quarter Sessions of Westminster, and co-founder of the Universal Register Office (a kind of Labour Exchange). Hogarth was Governor of St. Bartholomew's, Bethlehem, and the Foundling Hospital. He published the *Four Stages of Cruelty* in 1751, the year in which Fielding published his *Enquiry into the Causes of the late Increase of Robbers* which, in its turn, was followed a few weeks later by Hogarth's *Gin Lane and Beer Street*. It looks like a joint effort.

The works and careers of Hogarth and Fielding, then, seem to be remarkably similar in quite a few respects and to an extent which makes it seem undesirable and perhaps impossible to write about either without referring to the other; indeed, they have often been linked in scholarly discussions of their work. Wilbur L. Cross foreshadowed the modern critical commonplace — that Fielding and Hogarth influenced each other to a considerable extent — when he said that "Fielding's tendency to exaggerate was checked by the example of his friend Hogarth, which showed him how in a sister art character and incident may be heightened for comic effect and yet escape caricature."⁷

The habit of casually bracketing Hogarth and Fielding has a long history, and its underlying assumptions have to a certain extent determined readings of their work. One of the difficulties with this conventional view is that it tends to colour the facts. For instance, many works on Fielding and Hogarth state as evidence for their assumed friendship that Hogarth designed tickets for benefit performances of some of Fielding's plays.⁸ He did so for two plays only, *An Old Man Taught Wisdom* and *Pasquin*, and in both cases the benefit night was not the author's.⁹ It is also believed that Hogarth designed the headpiece to

6. *Amelia*, III, 12 (First ed., 1751), I, p. 271.

7. Cross, I, p. 323.

8. See Cross, I, pp. 171, 196, and W. Gaunt, *The World of William Hogarth* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1978), p. 75. A "benefit" was a performance the receipts of which (after house charges) went to the actor, actress, author, or theatre employee whose "night" it was.

9. Hogarth designed a ticket for the benefit night of John Laguerre in *The Old Man Taught Wisdom* (1735) and one for the benefit night of John Roberts in *Pasquin* (1736). Laguerre, who was not only an actor but also a scene painter, was in the same Masonic

Fielding's periodical *The Jacobite's Journal*;¹⁰ this can be seriously doubted in view of the fact that Hogarth shows in his *March to Finchley* that he does not know that Fielding's periodical is anti-Jacobite.¹¹ R.H. Hopkins thinks that it is significant that both Hogarth and Fielding allude to the sex shows in the Rose Tavern.¹² But this merely proves that both were acquainted with what was going on there, and does not reveal their reasons for alluding to it the way they do; it surely cannot serve as evidence of their mutual indebtedness. Frequently, Fielding's obvious literary sources (e.g. Lucian, Cervantes, Marivaux) are not given the emphasis they deserve, because the supposed Hogarth-Fielding analogy is given pride of place,¹³ nor is Hogarth's being Fielding's senior by ten years ever taken into account. On closer analysis it appears that many Hogarth and Fielding studies contain a number of "facts" that turn out to be fictions, just as there are, in fact, many stock notions about Fielding that have no basis in reality: the myth, for instance, that he was a profligate, pub-crawling hack writer (a myth expounded by his influential biographer Arthur Murphy,¹⁴ and dispelled only in this century), or the notion that Fielding turned to the novel because the Licensing Act of 1737 made it impossible for him to continue his dramatic career.¹⁵

The purpose of this study is to ascertain the extent to which we can say that Hogarth influenced Fielding in the conception of his "new Province of Writing."¹⁶ I will concentrate on Fielding, not only because I am no art-historian, but also because most students of the subject approach it in the course of a study of Hogarth's work. By approaching it from the other side I hope to throw a different light on the subject. Besides, all the

Lodge with Hogarth; his lampoon on the theatre war is quoted with approval by Hogarth in *Southwark Fair*. Nothing is known about Hogarth's relation to the actor John Roberts.

10. See *JJ*, p. lii. and A.P. Oppé, *The Drawings of Hogarth* (London: Phaidon, 1948), pp. 20 and 45.

11. See W.B. Coley, "Hogarth, Fielding, and the Dating of the *March to Finchley*," *JWCI*, 30 (1967), 317-26.

12. R.H. Hopkins, "Language and Comic Play in Fielding's *Jonathan Wild*," *Criticism*, 8 (1966), 213-28; the article is partly reprinted in *Henry Fielding: Penguin Critical Anthologies*, ed. C.J. Rawson (Harmondsworth, 1973), pp. 455-56.

13. See my remarks on Moore, Paulson, *et al.* in chapter 1, pp. 24-29 below.

14. See pp. 12-13 below.

15. In fact, Fielding's plays continued to be published and performed after 1737. He had a share in *Miss Lucy in Town* (first performed on 6 May 1742), and revised an old manuscript for the stage in February 1743: *The Wedding-Day* (first performed on 17 February 1743). He published his *Dramatick Works* in two volumes on 28 October 1745.

16. Fielding wrote: "I am, in reality, the Founder of a new Province of Writing" (*TJ*, II, 1, p. 77).

evidence available seems to point to the influence running from Hogarth to Fielding and culminating in Fielding's novels of the forties.¹⁷ What I should like to investigate is what exactly Fielding learned from Hogarth, how Hogarth's example helped Fielding in achieving, say, *Tom Jones*, what common theoretical ground they trod — or, for that matter, whether the critical commonplace that they influenced one another is true at all. In order to place my discussions in the necessary perspective, I will first survey the long history of the Hogarth-Fielding analogy and comment upon the ways in which the painter and the writer have been bracketed (ch. 1). Next, I will compare the careers of Hogarth and Fielding (ch. 2), and discuss the problems which are raised by the idea of the parallelism between verbal and visual art (ch. 3). After a close analysis of Hogarth's progresses (ch. 4) I will compare the art of Hogarth and Fielding in detail (chs. 5, 6 and 7) and, finally, discuss Fielding's last novel *Amelia* (ch. 8).

17. See F. Antal, *Hogarth and his Place in European Art* (London: Routledge, 1962), p. 22, and Paulson, I, p. 470.