

## Book Reviews



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***Enduring Presence: William Hogarth's British and European Afterlives, Book 1, Aesthetic, Visual and Performative Cultures***, ed. by Caroline Patey, Cynthia E. Roman, Georges Letissier, Peter Lang, Oxford 2021, xxiv + 331 pp.

***Enduring Presence: William Hogarth's British and European Afterlives, Book 2, Image into Word***, ed. by Caroline Patey, Cynthia E. Roman, Georges Letissier, Peter Lang, Oxford 2021, xi + 332 pp.

Writing on Nick Dear's Hogarthian play *The Art of Success* (staged by the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1986), Mariacristina Cavecchi quotes Dear praising Hogarth's

*particular and peculiar Englishness. Time and again he delineates our national characteristics, and he doesn't spare our blushes. ... Everyone is just a step away from debt, disgrace, disease and disaster – much like now.... (1 204)*

How paradoxical that an artist celebrated for his original and intense engagement with his fellow nationals should also become admired much wider afield than his own country, as a depicter of the human condition in ways that keep speaking to us. One might instance Goya as a similar figure – except for the important difference that Goya was largely funded by patrons and the court whereas Hogarth was a revolutionary in the art market, making his own self-determined way, inventing new genres that expanded the circulation of prints and graphic satire in particular, and insisting on the significance of the artist's labour rather than the collector's. And Goya, such a fascinating figure, seems to point one back to his own art rather than fertilise a whole range of arts, including theatre, film, television and literature. Two more pioneer points: Hogarth is acclaimed as the progenitor of the graphic novel, a genre hugely popular in the twenty-first century; Hogarth also has his own adjective, Hogarthian, which proclaims his influence allusively in ways that nationals of Britain still understand and take up enthusiastically. The Tate Gallery in London has just held an exhibition on *Hogarth and Europe* – Europe being an area of cultural influence that British nationals have been terribly divided about, whereas Hogarth, everybody knows, is a rock-solid national treasure. Finally, Hogarth was interested in the theory of art: he joined aesthetic debates to add his own brilliant flourish – the serpentine line. It had of course existed before, and been championed, but Hogarth's insistence on the Line of Beauty led, some think, to the jouissance of rococo and instated a new approach to the winding turns of aesthetics.

With such a wide reach and legacy, Hogarth attracts many kinds of scholars. The double-volume essay collection edited by Caroline Patey, Cynthia E. Roman and Georges Letissier brings together a really imaginative

group to explore Hogarth's «Enduring Presence»; their subtle and inventive explorations form a kind of seductive serpentine line, or line-up, in themselves. This review can't do justice to them all. Maybe this sort of collection should be read in an unlinear, serpentine way, dipping in, doubling back? Some contributors write on subjects obviously Hogarthian: the television mini-series *A Harlot's Progress*, for instance, is constituted with explicit reference to the six prints of Hogarth's *A Harlot's Progress*, (published 1732). Sylvia Greenup establishes the allusions evocatively, but more than that she identifies a Hogarthian model of looking: «understanding how the viewer's eye roams, and focuses, and dramatizing the process through which visual memory connects image to image, event to event, and gradually accrues meaning» (1 255). Explicit intertextuality appears too in William Kentridge's compelling reworking of another print series, *Industry and Idleness*, in which Hogarth's exploration of class mobility is transposed into race to depict the brutality of apartheid in dooming the Black protagonist to a fatal end not because of his moral choices but because of the state's immoral, inhuman ones. As C. Maria Laudando puts it, Hogarth and Kentridge share «a similar inextricable tangle of indulgent self-reference, compelling theatricality and fatal vulnerability» (1 320).

The knottily serpentine line of punishment, surveillance, and ideological ruthlessness leads us to Russia and the USSR, with a fascinating essay by Laura Rossi tracking the influence of Hogarth on Pavel Fedotov, one of the first genre painters in Russia, and – revelatory – the interest taken in Hogarth by Victor Shklovsky, best known as a formalist critic. For Shklovsky, «Vodka Lane», as he dubs Gin Lane, is the realm of the user and probably realistic. But Shklovsky also recognises Hogarth is more than a painter:

He was a man of a new cruel time. With his detailed allegories and numerous particulars, he wanted to create a new mythology, a new development in the meaning of drawings and pictures. As if anticipating cinema, he could think in whole series of interlacing pictures, while developing a single idea.... He had an analytic mind and was the poet of a new brutal era. (I 84)

That interlacing is picked up in Marie Gueden's essay on Hogarth and Sergei M. Eisenstein, which builds a bridge between film theory and the serpentine line, via Eisenstein's essay «Organicity and Imagicity», dedicated to Hogarth and unpublished in his lifetime. Hogarth's line combines ornament and movement in ways Eisenstein thought of as montage, in the cinematic sense. The horizontals of theatre staging become the verticals of the cinema screen, and «Eisenstein's vision of the Hogarthian

an serpentine line as ornament, simultaneously at rest and in motion, expressed the paradox of varying repetition» (1 247) inherent in arts including the cinema. Who knew?

The second book of essays, subtitled «Image into Word», takes a broadly chronological sweep, starting with Rosamaria Loretelli's essay, pp.3-24, on *The Analysis of Beauty*, a text arguably as influential as Hogarth's artistic works. Where previously more unity was understood to mean less variety, Hogarth links variety to change controlled by the unity of the serpentine line, but free to move. The pyramid and shell are beautiful forms, says Hogarth, because they are perceived gradually: as in the novels of Henry Fielding, scenes that open by degrees create a unified perspective. Roberta Ferrari and Paolo Bugliani investigate how Charles Lamb and Hazlitt respectively repositioned Hogarth in a poetics of the familiar where space is something to be read, not just viewed – continued, according to Francesca Orestano, by Hogarth's great admirer Charles Dickens in his reworking of the Sketch as a genre, not coincidentally overlapping with Hogarth's locations in London. The iconotext, to use Peter Wagner's helpful term from 1995, proves a way to connect Hogarth's art and visuality in authors including French fin-de-siècle writers, Katherine Mansfield, James Joyce, Ford Madox Ford, David Dabydeen – as art historian, novelist and poet – Peter Handke, Howard Jacobsen and Alan Hollinghurst, in essays variously loosely identifying and analysing their subjects' Hogarthian reference, allusion, paradigm and adaptation. What Lamb and Hazlitt saw as Hogarth's turn to the real is accompanied by things other than realism – by satire, the grotesque, irony, all open to updating. Hogarth's serpentine line, for instance, is said by Georges Letissier in the collection's final essay to inform Hollinghurst's camp slapstick; led on by Ronald Firbank, camp's serpentine replaces the teleological, time-orientated line of plot completion. As Letissier observes, this may tell us more about Hollinghurst than Hogarth, but then again less concealed traces, if less abstruse, make it possibly too easy to discuss Hogarth in terms of content rather than form. Discussing Ford Madox Brown, who set up a Hogarth Club and painted eighteenth-century industrial tension in *John Kay, Inventor of the Fly Shuttle* (among murals completed in 1893 for Manchester Town Hall), Max Saunders comments on the compositional terms it shares with Brown's more explicitly Hogarth-alluding *Work* (1865). He sees «Hogarthian distributed attention» (2, 119), a useful phrase whose psychological nuance builds on what Frédéric Ogée, in a magisterial foreword to Book 1, calls «polycentric images ... in which the beholder's

eye is invited to progress freely, make connections, and in the end, hopefully make sense of them» (1, xvii). Distributed attention could apply to visualities and aesthetics, or art and politics. Or both. A nice instance, new to me, was the iconotext discussed by Christine Reynier in Book 2 of this collection; its full serpentine title is *The Modern 'Rake's Progress'. Words by Rebecca West. Paintings by David Low*, published in 1934. Low, best known as a cartoonist, did the paintings first; West, in dialogue with Low and Hogarth, invents narrative possibilities to amplify ideological forces around class, masculinity and unemployment in the 1930s. One's attention is indeed distributed, though also strangely refocused to think about overlaps and differences. Or, one might say, unity and variety. Disparate figures, divided groups, symbolic details; portraits and graphic narrative; satirical themes and cultural topoi; urban fashion and chaos, and of course the serpentine line distribute attention from Hogarth to the Hogarthian, and from the Hogarthian back to Hogarth.

In a collection of essays published in 2016, entitled *Hogarth's Legacy*, one of the contributors writes ruefully that «it remains hard to find the right descriptive terms to define the invocations of, and allusions to, Hogarth»<sup>1</sup>. This double book collection should make its editors and contributors proud to have instigated such significant and compelling advancement of descriptive terms, and to have expanded persuasive and original critical investigation of Hogarth, in both his enduring presence and his afterlives.

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<sup>1</sup> B. Maidment, *Hogarth Moralized: Hogarth's Presence in Nineteenth-Century Mass Circulation Print Culture*, in *Hogarth's Legacy*, ed. C. E. Roman, Yale University Press, New Haven 2016, pp. 115-143: 138.