

Chapter 13

William Hogarth's Pregnant Ballad Sellers and the Engraver's Matrix

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The printmaker and painter William Hogarth (1697–1764) always identified himself as part of the English artisan tradition. He considered his engravings original art at a time when printmaking was regarded as a mechanical art, a trade dependent on physical work and repetitious exercises in rote imitation. Influential connoisseurs such as Jonathan Richardson the Elder increasingly privileged oil painting over engraving. The connoisseurs defined art as emanating from genius demonstrated by the fabrication of a singular object, and cited Old Master paintings and classical statues as evidence. Richardson characterized prints as “works done in such a manner as is not so proper as that whereby paintings or drawings are performed,” which meant “that thereby great numbers are produced instead of one, so that the thing comes into many hands: and that at an easy price.”¹ The connoisseurs strove to recast the mechanical art of painting as a liberal art that expresses the intellect and exists untainted by labor and commerce in hope of securing royal patronage for an English painting academy to rival those in France and Italy. Their rhetoric marginalized contemporary art as well as the values of craft and skill that traditionally guided printmaking. To Hogarth, however, the recycling of ancient motifs and Old Master styles recommended by the connoisseurs were truly mechanical and discouraged real creativity.

Against the backdrop of this ongoing debate over originality and professional status, Hogarth's images consistently feature detailed depictions of artisans at work, their tools and instruments, and their creations. These men and women, notably represented by the diverse figures populating the 1750/51 engravings *Beer Street* and *Gin Lane* (Figure 13.1), were called “mechanicks” and members of the “mechanical class.” Among Hogarth's mechanicks are the five female ballad seller characters that Hogarth featured in engravings published between 1735 and 1750.² All appear pregnant and/or hold an infant, a fact that merits further investigation.

¹ Richardson, *Works*, p. 233.

² Hogarth includes two male ballad sellers in the 1747 *Industry and Idleness* series—the disabled man in Plate VI and the young boy with the large head in the lower right corner of Plate XII—in addition to a male ballad and gin seller in *Gin Lane* discussed later in this chapter.



Figure 13.1 William Hogarth, *Gin Lane* (1750/51). Etching and engraving

This essay explores why, as a practitioner and defender of the mechanical arts, Hogarth employed the shabby female ballad seller character rather than a more heroic male figure to be the emblem for printmaking. What follows aims to show that these characters directly align the idea of image reproduction with the reproductive body. The discourse of the mechanical arts and rational medicine reinforce this conflation, which enabled Hogarth to elaborate on the complex and seemingly contradictory characteristics inherent in printmaking in order to propose a new and modern way of thinking about prints as inventive art.

The Market

Hogarth's engravings belonged in the upper end of London's burgeoning print market. In contrast, his ballad vendor characters hawk the cheap and abundant criminal literature, portraits, patriotic tracts, political newspapers, and bawdy songs that disseminated news, tales, and images across the city to people of all classes. These popular prints represent a native tradition. Up to the 1730s, the majority of the fine prints available in London were imported from France, Italy, and Holland.³ Hogarth's 1732 publication of the series *A Harlot's Progress* contributed to a new and growing interest in works with British subjects. By the 1780s, prints engraved by native artisans were plentiful in London. Talented foreign engravers were relocating to England to capitalize on the expanding print market. Sophisticated and inventive images were made locally for the middle and upper ranges of the English market, and engravers with a following signed their names to their plates. By depicting prints from the lower end of the market within his engraved designs, Hogarth emphasizes that all prints are commodities and this does not diminish their social importance or the originality of their content.

In 1755 Jean André Rouquet, the Swiss painter and Hogarth's friend, observed with amusement that in England when "a chimney or house is set on fire; if a robbery or murder is committed; if any person has made away with himself thro' disrelish of life or thro' despair, the public is informed thereof" by popular prints.⁴ For instance, in *The Idle Prentice Executed at Tyburn* (Figure 13.2), Plate XI from *Industry and Idleness* (1747), the wayward apprentice Thomas Idle is the subject of popular criminal literature. A patch of sunlight in the foreground draws the viewer's attention to a ballad woman who appears pregnant and seems to address the viewer directly. She supports an infant with her right arm and in that hand she holds a copy of the criminal ballad that she sells, "The last dying Speech & Confession of Tho. Idle." This print belongs to the broadside genre called the "dying speech" or "good-night" that has been discussed in this volume more fully by Simone Chess, Fran Dolan, and Joy Wiltenburg. As their chapters show, the dying speech or good-night is a print form that claims to report the condemned criminal's final words.

³ For an overview of the print market, see Clayton's *English*.

⁴ Rouquet, *Present*, p. 79.

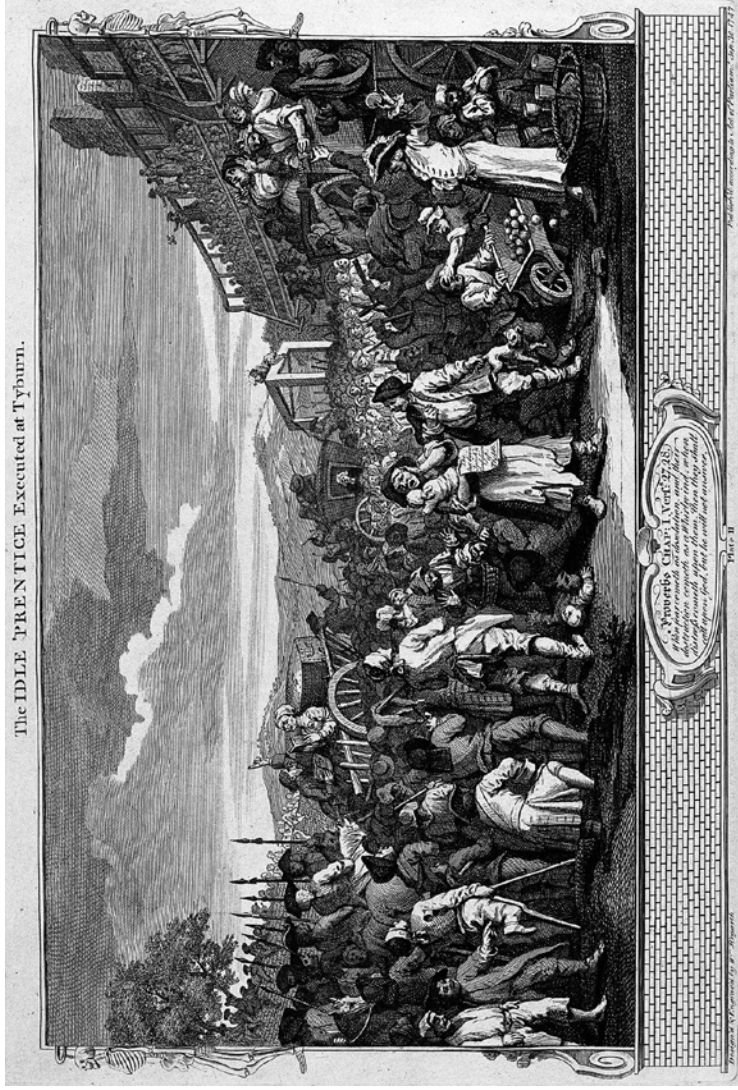


Figure 13.2 William Hogarth, *The Idle Prentice Executed at Tyburn*, Plate XI from *Industry and Idleness* (1747). Etching with some engraving

These typically combine news and fiction to give an account of the criminal's life and misdeeds embellished with lurid details, or they provide a moralizing confession that assures the reader that justice will be served. In engravings that work within this genre, generally a small and gruesome image at the top of the sheet enlivens the typography by depicting the means of execution, such as the three-sided Tyburn gallows on the ballad in Plate VI of Hogarth's *Marriage À-la-Mode* (1745), and the human figure dangling by a noose on the print in *The Polling*, Plate III from *An Election Entertainment* (1758). However, Idle is clearly still alive and he hasn't even reached the Tyburn gallows yet. He is the small and withered looking figure riding in the cart at left along with his coffin and a fiery preacher. The text of the dying speech had to be written and printed ahead of time in order to be sold at the execution and compete with the others available that day. Dying speech ballad sellers played a regular part in the commercial activity on hanging days, and this one mingles among the vendors hawking oranges, cakes, gin, and punch to the mob milling around the gallows.

This image speaks to the fact that ballad women were fixtures in London's public spaces during the eighteenth century. Pregnant women and those minding their small children could do this work more readily than other jobs. The trade required no special equipment aside from perhaps a basket, sturdy pocket, or an apron to carry the prints. Some women sold ballads because they were related to the publishers and others bought the prints from a distributor and sold them for a slim profit. The only necessary skills for a ballad hawker were the ability to move around the city and the will to sing and yell. Industrious ballad sellers developed signature catchphrases and dances to attract attention.⁵ Their calls were gimmicks that helped sell prints, much like the lotteries, auctions, and elegantly engraved subscription cards that the enterprising Hogarth used to attract buyers to his pictures. He may have picked up the strategy of sale by subscription from his father-in-law, Sir James Thornhill, but he took it further by issuing original images as subscription tickets.

The Womb and the Matrix

By referencing pregnancy in his figure of the ballad seller, Hogarth foregrounds the fact that prints exist as multiples and this is what makes them a vital part of urban and public life. It is difficult to ignore the fecundity of the ballad singer in the left foreground of the 1741 print *The Enraged Musician* (Figure 13.3). She holds a swaddled baby against her swollen belly, and sells a ballad titled "The Ladies Fall" that draws attention to her sagging breasts and her long-gone virginity.

⁵ Davis, *Shopping*, pp. 222–3: "Street-selling ... depended on a piercing cry, a cry that would rise above the rattle of iron wheels on cobblestones, a cry that would drown the other criers, a cry that would penetrate to every garret and cellar and back room and leave no peace anywhere."



Figure 13.3 William Hogarth, *The Enraged Musician* (1741). Etching and engraving

It also may imply that some destitute ballad sellers sell their bodies when they aren't hawking cheap prints. She appears to howl just to be heard over the noise made by the wandering pipe, horn, and drum players and the journeyman knife sharpener. The bird perched above her head on the broken light post mimics her voice with its screech, as do her baby's cries.

In this satire on the tensions between high and low art, and between art and life, the ballad singer plays a major role. The din generated by the mechanics and the ballad vendor's lowbrow song parody the refined music that the musician in the window wishes he could hear himself play. The ballad singer speaks to issues of physical labor and commerce, the factors that made prints an inferior medium in the eyes of the connoisseurs. But *The Enraged Musician* emphasizes the market's influence over both high and low art in that the mechanics in the street work for money and the musician must answer to his patrons.

Hogarth's punning on "reproduction" is the accretion of centuries of theoretical and practical connections shared by the allied mechanical arts of engraving,

printing, anatomy, and surgery. Western approaches to the mechanical arts and to Hippocratic medicine both originated in Aristotelian thought, in which man strives to approximate the ideal of nature through imitation and restoration.⁶ Images traditionally were indispensable components of hand-written and printed medical treatises. In his 1774 illustrated atlas of the pregnant uterus, the surgeon William Hunter praises the powerful way that an engraved illustration conveys “clearer ideas of most natural objects, than words can express” and “makes stronger impressions upon the mind.”⁷ Also, the professional surgeon was considered the mechanical lesser of the theory-based physician, just as the printmaker was to the painter. The word “surgery” derives from “the French *chirurgie*, which is from the Greek, meaning ‘hand-work,’” and the English used “handy-works” as a way of referring to the mechanical arts.⁸

Barbara Maria Stafford and Tristanne J. Connolly have commented on the significant parallels in process and instrumentation extant between intaglio printmaking and surgery or anatomization.⁹ The careers of men such as the sixteenth-century Flemish mathematician and printer Thomas Geminus, the earliest documented engraver in England, corroborate their observations.¹⁰ Henry VIII retained Geminus as a “surgeon and surgical instrument maker,” and Geminus created the plates for the midwifery guide *Byrthe of Mankynde* (1540), the first book published in England with engraved illustrations.¹¹ Geminus also is remembered as the instrument maker responsible for the Gemini Astrolabe made for Elizabeth I in the 1550s, and for creating the decorative motifs suitable for engraving or needlework for his book *Morysse and Damashin Profitable for Goldsmaythes and Embroiderars* (1548). His best-known English work, *Compendiosa Totius Anatomie Delineatio, ære Exarata per T. Geminum* (1543), a synthesis of two anatomy books by Vesalius, states that “[t]he woombe is called in Laten *Matrix* as it weare *Mater* (that is) a mother.”¹² The term “matrix” remained synonymous with the womb, as when the third edition of French physician André Levret’s midwifery manual *L’Art des Accouchemens, Démontré par des Principes de Physique et de Mécanique* (1766) asserts that it will “proposé de rendre raison du Mécanisme des fonctions de la matrice.”¹³

⁶ Rossi, *Philosophy*, p. 137.

⁷ From the first page of the unnumbered “Preface” in Hunter, *Gravid*.

⁸ Turner, *Instruments*, p. 127. Examples are Robert Dossie’s book *Theory and Practice of Chirurgical Pharmacy: Comprehending a Complete Dispensatory for the Use of Surgeons* (1761) and Joseph Moxon’s *Mechanick Exercises: Or, the Doctrine of Handy-Works* (1693).

⁹ Stafford, *Body*, p. 53–5; Connolly, *Blake*, p. 46.

¹⁰ Walpole, *Catalogue*, p. 7, also identifies Geminus as a printer.

¹¹ Hind, *Engraving*, p. 9; Turner, *Elizabethan*, pp. 3 and 5.

¹² Geminus, *Compendiosa*, unnumbered page accompanying the flap picture.

¹³ Levret, *L’Art*, p. iii.

The “matrix” must have had resonance for multi-skilled artisans like Geminus. Samuel Johnson’s *A Dictionary of the English Language* defines the “matrice” as a womb and as a “mould; that which gives form to something enclosed.”¹⁴ Printers had used the word in this second sense for the metal block that serves as a mold for making punches, the pieces of type from which letters are printed. In turn, a good punch is the basis for crafting a new matrix. Joseph Moxon’s *Mechanick Exercises on the Whole Art of Printing* (1683–4), the most influential early modern guide for book and picture printers, explicates the process for the “Punches to be Sunk into Matrices.”¹⁵ Likewise, John Smith’s influential text *The Printer’s Grammar* (1787) praises German printers for “removing all such irregularities as may obstruct their making a smooth and even impression when [punches] are sunk into matrices.”¹⁶ *Mechanicks* extended the name “matrix” to the casts and dyes employed to make coins, medals, and small sculptures, the kinds of work that John Evelyn identifies in *Sculptura* (1662)—the first book devoted to the study and collection of etchings and engravings—as precursors to engraving.¹⁷ Thus, a matrix is defined by its capacity to impress and replicate its image upon another substance, and the terminology circulated among diverse artisans engaged in related work.

The transference occurring between the printer’s matrix and the hot metal that becomes the punch is like what transpires between the copper plate and moist sheet of paper in printmaking, which is part of Evelyn’s point in linking sculpture to engraving. When the rolling-bed press forces the paper onto the copper plate’s surface, the paper absorbs the ink while the shape of the engraved tracks are embossed onto the paper. As sites of generation, the womb creates original humans and the engraver’s matrix issues individual printed impressions. Mary Thomas Crane’s research reinforces these connections by tracing “pregnant” to the Old French word *pregnant*, signifying “pressing” or serious subject matter, and during the Renaissance it came to describe something as being meaningful or malleable.¹⁸

The two meanings of the “matrix” converge in Isaac Fuller’s 1709 emblem for *Printing* (Figure 13.4). The emblem features a female figure in a flowing dress standing next to a printer’s press. A grid filled with letters marks off the area of the dress covering the woman’s stomach and abdomen. Fuller’s text explains that the grid is intended “to signifie the little Boxes for the Letters.”¹⁹ As such it conflates the womb with the press, and natural modes of reproduction with the artificial. Fuller created *Printing for Iconologia: or, Moral Emblems*, the only English edition of emblems based on Cesare Ripa’s seventeenth-century *Iconologia* produced during

¹⁴ Johnson, *Dictionary*, vol. 2.

¹⁵ Moxon, *Mechanick*, pp. 154–5.

¹⁶ Smith, *Printer’s*, p. 14.

¹⁷ Evelyn, *Sculptura*.

¹⁸ See Crane, “Pregnancy,” pp. 276–7.

¹⁹ Quote from epigram for “Printing” from Fuller, *Iconologia*, p. 70.



Figure 13.4 Isaac Fuller, *Printing*. Etching. Published in Isaac Fuller, *Iconologia: or, Moral Emblems, by Cesare Ripa, Wherein are Express'd, Various Images of Virtues, Vices, Passions, Arts, Humours, Elements and Celestial Bodies ... Useful for Orators, Poets, Painters, Sculptors, and all Lovers of Ingenuity* (London: Printed by Benj. Motte, 1709)

Hogarth's lifetime.²⁰ As a former apprentice to a silver engraver, Hogarth would have been familiar with both these sources. Fuller's emblems must have seemed excitingly innovative and modern due to their melding of natural motifs with mechanical symbols. His distinctly modern approach to emblem making would have been considered inappropriate in the previous century. In 1648 Henry Estienne advised artisans to adhere to ancient traditions when designing an emblem or "devise" and not "intermixe in the same body ... Naturall works with Artificiall, since they have no conformity at all with each other."²¹ Fuller's emblems demonstrate how the worldview held by British artisans increasingly reconciled mechanical creation with that of nature.

The matrix signifies one of many ways in which early modern printers and engravers understood there to be parallels between sexual reproduction and print reproduction.²² This assertion of artisanal identity as a point of authority, and craft as means for a mechanick to express honest observations about the wider world, is similar to the use of the image of the cobbler in the Rigby ballads discussed by Angela McShane in this collection of essays. In the case of the *Mechanick Exercises on the Whole Art of Printing*, Moxon demonstrates that printers described the parts of the press with terms used for human anatomy. He explains that the press possesses toes, feet, a back-side, balls, hands, ribs, shoulders, a neck, a head, ears, cheeks, teeth, a tongue; the letter mold's mouth-piece has jaws and a throat, the spindle has an eye, and these parts are accompanied by a carriage, coffin, and gallows.²³ His treatise describes the process of mechanical reproduction as an intimate affair between interlocking female and male parts, manipulated by a human hand:

When his *Stick of Letters* is thus transfer'd to the *Male-Block*, He claps the middle of the *Male-Block* into his left-Hand, tilting the *Feet* of the *Letter* a little upwards, that the *Face* may rest upon the *Tongue*, and then takes about the middle of the *Female-Block* in his right-Hand, and lays it so upon the *Male-Block*, that the *Tongue* of the *Male-Block* may fall into the *Tongue* of the *Female-Block*, and that the *Knot* at the hither end of the *Female Block* may stand against the hither side of the *Quadrat* at the hither end of the *Line of Letters*: So that when the *Knot* of the *Male-Block* is lightly drawn towards the *Knot* of the *Female-Block* lightly thrust towards the *Knot* of the *Male-Block*, both *Knots* shall squeeze the *Letter* close between them.²⁴

²⁰ Only three English editions of Ripa's emblems appeared between 1777 and 1800 according to the chronology in Ripa, *Baroque*, p. xi.

²¹ Estienne, *Art*, p. 44.

²² Also see di Grazia, "Imprints."

²³ Moxon, *Mechanick*, pp. 49, 57, 57, 57, 78, 73, 73, 71, 66, 56, 91, 186, 149, 71, 49, 49, 49. Chambers, *Cyclopaedia*, vol. 2, p. 877, also uses this kind of terminology for the rolling press used by copperplate engravers.

²⁴ Moxon, *Mechanick*, pp. 186–7, with the author's italics.

Moxon's mechanical/sexual metaphors express a habit of mind in which the machine and the body are regarded as rational counterparts, and the line between natural and artificial reproduction constantly is being reassessed and redrawn. This language is symptomatic of a desire to name and become familiar with the parts of the machines that artisans found themselves working with so closely. The range of meanings associated with the "matrix," like the puns on the term "garland" explored in Steve Newman's chapter in this volume, speaks to how the printmaker strove to communicate specific, and unexpectedly complex, ideas to a broad audience.

Moxon's emphasis on material practice stresses worker productivity. Engraving, printing, and bookbinding required skilled and literate workers to prevent costly errors.²⁵ Even among those who were not literate, their work exhibited a profound technical understanding of mathematical science, chemistry, and physics, which became useful only after these "craftsman succeeded in giving it material form" as a print or book.²⁶ Likewise, Hogarth's preoccupation with depicting ballad women as pregnant intimately links their bodies with the products they sell. His persistent association between fertility, labor, and artistic creativity explains why he never drew a pregnant gin seller.²⁷ Gin notoriously hampered the mechanic's work performance, and so the gin seller's body is contaminated and unfit for reproduction.

Hogarth became acutely aware of the links between gin consumption and infanticide while serving as a governor at the Foundling Hospital. In *Gin Lane* (Figure 13.1), no gestating women sell or buy the drink. Instead, a gaunt man in the lower right corner sells ballads titled "The Downfall of Mdm Gin" as well as gin gulped straight out of the bottle in his basket. In the left foreground a carpenter sells his saw, the very tool of his mechanical trade, to the pawnbroker for gin money. This speaks to the period's concern that gin was wasting the nation's "Laborious Hands," alienating workers from their trades, and crippling the future economy by killing the next generation of mechanical workers "in the womb."²⁸ He depicts the effects of maternal gin addiction on children through three central mother-and-child pairs. In the middle foreground a drunk drops her neglected infant head first over a railing while groping for her snuff. Behind her head an

²⁵ Lane, *Apprenticeship*, p. 66.

²⁶ Daumas, *Scientific*, p. 1.

²⁷ Hogarth's two female gin sellers are the woman carrying a basket of bottles at her waist in Plate XI of *Industry and Idleness* (Figure 13.2) and the woman at the drinks stall in *The Stage Coach, or the Country Inn Yard* (1747), who is rotund but the image lacks the usual clues indicating pregnancy. This all makes Hogarth's reproductive ballad sellers seem like a deliberate graphic program.

²⁸ White, "Slow," pp. 46–7, 51. Second quotation from "Downfall," pp. 310–12. Hogarth's acquaintance Henry Fielding asked "[w]hat must become of the Infant who is conceived in *Gin*? with the poisonous Distillations of which it is nourished both in the Womb and at the Breast," in *Enquiry*, p. 30.

infant leans against a coffin into which two men load its mother's corpse, and on the scene's right edge a woman pours gin into her swaddled baby's mouth. The figures in this triangle appear to reference "Mother Gin" as the drink was known after the 1736 riots blamed on unruly gin addicts reputed to prefer to "shoot their own natural Mothers thro' the Heart" than turn away from "Mother Gin."²⁹

Mechanical Artisans and Mechanical Bodies

The reconciliation of artifice with nature at the site of the matrix, as articulated by Moxon and Hogarth, was indicative of an epistemological shift that had started in the seventeenth century. Zakiya Hanafi points out that it is at this time in Europe that machines begin to replace monsters as the marker against which man defined himself and his place in the universe.³⁰ Secular, mechanistic metaphors and experimental methodologies increasingly replaced religious explanations for the order of the cosmos. This gave rise to the mechanical philosophy, a scientific methodology that uses the systematic workings of a machine as a hypothetical model for explaining the structure and the principles of motion in organic things. Equipped with new tools like the microscope and the data gathered empirically from anatomizations, its adherents challenged many aspects of Aristotelian medicine. For one, René Descartes rejected many major tenets of Scholastic medicine, such as the system of the four bodily humours, and he conducted his own experiments to disprove the ancient doctrines.³¹ Descartes's posthumously published *Treatise of Man* (1662) articulates the first mechanistic explanation of human physiology, an approach Hogarth echoes in *The Analysis of Beauty* (1753) when he calls men "nature's machines."³²

Britain's widespread acceptance of mechanical metaphors as a means to imagine the body resulted from the public's emergent interest in the new experimental philosophy as well as its familiarity with real machines and the mechanical arts.³³ Historian of science J.A. Bennett argues that the mechanical arts are the "most obvious source of influence" for the late seventeenth-century English manifestation of the mechanical philosophy.³⁴ Knowledge increasingly depended on the raw data gathered by the physical performance of science, the repetition

²⁹ White, "Slow," p. 36.

³⁰ Hanafi, *Monster*, pp. x–xi.

³¹ Descartes, *Treatise*, p. xxvii.

³² Hogarth, *Analysis*, p. 71.

³³ Bennett, "Mechanics."

³⁴ According to Bennett, "Mechanics," p. 1, a "consensus in natural philosophy" developed after 1650 that "was based on an experimentally practiced mechanical or corpuscularian philosophy of nature, which Hooke, one of its ablest exponents and most assiduous practitioners, referred to in his *Micrographica* of 1665 as 'the real, the mechanical, the experimental Philosophy.'"

of procedures that imitated nature's workings and produced a body of data for evaluation, which resembled the processes integral to the mechanical arts. Earlier in the century Francis Bacon praised the virtues of this active model of science and called for greater encouragement of the mechanical arts because the two were interconnected. The critical importance of machines, tools, and instruments to the new science blurred the line that previously had distinguished theoretical *scientia* from the physically enacted *praxis*, and instigated a reassessment of the artisan's role in society, intellectual life, and the economy during the eighteenth century.³⁵

The heyday of the British mechanical philosophy roughly coincides with Hogarth's lifetime, cohering in the late seventeenth century and gradually falling out of favor in the 1760s. William Hunter learned the mechanical approach to the art of anatomy at the medical school at Edinburgh and he gained notoriety for disseminating it to London's physicians in training as well as to members of the curious public through lectures and dissections. Hunter also taught anatomy to students at Hogarth's St Martin's Lane Academy in the 1740s and became a professor of anatomy at the Royal Academy after its foundation in 1768. In the early 1750s Hogarth attended a lecture in which Hunter dissected a pregnant uterus, and Hunter recalled Hogarth drawing the specimen and expressing wonder at the design of the womb.³⁶ Hogarth's interest in rational anatomy and the empirical observation of nature indicates why he socialized with prominent physicians and became the portrait painter of choice for London's medical community. William Hunter's brother John, a celebrated anatomist and surgeon, displayed *A Rake's Progress* and *A Harlot's Progress* in his parlor for patients to contemplate while they waited to see him.³⁷

Rational physicians like Hunter approached the female body's reproductive anatomy as a closed system composed of different parts with specific functions that may vary, but only within a predictable range of deviation. This view relied on knowledge obtained through direct observation, rather than on the teachings of ancient physicians.³⁸ In the 1719 English edition of *A General Treatise on Midwifery*, Pierre Dionis prefaces his inquiry into the function of "the neck of the womb" by stating "there's no Part of a human Body, that noble and most perfect Machine, which is not of some use."³⁹ English midwife John Burton declares the womb, "with regard to its Substance and Structure, to be as extraordinary a Piece of Mechanism, as any in the whole body."⁴⁰ The mechanical methodology

³⁵ See Smith, *Body*.

³⁶ Hopkinson, "William," pp. 156, 159.

³⁷ Moore, *Knife*, p. 320.

³⁸ See McLaren, "Pleasures," for more on how rational eighteenth-century physicians regarded traditional knowledge.

³⁹ Dionis, *General*, p. 71.

⁴⁰ Burton, *Essay*, p. 11. Burton's peers renounced his text for its glaring errors in anatomy. Laurence Sterne parodied him with the character Dr Slop in *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1760), but his mechanical approach was characteristic of the period.

replaced the medieval belief in a wandering womb that prowled around the body causing illness and hysteria. Instead, the modern female machine regulates itself in a predictable fashion and on a standard timetable.

A satisfactory mechanical account of conception and gestation proved more elusive. One tack taken by legitimate physicians and quacks was to seize on the metaphor of printing in order to make sense of the complex relation between a woman's body and her unborn child. This discourse describes early human development as a process in which the body acts like a printing press, stamping impressions on the fetus that determine the child's outward characteristics, in an attempt to account for physical resemblance or deformity. It proposed that a substance known as "animal spirits" (because it possesses the *anima*, the property that animated organic life) courses through tubes that stretch from a woman's mind to her womb. In the *Cyclopedia* (1728), Ephraim Chambers compares the movement of images through the body via the animal spirits to printmaking: "by impressing [images] on the Fibres of the Brain, it follows, that the larger and more difficult ... Tracks of the animal Spirits, which are the Lines or Strokes, as it were, of those Images, are, the more strongly and distinctly" made, just as "the Breadth, Depth, and Cleanness of the Strokes of a Graving depend on the Force therewith the Graver acts, and the Obedience which the Copper yields."⁴¹ In the case of the pregnant woman, her fetus acts like paper when it retains the images pressed into it. This mechanical stamping process resembles Robert Campbell's account of printing in *The London Tradesman's* (1747), in which "[t]he Paper ... is moistened, and then laid upon the Plate and put into the Rolling-Press, and the Impression of the Figure remains upon the Paper."⁴² Some medical men remained skeptical of the stamping metaphor and regarded it as a naïve explanation based on inconclusive evidence and lingering folk beliefs. This negative connotation underpins the verse in *The Fair Concubine; or, The Secret History of the Beautiful Vanella* (1732), a satire on the mistress of Frederick, Prince of Wales, stating that she stared at his portrait to ensure resemblance and, therefore, true paternity:

⁴¹ Chambers, *Cyclopedia*, 2.375. Chambers defines "impression" as "a Term in Philosophy, apply'd to the Species of Objects, which are supposed to make some Mark or Impression on the Senses, the Mind, and the Memory ... Impression is also frequently used in speaking of the Editions of a Book, or of the Number of Times that they have been printed" (pp. 378–9). During the eighteenth century this term was applied to describe the individual prints making up an edition. The term "impress" in this context also would remind engravers of the traditional art of creating emblems and devices. Estienne, *Art*: "[t]he Italians call a *Devise* an *Imprese*, deriving it from the verbe *Imprendere*, which signifies, to undertake; because the ancient Knights did beare upon their Shields a *Devise*, discovering the design of their enterprize, which his called in Italian *Imprese*, and that doth also signifie a gallant and heroic action ... and a *Devise* is nothing else with us, but the *Imprese* of the Italians" (p. 9).

⁴² Campbell, *London*, p. 111.

"So Big Vanella with a Serious Air / Views ev'ry Feature with Attentive Care / To give her coming Boy his Father's Princely Stare."⁴³

The mechanical imprinting theory informs the printers' and printmakers' perception of the womb as the site of mechanical production, further encouraging the idea that creation is both mechanical and natural. This sheds more light on Hogarth's engraver's matrix imagery, and particularly on the relation between his pregnant ballad sellers and the prints they sell. As Hogarth's gritty print vendors move through crowded streets and taverns, the content of their prints register the overall tone of the scene as if they were barometers sensitive to their social climate. In Plate III from Hogarth's *A Rake's Progress* (1735), a pregnant ballad vendor sings her song to the drunk and debauched crowd in the back room of the Rose Tavern. The scene that unfolds in front of her is the kind that was thought to stamp itself upon the unborn child. The animal spirits would supposedly press this into the child, making the child's "content" resemble that of the print. From the perspective of Hogarth's print audience, the print stands in for the fetus. The idea that the maternal body functions like a printing press reproducing life's experiences merges originality with mechanical reproduction and bolsters Hogarth's view that his engravings of "modern moral subjects" are original art despite their mechanical birth.

Conclusion: Printmaking as Paternity

Hogarth's final two ballad vendors appear in the 1750 engraving *The March to Finchley* (Figure 13.5). This image is the only one to use this character type to address the issue of paternity. *The March to Finchley* depicts the chaotic mobilization of troops deployed to defend London's outskirts during the Jacobite uprising of 1745. As in Plate XI from *Industry and Idleness* (Figure 13.2), an illuminated spot in the foreground sets the ballad sellers apart from the other figures in the busy picture. One weeping and pregnant woman folds a hand over her protruding belly and grasps a soldier's arm with the other. She carries a basket of Protestant ballads titled "God Save our King" and portraits of the military hero the Duke of Cumberland. On the soldier's other side stands an older woman selling out of a sack Catholic newspapers and the *Jacobite Journal*. Her shawl is marked with a cross and it flaps in the air while she raises a rolled-up paper to attack the soldier. Rouquet understood that she beats the soldier because he impregnated her, a situation revealed by the title of the political paper in her fist, *The Remembrancer*, which makes a joke of the child he left her to remember him by.⁴⁴

⁴³ See the frontispiece of *Fair Concubine*. In contrast, Mowbray, *Female*, p. 60, argues for the power of the imagination to shape offspring and cites the Bible as evidence.

⁴⁴ Rouquet, *Letters*, p. 3. *The Remembrancer* was an actual paper that supported work by some of Hogarth's fellow rococo artists. See Girouard, "English," p. 61.



Figure 13.5 William Hogarth, *The March to Finchley* (1750). Etching and engraving

The Catholic woman may be a “mercury,” a name associated with the many women who sold opposition newspapers.⁴⁵ These two women are the composition's only pairing of stereotypical representations of Protestant and Catholic temperaments during the tensions of 1745. On another level, as images of pregnant women working in a very public venue, their bodies and their prints speak to the reproduction and distribution of information within a growing and increasingly literate city. Connoisseurs such as Jonathan Richardson found print accessibility unseemly, but to engravers it was a boon and an advantage that prints had over paintings.

The period of time that transpired between *A Rake's Progress* and *The March to Finchley* signals the first testing period of the 1735 Engravers Act. Hogarth witnessed his designs being pirated since he created one of his first satires, *Masquerades and Operas* (1723), which features a heavily pregnant woman pushing a wheelbarrow overflowing with volumes of Shakespeare, Congreve, Addison, Johnson, and Dryden. She is a scrap paper seller, an early prototype for the pregnant ballad vendor character, who calls out that she is hawking “Waste Paper for Shops.” This character encapsulates the satire's message: the connoisseurs' preference for foreign art has influenced the public's taste in theater to the detriment of British artists. However, the numerous piracies after *A Harlot's Progress* (1732) spurred Hogarth to join six other printmakers in lobbying for legal protection for their work by drafting the Engravers Act of 1735.⁴⁶ The act gave fourteen years of copyright protection to the engravers who designed images “to commence from the Day of the first Publishing thereof.”⁴⁷

Seventeenth-century law protecting authorship had included images and texts, but the 1710 Act for the Encouragement of Learning extended copyright protection only to texts. In 1735 when engravers sought autonomous copyright, they looked to the 1710 Act as a model.⁴⁸ Drafting the Engravers Act was a group effort, despite its being known as Hogarth's Act and despite Hogarth's claiming on his 1755 engraved subscription ticket *Crowns, Mitres, Maces, etc.* that the act's

⁴⁵ Hannah Barker identifies an eighteenth-century “mercury” as a woman who sells literature in the streets in p. 88 of “Women.” According to Margaret Hunt, in the seventeenth century mercuries were women who sold pamphlets, and during the eighteenth century the term identified “women who bought newspapers wholesale from the printer and then either dispersed them to hawkers or sold them retail out of a shop”; p. 47 of “Hawkers.” Michael Harris agrees with Hunt, and adds that shops belonging to mercuries were “concentrated around the Royal Exchange, Temple Bar, and Charing Cross”; *London*, p. 38.

⁴⁶ Kunzle, “Plagiaries,” pp. 311–48, summarizes how Hogarth dealt with print piracy. David Hunter discusses Hogarth's participation in drafting the act in “Copyright,” pp. 128–47.

⁴⁷ See the second page of *An Act for the Encouragements of the Arts of Designing, Engraving and Etching Historical and other Prints, by Vesting the Properties thereof in the Inventors and Engravers, during the Time therein mentioned*, 8 Geo II, Public Acts c.13. England Parliament Bills II, Read 4 March 1735, British Library, London.

⁴⁸ Kunzle, “Plagiaries,” p. 311.

passage was “[o]btain’d by the Endeavours & almost at the Sole Expence of the designer of this Print in the Year 1735.”

Engravers eligible for the act’s protection included the “Proprietor or Proprietors,” who are those “who shall Invent and Design, Engrave, Etch, or Work in Mezzotinto or Chiaro Oscuro, or from his own Works or Invention,” but not the mechanick hired to engrave someone else’s design.⁴⁹ The act emphasizes that the creative engraver is an inventor who owns his ideas, like the watchmakers and other mechanical artisans who already enjoyed copyright protection for their creations. This furthers the idea that print originality is unaffected by the fact that prints are an intersection between creation and commerce, as stated in the text that prefigured the act, the 1735 *Case of Designers, Engravers, Etchers, &c. Stated in a Letter to a Member of Parliament*:

Whatever right an Artist has to the Sale of his own Print arises from this: he has by his own Industry and Skill given this Print whatever Value it has above another common Piece of Paper; and therefore has a Right to all the Advantages arising from that Superior Value, as a proper and adequate Return for his Industry and Skill.⁵⁰

Hogarth’s pregnant ballad sellers betray a preoccupation with defining and defending print originality as well as with the success of the legislature that informally bore his name. The act proved effective as a manifesto defining print originality but not as functioning law, and practical revisions were implemented in 1767.

Since the Renaissance it was understood that the author invented a singular work that bore traces of his self, and that in effect “[a]uthorship was paternity.”⁵¹ Marie-Hélène Huet suggests that the psychological paternal connection between the visual artist and his art may be particularly strong because artists work with visual forms and outward resemblances.⁵² Hogarth’s model of the engraver’s matrix, explored in the pregnant ballad vendor figure and present in the ideas central to the 1735 Engravers Act, shows how the artisan conveys engravings into the world. In turn, these works are the offspring of the artisan, who is compelled to promote and protect his copper plates and engravings because they are part of himself. The artwork carries the maker’s name into the art market and the public sphere of discussion, criticism, and debate. Mark Rose has explored traditions reaching back to antiquity that express the author’s metaphoric relation to his work

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 2.

⁵⁰ “Whatever right an Artist has to the Sale of his own Print arises from this: he has by his own Industry and Skill given this Print whatever Value it has above another common Piece of Paper; and therefore has a Right to all the Advantages arising from that Superior Value, as a proper and adequate Return for his Industry and Skill”; *Case*, fifth unnumbered page.

⁵¹ Rose, “Copyright,” p. 4.

⁵² Huet, *Monstrous*, p. 163.

through the two metaphors of property, in the form of “real estate” or land and of paternity.⁵³ Hogarth’s reproductive ballad sellers collapse property and paternity into one culturally and commercially relevant sign that challenges the connoisseurs’ efforts to malign engraving. The parental association seems particularly relevant to a printmaker like Hogarth, a craftsman-merchant who aspired to show that his engravings were impressions of his original ideas and the products of his intellectual and physical labor.

⁵³ Rose, “Copyright,” pp. 3–8.

