



## **Hogarth's London**

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Whatever the virtues of this country, we are not terribly good at honouring our artists. There's Gainsborough's house, there is the Watts Gallery near Guildford, and that is about it, and so how very appropriate it is that Hogarth is most famous really as the name of a roundabout! Perhaps it is a fitting measure indeed of just how urban an artist Hogarth was.

His house now nestles beside one of the worst dual carriageways in Britain. It was once in the country as it is shown by an etching he made late in his life. He rests in a churchyard, St Nicholas Chiswick, that few people, alas, seem to visit. Rather oddly, it contains Whistler as well, but perhaps that is also appropriate. Hogarth's epitaph, which you can read on the very handsome tomb, was formulated by Dr Johnson, who of course remarked that he who was tired of London was tired of life, and the terms of the epitaph were finalised by their mutual friend, David Garrick, the great, possibly the greatest actor of all time, who lived off the Strand, and collected Hogarth's works. Most of those he collected can now be seen in the Sir John Soanes' Museum in Lincoln's Inn Fields. His favourite image of course, being an actor, was of himself, Hogarth's great painting of Garrick as Richard III. But he much preferred the engraving, because like any film star, he would sign copies of it, like a photograph to give away to his fans. But this is only one of the many, many connections between Hogarth's art and the theatre.

Hogarth of course himself lived in theatre land, in the middle of town. He used to go to the country - he went to the country for about nineteen years, before finally buying a little house in 1749, but he retained his main house in London. He lived in Covent Garden throughout, first, at the sign of the 'Golden Ball' in Little Newport Street. He then moved to Leicester Fields, which is now of course, Leicester Square, at the sign of the 'Golden Head'. His mother moved from their home territory of Smithfield, where his sisters continued to live, just near Bart's Hospital, and she lived in Cranborne Street, where she was fairly indomitable old lady and seemed to be going on forever, until someone deliberately started a fire in Thistle Court which consumed most of Cranborne Street at the same time. She died in 1735, which was the year in which Hogarth began or re-founded the St Martin's Lane Academy.

Hogarth had not had a very comfortable start in life. His father was a classical scholar, but lacked all the entrepreneurial resilience that was such a mark of Hogarth's own success. He had plenty of ideas, Richard Hogarth, they just were not very good ideas. Like his son, he was quixotic, but unsuccessful. And so it was that the family moved from St John's Gate, where Richard Hogarth ran a coffee house, to the debtors' prison, Fleet Prison, and for a very good reason.

Now, coffee houses were, in principle, a fantastic idea in the early part of the 18th Century. Everyone was starting coffee houses and they all had different specialties. One, for example, dealt in insurance - that is Lloyd's. Another dealt in gambling as it were - that is White's. So many of them survived. In some, you spoke in French, in some, German, in some, Spanish, and so on and so forth. Hogarth's father, being a classical scholar, decided the distinctive feature of his coffee house would be that everyone would speak in Latin or Greek and so he and his family landed up in the debtor's prison.

But to give you a further insight, in Hogarth's picture, just next to the rake on the table is a piece of paper that said 'A scheme to rescue the National Debt'. This is obviously a very characteristic Hogarthian joke. The devil is always in these details, so what could be funnier or more sick than the rake incarcerated with his family in the debtors' prison writing to the Lord Chancellor with a scheme to rescue the National Debt! Well, there is nothing so strange as life itself! Richard Hogarth, when incarcerated in the debtors' prison, actually wrote to the Lord Chancellor with a scheme to rescue the National Debt!

But Hogarth's life in London then is really everywhere reflected in his pictures. He was married to the daughter of the painter of Greenwich Great Hall, Sir James Thornhill, who lived just outside the Church of St Paul's, Covent Garden, in the Piazza. We have Hogarth's view of this from four times of the day. These pictures are actually backwards because he was trained as an engraver, so he thought backwards. Therefore he would sometimes paint backwards because he knew that the print would turn out the right way round, but that is a minor complication among many.

Hogarth's own drawing master, Louis Cheron, creator of many majestic images for his students to copy from, lived at the sign of the Green Door in the little Piazza, which is of course the area near the Floral Hall.

Just as a little digression, Louis Cheron is one of those people who nobody knows anything about, but I do now actually, and I write about him in Hogarth, France and British Art. I thought it would be rather fun to find out what paintings by Louis Cheron survived, and lo and behold, there are two in Notre Dame, of massive size, in the centre of Paris, and an even bigger one in Venice, at San Pantalon, painted when he was just 23 years old. It measures thirty feet by forty feet, if you can imagine. It is just on the right hand side of the altar. So do, I urge you, when you are next in Paris or Venice, just look up Louis Cheron. It is rather quirky I agree, but the main point is that Hogarth, as I shall return to, was actually taught by a very important French artist.

When Hogarth painted the orgy scene in *A Rake's Progress* he set it in London, in the Rose Tavern, which was at the top of Drury Lane. At the other end of Drury Lane was the Academy of Ancient Music - I wonder how many people know that it was actually founded in the late 1720s. It met fortnightly at the Crown and Anchor Pub near St Clement Danes. Hogarth and his chum, William Huggins, who incidentally, rather oddly, was the son of the most notorious warden of the debtors' prison, a great friend of Hogarth's, were both members of the Academy of Ancient Music by 1728. When Hogarth began to run his artists' academy in 1735, as I mentioned, it was not all that far away, opposite what is now the Coliseum, and in this academy, he himself had trained in its former shape when it was run by somebody called John Vanderbank, a very interesting painter actually, and Louis Cheron, who I have already mentioned, on exactly the same site. In a little lane, opposite the Coliseum he shared a studio with a French sculptor, Louis Roubiliac, who made a very great terracotta bust, in the National Portrait Gallery, of Hogarth at the time. One of the greatest losses in art is that, together with this terracotta bust of Hogarth, Roubiliac also modelled Hogarth's pug dog, called Trump, as a puppy, but it has been lost. That was exactly why Hogarth, when he did his self portrait with Trump, included the dog, because in existence there was already a double portrait in the form of two terracotta sculptures by his friend Roubiliac. But it is when you touch upon on this kind of thing, Vanderbank, Cheron, Roubiliac, that we come to one of the most significant aspects of Hogarth's London, and that is its truly international and cosmopolitan character.

Hogarth's probably most famous for his engravings, and indeed they are often referred to as cartoons, a term he would have in fact disliked very much, because he made a distinction between what he called character, characterisation, and caricature, which he felt erred on the side of becoming a cartoon. But he was certainly most famous for his engravings rather than his paintings - he was a very, very great painter - but perhaps as famous for his equally offensive remarks and satires about the French. In fact, many of Hogarth's best friends were French, yet he still has this reputation of being very pro-British, very anti-French and very chauvinistic, and Hogarth certainly encouraged this impression. The very interesting, but rather insular, exhibition at the Tate Gallery did nothing really to dispel this impression. The truth is much more complicated, I feel, and has a lot to do with the nature of London at the time. Hogarth was certainly 'un rosbig'. I spend quite a lot of time in France, as it happens, and I do so enjoy the fact that all the rugby reports in the *Figaro* never refer to 'les Anglais' but only 'le rosbig' - that is what you say when you are writing a rugby report, and not just in the sense of being a red-faced Englishman abroad. Hogarth actually was a founding member, in 1735, of the Sublime Society of Beef Steaks - isn't that lovely, a club dedicated to all things British, notably beef steaks, and defying everything French?! And yet, in practice of course, and this is one of the things I love about Hogarth and about the society of the time, they could not have been too xenophobic at all, because one of the most famous of the two dozen limited membership of the Sublime Society of Beef Steaks was one of the most famous French people alive in London at the time, a dancer called Francois Nivelon, a very close friend of Hogarth and of other artists, who wrote a fascinating etiquette book. If you want to know how you should sit, stand, speak - you may smile but you must not laugh in 18th Century London - you should read Nivelon's 'The Rudiments of Genteel Behaviour', a wonderful book, and I recommend it to you if you can ever find a copy.

For much of Hogarth's life, it is a matter of fact that the impossible relationship between England and France was exceptionally easy. Peace was established in 1717 - Hogarth was born in 1697 - and it lasted until war finally broke out again in 1743, at which point it interrupted a trip by Hogarth to Paris, and then there was a temporary armistice five years later in 1748. What did Hogarth do? He went to Paris again. I suspect that there were more than these two famous recorded instances.

We know more about the 1748 visit and it seems to have been a bit of a disaster, because Hogarth was actually arrested at Calais on the way home whilst sketching the gate of the city. It was of course part of the fortifications, rather obvious really when you think about it, and so he was arrested as a spy, because it was only an armistice, and not a full peace. He was released, and on his return to London, he painted this famous image of the Gate of Calais, which implicitly contrasts the oppressive nature of the French regime and rapacity of the Roman Catholic Church. In it there is a friar, bang in the centre, prodding a huge side of, potentially, roast beef. The Sublime Society of Beef Steaks' motto was in fact 'Beef and liberty' and the club song was 'Oh the Roast Beef of Old England', which is the title of the engraving that Hogarth made after this painting.

But as so often, despite his fury over the arrest, Hogarth's good humour softens the blow and, he actually incorporates himself being arrested in this scene. But during his trip to Paris. In 1748, he does not seem to have been in a terribly good mood. He got very bad-tempered as he got older. The engraver, Thomas Major, a pupil of Jacques Philippe Le Bas, who Hogarth had actually recruited to engrave for him five years early, quite interesting, Thomas Major recorded how Hogarth would walk around the city pouring abuse upon everything French, even the interior decoration. He said: 'He was sure to be dissatisfied with what he saw. If an elegant circumstance, either in furniture or the ornaments of a room, was pointed out, his narrow and constant reply was, 'It is French! Their houses are all gilt and beshit!' and in the streets, Major tells us, 'He was often clamourously rude.' He was all five feet tall, in a greatcoat and boots, and he sounded rather like an English football fan. But the phrase 'all gilt and beshit' is actually rather good, because it in fact refers to rococo plasterwork, looking like bird droppings, and of course the gilt covering them.

When in Paris, Hogarth had actually been to visit two of the very greatest French painters, who he was on record as admiring - Jean Baptiste Chardin, and Maurice Quentin De La Tour. Indeed, in the Gate of Calais, although painted in fury, it actually contains this very charming homage to Chardin, in a reflection of a still life painting that Chardin had only just completed. Also, when Hogarth went to Paris in 1743, five years earlier, to commission Jacques Philippe Le Bas and five other French engravers to make prints after his most brilliant painted series 'Marriage a-la-mode'.

It is interesting that there's another homage to Chardin hidden away in this final picture of the series, 'Marriage a-la-mode'. On the right hand side, if you look at that tablecloth, that actually is a reference to Chardin's still life called 'The White Tablecloth'. On the Chardin jug on the floor there is an image of Hogarth painting the scene in front of him with a window behind him which he rather carefully incorporates it in the engraving. It is right at the end of the engraved series, and it is something of a 'Hogarth was here', right in the middle of this Chardin still life.

Yet still Hogarth retains this image of an unredeemed Francophobe, but I would argue that his achievements were founded upon the most thoughtful understanding of French painting and engraving of any British artist perhaps of any time, and his ambition was to establish British art as an independent school for the first time. There is no contradiction in that, because, like his contemporaries in the visual arts, in the theatre, in literature, Hogarth instinctively measured his achievement against French art and culture. We should not forget either that the upper and aspiring middle classes of 18th Century England spoke French. A notable case of this was the King, who of course was German, and so needed French so that he could talk to his Cabinet, and all Cabinet proceedings were carried out in French. Actually, it turned out, when I looked into this, that he would have been a good candidate for Richard Hogarth's coffee house, because the King, George I, conversed with Walpole in Latin.

But the significant thing of this is revealed by Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough. She must be one of the great termagants who ever lived. She was a real tartar, great woman, she lived to a huge age, but there was one occasion when she was confounded, and that was when she was delivering a note to the King at the Palace. Through some oversight in her upbringing, she had no French, and she was so embarrassed - the time only she was known to be embarrassed - that she left the letter at the gate of the Palace rather than being caught out not being able to converse in French with the King. It is by the by, but that's quite a significant insight I think.

Now, Hogarth developed an intimate knowledge of French art and decorative forms from a very early age

because, as a result of family misfortunes, he was apprenticed to a very important goldsmith, Ellis Gamble who was the business partner of the very great Paul de Lamerie. Many instances of Hogarth's familiarity with their kind of goldsmiths' work can be found. For instance, if you look at the bottom left of 'The Graham Children', of 1742, there is a de Lamerie silver basket on the floor in the left hand corner.

He tended to use, in a way that I find still rather baffling, rather inappropriate decorative borders, even on a gigantic scale. You will find this if you look at the staircase at St Bartholomew's Hospital. Hogarth characteristically painted this for free - he knew the value of publicity and tended to combine it with philanthropy. The decorative surround is quite inappropriate really for a picture measuring some thirty feet high, but he got it of course from a tiny little drawing, from the de Lamerie circle.

He created a book plate for de Lamerie and he also engraved for de Lamerie a very important commission of 1728, 'The Walpole Salver'.

In France, there was a state-run academy for training painters, engravers and sculptors. There was nothing of that kind in Britain until 1768, with the foundation of the Royal Academy. But artists had always taken it upon themselves to run academies in London. At about the age of twenty, in 1717, Hogarth began to train at that St Martin's Lane Academy I have mentioned before, and there, drawing in accord with the priorities of the Royal Academy in France was the principal discipline. It was taught by this Frenchman, Louis Cheron.

Cheron was a Huguenot refugee from the persecution that followed the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, and Cheron had won the Grand Prix de Rome - he actually won it twice. He won it when he was sixteen, he was so good, but he was too young to go to Rome; so then he won it again at the age of eighteen and went to Rome. Louis's father was one of the royal painters, Peintre du Roi. His elder sister, Elisabeth Sophie Cheron, was a full member of the Academie Royale, as were at least two cousins, and as a young man, Louis enjoyed the company of a very important writer called Roger De Piles, who was often to be found in the salon of Louis's sister, Elisabeth Sophie. Hogarth was therefore actually taught to draw by a personal friend of the most important French art theorist of the age, and Louis Cheron himself was a most distinguished product of the French academic system.

Elisabeth Sophie also pops into Hogarth's history, because first of all, she published a series of instructional drawings after Raphael, and this inspired Hogarth's father-in-law, Thornhill, to carry out a similar project. A copy of this book was actually in the house, the library, of Dr Richard Mead, the greatest physician of the time, in Great Ormond Street, where Hogarth was a regular visitor.

The precocious Louis - just a little further digression on dear Louis Cheron - had decorated his sister's house in Paris, including his 'Apotheosis of Hercules'. I found that the house still survives, I am delighted to say, 35 Rue de Grenouilles. It actually became an artist's house again in the Nineteenth Century. It was decorated by a sculptor, but the shell of the house is still there. Louis, even though living in London as an exile, continued to work for and with his sister, decorating for her another book that was in Dr Mead's library, a metrical version of the psalms. It actually had never been noticed - it is obvious really, once you start following these kinds of slightly recherché leads, that Hogarth obviously knew the books, and so these compositions of Louis had a very formative influence on Hogarth's imagination, and the very first scene of his first successful series, 'A Harlot's Progress', is actually indebted to Louis Cheron's illustration of all things, the Magnificat, which of course lends a wonderful irony, what would now be called a sub-text I think. In Hogarth's picture, the innocent young girl arrives in London, and is immediately taken up by the most famous brothel keeper of the time, Mother Needham, while in the background is the most famous rapist of the time, Francis Charters, spelt Charteris sometimes. You can see he was the man with his hand in his pocket, and yes, there is a reason why he was got his hand in his pocket. He in fact had just been arrested for rape. He had raped a great many victims and was very much in the news, and he of course, being Francis Charteris, actually founded the fortunes through blackmail of the Earls of Wemyss. I hasten to add that I was informed of this by the Earl of Wemyss so I am not telling stories out of turn! He had a thing called his little black book with which he blackmailed all the upper classes of England and Scotland and amassed a gigantic fortune, some of which they, unusually, still possess. Charters was therefore, and indeed Mother Needham, they were very much in the news, and so this is a particularly grisly introduction or meeting, and that is of course the link.

In Louis Cheron's illustration of the Magnificat you can see in the background two women meeting and a figure in the background and so on. The comparison is fairly obvious, and one does not want to labour the point.

Similarly, one of Hogarth's earliest and most ingenious compositions, 'Satan, Sin and Death', appears to have been influenced by Louis's illustration to Psalm seventeen, where in fact the words are resonant. The passage that he was illustrating, actually is 'the sorrows of hell compassed me about; the snares of death prevented me.' So there is actually a perfectly logical connection between the two things.

It is also been I think more usually pointed out that Hogarth's art was actually engendered, in many ways, not in terms of a straight influence from Louis Cheron or anyone else, but in terms of reaction. Very early on, he reacts against Louis's intensely academic approach. If you compare Louis Cheron's typical academic nude studies, and Hogarth's drawings from exactly the same time, you are looking at 'the nude' versus a woman. That is the difference really between Louis Cheron's academic art and Hogarth's much more human and imaginative approach.

By 1720 London was absolutely bursting with Huguenots. There were some 50,000 Huguenot refugees in Britain by about 1750, many of them engaged in the visual and decorative arts. This very unusual period of peace between the countries meant that British artists tended to travel frequently to Paris during these years, and many French artists, quite in addition to Huguenots, came to London. One of the most important of them all was Antoine Watteau, because he was being treated for tuberculosis by Hogarth's friend, Dr Richard Mead. When he was in London, he drew one of Hogarth's engraving collaborators, Bernard Baron.

Now, a history painting is perhaps the chimera of British art really. Because, in the absence of say the Roman Catholic desire for religious images and so on and a lively classical culture, how do you create history paintings which everyone thought of as the pinnacle of art? In this period, there was a hierarchy: you had history painting at the top; you had portraiture at the next level down; and then you graded all the types of art until still life right down at the bottom, which nobody really talked about. One of the problems in France was of course that Chardin was obviously a great artist, but painted still lifes - they could not understand it and they did not know what to do, so they made a special category in the Academie Royale. It took about ten years for them to work through the rules so that they could actually accept that their greatest living painter painted still lifes! Regardless, history painting was what you aimed at, and so Hogarth, throughout his life, aimed at history painting.

The first thing he did was 'Falstaff Examining his Recruits'. It is Henry IV Part II, but it is not Shakespeare's. It is in fact written by an actor called Betterton, a complete adaptation of Shakespeare which bears very little relationship to the original play. But Hogarth went to the theatre and made this drawing from the stalls, just sat in the front and drew directly from the stage and created the image for his painting. The reason he did that is because that was what Watteau did. Watteau, famously, used to go to the theatre and draw direct from the stage. Interestingly, I was able to work out that this was the case with this painting that Watteau created for Dr Richard Mead and gave to him. It was painted in London and engraved by Baron, Hogarth's friend. Watteau made the original drawing directly from the stage, but he made it in London, not Paris. So Hogarth had this very direct model for his own very unusual practice of drawing in the theatre.

So, Hogarth came up with the idea that, we cannot really do religious paintings, people are a bit sick of classical allegories and so on, what about Shakespeare? What about Milton? And that is where he starts to look. So when he does his first Shakespearean painting it is all very well to decide to do this, but what do you look at? How do you make a Shakespearean history painting? Well, interestingly, you look at French art, and what he did was look at a painting by Louis Galloche of Diana and Acteon of 1725.

Hogarth also painted a scene from Milton's 'Paradise Lost' Book 2 - 'Satan, Sin and Death'. Now, why did he pick this episode? As we all know, there is an awful lot of 'Paradise Lost', so why choose just this section? Well, the reason is Voltaire! It is one of the quirkiest things I have found out. The story is that Voltaire was in London between 1726 and 1728, and actually Voltaire was a great friend of John Gay, who wrote the 'Beggar's Opera' which was painted by Hogarth. When he was staying in London, he stayed with somebody called Mrs Conduitt, Catherine Barton, and she was a patron of Hogarth - he painted 'The Conquest of Mexico' for her. When he stayed in the country, he stayed in Hogarth's father-in-law's constituency with Bubb Doddington, who was a friend of Hogarth. When he was in the country, in Dorset, Edward Young met him and coined an epigram, which is very revealing: 'You are so witty, profligate and thin. At once we think thee Milton death and sin.' So, the reason for this is that Voltaire had published an essay with a very particular title: 'Upon the Epic Poetry of the European Nations from Homer Down to Milton.' In this he made only one real objection to 'Paradise Lost', just one, but it happened to be 'Satan, Sin and Death' and this is what Voltaire wrote: 'Sin brings forth death. This monster inflamed with lust and

rage, who lies with his mother, as she had done with her father, from that new commerce, brings a swarm of serpents which creep in and out of their mother's womb and gnaw and tear the bowels they are born from. Let such a picture be never so beautifully drawn, let the allegory be never so obvious, and so clear it will be intolerable on account of its foulness. There is no meaning in the commerce between death and sin. What signifies Satan and death quarrelling together, grinning at one another, and ready to fight?' Well, Hogarth obviously took this as a direct challenge and deliberately depicted all the grisly details that Voltaire explicitly objected to. Certainly, the only previous illustration of this passage, by Louis Cheron, funnily enough, bears no relation at all to Hogarth's quite brilliant invention.

But there is another connection and that is that Voltaire's favourite translator was one of Hogarth's closest friends, John Lockman, who translated the 'Lettres Philosophique', Letters to the English Nation, for publication in 1733. Dear John Lockman makes a most unexpected appearance in one of Hogarth's most famous images, 'Beer Street.' Right in the middle foreground, there are two fishwives looking at what is described as 'A New Ballad on the Herring Fishery by Mr Lockman'. Isn't that lovely?! Lockman was incredibly cross about this because he did so many other things, but he was known as 'the herring poet' because he was one of these people who 'hung lose' upon society. He was a hack basically, a very distinguished hack but a hack all the same, and one of the ways he made money was to act as Secretary of the Free British Fishery Society. He actually wrote a song called 'Britannia's Gold Mine or the Herring Fishery Forever!' Since he was also Poet in Residence at Vauxhall Gardens, he actually had it performed at Vauxhall Gardens, so he only had himself to blame really for going down in history as 'the herring poet', but that was how he got himself into that picture.

Voltaire's criticism of Milton was answered in a manner that suggests the very cosmopolitan nature of London, not in fact by anyone English, but by an Italian scholar, Paolo Rolli - he was actually, by the way, one of the two most important lyric poets of 18th Century Italy, and spent most of his life in London - whose own translation into Italian of 'Paradise Lost' began to appear in 1729. It is also a fact that this internationalisation of London, if I can call it that, coincided with an increasing sense of the value of native vernacular culture, such as 'Paradise Lost', the assertion really of what 'being British' might actually mean, and this was the motivation that drove Hogarth in practically everything he ever did. So it is that, along with the re-founding of that artists' academy that might produce a British school of artists, Hogarth also belonged to that Academy of Ancient Music that I referred to earlier.

The Academy of Ancient Music was actually dedicated to everything British. There was a split, there always is in these kinds of things, and the split here was between the Apollo Society, which was founded by Dr Morris Green in 1731, and the Academy of Ancient Music, which was wholly committed to the setting of vernacular English.

The most famous composer in London at the time was of course George Frederic Handel, and he was utterly committed to Italian opera, while developing a habit of upstaging native attempts at setting English words in oratorios. But Italian opera was fraught with immense financial problems and its decline was paralleled by the rise of oratorio, which of course culminated in Messiah in 1741. Throughout Hogarth's lifetime, this controversy over Italian opera was at the forefront of cultural life in London. First of all, it was incredibly expensive to put on and established by aristocratic patrons at the King's Theatre in Haymarket. Here it was entitled, not the Italian Opera, but in direct translation from French, the Royal Academy of Music - confusing, I agree! There were three resident composers, an orchestra, a chorus, a secretary - Paolo Rolli - and a host of imported stars, especially of course castrati. Basically, castrati and the female Italian singers were of course overpaid, overweight, and over here!

The President of the Academy of Ancient Music was a man call Pepusch, and what did he do? Well, he arranged the music for the hit musical of the century, 'The Beggar's Opera'. Hogarth of course cashed in on its success by painting several versions of the climatic scene. It was written by John Gay, assisted by Pope, Arbuthnot, Swift and so on, and the whole plot of 'The Beggar's Opera' specifically are parodies of Handel's recent opera, 'Alessandro'. It offered plain English and familiar folk tunes and it was a brilliant idea, the ballad opera, and it ran for 62 nights, which is a record. I think the closest was 23 nights otherwise. The last night was a bit of a surprise because the leading lady, Polly Peachum, was nowhere to be seen, and the reason was that she'd been taken away as a mistress by the Duke of Bolton.

As I suggested, he drew his images first of all directly from the stage, and in his final painted version, he does come up with a very ingenious double entendre, because Peachum says to his daughter, 'Set your heart at rest, Polly. Your husband is to die today' - that's the highwayman Macheath, who is in chains in the centre of the picture. 'Therefore, if you're not already provided, 'tis high time to look about for another.'

Peachum has his right hand gesturing over his left shoulder, and this is because the person at the very forefront of the painting on the right hand side is none other than the Duke of Bolton! So there is this wonderful interaction between the fiction of the play and the reality of the last night, when she was not there, and he had been, every night up till then.

One of the well-known tunes in 'The Beggar's Opera' was 'Sally in our Alley' It is by a man called Henry Carey, who not only tried to provide English opera but wrote many satirical verses about Italian opera. I do feel that I have got to share one of these with you, because it celebrates the triumph of 'The Beggar's Opera'. You need to know that one of Handel's singers was called Cuzzoni and another was Foustina and that the castrato was Senesino. If you think of 'Sally in our Alley', it goes:

*'There's Madame Foustina Cazzo*

*And the Madame Cazzoni*

*Likewise Snr Senesino*

*A tutti abomdomni*

*Ha-ha-ha-ha, do-rah-me-fah*

*And now but fast and folly*

*We ravished all*

*With toll-lol-lol and pretty, pretty Polly.'*

Of course there are tremendous plays on words here. 'Cazzo' is Italian for 'prick' and so Cuzzoni becomes Cazzoni, literally 'big prick', the whole point being that the women were singing with a castrato, and Cazzo Cazzoni no doubt also alludes to the fact that Cuzzoni and Foustina sang and fought like cats. In fact, they actually fought in the middle of Astianatte, an Italian opera, in 1726, and the whole opera house was shut down, the opera was pulled down. So, as they would say nowadays, there was history to this whole fascinating episode.

Now, as it happens, John Lockman wrote a very important essay on setting English words to music, which sometimes drove Handel to despair. Handel much preferred speaking French. He actually spoke to his musicians in French. One of Hogarth's very close friends was Dr Thomas Morell, who wrote a number of libretti for Handel and recorded all sorts of difficulties that Lockman analysed. Now, the key difference between English and Italian is that English is essentially iambic, which means di-dum-di-dum, di-dum-di-dum di-dum di-dum, whereas as Italian is actually trochaic - it goes da-dum da-dum da-dum - with me so far?! So one day, Handel and Morell were working on a libretto, incidentally out in Chiswick where Morell lived, close to Hogarth's house, on their oratorio 'Alexander Baylis', when Handel exploded. He said, 'Damn your iambics!' and Morell said, 'Don't put yourself in a passion! They're easily turned into troches!' 'What are troches?' Handel said. Morell replied, 'The reverse of iambics. By leaving out a syllable, instead of 'Convey me to some peaceful shore', I can write 'Lead me to some peaceful shore'.' Quite clever actually! And Handel says, 'That's what I want!' And so Morell says, 'Okay, I'll just go into the parlour and I'll change them straightway.' Incidentally, if you ever listen to 'Alexander Baylis', Handel actually goes back to the original, but that's by the by - it is a nice story.

Handel was utterly dedicated to Italian Opera and kept on writing it even though increasingly nobody wanted to go, and so everybody lost huge sums of money. For instance, £12,000 a year is calculated as Handel's loss in one calendar month. So by the middle of the century, everyone was getting completely fed up with Italian opera, and so Handel, cashing in, actually writes 'Messiah' in 1741, incidentally commissioned in Dublin by one of Hogarth's sitters, the future Fourth Duke of Devonshire. Hogarth produced a print called 'The Enraged Musician' which is entirely dedicated to noise. And the victim of all the noise is a professional musician who can be identified definitely Pietro Castrucci, who is none other than Handel's leader, the first violin in the orchestra of the Italian Opera. He was throwing up the window and swearing at everybody outside. There is somebody hammering pewter, there is somebody grinding knives, there is somebody beating a drum, there is somebody singing, the bells are ringing in the background, and he cannot hear himself think. There is a ballad singer next to his window, and a playbill on the wall next to the window, and what does it say? 'The Beggar's Opera!' And there's a parrot as well,

and that is pretty Polly of course.

Another of Hogarth's friends, Fielding, the novelist, writes about this when he found himself in 'the confines of Wapping and Rotherhithe tasting a delicious mixture of the air of both these sweet places' - this is somewhat ironic - 'and enjoying the sweet sounds of seamen, water men, fish women, oyster women, and the vociferous inhabitants of those shores composing altogether a greater variety of harmony even than Hogarth's in that print of his, which is enough to make a man deaf to look at.'

Now, despite Hogarth's print of 1741 celebrating the defeat of Italian opera and the success of all things British, it remains a fact of course that 'Messiah' was composed by a German, who spoke French to his singers and preferred setting English to Italian. Handel, in many ways, characterises Hogarth's London, as a truly European city. And yet, within this multi-lingual, multi-cultural perhaps, mixture, there was something precipitating out, a new sense indeed of national identity. Only one year before 'Messiah', there was a very British occasion, in 1740, for which Hogarth designed the ticket. This was the 'Masque of Alfred' composed by Thomas Arne, a British composer, and performed for Frederick, Prince of Wales, at Clivedon. It contained a well-known song, still performed at that post-imperial rite, the Last Night of the Proms, 'Rule Britannia', and when you think of it, that could well be Hogarth's motto.

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