

Choice 23

Hogarth's First Oil Sketch for *The Beggar's Opera*

This is the first of six oils by Hogarth of Gay's *Beggar's Opera*, Act III, Scene IX with Lucy Lockit, her father the Warden of Newgate, Macheath the highwayman, Polly Peachum, and her father. The scene shows the two girls begging their fathers to save their lover from hanging. Walpole wrote a note on the back of the picture that he copied in the *Description of Strawberry Hill*: "Sketch of The Beggar's Opera as first performed: Macheath, in red, by Walker. Polly kneeling, in white, by Miss Fenton, afterwards Duchess of Bolton; Lucy in green, her face turned away, by Mrs. Eggleton; Peachum, in black, by Hippisley; Lockit, by Hall. Amongst the audience, on the left hand, Sir Thomas Robinson of Rokeby, a tall gentleman with a long lean face; on the right Sir Robert Fagge, profile, a fat man with short grey hair, much known at Newmarket. Painted by Hogarth. H.W." Walpole added in his copy of the '84 *Description*, "Bought at the sale of John Rich, the well-known harlequin, and master of the theatres in Lincoln's-inn-fields and Covent-garden, for whom the picture was painted." He also added in his copy of the '74 *Description* "with prices of such pieces as I can recollect" that he paid five guineas for the picture. When it was sold in the Lowther Castle Sale in 1947 Annie Burr bought it for me through Messrs Spink and it hangs now in the long hall at Farmington beside a black and white chalk drawing of Sir John Perrott, an Elizabethan Deputy of Ireland, that Walpole hung next to it in the Great North Bedchamber at Strawberry Hill. Our *Beggar's Opera* was reproduced by the Harvard and Yale University Presses in a portfolio that Philip Hofer and I made of Hogarth's six versions of the scene in 1965. We also reproduced Walpole's copy of Blake's print of it that is at Farmington.

Walpole gave Hogarth a chapter to himself among "Painters in the Reign of King George II" in the fourth volume of the *Anecdotes of Painting*. "Having dispatched the herd of our painters in oil," the chapter begins, "I reserved to a class by himself that great and original genius, Hogarth; considering him rather as a writer of comedy with a pencil, than



Hogarth's "Beggars' Opera," Act III, Scene IX.

as a painter. If catching the manners and follies of an age *living as they rise*, if general satire on vices and ridicules, familiarized by strokes of nature, and heightened by wit, and the whole animated by proper and just expressions of the passions, be comedy, Hogarth composed comedies as much as Molière. . . . He is more true to character than Congreve; each personage is distinct from the rest, acts in his sphere, and cannot be confounded with any other of the *dramatis personae*." In the Hogarth chapter we see Walpole the patriot who wrote in the *Anecdotes*, "This country which does not always err in vaunting its own productions," a sentiment quoted by the British Walpole Society in its notebooks. It also inspired the leading collectors of early American antiques in 1910 to adopt his name when starting the private American Walpole Society. Patriotism is one of Walpole's attractive qualities that has been missed by his detractors.

The panegyric of Hogarth in the *Anecdotes* has a mildly disparaging notice of Hogarth's *Analysis of Beauty*, 1753. "So little had he eyes to his own deficiencies," Walpole wrote, "that he believed he had discovered the principle of grace." Walpole's copy of the *Analysis*, which was given me by R. W. Chapman, has no notes by Walpole, but he did paste in the subscription ticket to it, "Columbus Breaking the Egg," as a frontispiece. The chapter on Hogarth in the *Anecdotes* ends with a very severe criticism of his "Sigismonda," which, Walpole wrote, "was no more like Sigismonda than I to Hercules. Not to mention the wretchedness of the coloring, it was the representation of a maudlin strumpet just turned out of keeping, and with eyes red with rage and usquebaugh, tearing off the ornaments her keeper had given her. . . . I make no more apology for this account than for the encomiums I have bestowed on him. Both are dictated by truth, and are the history of a great man's excellences and errors." Not to offend Hogarth's widow, Walpole held up the publication of the volume for nine years until pressure from the subscribers to the *Anecdotes* forced him to publish it. The letter he sent Mrs Hogarth with the book is missing, but at Farmington is a copy of it in Kirgate's hand on which Walpole wrote, "Copy of my letter with the 4th volume of my *Anecdotes of Painting* to Mrs Hogarth. She returned no answer. H.W." He pasted it into his copy of John Nichols's *Biographical Anecdotes of William Hogarth*, 1781, opposite Nichols's passage on the "Sigismonda."

Walpole and Hogarth were not on the best of terms. Walpole wrote Montagu 5 May 1761,

. . . the true frantic œstrus resides at present with Mr Hogarth; I went t'other morning to see a portrait he is painting of Mr Fox—Hogarth told me he had promised, if Mr Fox would sit as he liked, to make as good a picture as Vandyke or Rubens could. I was silent—"Why now," said he, "You think this very vain, but why should not one speak truth?" This *truth* was uttered in the face of his own Sigismonda, which is exactly a maudlin whore tearing off the trinkets that her keeper had given her, to fling at his head. . . . As I was going, Hogarth put on a very grave face, and said, "Mr Walpole, I want to speak to you"; I sat down, and said, I was ready to receive his commands. For shortness, I will mark this wonderful dialogue by initial letters.

"H. I am told you are going to entertain the town with something in our way [the *Anecdotes of Painting*.] W. Not very soon, Mr Hogarth. H. I wish you would let me have it, to correct; I should be sorry to have you expose yourself to censure. We painters must know more of those things than other people. W. Do you think nobody understands painting but painters? H. Oh! So far from it, there's Reynolds, who certainly has genius; why, but t'other day he offered £100 for a picture that I would not hang in my cellar; and indeed, to say truth, I have generally found that persons who had studied painting least, were the best judges of it. . . . I wish you would let me correct it—besides, I am writing something of the same kind myself, I should be sorry we should clash. W. I believe it is not much known what my work is; very few persons have seen it. H. Why, it is a critical history of painting, is it not? W. No, it is an antiquarian history of it in England; I bought Vertue's MSS, and I believe the work will not give much offence. Besides, if it does, I cannot help it; when I publish anything, I give it to the world to think of it as they please. H. Oh! if it is an antiquarian work, we shall not clash. Mine is a critical work; I don't know whether I shall ever publish it—it is rather an apology for painters—I think it owing to the good sense of the English, that they have not painted better. W. My dear Mr Hogarth, I must take my leave of you, you now grow too wild"—I left him—if I had stayed, there remained nothing but for him to bite me.

Walpole believed he had the largest collection of Hogarth's prints in existence, 365 in number. It may have been the largest when he made the claim, but after the painter's death Walpole wrote Cole that George Steevens "ransacked" Mrs Hogarth's collection of the prints. Steevens's collection is now at Farmington. It has 469 prints with 236 additional copies of Hogarth's prints by Bickham, Ireland, and Paul Sandby. Steevens pasted the prints into three elephant folios. He discriminated the states of the early tradesman's cards and exhibition announcements and included lists of the prints priced by Hogarth and his widow. Steevens be-

queathed his collection to William Windham of Felbrigg Hall in Norfolk, where it remained until Wyndham Ketton-Cremer's uncle sold it at Sotheby's in 1919 to Dyson Perrins whose estate resold it at Sotheby's in 1959. I bought it in memory of Annie Burr and so it has joined the collections of Hogarth at Farmington formed by Queen Charlotte and Lord Kinnaird. According to Ronald Paulson, we are now second only to the British Museum's collection, which includes a large proportion of the prints from Strawberry Hill. Thirteen of them are at Farmington. They include drawings of Dr Misaubin and Dr Richard Mead, prints of "the Black Girl in Bed," and "Humours of Oxford," which turned up in Lady Ossory's copy of Walpole's *Fugitive Pieces in Verse and Prose*. We also have the copperplates for "The Sleeping Congregation," and Hogarth's portrait of himself painting the Comic Muse. His plates are rare because so many of them were melted down for bullets in the dawn of the New Dark Ages.

The runner-up in this Choice is Walpole's collection of prints and drawings by Henry Bunbury. I owe it to John Carter, who bought it for me from an undergraduate at King's. It is bound in two elephant folios, each with a special title-page printed at the Strawberry Hill Press: "Etchings/by/Henry William Bunbury, Esq; and/ After His Designs." We hear of it first in Walpole's letter to Lady Ossory of 13 July 1776: "I am obeying the Gospel, and putting my house in order, am ranging my prints and papers, am *composing* books, in the literal sense, and in the only sense I will compose books any more, I am pasting Henry Bunbury's prints into a volume." After he filled the first volume he started the second and went on adding to it as long as he lived. He referred in the *Anecdotes of Painting*, to "the living etchings of Mr H. Bunbury, the second Hogarth, and first imitator who ever fully equalled his original." This astonishing encomium did not prevent Bunbury from falling into long neglect, but owing in large part to my colleague in the Yale Walpole, John Riely, whose paper on him, "Horace Walpole and the Second Hogarth," appeared in *Eighteenth Century Studies*, Fall 1975, he has been brought back to respectful notice.

Bunbury was the son of a clerical baronet and the younger brother of Sir Charles Bunbury, the husband of Walpole's friend, Lady Sarah Lennox. After Westminster and St Catharine's Hall, Cambridge, Bunbury went on the Grand Tour and was painted by Patch at Florence as the central figure in a comical conversation piece that no doubt delighted its first viewers, but whose humorous references are lost on us today as we pass

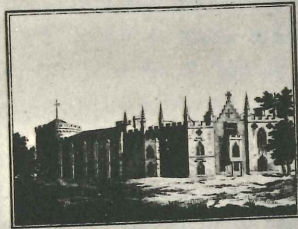
E T C H I N G S

B Y

Henry William Bunbury, Esq;

A N D

AFTER HIS DESIGNS.



Bunbury's prints and drawings, with a special title-page printed at Strawberry Hill.

it in our long hall. Bunbury went to Rome for a few months to study drawing before returning to Cambridge. In 1771 he left the University to marry one of the beautiful Hornecks who had been painted by Reynolds and whose family were intimate with Goldsmith and the Johnson circle. Bunbury's etching of Goldsmith annotated by Walpole is at Farmington.

I was introduced to Bunbury in 1915 when, a Sophomore at Yale, I joined Mory's, a pleasant eating-club that cultivated an olde English coffee-house atmosphere with the aid of one eighteenth-century caricature, "The Coffee-House Patriots." Its chief figure is a fat gormandizing man said to be Dr Johnson, who is staring at us with an open mouth; with him are a dog and half a dozen men arguing. I glanced at it daily, not because I liked it particularly, but because it was that strange and alluring world, the eighteenth century. Thirteen years later when Annie Burr and I married, an old and dear friend, Leonard Bacon, gave us the original drawing for the print, which is signed, "H. W. Bunbury, 1780."

There are forty-seven of Bunbury's drawings at Farmington. They range from five that were drawn for Boydell's *Shakespeare Gallery*, to servants playing billiards, wood-gatherers, and the younger Horace Mann, having lost his way being escorted home by a farmer's wife. Of special interest is *La Cuisine de la Poste*, which was exhibited at the Royal Academy Exhibition in 1770. Walpole noted on it in his copy of the catalogue, "All the characters are most highly natural, and this drawing perhaps excels the Gate of Calais by Hogarth in whose manner it is composed." Bunbury's drawing has come to Farmington since I began this Chapter. Eleven years after it was drawn Bunbury exhibited his "Richmond Hill" at the Royal Academy and presented it to Walpole in a note after the Exhibition was over. Walpole wrote him,

I am just come, Sir, from the Royal Academy, where I had been immediately struck, as I always am by your works, by a most capital drawing of Richmond Hill; but what was my surprise and pleasure—for I fear the latter preceded my modesty—when I found your note, and read that so very fine a performance was destined for me! This is a true picture of my emotions, Sir, but I hope you will believe that I am not less sincere when I assure you that the first moment's reflection told me how infinitely, Sir, you think of overpaying me for the poor though just tribute of my praise in a trifling work, whose chief merit is its having avoided flattery. Your genius, Sir, cannot want *that*, and, still less, my attestation; but when you condescend to reward *this*, I doubt I shall be a little vain, for when I shall have such a certificate to produce, how will it be possible

to remain quite humble? I must beg you, Sir, to accept my warmest and most grateful thanks, which are doubled by your ingenious delicacy in delivering me, in this very agreeable manner, from the pain I felt in fearing that I had taken too much liberty with you. I am, etc., Hor. Walpole.

Bunbury's high place in Walpole's collection of talented ladies and gentlemen is seen in our Print Room. I believe his reputation will grow as more and more discover his good-natured drawings and prints that give us characters in all walks of eighteenth-century life going about their daily business with the "touches of nature" that won the encomiums of the first historian of his country's artists.