



The Harlot and The Rake

Poems after William Hogarth
By Peter Raynard

with an Introduction by Fran Lock

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Engravings from *A Harlot's Progress* (1731) and *A Rake's Progress* (1733)
by William Hogarth courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum

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Introduction

By Fran Lock

William Hogarth (1697–1764) was an English painter, printmaker, and social satirist, best known for his series of ‘modern moral subjects’, most notably *A Harlot’s Progress* (1731) and *A Rake’s Progress* (1733). These works are characterised by their combination of dark, caustic humour, graphic and openly sexual images, and a stern moralistic tone. *A Harlot’s Progress* is a series of six paintings unfolding the fate of a young woman from the country, arriving in London for the first time, and being lured into a life of prostitution. *A Rake’s Progress* is a series of eight paintings telling the story of Tom Rakewell, a young man who follows a path of dissipation, lechery, and self-destruction after inheriting—and in short order squandering—his father’s fortune.

Hogarth spent much of his childhood in a debtors’ prison, an experience that left him with an awareness of poverty, and a greater degree of sympathy towards the poor than many of his contemporaries. It also left him *profoundly* mistrustful of the wealthy, and with an abiding concern with what he saw as the slow deterioration of British morals. Raynard’s heroic crown of sonnets after Hogarth run the same gamut of moral and social concerns, but bring a contemporary socialist sensibility to bear on the interconnected fates of Tom Rakewell and Moll Hackabout.

The collection opens with ‘The Heir’ in which the newly monied Rake is already scheming his idle and profligate future at the expense of his female dependents:

mother weeping, wife with child warming inside her.
He will leave enough to oil their grief, but says there
is no need to pray.

The poem’s speaker has an omniscient satirical eye, relating events in the third person, and in the present active tense. This imparts to the poem a quality of penetrating and impartial witness and combined with the metrical strictures of the sonnet form, it produces a distinct poetic voice, at once watching events unfold in real-time and at a disinterested distance of centuries. Raynard’s speaker owes something to the excoriating wit of Pope as well as to his own startlingly apt turn of phrase. Who else would signal the hollow and airless propriety of 18th Century patriarchy with the lines:

his Father, a staid suit of a man
battered down by the clamp of God's utility

What impresses about this poem, I think, is the way in which Raynard extends Hogarth's original commentary of moral decline and hypocrisy by weaving the turpitude of the individual with that of the state and its most venerated institutions. While Tom betrays his family, his religion, and the presumed probity of his class by setting out to waste his fortune, this same fortune is built—on a national scale—upon the betrayal of humanity, a betrayal that same church passively sanctions:

with enough silver to sail a ship. London ho!
with its trade winds blown by slave labour. God well knows.

The next sonnet in the crown is after *The Harlot's Progress*, and Raynard alternates between Rake and Harlot throughout the sequence. By choosing to write a crown of sonnets, a form in which each of the fifteen sonnets is linked to the preceding and succeeding sonnets by repeating the final line of the preceding sonnet as its first line, and where the first line of the first sonnet is repeated as the final line of the final sonnet, Raynard skilfully entangles the stories of the exploited woman and the rich and feckless wastrel. This is something he signals explicitly in the text with the description of the pimp as 'the Rake's shadow', and a theme he returns to with mounting conviction and intensity throughout the collection.

By following the Rake's abandonment of his female family with 'Moll Hackabout arrives at the Bell Inn, Cheapside' Raynard offers a sad and suggestive commentary on the futures of women thus abandoned. Moll's choices upon arrival in London are limited and stark: she could support herself as 'seamstress' with 'pins & needles', likely performing what was called 'slop work' (the sewing of rough, ready-made clothes) for starvation wages, or she could allow herself to be sold to the highest bidder. Thomas Hood's campaigning poem 'The Song of the Shirt' written over a century later offers an insight into the life of a seamstress in London, and demonstrates how slow society was to grapple with the plight of destitute women and girls:

Stitch! Stitch! Stitch!
In poverty, hunger, and dirt,
And still with a voice of dolorous pitch
She sang 'The Song of the Shirt!'

The poor in London were compelled to use what physical capital they had in

order to exist, trapped in bodies worn out by hard use. Poor bodies break down, class was—and is—a form of built-in obsolescence; for women this is also reproductive and sexual. As their trade takes its toll on their physical frames, they are forced to offer themselves for evermore abject forms of labour: what the prostituted woman does in order to survive is that which kills her. A bitter irony lost on neither Hogarth nor Raynard.

It is the sequence's clear-sighted and empathetic treatment of Moll that is its most compelling feature. Raynard turns his gift for the acutely coruscating lyric riff upon Tom Rakewell and those who encourage him, as in these lines from 'The Rake at the Levee':

we'll show him many ways
a man can spend riches, gambling drinking fucking
pox-ridden bitches. Behind them are the pictures:
'Judgement of Paris', driven by the mad rutting

of hormonal lust, limp biscuit men gather round
with all the pox from pleasure, tasty teeth turn foul.

or as in the grotesque carnival described in 'The Orgy', where wealth and degeneracy are linked together through the metaphor of the orgasm:

Pockets bulge with stress
burst open a scene of cocks with no crow.

Moll's portrayal meanwhile is always underscored by a deep understanding of her status as a uniquely exploited worker, as painfully enmeshed in the logics of a rapacious emergent capitalism as millworkers or match girls. Moll's life is inescapably tied to the whims of men, who emerge in the sequence as an oppressor class who profit from, punish and discard her for her 'shame' at will.

I found 'From Kept Woman to Sex Worker' particularly poignant, as the criminalisation of prostituted women, and the comparative leniency towards both pimps and johns is still a dangerous reality today. Moll's 'rise a balloon men / will pop', the piece ends with her being dragged away, and it almost feels as if a snatch her own voice infiltrates the poem under the pressure of the moment:

Judge Gonson bursts in, three bailiffs
in tow, spots the witches hat and stick, time for Moll

to go. Told she's nothing but a common law stiff
of a whore. Which of these puritans are pure of whiff?

These forever-men still command immoral strays
as chattel catching wealth snatchers take Moll away.

Raynard uses the connected but very different downfalls of Tom and Moll to interrogate the complexities of 'choice', the notion of complicity and the limits of our sympathy. Do we pity Tom Rakewell, now become a Tom O' Bedlam, repenting in a madhouse? Do we pity Moll, beating rope in Bridewell Prison? Or dead in 'the cold dark ground where a pauper's/ place may be found'? What seems telling is that Moll is bereft of even sincere mourners, punished, as Raynard writes for 'a simple dream to simply exist' with only her madam upset by her passing. Tom Rakewell meanwhile is attended in his extremity by his much-abused wife, 'Sarah, who somehow stays'. Are we left with a feeling of unfairness that Moll's only solace is death; that she is shunned and neglected even as she leaves life? Or perhaps we feel that although not equally responsible for their fates, both the Harlot and the Rake have been cruelly duped by the malignant machinery of Capital, equally seduced and destroyed by money?

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*What's the use of this, and that,
 And all the rest of the world?
 The only use of all is to
 Be a good man, and a good wife.*

*What's the use of this, and that,
 And all the rest of the world?
 The only use of all is to
 Be a good man, and a good wife.*

*What's the use of this, and that,
 And all the rest of the world?
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 Be a good man, and a good wife.*

*Printed and sold by W. H. and J. W. at the
 Sign of the Three Stars, in the Strand.*

(I) The Heir

A rich Father dies, so a son's life as heir begins.
Vanity's the sling which Tom will throw family
chains from: his Father, a staid suit of a man
battered down by the clamp of God's utility

mother weeping, wife with child warming inside her.
He will leave enough to oil their grief, but says there
is no need to pray. With old money, time does shun
less miserly ways ending troughs of emotion

such wealth held: when men lay idle no-one need read
King James' bible. New clothes fit both size and stead
with enough silver to sail a ship. London ho!
with its trade winds blown by slave labour. God well knows

the streets men of off-note graze on. All benighted
in the Capital's treasures of sin but not be sinned.



H. Charles, Proprietor, Plate 1

W. A. Smith, del. and J. A. Smith, sculp.

(II) Moll Hackabout arrives at the Bell Inn, Cheapside

In the Capital's treasures of sin but not be sinned
befalls this young woman's fate. Seamstress, those pins

& needles will not be needed; Brothel Creeper
Rape Master General wants new things from this sheep.

The dead goose—gift to a cousin—lies as they do
a payoff for the pimp Gourley, this Rake's shadow.

See, even the Priest ignores what goes on, the man
makes merry with children as his horse tips the pans

to signal Moll's falling. Let the bell ring, a ripe
lady is picked drawn by facades of sexed-up hype

marks of black spots hidden red pox Moll will no doubt
take on. The Harlot is here, though she doesn't yet

know it. This visitation, birth of mammon, told
filial men fill women, thus emptying their souls.



*Properly said, he's made
With pleasure in the next degree
From one to all the rest
Of his own kind, and mine*

*I see he's a good man, and
And his own kind, and mine
And his own kind, and mine
And his own kind, and mine*

*Plenty in her school, there
And his own kind, and mine
And his own kind, and mine
And his own kind, and mine*

*And in that school, there
And his own kind, and mine
And his own kind, and mine
And his own kind, and mine*

(III) The Rake at the Levee

Filial men fill women thus emptying their souls
after this bright piss up marry King George's foals:
the soldiers, the fighters, the jockeys, the dancers,
fiddlers & gardeners. Those of note, as Handel

and Bridgeman, all frequent amid frequent false grace.
On guard, en garde!, who is this man here? Tom Rakewell
from dry land, to make merry his father's estate.
Let us welcome him. Handel does always raise hell

for such shiny young things; we'll show him many ways
a man can spend riches, gambling drinking fucking
pox-ridden bitches. Behind them are the pictures:
'Judgement of Paris', driven by the mad rutting

of hormonal lust, limp biscuit men gather round
with all the pox from pleasure, tasty teeth turn foul.



(IV) Moll as The Mistress

With all the pox for pleasure tasty teeth turn foul
the Upended table turns the rich merchant's head
as her lover comes from behind fresh out her bed
to the door makes his escape. Moll's a mistress now:

makeup and masks, swingers' high society balls
swept up like a love letter made of bloodied silk
to be thrown away. Black servant boy, maid, oh look
a monkey dashes around at her call. Poor girl

if she could but see the paintings her suitor keeps
on the wall, for they foretell her fallen favour.
Men with money are rarely men with morality.
Whether fact or fable their gains come from silver

service slavery, gathering like strong trade winds
blown to this septic Isle by the squall of the rich.

(V) The Orgy

Blown to this septic Isle by the squall of the rich

the lush men treat their women the same as a bitch
surrounded by coin-counting wenches, fully flushed
and open for business. This splurge of spotted flesh
hardens the men's drive but weakens their doggedness.

Woof/woof, our Rake is not immune as the watch ticks
away from his possession. Pockets bulge with stress
burst open a scene of cocks with no crow. Women

are not the choppers of any man's fall when things
are left to the belief of 'will he?' For rarely
is a 'won't he?' who foots the bill. Fair-to-middling

Tom leaves many a seed inside the grinding thighs
of London's ill greed, taken from illicit games.

A woman's choice: play mother or take a man's shame.



Plate 1

†

W. Kneller del. (sculp. G. Kneller)

(VI) From Kept Woman to Sex Worker

A woman's choice play mother or take a man's shame
sees Moll a sex worker, her rise a balloon men

will pop. With her suitor gone, and maid arthritic
even the cat's unsympathetic. Moll's at it

lying back for lithe men's fallacious invasions.
Such as dandy rogue Dalton, left behind his case

gone all a bit ropey, snap of the hangman's station
for him. Smiles on display, she shows off her timepiece

paid for in flesh. Judge Gonson bursts in, three bailiffs
in tow, spots the witches hat and stick, time for Moll

to go. Told she's nothing but a common law stiff
of a whore. Which of these puritans are pure of whiff?

These forever-men still command immoral strays
as chattel catching wealth snatchers take Moll away.



Wonders of Great-Britain
 & by Henry, the people's friend
 Britain's wealth & power increased
 The streets were so much a street

Remembering even the things that
 And always with a view
 Reminds of the great things that have been done
 In the streets of London

Ready to see the great things that have been done
 In the streets of London
 And the things that have been done
 In the streets of London

And the things that have been done
 In the streets of London
 And the things that have been done
 In the streets of London

And the things that have been done
 In the streets of London
 And the things that have been done
 In the streets of London

Plate 4

(VII) The Rake's Arrest

As chattel catching wealth snatchers take Moll away
gaze at the stricken skies, they clock this Rake's match
but the detail's in this devil's face, bemused lays
out his fingered hand—just like that—as if to catch
the arrester's snatch. Hangers hang below his feet,
steal a cane or a watch that they'll sell on the street.
As the tallow man anoints our Tom, so again
Sarah becomes his jilted saviour, such a shame

on this St David's Day he thinks all life's a stage:
Falstaff or Hamlet? The jury will have its say.

Is it not time faithful Sarah to rise up in rage?
To tell him that the butter's spread you will not play.

Tempted to break his head? The Rake is clever (as if)
treats London as a holiday camp, lights a spliff.



1700. 4.

1700. 4.

(VIII) Moll Beats Hemp in Bridewell Prison

Treat London as a holiday camp? Lights a spliff?
Only the lowly can get their hands on the stuff,
beating their faux crimes away, day by day by day
in the late wife-killer King Henry's Bridewell stay.

Moll's joined this band of merry gubbins, repeaters
who make the rope, the cordage, clothing and paper
for those able to write, parade then hang the beaters
with. Even the Judge Gonson now swings thataways

and in the stocks the message is clear: 'better to work
than stand thus'. But who amongst the shirkers
is able to read such words? Moll is being robbed
by cards so sharp they take a life. You may be daubed

with stolid friends it's enemies will keep you warm.
Better to stand thus, or better still make no fuss.

[illegible]

(IX) The Marriage

Better to stand thus, or better still make no fuss.
Fuck and lie to further your way to the grave? Tom
prefers to marry this rich 'hag', feast on her gold,
no matter to you that witches are deaths foretold.

Nuptials an elsewhere, money's your recovery.
Just like the dog on hind legs stands to attention
whispering dirty sweet nothings, maids so flighty
to catch the obscene. Not even a child of his own

will change man's ways; Sarah, Tom's magic money tree
will conjure his own crepuscular fall as he flees

to the races to bet on a loss. Easy to count
his tail comes back wagging with no ride to mount.

Pimp and ponce off women the lowest form to take;
failed men so foul they will shame even a snake.



Pl. 1.

†

W. Kneller del. J. Kneller sculp.

(X) Moll Dying of Syphilis

Failed men so foul they will shame even a snake
sees the British and French are still at it, medics

fight over a cure for Moll now syphilitic.
Little difference will bleeding or cupping make

science never settles political disputes.
Arrogance breeds death amongst the lower classes.

Moll's child picks his nits plays with the fire, so cute
the work of an orphan-to-be as the angry

French armies think about crossing our thin channel.
Moll is swaddled in a dream-like fate so ill, loss

of cares and worries her only joy. Society
is rarely kind to the female state there to serve

and bear more children. Whores, harlots, prostitutes
sex workers; whatever the term the same end awaits.



And thus the night was spent in merriment
 Of dancing, singing, and of merriment
 And the day was spent in the same
 And the night was spent in the same
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 And the day was spent in the same
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(XI) The Gaming House

Sex workers, whatever the term the same end awaits
amidst this riot of men lost to gold, some wards
see black smoke, London's ablaze forever the fault
of rich men's wants. So why not try to pick a card
any card don't think yourself lucky to draw a Jack
as sure is sure, the next card dealt will take the skin
from your back. White bald head of the fading Tom
prays to no-see gods, but hears back from less than one.
Would you like to bet your life away, wife/kids/cart?
You bet you would if you were smart for gain is good,
going along with the chase even though it could
be your own tail, swishing out of the devil's arse.
If only the fire would burn the cut and thrust
of wanton greed wanton lust. May peace be a must.



Pl. 16.

W. D. 1711. and 1712. 1713.

(XII) Moll's Wake

Of wanton greed wanton lust, may peace be a must
for Moll a simple dream to simply exist. Targets
shot at but always missed, all the men wanted
was you undressed. On your back or bent double

polishing their shoes, nothing but trouble. Look
at your wake: no change there, they'll use your coffin
as a bar. Last orders never called, line them up
barman there's no work to be done but to bury

poor Moll in the cold dark ground where a pauper's
place may be found. So to you still living peekaboo
at this woman's end who used to call you all a friend.
Only her madam is upset, the son has no clue.

We'll miss you Moll but it won't be long,
until death clears its throat and sings your song.

(XIII) The Prison

Until death clears its throat and sings your song
it does not matter what you see above the trees

in the skies what matters most is where you run
aground. Prisons are a crowded house and Fleet

is full of those who can't pay/won't pay. Oh Tom
you have brought the whole dam shebang down.

They harangue the way in which your folly laid
them in this living grave. Ever faithful Sarah

son in tow, and the beer boy wants his shill,
the jailer what's owed. I see you are edging towards

the madness few understand. The telescope will
not tell your fortune; longitudinal rewards

are just the government's ruse to kid you along
the empire's returns is where vanity belongs.

(XIV) The Madhouse for Tom

The empire's returns is where vanity belongs
in this spectacle, so much so flutter-by ladies
in their fineries see such madness in their songs
like some grotesque theatre. Get up Tom, time

to perform; tell them of all the dark guises worn,
tell them of the money you've lost, tell them of the lives
you've cost. For here is an end worse than predicted
death, a labyrinth of minds all in a maze. Take lines

as long as you dare, scratch and pray, confess even
to Sarah who somehow stays; was it worth the drink
and gambling the whoring and stealing? STOP, think
words are now an altered language, mangled, tangled.

Up above the light grows dimmer, slants of shade
tell of men who should have chosen another trade.

(XV) The Fate of the Harlot and the Rake

A rich Father dies, so a son's life as heir begins
in the Capital's treasures of sin but not be sinned
filial men fill women, emptying their souls
with all the pox for pleasure, tasty teeth turn foul.
Blown to this septic Isle by the squall of the rich
a woman's choice, play mother or take men's shame
as chattel catching wealth snatchers take them away.
Treat London like a holiday camp? Light a spliff?
Better to stand thus, or better still make no fuss.
So take the men who could shame even a snake.
Sex workers, whatever the term the same end awaits
by wanton greed and wanton lust. Peace be a must
as death clears its throat to sing your song.
The empire's returns is where vanity belongs.

