How reliable are William Hogarth’s ‘The Rake’s Progress’ as evidence of the social conditions in 18th century London?

“Wealth however got in England makes Lords of mechanics, gentlemen of rakes:
Antiquity and birth are needless here;
Tis impudence and money makes a peer.”

Abstract

This investigation will try to answer the question “How reliable are William Hogarth’s paintings ‘The Rake’s Progress’ as evidence of the social conditions in 18th century London?”. At the age of 36 William Hogarth painted the set of eight paintings ‘The Rake’s Progress’ which this essay will be based on. The reason for the choice of question is to gain an understanding on whether visual art can be trusted as evidence of a historical source.

The investigation will be broken down into eight sections providing a theme for each piece which was derived from the assumption that the theme given was what Hogarth had intended to portray. This essay will find supporting arguments for and against each painting but also place them into their contemporary relevance.

The conclusions reached from this essay are that Hogarth’s moral subjects can each be supported by evidence from the 18th century. Hogarth’s paintings can also be supported by contemporary relevance. The significance of this essay is that the artist’s paintings are equally as important for the current market as each painting has the potentially to be used as a comment on today’s society. The works as a whole has highlighted each social aspect in breadth thus has given proof of the 18th century social conditions.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>Page Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investigation</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I - The Heir</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II - The Levée</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III - The Orgy</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV - The Arrest</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V - The Marriage</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI - The Gaming House</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII - The Prison</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII - The Madhouse</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

William Hogarth, born in 1697 began his career as an engraving then developing into a “painter of chaos and cruelty”\(^3\). ‘The Rake’s Progress’ acts as a comic strip which illustrates step by step Tom Rakewell’s gullible life due to his inheritance of his miserly father. Rakewell begins as a respected upper-class member to someone who was driven to insanity due to the pressure of his society and his spendthrift attitude.

The question “How reliable are William Hogarth’s paintings ‘The Rake’s Progress’ as evidence of the social conditions in 18\(^{th}\) century London?” will be answered; basing it on eight themes. These themes are relevant to the English 18\(^{th}\) century because the artist wished to bring to light England’s social conditions through visual criticism. Hogarth’s intentions of these paintings were down to his knowledge that the “public derived pleasure from seeing real people in paintings and prints”\(^4\). Moreover, each scene can be related to Hogarth’s own life as each setting was “precisely observed from a particular episode in his life” where there is evidence of this in “memoirs and biographies”.\(^5\)

Hogarth’s paintings are just as important now because they are still relevant to today’s society. Each theme that has been focused on can be applied for today’s society as Hogarth has highlighted the social failures.

A piece of visual art has the “ability to persuade us that we are looking at a representation of real events”\(^6\) therefore there will never be complete valid proof to support the idea that Hogarth’s paintings can be seen as a historical source. It is essential to remember that despite evidence which supports each canvas the paintings are “as much works of fiction as any play or novel of the period”\(^7\) and so the reliability of each piece depends on how biased Hogarth was. One thing that is reliable is that the satirist based his work on places that had the potential for a spendthrift to end up in.\(^8\)

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\(^5\) IBID
\(^7\) IBID
\(^8\) For example the environs of the West End and the Court, the Rose Tavern in Covent Garden, St James’s Palace, Marylebone church, White’s Club, the Fleet Prison and finally Bedlam.
I visited the Sir John Soane’s museum\textsuperscript{9} to see ‘The Rake’s Progress’\textsuperscript{10}. There is an importance of seeing the paintings \textit{in the flesh} so they can be put into contextualisation and I can have a better grasp of the sources I am working with.

\textbf{Investigation –}

\textbf{I - the Young Heir taking possession}

\textsuperscript{9} See image below. Source – own photo taken August 14\textsuperscript{th} 2009
\textsuperscript{10} Each photo of ‘The Rake’s Progress’ is from scanned images of 8 postcards that I bought at the museum.
The theme of this scene is based on women and their gender roles. This scene illustrates Tom Rakewell’s first time that he spends his wealthy but miser father’s inheritance. To the centre is the main character, who is paying off the servant girl; Sarah Young. It can be assumed that he is doing so to ensure she remains quiet about their relationship.

The message depicted is that women are victims of male oppression\textsuperscript{11}. The scene emphasizes how easy it was for a man to dismiss the opposite sex; Sarah Young has been paid to keep quiet about their past relationship.

\textsuperscript{11} He has also illustrating the differences of the male and female role. This is seen through Rakewell’s treatment of the servant girl and how she has been exploited by his power. She is a submissive character, and throughout the paintings does not gain full
The contemporary relevance is that there is still evidence of the inequality of gender where a woman is stereotyped. The image below illustrates the female as an ‘object’. Sexism in advertising is seen in even the highest market.  

During the 18th century the portrayal of women was never truly accurate but they were reminded that men and women differed which support’s Hogarth’s idea that women were submissive figures. This is due the woman’s portrayal by men. Lord Halifax stated that there “is inequality in the sexes”. It was known for a woman to obey four duties in life. It seems that the male’s word won over any female

12 A woman must be a cook, a child bearer and an object of desire.
13 This photograph won the ‘2008 Macho Prize’, voted by La Meute (a campaign against sexism in advertisement).
14 Such as Dolce and Gabbana.
15 The scented salamander, Dolce & Gabbana Win the Macho Prize for Most Sexist Advertising & Le Mouvement du Nid for Least Sexist Ad [Cultural Notes], http://www.mimifroufrou.com/scentedsalamander/2008/03/dolce_gabbana_wins_the_macho_p.html [Accessed 11th November 2009]
17 “much of our evidence about what women were like and thought – or were expected to think – comes from men, from sermons and courtesy manuals, from male diarists, writers, painters and doctors.” - Porter, Roy, 1991, revised edition, London, Penguin History, (ISBN 978-0-14-013819-1) page 22
19 In “The Lady’s New Year’s Gift or advice to a Daughter.” - Smith, D.B, 1980, Inside the Great House Planter Family Life in Eighteenth-century Chasepeake Society, [e-book], New York, Cornell University Press,
http://books.google.com/books?id=cohbC8uzacoC&pg=PA66&lpg=PA66&dq=there%20is%20inequality%20of%20the%20sexes%20lord%20halifax&source=bl&ots=hkrFiOMVfj&sig=n_j8NhUgpIRBvgUc793azBZIRuk&hl=en&ei=jJT6SobKOtGx4QbF6LWNAQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=3&ved=0CA4Q6AEwAg#v=onepage&q=there%20is%20inequality%20of%20the%20sexes%20lord%20halifax&f=false [Accessed 11th November 2009]
opinion. Even the wealthiest women, such as Mary Eleanor Bowes\(^1\) succumbed to her husband.\(^2\) Mary could not argue her case as his treatment was supported by law.\(^3\)

On the other hand, Hogarth’s viewpoint can be seen as biased. Despite the fact that Hogarth saw women as the ‘weaker sex’ in society\(^4\) it seems that he was no misogynist of women. He frequently portrayed women as victims of society, such as ‘A Harlot’s Progress’\(^5\) where the main character is an innocent country girl who has been preyed by “the powerful and unscrupulous” as she can “expect no guidance or charity in the big city.”\(^6\) ‘The Shrimp Girl’ is an example of Hogarth’s appreciation of women\(^7\).

\(^1\)“Mary was one of the wealthiest women in Britain: an heiress worth £1 million (£150 million in today’s money) and raised in a life of privilege.” Sarah Chalmers, 2009, Britain’s worst husband: How 18\(^{th}\) century’s Andrew Robinson Bowes will make your spouse look a saint, Daily Mail, [internet] available at: http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1131262/Britains-worst-husband-How-18th-centurys-Andrew-Robinson-Bowes-make-spouse-look-saint.html [Accessed 11th November 2009]

\(^2\)Andrew Robinson Bowes. In 1778, Mary wrote: ‘He beat me several times, particularly once with a thick stick, the head of which was heavy with lead, and with the handle of a horsewhip.’ - Sarah Chalmers, 2009, Britain’s worst husband: How 18\(^{th}\) century’s Andrew Robinson Bowes will make your spouse look a saint, Daily Mail, [internet] available at: http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1131262/Britains-worst-husband-How-18th-centurys-Andrew-Robinson-Bowes-make-spouse-look-saint.html [Accessed 11th November 2009]


\(^4\) This is seen in his engravings of his ‘Before and After’ engravings of 1751. See image of the 2 engravings.

\(^5\) see image below of scene I

28 William Hogarth, *A Harlot's Progress*, plate 1, April 1733, Etching with engraving on paper, 320 x 380 mm
Courtesy Andrew Edmunds, London,
There is also evidence that challenges this view. The Duchess of Devonshire is an example of a woman who indeed had independence and freedom. Amanda Foreman comments on the importance of the Duchess.\textsuperscript{31} Mrs Mary Manley\textsuperscript{32} and Mary Wollstonecraft\textsuperscript{33} are examples of “brave individuals”\textsuperscript{34} who tried to defend their rights as women. Wollstonecraft wrote one of the first works of feminist philosophy.\textsuperscript{35} She stated that “women are essential to the nation because they educate its children and because they could be "companions" to their husbands, rather than mere wives.”\textsuperscript{36}
I - the Rake’s Levée
The theme of this scene is manners and appearance. This scene illustrates Rakewell’s gullible attitude which how it has led him to be surrounded by ‘gentlemen’ and it appears that he has fitted well into the upper class surroundings.

It seems that Hogarth is mocking the obsessive idea of ‘etiquette and manners of the gentleman’. The artist has illustrated the contrast between interior self and public persona. There is the idea that a gentleman should be well dressed, educated and mannered.37

The contemporary relevance is that today’s population is still being branded and given an ideal image. Jeremy Paxman, who wrote “The English”38 defines the ideal Englishmen as a group of young men called the “Breed” which these men have specific traits.39

There is evidence to support Hogarth’s view of ‘etiquette and manners of a gentleman’. John Harris stated how a gentleman must be.40 Hogarth has used hyperbole to comment on the hypocritical veneer of the concept. Later scenes show how Rakewell only ‘appeared’ to be in touch with the ideas of the aristocrats. Lord Chesterfield’s letters41 also explain the ideas as they have strong links with Hogarth’s scene II.

However, Hogarth’s viewpoint can also be seen as close-minded. Superficially, he can be seen as a reliable witness as he was supportive of his political friends. He produced a piece which highlighted the excellence of Earl of Bute42 in the engraving “The Times, Plate I”43. However, this was only for Hogarth’s benefit.45 This scene proves Hogarth’s distaste for aristocracy through hyperbole as he was

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37 This has can be seen Rakewell’s posture and the props that surround him; such as the clothes he and his fellow companions. There are symbolic objects, such as the piano which represents music, the paintings (art), and the jockey’s trophy (sports).

38 “Eton educated, athletically charged, fearless crusaders were the embodiment of Englishmen and were “reproduced” in great numbers at boarding schools throughout the country. Additionally, they were those that you would follow to the ends of the earth and will die for King and country.” Paxman J, (2007). The English. Penguin Books Ltd (ISBN: 0141035145).


40 A gentleman should have “refined phrases, a certain number of postures and dispositions of the body, nor the manoeuvres of sly dissimulation, of affected bluntness or implicit reverence, or impudent assiduity” - John Harris An Essay on Politeness 1775, unknown publisher, - Brewer, John, The Pleasures of the Imagination, 1997, London, Harper Collins Publisher, (ISBN 000 255920 X) page 112

41 The links between the letters and the painting have been highlighted. See appendix B

42 Prime Minister of Great Britain. In office during 26 May 1762 – 8 April 1763.

43 See photo of plate below.

44 Early Brute was portrayed as a “lone fire-fighter trying to put out the flames of war fanned for the sake of profit by Pitt and the mercantile interest, who are mercilessly lampooned.” - Bindman D, Hogarth, 1981, Norwich, Thames and Hudson, (ISBN 0-500-18182-9) page 162

45 In the 1750s “Hogarth appears to have been clarifying his political allegiance.” - Bindman D, Hogarth, 1981, Norwich,
“satire was too strong for him to be fair to those who felt that Old Masters could be successfully emulated.” His criticism was caught by Vertue, yet Hogarth later admitted his wrong doing.

There is also evidence that argues this viewpoint; like the Grand Tour. The New York Times comments on the Grand Tour which illustrates how men wished to develop themselves through their appearance but also mentally by growing into true gentlemen. The “wealthy young Englishmen” who took a “trek through France and Italy in search of art, culture and the roots of Western civilization”; they had months or even years to “roam, they commissioned paintings, perfected their language skills and mingled with the upper crust of the Continent.”

[Image of Hogarth's The Times, Plate 1]

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46 such as Michelangelo  
47 IBID page 108  
48 See appendix C  
49 See appendix D  
52 Three hundred years ago, wealthy young Englishmen began taking a post-Oxbridge trek through France and Italy in search of art, culture and the roots of Western civilization. With nearly unlimited funds, aristocratic connections and months (or years)
III – the Tavern scene or (the Orgy)

The theme of this scene is prostitution where the *Tavern Scene* depicts how Rakewell has indulged in the *pleasures* of life in the Rose Tavern enjoying the company of prostitutes. Some have a sexually transmitted disease, which has been represented by a black dot on their faces; such as the woman undressing on the left.

Hogarth has illustrated the effects of overindulgence and drunken disorder. The fact that some of the prostitutes have a sexually transmitted disease illustrates the effects of the lack of composure and self-respect. Hogarth depicts the social misfit of the time period.

The contemporary relevance is that there is still a social misfit which is tied to drunken disorder. This is the rise in binge drinking in Great Britain. An example of a recent shameful drunken disorder event was down to Philip Lain, a 19-year-old student who was “found guilty of ending a seven-hour drinking binge, during an event organized by Carnage, by urinating on a wreath of poppies at a war memorial.”

There is evidence to support Hogarth’s view as it was estimated that “London had an excess of 10,000 prostitutes”. To support this, London had “447 taverns”. The topography of this scene is accurate as *The Rose Tavern* was in Covent Garden; Convent garden was renowned for its prostitutes. Samuel Derrick wrote “Harris’s List of Covent Garden Ladies” which was a directory of prostitutes. This book sold over a quarter of a million copies and provided biographical details of the prostitute.

To contrast Hogarth has repeatedly depicted the idea of lust and prostitution which is proof of his recurring distaste. His set of paintings the ‘Harlot’s Progress’ visually captures ... a young girl arriving in London to her fate of prostitution, disease and death’. While his obsession with lust is seen in his paintings ‘Before and After’ of 1730-1.

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56 Written between 1757 and 1795
57 such as their personality, appearance, and sexual qualities. See appendix E
58 See below for image of Plate I
A Harlot’s Progress – Plate I

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61 William Hogarth, A Harlot's Progress, plate 1, April 1733, Etching with engraving on paper, 320 x 380 mm
Courtesy Andrew Edmunds, London,
tel1.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.tate.org.uk/britain/exhibitions/hogarth/modernmorals/harlotsprogress.shtm&usg=__wEM5fZrvg
GaNc29GAF4-91i9bk4=&h=444&w=550&sz=96&hl=fr&start=3&um=1&tbnid=eL6i8KQgV5co-
M:&tbnh=107&tbnw=133&prev=/images%3Fq%3Daharlot%27s%2Bprogress%2Bscene%2B1%26hl%3Den%26rlz%3
D1T4GGLL_enFR320FR321%26um%3D1 [Accessed 15th November 2009]

On the other hand Vic Gratell 64 has given contemporary evidence that prostitutes were not entirely unhappy. His book 65 illustrates that the events should be considered with the “interest of mentalities” 66. Therefore Thomas Rowlandson’s explanation that “prostitutes in that age were on the whole happy” suggests “the idea that the age could have been misogynistic” 67.

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65 City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in Eighteenth Century London, 2007


IV – Arrested for debts
The theme of this scene is the South Sea Bubble crisis. Plate IV illustrates the aftermath of the main character’s quick spending as he is to be taken to a debtor’s prison. However Tom’s servant girl, Sarah Young, is prepared to pay to bail him out as his over-indulgence has finally caught up with him.

This scene is a metaphorical scene to portray the effects of recklessness with money. The years of 1720-1721 saw a financial crisis called the South Sea Bubble; it is possible that Hogarth is commenting on the effects of profligacy.

The contemporary relevance is today’s financial crisis. The South Sea Bubble and both today’s economic crash were down to the Government’s over spending. “There is the worry that the underlying reason bubbles keep recurring is that the modern global economy can only run on cheap money and debt”⁶⁸.

To support the artist’s idea is his engraving named ‘The South Sea Bubble’⁶⁹ emphasizes his criticism on recklessness. There are people sitting on a ‘ride’ where it has been surmounted by a goat, symbolic of stupidity and idiocy. The general atmosphere is seen through the mass of crowds and the clouds show disorder and confusion. ⁷⁰ It also became “extremely fashionable to own South Sea Company shares.”⁷¹

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⁶⁹ See below
⁷⁰ Also, “Hogarth’s theme was that once people became preoccupied in speculation, evils that were ordinarily hidden could emerge do their worst.” - Unknown author, unknown date, John Law And the Mississippi Scheme, Specialist Antique Map Magazine, [internet] HTTP://WWW.MAPFORUM.COM/05/LAW.HTM [Accessed 15th November 2009]
⁷¹ Many investors were enamoured by the lavish corporate offices that had been set up. This painted an image of success and wealth in the eyes of shareholders. At this point in England’s industrial revolution, investment capital was plentiful. - Unknown author, Stock Market Crash, unknown date, [internet], http://www.stock-market-crash.net/southsea.htm [Accessed 15th November 2009]
On the other hand, Hogarth’s viewpoint can also be seen as biased. He “satirizes crowds consumed by political speculation on the verge of the stock market collapse” where the Merry-go-round represents the trade “between South America, the Pacific Islands and England.” Moreover, Hogarth was fixated on money as he introduced the Engravers’ Copyright Act in 1735 which gained royal assent; this “extends the regulations of the Literary Act (‘Queen Anne’s Act’). The publication of *The Rake’s Progress* prints was deliberately delayed.” Some people refer the act as The Hogarth Act, and the effect of this act was a rapid diminish in the amount pirated prints.

Alternatively, there is also evidence that challenges this concept because Hogarth does not illustrate that this was actually a time of unprecedented economic growth for the United Kingdom. Hogarth has

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73 Unknown author, Politics in Print, Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections, unknown date, Northwestern University, [online] http://www.library.northwestern.edu/spec/hogarth/politics1.html [Accessed 15th November 2009]

74 This was until the Act took effect. - Unknown author, unknown date, IP review online, [internet] http://www.cpaglobal.com/ip-review-online/widgets/notes_quotes/more/1924/the_hogarth_act [Accessed 15th November 2009]
been biased with his illustration. By the 1700’s, “the British became the largest and most efficient carriers of slaves to the New World” and the economy was industrializing fast.  

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V – Marriage
The theme of this scene is the lack of support for religion and demonstrates the disrespect for the church with an example of a shallow marriage. Rakewell has married an old lady out of desperation and in the background Sarah Young is trying to enter the church to stop Rakewell’s wrong doings.

Hogarth has portrayed the failings of religion and lack of commitment through the crumbling Mary-le-bone church in the background and the scandalous marriage. There was also a continuous problem between Protestantism and Catholicism as “religious divides went deep” due to the advancement in “new material prosperity, science and freedom of inquiry.”

This scene can be supported by some contemporary evidence that today as it seems that religion is fading away as Britain is becoming more and more multi-cultural. There are “170 distinct religions counted in the 2001” in the UK. Moreover, it seems that different religions are becoming more acceptant of each other. The Archbishop of Canterbury stated that “formal recognition of sharia law ‘seemed unavoidable’.” This raises concern similar concern as Hogarth’s piece is depicting the dangers of the collapse of religions.

There is evidence to support Hogarth’s view because Rakewell is someone who is “seeking [to] gain from marrying into a wealthy family” which is an example of a Fleet Marriage; a decadent act on religion. The Mughouse Riots of 1715 is a valuable example of the clash between different religions, such as the differences between the Torries and the Whigs. It was common for religious strikers to make “means of making a political statement”. One reporter one the event stated that the “windows were all broke to pieces ... and it look’d like a house that was pulling down.”

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78 Rowan Williams,
80 Unknown author, New BMD Registers - Fleet Marriages , unknown date, genealogy supplies, [online], http://www.awurl.com/2WUmLDCK2 [Accessed 17th November 2009]
82 “Tories being associated with High Church sentiments (including preservation of the privileges and exclusions of the established Church) and Whigs being associated with latitudinarianism and Protestant Dissent.” - Yadav A, Whig and Tory, 2008, [internet], http://mason.gmu.edu/~ayadav/historical%20outline/whig%20and%20tory [Accessed 17th November 2009]
To contradict this idea Hogarth has further artwork which has shown proof of his biased attitude towards shallow marriages such as the set of paintings Marriage a la Mode\textsuperscript{85}. Interestingly, one of Hogarth’s “closest friends”\textsuperscript{86} was Benjamin Hoadly, the Bishop of Winchester. The reason for his relevance is that it is possible to assume that had an influence on Hogarth’s opinion as Hoadly opposed “Nonconformity” yet he was “tolerant of different beliefs within the Church of England.”\textsuperscript{87}

There is also evidence that challenges this view. George Whitefield is known for spreading the Great Awakening in Britain and he preached “more than 18,000 sermons in his lifetime”; who was also friends with Charles Wesley. Wesley is another great important person for religion who; during 1729; became the leader of Methodism. This illustrates that Hogarth’s scene is unreliable as religion, or Methodism, was a strong movement at the time.

\textsuperscript{85} Painted in 1743. See below for image. See photo below
\textsuperscript{87} IBID page 86
VI – in a Gaming house
The theme of this scene is gaming houses and the effects of gambling. Rakewell has only one option which is to regain his fortune through gambling as this scene has shown the early signs of his mental breakdown.

Hogarth is criticizing English society and their need for consumption which has been illustrated through the lack of awareness of each character. A fire has broken out and this is not seen by a single person while Rakewell has removed his wig portrayed the reality of his problem, or England’s society’s problem which is ultimately driving them into ruins.

The contemporary relevance is the government’s relaxation on super-casinos. There are plans to build one in Manchester, Blackpool and London. It seems that today’s market is looking for a bigger thrill where Councils have invested “hundreds of thousands of pounds between them in their super-casino bids”89.

There is evidence to support Hogarth’s view because “games were played and stocks were traded in the same coffee houses”90, such as stocks from the South Sea Bubble. It seems that the effects of gambling affected the wide range of social classes, from the poor to royalty. A key figure in the 18th century renowned for her gambling was the Duchess of Devonshire. Georgiana found comfort in gambling “and particularly in the popular game of faro.” Moreover she turned “the Devonshire House into London’s most exclusive gambling club, even charging professional faro dealers fifty guineas a night, illegally, for the right to set up tables there.”91

On the other hand, Hogarth’s viewpoint can also be seen as biased as scene IV ‘Arrested for Debts’ also illustrates his attitude and personal interest in the effects of money. There is a much deeper reason for his hate of gambling and obsession with money as his father was affected by the debt and “harsh consequences of failures” as this led to the imprisonment of his father in the Fleet Prison.

There is also evidence that challenges this view. Despite the spendthrift attitude it seems that Britain “From the 1780s onwards was transformed by the industrial revolution”92 where there was a development

92 Lambert, Tim, DAILY LIFE IN THE 18th CENTURY, unknown date, A WORLD HISTORY ENCYCLOPEDIA, [internet]
in factory organisation but also an improvement in the equipment used as there was the introduction of power-driven machinery. It was also a time where people first began to move out of the countryside and build new lives in the city. An example of the development of the industry was in the field of textiles. In 1733 the flying shuttle was invented by John Kay which allowed looms to be woven faster. In 1742 cotton mills were first opened in England and the development of factories brought prosperity and hope to Britain.
VII – in the Debtor’s prison
The theme of this scene is debt and the Fleet Prison. The result of his obsession has put him into prison with the forever faithful Sarah Young by his side who has fainted in desperation.

Hogarth has portrayed society’s dismissal towards the victims of poverty and bankruptcy and the poor living conditions. This is shown through Rakewell’s confusion and lack of understanding of reality as he is contrasted by the Sarah Young.

The contemporary relevance is that today’s prisons still are not reaching the appropriate standards. An example of this is the Portland Youth Prison which was investigated by the chief inspector of prisons. He described the “conditions inside a unit of a youth jail so filthy and "squalid" that it should be immediately demolished”\(^{93}\)

There are sources to emphasize the idea of the poor living conditions and the neglect of the victims of poverty. The conditions of the Fleet Prison had an “extraordinary effect upon the nerves of the sensitive visitor” as the passages were “ill-lighted; and what with their dank and dirty appearance”.\(^{94}\) Hogarth has illustrated the chaos and confusion of prison life and emphasizes that prison life was part of Rakewell’s deteriorating mental state therefore it can be assumed that it was partly due to the environment he lived in.

On the other hand, Hogarth’s viewpoint can also be seen as biased Hogarth’s father suffered “the inevitable fate of those who were unsuccessful, by enduring a prolonged period in the Fleet Prison for debtors.”\(^{95}\) Hogarth himself stated that the death of his father was due to the “usage he met with from [the set of unsuccessful people] and partly by disappointments from great mens Promises.”\(^{96}\) Despite the fact that this scene may be seen as biased, the fact that Hogarth’s father was in the Fleet Prison emphasizes that Hogarth saw the effects of prison life on someone, therefore his biased attitude is reliable as it supports the idea of the poor prison conditions and the lack of care for victims of society.

It seems that Hogarth’s portrayal of prison life was correct where most prisons were “filthy and overcrowded”\(^{97}\). Moreover “drunkenness and gambling were rife” which supports the ideas of scene six.

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\(^{94}\) Moreover “the turmoil of prisoners and visitors passing to and fro from the rooms, the ceaseless banging of doors, echoing through the vaulted roofs” gave effect to the visitors. See appendix G


\(^{96}\) IBID page 9

while “violence and disease took a terrible toll of the inmates”98 such as Tom Rakewell. The Wood Street Compter99 is an example of a poor prison as it was stated in “1725 it [was] estimated that an average 4 to 8 inmates died a week”.”100

98 IBID
99 Small prison in London.
VIII – Bedlam
The theme of this scene is medicine and the Bethlem Royal Hospital of London. The most notorious scene shows Rakewell’s tragic ending as he will spend his last days in the mental house – Bedlam.

Hogarth has brought to light the matter of the treatment of the victims of mental illness and how they are dismissed by society; such as the upper class. There is irony behind the two ladies in the background; believing to be from Rakewell’s previous social class; who as one shields her face in disgust despite her laughing at what she sees.

The contemporary relevance is the neglecting of the victims of society – the elderly. It seems that the mental illness of dementia has not gained full recognition from the government. A recent review for the Department of Health “found that as many as 144,000 people with dementia are being given these drugs which, used excessively, can cause an estimated 1,800 deaths each year.”

There is evidence to back up Hogarth’s scene due to the setting of the scene but more importantly due to the layout of the room which the main character has been placed in of the scene. The appearance of the scene is valuable as the scene contains detail of the “iron grille at the head of the staircase” and Rakewell has had his head shaved which is “in accordance with eighteenth-century medical practise” but he has also been “blooded” where leeches were applied to him to “suck out his ill-humours”.

Hogarth’s viewpoint can also be seen as prejudiced due to his commitment to the Foundling Hospital in 1739 as he became the “founding Governor”. The Hospital was created Captain Thomas Coram who was responding to his “disgust at the exposure and abandonment of the new-born babies of the capital”; whom Hogarth painted in 1740. Hogarth’s close relationship with the Foundling Hospital even resulted in he and his wife becoming “foster parents to some of the children” as Hogarth was “in total sympathy with Coram’s mixture of compassion and practicality.” Moreover, Hogarth even donated some of his paintings which were aimed at “positional donors” to the hospital.

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102 Which is “accurate in every detail” as it was installed in “1729 to divide the incurable from curable patients.” - Arnold, Catherine, Bedlam – London and it’s mad, 2008, Australia, Simon & Schuster, (ISBN 978-1-84737-000-6) page 101

103 IBID


106 See image below

On the other hand there is evidence that during the 1700’s there was a development of anatomy. After 1745 surgeons “began to be university educated.”\textsuperscript{110} The findings of smallpox were discovered by Edward Jenner\textsuperscript{111} that a “patient gained immunity” if the patient “was cut then matter from a cowpox pustule was introduced.”\textsuperscript{112} This is proof of how the field of science was developing and focused on to improve the nation’s health.


\textsuperscript{110} Previous to this “craftsmen called barber-surgeons performed operations. However in that year the barber and the surgeon became two different jobs.” Lambert, Tim, \textit{DAILY LIFE IN THE 18th CENTURY}, unknown date, \textit{A WORLD HISTORY ENCYCLOPEDIA}, [internet] http://www.localhistories.org/18thcenteng.html [Accessed 24th November 2009]

\textsuperscript{111} (1749-1823)

\textsuperscript{112} Lambert, Tim, \textit{DAILY LIFE IN THE 18th CENTURY}, unknown date, \textit{A WORLD HISTORY ENCYCLOPEDIA}, [internet]
Conclusion

To conclude, this investigation sought to answer if ‘The Rake’s Progress’ was reliable as evidence of the social conditions of the 18th century in England or more specifically London. This essay has demonstrated that Hogarth is proof that there will always be social failures. This is due to the fact that the themes applied for each section are still relevant today and can be used to depict England’s social conditions.\footnote{For example, the theme of the “South Sea Bubble Crisis” is a version of today’s credit crunch. The effects of the “South Sea Bubble Crisis” are seen in canvas number seven - “The Gaming House”. This scene mimics the effects of today’s crisis thus the repossession of homes and the problem of debt due to the over-use of credit cards and consumer consumption.}

From this investigation it is possible to conclude a postmodernism idea of the findings because Hogarth’s paintings were biased visual sources which have been reinforced by the sources that I have chosen to deliberately support and argue my ideas. However, I prefer to agree with the concept of teleology where William Hogarth’s paintings can be used as a lesson drawn from history where his illustrations portray the path taken and chosen to follow by the English society of the 18th century.

Nevertheless, there were still some limitations of this essay. The main limitation of this essay was the word count provided which meant that I was restricted to properly investigate into each theme. If this investigation was to be rewritten, with the same word count limitations of 4000 words then I would have maybe focused on 4-6 themes as this would have allowed me to focus on developing my ideas in depth. It needs to be considered that Hogarth intended for his chronological work of ‘The Rake’s Progress’ to include eight set of paintings therefore the investigation into 4-6 themes would not have fulfilled the whole investigation into his work.

There is also a limitation to Hogarth’s work itself. It is clear that Hogarth has commented on the social conditions of the 18th century though he has only offered criticism rather than critique. He does not give the audience any solutions to the problem.\footnote{For example the engraving ‘Gin Lane‘ was responded by the engraving ‘Beer Street’ which offers the audience advice}

The question could be improved by answering: “To what extent is William Hogarth’s paintings ‘The Rake’s Progress’ as evidence of the social conditions of the 18th century?”. This is because this question implies that his work must be reliable as proof of evidence and that it is an investigation into the extent of the reliability his paintings.
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**Books**


**Dissertation**


**E-book**


Newspaper article


Picture

William Hogarth, *A Harlot's Progress*, plate 1, April 1733, Etching with engraving on paper, 320 x 380 mm

Courtesy Andrew Edmunds, London,


Photograph

Photograph of 8 paintings, scanned images, bought at the John Soanes Museum, August 2009:

I - The Heir,
II - The Levée,
III - The Orgy,
IV - The Arrest,
V - The Marriage,
VI - The Gaming House,
VII - The Prison,
VIII - The madhouse
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Appendix


1. First duty was to obey her husband.
2. Second, she had to produce heirs.
3. The third duty of the married lady was to run the household.
4. Her fourth was to be ladylike, an ambassadress of grace.

Appendix B – Chesterfield, Philip Dormer Stanhope, Earl of, 1756-58, Letters to his son on the Art of Becoming a Man of the World and a Gentlemen, [e-book], Project Gutenberg,

“Speaking and Writing, clearly, correctly, and with ease and grace, are certainly to be acquired, by reading the best authors with care, and by attention to the best living models. (…) In truth, whatever is worth doing at all, is worth doing well: and nothing can be done well without attention: I therefore carry the necessity of attention down to the lowest things, even to dancing and dress. (…) Dress is of the same nature; you must dress; therefore attend to it; not in order to rival or to excel a fop in it, but in order to avoid singularity, and consequently ridicule. (…) If, therefore, you would rather please than offend, rather be well than ill spoken of, rather be loved than hated; remember to have that constant attention about you which flatters every man's little vanity; and the want of which, by mortifying his pride, never fails to excite his resentment, or at least his ill will.”

Vertue stated:

[Hogarth] despised under-valud all other present, & preceedent painters, such as Kneller Lilly Vandyke – those English painters, of the highest Reputation – such reasoning or envious detractions he not only often or at all times – made the subject of his conversations and Observations to Gentlemen Lovers of Art But such like invidious reflections he would argue and maintain with all sorts of Artists, painters, sculptors.

Hogarth stated:

by this idle way of preceding (i.e. using his method of direct observation) I grew so profane as to admire Nature beyond Pictures and I confess sometimes objected to the divinity of even Raphael Urbin Corregio and Michael Angelo for which I have been severely treated.

Written by John Harris, 1757 to 1795, Harris's List of Covent Garden Ladies.

“Miss B…m. No. 18 Old Compton Street, Soho. This accomplished nymph has just attained her 18th year, and fraught with every perfection, enters a volunteer in the field of Venus. She plays on the pianoforte, sings, dances, and is mistress of every manoeuver in the amorous contest that can enhance the coming pleasure; is of the middle stature, fine auburn hair, dark eyes and very inviting countenance...In bed she is all the heart can wish; her price two pounds.”
Beautifully illustrated, but..., 25 August 2008

By A. Crowther (Bradford, UK)

This review is from: City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in Eighteenth-Century London (Hardcover)

The best part of this book is its pictures—an amazing selection of satirical and "bawdy" prints from about 1790 to about 1830. Vic Gatrell's text is a robust defence of the society which created these pictures. The reader, having ploughed through 600 pages of pictures which are only funny if farting, urinating, defecating and copulating are funny in themselves, may possibly end up in a state of bilious revulsion against the whole age. The print makers celebrated "libertine" sex but also mocked the Prince of Wales crudely and persistently for having a mistress. They mocked William Wilberforce in horrible prints for trying to abolish the slave trade (see p480). They portrayed women as slabs of meat (see p386).

Vic Gatrell defends every one of the values of the age. For instance, on p109 he suggests that prostitutes in that age were on the whole happy—and apparently does so simply because Thomas Rowlandson portrayed them as happy in a print. The chapter "What Could Women Bear?" toys with the idea that the age could have been misogynistic (surely not!) but rebuts the charge with naïve arguments that show his ignorance of feminist criticism. A reading of "The Troublesome Helpmate" by Katharine M Rogers (1966) could have helped him here.

As we might expect, this portrayal of the pre-Victorian "Golden Age" ends with those nasty Victorian moralisers bringing in the "Age of Cant"--a term apparently invented by Lord Byron to pin down the kind of people who wanted to limit Byron's sex life. Here Gatrell's arguments descend into a persistent sarcasm which allows him to talk of "morality" and "improvement" (with or without inverted commas) without actually showing that they were bad things. For instance, on pp574-5 he quotes Francis Place, who wrote in 1820 of the improvements in hygiene and behaviour that he had seen in the past thirty years. Place's comments are quoted with an implicit mockery, but it is difficult to see why. Were things really better in the good old days when the streets were full of "wretched half-starved, miserable scald headed children, with ricketty limbs and bandy legs"?

The Victorians were the people who stopped children being sent up chimneys, not the people who started the practice. The Victorians were the people who realised, with a shock, that many of the values they inherited were hypocritical, and started to insist that something should be done about it. They were the people who finally realised that the poorest of their society were suffering, and started to do something about that, too. They even realised that libertine sex might end in women getting a pretty raw deal. Is it not possible that the Victorian age actually was what it said it was: an Age of Improvement?

Nice pictures, though.


At length, the Prison of "The Fleet" has been abolished, and removed, after an existence of nearly eight centuries . . .

In "the Riots" of 1780 the Fleet was destroyed by fire, and the prisoners liberated by the mob; consequently great part of the papers and prison records were lost . . . .

Immediately after "the Riots," the Prison was rebuilt: it consisted chiefly of one long brick pile, parallel with Farringdon-street, and standing in an irregularly shaped area, so as to leave open spaces before and behind, connected by passages round each other. This pile was called the Master's Side. The front in
Farringdon-street had little that was noticeable, if we except the arched opening into a room technically called "the grate," from its crossed iron bars. Above was inscribed, "Pray remember the poor prisoners, having no allowance;" a small box was placed at the window-sill, to receive the charity of passengers in the street, while a prisoner within shouted in suppliant tone the above prayer. The was, unquestionably, a relic of the ancient prison, corresponding with the "begging at the grate" referred to in some of our old comedies. Sometimes, however, the sharing of the public charity was called "having a part of the box," as may be seen by references in the account of the Warden's fees in Elizabeth's reign.

The entrance to the Prison was by a heavy, stone-framed doorway, bearing on it jambs the figure 9; so that a sort of fictitious address to the inmates of the Prison was "No.9, Fleet Market," and subsequently "Farringdon Street."

The interior arrangements were very simple: On each of five stories, a long passage extended from one extremity to the other, with almost countless doors opening into single rooms. These passages, or galleries, were ill-lighted; and what with their dank and dirty appearance, and the turmoil of prisoners and visitors passing to and fro from the rooms, the ceaseless banging of doors, echoing through the vaulted roofs, they had a most extraordinary effect upon the nerves of the sensitive visitor, and made him shudder at man's self-imposed suffering. The room presented the usually wretched aspect of a Debtor's prison luxury, in the dirty-white squalor of the walls, perchance scrawled with the offscourings of a low mind, or vulgarity ill at ease. Perchance, too, the light streamed through murky and begrimed glass upon a bed of "London white," which the occupant, in the heyday of his dissipation, would have scarcely deemed fit for a pauper. In short, the tattered curtain, the rickety or broken furniture, and the "G.B." upon the jambs of the grate, denoted "all manner of unrest," however those initials, under ordinary circumstances, impart the idea of security and Royal possession.

The inmates and straggler in this house of care, presented almost as various aspects as those of a Spanish crowd. Here might be seen the turbaned debtor, bewrapped in the dirty relics of his flaunting finery; the ci-devant man of property creeping about in rags, and craving to do the offices of the menial; and the woful wife ministering to cheat sorrow of a smile, yet heart-sick and sore. Ever and anon doors opened, and then came forth the revel shout and the jolly laugh - the indiscriminate welcome, which would have the whole world for one table, and then keep it in a roar. They, whom curiosity tempted to stroll hither, did not soon forget the rabble rout, and their nestling-places:-

Whence even now the tumult of loud mirth
Was rife and perfect to the listening ear

Alack! what "strange bedfellows" did Debt - a phase of misery - make men acquainted with the Fleet. If a prisoner did not wish to go to the Common Side (a building apart, and to the right of the Master's side, where he was put with several other prisoners, into a common room, divided within only cabin-fashion, for which he paid nothing), he had the choice of going into "Bartholomew Fair," the lowest and sunken story, where he paid 1s. 3d. for the undisturbed use of a room; or up to some of the better apartments, where he paid the same rent, but was subject to chummage, i.e. a fellow prisoner put into his room or "chummed upon him" but who might be got rid of by a payment of 4s. 6d. per week, or more, according to the fulness of the prison. The latter prisoner would then provide himself with a common lodging, by letting which prisoners in the Fleet are known to have accumulated hundreds of pounds in the course of a few years.

Out of doors, there was the same indication of recreant waste as in the interior, though with a stronger shade of vagabondism, and ruffian recklessness. Here might best be seen the characterless "characters" of the place, in which every prison is sure to about. Smokers and other idlers loitered about the steps leading to the racket-ground, where shone many a wight who had lamentably failed in bandying the ball of life. Beneath a shed was played skittles - its senseless wooden rumble echoing through the place. Here you might hear the roar of the great Babel without; and from some point, see one or two of its churches aspiring about the chevaux-de-frize of the prison walls. What a painful train of reflection was called up by the busy hum of the town in contrast with the stagnant life within these brick walls! Then, as if to keep up the mockery, they verged upon the yard of the Belle Sauvage Inn, a place associated with all sorts of locomotion.

Happily, this pest of a Prison - the Fleet (devoted, we supposed, for sake of contrast, to Chancery
prisoners) has been razed to the ground. By Act of Parliament, 1842, the Prison was abolished, and its few inmates were drafted to the Queen's Prison. The Fleet has since been sold to the Corporation of the City . . .

*from* The Illustrated London News, 1846