

JOHN COLLET (CA. 1725-1780)
A COMMERCIAL COMIC ARTIST
TWO VOLUMES
VOLUME I

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ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on the comic work of the English painter John Collet (ca. 1725-1780), who flourished between 1760 and 1780, producing mostly mild social satires and humorous genre subjects. In his own lifetime, Collet was a celebrated painter, who was frequently described as the ‘second Hogarth.’ His works were known to a wide audience; he regularly participated in London’s public exhibitions, and more than eighty comic prints were made after his oil paintings and watercolour designs. Despite his popularity and prolific output, however, Collet has been largely neglected by modern scholars. When he is acknowledged, it is generally in the context of broader studies on graphic satire, consequently confusing his true profession as a painter and eliding his contribution to London’s nascent exhibition culture. This study aims to rescue Collet from obscurity through in-depth analysis of his mostly unfamiliar works, while also offering some explanation for his exclusion from the British art historical canon. His work will be located within both the arena of public exhibitions and the print market, and thus, for the first time, equal attention will be paid to the extant paintings, as well as the reproductive prints. The thesis will be organised into a succession of close readings of Collet’s work, with each chapter focusing on a few representative examples of a significant strand of imagery. These images will be examined from art-historical and socio-historical perspectives, thereby demonstrating the artist’s engagement with both established pictorial traditions, and ephemeral and topical social preoccupations.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Volume I

Title Page	i
Abstract	ii
Contents	iii
List of Illustrations	iv
Acknowledgements	xxiii
Author's Declaration	xxiv
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: The Comic Countryside.....	28
Chapter 2: Imitation and Emulation.....	78
Chapter 3: Violence, Laughter, and the Street	143
Chapter 4: Feathers, Fashion, and Female Beauties	195
Epilogue: The Death of the Commercial Comic Artist.....	251
Appendix I: Catalogue of Extant Original Works.....	280
Appendix II: Catalogue of Extant Prints.....	286
Appendix III: List of Exhibited Works	297
Abbreviations	302
Bibliography	
i. Primary Sources	304
ii. Secondary Sources	312
iii. Digital Sources	329

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Introduction

1. John Goldar after John Collet, Thomas Bradford publisher. *The Canonical Beau, or Mars in the Dumps*, 1768, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
2. Gérard Jean Baptiste Scotin after William Hogarth. “The Marriage Settlement,” Plate 1 from *Marriage a la Mode*, 1745, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).

Chapter 1

- 1.1. John Collet. *River Scene*, ca. 1760-1770, Victoria and Albert Museum, London (photo: Beatrice Bertram).
- 1.2. James Caldwell after John Collet, Robert Sayer and John Smith publishers. *The Gipsies*, 1770, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 1.3. Andrea Casali. *Edward Martyr Being Stabbed in the Back in the Presence of Alfredo at Corfe Castle*, ca. 1760, Burton Constable Hall, Yorkshire (photo: Courtesy of BBC Your Paintings).
- 1.4. George Smith. *Landscape*, ca. 1760, Cheltenham Art Gallery & Museum, Cheltenham. (photo: Courtesy of BBC Your Paintings).
- 1.5. William Hogarth. *The Enraged Musician*, 1741, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 1.6. Detail of *The Gipsies*. See 1.2.
- 1.7. Detail from William Hogarth. *The Jones Family*, ca. 1730, National Museum, Wales (photo: Courtesy of BBC Your Paintings).
- 1.8. Thomas Major after David Teniers the Younger. *A Flemish Wake*, 1752, Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery, Glasgow (photo: Courtesy of Hunterian Collection online).
- 1.9. Housebook Master (Master of the Amsterdam Cabinet). *Gypsy Family*, ca. 1475, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Drypoint (photo: Holberton, 1995: 383).

- 1.10. David Teniers the Younger. *The Gypsies*, ca. 1650-1690, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lille (photo: Courtesy of <http://www.repro-tableaux.com>).
- 1.11. Thomas Gainsborough. *Landscape with Gypsies*, ca. 1753, Tate Britain, London (photo: © Tate, London).
- 1.12. Simon de Vos. *The Fortune Teller*, 1639, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp (photo: Courtesy of <http://www.kikirpa.be>).
- 1.13. *The Chequer'd World's Before thee Go...* 1753, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 1.14. Antoine Watteau *La Diséause d'aventure (The Fortune Teller)*, 1710, oil on canvas (ca. 1710), Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco (photo: <http://www.topofart.com>).
- 1.15. George Bickham after Antoine Watteau. *Falsehood*, illustration from the *Universal Penman*, 1740, British Library, London (Bickham, 1743: 41).
- 1.16. Edward Ryley after Antoine Watteau. *The Fortune Teller*, 1754, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 1.17. Chelsea Porcelain Manufactory, Figurine after Francois Boucher. *Fortune Teller*, ca. 1760, British Museum, London. Porcelain (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 1.18. Francis Vivares after Francis Hayman, Thomas Bowles, publisher. *The Fortune Teller or Casting the Coffee Grounds*, 1743, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 1.19. William Jones. *The Fortune Teller*, ca. 1740, Private Collection (photo: Courtesy of <http://www.fineartbase.com>).
- 1.20. Francis Hayman. *The Milkmaid's Garland or Humours of May*, 1741-1743, Victoria and Albert Museum, London (photo: © Victoria and Albert Museum).
- 1.21. John Goldar after John Collet, Robert Sayer and John Smith, publishers. *Female Nude*, 1770, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 1.22. Charles Grignion after John Collet, Robert Sayer and John Smith, publishers. *Female Nude*, 1770, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).

- 1.23. Charles Grignion after John Collet, Robert Sayer and John Smith, publishers. *Female Nude*, 1770, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 1.24. Album containing incomplete first installment of *Collet's Designs both Serious and Comic*, ca. 1770, Burton Constable Hall, West Yorkshire (photo: Courtesy of Burton Constable Hall).
- 1.25. Edward Rooker after John Collet, Robert Sayer and John Smith, publishers. Plate 1, *Collet's Designs...*, 1770, Burton Constable Hall, West Yorkshire (photo: Courtesy of Burton Constable Hall).
- 1.26. Samuel Smith after John Collet, Robert Sayer and John Smith, publishers. Plate 3, *Collet's Designs...*, 1770, Burton Constable Hall, West Yorkshire (photo: Courtesy of Burton Constable Hall).
- 1.27. Samuel Smith after John Collet, Robert Sayer and John Smith, publishers. Plate 4, *Collet's Designs...*, 1770, Burton Constable Hall, West Yorkshire (photo: Courtesy of Burton Constable Hall).
- 1.28. William Byrne after John Collet, Robert Sayer and John Smith, publishers. Plate 6, *Collet's Designs...*, 1770, Burton Constable Hall, West Yorkshire (photo: Courtesy of Burton Constable Hall).
- 1.29. John Collet. *Landscape with Ruined Abbey and Figures*, ca. 1770, Private Collection. Oil (photo: Courtesy of Dreweatts & Bloomsbury Auctions).
- 1.30. George Lambert. *Classical Landscape with Fishermen*, 1743, Private Collection (Einberg, 2001: 149).
- 1.31. Claude Lorraine. *A Sunset or Landscape with Argus Guarding Io*, date unknown, Holkam Hall, Norfolk (photo: Courtesy of <http://www.magnoliabox.com>).
- 1.32. Francois Boucher. *The Bridge*, 1751, Louvre, Paris (photo: Courtesy of photo: Courtesy of Wikipedia).
- 1.33. George Lambert. *English Farm with Labourers*, 1757, Foundling Museum, London (photo: Courtesy of <http://www.art-prints-on-demand.com>).
- 1.34. James Mason after George Lambert, John Boydell publisher. Detail from a *Picture Presented to the Foundling Hospital* (i.e. *An English Farm with Labourers*), 1771, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).

- 1.35. John Collet. *Farmyard Scene*, ca. 1770, Wichita Art Museum, Kansas. Watercolour, pen and ink (photo: Courtesy of Wichita Art Museum).
- 1.36. James Mason after John Collet, Robert Sayer and John Smith, publishers. Plate 7, *Designs by Jn Collett...*, 1770, Kohler Art Library, Madison (photo: Courtesy of the photo: Courtesy of the University of Wisconsin Digital Collections).
- 1.37. Samuel Smith after John Collet, Robert Sayer and John Smith, publishers. Plate 18, *Collet's Designs...*, 1770, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 1.38. James Mason after John Collet, Robert Sayer and John Smith, publishers. Plate 13, *Collet's Designs...* 1770, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 1.39. Samuel Smith after John Collet, Robert Sayer and John Smith, publishers. Plate 10, *Designs by Jn Collett...*, 1770, Kohler Art Library, Madison (photo: Courtesy of the University of Wisconsin Digital Collections).
- 1.40. Samuel Smith after John Collet, Robert Sayer and John Smith, publishers. Plate 8, *Collet's Designs...*, 1770, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 1.41. Thomas Gainsborough. *Landscape with Milkmaid and Woodcutter*, ca. 1755, Private Collection (photo: Courtesy of Wikipedia).
- 1.42. George Lambert. *Landscape with Farmworkers*, ca. 1735, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven (photo: Courtesy of Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection).
- 1.43. Robert Hancock after John Collet, Robert Sayer and John Smith, publishers. Plate 16, *Designs by Jn Collett...*, 1770, Kohler Art Library, Madison (photo: Courtesy of the University of Wisconsin Digital Collections).
- 1.44. Francis Hayman. *The Play of Skittles (The Enraged Vixen of a Wife)*, ca. 1741, Birmingham City Museum and Art Gallery (photo: Courtesy of Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery).
- 1.45. Isaac Taylor after John Collet, Robert Sayer and John Smith, publishers. Plate 19, *Collet's Designs...*, 1770, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 1.46. Transfer-printed ceramic jug, ca. 1770s (photo: Drakard, 1992: 83).

- 1.47. *Ibid.*
- 1.48. John June after John Collet, Robert Sayer and John Smith, publishers. Plate 15, *Designs by Jn. Collett...*, 1770, Kohler Art Library, Madison (photo: Courtesy of the University of Wisconsin Digital Collections).
- 1.49. David Teniers. *The Country Dance*, ca. 1650, Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow (photo: Courtesy of <http://www.magnoliabox.com>).
- 1.50. David Teniers. *The Courtyard of a Village Inn with a Man Toasting Departing Revellers*, ca. 1640, Private Collection (photo: Courtesy of <http://www.art-prints-on-demand.com>).
- 1.51. After John Collet, Robert Sayer and John Smith, publishers. *An Holland Smock to be run for by any Woman born in this County: the Best Woman in three Heats*, 1770, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 1.52. William Hogarth. *Southwark Fair*, 1734, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).

Chapter 2

- 2.1. John Collet. “The Courtship” from *A Love Match*, ca. 1764, Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia (photo: Courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg).
- 2.2. John Collet. “The Elopement” from *A Love Match*, ca. 1764, Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia (photo: Courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg).
- 2.3. John Collet. “The Honey-Moon” from *A Love Match*, ca. 1764, Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia (photo: Courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg).
- 2.4. John Collet. “Discordant Matrimony” from *A Love Match*, ca. 1764, Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia (photo: Courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg).
- 2.5. John Collet. *High Life Below Stairs* (or *High Taste in Low Life*), 1763, Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia (photo: Courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg).
- 2.6. William Hogarth. “The Marriage Settlement” from *Marriage a la Mode*, 1743, National Gallery (photo: Courtesy of photo: Courtesy of Wikipedia).
- 2.7. Philippe Mercier. *Lovers in a Park*, ca. 1727, Syon House, Middlesex (photo: Courtesy of <http://www.art-prints-on-demand.com>).
- 2.8. Jean-Antoine Watteau. *The Scale of Love*, ca. 1715, National Gallery, London (photo: Courtesy of Wikipedia).

- 2.9. Detail from “The Courtship.” *See fig. 2.1.*
- 2.10. Detail from “The Elopement.” *See Fig. 2.2*
- 2.11. John Goldar after John Collet, Thomas Bradford, publisher. Detail from “The Elopement,” Plate 2 from *Modern Love*, 1765, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 2.12. William Hogarth. “The Tête à Tête” from *Marriage a la Mode*, 1743, National Gallery, London (photo: Courtesy of Wikipedia).
- 2.13. Luca Giordano. *Cupid Abandoning Psyche*, ca. 1695, Royal Collection (photo: © HM Queen Elizabeth II).
- 2.14. Johann Zoffany. *John, Fourteenth Lord Willoughby de Broke, and his Family*, ca. 1766, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (photo: Courtesy of Wikipedia).
- 2.15. William Hogarth. “The Lady’s Death” from *Marriage a la Mode*, 1743, National Gallery, London (photo: Courtesy of Wikipedia).
- 2.16. Carington Bowles, publisher. *The Honey-Moon*, 1777, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 2.17. Carington Bowles, publisher. *Six Weeks after Marriage*, 1777, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 2.18. James Gillray, Hannah Humphrey, publisher. *Harmony before Matrimony*, 1805, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 2.19. James Gillray, Hannah Humphrey, publisher. *Matrimonial Harmonics*, 1805, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 2.20. John Lewis Marks. *Before Marriage!/After Marriage!*, ca. 1825, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 2.21. William Hogarth. *A Scene from the Beggar’s Opera, IV*, 1731, Tate Britain, London (photo: © Tate, London).
- 2.22. Francis Hayman. *Falstaff Reviewing Recruit*, ca. 1760-1765, Private Collection (photo: Courtesy of Philip Mould Fine Paintings).
- 2.23. Francis Hayman. *Garrick as Richard III*, ca. 1760, Holburne Museum, Bath (photo: Courtesy of <http://shakespeare.emory.edu>)

- 2.24. Johann Zoffany. *David Garrick as Sir John Brute The Provok'd Wife by Sir John Vanbrugh: Drury Lane Theatre*, ca. 1763, Holburne Museum, Bath (photo: Courtesy of BBC Your Paintings).
- 2.25. Angelica Kauffmann. *David Garrick*, 1764, Burghley House, Stamford (photo: Courtesy of Wikipedia).
- 2.26. William Dawes. *The Downfall of Shakespeare represented on the Modern Stage*, ca. 1765, Victoria and Albert Museum (photo: © Victoria and Albert Museum).
- 2.27. Johann Zoffany. *The Farmer's Return from London*, 1762, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven (photo: Courtesy of Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection).
- 2.28. F.W. Fairholt. "Father Paul in his Cups," scene from *The Duenna*, illustration in *A History of Caricature and Grotesque in Literature and Art* (photo: Courtesy of <http://openlibrary.org>).
- 2.29. Attributed to Robert Dighton, Carington Bowles publisher, "Father Paul in his Cups," scene from *The Duenna*, ca. 1777, British Museum (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 2.30. Attributed to Robert Dighton, Carington Bowles publisher, "Father Paul Disturb'd or the Lay-Bother Reprov'd," scene from *The Duenna*, ca. 1777, British Museum (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 2.31. William Hogarth. "The Toilette," fourth canvas from *Marriage a la Mode*, ca. 1746, National Gallery, London (photo: Courtesy of Wikipedia).
- 2.32. Jan Steen. *In Luxury Beware*, 1663, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (photo: Courtesy of Wikipedia).
- 2.33. Jan Steen. *Twelfth Night*, 1668, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin (photo: Courtesy of Wikipedia).
- 2.34. Jan Steen. *The Dissolute Household*, ca. 1660, The Wellington Collection, Apsley House, London (photo: Courtesy of BBC Your Paintings).
- 2.35. *Fashion Doll*, ca. 1755-1760, Victoria and Albert Museum, London (photo: © Victoria and Albert Museum).

- 2.36. *Bergère Hat*, ca.1760, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Silk and raffia (Met Museum collections online).
- 2.37. Jean-Honoré Fragonard. *The Shepherdess*, ca. 1750-1752, Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee (photo: Courtesy of Wikipedia).
- 2.38. Thomas Gainsborough. *Mary, Countess Howe*, ca,1763-1764, Kenwood House, London (photo: Courtesy of Wikipedia).
- 2.39. Joshua Reynolds. *Catherine Moore (Lady Chambers)*,1756, Kenwood House, London (photo: Courtesy of Wikipedia).
- 2.40. Detail from *High Taste in Low Life*. See fig. 2.5.
- 2.41. Photograph of lost trade-card for Joseph White, ca. 1764, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 2.42. Thomas Gainsborough. *Ann Ford (later Mrs. Philip Thicknesse)*, ca. 1760, Cincinnati Art Museum, Cincinnati (photo: Courtesy of Wikipedia).
- 2.43. Charles Corbutt after Joshua Reynolds. *Miss Fordyce*, ca. 1763-1766, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 2.44. George James. *The Three Miss Walpoles as Children*, ca. 1768, Private Collection (photo: Courtesy of www.1st-art-gallery.com).
- 2.45. William Hogarth. Plate 3 from *The Harlot's Progress*, 1732, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 2.46. Details from *High Taste in Low Life*. See fig. 2.5.
- 2.47. Details from *High Taste in Low Life*. See fig. 2.5.
- 2.48. James McArdell after William Smith of Chichester. *Elizabeth Canning*, 1754, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 2.49. James Caldwell after John Collet, Robert Sayer and John Smith publishers. *High Life Below Stairs*, 1772, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 2.50. Robert Laurie after John Collet, Robert Sayer, publisher. *The Jealous Maids*, 1772, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).

- 2.51. Robert Laurie after John Collet, Robert Sayer, publisher. *The Rival Milleners*, 1772 (reissued state ca. 1778), British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).

Chapter 3

- 3.1. John Collet. *The Female Bruisers*, 1768, Museum of London (photo: Courtesy of Museum of London).
- 3.2. Butler Clowes after John Collet. *The Female Bruisers*, 1770, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 3.3. John Goldar after John Collet, Thomas Bradford, publisher. *The Female Bruisers*, 1770, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 3.4. John Collet. *Covent Garden Piazza and Market*, ca. 1770, Museum of London (photo: Courtesy of Museum London).
- 3.5. Samuel Scott. *Covent Garden on a Market Day*, 1758, Museum of London (photo: Courtesy of Museum London).
- 3.6. Detail from *Covent Garden Piazza and Market*. See fig. 3.5.
- 3.7. *Ibid.*
- 3.8. *Ibid.*
- 3.9. *Ibid.*
- 3.10. *Ibid.*
- 3.11. Pieter Angellis. *Covent Garden*, 1726, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven (photo: Courtesy of Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection).
- 3.12. Martin Rennoldson after John Collet, Robert Sayer and John Smith, publishers. *The Female Orators*, 1768, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 3.13. Marcellus Laroon, Pierce Tempest, publisher. *Four for Six Pence Mackrell* from *The Cryes of the City of London Drawne after the Life*, 1688, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).

- 3.14. Paul Sandby. *Rare Mackerel* from *Twelve London Cries Done from the Life, Part 1st*, 1760, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 3.15. William Hogarth. *Beer Street*, 1751, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 3.16. William Hogarth. *Gin Lane*, 1751, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 3.17. Anthony Walker. *The Beaux Disaster*, 1747, British Museum (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 3.18. Charles White after John Collet, Robert Sayer and John Smith, publishers. *The Frenchman in London* (or *Le Francois a Londres*), 1770, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 3.19. Carington Bowles, publisher. *Billingsgate Triumphant, or – Poll Dab a Match for the Frenchman*, hand-coloured mezzotint (1775), British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 3.20. After Adriaen van der Venne. *The Battle for the Breeches*, 1635, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 3.21. Anonymous. *Tittle-Tattle; Or, the Several Branches of Gossipping*, image ca. 1600, impression ca. 1750, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 3.22. Wenceslaus Hollar. *Satire on Gossip*, ca. 1622-1677, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 3.23. Detail from *Tittle-Tattle*. See Fig. 3.21.
- 3.24. Frontispiece to *The New Art and Mystery of Gossipping*, 1760, British Library, London (photo: Courtesy of Eighteenth-Century Collections Online).
- 3.25. John Collet. *A Rescue, or the Tars Triumphant*, 1767, private collection (photo: Courtesy of Blouin Art Sales Index).
- 3.26. Butler Clowes after John Collet, Robert Sayer, publisher. *A Rescue or the Tars Triumphant*, 1768, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).

- 3.27. Anonymous. *Greenwich Hill or Holyday Gambols*, ca. 1740-1760, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 3.28. After Arnold Van Haecken. *The View and Humours of Billingsgate*, 1736, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 3.29. Anonymous, Robert Sayer, publisher. *An English Jack-Tar giving Monsieur a Drubbing*, 1779, Library of Congress, Washington (photo: Courtesy of the Library of Congress).
- 3.30. William Tringham after Egbert van Heemskerck. *The Midnight Magistrate or the Humours of a Watch House*, 1734, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 3.31. Charles Mosley. *The Tar's Triumph or Bawdy House Battery*, 1749, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 3.32. Anonymous. *The Beggar's Chorus or Jovial Crew*, ca. 1750, Huntington Library, San Marino (photo: © The Huntington Library, Art Collections & Botanical Gardens).
- 3.33. William Hogarth. Plate 3 from *Hudibras's First Adventure*, 1726, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 3.34. John Goldar after John Collet, Robert Sayer and John Bennett, publishers. *The Mutual Embrace*, 1774, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 3.35. John Collet. *A Scene in a London Street*, 1770, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven (photo: Courtesy of Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection).
- 3.36. Andrea Casali. *Cleopatra (or The Death of Cleopatra)*, ca. 1760s, private collection (photo: Courtesy of Fondazione Fedrico Zeri, University of Bologna).
- 3.37. Henry Robert Morland. *A Girl Singing Ballads by a Paper Lanthorn*, ca. 1760s, Tate Britain, London (photo: © Tate, London).
- 3.38. George Romney. *A Large Family Piece (or The Leigh Family)*, ca. 1768, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne (photo: Courtesy of Wikipedia).
- 3.39. Butler Clowes after William Dawes, Robert Sayer, publisher. *The Hen-Peckt Husband*, 1768, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).

- 3.40. William Dawes. *The Hen-Peckt Husband*, ca. 1767, private collection (photo: Courtesy of Artnet).
- 3.41. *The Victorious Wife: Or, The Hen-peckt Husband*, ca. 1685-1688, Pepys Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge (photo: Courtesy of the English Broadside Ballad Archive).

Chapter 4

- 4.1. John Collet. *The Hurdy-Gurdy Player*, ca. 1770, Private Collection (photo: Courtesy of <http://www.bonhams.com/auctions/19777/lot/120/>).
- 4.2. After John Collet, Carington Bowles, publisher. *The Feather'd Fair in a Fright*, ca. 1777, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.3. After John Collet, Carington Bowles, publisher. *The Feather'd Fair in a Fright*, 1779, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.4. Detail from *The Feather'd Fair in a Fright*. See fig. 4.2.
- 4.5. "Two Ladies in the Newest Dress," in the *The Lady's Magazine*, 1775, Lewis Walpole Library, Farmington (photo: Author).
- 4.6. "Fashionable Dresses in the Rooms at Weymouth" in *Lady's Magazine*, 1774, Victoria and Albert Museum, London (photo: © Victoria and Albert Museum).
- 4.7. "A Lady in the newest full Dress and another in the most fashionable Undress," in unknown pocket book, 1778, Barbara Johnson's album, Victoria and Albert Museum (photo: © Victoria and Albert Museum).
- 4.8. Unidentified fashion plate, Barbara Johnson's album, Victoria and Albert Museum, London (photo: © Victoria and Albert Museum).
- 4.9. Robert Pranker after John Collet, Robert Sayer, publisher. Fashion plate, 1770, British Museum London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.10. Robert Pranker after John Collet, Robe Sayer, publisher. Fashion plate, 1770, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.11. Charles Grignion after John Collet, Robert Sayer, publisher. Fashion plate, 1770, British Museum, London (photo: Courtesy of the University of Wisconsin Digital Collections).
- 4.12. Martin Rendolson after John Collet, Robert Sayer, publisher. Fashion plate, 1770, British Museum, London (photo: Courtesy of the University of Wisconsin Digital Collections).

- 4.13. Thomas Gainsborough. *Elizabeth and Mary Linley*, 1771-1772, Dulwich Picture Gallery, London (© Trustees of Dulwich Picture Gallery).
- 4.14. Joshua Reynolds. *Mrs. Elisha Mathews*, 1777, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (photo: Courtesy of Museum of Fine Arts, Houston online).
- 4.15. Joshua Reynolds. *Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire*, ca. 1774-1775, Huntington Art Gallery, San Marino (photo: © The Huntington Library, Art Collections & Botanical Gardens).
- 4.16. Attributed to Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Matthew Darly, publisher. *Miss Shuttlecock*, 1776, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.17. Matthew Darly, publisher. *The Vis-à-vis Bisected, or the Ladies Coop*, 1776, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.18. Philip Dawe, Robert Sayer and James Bennett, publishers. *A Hint to the Ladies to Take Care of their Heads*, 1776, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.19. William Sherwin. *The most High, most Excellent, and most Mighty Monarch Charles the Second...*, ca. 1672, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.20. William Hoare. *Christopher Anstey and his Daughter*, ca. 1776-1778, National Portrait Gallery, London (photo: © National Portrait Gallery, London).
- 4.21. John Collet. Study for *The Feather'd Fair*, ca. 1776, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.22. John Raphael Smith, Carington Bowles, publisher. *All Sorts*, ca. 1775-1776, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.23. John Raphael Smith, Carington Bowles, publisher. *A Bagnigge Wells scene, or No Resisting Temptation*, 1776, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.24. John Smith after Jacopo Caraglio and Perino del Vaga. *Apollo and Daphne* from the series *The Loves of the Gods (Tabulae novem coelo elaboratae ad totidem Titiani archetypes)*, *Nine Prints from the Celebrated Paintings of Titian, in the Duke of Marlboroughs Gallery, at Blenheim*, ca. 1709, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.25. Valentine Green after George Willison, Robert Sayer, publisher. *Leda and the Swan*, 1771, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.26. Cesare da Sesto. *Leda and the Swan*, ca. 1505-1510, Wilton House, Salisbury (photo: Courtesy of Wikipedia).

- 4.27. Carington Bowles, publisher. *Bob Blunt in Amaze, or Female Fashionable Follies* (also published as *The Fashionable Dresses for the Year 1776*), 1776, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.28. After John Collet, Carington Bowles, publisher. *Miss Wicket and Miss Trigger*, 1778, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.29. After John Collet, Carington Bowles, publisher. *The Pleasures of Skating, or a View in Winter*, 1780, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.30. After John Collet, Carington Bowles, publisher. *An Actress at her Toilet, or Miss Brazen just Breecht.*, 1779, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.31. After John Collet, Carrington Bowles, publisher. *The Proverb Revers'd, or, a Bird in the Bush worth Two in the Hand*, ca. 1778, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.32. After John Collet, Carington Bowles, publisher. *The Victim*, mezzotint, ca. 1780, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.33. After John Collet, Carington Bowles, publisher. *The Pretty Waterwoman, or Admiral Purblind just run-a-ground by Peggy Pullaway*, 1780, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.34. Philip Dawe after Henry Morland, Carington Bowles, publisher. *The Oyster Woman*, 1769, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.35. Attributed to John Raphael Smith, Carington Bowles, publisher. *The Bird of Paradise*, 1781, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.36. After John Collet, Carington Bowles, publisher. *The Pretty Bar Maid*, 1778, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.37. After John Collet, Carington Bowles, publisher. *Tight Lacing, or Fashion Before Ease*, ca. 1777, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.38. After John Collet, Carington Bowles, publisher. *The Amorous Thief, or Lover's Larceny*, ca. 1777, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.39. Carington Bowles, publisher. *Lady Betty Bustle and her Maid Lucy Preparing for the Masquerade at the Pantheon*, ca. 1772, Lewis Walpole Library, Farmington (photo: Courtesy of Lewis Walpole Library).

- 4.40. Carington Bowles, publisher. *Miss Rattle Preparing for the Pantheon*, ca. 1772, Lewis Walpole Library, Farmington (photo: Courtesy of Lewis Walpole Library).
- 4.41. John Linnell. Design for a pier table, pier-glass and pedestals, ca. 1765, Victoria and Albert Museum, London (Hayward and Kirkham, 1980: 105).
- 4.42. Matthew Darly after Thomas Chippendale. Design for *The Gentleman and Cabinet-Maker's Director...*, 1772, British Library, London (photo: Courtesy of Eighteenth-Century Collections Online).
- 4.43. Matthew Darly after Thomas Chippendale. Design for *The Gentleman and Cabinet-Maker's Director...*, 1772, British Library, London (photo: Courtesy of Eighteenth-Century Collections Online).
- 4.44. After John Collet, Carington Bowles, publisher. *Bachelor's Fare, or, Bread and Cheese with Kisses*, 1777, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.45. After John Collet, Carington Bowles, publisher. *Fielding's Myrmidons spoiling Bob Booty's Morning Draught*, 1781, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.46. After George van der Mij, Carington Bowles, publisher. *The English Coachman*, 1769, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.47. Philip Dawe after Adriaen van Ostade, Carington Bowles, publisher. *The Waggoner and the Fisherman*, 1769, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.48. After Adriaen Brouwer, Carington Bowles, publisher. *Dutch Amusement*, ca. 1760s, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.49. After John Collet, Carington Bowles, publisher. *An Officer in the Light Infantry Driven by His Lady to Cox-Heath*, 1778, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.50. After John Collet, Carington Bowles, publisher. *The Female Fox Hunter*, 1778, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.51. Fashion Plate, date unknown (photo: Mark Hallett).
- 4.52. Joshua Reynolds. *Lady Worsley*, ca. 1776, Harewood House, Yorkshire (photo: Courtesy of Wikipedia).
- 4.53. John Collet. *Corporal Cartouche Instructing Miss Camplove in her Martial Exercises*, 1778, Guards Museum, London (photo: Courtesy of <http://www.military-historians.org/company/journal/guards/guards.htm>).

- 4.54. Attributed to John Raphael Smith, Carington Bowles, publisher. *Spectators at a Print Shop in St. Paul's Church Yard*, 1774, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.54a Carington Bowles, publisher. *The Paintress of Macaroni's*, 1772, Lewis Walpole Library, Farmington (photo: Courtesy of Lewis Walpole Library).
- 4.54b Carington Bowles, publisher. *Beau Mordecai Inspir'd*, ca. 1772-1773, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.54c After Nathaniel Hone, Carington Bowles, publisher. *The Revd Mr John Wesley*, 1770, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.54d After Nathaniel Hone, Carington Bowles, publisher. *The Revd George Whitefield*, 1769, mezzotint, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.55. Edward Topham, Matthew Darly, publisher. *The Macaroni Print Shop*, 1772, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.55a After Richard St. George Mansergh, Matthew Darly, publisher. *The Clerical Macaroni*, 1772, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.55b Matthew Darly. *The Fly-Catching Macaroni*, 1772, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.55c Matthew Darly, *The Unfortunate Macaroni*, 1772, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.56. Carington Bowles, publisher. *Lady Fashion's Secretary's Office, or Petticoat Recommendation the Best*, 1772, Victoria and Albert Museum, London (photo: © Victoria and Albert Museum).
- 4.57. Matthew Darly. *The Macaroni Auctioneer*, 1772, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.58. Carington Bowles, publisher. *The Lilly-White Maccaroni*, 1772, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.59. Matthew Darly. *The Old Maids Morning Visit or the Calash Lady's*, 1777, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.60. Carington Bowles, publisher. *A Morning Visit –or the Fashionable Dresses for the Year 1777*, 1778, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.61. Matthew Darly, publisher. *Tight Lacing or Hold Fast Behind*, 1777, Lewis Walpole Library, Farmington (photo: Courtesy of Lewis Walpole Library).

- 4.62. Butler Clowes after John Collet, Robert Sayer, publisher. *Grown Gentlemen taught to Dance*, 1768, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.63. *Grown Citizens Learning to Dance* in Oxford Magazine, 1769, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.64. Matthew Darly. *The Extravaganza or the Mountain Head Dress of 1776*, 1776, Lewis Walpole Library, Farmington (photo: Courtesy of the Lewis Walpole Library).
- 4.65. Carington Bowles, publisher. *Slight of Hand by a Monkey*, 1776, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.66. After John Collet, Carington Bowles, publisher. “Spring” from *The Four Seasons of the Year*, ca. 1778, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.67. After John Collet, Carington Bowles, publisher. “Summer” from *The Four Seasons of the Year*, ca. 1778, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.68. After John Collet, Carington Bowles, publisher. “Autumn” from *The Four Seasons of the Year*, ca. 1778, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.69. After John Collet, Carington Bowles, publisher. “Winter” from *The Four Seasons of the Year*, ca. 1778, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.70. Crispijn de Passe after Martin de Vos. “Summer” from *The Seasons*, ca. 1600, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.71. Wenceslas Hollar. “Summer” from *The Four Seasons*, 1644, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.72. Richard Houston after Philippe Mercier. “Evening” from *The Parts of the Day*, ca. 1750, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 4.73. Bernard Baron after William Hogarth. “Evening,” from *The Four Times of the Day*, 1738, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).

Epilogue

- 5.1. After Robert Dighton, Carington Bowles, publisher. *An English Man of War, taking a French Privateer*, 1781, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 5.2. After Robert Dighton, Carington Bowles, publisher. *An English Sloop Engaging a Dutch Man of War*, 1781, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 5.3. After Robert Dighton, Carington Bowles, publisher. *Men of War, Bound for the Port of Pleasure*, 1791, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 5.4. After Robert Dighton, Bowles and Carver, publishers. “The Lads of the Village,” from *Twelve Elegant and Humorous Prints of Rural Scenes, adorned with Comic Figures*, ca. 1784, Grosvenor Prints, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 5.5. After Robert Dighton, Bowles and Carver, publishers. “The Gypsy’s Prophecy,” from *Twelve Elegant and Humorous Prints of Rural Scenes, adorned with Comic Figures*, ca. 1784, Grosvenor Prints, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 5.6. George Morland. *Gypsies in a Landscape*, ca. 1790, Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, Bristol (photo: Courtesy of BBC Your Paintings).
- 5.7. George Morland. *Interior of a Stable*, 1791, Tate Britain, London (photo: © Tate, London).
- 5.8. William Ward after George Morland. *The Ass Race*, 1789, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 5.9. John Raphael Smith after George Morland. “The Fair Penitent,” Plate 6 from *Laetitia, or a Harlot’s Progress*, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 5.10. David Wilkie. *Village Politicians*, 1806, Private Collection (Solkin, 2008: x).
- 5.11. David Wilkie. *The Village Holiday*, 1811, Tate, London (photo: © Tate, London).
- 5.12. Detail from *The Village Holiday*. See fig. 5.14.

- 5.13. Joshua Reynolds. *Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy*, 1761, Private Collection (photo: Courtesy of Wikipedia).
- 5.14. Simon Gribelin after Paolo di Matthais. *The Judgment of Hercules*, illustration in Anthony Ashley Cooper, third earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, Volume 3, 1714, British Library, London (photo: Courtesy of Eighteenth Century Collections Online database).
- 5.15. Thomas Heaphy. *The Fish Market*, 1809, private collection. Watercolour (Solkin, 2008: 55).
- 5.16. Detail from *The Fish Market*. See fig. 5.18.
- 5.17. Thomas Rowlandson. *Vauxhall Gardens*, ca. 1784, Victoria and Albert Museum, London (photo: © Victoria and Albert Museum).
- 5.18. Thomas Rowlandson, S.W. Fores, publisher. *A Little Tigher*, 1791, Berkley Art Museum, Berkley (photo: Courtesy of <http://www.posterlounge.de>).
- 5.19. Thomas Rowlandson, Rudolph Ackermann, publisher. Plate from *Miseries of London*, 1807, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 5.20. Thomas Rowlandson. *A Smock Race at a Country Fair*, ca 1790-1810, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 5.21. James Gillray, Hannah Humphrey, publisher. *Political-Dreamings! – Visions of Peace! – Perspective Horrors!*, 1801, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 5.22. James Gillray, Hannah Humphrey, publisher. *Following the Fashion*, 1794, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 5.23. James Gillray after George Moutard Woodward (?), Hannah Humphrey, publisher. *Fashion before Ease, or, A Good Constitution Sacrificed for a Fantastick Form*, 1793, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 5.24. James Bretherton after William Henry Bunbury. *Pot Fair, Cambridge*, 1777, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).
- 5.25. After William Henry Bunbury, John Harris, publisher. *The Kitchen of a French Post House/ La Cuisine de la Poste*, 1771, British Museum, London (photo: © Trustees of the British Museum).

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

The work contained in this thesis is the author's own. It was developed between January 2010 and December 2013. It is the original work of the author except where specifically acknowledged by reference. Portions of Chapter 4 previously appeared in an article published by the *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* (Wiley-Blackwell) in September, 2013 (Blackwell, 2013).

INTRODUCTION

Today, John Collet is an obscure figure in the history of British art. However, there is ample evidence to show that, within his own lifetime, he was a well-known comic artist who was frequently lauded as the ‘second Hogarth.’ At the height of his career, in the 1760s and 1770s, Collet’s name appeared regularly in the London newspapers; a typical reference to the artist can be found in a letter to the editor of the *Morning Chronicle* of 8 May of 1775, which states: “Mr Hogarth is now no more; but we see a genuine successor to his genius in Mr Collet, whose pencil is happily excited in the same ample field of humour, and on the same interesting, general subjects, characters, and manners.”¹ An exhibition-going public saw these Hogarthian works – along with Collet’s many landscapes and animal pictures – at the annual displays of the Free Society of Artists, between 1761 and 1783. Meanwhile, a much broader audience was exposed to his work through the numerous engravings that were made after his oil paintings and watercolour designs. There are more than eighty extant line-engravings and mezzotints after Collet’s comic subjects, and it is primarily through these prints that his work is now known.²

Despite his popularity and prolific output, Collet has been largely neglected by modern scholars. When he is acknowledged, it is generally in the context of broader studies on graphic satire, consequently confusing his true profession as a painter and eliding his contribution to London’s nascent exhibition culture.³ Similarly, his work is conspicuously underrepresented in the major national art collections in England; there are no original canvases by Collet in the National Gallery, the Victoria and Albert Museum,

¹ *The Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* (9 May, 1775).

² For Collet-based prints, see: App. II; Alexander, 2002. Including his non-comic works, there are more than 100 extant Collet-based prints.

³ For Collet in scholarship on graphic satire, see below: 13-14. See also: Brinton, 1904: 38-39; Donald, 1996: 3, 207, 227; George, 1967: 9, 57, 83-84; Kunzle, 319; Paston, 1904: 78, 122, 127-129.

the Royal Academy of Arts, or, most notably, Tate Britain, whose remit it is to collect works which demonstrate “a contribution to the history and development of British art.”⁴ Scanning the index of even the most comprehensive volume on the history of British painting, one tends to find that the artists names listed there jump from Closterman to Collier, indicating that Collet’s impact on the national history of his own profession was negligible, regardless of the fact that he flourished during a period that is now widely recognised to be a formative stage in the history of the British school of painting.⁵ This study aims to rescue Collet from obscurity through in-depth analysis of his mostly unfamiliar works, while also offering some explanation for his exclusion from the British art historical canon. The arguably derivative quality and patently commercial nature of his production, combined with his often bawdy subject matter, make Collet a figure who is difficult to reconcile with accepted narratives regarding the emergence of a British art school; and yet, he was evidently an active and successful participant in the visual culture of his time. In the following pages, Collet’s work will be located within both the arena of public exhibitions and the print market. For the first time, equal attention will be paid to the extant paintings, as well as the reproductive prints, and in the process, this study will uncover a forgotten class of Georgian painter – the commercial comic artist.

I.

The life of John Collet is shrouded in mystery. In spite of his prolific body of work, and his contemporary renown, there is very little in the way of verifiable biographical

⁴ The V&A does hold three pen and ink sketches, and a copy of Hogarth’s *The Affiliation*, which have been attributed to Collet, and the Tate Britain has one pen and ink sketch attributed to Collet. These sketches appear to be print studies. See: App. I, nos. 24, 66, 71, 75.

Tate Acquisition and Disposal Policy (November, 2011), <http://www.tate.org.uk/download/file/fid/11111> (accessed 9 June, 2013).

⁵ See for example: Pears, 1988; Piper, 1965; Waterhouse, 1954.

information on the artist. For the most part, researchers are forced to rely on the scant pieces of anecdotal evidence provided by a number of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century sources, almost all of which were written long after the artist's death.⁶ The most substantial of these early sources is Edward Edwards's *Anecdotes of Painters Who have Resided or been born in England* (1808), a supplement to Horace Walpole's seminal work on English art, *Some Anecdotes of Painting in England* (1762-1782) – which, notably, does *not* include any information on Collet. Edwards's account is probably the most reliable of all sources on the artist. He was a contemporary of Collet's, a fellow artist and member of the St. Martin's Lane Academy, and in all likelihood knew Collet, or, at the very least, shared mutual friends and acquaintances with him.⁷ But even Edwards's entry on Collet is threadbare and incomplete, and other near-contemporary sources must be used to fill in the gaps. These sources include a brief entry in Joseph Strutt's *Biographical Dictionary of Engravers* (1785), which is based on information supplied by a "Mr. Grose," probably Francis Grose⁸, an engraver and antiquary, who seems to have known Collet. Further information is provided by the artist William Henry Pyne's references to Collet in the *Somerset House Gazette* (1824), which are also based on secondary information, possibly provided by the same "Mr Grose," or more likely, his son⁹; and by George Steevens's very brief remarks on his "ingenious friend, the late Mr John Collet" made in *The Genuine Works of William Hogarth* (1808-1817).

The details of Collet's early life are practically non-existent. It is not known when or where the artist was born, only that, according to Edwards, he was born "the son of a

⁶ For a useful survey of these early sources, see: Crown, 2002: 130-132. See also Helen Pierce's entry for Collet in *ODNB*, a revised version of the original biography written by L.H. Crust in 1887.

⁷ For Edwards (1738-1806), see *ODNB*.

⁸ For Grose (1731-1791), see *ODNB*.

⁹ One of Pyne's most detailed anecdotes is attributed to a Mr. G****, who claims that Collet was a friend of his father's, and provides childhood recollections of him. Because the engraver/antiquarian died in 1791, it is most likely that this source was his son, Lieutenant-General Francis Grose (1758-1814). See: *Somerset House Gazette* (12 June, 1824): 142.

gentleman, who possessed a genteel appointment in one of the public offices.”¹⁰ All of the sources seem to agree on this point; however, some later biographies¹¹ maintain that Collet’s father was also an amateur artist, a claim that is validated by an obituary for John Collet, portrait painter of Chelsea, that appeared in the *General Evening Post* of 17 January, 1771, and by a corresponding will, which names the younger Collet, along with his siblings, Matthew, Philippa, and Mary, as among the beneficiaries.¹² Nothing else is known about the Collet family, only that they seem to have been reasonably affluent property-holders. From the elder Collet’s extant will, it is known that he possessed a leasehold property, which he bequeathed to his children upon his death; and according to Strutt, the younger Collet also, at some point, inherited a comfortable annuity from an unnamed, wealthy relative.¹³

Most of the sources are also agreed that Collet received his early training at the second St. Martin’s Lane Academy, an art school established in London in 1735, and run by William Hogarth and the circle of artists and designers who typically congregated at the nearby venue of Slaughter’s Coffee House.¹⁴ Unfortunately, the records of the school are now lost, but Collet’s name is included in a list of academy members compiled by Pyne in the early nineteenth century, at which time the school’s papers may have still been in existence.¹⁵ It is also stated by Edwards, Strutt, and Pyne that Collet studied under the prominent landscape painter, George Lambert, who was a tutor at the St. Martin’s Lane

¹⁰ Edwards, 1808: 66.

¹¹ *ODNB*; Redgrave, 1878: 91. There seems to be some confusion between father and son in some of the early sources. For example, in the aforementioned issue of the *Somerset House Gazette*, Pyne (quoting Mr. G***) states that “Collet was a placeman, either in the Excise or the Customs,” but nowhere else is it mentioned that the younger Collet ever worked in public office.

¹² *General Evening Post* (17 January, 1771); Will, Prob 11/963.

¹³ Strutt, 1785: 212-213.

¹⁴ Edwards, *Ibid.*; Pyne, 1, 1824: 180; Redgrave, *ibid.*

¹⁵ William T. Whitley has said that the Academy’s papers were still in existence in 1813. See: Whitley, 1968: 157. See also Martin Myrone’s history of the St. Martin’s Lane Academy for the *ODNB*.

Academy.¹⁶ Again, this is difficult to substantiate, but the fact that Collet produced a large body of landscape imagery seems to support these claims.

There is almost no evidence of Collet's activities and whereabouts before the 1760s.¹⁷ Then, suddenly, in 1761, he emerges on London's burgeoning art scene as one of the contributors to the second annual exhibition held at the Society of Arts' Great Room on the Strand. His first exhibited works were landscapes.¹⁸ Based on exhibition catalogues, and a smattering of newspaper reports, it is evident that from this point onwards, Collet exhibited almost annually until his death in 1780 (with one further work exhibited posthumously in 1783), and that he displayed works in a variety of genres, including landscapes, animal pictures, and even a few portraits; however, the bulk of his *oeuvre* was comic.¹⁹ It is worth pointing out that Collet only ever exhibited with the group that was eventually known as the Free Society of Artists, and never with the more prominent rival group, the Society of Artists, nor with the Royal Academy. His apparent disavowal of these more illustrious and organised bodies of artists suggests that, though commercially successful, Collet remained somewhat on the periphery of the art community.

From the large volume of extant prints, it is known that many of Collet's paintings were being reproduced as engravings from the mid-1760s onwards. The majority of these prints were supplied by three known publishers: Thomas Bradford, a print publisher and collector of contemporary art, who issued a number of Collet-based line-engravings from 1765 until his death in 1773; Robert Sayer, a leading publisher of maps, prints, and design

¹⁶ Edwards, *Ibid.*; Pyne, 2, 1824: 55; Strutt, *Ibid.* For Lambert, see: Chapter 1: 59-61, 62-63.

¹⁷ There is only one extant painting that can be confidently dated to this pre-1760 period, see: App. I, No. I. There is also some spurious evidence that Collet may have been the author of an anonymous novel published in this period, entitled *Chit-Chat or Natural Characters, and the Manners of Real Life* (1755). This is based on a receipt for the manuscript, made out to a 'Jn. Collet,' which is preserved in the collection of papers of the publisher Robert Dodsley (1704-1764). Ralph Straus, Dodsley's biographer, seems to have made the assumption that this was Collet, the painter, with little evidence, other than the name. This could just as easily have been the elder Collet, or another person entirely. My research has found that, in this period, Collet was a reasonably common name. For the receipt, see: Straus, 1968: 355.

¹⁸ SEAMC, 1761: 4,8.

¹⁹ For a list of Collet's exhibited works, see: App. III.

books, who, together with his partners, John Smith and John Bennett, issued Collet-based line-engravings and mezzotints between 1768 and 1778; and Carington Bowles, a scion of the Bowles publishing dynasty, who issued Collet-based mezzotints from the mid-1770s until around the time of the artist's death in 1780.²⁰ Given the prodigious number of these prints, and the fact that Collet's name is usually included in the inscriptions, it can be deduced that the artist's work was in high demand. Furthermore, it is apparent that Collet, like many eighteenth-century painters, worked closely with print publishers in order to advertise his paintings and gain additional income.²¹ Exactly how much involvement he had in the print trade is, however, a matter for debate. In his *Biographical Dictionary of Engravers*, written just five years after Collet's death, Strutt claims that the artist engraved his own works, and cites two etchings as examples.²² These prints do not survive, nor do any prints engraved by Collet, which inevitably casts doubt on the notion that the artist ever worked as an engraver. Nevertheless, the fact that the artist sold so many of his canvases directly to print publishers – to Bradford, Smith, and Bowles – and produced dozens of watercolour studies, apparently designed with the express purpose of being engraved, indicates that Collet was heavily invested in the business of print selling.

If the details of Collet's professional life are patchy, even less is known about his personal life. Even to his contemporaries and near-contemporaries the artist seems to have been something of an enigma. He is persistently described in the early sources as “sober,” “silent,” and “extremely shy.”²³ In a particularly evocative anecdote relayed in an anonymous letter printed in the *Somerset House Gazette* in 1824, it is recalled that “John

²⁰ App. II; Alexander, 2002: 136-138.

²¹ For symbiotic relationships between painters and print publishers, see: Alexander, 1983; Clayton, 1997; Griffiths, 1990.

²² These etchings are described as: “Antiquarians Smelling to the Chamber-pot of Queen Boadica” and “A Monkey Pointing to a Very dark picture of Moses Striking the Rock.”

²³ Pyne, 1, 1824:249 ; *Somerset House Gazette*, *ibid.*; Strutt, *ibid.*

Collett, the gravest of the grave, would sit at *Turk's Head*²⁴ behind his pipe, and smoke both *Oroonko*²⁵ and his neighbours until St. Clement's midnight bells chimed."²⁶ Such descriptions further contribute to a developing picture of Collet as a shadowy figure, who sat silently on the side-lines of the artistic social scene.

A possible explanation for Collet's detachment from the art community is offered by Steevens, who describes his friend as "a man of learning [and] of considerable fortune" – a fortune which allegedly allowed him to pursue painting "languidly" as a gentleman, rather than a professional painter.²⁷ In fact, most of the available sources allude to an independent wealth, and characterise Collet as an amateur artist.²⁸ The evidence of his energetic production, his frequent recourse to exhibition, and his involvement with the print trade, rather contradicts the image of a gentlemanly amateur, but it does appear that Collet was at least moderately wealthy. At some point in the late 1760s, the artist moved from James Street in Covent Garden to the more genteel borough of Chelsea, where he lived for the rest of his life.²⁹ On 30 July, 1780, at his residence in St. Luke's parish, Collet

²⁴ *Turk's Head* is likely the Turk's Head Tavern on Gerrard Street in Soho, a popular watering hole for artists and writers, known as the first meeting place for The Club, founded in 1764 by Joshua Reynolds and Samuel Johnson. Collet was not a member of this illustrious dining club, but according to Pyne, he was a member of the Eel Pie Club, which met at the Coal Hole Tavern on the Strand. Members of this club included fellow artists Samuel Hieronymus Grimm (1733-1794) and William Thomson (ca.1730-1800). Notably, Pyne's anecdote describing a rollicking evening enjoyed by the Eel Pie Club, also has Collet in the role of the silent observer. For the Turk's Head Tavern, see: Sheppard, 33: 384-386. For the Eel Pie Club, see: Pyne, 2, 1824: 54-55.

²⁵ *Oroonko* is presumably 'Orinoco' tobacco, a sweet variety of the plant that was first cultivated by the Virginia settler John Rolfe (1585-1622), and which was well-liked by English consumers, see: "The Founding of West Virginia," <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-colonial/2029> (accessed 16 June, 2013). For a contemporary advertisement for a tobacconist selling Orinoco, see: *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* (12 June, 1777).

²⁶ *Somerset House Gazette* (4 September, 1824): 347.

²⁷ Nichols and Steevens, 1, 1808: 419.

²⁸ Edwards, *Ibid.*; Pyne, *Ibid.*; Strutt, *Ibid.*

²⁹ The artist seems to have lived at a number of different addresses in this borough, and there is some debate about where he actually spent his final years. His will states that he was "formerly of Millman Street, Chelsea, and currently of St. Luke's Chelsea," presumably referring to the parish of St. Luke's, now known as Chelsea Old Church. He is listed as a rate paying occupant of nearby Cheyne Row from 1766 to 1773, see: Godfrey, 1914: 71-72. Many sources, however, maintain that he lived at this address until his death in 1780, see: *ONDB*, Redgrave, *ibid.*; *The Repository of Arts*, Vol. 8 (1812): 131. Thomas Faulkner, in his history of Chelsea, contends that Collet actually died in a residence on Paradise Row, see: Faulkner, 1829: 211-212.

died a bachelor.³⁰ His sizable estate was divided amongst the families of his two sisters and several friends.³¹

II.

As far as it is known, Collet left nothing in the way of personal memoirs or correspondence; however, his voice is briefly captured in a letter that was published in the *St. James's Chronicle* in May of 1768. Collet's was one of three letters appearing in the *Chronicle* that discussed and debated the subject and meaning of one of the artist's recently exhibited paintings. This exchange is significant not only for the fact that it represents the sole surviving document of the artist's own thoughts on his work, but also because it provides valuable insight into how his art was viewed in his own time. As such, it is worth quoting at considerable length. But before delving into these letters, it will be useful to first look at the painting that initiated the debate: a satirical subject, entitled *The Canonical Beau: or Mars in the Dumps* (fig.1). This work survives in the form of a line-engraving, executed by John Goldar, and published by Thomas Bradford in the same year that the original painting was put on public display. It depicts an elegantly appointed drawing room, in which a group of fashionably-dressed women crowd around a handsome, young clergyman while a disgruntled officer, with a wooden leg, jealously looks on.

In many ways, *The Canonical Beau* is a typical work by Collet, and can be used to introduce some of the defining characteristics of the practice that will be addressed in more

³⁰ His obituary appeared in several newspapers; for a typical example, see: *London Chronicle* (5 August, 1780). The *ODNB* entry erroneously cites his death as 6 August.

³¹ Wealth at death: approx. £850; plus £100 p.a. for thirty years from Jan. 1776 in annuities; also bequeathed furniture, jewellery, books, paintings, and prints. See: Will, Prob 11/1068.

One notable beneficiary of Collet's estate is a woman named Sarah Augul "spinster" of Surrey, who is left £100 and part of an annuity for the maintenance and education of her son, Matthew. Patricia Crown has speculated that this generous endowment is evidence of a significant romantic relationship, and an illegitimate child.

detail in upcoming chapters. Firstly, the viewer will observe the conspicuous use of Hogarthian devices – that is, the distinctive pictorial strategies of the social satires of William Hogarth, the famed London-based painter and engraver, who flourished between 1730 and 1764, and who is widely considered to be the father of British comic art.³² Here, a plate from the earlier artist’s celebrated series, *Marriage a la Mode* (1745), can be used as a preliminary point of reference (fig. 2).³³ Collet’s work is punctuated by details that evoke such works: anthropomorphised pets, including a pug dog who mimics the fawning actions of its owner; a book, fallen open to reveal legible text, which contributes to an overriding satirical theme (“The Church Triumphant/ *cedunt arma togae*³⁴”); and an emblematic painting – in this case a picture of a burning martyr – which cryptically relates to the actions taking place below. Secondly, the viewer will notice the artist’s careful deployment of sartorial detail in the service of his satirical narrative: the thick swathes of satiny fabric; the intricate lace trimmings; and the prominent placement of fashionable accessories, such as the fur muff worn by the older woman on the right, the ribbon-festooned *bergère* hat propped up on the sofa, and a similar piece of millinery worn by the young woman in the middle, which works to crown the roughly triangular figural arrangement below. Finally, there can be detected a palpable sexual undercurrent in *The Canonical Beau*, as manifested in the rapturous expressions on the women’s faces, the lingering glances between the clergyman and his companion on the left, and her almost-spilling cup of hot chocolate, which here suggests imminent sexual release. This last aspect of the image was, as we can now go on to see, one that provoked a sharp note of criticism in the press; however, it was not just his erotic narratives that got Collet in trouble – it was also, crucially, his work’s moral and interpretive ambiguity.

³² For scholarship on Hogarth, see below: 16-17.

³³ For more on *Marriage a la Mode*, see: Chapter 2: 85-96, 122-123; figs. 2.6, 2.12, 2.15, 2.31.

³⁴ Let arms yield to the toga; let military power give way to civil power (Cicero, *De Officiis*, I, 77).

In the first of the three letters dealing with this picture, published on 14 May, an anonymous critic writing under the pseudonym “Crito” begins with an extravagant panegyric on Collet’s skills as “an excellent landscape painter,” a painter of animals (“a second Rubens”), and in humour (“a second Hogarth”), before it settles in to scrutinise *The Canonical Beau*. The critic describes the picture as follows:

No. 59 by Mr. Collet is styled *The Canonical Beau*, and represents a young Bob Jerom drinking Chocolate with a Mother Sinclair and her Nymphs; in other words, a handsome smart Divine in his Canonicals sitting in a bawdy-house with Bawds and Whores. A Harlequin Dog is begging to him. At the other End of the Room sits a disconsolate rejected Officer, with a Wooden Leg, eyeing his happy Rival with much the same Malignity as Milton ascribes to Satan on Surveying our first Parents in Paradise.³⁵

The critic then goes on to air his grievances with this subject: “Allowing all the wit and Humour of all this, will not everyone, however, immediately discover by this Description a manifest Impropriety (not to say Indecency) in this Piece?” According to “Crito,” a clergyman in a bawdy house – and dressed in his canonical robes, no less – is a “Monster the World never saw.” He concludes:

This Picture, therefore, though admirably executed is an Insult on Common Sense as well as on Decorum, and I will be bold to say that, had not the Plan of Mr Collet’s other Pieces been less exceptionable, he would never have received such just Applauses from his Countrymen.

Four days later, on 19 May, the artist submitted his defence, and in this, the only surviving letter penned by Collet, the reader catches a glimpse of a dour (possibly mock-) sincere man, who thanks his reviewer for his compliments, and tactfully corrects his interpretive errors:

³⁵ *St. James’s Chronicle* (14 May, 1768).

Sir, I Beg you will present my Acknowledgements to Your Correspondent Crito, for the unmerited Encomiums he so lavishly bestows upon me in his Letter in your last Paper, and assure him, that though I am not vain enough to expect the World will overlook the Partiality of his Applause, I am happy in the Consciousness of being perfectly innocent of any impropriety or Indecency of which he afterwards thinks fit to accuse me. The Scene of the Picture, called in the Catalogue of the Pall-Mall Exhibition *the Canonical Beau*, is supposed to be an Apartment in a private House, where the Lady of the Family is regaling a Clergyman, and other visitors, with Chocolate, after the Fatigue of a Morning's Devotion; and I am assured, by my gay Friends, that the Nature of the Refreshment, the Dress, and Manner of the Company, and every Circumstance in the Picture are too remote from what are met with in Bagnios and Brothels to excite the most distant Idea of Indecency in any Person at all acquainted with those Scenes of Riot and Debauchery. The Admiration bestowed on this blooming Divine is only such as a handsome young Fellow, so perfectly *adonise*, might raise in Women of all Ages of the strictest Honour, as those in the Picture are supposed to be. And the intention of this little Piece is, gently to reprove those trim Divines who (in this luxurious and dissipated Age) too often trip into the Pulpit in a Manner and dress apparently better calculated to attract the Regards of the Fair, than to inspire that Reverence, which the Dignity and the Importance of their sacred Office require. I am sorry to give you so much Trouble on Account of this Trifle; had I imagined it could have offended any real Friend to Religion and Decency, you may be assured it should not have been exposed to the publick Eye.³⁶

Evidently, in order to clear his name, the artist had not only to deny the charge that he was depicting a man of the cloth in the company of women of ill-repute, but also to prove that his satire served an admirable, didactic purpose.

Finally, on 2 June, another critic, going by the name "Eusebius," weighed in, claiming that, after seeing the painting himself, he "cannot quite clear Mr Collet from the Charge brought against him," citing various symbolic details and the "Air and Dress" of

³⁶ *St. James's Chronicle* (19 May, 1768).

the women as evidence of their true nature and profession. In conclusion, he offers the following salient observations:

Levity and Vanity are just objects of Satire; and so is Vice too, but then the Fact should always be flagrant, and notorious. Hogarth, indeed, (like Fielding) could never properly represent a virtuous woman [...] but in this, as well as other particulars, I hope and believe that [Hogarth's] successor excels him, and doubt not that he can represent scenes of Elegance and Virtue, as well as those of Riot and Debauchery.³⁷

Patricia Crown, one of the few scholars to devote serious attention to Collet's work, has expressed doubts about the veracity of these letters, suggesting the possibility that they were "planted by Collet, his publishers, or friends to excite interest."³⁸ This is certainly an intriguing suggestion, given the extravagant praises bestowed on the artist, the relatively mild censure, and the fact that self-promoting 'puff' pieces were a common occurrence in eighteenth-century newspapers and periodicals. It should be noted, however, that "Crito," whose letter initiated the debate, also offered his opinion on the work of the sculptor John Michael Rysbrack, a fellow Free Society exhibitor, which might steer us away from believing the whole exchange was manufactured by Collet or one of his cronies. But regardless of whether they are genuine reviews or not, these letters obviously play on very real contemporary concerns about the proper sources of laughter and the perceived necessity for satire to serve a corrective function; and indeed, they echo the sentiments of many other reviewers of Collet's comic works. The artist was often celebrated and admonished in the same breath for his affinity with Hogarth, as in the case of another piece of anonymous criticism in *The Gentleman's Magazine* of May, 1767, which declared that: "The colouring of Hogarth is here greatly excelled, his humour agreeably kept up, and was this painter not to follow him in his debauched scenes, but to keep to innocence only, he

³⁷ *St. James's Chronicle* (2 June, 1768).

³⁸ Crown, 2002: 126.

would be surpassed by none of his contemporaries.”³⁹ Yet, in spite of his “debauchery,” or perhaps partially because of it, Collet enjoyed considerable fame and commercial success.

III.

Hitherto, there have been only two scholarly studies that have dealt with Collet’s work in any great depth. These are Crown’s 2002 article, published in *Eighteenth-Century Life*, which looks at the many Collet-based prints of the 1770s that depict women dressing and behaving in a typically masculine manner; and David Alexander’s extensive catalogue of the extant prints after Collet’s works, which appeared in the same issue.⁴⁰ Both of these studies are invaluable resources for any researcher interested in Collet’s art, and indeed, they have played a foundational role in my own study. Crown’s and Alexander’s studies have a relatively narrow scope, however, focusing as they do on the reproductive prints after Collet’s works – and in the case of Crown, on prints of a particular character, rather than on the artist’s wider practice. Nevertheless, these studies have remained, until now, the most substantial scholarship available on the artist.

There are also, as I have previously mentioned, several fleeting references to Collet in a handful of books devoted to the history of graphic satire, English caricature, and comic art. The earliest of these is Thomas Wright’s *A History of Caricature and Grotesque in Literature and Art* (1875), which devotes a few paragraphs to Collet within a section that deals with “the lesser caricaturists of the reign of George III.” Wright says of the artist: Collet chose for his field of labour that to which Hogarth had given the title of comedy in art, but he did not possess Hogarth’s power of delineating whole acts and scenes in one picture, and he contented himself with bits of detail and groups of characters only. His caricatures are rarely

³⁹ *The Gentleman’s Magazine* (May, 1767): 239.

⁴⁰ Alexander, 2002: 136-146; Crown, 2002: 119-135.

political – they are aimed at social manners and social vanities and weaknesses and altogether they form a singularly curious picture of society during an important period of the last century.⁴¹

Similarly, in George Paston's *Social Caricature in the Eighteenth Century* (1904), the author remarks that Collet's "pictures are more valuable for the light they throw upon the middle-class society of his time than for his artistic merit," and as such, Collet's work is used by Paston to illustrate several popular subjects for social satire of the period.⁴² Many decades later, Mary Dorothy George took a similar approach to Collet in her classic text *Hogarth to Cruikshank: Social Change in Graphic Satire* (1967). Though she eschews aesthetic judgement, she too finds that the artist's work is most valuable as an illustration of the prevalent cultural preoccupations of the mid-eighteenth century. Clearly, Collet's technical skill and individual agency have been drastically minimised in these modern histories of pictorial satire.

In these texts, and others, very little effort is made to differentiate Collet from the jobbing engravers and amateur caricaturists who were responsible for the vast majority of satirical prints. This understanding of Collet's work must be, at least partially, due to the fact that so many of the reproductive prints survive, while so few of the original canvases can be traced. Because of this, I will often have to rely on the prints to stand in for the paintings, as I have already had to do with *The Canonical Beau*. This presents its own set of limitations: nothing can be known for certain about the original painting's colouring, its finish, or if the engraver made any significant changes to the composition. It must be acknowledged that the reproductive print has its own autonomy as a work of art, and that it is always at least one step removed from the thing it claims to reproduce. Fortunately, however, some of the original canvases do survive, and in these cases, I will be able to

⁴¹ Wright, 1875: 451-452.

⁴² Paston, 1905: 78.

compare painting and print, revealing that the engravers occasionally did make changes. Of course, in these cases where the originals do survive, I will also be able to speak much more confidently about Collet's technical style and individual artistic choices.

While this study aims to redress the fact that Collet's career as an exhibiting painter has been largely overlooked, it will nevertheless keep one eye firmly focused on the contemporary trade in comic prints. It is fundamental that Collet's work continues to be read in relation to graphic satire of the period, not only because so many of his works were turned into prints, but also because, as Wright, Paston, and George have pointed out, his subjects do, indeed, reflect broader trends in the print market. As I will show, his works focusing on topics like urban violence and ephemeral clothing styles, represent popular tropes for graphic satirists of the age. Moreover, the several series he produced, which were afterwards engraved and sold in sets, stand out as elaborate and ambitious graphic products, and seem to demonstrate the artist's active involvement in the commercial trade.

In addition to recovering the work of a single artist, this thesis will contribute to the rich and growing field of research on Georgian pictorial satire, and will aim to help fill a notable gap in the present scholarship. In recent years, scholarly attention paid to this field has intensified. At the beginning of the last century, important groundwork was laid by George, whose contributions to the *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires Preserved in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum* (1870-1954) have become an essential resource for subsequent researchers working in this area. While the first four volumes of the catalogue were produced by Frederick George Stephens in the late nineteenth century, George is responsible for seven volumes, containing detailed descriptions and careful analyses of thousands of satirical prints that were published between 1770 and 1832. It is this six decade-long period covered by George that has become the focus of the majority of modern scholarship, which is not surprising given the

fact that more than 5,000 prints, over a third of the museum's satirical collection, date from this era. Diana Donald has christened this period 'the age of caricature,' due to both the immense volume and "astonishing range, verve, and audacity" of the works published at this time.⁴³ Donald's book, *The Age of Caricature: Satirical Prints in the Reign of George III* (1996) is probably the most comprehensive and authoritative scholarly text on graphic satire from this period, and like George's earlier work, it has become a foundational touchstone for subsequent scholarship in the field. In the past two decades, David Alexander, Vic Gatrell, and Cindy McCreery, among others, have also produced studies on aspects of graphic satire from the second half of the eighteenth century.⁴⁴ And in addition to these broader studies, over the years, there have also been several monographs and exhibitions focusing on the work of Collet's younger contemporaries, James Gillray and Thomas Rowlandson, prolific and subversive professional etchers, who have come to embody the highest achievements of this 'age of caricature.'⁴⁵

Meanwhile, the field of research devoted to graphic satire in the first half of the eighteenth century is no less crowded; however, it is almost exclusively focused on the work of a single practitioner, William Hogarth, who has, since the late eighteenth century, been credited with the invention of English pictorial satire. Over the past several decades there have been countless studies devoted to the interpretation of Hogarth's painted and graphic works, too many to discuss at any great length here, but is worth mentioning a significant few. The first modern resurgence in interest in Hogarth occurred in the middle of the last century, with the publication of George's aforementioned *Hogarth to Cruikshank*, Frederick Antal's *Hogarth and his Place in European Art* (1762), and Ronald

⁴³ Donald, 1996: 1. Donald attributes the term 'the age of caricature' to an anonymous writer responsible for an early work on James Gillray, *The Caricatures of Gillray, with Historical and Political Illustrations* (1818).

⁴⁴ Alexander, 1998; Gatrell, 2006; McCreery, 2006.

⁴⁵ Godfrey, 2001; Hill, 1972; Paulson, 1972; Payne and Payne, 2010; Phagan, Gatrell and Rauser, 2010.

Paulson's monograph *Hogarth: His Life, Art, and Times* (1971). Then, in the 1990s and 2000s, there was a second renaissance for Hogarth, at which point several books, essays, and exhibitions were developed, in part, to mark the three hundredth anniversary of the artist's birth.⁴⁶ The last two decades have witnessed the publication of new editions of Paulson's seminal works, as well as significant contributions made by a second generation of Hogarthian experts.⁴⁷ Though much of this scholarship on Hogarth has attempted to situate the artist within some kind of art-historical context, there are few studies that properly address the wider world of early eighteenth-century pictorial satire. A notable exception is Mark Hallett's *The Spectacle of Difference: Graphic Satire in the Age of Hogarth* (1999), which uncovers a crowded and flourishing market for satirical prints at this time.

This brief survey has demonstrated that, hitherto, much attention has been paid to the Hogarthian era as a foundational period for the satirical tradition, and the final decades of the century as the ascendancy of celebrated practitioners such as Gillray and Rowlandson. Though the period in between, the 1760s and 1770s, has not been entirely neglected – it is, of course, encompassed in the works of George, Donald, McCreery, and others – it has not been subjected to the same degree of scrutiny as the earlier and later stages, with few studies focusing exclusively on the satirical prints produced during these decades.⁴⁸ In broader chronological works, like George's *Hogarth to Cruikshank*, the period has often been treated as a mere interregnum between the 'age of Hogarth' and the 'golden age' of Gillray and Rowlandson.⁴⁹ Yet, the extensive fourth and fifth volumes of the British Museum's catalogue indicate that the 1760s and 1770s have just as much to

⁴⁶ Bindman, 1997; Bindman, Ogée, and Wagner, 2001; Fort and Rosenthal, 2001; Moller, 1996.

⁴⁷ Hallett, 1999; Hallett, 2000; Ogée, 1997; Paulson, 1991-1993, Riding and Hallett, 2006; Uglow, 2002.

⁴⁸ Ellen D'Oench has written about John Raphael Smith's (1761-1812) prints of prostitutes and courtesans dating from the late 1770s, see: D'Oench, 1999, Chapter 2. There have also been a few brief but fascinating studies on the publisher Matthew Darly (ca. 1741-1778) and his 'macaroni prints' of the 1770s, see: Rauser, 2004; Stroomberg, 1999; West, 2001. For fashion satires of the 1770s, see also: Blackwell, 2013.

⁴⁹ George, 1967: 17, 57.

offer in terms of quantity, dynamism, and variety. Through the lens of Collet's work, this thesis will illuminate some of the patterns and trends of this under-researched period of pictorial satire.

While the 1760s and 1770s have been largely overlooked by scholars of graphic satire, these decades are well-documented in the history of British painting as an important foundational period for a burgeoning exhibition culture, and the establishment of the Royal Academy. This, of course, was the age of Joshua Reynolds, Thomas Gainsborough, Benjamin West, and Richard Wilson, all of whom were founding members of the Royal Academy, and, with the exception of Gainsborough, avid promoters of a mode of painting styled by Reynolds the 'Grand Manner.'⁵⁰ The most familiar painters from this period are mostly portraitists, or else, producers of classicising history paintings or landscape. This obviously leaves Collet out, and unsurprisingly he is mostly absent from the scholarship on painting of the period, aside from a brief entry in Ellis Waterhouse's *The Dictionary of British Eighteenth-Century Painters in Oils and Crayons* (1981), which seems to have been mostly cribbed from the *Dictionary of National Biography*.⁵¹ Admittedly, Collet is not an especially representative painter of his time, but as scholars like David Solkin and Matthew Hargraves have observed, the early years of public exhibitions in London were uncertain and experimental ones, in which many artists toyed with various ways of attracting viewers and establishing their own respective niches in the art market.⁵² Francis Hayman and Edward Penny used the exhibition space as a testing ground for their contemporary history paintings; George Stubbs laid claim to the sporting picture, introducing Grand Manner gravitas to the humble animal subject; Richard Wright

⁵⁰ Reynolds first uses the phrase 'grand style' (later used interchangeably with 'grand manner' and 'great style') in his essay published in the *Idler* (No. 79, 20 October, 1759) to describe a timeless, universal quality to be found in Italian history painting, but which, in practice, he applied to his own large, idealised portraits.

⁵¹ Waterhouse, 1981: 83.

⁵² Hargraves, 2006: Chapter 1; Solkin, 1993: Chapter 5.

specialised in the seascape, also endeavouring to raise the status of a lowly genre; Johann Zoffany entertained the exhibition-going public with his trademark theatrical conversation pieces; and, of course, John Collet cornered the market in comic art.

Where so many other artists of the period looked to continental modes of painting in order to imbue their works with an aura of grandeur and prestige, Collet chose a staunchly English and resolutely modern exemplar for his exhibited paintings – the comic work of Hogarth himself. Although he was not quite the only artist to follow this route – his elusive friend and fellow Free Society member William Dawes also exhibited several works in the comic mode – he was certainly in the distinct minority.⁵³ In some ways, this was a successful strategy on the part of Collet and Dawes, who together, stood out from the artistic pack. During their exhibiting careers, they were frequently acknowledged for their distinctiveness, and applauded for their unique comic efforts, as in an anonymous review appearing in the *Public Advertiser* in May of 1766, which stated: “Collet and Dawes [have shown] that the Humour of Hogarth is far from being lost in this country.”⁵⁴

In his aforementioned study, *Hogarth and his Place in European Art*, Frederick Antal contends that in the decades after Hogarth’s death, the artist’s reputation and influence in the field of painting went into considerable decline, while his real and perceptible legacy was in graphic satire, with engravers like Gillray and Rowlandson acting as his true successors in comic art.⁵⁵ Following a discussion on Hogarthian graphic material of the late eighteenth century, Antal writes:

⁵³ The painter Dawes (fl. 1760-1784), an obscure figure, exhibited mostly comic and theatrical subjects with the SAGB (1760-1762) and FSA (1764-1774). According to Nichols he was a friend of Collet’s, and like him, was independently wealthy, and “languid in his pursuit of art.” For Dawes see: Chapter 2: 109-112; Chapter 3: 191-194.

⁵⁴ *Public Advertiser* (12 May, 1766).

⁵⁵ Antal, 1962: 175-177.

On a somewhat higher social level there actually appeared a follower of Hogarth: John Collet, a rather weak imitator of his genre pictures, who specialised in ‘low life,’ used many of his motifs and even retained his popular habit of using many inscriptions. But as a painter he was rather an exception and not much favoured in fashionable circles. He chose, for instance, such a plebeian theme as *The Press Gang* (Foundling Hospital), which certainly did not interest high society. He is also said to have painted copies after all the scenes of *A Rake’s Progress* and also *A March to Finchley*. The prints after his pictures, done by popular or half-popular engravers, seem to have been more in demand than the original paintings. Almost all of these were built up out of Hogarth’s motifs, which were then applied to low life and became far cruder and caricature-like.⁵⁶

There are a number of specious and uninformed claims made in this statement, which are, in many ways, reflective of the modern misconceptions about Collet. For example, what evidence does Antal have that, on the whole, “high society” did not like Collet’s art? In fact, prints after his works are known to have been purchased by some prestigious collectors, and his paintings were in demand by well-to-do buyers as far afield as Virginia.⁵⁷ The painting Antal lists as a representative example of Collet’s work, *The Press Gang*, is now only tentatively attributed to the artist, and is by no means wholly characteristic of his output.⁵⁸ Antal only seems to be aware of the artist’s depictions of

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*: 183.

⁵⁷ Collet-based prints can be found in the extant collections of Sarah Sophia Banks (1714-1818) (BM Nos. J,5.40; J,5.72; J,5.74; J,5.76; J,5.78; J,5.81; J,5.100), and William Constable (1721-1791) of Burton-Constable Hall. For brief discussions of these collectors, see: Chapter 1: 37, 73; Chapter 4: 245. Crown made the fascinating discovery that William Nelson (1711-1772), the then governor of Virginia, wrote letters to friends in England in the 1770s, requesting that they send him both Collet-based prints, as well as two landscape paintings, about which Nelson wrote: “As I think Mr. Collett shines most in Landscape painting (tho there was great Humour & Merit in the Prints you sent me) I shall be glad if you will send me something of that Kind from him.” See: Crown, 2002: 131; *William Nelson Letter Book, 1766-1775* (Virginia State Library, M-60).

⁵⁸ *The Press Gang* is a painting now preserved in the Foundling Museum, depicting the dingy interior of a tavern or inn, where recent naval recruits have been brought to formally enlist. In February, 2011, I corresponded with Jane King, a curator at the museum, who informed me that the painting was not in the original eighteenth-century collection of the Foundling Hospital, but rather, was donated in the nineteenth century. She also said that an unidentified Tate Britain curator had expressed doubts about the attribution to Collet, though King does not know on what grounds. It is unsigned and does not appear to have been the basis for any reproductive prints; however, it should be noted that Collet only sporadically signed his canvases, and there are other extant examples of his paintings that were never engraved. For *The Press Gang*, see: App. I, No. 70.

“low life,” and not his many images of fashionable society, like *A Love Match* (see: figs. 2.1-2.4), and *Grown Gentlemen Taught to Dance* (see: fig. 4.62), which were among the artist’s best-known works. Finally, Antal’s claim that the reproductive prints were “more in demand” than his paintings is difficult to support, and offers a misinterpretation of Collet’s apparent business practices, in which the artist produced his paintings with the full knowledge and intention that they would afterwards be engraved. But one indisputable fact can be gleaned from Antal’s otherwise misleading text: Collet was, indeed, one of the very few painters to follow in the footsteps of Hogarth, the father of English comic art.

IV.

Given what little is actually known about Collet as a person, it is only logical that this study should focus on his art. As I have suggested, Collet’s art has, hitherto, only been dealt with superficially. Apart from Crown’s study, and a few brief, if fascinating readings of his works carried out by art historians such as David Solkin, Harry Mount, and Kate Retford, the artist’s images have mostly been used as relatively straight-forward illustration of the social trends and preoccupations of his time.⁵⁹ Unquestionably, Collet’s *oeuvre* does offer valuable insight into the social and cultural environment of mid-Georgian England; however, as ambitious, heterogeneous compositions, many of his works merit in-depth art-historical analysis. As such, I have organised the thesis into a succession of close readings of Collet’s work, with each chapter focusing on a few representative examples of a significant strand of his imagery. In order to maintain a bifurcated approach to his artistic production, all four chapters will look at both exhibited paintings and reproductive prints. I will follow a roughly chronological route, beginning with a painting exhibited in 1762 and

⁵⁹ Mount, 1989 (unpublished); Retford, 2006: 62-65; Solkin, “The Battle of the Ciceros: Richard Wilson and the Politics of Landscape in the Age of John Wilkes” in Pugh (ed.), 1990: 41-66.

ending with a series of prints published in the late 1770s, though I will occasionally have to jump backwards and forwards in time to address thematically relevant material.

The subjects of the four chapters are as follows: Chapter 1, “The Comic Countryside,” looks at a selection of Collet’s many landscapes and genre subjects with rustic rural settings, which together represent a little known facet of the artist’s *oeuvre*; Chapter 2, “Imitation and Emulation,” examines a group of paintings, and subsequent prints, which constituted the artist’s most explicit attempts to declare himself Hogarth’s successor; Chapter 3, “Violence, Laughter, and the Street,” looks at Collet’s comic images of urban violence, and attempts to explain their presence at public exhibition, in spite of their seemingly problematic subject matter; Chapter 4, “Feathers, Fashion, and Female Beauties,” explores Collet’s contribution to the flourishing market for fashion satire in the 1770s; and finally, an Epilogue, “The Death of the Commercial Comic Artist,” which traces Collet’s artistic legacy and reputation in the years, decades, and centuries after his death.

I have entitled this study “John Collet: A Commercial Comic Artist,” and before proceeding, I feel it necessary to clarify my use of two important words included here, as well as a few related terms and concepts that will likewise appear throughout. I will begin with the word that will appear most frequently – ‘comic.’ I have called Collet a ‘comic artist’ rather than a ‘satirical artist’ for a few reasons. For one thing, this seems to have been the adjective most often used by contemporaries to describe the artist’s work. It was also frequently applied to the art of Hogarth, whose characteristic works were famously christened ‘comic history paintings’ by his friend and fellow ‘comedian’ Henry Fielding – a figure whose thoughts on comedy will later serve a central role in discussions on laughter

and caricature.⁶⁰ The eighteenth-century meaning of ‘comic,’ as defined by Johnson’s dictionary, was anything “raising mirth” or anything “related to comedy,” which was, in theatrical terms, “a Dramatick Representation of the lighter Faults of Mankind.”⁶¹ Though it does not seem to be as universally applicable to Hogarth’s works (which are often dark and decidedly un-mirthful), it is the perfect, catch-all phrase for Collet’s typical light-hearted social scenes, which gently mock the habits and appearances of his countrymen. As such, I will most often refer to Collet’s works as comic subjects, though I will occasionally call them ‘genre’ scenes, when they are, perhaps, not as explicitly comic in tone.⁶²

Conversely, I will aim to be somewhat more selective and precise with the use of the word ‘satirical.’ Today, this term is quite liberally applied to a wide range of types of visual material. Since the nineteenth century, the British Museum’s *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires* has encompassed a diverse assortment of comic, polemical, narrative, and didactic graphic objects. However, as Cindy McCreery has usefully pointed out, Georgian print publishers used a number of other seemingly interchangeable words to define what are now conventionally termed ‘graphic satires.’⁶³ These included ‘caricatura,’ ‘droll,’ ‘humorous,’ ‘facetious,’ and, of course, ‘comical.’ In the eighteenth century, ‘satire’ did have a number of connotations, but it was perhaps not as widely employed as it is today. The primary definition of the word in Johnson’s dictionary – “a poem in which wickedness or folly is censured” – does not seem to directly apply to Collet.⁶⁴ Though principally a literary term, contemporaries would have identified some visual material as

⁶⁰ The phrase ‘comic history painting,’ is first used by Fielding in the preface to *Joseph Andrews*, see: Fielding, 1, 1742: viii-x. For more on Fielding’s preface, see: Chapters 2: 110-111; Chapter 3: 174-175; Chapter 4: 244-245.

⁶¹ Johnson, 1, 1755: 413-414.

⁶² The term ‘genre’ as applied to scenes of everyday life was not yet in use in eighteenth-century England. I will use it for lack of a clearer phrase. For ‘genre’ painting, see: Chapter 1: 38, 42-45; Epilogue: 255-259.

⁶³ McCreery, 2004: 6-7.

⁶⁴ Johnson, 2, 1756: 591.

satirical – most notably the art of Hogarth, which typically worked to expose and denounce vice and folly.⁶⁵ Much of Collet’s work does appear to serve a similar purpose, but it usually depicts folly as a kind of foolish yet benign levity, and often seems to lack satire’s distinguishing censure. It is possible to interpret some of this material as *failed* satire, as apparently, the reviewer, “Eusebius” viewed *The Canonical Beau*, but in other cases, the word ‘satirical’ simply cannot be used to accurately describe Collet’s art.

If Collet’s work is to be properly defined as comic, then it is important that it be read in relation to contemporary theories and understandings of comedy and laughter. The eighteenth-century discourse on laughter will be discussed at length in Chapter 3, but a few key points can be briefly summarised here. Historians and literary scholars have recently devoted attention to the changing conception of comedy over the course of the eighteenth century.⁶⁶ They have shown that considerable efforts were made by philosophers, writers, and literary critics to improve the low status of the genre of comedy, and to emphasise the positive and beneficial aspects of laughter. Collet’s career coincided with a period in which older comic theories that defined laughter as an expression of malice and scorn were supplanted by new theories that viewed laughter as a benevolent, kindly, and natural expression of shared mirth and delight. The proponents of these new theories believed that pure and genuine laughter never came at the expense of the suffering or misfortune of another.

Though this amiable mode of humour fits nicely with the prevailing notion of the Georgians as a polite and sentimental people, an examination of Collet’s *oeuvre* will demonstrate that a crude, rude, and unsentimental kind of humour continued to thrive in

⁶⁵ For the term ‘satire’ and its application to visual materials, see: George, 1969: 13; Hallett, 1999: 5-6.

⁶⁶ For eighteenth-century comic theory, see: Chapter 3: 171-177.

spite of the influence of an emerging cult of sympathy.⁶⁷ Furthermore, it thrived not just in jestbooks and popular prints, but in mainstream, middle class culture, on conspicuous display at public art exhibitions. While some of Collet's comic subjects will be seen to be in keeping with this new model of benevolent laughter, many other examples will seem to explicitly fly in the face of contemporary theory. As this thesis will show, Collet's images of 'clownish' country peasants, crippled prostitutes, and quarrelling fishwives, were rooted in long-established pictorial and literary traditions that preserved old-fashioned forms of unsentimental comedy.

This resistance to easy categorisation leads us to a salient issue regarding Collet's imagery: its characteristic ambiguity. As will become increasingly apparent as this thesis develops, the artist's pictures continually open themselves up to different, and sometimes contradictory types of art-historical interpretation. On the one hand, they can be appreciated as works of satiric critique that, through the use of humour, highlighted and ridiculed various forms of social, cultural and sexual transgression; on the other, they can be understood as works that, in their insistent good-humoured focus on these narratives of transgression, served ultimately to excuse or even to celebrate the disruptive desires and surreptitious fantasies generated within England's vital, flourishing commercial culture. I shall argue that this openness to different, even antithetical kinds of interpretation was a crucial aspect of Collet's work even in his own time, and one that gave his pictures an especially wide appeal. In his practice, the sharpness of satire and the pleasures of comedy are continually put into productive, playful dialogue, generating an imagery that, as we shall see, could be understood and appreciated in a rich variety of ways.

Finally, I will now explain my use of the word 'commercial.' Obviously, this term is familiar to any student of Georgian history; in the last few decades, it has been

⁶⁷ Simon Dickie makes a similar argument, but uses popular jestbooks as evidence. See: Dickie, 2011: 1-32.

ubiquitously applied to eighteenth-century England, as a means of explaining and characterising a society that was distinguished by an unprecedented level of trade in consumer goods, and a people, who were increasingly conscious and critical of their own participation in the acts of buying and selling.⁶⁸ On a relatively straight-forward level, Collet can be described as a ‘commercial artist’ – a perfect product of his own time – in that he primarily produced art not for elite patrons, but rather, for the print market, an industry that widely catered to the tastes and demands of a broad, middling customer base, and which maximised profits by offering extensive print-runs, and a copious array of product-choice. Moreover, Collet, like many artists of the period, used the exhibition space for predominantly commercial purposes, as a platform for advertising both his painted work, as well as forthcoming graphic products. But unlike his academically-minded colleagues, who sought to downplay their pecuniary motives by vehemently arguing that public exhibitions had been devised for the “honour and advancement of the arts in England,”⁶⁹ Collet seems to have made no such claims.

On a more abstract level, one can perhaps identify in Collet and his work the qualities of the typical, eighteenth-century ‘commercial personality’ as described by Lawrence Klein in his influential essay on consumption and social identity in early Georgian England.⁷⁰ Klein writes that, in contrast to earlier theories about Georgian society that have focused on the supply-side of economic history, the “commercial personality conceived under the sign of consumption rather than accumulation required such qualities as the desire for pleasure and comfort, a willingness to spend, playfulness,

⁶⁸ For just a few examples from the expansive body of scholarship on eighteenth-century commercialism/consumerism, see: Bermingham and Brewer (eds.), 1995; Berg, 2005; Brewer and Porter(eds.), 1993; McKendrick, Brewer, and Plumb, 1982; Weatherill, 2002.

⁶⁹ This excerpt is taken from the minutes of a “General Meeting of All Artists” at the Turk’s Head Tavern in London (12 November, 1759), as quoted in Hargraves, 2006: 5. These minutes were the plans/objectives for the first public exhibition in London. Collet was not present at this pivotal meeting.

⁷⁰ Klein, “Politeness for Plebes: Consumption and Social Identity in Eighteenth-century England” in Bermingham and Brewer (eds.), 1995: 362-382.

and ambitions to emulate and display. The latter were expressed in capacities and interests concerned with the ‘ornamental’ aspects of life, such as taste, style, fashion, and politeness.”⁷¹ Close readings of Collet’s art will reveal it to be both a product of and a product designed for this ‘commercial personality,’ namely in its inherent playfulness, its evident interest in fashion and ornamentality, and its frequent engagement with the values and concerns of the dominant middle class, who widely identified themselves as a “polite and commercial”⁷² people. Additionally, one can find in Collet’s work many of the salient features of the commercialised culture described by John Brewer in his equally consequential essay on the commodification of culture in the eighteenth century.⁷³ These features include the indiscriminate mixture of elements from ‘high’ and ‘low’ art forms, the blatant attempt to titillate consumers with libidinous content, and the primacy of entertainment over moral edification. In these various ways, Collet’s work will be shown to exemplify the commercial age of England in the second half of the eighteenth century.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*: 364.

⁷² This phrase was first used by William Blackstone in *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765-1769), and was incorporated into the title of Paul Langford’s authoritative history of eighteenth-century England, see: Langford, 1998.

⁷³ Brewer, “‘The Most Polite Age and the Most Vicious’: Attitudes towards Culture as Commodity, 1660-1800” in Bermingham and Brewer (eds.), 1995: 341-360.

CHAPTER 1

THE COMIC COUNTRYSIDE

In the spring of 1761, two rival groups of artists held simultaneous public exhibitions in London's West End. The first group, operating under the auspices of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce (hereafter, the Society of Arts), held their exhibition in the Society's Great Room in the Strand.¹ Meanwhile, a group of seceding artists, the Society of Artists of Great Britain (the Society of Artists), who had broken away from the former group earlier that year, displayed their work at a nearby auction house at Spring Gardens, Charing Cross. This second group included many of the best-known artists of the day: the aging master of comic history painting, William Hogarth; several leading portrait painters, such as Joshua Reynolds, his former master Thomas Hudson, and the fashionable Bath-based painter Thomas Gainsborough; and celebrated landscape painters, including Richard Wilson and George Lambert. Conversely, the Society of Arts hosted mostly younger and lesser known artists, many of whom had stayed with the institution in order to take advantage of the premiums offered for exceptional landscapes, history painting, sculpture, and engraving.² One of these lesser known artists was John Collet, who had selected for his first foray into public exhibition three landscapes: one in oil and two in india ink.³

It will probably never be known what Collet's first exhibited works looked like, owing to the fact that the Society of Arts' exhibition catalogue for that year provided no identifying details of these submissions, and nothing at all was said about them in the contemporary press, which is unsurprising given the artist's low profile at the time.

¹ For the SAGB, see: Graves, 1907; Hargraves, 2006.

² Edwards, 1808: xxix.

³ SEAMC, 1761: 4, 8.

Moreover, the whereabouts of very few of Collet's landscape paintings are currently known. It can be speculated, however, that the two pieces executed in india ink may have looked something like the small watercolour study, now preserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum, depicting two fishermen in a boat floating on a tree-canopied river (fig. 1.1).⁴ Though unsigned, it has long-been attributed to Collet (rather persuasively) on stylistic grounds; it features the artist's characteristic thick, black outlines and shading; a feigned oval framing device; and a rural setting, populated by humble country-folk and trees adorned with cottony, artificial leaves. While his contribution to this genre of art is all but forgotten, this type of work was a mainstay of Collet's artistic repertoire; not only was he trained in this field, but he continued to paint and exhibit landscapes for the rest of his career. Indeed, in early 1770, a selection of Collet's landscapes, along with a handful of genre subjects, all in a rustic pastoral idiom, were reproduced by well-known and respected engravers, and were included in a series of twenty-four prints published by Robert Sayer and John Smith, entitled *Collet's Designs both Serious and Comic*.⁵ Evidently, these prints were popular and considered to be well-executed as they were later used as illustrations in a regularly re-issued drawing manual published by Sayer entitled *All Draughtsmen's Assistant; or Drawing Made Easy* (ca. 1780), and could still be purchased at the end of the century from Sayer's successors, Laurie and Whittle.⁶ Moreover, images from this series were even copied onto decorative ceramic housewares.⁷

In 1762, the second year in which Collet exhibited with the Society of Arts, the artist went in a different direction – he submitted just one work, a humorous genre subject, which was listed in the exhibition catalogue as *A Gypsey Telling Some Country Girls Their*

⁴ For provenance, see: App. I, no. 75.

⁵ Alexander, 2002: 141; Sayer and Bennett, 1775: 114.

⁶ A later edition of the drawing manual in LWL includes an illustration from the *Collet's Designs* series with the inscription: "Published 12th May, 1794, Laurie & Whittle, 53 Fleet Street London."

⁷ For Collet's images on transfer-printed pottery, see: 71, figs. 1.46-1.47; Drakard, 1992: 83, 141-142. My thanks to Diana Donald for drawing these items to my attention.

Fortune.⁸ As is the case with most of the paintings he exhibited, including the landscapes from the previous year, this canvas itself is now untraced. However, in this case, the descriptive title in the catalogue convincingly suggests that this painting was the source for a later print (fig. 1.2) engraved by James Caldwell “from an Original Picture Painted by Mr Jn. Collett in the possession of Mr. Smith,” and published by Sayer and Smith in 1770, entitled, simply, *The Gipsies* (for the sake of clarity and brevity, I will use the print’s abbreviated title from this point forward). This print depicts an interaction between a ragged fortune-teller and a young maid on a lane in a country village. The fortune-teller, stooping under the weight of a screaming infant on her back, examines the outstretched palm of a pretty, rustically-attired girl, while a curious female companion peers over her shoulder. Surrounding them are boisterous children, a variety of farm animals, villagers going about their daily activities, and, in the background, a pair of gypsies tending to their camp-fire. Though we cannot be completely certain, it seems highly likely – given the exact correspondence between the print’s narratives and those described in the 1762 catalogue entry for Collet’s painting – that at least the central vignette in this print derives from the original canvas. However, in this particular instance, it is clear that at least some additions were made by the engraver, Caldwell, presumably to freshen up and contemporise the image. On the right, an old man standing outside a cottage door is poring over a copy of the *North Briton No. 45*, the most famous issue of the radical newspaper, published in April 1763 (a year after Collet exhibited his painting), which contained John Wilkes’s well-known essay criticising a royal speech that resulted in his imprisonment for libel, and his subsequent emergence as a champion of freedom of speech. In the year Caldwell’s print was published, Wilkes had just been released from prison, making the *No. 45* a powerful and topical symbol of Wilkesite politics and liberty, in general.

⁸ SEAMC, 1762: 4.

The works that will be examined in the following pages – the image of *The Gipsies* and plates from *Collet's Designs Both Serious and Comic* – are characteristic examples of a large body of Collet's output in which he depicts humorous lower-class subjects in rustic pastoral settings. These works have yet to be the focus of any sustained scholarly attention, and are probably the least familiar images from the artist's *oeuvre*. Indeed, when we think of comic and satirical imagery from this period, it is invariably of urban subjects, mostly thanks to Hogarth's iconic illustrations: his descent into London's seamy underworld in the *Harlot's* and *Rake's* progresses (1732 and 1735); his satirical city tour in *Four Times of the Day* (1738); and his dramatic contrast of urban prosperity and poverty in *Beer Street* and *Gin Lane* (1751). Likewise, the graphic satire of the following generation – of the 1760s and 1770s – is equally dominated by imagery of the city. Here, the satires on eccentric urban characters and fashionable urban resorts published by Matthew Darly, Robert Sayer, and Carington Bowles are probably the most familiar. As will be discussed in upcoming chapters, Collet did produce many humorous images of the city, but he was also an active producer of images of a comic countryside. Between 1761 and 1780, Collet painted and exhibited no less than fifteen subjects with rural settings, making up more than a third of his overall submissions.⁹ Furthermore, over two dozen engravings based on Collet's rural subjects were published in the late 1760s and early 1770s.¹⁰ There was clearly a lucrative market for humorous depictions of the countryside, and although such imagery is less familiar within the context of the study of Georgian graphic satire, readers will quickly recognise elements of these works from Dutch and Italian traditions of landscape, French *fête galantes*, Dutch genre painting, and polite and popular poetry and song. Spending some time examining *The Gipsies* and *Collet's Designs* will reveal a diverse range of pictorial and literary sources for these images, while shedding light on Collet's lesser

⁹ App. III, nos. 1-3, 6, 17, 19, 21, 25-27, 30-31, 36, 39, 43.

¹⁰ App. II, nos. 4-5, 15, 22-24 (24.1a-r), 29, 35, 38.

known work in the field of landscape. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, *The Gipsies* and the related prints will allow us to address broader issues relating to Collet's role within London's contemporary art market, and the nascent exhibition culture of the 1760s.

I.

When Collet began exhibiting in April of 1761, public art exhibitions in London were still a novelty, and the nature of the exhibitions – including the types of art to be displayed and the types of people to be admitted – were a matter of contention.¹¹ Before the first exhibition held at the Society of Arts in 1760, there were only a few venues in which modern English art was exhibited, including the donated collection of history paintings and portraits at the Foundling Hospital, Francis Hayman's painted supper boxes at Vauxhall Gardens, and of course, the informal displays in artist's studios that could be viewed by prospective clients.¹² Unlike the French, who had a state-sponsored art academy and biannual public exhibitions, English artists lacked the proper means to promote their work.¹³ The art market was controlled by auctioneers and picture-dealers who catered to collectors with mostly conservative tastes for continental Old Masters.¹⁴ Thus, in late 1759, after several years of public discussion and debate about the poor state of the fine arts in England, a group of artists approached the Society of Arts – an organisation founded in 1754 to promote native arts and industry – and requested the use of their Great

¹¹ Hargraves, 2006: 21-43.

¹² For art at the Foundling Hospital, see: Hargraves, 2006: 10-12; Solkin, 1996: 157-174. For the art at Vauxhall Gardens, see: Edelstein, 1983: 25-32; Solkin, 1996: 106-148.

¹³ *Académie de peinture et de sculpture* founded by Cardinal Mazarin in 1648; public exhibitions commenced in 1737.

¹⁴ See Hogarth's satirical essay on picture dealers and connoisseurs: *St. James's Evening Post* (7-9 June, 1737).

Room for a temporary display of modern English art.¹⁵ Permission was granted, and the nation's first annual public exhibition commenced on 21 April, 1760.

Although this momentous occasion brought together many of the leading contemporary artists – Hayman, Reynolds, Wilson, and others – the exhibition seemed to lack a sense of cohesion. The work of seasoned professionals hung alongside women's handicrafts, wax model curiosities, and amateur entries for the Society's premiums. As Matthew Hargraves has observed in his recent in-depth study of the Society of Artists: "The visitor's experience, then, would have been very different to the elaborate hierarchies found in the displays at [the exhibitions at the Salon Carré in] Paris."¹⁶ However, many artists envisioned that this exhibition would be the first important step towards the foundation of their own national academy, and an improved native school of art. This faction, which included Reynolds and Wilson, tended to work in genres at the head of the traditional academic hierarchy, exhibiting large scale history paintings and portraiture in the Grand Manner.¹⁷ Yet, just as many artists ignored such generic hierarchies, the calls for an improved national style, and the tastes of discerning connoisseurs, and instead appealed to a broader audience through exhibiting virtuosic still-lives, decorative 'fancy subjects,' and portraits of popular public figures.¹⁸

In terms of the sheer numbers of visitors, this first exhibition was a resounding success. However, the lack of homogeneity in the display was mirrored in the artists' attitudes towards the management of the exhibition. In the main, two key issues lead to a

¹⁵ For contributions to the discourse on the state of the 'polite' arts in England see, for example: abbé Le Blanc, 1747; Gwynn, 1749; Rouquet, 1755.

¹⁶ Hargraves, 2006: 23-24.

¹⁷ At the first exhibition, Reynolds showed four portraits (two military heroes, and two society women); Richard Wilson exhibited three Italianate landscapes, including the highly acclaimed *Destruction of the Children of Niobe* (c. 1759), which contains a classical narrative. See: SEAMC, 1760: 7, 9.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

schism in the exhibiting group.¹⁹ Firstly, the fact that the governors at the Society of Arts had refused to implement an admission charge meant that the exhibition was over-crowded with attendees, many of whom were deemed vulgar and uneducated, and therefore, ill-equipped to properly appreciate the works of art being displayed. Secondly, the entries for the Society's premiums for landscape and history painting had been allowed to remain in the Great Room during the exhibition, where some were clearly identified as award winners, thereby undermining the work of the exhibiting artists, who had no such accolades. So, in January of 1761, when the Society of Arts governors rejected proposals for reform, the dissatisfied artists broke away and made plans to mount their own independent exhibition. Consequently, in the spring of that year, exhibiting artists had the choice to remain loyal to the Society of Arts, or to join the rebelling artists in Spring Gardens.

It is not clear why Collet chose to exhibit at the Society of Arts. He had been elected as a member of the Society of Arts on 5 March, 1760, but he does not appear to have ever made himself a candidate for the premiums, and his former tutor Lambert, and many of his colleagues from the St. Martin's Lane Academy had withdrawn to the Society of Artists.²⁰ Yet, Collet stayed faithful to this group – eventually known as the Free Society of Artists²¹ – for the rest of his life. He never exhibited any of his work with the more prominent rival society, nor did he ever show any interest in the nation's long anticipated Royal Academy and its annual exhibitions, which commenced in the summer of 1769. Furthermore, the scant surviving records of the Free Society of Artists indicate

¹⁹ Hargraves, 2006: 25-27.

²⁰ Collet's membership with the SEAMC was sponsored by Henry Baker (1698-1774), a natural philosopher and one of the founding members of SEAMC; information provided by Rebecca Short at the RSA Archive and Library.

²¹ In 1765, the group of artists that had been exhibiting in the SEAMC's Great Room began exhibiting independently at Mr. Moreing's auction room on Maiden Lane; until 1767, they were known as the 'Body of Artists associated for the Relief of their Distressed Bretheren, their Widows and Children', and afterwards they usually identified themselves as the 'Free Society of Artists.' See: Graves, 1907: 331-341.

that Collet rarely attended the frequent society meetings, suggesting that he was uninterested in the institutional and collegial aspects of the London art world.²² What, then, were Collet's objectives as an exhibiting artist? Though he continued to exhibit landscapes, it appears that, even before the death of Hogarth in 1764, Collet was attempting to corner the market in the field of comic art. Despite the successful precedent set by the older artist in this genre, to exhibit such paintings was unusual and potentially problematic. The contemporary criticism of genre subjects, combined with the academic aspirations of many of Collet's peers, made comic painting a less than obvious choice. Yet, as this chapter will demonstrate, it was a genre that offered the potential to speak to the interests and tastes of a diverse audience.

II.

Although his exhibited paintings would eventually attract attention in the London press, Collet and his *Gipsies* were not mentioned in any of the contemporary coverage of the 1762 exhibition at the Society of Arts. Nor does his name appear in *An Historical and Critical Review of the Paintings &c. now exhibiting at the Great-Room of the Society instituted for the Encouragement of Arts* (1762), an anonymous pamphlet that functioned as a kind of critical guide to the exhibition, supplementing the official catalogue, offering observations on many of the works that were displayed there, including the recipients of the premiums for history painting and landscape, Andrea Casali's *King Stephen Brought Prisoner to Empress Matilda* and John Smith of Chichester's untitled landscape.²³ At this early stage, Collet was still working in relative anonymity, while the Italian-born Casali, and the Smith brothers of Chichester, the best-known exhibitors with the Society of Arts,

²² The impartial records of the minutes, entries and proceedings of the meetings of the FSA are housed at the RSA, they run from 1768 to 1780.

²³ *An Historical and Critical Review of the Paintings...*, 1762.

were widely celebrated for their Italianate works in history painting and landscape, respectively. It will be useful to begin by briefly looking at the work of Collet's more prominent colleagues in order to properly contextualise his work within this exhibition and the art market of the period.

Casali – who had trained under the Baroque masters Francesco Trevisani and Sebastiano Conca – first came to England in 1741 after forging connections with wealthy Englishmen on the Grand Tour in Rome, among them Henry Howard, Earl of Carlisle, and Charles Frederick, the antiquarian collector, whose portrait by Casali now hangs in the Ashmolean Museum.²⁴ The Roman painter soon gained commissions for history paintings from Lord Castlemaine, for portraits from the Duke of Ancaster, and for decorative interior schemes from the Earl of Leicester and Alderman William Beckford. During his time in London (and even after he returned to Rome in 1766), Casali exhibited paintings with both the Society of Artists and the Free Society of Artists, and his work was generally well-received – though some critics said that it all displayed a tedious “sameness of Manner and Colouring.”²⁵ Nevertheless, his canvases seem to have appealed particularly to aristocratic and noble virtuosi, thus allowing him to earn a comfortable living working within the traditional patronage model; a model that most of his English-born contemporaries found unviable. Though Casali's prize winning canvas of 1762 is now lost, the painting that earned him the Society of Art's first-place premium for history painting the year before is now preserved in Burton Constable Hall. A characteristic example of his work, *Edward Martyr Being Stabbed in the Back in the Presence of Elfredo at Corfe Castle* (fig. 1.3) is a crisply painted, yet sensuous composition, with a rich, Rubeniste palette, taking for its

²⁴ For Casali (1705-1784), see: *ODNB*; Coen, 2011.

²⁵ *Public Advertiser* (15 May, 1765). See also *St. James's Chronicle* (2 June, 1761): “I do not mean to reflect on Signior Casali [...] I should have liked him better if I had seen only one of his Pieces – any one of them – for they are all alike [...] the same idea of Beauty repeated in every Figure, and without least Variety in the Groupes, the Attitude, or the Airs of the Heads [...]”

subject a dramatic episode from early English history that had recently been re-told in Tobias Smollett's best-selling multi-volume tome, *A Complete History of England* (1757-1758).²⁶ The painting was awarded 100 guineas, and was later purchased in 1766 by Sir William Constable, who had it installed in his grand Yorkshire country house where it remains today.²⁷

John Smith of Chichester, the first place premium winner for landscape, was one of three brothers, all of whom were successful landscape painters who exhibited regularly and exclusively with the Free Society of Artists, alongside Collet. In the traditional hierarchy of genres, landscape painting was trumped by history painting, and for most of the eighteenth century it was still considered one of the 'low' subjects, along with, in Jonathan Richardson's words, "Battels, Drolls, Still-Life, Flowers, and Fruit, Ships, &c."²⁸ Nevertheless, it was widely felt that landscape painting could be elevated if, rather than remaining strictly faithful to nature, the artist improved upon it by rearranging topographical features into pleasing formations, by introducing interesting architectural forms, and by inserting figures in order to act out canonical narratives from Classical or Biblical history.²⁹ The example for this was set by seventeenth-century continental painters like Claude Lorrain and Salvator Rosa, whose works were among the most highly sought after commodities in the eighteenth-century English art market.³⁰ The Smith brothers – and other English landscape painters like William Woollett, Richard Wilson, and Collet's former tutor, Lambert – attempted to attract the same customers who purchased Claudes and Rosas (as well as those who couldn't afford the real thing)³¹ by imitating the Italianate

²⁶ *London Chronicle* (16 April, 1761).

²⁷ Myrone, "Patriotism, Virtue, and the Problem of Heroes" in Bennett (ed.), 2008: 58.

²⁸ Richardson, 1725: 38.

²⁹ *Ibid.*: 179-180.

³⁰ For Italian landscape in eighteenth-century England, see: Barrell, 1972; Hermann, 1973: 49-90; Howard, 1969: 726-733; Manwaring, 1965; Solkin, 1983; Sunderland, 1973: 785-789.

³¹ This idea was put forth by Solkin in relation to Wilson, though he has noted that there may not have been sufficient demand for this kind of work due to the fact that the taste for Italian landscape was mostly held by

masters, often applying the formal conventions of their work to views of the English countryside. George Smith, John's older brother, was the most successful and admired artist in the Smith family.³² His works could be found in aristocratic collections, like the Duke of Richmond's, and many of his pieces were reproduced as luxuriant engravings issued by John Boydell, a publisher who catered to the higher-end of the print market. George's premium-winning landscape of 1761 (fig. 1.4), now held in the Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum, is reflective of what was most in demand amongst English buyers of landscape painting in the period. It is an expansive view of a verdant, pastoral locale – indeterminate, though likely English, judging by the noble oaks, and castle ruins. In typically Claudian fashion, it features a distant, hazy, yet softly radiant horizon, a middle and foreground dotted with ancient buildings and tiny pastoral figures, and trees on either side of the canvas that frame the idealised view. Smith's *English Arcadia* was awarded 100 guineas too, and, as it had "so agreeably attracted the eyes of spectators during the time of exhibition," it was soon after engraved by Woollett, and published by Boydell.³³

The Gipsies – and here, to repeat, I am working on the assumption that the painting exhibited in 1762 closely resembled the later print of this name – was, of course, markedly different from the types of submissions made by Collet's famed fellow exhibitors. In this picture, there was evidently no grand historical narrative, no blissful vision of country-life, and no illustrious, Italian exemplar. Instead, Collet offered what his contemporaries would have termed a 'droll' (and not a 'genre subject,' as I have been referring to it, because the term 'genre' was not yet used in England to describe paintings of everyday life). A droll – one of the 'low' genres previously alluded to by Richardson – was a humorous painting or

the upper classes. Solkin remarks that, "If [elite] buyers could afford to acquire Italian (or French) originals, why then should they have bothered with British imitations?" And that painters like Wilson were "not foreign enough for the very great, and too pretentious for the lower echelons of the market." Solkin, 1983: 19-20.

³² For George Smith (1714-1776), see: *ODNB*; Smith, 1986.

³³ *The Critical Review, or, Annals of Literature* (April, 1761): 332.

print, typically depicting a mean or vulgar subject. For this type of work, Collet would have looked not to Italian Old Masters, but to seventeenth-century Dutch and Flemish painters of everyday life, and to Hogarth – both of which were artistic models that had somewhat equivocal reputations in the period. In Reynolds's words, delivered to the Royal Academy in the same year *The Gipsies* was published as a print:

The painters who have applied themselves more particularly to low and vulgar characters, and who express with precision, the various shades of passion; as they are exhibited by vulgar minds (such as we see in the works of Hogarth) deserve great praise: but as their genius has been employed on low and confined subjects, the praise that we give must be as limited as its object. The merry-making or quarrelling of the Boors of Teniers; the same sort of productions of Brouwer, or Ostade, are excellent in their kind! So, likewise are the French gallantries of Watteau; the landscapes of Claude Lorraine; the sea-pieces of Vandervelde; the battles of Burgoyne; and the views of Canaletti. All these painters have in general, the same right, in different degrees, to the name of a Painter, which a satirist, an epigrammist, a sonnetter, a writer of pastorals, or descriptive poetry, has to that of a poet.³⁴

As Reynolds elucidates, Hogarthian satires and Dutch drolls had intrinsic value, but existed in an inferior category of art.

In exhibiting *The Gipsies* in 1762, Collet was, in effect, filling a void that had recently been left in London's exhibiting community. The previous year, Collet's first year exhibiting with the Society of Arts, was also the first and last that Hogarth would exhibit with the rival Society of Artists of Great Britain.³⁵ For the inaugural show at Spring Gardens, Hogarth selected seven paintings – three portraits, four of his celebrated comic history paintings, and *Sigismunda Mourning over the Heart of Guiscardo* (1759-1761), a serious history painting depicting a tragic heroine derived from Boccaccio's *The*

³⁴ Reynolds, 1771: 17-18.

³⁵ Paulson, 2, 1971: Chapter 26.

Decameron (ca. 1353).³⁶ By most accounts, the exhibition was a failure for Hogarth, and in particular, the public's response to *Sigismunda* was damaging to the artist's fragile ego and professional reputation. Many viewers were bemused by the contrast between this melodramatic work and his standard comic fare, and shocked by the even more startling contrast between the beautiful female subject and the bloody severed heart she clutched to her chest. Expressing the popular distaste for the painting, Horace Walpole famously referred to Hogarth's *Sigismunda* as a "maudlin whore" with fingers bloodied as if "she had just bought a sheep's pluck [heart] in St. James's market."³⁷ After just ten days, the painting was reportedly taken down at the insistence of the artist, and replaced with *Chairing the Members*, a canvas from the more favourably received comic series, *The Humours of an Election* (1754).

Though many of his contemporaries vehemently argued in favour of exhibiting history paintings, Hogarth's attempt to do so was met with harsh criticism from which he seems to have never fully recovered. In 1762, Hogarth was noticeably absent from the Society of Artists exhibition, but he likely had a hand in the Sign Painters' Exhibition, a burlesque on the concurrent shows at the Society of Arts and Spring Gardens, which many considered to be a "most impudent and scandalous abuse" on the two exhibiting bodies.³⁸ Modern scholars have interpreted Hogarth's withdrawal from the Society of Artists and his involvement with the Sign Painters' show as a reflection of the aging artist's feelings of alienation from an artistic community he had helped to foster.³⁹ Yet, in spite of the backlash in public opinion, and the mocking caricatures produced by adversaries such as Paul Sandby, a fellow exhibitor with the Society of Artists, Hogarth was still, without

³⁶ SAGB, 1761: 6.

³⁷ As quoted in Paulson, 2, 1971: 326, from a letter Walpole wrote to George Montagu on 5 May, 1762, after having seen *Sigismunda* in Hogarth's studio, days before it was hung in Spring Gardens.

³⁸ Excerpted from a letter signed "A Despiser of all Tricking," *London Evening Post* (22 April, 1762).

³⁹ Hargraves, 2006: 32-35; Paulson, 2, 1971: 348-353.

question one of the most famous living British artists, and his work continued to be commercially viable. Collet, clearly aware of this fact, heedless of the recent negative press and without any allegiances to the anti-Hogarth factions at Spring Gardens⁴⁰, took his first tentative steps down the Hogarthian path with the painting he submitted to the Society of Arts exhibition of 1762.

The Gipsies is actually somewhat different from Hogarth's most recognisable works. For one thing, it appears to lack the older artist's acerbic tone, a difference that, for the rest of his career, would continue to mark out Collet's work from that of his predecessor. As will soon be discussed in more detail, *The Gipsies* does contain a vaguely moralising narrative – one that cautions young women to be wary of duplicitous charlatans – but the negative consequences do not play out in the scene, and the didactic message is further obscured by the emphasis on the charms of the young country girls. Additionally, Collet has set his scene in a country village, a locale that was rarely used by Hogarth, who was, of course, best known for his images of the bustling metropolis. Yet, despite these differences, the viewer can still identify some subtle allusions to Hogarth's designs.

Unlike some of the later works that will be addressed later in this thesis, there is no one obvious Hogarthian model for *The Gipsies*, only slight nods towards figures, themes, and compositions with Hogarthian origins. In the most general sense, *The Gipsies* evokes the work of Hogarth through its crowded composition with multiple, overlapping figures, and a profusion of material detail. The themes of noise and calamity – as embodied by screeching cats, a crying child, and the crack of a horsewhip – are also redolent of the older artist's work, and in particular, the disorderly children surrounding the gypsy and her client recall the cacophonous scene in Hogarth's engraving, *The Enraged Musician* (1741) (fig.

⁴⁰ Scholars have often seen Hogarth as being at considerable odds with many of his fellow exhibitors, such as Reynolds, who represented a more cosmopolitan/academic strain in the SAGB. See: Hargraves, *Ibid.*; Paulson, 2, 1971: 296-302.

1.5), which likewise includes misbehaving children, a screaming infant, and a dim-witted drummer-boy. In Collet's work, one of the squalid gypsy children (fig. 1.6) scowls at the dog eyeing his bone, and lifts his fist as if about to box the poor animal's ears. The dog stares back coolly, exhibiting more restraint than his human companion. Here, Collet is recycling one of Hogarth's favourite topoi – the pairing of animal and human to humorously expose the bestial qualities of man – which is well illustrated in a portrait of the *Jones Family* (ca. 1730) that includes an unkempt urchin angrily wrestling with a monkey (fig. 1.7).

However, more than any Hogarthian template, *The Gipsies* clearly recalls the rustic genre scenes of the Netherlandish tradition. As earlier alluded, Dutch and Flemish drolls – those paintings and prints depicting the often debauched recreations of the rural poor – had a paradoxical presence in eighteenth-century England.⁴¹ Continental art theory had long used Netherlandish painting as the negative paradigm and inferior counterpoint to illustrious Italian painting, and as early as the 1690s, English writers on art had adopted this opinion.⁴² Netherlandish artworks – genre pieces, as well as landscapes, still-lives and marine subjects – were typically reproved for their minute attention to lowly, quotidian detail. Foreshadowing Reynolds's heavily qualified praise in his *Discourse* of 1770, Richardson wrote in 1715:

There is some degree of Merit in a Picture where Nature is Exactly copy'd though in a Low Subject; such as Drolls, Countrey Wakes, Flowers, Landscapes, &c. [...]. Herein the Dutch and Flemish Masters have been Equal to the Italians, if not Superior to them in general. What gives the

⁴¹ For Dutch and Flemish painting in eighteenth-century England, see: Mount, 1991 (unpublished); Simpson, 1953; Solkin, 1993: Chapter 3.

⁴² See for example: Dryden, 1715: xlv-xlvi; Ashley-Cooper, B. Rand (ed.), 1914: 99, 136-137; Richardson, 1725: 160-161.

Italians and Their Masters the Ancients the preference is, that they have not servilely followed Common Nature, but Rais'd, and Improv'd [it...].⁴³

Furthermore, as Harry Mount has pointed out, this negative opinion of Dutch painting was probably reinforced by the generally xenophobic attitude in England towards the Dutch people, who were seen as a nation of vulgar peasants.⁴⁴ Their depictions of 'boors' and 'clowns' – which, of course, only worked to reinforce the stereotype – were considered amusing, but were nevertheless dismissed as trivial nonsense by many critics and theorists. In his "Parallel Betwixt Painting and Poetry" of 1715, the preface to his translation of C.A. du Fresnoy's *De Arte Graphica*, John Dryden compares history painting to exalted tragedy, and drolls to lowly burlesque:

[...] as Comedy is a representation of Humane Life, inferior persons, and low Subjects, and by that means creeps into the nature of Poetry [...] so is the painting of Clowns, the representation of a Dutch Kermis, the brutal sport of Snick or Snee, and a thousand other things of this mean invention, a kind of Picture, which belongs, but of the lowest form.⁴⁵

But, of course, theory and prescriptive literature rarely dictate reality. Throughout the long eighteenth century, Dutch and Flemish genre paintings commanded high prices at auction – often as much or more than the Italian works that were held in such high esteem.⁴⁶ In spite of Baynbrigg Buckeridge's disparaging remark that only "waggish collectors and the lower rank of virtuosi"⁴⁷ purchased them, painted and engraved drolls could be found in the collections of noblemen and discerning connoisseurs, including Samuel Pepys, Robert Walpole, the Dukes of Bedford, Portland, Chandos, and Rutland, as well as in those

⁴³ Richardson, 1725: 171.

⁴⁴ Mount, 1991: 31.

⁴⁵ Dryden, 1715: xxv.

⁴⁶ Mount, 1991: 56.

⁴⁷ Buckeridge, 1716: 430. Buckeridge is referring specifically to the "drunken drolls [...] wakes [...] and] quaker-meetings" of the Dutch-born immigrant to England, Egbert van Heemskerck I, who flourished in the late seventeenth century, but whose work was still reproduced as engravings in Collet's time.

amassed by genteel women, including the Countess of Stamford and the Duchess of Northumberland.⁴⁸

Around the time of the public exhibitions of 1761, an anonymous supporter of Hogarth, writing under the pseudonym “Mr. Oakly,” described the curious contemporary vogue for Netherlandish painting in a letter to the *St. James Evening Post*:

[...] the drawings of Rembrandt and the pictures of Teniers, and the scarce-visible Productions of some antiquated Dauber have been bought up with a kind of religious enthusiasm. I speak not of Rembrandt and Teniers with contempt: I think the one a great Genius, and the other a good painter: But with regard to the Designs and Ideas of the last, they were as narrowly conceived, as they are masterly executed. Yet, notwithstanding their Vogue and Merit, I would rather for my own Entertainment be possessed of one of our own Countryman’s Performances, than all of the Chermishes and Skittle Grounds of the Flanderkin.⁴⁹

“Mr. Oakly” was evidently not alone in this sentiment, and yet there remained a thriving market for the popular village “Chermishes” (‘kermises’ or festivals) by the Flemish artist David Teniers, which were extensively reproduced as engravings in the mid-eighteenth century. A particularly elegant example of this, *The Flemish Wake* (fig 1.8), one of several Netherlandish paintings to be engraved by Thomas Major in the 1750s, was dedicated to the Duke of Cumberland, and later hung in the same exhibition as *The Gipsies*.⁵⁰ It depicts the bustling courtyard of a village inn, where inebriated patrons dance, drink, fight, flirt, and steal. In the distance, a solemn church steeple ironically presides over the cheerful mayhem. While Collet’s work lacks the broad view, multitude of figures, and profuse detail of this image, it similarly illustrates the unrefined entertainments of lowly peasants

⁴⁸ Simpson, 1953: 40-42.

⁴⁹ *St. James’s Evening Chronicle, or the British Evening Post* (5 May, 1761).

⁵⁰ SEAMC, 1762: 7.

in a village setting, juxtaposed against the noble edifice of a parish church in the background.

At the Society of Arts show in 1762, the Teniers engraving and Collet's rustic scene shared wall space with decidedly grander paintings, including Italianate landscapes, portraits of monarchs and military heroes, and history paintings with subjects taken from Classical myth, biblical stories, and historic events.⁵¹ Surprisingly perhaps, Collet's 'low' subject may have actually appealed to the same 'high' clientele that valued these grander paintings, for as Richardson expressed it, drolls in the Netherlandish tradition offered polite viewers the thrilling opportunity of "knowing the Humours of low Life without [actually] mixing with it."⁵² By way of example, Bouchier Cleeve, the owner of the original painting after which *The Flemish Wake* engraving was made, had in his impressive collection at his Palladian villa at Foots Cray Place, Kent, several bawdy genre paintings by Teniers, Jan Steen, and Adrian van Ostade.⁵³ But he also had history subjects by the Carracci, Rubens, and Veronese, landscapes by Claude, Rosa, and Poussin, and portraits by Van Dyck, Holbein, and Rembrandt, illustrating that 'high' and 'low' subjects often shared the same illustrious setting.⁵⁴ Ultimately, however, it seems that *The Gipsies* was purchased not by a genteel collector, but rather, a print publisher, John Smith, who would eventually amass a considerable collection of Collet's works, which he perhaps displayed in his premises at Hogarth's Head, facing Wood's Street, on Cheapside, or at his partner Sayer's shop on Fleet Street, where customers could, after viewing the original, purchase

⁵¹ *Ibid.*: 1-3: Robert E. Pine exhibited "A whole length Portrait of his late Majesty " and "A Landscape with the Story of Diana and Acteon"; J.H. Schaak exhibited "A Small whole length of General Wolf"; Andrea Casali exhibited "The Judgement of Paris", "Samson and Dalila", "A Magdalen," "King Stephen," etc.

⁵² Richardson, 1725: 8-9.

⁵³ For a list of paintings in the collection of Bouchier Cleeve at Foots Cray Place, see: *London and Its Environs Described...*, 1761: 313-316.

⁵⁴ Although 'high' and 'low' genres of painting were often separated and hung in different rooms, in the case of Foots Cray Place, the Teniers hung in the same room as history paintings by Rubens and Veronese.

the subsequent engraving.⁵⁵ Thus, Collet's painting would seem to have been able to fairly seamlessly transfer from a public exhibition with lofty airs to a wholly commercial setting, located at one or the other of two of the busiest commercial thoroughfares in the city.

III.

I would now like to take an even closer look at *The Gypsies*, with a particular eye to the trio of figures who make up its central vignette – the gypsy fortune-teller, her credulous client, and the curious female bystander. This group represents an enduring iconographic arrangement, one that can be traced through several centuries of continental art, and which surfaced again in eighteenth-century England in what was some of the most familiar imagery of the period. The gypsy was a recurrent character in Western art from as early as the fifteenth century, at which point the Romani people were beginning their gradual migration into Western Europe.⁵⁶ Their exotic visages, shabby yet distinctive attire and nomadic lifestyle immediately made them attractive to the artistic eye, and although they would eventually become symbolically charged, the first renderings of gypsies are almost anthropological in their attention to costume, countenance, and physiognomy. I turn now to one of the earliest surviving images of gypsies, not because I believe that Collet would have ever seen it, but because it demonstrates a remarkably unchanging archetype for the depiction of gypsies in Western art. The image in question is an etching (fig.1.9) datable to about 1475 by the anonymous German engraver, the Housebook Master. It depicts a gypsy family: a heavily bearded man in a soft brimmed hat; a frolicking barefoot boy; and a turbaned woman, wrapped in a cloak, carrying a small child on her shoulders. Here, the primary interest is the gypsy woman who, even at this early stage of iconographic

⁵⁵ Several other Sayer-Smith prints were based on paintings in Smith's collection, see: App. II, nos. 7,8, 22, 38.

⁵⁶ Pokorny, 2009: 597-600.

development, is already depicted with the defining attributes of the female gypsy: a long, ragged mantle or cloak, and an infant child riding on her back. These are the same signifiers that Collet would use for his gypsy more than three centuries later.⁵⁷

By the seventeenth century, gypsies had a persistent presence in the visual arts, and were used in several different ways. In landscape painting, tiny gypsy caravans or encampments, usually located in the middle or far distance, were used to emphasise the immensity and grandeur of nature, and the vulnerability and primitivism of the homeless vagrants. This can be seen in one of several paintings by Teniers – for whom the gypsy family was a recurring motif – in which tiny travellers are dwarfed by a vast and inhospitable rocky terrain (fig 1.10).⁵⁸ Gypsies were also a favoured form of staffage for Gainsborough, one of Collet’s celebrated contemporaries, who was known to be influenced by Netherlandish painting, and who produced a number of gypsy-landscapes early in his career in the 1750s and 1760s (fig. 1.11). For Gainsborough, the shabby vagabonds and other related figural types were, as he later described to a friend, “a little business for the Eye to be drawn from the Trees in order to return to them with more glee” – or in other words, an aesthetically interesting visual device used to move the gaze throughout the landscape.⁵⁹ The gypsies to be found in the works of Teniers, Gainsborough, and others, were later addressed in writings on the aesthetics of the ‘picturesque’ by William Gilpin, Uvedale Price and Richard Payne Knight, all of whom noted that wild, unkempt travellers

⁵⁷ Diana de Marly has shown that the costume of gypsy women, in both life and art, gradually changed over time; however, the long mantle and the swaddled child on the gypsy’s back are traits which reoccur in Western art over a period of several centuries. Gypsy women were also commonly depicted with turbans, and in some cases white caps, but Collet has omitted both sartorial items in favour of a kerchief. See: De Marly, 1989: 54-63.

⁵⁸ Holberton, 1995: 397-398; Pokorny, 600.

⁵⁹ As quoted in Andrews, 1989: 26.

exhibited the same ‘picturesque’ qualities as the rough and irregular landscapes into which they were so often set.⁶⁰

From quite early on, however, gypsies were used for more than just ‘picturesque’ ornament. As exotic outsiders, and heathens no less, real-life gypsies were often met with hostility and distrust, and were widely believed to be thieves and charlatans. Since at least as early as the sixteenth century, female gypsies especially were depicted in art as shadowy fortune-tellers. By the seventeenth century, they were an established emblem in genre painting, used to represent duplicity, treachery, and even sorcery.⁶¹ In the Flemish painter Simon de Vos’s *The Fortune Teller* of 1620 (fig. 1.12) the artist utilises the popular convention of a gypsy woman reading the palm of a vain and oblivious client, while her mischievous son picks his pocket. Though the true target of ridicule in this scene, and the countless others like it, is the gullible client, it nevertheless casts a dubious light on the gypsies.

In mid-eighteenth century England, the morally ambiguous nature of gypsies was a renewed topic of discussion. Less than a decade before Collet executed his painting of a gypsy fortune-teller, the sensational trial of Elizabeth Canning, a maidservant who claimed to have been kidnapped by a group of miscreants intending to force her into prostitution, captured the imagination of the London public.⁶² Canning accused Mary Squires, an older unattractive woman, believed to be a gypsy, of stripping her down and forcing her into a locked garret. Although Squires was eventually exonerated, her detractors managed to reinforce the already negative stereotype of gypsy women. In March of 1753, just following the trial, the *London Evening Post* published the following:

⁶⁰ Copley and Garside, 1994: 145-150.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *ODNB.*

Egyptians (Egyptiani) Commonly called Gypsies are by our Laws and Statutes a counterfeit kind of Rogues, who, distinguishing themselves in strange habits, smearing their Faces and Bodies and screaming to themselves in a canting unknown language, wander up and down under Pretense of telling Fortunes, curing Diseases, and such like abuse the ignorant common People, by stealing and Pilfering.⁶³

Meanwhile, the contemporary popular prints depicting Mary Squires (fig. 1.13) put this villainous witch-like imagery into crude visual form. Collet may have been reminded of these images of Squires when, in February of 1762, the *St. James's Evening Chronicle* reported that the old woman had recently died, and was buried in Surrey, following an elaborate gypsy funeral.⁶⁴ Indeed, there is something witch-like about Collet's fortune-teller, and she may owe something to the popular depictions of England's most notorious gypsy.

Yet, the most likely model for Collet's fortune-teller comes from a far more refined source: a painting called *La Diséaise D'Aventure* (the Fortune-Teller) (fig. 1.14) by the French rococo master Jean-Antoine Watteau. Typical of Watteau's work, this painting offers an elegant, aestheticised version of a traditional genre subject. On one side of the composition, a trio of fashionable aristocratic women stand in front of an ivy-lined wall, while on the other side, set against a backdrop of wispy tree-branches and a receding landscape, are an elderly fortune-teller, a curious boy, and a watchful sheep dog. Although the number and placement of figures diverges slightly, the central vignette in Collet's picture clearly demonstrates an awareness of this template, which the artist had likely seen in one of several reproductive engravings that were available in England in the mid-eighteenth century (figs. 1.15-1.16).⁶⁵ It is also interesting to note that the designs of

⁶³ *London Evening Post* (31, March – 3 April 3, 1753).

⁶⁴ *St. James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post* (23-25 February, 1762).

⁶⁵ For the popularity of Watteau in eighteenth-century England see: Eidelberg, 1975; Raines, 1977: 51-64.

Watteau and his fellow French rococo practitioners were widely disseminated through decorative consumer items, such as ceramics, sculpture, and fabric.⁶⁶ By the 1760s, one could purchase a Royal Worcester coffee mug transfer printed with Watteau's fortune-teller design, or from Chelsea, a soft-paste porcelain figurine based on a similar scene by Francois Boucher (fig. 1.17). A consumer could, then, purchase Collet's print to complement their existing interior décor.

The rococo style – or the 'modern' or 'modern French style' as it was then known – must have been a significant influence for Collet given his artistic gestation at the St. Martin's Lane Academy where he was exposed to the florid draughtsmanship of the French immigrant Hubert Gravelot, and the whimsical subjects of Francis Hayman, a champion of the school now referred to as the 'English rococo.' Collet's work reflects an awareness of the typical settings and subjects of French *fête galantes* – Arcadian environs, clandestine lovers, and the idle recreations of the beautiful, young, and rich – which the English artist adapted for comic purposes. As will be further discussed in upcoming chapters, the popularity of the rococo style, at its height in the 1730s and 1740s, was waning amongst the fashionable elite by the time Collet was exhibiting – probably in no small part due to the outbreak of war with the French in 1756, which made it difficult for many to embrace a style "so ridiculous and whimsical" and so closely associated with England's enemy.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, Collet's work was a product of this visual tradition, which in the 1760s, continued to have a powerful presence at one of the most popular outdoor entertainment venues of the age.

Vauxhall Gardens, or Spring Gardens, a property located in Kennington on the south bank of the Thames, consisting of several acres of land with pathways, fountains and

⁶⁶ Snodin (ed.), 1984.

⁶⁷ Andre Rouquet critiquing the rococo, as quoted in Snodin (ed.), 1984. For the rise and fall in popularity of the rococo in England, see: 29-33.

garden pavilions, had been opened to the public since the 1660s. It did not, however, take on its best known incarnation until the entrepreneur Jonathan Tyers took up its lease in 1728, turning a formerly seamy site known for licentious activity into an elegant and respectable resort for London's fashionable pleasure-seeking public. Here, visitors could stroll along the paths, attend outdoor concerts, or enjoy a meal in one of several private dining pavilions in the centre of the garden. At some point in the early 1740s, Tyers undertook renovations on these supper boxes, commissioning members of the St. Martin's Lane Academy to replace the existing decorative scheme with some fifty canvases, almost all of which were executed in a playful and decorative rococo idiom that complemented the sculpture and architecture in the surrounding park. These same paintings, mostly carried out by Hayman and his assistants, remained in place over two decades later, as is indicated by an anonymous guide of 1762, *A Description of Vauxhall*, which provides a comprehensive list of their titles and locations.⁶⁸

Like rustic *fête galantes*, the subjects of these paintings were predominantly the recreations of children and rural peasantry, which included May Day festivities, ice skating, kite flying, card playing, and, most relevant to this study, fortune-telling. All but a few of these paintings are now lost, but fortuitously, many of the designs have been preserved in the form of reproductive engravings. In 1743, Thomas Bowles selected eighteen of the Vauxhall pictures to be published as a set, which went into three subsequent editions and spawned several pirated imitations, making them, in David Coke's words, "together with Hogarth's *Harlot's Progress* and *Rake's Progress*, the best-known pictures in England."⁶⁹

⁶⁸ *A Description of Vauxhall Gardens*, 1762.

⁶⁹ David Coke, "Vauxhall Gardens" in Snodin (ed.), 1984: 79.

One of these prints is *The Fortune Teller, or Casting the Coffee Grounds* (fig. 1.18), an outdoor scene depicting a trio of well-dressed women taking coffee in a garden, while an elderly fortune-teller performs for them the ancient occult practice of tasseography, a method of fortune telling involving the interpretation of patterns in coffee grounds, tea leaves or wine sediments. Here, Hayman, the likely designer of the image, evokes the pastorals of Watteau, such as *La Diseuse D’Aventure*, but he has reinterpreted the conventional fortune-teller motif, substituting the standard palmist, with a different kind of mystic. Evidently, the reading of tea leaves or coffee grounds was a popular recreation in eighteenth-century England, especially among women, for it features in other cultural materials of the period, including for example, a contemporaneous genre painting by the London-based Irish artist, William Jones⁷⁰ (fig. 1.19), and in a verse appearing in *A New Tea Table Miscellany: Bagatelles for the Amusement for the Fair Sex* (1750). The bagatelle in question, called *The Tea Table Oracle or Modern Fortune-Teller*, warns of the powerful influence of the tasseographer over the weak and impressionable female mind:

A Race of Sybls more refined/Here captivate the female mind/In doubts and mysteries profound,/Deliver oracles around;/Or instant joy, or grief dispense,/And every passion influence;/A smile can from Prudera force,/And cause Flirtilla a deep remorse;/Make that, her gravity give o’er,/This laugh, and sing, and prate no more/These they numerous altars rear,/At which they morn and noon appear/To ask what their success will prove/At play, in business or in love [...].⁷¹

While the supper box pictures at Vauxhall served a primarily decorative function, Terri Edelstein has suggested that their subjects, focusing primarily on themes of “chance and balance or imbalance,” represent a moralising subtext related to the vanity of earthly

⁷⁰ Almost nothing is known about William Jones (fl. 1738-1747), but a pair of his paintings dating from ca. 1740, depicting scenes from Colley Cibber’s popular one act opera *Damon and Phillida* are in the Tate Britain (TO3111 and TO3112).

⁷¹ *A New Tea-table Miscellany...*, 1750: 14.

pursuits.⁷² Though this moralising function has been disputed, the first imprint of *The Fortune Teller* engraving makes clear that, for this image, at least, there was a clear didactic message.⁷³ Beneath the image appears a lengthy verse that anticipates the style and subject of the later *Tea Table Oracle*. It concludes with this stern warning to the potential patrons of the “the wily coffee sorceress”:

Ah! Simple Maid, the faithless Lore disdain/nor weep too late thy Parents cares were vain;/Let not an Hag’s vile Cant thy Heart insnare~/When Vertue guides thy steps Thou Canst not ‘err.

The print, therefore, can be seen to be related to the prescriptive literature of the period that cautioned naive young women to be wary of the pecuniary motives of fortune tellers.⁷⁴

Returning to Collet’s image, we see that the artist has chosen for the gypsy’s dupe the type of woman believed to be the most dangerously susceptible to charlatanism – the simple maid, one of those “poor ignorant wretches,” who, according to Eliza Haywood in her conduct book for maid-servants, “misspend [all their] Time and have [their] Head[s] filled with a Thousand vain imaginations.”⁷⁵ Certainly, the mesmerised client and her astonished companion represent negative examples of female gullibility, and yet, their doe-eyed innocence and nubile beauty would have simultaneously made them the focus of the male viewer’s prurient gaze. In this respect, Collet’s country girls are illustrative of a tendency in eighteenth-century English genre painting to not only sexualise lower class women, but to present them as cleaner, better-behaved, and even better-dressed than their male counterparts.⁷⁶ John Barrell, in his seminal study on depictions of the rural poor in eighteenth-century English painting, attributes this tendency to the influence of the mock-

⁷² Edelstein, 1983: 27, 31.

⁷³ Solkin, for example, has downplayed the moralising function of the Vauxhall supperbox images. See: Solkin, 1993, Chapter 4.

⁷⁴ For prescriptive literature containing warnings about fortune tellers see, for example: *Druid Gent.*, 1752: 58-59; Fowler, 1743: 20-21.

⁷⁵ Fowler, *ibid.*, on fortune-telling, Fowler says: “It must be confessed a Desire of prying into future Events is very much ingratiated in human Nature, especially in Your sex [female]; yet sure nothing can be more silly than an Endeavour to penetrate them by looking into a Cup [...].”

⁷⁶ Barrell, 1980: 53-60; Solkin, 1996: 142-143.

pastorals of John Gay, to which I will be returning later. To quote Barrell, Gay envisioned an English countryside “populated by desirable girls who, though they might be hoped to distribute their favours with some freedom, did so with a bashful sincerity which added to their charm; and by honest clowns, who were incapable of fine feelings but who knew, at least, how to have a good time.”⁷⁷

The country girls in Collet’s picture are modestly well-dressed, especially considering their implied peasant status. Their attire recalls the ‘Sunday best’ worn by the revelling rustics in *The Milkmaid’s Garland, or the Humours of May* (Fig. 1.20), Hayman’s best-known contribution to the Vauxhall supper boxes. In Hayman’s work, depicting the traditional peasant celebrations of May Day, viewers are invited to compare the surprisingly elegant figure of the rosey-cheeked milkmaid on the right with the grotesque form of the peg-legged fiddler playing alongside her. Likewise, in *The Gipsies* viewers are confronted with an amusing juxtaposition between the pair of pretty peasants standing to the right and the pair of gypsy urchins crouching indecorously in the muddy lane. The contrast here is reflective of that convention in comic pastorals to pair comely peasant women with male comic foils, but it is also reflective of two divergent strains of genre painting that have been married together in a single image. If the central vignette is split in two, the viewer finds on the one side a group of boorish characters that seem to have been lifted directly from a ‘low’ Dutch genre painting, while on the other side, there are pretty peasants who appear to belong to the more polished pastoral of the ‘high’ French tradition. In this respect, Collet can be seen to be responding to dual artistic impulses: the decorative and the comic, traits that he would attempt to balance for much of his career.

I would like to make one final note about *The Gipsies* and its relationship to the genre paintings at Vauxhall Gardens, which is to say that not only did they share a similar

⁷⁷ Barrell, 1980: 58.

style and subject, but they were also likely viewed under remarkably similar circumstances – more similar, perhaps, than might initially be assumed. David Solkin has evocatively described the experience of viewing the works of Hayman and his studio in the supper boxes at Vauxhall Gardens, noting that these works were essentially part of the fashionable furniture of an entertainment venue to which most visitors had come to partake in food, drink, and conversation, and not the viewing of art. If at all, writes Solkin, the pictures would have been “read for a quick joke, a pretty face, or the briefest of narratives.”⁷⁸ They would have frequently been ignored, hidden behind the crowds, and in some cases, damaged by careless customers who rubbed up against them, or even reached out to touch them, allegedly to see if the vibrant milkmaids were, in fact, alive.⁷⁹ Similarly, the exhibition room at the Society of Arts – in spite of efforts made to mirror the dignity and gravitas of the Salon Carré in Paris – was probably a fairly raucous environment, packed to the rafters with a diverse crowd of viewers, some of whom were there to look carefully at the paintings, some of whom came to socialise, and some of whom came expecting entertainment and spectacle. It was reported that the first exhibition held there was “crowded and imcommoded by the intrusion of great Numbers whose stations and education made them no proper judges of Statuary or Painting, and were made idle and tumultuous by the opportunity of seeing a *shew*.”⁸⁰ If a great many of the visitors were bored and uninterested in what they might have seen as dry history paintings and stuffy portraits, then perhaps displaying a humorous subject that featured nefarious gypsies, vulgar rustics, and a pair of pretty peasant-girls was a strategic decision on Collet’s part, designed to catch the eye – however momentarily – of this “idle and tumultuous” crowd.

⁷⁸ Solkin, 1996: 148.

⁷⁹ In a facetious column in *The Connoisseur* (15 May, 1755), it was reported that: “At Vauxhall [...] they have touched up all the pictures, which were damaged last season by the fingering of those curious connoisseurs who could not be satisfied without feeling whether the figures were alive.” Quoted by Allen, “Francis Hayman and the Supper-Box Paintings for Vauxhall Gardens” in Hind (ed.), 1986: 119.

⁸⁰ As quoted in Hargraves, 2006: 26.

But of course, there was also plenty to attract the more discerning connoisserial eye – Collet made clear allusions to the works of fashionable continental artists, as well as the most celebrated British painters of the day, Hogarth and Hayman.

Though it provides only the vaguest of descriptions, the catalogue for the Society of Arts exhibition of 1762 indicates that, out of the 108 paintings exhibited that year, nearly half were portraits, another quarter were landscapes, and the remainder a smattering of history paintings, still life and marine subjects.⁸¹ Therefore, Collet appears to have been in a distinct minority in choosing to exhibit a narrative genre subject, with only Gabriel Mathias's now lost *A Servant Maid with Chocolate* appearing to fall into a similar category.⁸² *The Gipsies*, then, was an unusual submission, but a calculated one that borrowed familiar elements from both 'high' and 'low' art, decorative consumer products, and a set of particularly famous pictures that could be viewed at one of London's most popular entertainment venues.

Given its broad commercial appeal, it is unsurprising that *The Gipsies* was later purchased by the print publisher, Smith, who must have immediately recognised its lucrative potential as a reproductive engraving. However, it was not until 1770 that the print version of *The Gipsies* was engraved by Caldwell, and issued by Smith, and his partner, Sayer. This print was, in turn, displayed at the Free Society of Artists exhibition the following year.⁸³ We can only speculate about the reason for the long delay between the exhibition of the original painting, and the publication and exhibition of the print; however, it seems that it was around this time, from the late 1760s, that Smith began to consider reproducing a number of Collet's paintings as engravings, several of which were

⁸¹ SEAMC, 1762: 1-4.

⁸² Gabriel Mathias (1719-1804) was a German-born painter who studied under Allan Ramsay, producing mostly portraits, such as the portrait of the freed slave William Ansa Sasraku of which there is an extant print in the BM, BM No.1902,1011.1867.

⁸³ FSA, 1771: 5.

issued with the caption “from an Original Picture Painted by Mr John Collet in the Possession of Mr Smith.”⁸⁴ These prominent inscriptions, boldly advertising the artist’s name, indicate that, by 1770, Collet’s works were popular and profitable commodities.

IV.

In the same year *The Gipsies* was published, Sayer and Smith issued the twenty-four plate series *Collet’s Designs Both Serious and Comic*. In contrast with *The Gipsies*, the prints from this series appear to have been based not on finished oil paintings, but rather, small, sketchy watercolour drawings by Collet, a handful of which are still extant.⁸⁵ These sketches were almost certainly made with the express intention of engraving, and thus, it would seem that Collet was complicit in the plans for the series, though the exact arrangement he had with the publishers is not known. The result was a prudently branded graphic product that was marketed to consumers who were, by now, familiar and appreciative of Collet’s particular specialities, landscape and comic genre subjects or drolls.

Initially, Smith and Sayer released the *Collet’s Designs* series in four, six-plate sets, costing four shillings each, the first instalment of which appeared in January, 1770.⁸⁶ Later that year, the series was expanded to include a dozen fashion plates (see: fig. 4.9-4.12) and female nudes (figs. 1.21-1.23), and was sold for 1 guinea in a bound volume, entitled *Designs by Jn Collett, Both Serious and Comic, Engraved on 36 Plates*.⁸⁷ The prints were executed by half a dozen different hands, including William Byrne, James Mason, Edward

⁸⁴ See: fn. 54.

⁸⁵ App. I, nos. 13, 17, 19, 20, 56, 77.

⁸⁶ Later advertised in Sayer’s 1774 catalogue as “Twenty-four *Delightful Views*, embellished with pleasing groups, being excellent designs for youth to copy; drawn from nature, by the celebrated Mr. Collet, engraved by Mssrs. Rooker, Mason, Canot, and other eminent artists, quarto 10s6d.” see: Sayer, 1774: 114.

⁸⁷ App. II, no. 24.

Rooker, and Samuel Smith, engravers who were mostly known for producing elegant topographical and landscape engravings after Old Masters, and celebrated contemporary landscape artists, like George Lambert and Paul Sandby, thus suggesting the high status now conferred upon Collet's own work. Evidence that these prints were designed to serve both decorative and practical purposes is indicated by the title page for the bound volume, which announces that the series is "Intended for the use of Artists, as well as Gentlemen and Ladies," denoting its potential function as a drawing manual. Furthermore, as earlier mentioned, many of the same images from the *Collet's Designs* series were later reproduced in Sayer's *All Draughtsmen's Assistant*, a frequently reissued drawing manual, which, unlike the earlier volume, included extensive textual instruction.⁸⁸

There is no complete set of the original twenty-four plate series surviving, only a dozen or so extant prints and preparatory studies widely dispersed in different collections in England and America.⁸⁹ There is, however, an incomplete set of the first instalment of the series – missing plates number two and five – which is preserved, along with a title page, in a small album in Burton Constable Hall (figs. 1.24-1.28). There is also an extant copy of the later bound volume, *Designs by Jn Collett*, in the Kohler Art Library at the University of Wisconsin. Based upon these surviving sets, it can be deduced that each six-plate instalment included a selection of both landscapes and genre subjects, and that, though the prints are sequentially numbered, there is apparently no attempt at continuous narrative, no recurring characters (though there are recurring character-types), and no legible order, with settings arbitrarily shifting from countryside, to farmland, to village, and back again. Rather than offering a cohesive plot, *Collet's Designs* presents a succession of episodic glimpses of country life, often humorous, and usually focusing on the exploits of the lower classes, which perhaps can be seen as a kind of rural equivalent to

⁸⁸ Sayer and Bennett, ca.1780.

⁸⁹ For sketches, see: fn.84. For prints, see: App. II, nos. 24.1a-d, f,h,m,o.

the literary views of urban life offered in Tom Brown's popular satirical guide to the city, *Amusements, Serious and Comical* (1700), from which Collet's series may have derived its title.

A cursory survey of the extant prints (figs. 1.24-1.28; 1.37-1.40; 1.43; 1.45, 1.48) reveals that Collet's countryside is, for the most part, a peaceful and happy land, inhabited by small, toy-like pastoral figures, and their livestock and pets, including dogs, cows, goats, and, most conspicuously and frequently, donkeys. The plebeian figures are depicted ambling through the countryside, frolicking in the tavern courtyard, playing games, fishing, and flirting. Significantly, there is only one plate in which the figures are shown engaging in work, and even here, the work is not being taken particularly seriously. The landscape into which these playful figures are set is temperate and lush, but decidedly un-Italianate. It is mostly flat, with the occasional mound or modest precipice, and it is ornamented with an eclectic combination of gothic ruins, thatched-roof cottages, and prettily manicured foliage affixed to contrastingly gnarled tree trunks and deadwood. These views, along with the many other rural subjects that Collet produced, can be seen as a product of his early training and experience working under the landscape painter George Lambert. They can also, however, be seen as a reaction against the particular type of landscape painting in which his former master specialised.

Lambert was one of the first British artists to have established a successful career working primarily in the genre of landscape.⁹⁰ According to George Vertue, he was born in about 1699, and he trained under a painter named Hassel – possibly the portrait painter Warner Hassels.⁹¹ By the late 1720s, Lambert was employed at the Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre as a set painter, and soon after, he followed the manager, John Rich, to the newly

⁹⁰ For Lambert (1700-1765), see: *ODNB*; Einberg, 1970; Einberg, 2001; Hermann, 1973: 20-23.

⁹¹ Vertue, 1933-1934: 6

constructed Covent Garden Theatre, where he would work for the rest of his life. It was perhaps through Rich that Lambert gained entry into the upper echelons of the London art world, for Rich was friends with Hogarth, who was not only, at that time, a celebrated new talent, but also the son-in-law of Sir James Thornhill, the decorative painter who ran the prestigious precursor to the St. Martin's Lane Academy, which Hogarth took over after his death. Lambert was probably also involved in the management of the new incarnation of the academy in the 1730s and 1740s, along with Hogarth, Hayman, Gravelot, and others. Later, he was one of the many high profile artists to donate art to The Foundling Hospital, and he was also a founder member of the Society of Artists, as well as its first elected chairman. Given his extensive involvement in London's earliest art institutions, had he lived beyond 1765, Lambert would have almost certainly played a pivotal role in the founding of the Royal Academy.

Lambert's work was described by Vertue as being "much in imitation of Wotton" and in the "manner of Gaspar Poussin."⁹² Walpole later expanded on this, saying that he "was a very good master in the Italian style, and followed in the manner of Gaspar, but with more richness in his compositions."⁹³ The artist's friend and colleague Hogarth, however, lovingly declared that "the rising sun was once Claud. de Lorain's peculiar excellence, and is now Mr. Lambert's."⁹⁴ Whether a second Gaspar or second Claude, Lambert was obviously greatly influenced by landscape in the Italian tradition, and much like his younger contemporary George Smith, he was known for transforming the native topography into something akin to the classical landscapes that were in such great demand amongst English collectors.

⁹²*Ibid.* The French painter Gaspard Dughet (Poussin) (1615-1675), a pupil of Poussin, and the English painter John Wootton (1682-1764) were among the most highly revered landscape painters amongst English collectors in the first half of the eighteenth century.

⁹³ Walpole, 4, 1771: 65.

⁹⁴ Hogarth, 1753: 96.

At some point in his career, Collet seems to have experimented with his master's favoured style. A signed but undated canvas (fig. 1.29) by the younger artist recycles many of the conventions of the English school of classical landscape, including lush trees, gothic ruins, and tiny pastoral figures and their livestock resting beneath the shade of an aged oak. In this somewhat uncharacteristic canvas, Collet has applied a fairly standard compositional schema to his prospect of an unknown idyllic setting, which can likewise be seen in examples by both Lambert (fig. 1.30) and Claude (fig. 1.31), and which can be itemised as follows: a *coulisse* of trees in the left foreground; a clearing with figures in the middle foreground or mid-ground; an elevation with architectural features in the background on the right; and an opening on the left, allowing an unobstructed view of a far-off horizon. This was but one variation on a model designed to move the eye through various spatial layers of the canvas, leading it, in Michael Kitson's words, "on a circuitous path [...] by easy and varied stages to a luminous distance."⁹⁵ Yet, in contrast to the work of Claude and Lambert, whose landscapes seem expansive and unending, Collet's world feels cramped and contained, almost as if we are peering into a fishbowl, an effect which is heightened by the rounded edges of the imposing *coulisse* on the left and the hovering clouds on the right, and of course, by the *trompe l'oeil*, masonry frame that confines the entire composition. The feigned oval is a recurrent motif in Collet's work, employed not only in landscape – for which it may have been used to imitate the appearance of the decorative landscapes that were commonly installed into carved chimney pieces – but also in his comic work.⁹⁶ As in the undated oil painting, a feeling of confinement presides over the landscapes in Collet's print series, and even though these works lack the restrictive oval framing device, the viewer nevertheless senses that they are most assuredly not in the grand and infinite realm of Claude and Lambert.

⁹⁵ Kitson, 1969: 7. John Barrell argues against Kitson's proposed path of viewing, claiming the viewer is encouraged to first look at the horizon, see: Barrell, 1972: 7-10.

⁹⁶ See: App. I, nos. 28,33,75; App. II, no. 2,3,54.

The landscapes in *Collet's Designs Both Serious and Comic* are perhaps more obviously indebted to seventeenth-century Dutch landscape painters, artists such as Jan Wynants, Philips Wouwerman, and Jan Van Goyen, who were increasingly admired and respected amongst English collectors by the mid-eighteenth century, and whose influence can also be detected in landscapes by Gainsborough, and the more rustic pieces of Lambert and the Smiths of Chichester.⁹⁷ In Collet's prints, the low, flat terrain, windmills, modest thatch-roof cottages, humble peasants, and lowly livestock – donkeys rather than Arcadian sheep – seem to derive from the work of his Dutch predecessors. However, his landscapes plainly lack their characteristic naturalism. Instead, his work shares the contrived artificiality of French rococo paintings, like many of Francois Boucher's pastoral pieces (fig. 1.32), which likewise feature contained, set-like backdrops, and fleecy, fake-looking foliage. Once again, Collet's works can be seen to combine Dutch rusticism and French ornamentality.

The rise in popularity and influence of Dutch landscape in mid-eighteenth century England has been convincingly explained by Barrell as being the result of the emergence and ascendance of a new customer base that increasingly rejected classical landscape as an effete, aristocratic fantasy.⁹⁸ In place of dreamy shepherds idling their time in Arcadia, the landed gentry and upper middle classes of England now demanded a more earthly, pragmatic and productive countryside. A depiction of a harmonious, working farm, for instance, would have appealed to a land-owning English gentleman, who had an active and invested role in the management of his own estate. It would have also served as a positive and prescriptive image of the English countryside, more generally. For example, in 1757, Lambert presented to the Foundling Hospital his *English Farm with Labourers* (fig. 1.33), a rustic landscape that functioned as a celebration of the rural trades for which the young

⁹⁷ Simpson, 1953: 41-42.

⁹⁸ Barrell, 1980: 8-13.

foundlings living in the hospital were being raised. Here, the modest dignity of farm labour is embodied by the small figures in the middle ground (fig.1.34), which include a woman milking a cow, another instructing her young children to watch, and another, who balances a bundle of hay on her head. These figure types – happy, industrious, yet idyllic – frequently appear in many Lambert paintings, and in other rustic landscapes of the period.⁹⁹ In an extant watercolour study by Collet (fig. 1.35) and the subsequent plate (fig. 1.36) engraved for the series by James Mason, the artist offers a variation on this type. For Collet's scene, the figures have been enlarged and brought to the mid-ground, while the agricultural equipment and the farmland have been relegated to the hazy background, along with a faint impression of a nearby town. The milkmaid in the centre of the composition has her back to the viewer as she crouches in the mud in order to perform her task, while her two companions, a seated cow and a fellow milkmaid, make direct eye contact. More playful than her hardworking counterparts in Lambert's painting, the forthright milkmaid seems to be performing a dance rather than an arduous task. She balances the milk bucket on her head with one hand, holds up her apron with the other, and strides towards the viewer, with an elegantly pointed toe – somewhat reminiscent of the singing milkmaid in Hogarth's aforementioned *Enraged Musician*. While Lambert's scene emphasises the order and harmony of a productive English farm, Collet's hints at disorder through his inclusion of a dancing maid, a lazy cow, and a dog stealing laps of milk from an unguarded bucket.

In other plates in Collet's series, farm labourers and country folk have abandoned their work entirely in order to play, to imbibe, and most frequently, to flirt. For example, in a plate engraved by Samuel Smith (fig. 1.37) the viewer finds a coquettish milkmaid who has set aside her pail in order to fend off the advances of a lustful sailor. She points to a

⁹⁹ For rustic figures in eighteenth-century English landscape, see: Barrell. 1980: 35-50.

nearby church, intimating her virtue and chastity, but her mischievous grin, and sidelong glance tell a different story. Similarly, in an engraving by William Mason (fig. 1.38), where a handsome young gentleman attempts to persuade yet another milkmaid to abscond with him, the pretty farm girl pulls away demurely, but allows a sheepish smile to creep across her face. An indignant old crone spies on the young lovers from behind a tree. In a less coy and euphemistic plate (fig. 1.39) by Smith, a lusty farmhand manhandles a blushing young maid, attempting to pull her into a barn for a literal roll in the hay. Again, an audience of livestock looks on – a pair of attentive pigs, and a lazy dog. In yet another plate by Smith (fig. 1.40), with an unexpected and vaguely sinister twist, a haymaker pauses to consider the proposition of an elderly country squire. As Solkin points out, their posture mimics that of the harlot and the procuress in the first plate of *A Harlot's Progress*.¹⁰⁰ The man leers at his prey, as he gestures towards a hangman in the distance, suggesting the poor girl's fate should she refuse his offer. This unusually dark narrative is softened considerably by the grinning youth hiding in the trees, and the curious goat in the foreground, a conventional symbol of animal lust in the period. In a comparatively soothing scene, engraved by William Byrne (fig. 1.28), the viewer finds a more amiable and socially appropriate match, two rustics kissing in the moonlight. Our voyeuristic presence seems to have been detected by the donkey in the foreground, who stares dead-ahead, with his ears flattened in alert of the sounds of an approaching interloper. The female rustic also seems to be aware of the viewer, and perhaps for this reason, she begins to pull away from her lover in an effort to see who is watching them. Had they not been interrupted, the couple would be free to engage in their dalliance, with only the company of the disinterested donkey.

¹⁰⁰ Solkin, "The Battle of the Ciceros: Richard Wilson and the Politics of Landscape in the Age of John Wilkes" in Pugh (ed.), 1990: 58; BM No. 1868,0822.1518.

These images appear to blend the rustic settings of Lambert's English landscapes with the amorous subjects of French *fête galantes*; only here, the idyllic shepherds and shepherdesses have been replaced with ordinary English country-folk. The milkmaid, in particular, is a recurrent character. According to Barrell, the emergence of the milkmaid as a surrogate for the shepherdess in eighteenth-century pastoral poetry and painting coincided with the aforementioned greater interest in naturalism, and the shift away from traditionally aristocratic themes in art.¹⁰¹ He observes that the milkmaid remained a romantic, beautiful, and idyllic figure, but one who had "exchanged her silken gown for a woollen frock,[and] her crook wreathed with flowers for a stool and pail."¹⁰² In other words, she belonged to the new, natural, and pragmatic landscape of the eighteenth century. Gainsborough's *Landscape with a Woodcutter Courting a Milkmaid* (fig. 1.41), which predates Collet's prints by a dozen or so years, showcases the milkmaid in her typical setting and role.¹⁰³ She rests next to her cow, beneath the partial shade of a gnarled oak tree, which has been pollarded, or cutback to encourage new growth, resulting in an asymmetrically 'picturesque' form.¹⁰⁴ The beautiful maid blushes, turning shyly away from her suitor, a youthful woodcutter, who has assertively positioned himself between his love-interest and her cow. All of this is familiar from Collet's prints – the idle milkmaid, the persistent admirer, and the crooked pollard decorated in fleecy leaves – except, in the distance, Gainsborough has included a diligent ploughman, toiling away in the noonday sun. Gainsborough's image, thus, combines industry and idleness, in order to, in Barrell's words, "present [a] harmonious view of a countryside which must be cultivated [...] if it is to be productive, but which does not impose its sentence of hard labour without continual

¹⁰¹ Barrell, 1980: 51.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ For Gainsborough's landscape painting, see: Barrell, 1980: Chapter 1; Birmingham, 1986: 33-88; Hayes, 1982; Sloman, 2011.

¹⁰⁴ Smith, 2007.

remission.”¹⁰⁵ Conversely, in Collet’s countryside there is not only little evidence of work, but also a conspicuous absence of a respectable land-owning authority. Though in Gainsborough’s landscape, the landowner is not actually physically present, his spectre presides in the form of the productive, effectively-managed estate, while in Collet’s series, the landowner – or at least a representative of the landowning class – is literally pictured as a feeble and lecherous old man.

Collet’s prints, then, can be seen to poke fun at the ideals behind the rustic landscapes of painters like Lambert and Gainsborough, and for this reason, his series might be considered a playful parody of this increasingly popular genre of painting. However, it can also be seen as a pictorial equivalent to the mock-pastoral poetry and comic songs of the period, in which the countryside is imagined to be overrun with hearty, healthy, and inherently sexual farm labourers. In the eighteenth century, it was widely held that, due to their austere and active lifestyles, members of the rural lower classes were more sexually desirable and active than the languid members of the urban upper classes. As Robin Ganev has recently shown, the milkmaid and her male counterpart, the ploughman, emerged as the gendered representatives of this sexual myth, and together had a ubiquitous presence in both polite and popular culture throughout the period.¹⁰⁶ In John Gay’s celebrated poem *The Shepherd’s Week* (1717) – which was reissued throughout the century, including in an anthology the year Collet’s series was published – milkmaids are shown to be fair, honest, and good-natured, but also, easily susceptible to seduction. Cuddy, a male farmworker, recalls of his beloved:

¹⁰⁵ Barrell, 1980: 36.

¹⁰⁶ Ganev, 2007.

As my Buxoma in a Morning fair, with gentle Finger stroak'd her milky Care, I quietly stole a Kiss; at first, 'tis true She frown'd, yet after granted one or two. Lobbin, I swear, believe who will my Vows, Her Breathe by far excell'd the breathing Cows.¹⁰⁷

This stanza provides some insight into the probable outcome of the attempts made to seduce the milkmaids in Collet's prints.

Furthermore, in Gay's poetry and elsewhere, the activity of milking itself served as a sexual metaphor – Buxoma “‘stroak'd her milky Care,” and the lovelorn milkmaid Marian softly “stroake[d] the udder'd cow.”¹⁰⁸ As Ganev has pointed out, milking was a common euphemism for masturbation. In a bawdy song from the middle of the century, “The Pretty Milkmaid” the maiden asks her suitor to free her hand so that she can “go milk the kine,” but he protests, “If that my Dame would not blame me/ I'd freely give thee mine.”¹⁰⁹ Additionally, milk and milk products often served as the milkmaid's seductive gift or post-coital reward. In a verse included in Allan Ramsay's popular, multi-edition *Tea-Table Miscellany: a Collection of Scots Songs* (1723), called “Susan's Complaint and Remedy,” the eponymous heroine sings: “As he went forth to harrow and plow, /I milk'd him sweet syllabubs¹¹⁰ under my cow. /O then I was kiss'd as I sat on his knee! /No man in the world was so loving as he!”¹¹¹ It is probable, then, that Collet's depictions of milkmaids were meant to be titillating. The print depicting the pair of milkmaids, for example, now seems to be infused with previously undetected sexual undertones: one milkmaid busily engages in her euphemistic task, as the other balances a bucket of her milky aphrodisiac on top of her head, while brazenly staring directly at the viewer. Elsewhere, however, the milkmaids are relatively demure, and yet, they remain both

¹⁰⁷ Gay, 1770: 57-58.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*: 61.

¹⁰⁹ *The Pretty Milk-maid's Garland...*, 1765: 2, partially quoted in Ganev, 2007: 41.

¹¹⁰ ‘Syllabub’: a whipped cream dessert, typically flavoured with white wine or sherry (*OED*).

¹¹¹ Ramsay, 1768: 328.

sexually appealing and sexually vulnerable. Particularly in the plates where there is a conspicuous social divide between seducer and seduced, it is difficult to determine whether the viewer is meant to sympathise with the exploited female, or share in the sexual excitement of the exploitative male.

The voyeuristic element in these prints – the feeling that the viewer is spying on the sexual exploits of Collet’s country-folk – is also a trope to be found in popular song. In an early eighteenth-century erotic verse entitled *Kick Him Jenny. A Tale* (1733), which was apparently popular enough to spawn at least eleven editions, and the sequel *Kick Him Nan* (1734), an innocent country maid, Jenny, falls in love with a handsome swain, Roger.¹¹² Though she loves him, Jenny insists that Roger prove his affections for her before she will consent to marriage, requesting that he make love to her, though she is naively unaware of what exactly love-making entails. Roger ends up raping poor Jenny in a locked chamber, as the lord and lady of the house watch through a key-hole, initially unbeknownst to the rustic couple inside. The lady shouts: “Why Roger, is the Devil in ye?/ You cursed Villain – Kick him, Jenny!”¹¹³ Her husband, meanwhile, “lov’d the sport/ And would not have the Lad retort.”¹¹⁴ Roger is thus “encourag’d by the Knight,” and during the ensuing struggle, “The Knight laugh’d out to hear [Jenny] roar;/ For no one merrier he swore,/ Did ever commence a Whore.”¹¹⁵ Readers, then, are encouraged to be both amused and aroused by the sexual activities of peasants, and by the victimisation of lower-class women. Collet, too, seems to invite a similar response to his images of rapturous rustics and pretty young milkmaids and haymakers.

¹¹² For analysis of *Kick Him Jenny*, see: Harvey, 2005: 194-195; Wagner, 1988: 176-177.

¹¹³ *Kick Him, Jenny*, 1737: 19.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*: 20.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

It might be assumed that this kind of comically lascivious imagery of the countryside was far removed from the polite and idealised rural imagery of contemporary landscape painting; however, there is evidence to suggest that, not only were both modes of depicting the countryside accepted and appreciated by polite consumers, but occasionally, these divergent modes could even coexist in the very same canvas. For example, in another Lambert landscape of about 1735 (fig. 1.42), which is compositionally and thematically similar to the later painting he donated to the Foundling Hospital, the artist illustrates another happy and harmonious English farm, populated by a number of small rustic figures, who are believed to have been supplied by the artist's friend, Hogarth. One of these figures, the woman on the right, is busily engaged with her prescribed task of raking hay into haycocks. Her colleagues, on the other hand, are engaged in less productive activities: in the foreground, a man and woman have toppled over onto one of the haystacks, where the man puts his hand up the woman's skirt, as the other labourers pause from their work, and amusedly look on. Although, as Barrell points out, this was an unusually ribald subject for an otherwise conventional landscape painting, it nevertheless serves as a useful demonstration that, in rural imagery of the first half of the eighteenth century, the comic was far from being wholly divorced from the polite.¹¹⁶ The fact that a painter like Lambert – who often worked in an exalted mode of landscape based on the work of esteemed continental masters – saw fit to include such bawdy figures in his painting, suggests that they were relatively commonplace and unoffending. Barrell explains the inclusion of these types of comic figures in the landscape painting of the period as being part of the aforementioned efforts to depict the English countryside as a congenial environment, where work and pleasure went hand in hand.¹¹⁷ Though by 1770, this seems to have been an increasingly less common approach to rural imagery, shifting

¹¹⁶ Barrell, "Sportive Labour: the farmworker in eighteenth-century poetry and painting" in Short (ed.), 1992: 106.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*: 108-110.

instead to the more sombre and sentimental, Collet's series would have been quickly read and understood within this established tradition of combining the serious and comic.¹¹⁸

Returning to the series, Collet's country-folk provide the viewer with further non-sexual entertainment. The artist seems to have considered the popular pastimes of the rural lower classes to be a particularly fertile source of amusement, as apparently did many of his contemporaries – Hayman, for example, depicted in the Vauxhall supperboxes peasants playing at games of leap-frog, skittles, see-saw, and blind man's bluff. Similarly, in one of the *Collet's Designs* prints, engraved by Robert Hancock (fig. 1.43), a pair of country urchins participate in a race carried out on the backs of donkeys, which they propel forward by beating with the bristly ends of chimney brushes. In terms of subject, setting, and even compositional format, this plate is particularly reminiscent of Hayman's *The Play of Skittles (or The Enraged Vixen of a Wife)*, now known only from an extant preparatory sketch (fig. 1.44), which likewise illustrates a group of country boors, playing a traditional plebeian game – a favourite subject for Dutch genre painting – beneath the gnarled boughs of a pollarded oak, as their amused fellow townfolk look on.

The recreation depicted in Collet's image, the donkey race, was a customary pastime for the rural lower classes, conventionally held at country fairs and festivals, where the prize was typically a new bridle or saddle.¹¹⁹ The obstinate nature of the donkeys made it amusing to watch, and challenging to undertake, but it also, surely, served to mock conventional horse racing. In the eighteenth century, donkey racing also emerged as a burlesque form of entertainment enjoyed by the urbane upper classes, often staged after prestigious equestrian events, much like the comic afterpieces that so-often followed

¹¹⁸ For the shift in approach to rural imagery, see: *Ibid.*: 121-132; Barrell, 1980: Chapter 1.

¹¹⁹ Miller, 1859: 108.

tragic plays.¹²⁰ Meanwhile, in the city, rakish gentlemen were known to hire chimney-sweeps to race donkeys for their own personal amusement.¹²¹ Initially, then, donkey racing was a subversive, Rabelaisian parody of the noble art of horse racing, but it had been re-appropriated by the upper classes, who laughed at their social inferior's foolish attempts at the 'sport of kings.' It is, therefore, unclear in Collet's image, whether the viewer is sharing in the subversive pleasures of the commoner, or the imperious laughter of the bourgeois.

I will now conclude by looking at two further prints from the series, which similarly find amusement in the clownish recreations of the rural poor. The first, an engraving by Isaac Taylor (fig. 1.45), takes place outside a country inn called "The Good Woman"—and a good woman, according to the signboard above the door, is a quiet one, as illustrated by the popular emblem of the headless woman.¹²² If the signboard represents the comic feminine ideal, then the women depicted below represent the reverse. The inn owner's wife, a stout middle-aged harpy, stands in the doorway, with her hands on her hips, looking on crossly as her husband attempts to entice a staggering drunk with one more tankard of ale. The drunkard's hen-pecking wife vigorously attempts to thwart him by pulling him in the direction of home. Alongside them, the couple's young son plays with his father's tricorne and sword, leaving the drunkard hatless, unarmed and emasculated. This image was later copied onto ceramic jugs by two competing potters (figs. 1.46-1.47).¹²³ The second print (fig. 1.48), engraved by John June, depicts two merry

¹²⁰ "York 8 Oct. They write from Felton that on the 30th a subscription Purse was run for by the following Horses [...] the same day started four Asses [...]. The Asses were handsomely dressed in variegated Body Cloathes, and march'd all with all the Pomp and Mockery of New Market to the Race Ground, which afforded infinite diversion to the spectators." *Public Advertiser* (12 October, 1754).

¹²¹ Dickie, 2011: 149.

¹²² 'The Good Woman' and 'The Quiet Woman' were common names for taverns and inns in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the headless woman was frequently used on signboards, as can be seen in the "Noon" plate in Hogarth's *Four Times of the Day* (1736-1738). See: Hotton and Larwood, 1990: 454; BM No. 1868,0822.1547.

¹²³ Drakard, 1992: 83.

peasants – a buxom woman and an emaciated man – dancing a jig played by a blind fiddler in the courtyard of a tavern, called the “Ram’s Head,” as indicated by the nearby signboard. Their fellow revellers look on, including the corpulent proprietor, a small girl and her doll, and a lone maid, who peers down from the upper-storey window of the modest, half-timbered tavern. Once again, viewers are reminded of those ‘low’ Dutch drolls, depicting the mindless entertainments of country boors, and particularly of the work of David Teniers, who clearly had a pervasive presence in Georgian visual culture, widely known through both original paintings and reproductive prints. Teniers produced a surplus of images of imbibing villagers, including ones that similarly depict tavern courtyard jigs (fig. 1.49) and impatient wives dragging home drunken husbands (fig. 1.50). Like the boors in Tenier’s images, Collet’s drunken villagers are happy, humorous, and mostly innocuous, and therefore contribute to a vision of a comic countryside that seems to poke fun at the polite alternative, while remaining primarily positive and nonthreatening.

The prints from *Collet’s Designs Both Serious and Comic* conflate the motifs and conventions of a number of different pictorial and literary models, often adapting elements from polite modes of rural representation for comic purposes. Occasionally, these images appear to be mildly subversive, seemingly turning cherished aristocratic and middle class myths of the countryside on their head by offering a vision of a less productive, and more raucous, disorderly, and lascivious rural landscape. However, as I have shown, this comic mode remained just as firmly rooted in well-established traditions of depicting the countryside, and thus, would have been too familiar to be truly incendiary. Like *The Gipsies*, the prints from this series would have appealed to a diverse audience through their allusions to both ‘high’ and ‘low’ art, well-known poetry and verse, and traditional forms of popular entertainment. At four shillings per set, the series was obviously well beyond the budget of the lower class people actually depicted in the prints, but it was affordable

enough to reach a broad, middling demographic. There is, however, compelling evidence that the prints were also purchased by an even higher class of clientele. The small, well-worn album (fig. 1.24), containing four prints from the series, which is currently at Burton Constable Hall, long pre-dates the modern archival history of the house's art collection. Though its provenance is unknown, it is speculated to have been part of the original collection amassed by Sir William Constable in the second half of the eighteenth century, at which point, the wealthy connoisseur also purchased prints by Gavin Hamilton and Piranesi, and paintings by Pieter Van der Bosch, Pompeo Batoni, and of course, Andrea Casali, once again illustrating that in Georgian England, the 'high' and 'low'; the Dutch and the Italian; and the serious and the comic, often coexisted in the same prestigious collections.¹²⁴

V.

In the context of his brief discussion of one of the plates from *Collet's Designs Both Serious and Comic*, David Solkin remarks that, "Collet is a little known but nonetheless fascinating figure, perhaps the only English painter of his generation who was able to straddle the dividing-line between polite and popular art."¹²⁵ This extended discussion of Collet's genre subjects and landscapes has served to support this view, and to illustrate the artist's ability to successfully operate within the confines of the Society of Arts, an art institution which was conservative in conception, but which nevertheless permitted Collet to advertise his humorous, bawdy, and sometimes subversive paintings, and the subsequent prints, to a broad customer base. The images examined here, *The Gipsies* and plates from *Collet's Designs Both Serious and Comic*, attest to the artist's

¹²⁴ Kelly Wainwright, the current curator of the art collection at Burton Constable Hall, informs me that while there is no provenance for the Collet prints, she presumes they were collected by William Constable in the eighteenth century, but cautions that there is no explicit evidence to support this. For Constable's collection, see: Gilbert, 1970: 183-184; Hall, 1970.

¹²⁵ Solkin in Pugh (ed), 1990: 58.

knowledge of exalted traditions of painting, but also reveal a keen awareness of more mainstream interests, developing trends in art collecting, and ephemeral topics and fashions. More generally, this chapter has aimed to recover the artist's little known rural subjects, and to conclude, I would like to turn to one final image, which perfectly encapsulates Collet's vision of a comic countryside.

An Holland Smock to Be Run for By Any Woman Born in this County (fig. 1.51), an anonymous line-engraving made after a Collet design, was published by Sayer and Smith in 1770, the same year that the publishers issued both *The Gipsies* and the *Collet's Designs* series. Unfortunately, no corresponding painting or drawing survives for this print, and, unlike *The Gipsies*, it does not bear a caption stating that it was "Engraved from an Original Picture" in the possession of Smith. But, its formal intricacy and ample dimensions (25 by 37 centimetres) suggest that it may well have been based on a finished oil painting, and that it was probably never intended to be part of the *Collet's Designs* series, for which the prints are much smaller (14 by 20 centimetres) and far less detailed.¹²⁶ This was a considerably more ambitious and complex composition that was evidently designed to stand alone. Nevertheless, its similar subject matter, setting, and comic tone relate it to several of the prints from the series that have already been discussed.

In this image, taking place on the outskirts of what appears to be a bustling provincial town, Collet depicts another traditional lower-class sporting event: the smock-race. As the title of the print suggests, a smock-race was run by country women for the nominal prize of a smock – in this case, one apparently made from Dutch linen.¹²⁷ The

¹²⁶ The prints from the original *Collet's Designs* series were smaller than the average print, with most mid-market portrait, landscape, and satirical prints measuring about 25 x 37 cms. (or 10x14 in.), roughly the same as *An Holland Smock*. The prints for the later *Designs by Jn Collett* were 24 x 29 cms.

¹²⁷ Oliver Goldsmith references smock-racing in his roughly contemporary novel, *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1762); the title character remarks: "I don't like to see my daughters trudging up to their pew all blowzed and red with walking, and looking for all the world as if they had been winners at a smock-race." For historical

subtitle of the engraving reads: “N.B. Runners all to be enter’d by the clerk of the course before starting; and after the Race Cocking as usual.” This is surely a play on the verb “to cock,” which could refer to the fact that, after the festivities, the country-folk were meant to resume their daily tasks, which might have included cocking, the arranging of straw or hay into piles. But of course, cocking could also refer to the boastful behaviour of the winner, or some kind of sexual activity that was likely to take place at the public celebration.¹²⁸ Like donkey races, smock-races were sometimes staged for the amusement of the upper classes, but were also a traditional part of country festivals and tournaments, such as the Cotswolds Olimpick Games, an annual sporting event held since the early seventeenth century. It was first sanctioned by James I, who believed that “delighting the people with public spectacles of all honest games” would curry favour with his subjects and encourage them to otherwise work hard for the rest of the year.¹²⁹ However, these festivities frequently devolved into drunken melees, such as they have in Collet’s print.

Again, it might be useful to read this image in the light of mock-pastoral poetry of the period; William Somervile’s burlesque epic *Hobbinol: or the Rural Games* (1740), is a particularly fitting literary parallel.¹³⁰ Though less famous than Gay’s mock-pastorals, *Hobbinol* had a long life, with new editions printed in the 1760s and 1770s, and even as late 1788, it served as the inspiration for a painting by Gainsborough.¹³¹ In the poem, Somervile ironically describes the chaos of the Cotswolds Games and his low-born hero and heroine, Hobbinol and Gandaretta, in the exalted language of a Homeric epic. As

accounts of smock-racing, see: Mandell, 1984: 145; Radford, 1994: 50-61; Rizzo, 2002: 70-118; Robinson, 2003: 82-90.

¹²⁸ “To Cock: To Raise Hay in Small Heaps,” or “To strut; to hold up the head, and look big, or menacing or pert,” Johnson, 1, 1755: 399.

¹²⁹ Quote from James I’s *Basilikon Doron* (1599), as quoted in Haddon, 2004: 28. The Cotswold Olimpick Games were founded by the attorney and writer Robert Dover in about 1612, though there was already a pre-existing traditional rural festival of games and tournaments held near Chipping Camden. For the Cotswold Olimpick games, see: Haddon; Williams, 2009: 150-170.

¹³⁰ Smock-racing is the subject of another mock-pastoral poem, James Ward’s *The Smock-Race at Finglas* (1714).

¹³¹ Gainsborough, *Hobbinol and Gandaretta as Children* (ca. 1788), Huntington Library, San Marino.

“chairs and Forms and batter’d bowls are hurl’d with fell intent like Bombs,” by boorish townspeople, the beautiful Gandaretta, who “shines unclouded by her native charm,” wins a smock-race with her uncommon combination of “peculiar grace” and “impetuous speed.”¹³² A similar scene unfolds in *An Holland Smock*, where we find a host of revelling country characters, including a pair of urchins wrestling over a gingerbread, a drunken constable asleep on duty while guarding a beer barrel, a mischievous sailor who has climbed up a tree to peer under the skirt of the prize smock, and of course, the focal point of the scene, a pretty barefoot peasant girl who determinedly carries on in the race, even as her nearest opponent falls at her feet after tripping over an obstructive dog. Here, viewers may be also reminded of Hogarth’s *Southwark Fair* (fig. 1.52), which likewise depicts the popular pleasures of an annual state-sanctioned festival, and which also illustrates a beautiful plebeian woman, surrounded by the chaos and cacophony of precariously balancing and falling figures and forms, who is similarly positioned beneath a fluttering flag, and highlighted in angelic white, thereby setting her apart from the meaner, more crudely comical characters that surround her.

In the preface to his mock-heroic poem, *Hobbinol*, Somerville writes:

To Mr. Hogarth, Permit me Sir to make choice of you for my Patron, being the greatest master in the burlesque way [...]. Your Province is the Town, leave me a small ride in the Country, and I shall be content. In this, at least we both agree to make Vice and Folly the Objects of our ridicule, and we cannot fail to be of some service to mankind.¹³³

With *An Holland Smock*, and his many other rustic genre scenes, Collet visually encroaches on Somerville’s declared satirical domain, but where Somerville makes clear that his poem is a censure of the “vice and folly” of the rural lower classes, Collet’s

¹³² Somerville, Cantos I-II, 1757: 14,21, 54.

¹³³ *Ibid.*: i-ii.

intentions are somewhat more ambiguous. Are his images a nostalgic and egalitarian vision of a mythic countryside, before widespread enclosure, when the rural lower classes were comparatively happy, free, and prosperous? Are they a comic celebration of enduring rural traditions and the lively tenacity of country-folk? Or are they a mockery of their foolish pastimes and general uncouthness? Whatever the case may be, Collet's countryside is a far cry from the peaceful and ordered landscapes that were more typically depicted in the canvases of his contemporaries.

As is the case with much of the artist's comic work, the images discussed in this chapter seem to have been deliberately left open to interpretation, thereby allowing viewers to understand and appreciate them in a variety of ways. Indeed, Collet's comic countryside can be variously read as a playful parody of polite pastoral imagery, as a mild rebuke on crude plebeian subjects, as a voyeuristic glimpse of the titillating exploits of such subjects, and as a humorous and predominantly positive imagining of rural England.

CHAPTER 2

IMITATION AND EMULATION

The year 1765 was an important milestone in John Collet's career. After his comic debut with *The Gipsies* in 1762, the artist took a brief hiatus from exhibition, returning in 1764 with a single submission, the now lost *Rakes Quarrelling with the Watchman*.¹ The following year, however, he submitted an impressive eight canvases to the exhibition of the group of painters now known as the "Body of Artists Associated for the Relief of their Distressed Bretheren, their Widows and Children," the group formerly affiliated with the Society of Arts, but which had been turned loose to find alternative accommodations for their displays at the auction house of a Mr. Moreing in Maiden Lane, Covent Garden.² According to Edward Edwards: "[the Society of Arts] finding that those who continued [to exhibit] with them began to diminish in numbers, and that the exhibitions interfered with their own concerns, no longer indulged [the artists] with the use of their room and the exhibitions at this space terminated in 1764."³ Without the prestige brought by the backing of the larger institution, the body of artists eventually known as the Free Society of Artists⁴ (the name I will now be using for the sake of clarity and consistency) was forced to compete with the more prominent Society of Artists on their own. The latter group, which opened their exhibition on 23 April, flaunted the talents of Hayman, Reynolds, Wilson, and the other eminent figures who had aligned themselves with the Society of Artists from the beginning, as well as a few defectors, including the history painter Robert Edge Pine and the portraitist J.H.C. Schaak.⁵ Horace Walpole declared their show for that year to be the

¹ SEAMC, 1764: 4.

² FSA, 1765: 6.

³ Graves, 1907: 330.

⁴ The group adopted this name in 1767.

⁵ FSA, 1765.

“best exhibition that had been yet.”⁶ Meanwhile, the Free Society of Artists exhibition, which opened on 9 May, was less illustrious, boasting fewer big names, featuring the work of second-string portraitists, copies after other artists, and various craftwork and novelties, including for example, “The lord’s prayer engraved in enamel in a ring, in less compass than a silver penny.”⁷ It was, however, in this year that Collet’s name began to appear in contemporary exhibition reviews alongside Casali, the Smith Brothers of Chichester, and the celebrated newcomer Angelica Kauffmann, indicating that he was now recognised as one of the Free Society’s most prominent exhibitors. As this lesser body of artists struggled to stay afloat, Collet was enjoying his first taste of public recognition.

The eight paintings Collet exhibited that year were, in effect, a showcase of his talents, demonstrating that he could work in a variety of modes, but with a particular emphasis on his speciality, comic painting. He showed a portrait of a lady, a picture of a cat, a landscape with a watermill, and five comic subjects – a four-part satirical series entitled *A Love Match* (ca. 1764) (figs. 2.1-2.4), following the whirlwind courtship and marriage of a lustful young couple, and a stand-alone satirical piece called *High Taste in Low Life* (1763) (fig. 2.5), which mocks the pretensions of a party of servants, who ape the fashions and recreations of their well-to-do employers. For these latter works, the artist moved out of the comic countryside and into a fashionable metropolitan milieu, choosing subjects and settings that would have been even more closely identified with the extremely popular ‘Modern Moral Subjects’ of his predecessor Hogarth.

For Collet, it was a shrewd decision to exhibit works of this nature at this particular juncture, less than a year after Hogarth’s death, at a moment when panegyrics

⁶ Gatty, 1938-1939: 83.

⁷ FSA, 1765: 10; Hargraves, 2006:58.

and nostalgia for the father of English comic art were at a highpoint.⁸ Visitors to the exhibition were quick to point out this timely pictorial reference. In the first published review of Collet's work, appearing in the *St. James's Chronicle* on 11 May, the pseudonymous author, "No Connoisseur" declares:

Having lately lost the incomparable Hogarth, it is some Consolation to see Some Sparks of his Genius reviving in Mr. Collet. His Series of Pictures called 'A Love-Match' are much in the Stile and Manner of that excellent Author of Comedy upon Canvas. We could wish however that the living Artist had rather attempted to refine on his Original than followed him in the Coarseness of his Figures, which commonly relished of the Pound-Brush, rather than the Pencil [...].⁹

Despite his final note of complaint, with its mocking reference to a 'pound brush'¹⁰ – a large housepainter's brush – it is clear that "No Connoisseur" applauds the artist's efforts to carry on Hogarth's illustrious legacy in comic art. Ten days later, another anonymous reviewer in the *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* similarly remarked that "Mr. Collet seems to have a great deal of comic humour; engravings from these pictures might possibly have as much success as some of Mr. Hogarth's; and Mr. Goldar may likely do for that purpose."¹¹ Here, the critic refers to the line-engravings for *A Love Match*, executed by

⁸ Hogarth died on 25 October, 1764, and was buried in the churchyard of St. Nicholas in Chiswick on 2 November. Soon after, there appeared a deluge of advertisements in the London papers for complete sets of his works. Many of these were placed by his wife, Jane, who had been bequeathed his copperplates, from which she earned a comfortable living until her own death in 1789. Several of her advertisements make reference to the pirated and unauthorised copies of Hogarth's prints, which were then being sold by printsellers who were eager to capitalise on the renewed interest in the artist's work. For a characteristic example of these advertisements, see: *St. James Chronicle* (5 February, 1765).

In December, 1764, an anonymous, laudatory biography of Hogarth was published in several periodicals. See: *The British Magazine* (December, 1764): 647-649; *The Royal Magazine* (December, 1764): 314-316; *The Scots Magazine* (December, 1764): 648-649.

On 1 December, 1764, it was announced in the *Public Advertiser* that "a neat and elegant Monument will soon be erected in Westminster Abbey to the Memory of the late celebrated Mr. William Hogarth, Esq." On 27 March, 1765, the *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* further reported that this monument would be erected at the expense of the SAGB; however, these plans never came to fruition. A classicising tombstone, bearing an epitaph written by the artist's friend David Garrick was eventually erected at Chiswick in 1771.

⁹ *St. James's Chronicle* (11 May, 1765).

¹⁰ A 'Pound brush' is defined as a "large paint brush" (*OED*) or a "housepainter's brush of any of the largest sizes" (*Merriam-Webster*). The inference seems to be that Collet's work lacked the delicacy of a fine art painter, and displayed the 'coarseness' of a housepainter.

¹¹ *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* (21 May, 1765).

John Goldar, and published by subscription by Thomas Bradford, for which there had already appeared advertisements in the London newspapers.¹² These earliest surviving references to Collet in the press show that the artist had successfully captured the public's attention through his emulation of a highly revered and recently deceased artist. Like the subsequent reviews, letters, and advertisements that appeared throughout his career, these first sources maintained that the strength of Collet's work was based in part on his close kinship with Hogarth.

This chapter focuses on the comic canvases that Collet exhibited in the spring of 1765, a portfolio of work representing the artist's most explicit attempt to declare himself Hogarth's comic successor, and exemplifying his characteristic variation on Hogarthian social satire. An examination of these paintings, and the subsequent reproductive prints, will reveal a number of clear visual borrowings and thematic parallels with the older artist's work, as well as some notable differences in terms of their formal style, satirical tone, and narrative legibility. But in addition to their obvious indebtedness to Hogarth, Collet's works will also be shown to engage with a variety of other cultural materials, such as conduct books, plays, popular sartorial fashions, and other forms of contemporary painting. As is the case with most of Collet's work, the paintings he exhibited in this year are more than mere Hogarthian copies; they are complex heterogeneous works, which incorporate and capitalise on concurrent trends in art, literature, and fashion.

The leitmotif that will serve as a backdrop to the close readings of these works is the concept of imitation. Principally, imitation will be discussed as a contentious social practice, which preoccupied many social critics, essayists, playwrights, and artists of the period, thus making it a lucrative satirical subject for Collet's painting, *High Taste in Low Life*. But this chapter will also consider imitation in another distinct and separate manner,

¹² *Public Advertiser* (15 May, 1765).

as an *artistic* process, intrinsic to both painting and graphic art, and indeed to Collet's career as a painter who modelled himself after Hogarth, and whose work was frequently reproduced in graphic form. Interestingly, although his feelings about his younger follower, Collet, are unknown, Hogarth himself seems to have had a lifelong obsession with the notion of mimesis – both as an artistic practice and a social phenomenon. As Ronald Paulson has elucidated, from very early in his career, Hogarth castigated copyists of foreign paintings, and the plagiarists of his own engraved works, against whom he waged an aggressive legal battle in the form of the Engraver's Act of 1735.¹³ Later, with his theoretical magnum opus, *The Analysis of Beauty* (1753), the artist rebelled against traditional art treatises by de-emphasising the dogmatic importance of copying Old Masters, instead urging artists to carefully observe the intricate and varied forms of beauty existing in nature. This treatise was a seminal part of what E.H. Gombrich has eloquently referred to as the artist's "grim campaign against fashionable taste."¹⁴ Hogarth's contempt for all manner of affected connoisseurs, blind followers of foreign fashions, and emulative social climbers took vivid and varied visual form in engraved satires such as *The Bad Taste of the Town* (1724); *The Harlot's* and *The Rake's* progresses (1732 and 1735); and *Marriage a la Mode* (1745).

Significantly, the concept of imitation is also a crucial key to the understanding of the developments of the commercial culture of which Collet was a part. Many social and economic historians have considered social emulation – that is, the attempt to act and appear of a higher social station – to be one of the primary motivations behind people's purchasing decisions in the eighteenth century.¹⁵ Perhaps most influentially and

¹³ Paulson, "Emulative Consumption and Literacy. The Harlot, Moll Flanders, and Mrs. Slipslop" in Bermingham and Brewer (eds.), 1995: 383-400.

¹⁴ Gombrich, 1995: 464.

¹⁵ For social emulation in the eighteenth century, see for example: Fairchild, "The Production and Marketing of Populuxe Goods in Eighteenth-century Paris" in Bermingham and Brewer (eds.), 1995: 228-248; Klein,

controversially, Neil McKendrick has argued that social emulation was one of the major forces behind what he calls the “consumer revolution” of Georgian Britain, during which, the historian claims, “more men and women than ever before in human history enjoyed the experience of acquiring material possessions.”¹⁶ Furthermore, imitation is central to trans-historical and sociological theories of both consumption and fashion, as put forward by influential writers such as George Simmel and Thorstein Veblen.¹⁷ While Colin Campbell – among others – has cautioned that real patterns of consumption in the eighteenth century should not be read so blithely as evidence of Veblen’s theory of conspicuous consumption – the acquiring of luxury goods as a means of displaying economic power – or Simmel’s “trickle-down” theory of fashion, the notion of social emulation unquestionably loomed large in the minds of many Georgians, who endlessly bemoaned the fact that the lower orders were usurping the styles and tastes of their social superiors.¹⁸ As this chapter will show, the contemporary anxieties related to emulative consumption were clearly and creatively articulated in Collet’s social satires of 1765.

I.

The quartet of paintings exhibited as *A Love Match* (figs. 2.1-2.4) – and engraved under the title *Modern Love* – stand out as Collet’s most cogent and ambitious efforts to work in a Hogarthian vein. Based upon the contemporary press it generated, and the various graphic and literary products it later spawned, this series can be recognised as the

“Politeness for Plebes: Consumption and Social Identity in Early Eighteenth-Century England” in *Ibid.*: 362-382; McKendrick, Brewer, and Plumb, 1982: Chapter 1; Perkin, 1969: 85-87, 140-1.

¹⁶ McKendrick, Brewer, and Plumb, 1982: 1. For critics of the emulative model of consumption and of McKendrick’s thesis more generally, see for example: Brewer, 2004; Campbell, 2005; Campbell, “Understanding Traditional and Modern Patterns of Consumption in Eighteenth-century England” in Brewer and Porter (eds.), 1993: 40-57; Weatherill, 2002.

¹⁷ Simmel, 1904; Veblen, 1899.

¹⁸ Campbell in Brewer and Porter (eds.), 1993: 40-41.

artist's crowning achievement in the field of comic art. It is fortunate, then, that these paintings are among the few of Collet's original works to survive; today, they can be found in the collection at Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia. Unlike some of his sketchier extant canvases, these works bear a polished painterly style, with a smooth unbroken surface, indicating that, though they may have always been intended for graphic reproduction, they were clearly designed to be seen on display. Indeed, the first advertisement for the engraved series, appearing in the *Public Advertiser* on the 15 May, notified prospective buyers that "the Pictures [...] may be seen at Exhibition in Maiden Lane."¹⁹

To a visually literate mid-eighteenth century viewer, it would have been immediately apparent that *A Love Match* was modelled after the work of Hogarth. The subject, narrative format, and even the title of the subsequent set of prints, clearly invited comparison with the older artist's celebrated satirical series, *Marriage a la Mode*, a set of six paintings and engravings that tell the story of a doomed arranged marriage between the son of a destitute nobleman and the daughter of a wealthy merchant.²⁰ Collet's series, however, reverses the terms of Hogarth's story, instead offering a tale of an impulsive young couple, who seemingly fall passionately in love, marry hastily without parental consent, and following their honeymoon, discover that their passion has subsided. Though told from a divergent perspective, using fewer characters and plates, the younger artist similarly conveys the unhappy consequences of an ill-advised union, while employing a plethora of easily identifiable Hogarthian narrative and pictorial devices.

Before taking a closer look at *A Love Match* and juxtaposing it with Hogarth's earlier series, something should be said about their shared satirical subject – marriage. Crucial to the understanding of both narratives is a familiarity with eighteenth-century

¹⁹ *Public Advertiser* (15 May, 1765).

²⁰ For *Marriage a la Mode*, see for example: Cowley, 1983; Hallett and Riding, 2006: 141-152, cat. no. 77; Paulson, I, 1965: 267-275.

ideals of love and matrimony – ideals that were ubiquitously expressed in contemporaneous conduct books, novels, portraits and conversation pieces.²¹ In this period, the ideal marriage was believed to be based on a love that was tempered by good sense. Moralists and social commentators of the period advocated unions that balanced romantic feelings and practical considerations, such as compatibility, parental approval, and socio-economic benefit. It was believed that one should neither enter into marriage for purely financial reasons, nor emotional ones; as one anonymous social critic cautioned: “either of these Extreams are generally attended with very unhappy consequences.”²²

The first installments of Hogarth’s *Marriage a la Mode* (fig. 2.6) and Collet’s *A Love Match* (fig. 2.1) ostensibly present the preludes to marriage based on these two negative extremes. The earlier artist’s story begins in a drawing room belonging to Lord Squanderfield, an extravagant but insolvent earl, who is busy arranging the marriage of his son to the daughter of a wealthy alderman. The scene is crowded with figures, including the fathers, various self-interested employees, the bored bride and groom, and two dogs chained together. In Collet’s story, some of the same characters remain, but the setting has moved outdoors to an idyllic classical garden, and the young couple have become the central focus in a far less crowded scene. A young beauty, seated in profile, is lavished with attention by both her prostrate lover, a slightly foppish military officer, who brushes his lips against her hand, and her pet dog, who mimics the affection of the man in the form of a gentle lick. Behind them, hidden in the brush, is an old crone who points out the love-struck couple to a middle aged man, no doubt the young lady’s disapproving father. Statues of Venus and Cupid look down on the scene from a pedestal inscribed with the Latin adage *Omnia Vincit Amor* (‘Love Conquers All’). Cupid tramples on a small crown as he steps

²¹ For eighteenth-century literature dealing with marriage and courtship, see for example: *The Spectator*, No. 261 (29 December, 1711), No. 479 (9 September, 1712); Franklin, 1752; Rousseau, 1763; Wilkes, 1740.

²² Philogamus, 1739: 47.

forward to aim his arrow at the couple, symbolising that love even vanquishes thoughts of rank and fortune.

In these opening scenes, Hogarth and Collet have constructed courtship scenarios that seem to be worlds apart: one, a miss-matched union based on material greed and the other based on fleeting (and possibly feigned) emotion. Both series, however, attack the insincerity and affectation of the central characters. In Hogarth's image, entitled "The Marriage Settlement," the evidence of Lord Squanderfield's pretensions can be seen on the walls, where a few too many Old Master paintings hang, and outside the window, where a fashionable neo-Palladian mansion is being built. Meanwhile, in Collet's image, entitled "The Courtship," the affectations of the characters are primarily expressed through actions rather than possessions. Indeed, there is a highly theatrical quality about Collet's courtship scenario which is perhaps suggestive of the fact that the image is intended to be read as a superficial performance of the rituals of romantic love, rather than being a depiction of a naïve young couple who are caught up in a passionate romance. Evidence that that the couple's feelings are less than wholly sincere is manifested in their lack of eye contact, their contrived poses, and the subtle hint of a self-conscious awareness of their audience. In particular, the grovelling posture of the dotting officer appears histrionic and hollow. Such a performance flies in the face of the models of behaviour prescribed by authors of conduct books. In Wetenhall Wilkes popular text *A Letter of Genteel and Moral advice to a Young Lady* (1740), which went into its seventh edition in 1760, the author advises eligible ladies to be wary of overly rapturous suitors. He writes: "When a Man talks of honourable Love, you may with an honest Pleasure hear his story; but if he flies into Raptures, calls you an Angel, or a Goddess; vows to stab himself like a Hero, or die at your feet like a Slave, he no more than dissembles."²³ As Kate Retford has observed, Wilkes argued that genuine

²³ Wilkes, 1740: 162.

emotions should be expressed with a suitably ‘English’ reserve.²⁴ He writes: “Tenderness, Friendship, and Constancy dressed in a simplicity of Expression recommend themselves by a more *native* Elegance, than violent Raptures, extravagant Praises, and Slavish Adoration.”²⁵ Thus, from Wilkes’s perspective, the suitor in “The Courtship” is not only insincere, but also suspiciously un-English. The young lady’s behaviour, meanwhile, is no more honourable. She acquiesces to her suitor’s exaggerated advances – though she does so with a seeming lack of enthusiasm that would further suggest the hollowness of this superficial affair.

The debasing effect of the foreign is an important subtext of Hogarth’s series, for which he very deliberately employed French engravers, a French rococo style, and a ‘Frenchified’ title in order to ridicule the fad in English high society for all things French.²⁶ For Collet, the French *fête galante* was not only evocative of the theatrical courtly love he was attempting to capture in his image, but it was also an influential genre during his formative years. As I have already established, Collet was exposed to the rococo-style work of artists like Gravelot, Hayman, and others while training at the St. Martin’s Lane Academy. He was also no doubt familiar with the work of the Philippe Mercier, a Huguenot immigrant who specialised in portraits and conversation pieces in the manner of Jean-Antoine Watteau, the aforementioned originator of the *fête galante*.²⁷ Mercier’s *Lovers in a Park* (ca.1727) (fig. 2.7), an outdoor scene depicting an amorous couple, seated beneath a tree under the gaze of a classical sculpture, is another convincing model for “The Courtship.” Beyond sharing a similar compositional format, Collet’s painting displays the same shimmering quality of fabric, warm colouring, and feathery tree branches – all trademarks of the rococo mode.

²⁴ Retford, 2006: 62.

²⁵ Wilkes, *ibid.*

²⁶ Paulson, 1971: 476.

²⁷ For Mercier’s impact on the development of the English conversation piece, see: Solkin, 1993: 73-77.

One motif commonly employed in the *fête galante* that is absent in Mercier's example, but present in Collet's image is music making. On the ground beside the lady is a flute and a book of music. Next to this, there is a sheet reading: "*La Lettione del l'Amore: A favourite Duet Compos'd by Sigr Pianissimo.*" Collet may have lifted this motif directly from the work of the celebrated rococo master Watteau, whose work, as earlier mentioned, was widely collected and reproduced in England in the first half of the eighteenth century.²⁸ For example, Watteau's *The Scale of Love* (ca. 1715) (fig. 2.8) similarly depicts a young couple, seated outdoors beneath a statue, performing a duet. In Watteau's painting, music making is an allegory for romantic love, such as it is in Collet's work too, but for the English artist, music also has dangerous implications. Although, as Richard Leppert has shown, music was a common, and frequently positive metaphor in eighteenth-century English art, it could also be associated with unmediated passions and lewd sexual transactions.²⁹ In his popular conduct book *The Gentleman Instructed* (1709), William Darrell allows that music is not "directly vicious," but that secular love songs, like the duet in Collet's image, are: "lewd to scandal, and irreligious to excess."³⁰ In particular, Darrell censures ladies who partake in such music making: "A Woman that courts in Musick, solicits in good earnest, and is either some Spark's Conquest already, or intends to make one."³¹ The fact that Collet's young couple have abandoned their sheet music and instrument suggests that the lascivious song has already done its damage and the "Spark" has completed his conquest. As will be seen in later images, music is a potent recurring theme for *A Love Match*.

Perhaps even more so than Hogarth's series, Collet's work maintains the formal exigencies and thematic interests of the rococo style. Though his image, in some ways,

²⁸ For Watteau, see: Chapter 1: 49-50.

²⁹ Leppert, 1988.

³⁰ Darrell, 1755: 211.

³¹ *Ibid.*: 212.

seems to subvert the *fête galante* genre for satirical purposes, it also unquestionably capitalises on its considerable decorative and erotic appeal. Collet's slick brushwork and careful attention to sumptuous sartorial detail work to delight the eye, while his many allusions to sexual love and the act of voyeurism are – at least partially – designed to titillate. Although, as previously mentioned, the rococo mode was by this time waning in popularity amongst the elite, it carried on to have a long life amongst middling consumers, and as such, artists like Collet continued to feed this ample market with work in the 'modern' French style. Indeed, remnants of the rococo can still be found in Collet's work of the late 1770s, as will be seen in a later chapter.³²

For the second installments of their respective series, Hogarth and Collet move even further apart in terms of setting, with the younger artist transporting his central characters to a dusty, country road, and the older artist moving his couple into the plush confines of a drawing room in a modern, urban townhouse. I will return to Hogarth's iconic image shortly, but for the moment I will focus on Collet's scene. In this image (fig. 2.2), appropriately entitled "The Elopement," the young lovers steal away in the early hours of the dawn to be married in a clandestine ceremony. The old crone from the first scene, who has been bribed with a sack of coins, helps the gentleman lift his bride over a high paling. The lady's belongings, including a box labelled "For Miss Fanny Falsestep," rest on the ground, waiting to be loaded into a nearby post-chaise. One of the gentleman's attendants leans over to pick up a small trunk as the lady's dog makes off with his cap. Meanwhile, the coachman prepares his pistol for the perilous journey along the "Great Northern Road" to Scotland.

For Collet's contemporaries, this scene would have been especially topical. In 1765, renewed efforts were made to amend the controversial "Clandestine Marriages Act

³² Chapter 4: 229-230.

of 1753,” which among other things, stipulated that valid marriages required the advanced announcement of wedding banns and that couples under twenty-one required the permission of their parents or guardians.³³ The loophole of this act was that the law did not extend to Scotland. Thus, Scotch border towns such as Gretna Green experienced a flourishing elopement trade. Although it is difficult to quantify the Scottish marital flow, it was evidently enough to capture the imagination of a number of novelists, playwrights and artists, who employed elopement narratives to express the impulsivity and volatility of young romance.³⁴ Scottish elopements figure in works by Fanny Burney, Thomas Rowlandson, and Richard Brinsley Sheridan, among others.³⁵ Collet’s image was thus one of the first of what became a deluge of Scottish elopement narratives in the last decades of the eighteenth century.

In Collet’s scene, the artist once again lavishes attention upon sartorial detail – note, for example, the extravagant lace hat worn by the lady, and the glistening gilt buttons and aiguillettes adorning the uniform of the officer. Even the old crone is afforded shiny, new, robin’s egg blue ribbons to ornament her otherwise ragged ensemble. Conversely, the details of physiognomy have been attended to with considerably less precision. These three figures (figs. 2.9-2.10) bear little resemblance to the characters from the first image in the series, though it can be presumed that they are one and the same, based on the trajectory of the narrative. The engraver Goldar did little to rectify this problem in the print version (fig. 2.11), prompting Mary Dorothy George to remark that the “lady looks many years younger” than she does in the plate before.³⁶ This apparent deficiency in figural drawing may have been what the critic “No Connoisseur” referred to when he rebuked Collet for

³³ Outhwaite, 1995.

³⁴ O’Connell, 2001: 5-23.

³⁵ See for example: Fanny Burney, *Camille* (1796); Thomas Rowlandson, *Elopement from Bristol to Gretna Green* (1791), BM No. 1868,0808.6022; Richard Brinsley Sheridan, *The Rivals* (1775).

³⁶ George, 5, 1935: 662, BMSat. 6149.

his “coarseness of figures,” though he surely meant to imply that these characters were “coarse” in behaviour, as well as appearance.

The next pair of images in *A Love Match* take place after the couple’s clandestine marriage, inside their London home. It is in these final two scenes that the influence of *Marriage a la Mode* is most palpable. In fact, the same image in Hogarth’s series appears to have served as the model for both works: that of “The Tête à Tête” (fig. 2.12), in which the newly married Viscount Squanderfield and his wife are depicted in their sitting room, seated on either side of a fireplace adorned with an eclectic assortment of decorative knick knacks, illustrating both their spendthrift ways, and their dubious taste in art and interior décor.³⁷ The lady, stretching indecorously after having spent a raucous night entertaining guests, glances across the table towards her husband. The oblivious viscount slouches forward in his seat, unaware that a lapdog is pulling a lacy bonnet belonging to a recent sexual conquest from out of his pocket. Their exasperated steward exits the room with his hand raised in alarm over the disarray. Next to him is an upturned chair, which simultaneously alludes to a hasty exit made by the lady’s lover, and to the overall chaos of the Squanderfield’s home and marriage.

In Collet’s third image, “The Honeymoon” (fig. 2.3), the artist depicts the Squanderfields’ ostensibly affectionate counterpart – a couple who share the same space, physical contact, and the same domestic activity. This scene captures a seemingly tender moment shortly after the wedding, in which the couple take tea together in a lavishly appointed breakfast room, filled with a similarly heterogeneous mix of fashionable consumer products, such as Chippendale-style furniture, a vibrant floral-patterned carpet, China teaware, and a copper coffee urn adorned with delicate silver handles. The lady drapes herself over the shoulder of her new husband, as she scoops a lump of sugar into his

³⁷ Cowley, 1983: 57-80; Hallett and Riding, 1965: 147-148; Paulson, 1, 1965: 270-271.

cup. The husband's eyes appear closed, possibly expressing the sleepy satisfaction of the refractory period, or possibly something else (boredom or post-coital *tristesse*?). From beneath the settee, a kitten pulls a benign piece of string from out of the gentleman's pocket, indicating that this husband has nothing salacious to hide. Scattered around the couple are various allusions to their apparent conjugal felicity, including discarded formal clothing, books on marriage and childrearing, a pair of dogs who imitate the doting behaviour of their masters, a flute, and an epithalamium written in honour of the couple's wedding. Likewise, the two paintings hanging on the wall comment on the couple's present state: one depicts a blindfolded cupid hand-in-hand with Hymen, the god of marriage; and the other is a rural scene with a peasant tilling a fertile field. Seemingly so absorbed in marital bliss, the young couple take no notice of their servant – a near facsimile of the Squanderfield's steward – who has dropped the contents of his plate after having his queue pulled by a mischievous pet monkey. However, the discord of this action alerts the viewer to the impending turmoil and disharmony of the relationship. Indeed, this action, combined with the general disorder of the room, hints at the possibility that there may already be trouble in paradise.

In Collet's final image, "Discordant Matrimony" (fig. 2.4), the couple, a few years into their marriage, have grown physically and emotionally apart. Like the Squanderfields, they sit on either side of a fireplace ornamented with exotic curios. The woman, apparently ill, is attended to by her black servant who prepares a dose of "composing draught" – likely to treat the hysterical symptoms of syphilis. She casts an embittered sidelong glance towards her husband, who is leering at their maid. The pretty young servant chaperoning the couple's two children, returns the gentleman's leer with an alluring look of her own. Completing this network of gazes is the black servant, who glowers disapprovingly at the

flirtatious maid.³⁸ Both parents ignore their children, and the room full of allusions to their unhappy fate: paintings that allegorise fading love, including a canvas loosely based on Luca Giordano's *Cupid Abandoning Psyche* (ca. 1695) (fig. 2.13), then in the collection of George III; books inscribed with titles like "The Scene is now Changed or the Faithless Husband"; and two snarling dogs chained together, a motif purloined from the first scene of *Marriage a la Mode*. In the foreground, tied to a toy horse being pulled by the young son, is a broken guitar – an unambiguous embodiment of "Discordant Matrimony."

While it is undeniable that *Marriage a la Mode* is the primary source for both the third and fourth images in Collet's series, the scenes also rely upon a non-satirical model – the domestic portrait. As Kate Retford has demonstrated in her recent study, the development of domestic portraiture in the mid-eighteenth century was informed by the concept of companionate marriage. Today, most scholars agree that the phenomenon of companionate marriage – a union based on mutual affection, respect and interests – does not reflect any actual change in marital practices, but rather, a powerful discourse that found expression in sentimental novels, prescriptive literature, and imagery.³⁹ Retford contends that the rise in affectionate marital portraits in the second half of the eighteenth-century can be explained by the respective patrons' desire to embody this ideal.⁴⁰ Rather than passionate love, the key element of this marital model was enduring friendship. Richard Steele, Joseph Addison, Jonathan Swift, and a host of other literary giants extolled the virtues of a wife who fulfilled the role of an intelligent companion. In a letter written to a bride-to-be, which was published and reissued throughout the century, Swift expresses the gravity of this role:

³⁸ David Dabydeen has identified the trope in eighteenth-century pictorial satire of using the black servant or other 'savage' as an ironic figure, embodying "civilized values," who expresses "amazement or disgust at the sordid and grotesque culture of the European." See: Dabydeen, 1987: Chapter 2.

³⁹ Most social historians now refute Lawrence Stone's claim that marriages became gradually more affectionate and equal over the course of the eighteenth century. See: Stone, 1990.

⁴⁰ Retford, 2006: 49-82.

[Your parents] failed as is generally the case, in too much neglecting to cultivate your mind; without which it is impossible to acquire or preserve the Friendship and Esteem of a wise man, who soon grows weary of acting the Lover, and treating his Wife like a Mistress, but wants a reasonable Companion, and a true Friend through every Stage of his life.⁴¹

In “The Honey-Moon,” the viewer can perhaps detect in the husband’s facial expression the faint intimation of ennui and even, possibly, of sexual satiety, indicating that he has already discovered that he has selected a partner who is unable to fulfill the duties of a “reasonable Companion.”

Roughly contemporary with *A Love Match*, Johann Zoffany’s portrait of Lord Willoughby de Broke and his family (ca. 1766) (fig. 2.14) is an exemplary model of companionate marriage and idyllic family life, and it is exactly the sort of image that Collet distorts in “Discordant Matrimony.” In Zoffany’s piece, the family have gathered to take tea in their tastefully austere living room, next to the fireplace, the hub of the family home. Though husband and wife do not share physical contact, they are shown close together with their faces turned inwards, towards one another. Lord Willoughby stands behind the group, with his hand resting on the back of his wife’s chair. From this vantage point, he is able to protectively survey his family, and gently scold his son for grabbing a piece of pastry. Lady Louisa, who occupies a space in the centre of the composition, is the image of attentive and affectionate motherhood – she embraces her youngest child as she takes her first steps on the tea table, while keeping a watchful eye on her elder son, who has just entered the room, pulling a toy horse behind him. Both Lord and Lady are performing ascribed roles: Lord Willoughby is the protector and provider; and Lady Louisa is the heart of the family. Conversely, in “Discordant Matrimony,” the couple are woefully neglectful of their marital and parental duties. Unlike his upright counterpart in Zoffany’s portrait, the

⁴¹ Swift, 1761: 205.

husband in *A Love Match* is shown seated, leaning lazily onto a nearby table. Whereas Lord Willoughby is represented as an active man, who contributes to society and provides for his family, Collet's indolent captain seems to have brought home nothing but venereal disease. His wife, who has never adequately fulfilled the role of a companionate partner, now ignores the most important female role of all. The negligent mother is too distracted by her unfaithful husband to receive her youngest child from the maid's outstretched arms.

As is the case with most satire, *A Love Match* is intended to be both humorous and admonitory. Collet's series exposes the folly of romantic impulsivity, and the final scene, "Discordant Matrimony," illustrates the unpleasant consequences. For Collet's couple, the results of their ill-advised tryst and clandestine marriage are incompatibility, infidelity and infectious disease. Certainly, it is an undesirable scenario, but it is minor penance when compared with the more disastrous fate of the couple in *Marriage a la Mode*. In Hogarth's graver 'Moral Progress,' both parties take on lovers – Viscount Squanderfield's mistress is a child prostitute, whom he infects with a venereal disease, and Lady Squanderfield's beau is a duplicitous lawyer, who fatally stabs the viscount in the second to last plate. In the final scene (fig. 2.15), the couple's only child, disfigured from venereal disease, kisses his dying mother, who has just poisoned herself with laudanum. Thus, the Squanderfields' story ends horrifically with disease, deformity, murder, and suicide; all of which are graphically depicted. By comparison, the punishment that the couple in *A Love Match* receives seems almost merciful. In *The History of the Comic Strip* (1973), David Kunzle suggests that the differences between *Marriage a la Mode* and *A Love Match* can be explained by changed social standards in the second half of the eighteenth century, which deemed the "more sordid forms of punishment" in Hogarth's series no longer acceptable.⁴²

⁴² Kunzle, 1973: 319.

It is also redolent of Collet's lighter brand of satire for which the artist tended to diminish moral instruction, and generally eschewed dire consequences for his subjects.

In addition to noting their divergent satirical tones, the few modern scholars who have dealt with these two series have pointed to the comparative simplicity of Collet's set, remarking that it lacks the older artist's characteristic nuance, and layered storytelling.⁴³ Yet, in spite of *Marriage a la Mode's* complexity, its longer format, and greater number of characters, it is arguably more coherent. Hogarth's careful arrangement of figures, and strategic use of doorways, windows, and various other openings, encourage easy visual passage through the series, and facilitate greater narrative legibility. Conversely, Collet's series can be seen to shunt more awkwardly from scene to scene, and seemingly relies more heavily on ham-fisted allusions and the excessive use of text in order to convey the story. For this reason, Harry Mount has opined that Collet, in comparison to Hogarth, struggled to communicate his humour through a purely visual language, diagnosing the artist with an acute case of 'logomania,' an obsession with words.⁴⁴

Eighteenth-century viewers, however, seem to have had little problem with these shortcomings, and in fact, *A Love Match* went on to become one of Collet's most celebrated and successful artistic ventures. While there is no clear indication of the monetary success of Bradford's sixteen-shilling print series – for which Collet himself was one of the subscription-takers – there is compelling evidence to suggest that it was not only a financial triumph, but also a great boon for publicity, earning Collet and his work a place in the contemporary popular imagination.

In 1767, a year after the final plate in the series had been issued, there appeared advertisements in the London press for *The Wooden Bowl, A Tale to which is added A*

⁴³ Crowley, 1983: 176; Crown, 2002: 133; Kunzle, *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Mount, 1989: 2 (unpublished).

Love-Match, taken from *Mr. Collet's four celebrated Pieces viz. Courtship, Elopement, Honey-Moon, and Matrimony*, an anonymous publication which included a five-page comic verse written in honour of the artist's series.⁴⁵ This work, as the foreword professes, is a crudely written poem inspired by the "doggerel Muse of Grub-Street."⁴⁶ As such, it focuses on the broadly humorous and bawdy aspects of Collet's work, and offers a fairly superficial interpretation of the series. For this Grub-Street hack, Collet's tale is a straightforward homily on the folly of impulsive love. The poem begins:

The Youth, the Maid, each other court/ With their romantic, usual sport/ So exalted with them their tone is, That she's a Venus, -- he Adonis/ Her hand he'll grasp it kiss, and kiss,/ Vowing, that it is his only bliss/ Then knelling, staring he compares/ Her brighter eyes to the bright stars;/ His arm then he'll throw round her bodice/ Crying Angel, Queen, Charmer, Goddess!⁴⁷

At first the woman resists her lover's charms, but then relents, casting him a "wishful eye," lamenting that her father will not consent to their marriage. Here, and elsewhere, the poet takes some liberties with the source material, inserting wistful glances, and inventing hyperbolic dialogue. He then goes on to describe the couple's transition from passionate paramours to disillusioned spouses – all the while ignoring Collet's more subtle cues that the relationship was dysfunctional and doomed from the very beginning. The poem ends with a whimper rather than a bang, with husband and wife grown weary by the banality of marriage. The poet concludes: "For as the Proverb trite, and old,/ Says what's too hot, can never hold:/ The Love of this Pair prov'd too hot,/ And consequently hold could not."⁴⁸

As paltry and poorly written as it is, this poem is suggestive of the success and fame of Collet's series. If the artist himself did not have a hand in the publication, he must

⁴⁵ *Public Advertiser* (8 November, 1767).

⁴⁶ *The Wooden Bowl...*, 1767: iii.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*: 16.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*: 19

have been surprised and pleased to be following now closer than ever in Hogarth's footsteps, having his own equivalent to the unofficial commentaries that were made to accompany the older artist's wildly successful first series, *A Harlot's Progress* (1732).⁴⁹ Evidently, enough people had seen Collet's paintings in person, or, more likely, purchased the reproductive prints to warrant a five-page celebratory explanation of them. Those who had not seen the images, meanwhile, might have had their curiosity piqued by the poem.

Furthermore, just as Hogarth had been forced to contend with crude copies and weak imitations of several of his popular works, the younger artist's own series would inspire cheaper imitations as well.⁵⁰ For example, in 1777, Carington Bowles issued a pair of mezzotints entitled *The Honey-Moon* (fig. 2.16) and *Six Weeks After Marriage* (fig. 2.17), which condensed Collet's narrative into a simple 'before' and 'after' contrast. This became a popular comic trope with considerable longevity, continuing to serve as the subject and format for comic prints well into the nineteenth century (figs. 2.18-2.20). While these later works may have been only loosely related to *A Love Match*, Collet's series did pass into posterity in a much more literal way. In 1782, two years after Collet's death, John Boydell, London's leading publisher of prints after old and modern masterpieces, chose to reissue the late artist's celebrated series. That same year, the publisher also printed engravings after Caravaggio's *The Calling of the Three Apostles*, Rubens's feted portrait of his wife Helena Fourment, and a series of allegorical subjects based on Reynolds's much admired designs for the painted windows at New College,

⁴⁹ See for example: John Bernal's *The Lure of Venus: or, A Harlot's Progress. An Heroic-comical Poem* (1733); *The Harlot's progress. Being the Life of the Noted Moll Hackabout, in Six Hudibrastick Canto's* (1740).

⁵⁰ For piracy of Hogarth's work, see: Kunzle, 1966; Paulson, 2, 1992: 35-45.

Oxford.⁵¹ Thus, in Boydell's inventory, *A Love Match* kept illustrious company with the work of some of the most famous artists of the time.

II.

The other comic subject Collet exhibited in the spring of 1765, *High Taste in Low Life* (fig. 2.5), is a painting that shares many of the same formal qualities, thematic interests, and artistic influences as *A Love Match*. Of this piece, the anonymous reviewer "No Connoisseur," writes: "The Picture called High Taste in Low Life is also in the Stile of the same school [i.e. Hogarthian], and has great Merit. The Figure of the Washerwoman is particularly excellent."⁵² The painting being described is, in all probability, the extant canvas currently in the collection at Colonial Williamsburg, along with the *Love Match* quartet. It now goes by the title *High Life Below Stairs* after the reproductive print of the same name, engraved by James Caldwell and published by Sayer and Smith in 1772, which in turn took its name from the wildly successful comic afterpiece by James Townley, performed regularly at the Drury Lane theatre from its debut in 1759 until the end of the century.⁵³ Collet's painting depicts the idle recreations of servants in their cluttered quarters: a male and female servant perform a duet; a lady's maid gets her hair dressed by a footman in livery; her daughter and another maid look on with raptured interest; and in the shadowed corner, a haggard washerwoman performs her regular duties, ignoring her frivolous colleagues.

⁵¹ See: John Murphy after Caravaggio, *The Calling of the Three Apostles* (1782), BM No. 1873,0809.33; Richard Earlom after Peter Paul Rubens, *Rubens's Wife* (1782), BM No. 1841,0809.8; Georg Sigmund Facius after Joshua Reynolds, *Allegorical Figures* (1782), BM Nos. 2006,U.329, 2006,U.328, 2006,U.334, 2006,U.333.

⁵² *St. James's Chronicle* (11 May, 1765).

⁵³ Stone, 4-5, 1962.

Although *High Taste in Low Life* was clearly designed to stand alone, it can be imagined that, at the Free Society exhibition, it hung near the *Love Match* series, complementing it well, and working as a playful afterpiece to the main act, much like Townley's play of the same subject. The *Love Match* narrative concludes in the drawing room of the unhappy couple's fashionable home, where a new character has been lately introduced – a seductive maid, who manages to both mind the children and make eyes at the adulterous master of the house. The viewer might envision this servant exiting the scene, travelling down a corridor, and into the servant's quarters, the setting of *High Taste in Low Life*, where she would join the others in their misguided mirth. Here, the sources of entertainment are items and activities borrowed (or possibly stolen) from their employers. Their master's ale, their mistress's cast-off clothing, the newly fashionable English guitar, even the curios on their mantelpiece – all look suspiciously similar to the ones displayed in the drawing room in "Discordant Matrimony." Thus, *High Taste in Low Life* would have been better appreciated when seen alongside the *Love Match* series, which in addition to satirising hasty courtships, also critiqued the affected tastes of the middle class, who filled their lives and homes with novelties made fashionable by the aristocratic *bon ton* and style setters on the continent. Social commentators of the period noted that these tastes had trickled down to the lower orders, and in particular to domestic servants, who were frequently chastised in plays, pamphlets, and the press for aping their betters, thereby dissolving traditional class distinctions.⁵⁴ To quote John Styles, who has recently devoted much attention to the consumer practices and dress of the Georgian lower classes: "In the eyes of the eighteenth-century elite, no group of working people was more guilty of sartorial extravagance than servants."⁵⁵

⁵⁴ McKendrick, Brewer, and Plumb, 1982: 59-62; Styles, 2007: 195-212.

⁵⁵ Styles, 2007: 277.

Critical commentary on servants provided by influential figures such as Bernard Mandeville, Daniel Defoe, and Jonas Hanway was prevalent enough to make misbehaving domestics a viable subject for Collet's satire, but the driving force behind the artist's decision to produce and exhibit *High Taste in Low Life* was almost certainly the popularity of Townley's comic afterpiece.⁵⁶ Though the painting was submitted to the exhibition with a different title – probably in an attempt to further align himself with Hogarth, whose 1746 engraving *Taste in High Life* was well-known – viewers would have also quickly associated it with Townley's much talked about play. Therefore, before locating Collet's painting in its broader social context, I will begin by considering this play, the public's response to it, and most significantly, the commercial appeal of exhibiting a theatrical painting.

On 20 October, 1759, four years before Collet set to work on his own satire on misbehaving servants, the *Public Advertiser* announced: “a new Comedy of two Acts, call'd *High Life Below Stairs* is now in Rehearsal at the Theatre-Royal in Drury-Lane.”⁵⁷ A little over a week later, on 31 October, following a performance of William Congreve's tragedy the *Mourning Bride*, the first public staging of the Reverend James Townley's⁵⁸ afterpiece took place, with parts played by some of Drury Lane's best comedic actors and actresses, including Thomas King in the male lead, Catherine “Kitty” Clive in the female lead, and a young and yet unknown Frances Abington in one of the many supporting roles.⁵⁹ Typical of most afterpieces written and performed in the eighteenth century, *High Life Below Stairs* was a farce, offering a bit of light, innocuous, comic relief after a more

⁵⁶ For eighteenth-century commentary on servants, see below: 114-123.

⁵⁷ *Public Advertiser* (20 October, 1759).

⁵⁸ James Townley (1714-1778) was a Church of England clergyman, who, from 1760 until his death, presided as the head master of Merchant Taylors' boys' school in London. During his tenure, he updated the curriculum to include drama. He was a friend to David Garrick, and is believed to have assisted in the writing of several of his comedies. Townley wrote himself three original plays: *High Life Below Stairs* (1759); *False Concord* (1764); and *The Tutor* (1765). *High Life*, which he penned anonymously, was the most successful. See: *ODNB*.

⁵⁹ Stone, 4, 1962: 752.

sombre main act. Unlike the more sophisticated full-length satires and Shakespearean comedies performed on the Georgian stage, afterpieces were generally broad, heavy-handed, and stereotypic in the manner of their continental progenitor, *Commedia dell'arte*.⁶⁰ Townley's afterpiece – telling the story of Lovel, a Creole gentleman who disguises himself as a rustic in search of work as a footman in order to discover and expose his servants as indolent cheats – was no exception. Like Collet's subsequent painting, the simple, two-act farce, primarily taking place in the servant's quarters of Lovel's upscale London home, derives its humour from the premise of domestics acting like their extravagant masters – travelling in sedan chairs, dancing the minuet, drinking fine spirits, speaking French, and addressing one another as Lord and Lady. Predictably, these insolent characters get their comeuppance when Lovel reveals his true identity, and terminates the employment of all but his humble and trustworthy servant, Tom.

Shortly after the first performance, Oliver Goldsmith produced a rather unfavourable review of the play for the November issue of his literary magazine the *Bee*, in which he bemoaned, “Just as I had expected, before I saw this farce, I found it formed on too narrow a plan to afford a pleasing variety. The sameness of the humour in every scene could not at last fail of being disagreeable.”⁶¹ He allows that there were one or two moments of comic strength, and compliments the performers, touting Mrs. Clive as having “more true humour than any actor or actress upon the English or any other stage,” but otherwise, he dismisses the play as crude and predictable.⁶² A critic writing for the *Critical Review; or Annals of Literature* around the same time agrees that “there is not much comic power shewn in this performance, but,” he contends, “there is a great deal of propriety.”⁶³

⁶⁰ Bevis, 1970: xiii.

⁶¹ *Bee*, Issue 5 (3 November, 1759): 154-155.

⁶² *Ibid.*: 156

⁶³ *Critical Review, or Annals of Literature* (November, 1759): 395; possibly written by Tobias Smollett, editor and frequent contributor.

The critic stresses the importance of the play's subject and provides a detailed list of grievances against its perceived satirical target:

The author of the farce now before us, is commendable for his design to reform the vices and extravagance of servants, which are indeed evils grown monstrous and intolerable. The waste, riot, and frauds committed by the servants of fashionable people are altogether incredible. They not only insist upon eating, drinking, and sleeping, as well as their masters; but they cannot live without their *menus plaisirs*. They entertain company at home and abroad, keep mistresses, game, drink and swagger; extort money from the guests and the tradesmen that visit and supply the family; cheat their masters in every article of expense; secrete wine and provision; light the candle at both ends, and, in a word, behave like so many hussars in a house abandoned to plunder.⁶⁴

Regardless of the play's debatable merit as a comedy, it struck a powerful chord with theatre-goers, both masters and footmen alike.

Following the debut of *High Life Below Stairs*, the London newspapers were flooded with references to the play and advertisements for related products, indicating that Townley's afterpiece had captured popular imagination and that merchandise inspired by it was found to be extremely marketable. Just a week after the first performance, on 6 November, the *Whitehall Evening Post* published an advertisement for the printed play, the first of an astonishing nine editions to be issued in the following decade and a half.⁶⁵ Two days later, the same paper printed the lyrics to a comic ballad from the play that had been sung by the beloved Kitty Clive.⁶⁶ In January of 1760, it included a news item that read:

The Farce of High Life Below Stairs was a few Nights ago realized near Grosvenor-Square, a noble family being absent, some servants agreed to have a Rout, but the under Butler having lately seen

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*: 394.

⁶⁵ *Whitehall Evening Post* (6 November, 1759).

⁶⁶ *Whitehall Evening Post* (8 November, 1759).

the above-mentioned Farce at Drury-Lane was so sensibly struck with it that he informed his Master of the entire rendezvous.⁶⁷

Meanwhile, the *London Evening Post* reported that in Edinburgh, a staging of the play had incited a riot amongst the footmen in attendance, who, according to theatre tradition, were allowed to watch from the gallery.⁶⁸ Prompted by the tremendous uproar caused by the play, there appeared in June of that year, a publication called *An Apology for the Servants, by Oliver Grey, Occasioned by the Representation of the Farce called High Life below Stairs, and by What has been said to their Disadvantage in the Public Papers*.⁶⁹ This essay, to which I will be returning, was supposedly penned by a sixty-three year old retired servant, but in actuality, was written by the author of the original farce, and served as a defence of servants, as well as a clarification of the play's intended satirical target – sybaritic masters, rather than their servants.

Throughout the early 1760s, *High Life Below Stairs* continued to attract attention. In 1763, the year that Collet painted *High Taste in Low Life*, the afterpiece was performed on seven occasions and still cropped up in the press.⁷⁰ According to the *Gazetteer and London Daily Advertiser* of 23 September of that year, it had been the riot in Edinburgh occasioned by the play that had led to the controversial abolition in Scotland of vails, the customary tips given to servants by visitors to their master's homes, which were believed to encourage extortion, greed and insolence.⁷¹ In 1765, the year Collet exhibited his painting, the play was staged four more times, including a performance that followed *Richard III* on the night before the opening of the exhibition at Maiden Lane. It seems,

⁶⁷ *Whitehall Evening Post* (15 January, 1760).

⁶⁸ *London Evening Post* (26 January, 1760). For the free admittance of servants in English theatres, see: Hecht, 1956: 137-139.

⁶⁹ Townley, 1760; the advertisement appeared in *Public Ledger or the Daily Register of Commerce and Intelligence* (26 June, 1760).

⁷⁰ Stone, 5, 1962 : 974-1026.

⁷¹ *Gazetteer and London Daily Advertiser* (21 September, 1763).

therefore, unequivocal that Collet was attempting to channel the interest and publicity the play continued to generate towards his own production.

In recent years, scholars have acknowledged the strong connection in eighteenth-century England between the theatre and contemporary pictorial and plastic arts.⁷² Shirley Strum Kenny, for one, has observed that, as early as the 1690s, artists recognised “the marketability of theatrical memorabilia in the form of paintings and prints,” and that by the mid-eighteenth century, “images of actors were created in the other forms as well, such as figurines, plaques, and even heads of cane.”⁷³ The explosion in production of theatre-related images and objects has been difficult to ignore, and much has been made of Georgian painters’ and graphic artists’ use of familiar subjects, themes and formats derived from the theatre. Hogarth, in particular, has been held up as an important link between the related art forms, a link that the artist himself drew attention to when he famously said:

I wished to compose pictures on canvas, similar to representations on the stage [...]. I have endeavoured to treat my subjects as a dramatic writer; my picture is my stage, and men and women my players, who by means of certain actions and gestures, are to exhibit *a dumb shew*.⁷⁴

Thus far, however, very little has been said about the particularly strong correlation between the theatre and London’s burgeoning exhibition culture. In his study of the Society of Artists, Matthew Hargraves briefly touches upon this subject when he says of the first public exhibition: “Many visitors had come in the expectation of seeing a ‘shew.’ Johnson’s *Dictionary* had defined a ‘show’ as ‘a spectacle; something publicly exposed to view for money.’ To describe something as a ‘shew’ therefore implied a connection to

⁷² For theatre and the pictorial/plastic arts, see: Ashton, Burnin, and Wilton (eds.), 1997; Shawe-Taylor, 1997; Strum Kenny (ed.), 1984; West, 1991.

⁷³ Strum Kenny (ed.), 1984: 18.

⁷⁴ As quoted in Waterhouse, 1954: 120.

popular commercial entertainments [...].”⁷⁵ As much as the more serious-minded artists involved in the exhibitions would have liked to deny such a connection, the plain fact of it was that these art “shews” were but another form of urban diversion, along with pleasure gardens, assembly halls, and, of course, the theatre. One evening a Londoner might pay a shilling or two to enjoy a performance of *Richard III*, followed by *High Life Below Stairs*, and the next day, he might part with another sixpence to gain entry to the Free Society exhibition in order to enjoy the ‘performances’⁷⁶ of Collet and his painterly colleagues.⁷⁷ The commercially shrewd artists, Collet being one of them, were keenly aware that they shared the same audiences with the Drury Lane and the Covent Garden theatres. Moreover, most of them would have known that celebrated actors, playwrights, and theatre managers would be among the exhibition-going crowd – David Garrick, for example, was usually offered complimentary admission to the Free Society shows.⁷⁸ Accordingly, dozens of the submissions to the exhibitions of both competing societies pandered to the public and flattered famous actors.

The theatrical images that were produced and exhibited in the eighteenth century conflate a number of different genres – portraiture, history painting, and conversation piece – but constitute a unique subgenre all their own. Essentially, there were three standard approaches to theatrical subjects. The first and most straight-forward approach was to select and reproduce a particular scene from a well-known play. Sometimes, as in the case of Hogarth’s early canvases depicting scenes from the *Beggar’s Opera* (fig. 2.21), the artist draws attention to the fact that a fiction is unfolding on a stage. In other instances, the

⁷⁵ Hargraves, 2006:26.

⁷⁶ In newspaper advertisements and reviews, and exhibition catalogues, the artist’s submissions are frequently termed ‘performances.’

⁷⁷ According to advertisements appearing in 1765, admission to the Drury Lane Theatre was as follows: 5s per box; 3s for seats in the pit; 2s for seats in the first gallery; 1s for seats in the upper gallery. Advertisements for the FSA state that admission was 6d, and the cost of the catalogue was also 6d.

⁷⁸ From the 1767 minutes of the meetings of the FSA housed at the RSA: “Resolved that David Garrick Esq. Have an honorary Ticket presented him gratis as Usual.”

scene is depicted as if it were a real event, much like the biblical episodes, classical myths, and other canonical narratives commonly conveyed in history painting. This was the approach taken by Hayman for his many Shakespearean scenes, thirty-one of which appeared as illustrations to Thomas Hanmer's 1744 edition of Shakespeare's collected works, four as large-scale paintings decorating the Prince of Wales's pavilion at Vauxhall Gardens, and another three as submissions to the Society of Artists exhibitions, including in 1765, *Falstaff Reviewing Recruits* (fig. 2.23), which the reviewer "No Connoisseur" remarked to be "a favourite subject of Mr. H's."⁷⁹

Another popular method of exploiting the stage was to focus on a particular actor in the guise of a character with whom they were commonly associated. Character portraiture appears to have been a lucrative business that generated publicity for both artist and sitter, and permeated nearly every artistic medium by the mid-eighteenth century – paintings, prints, playing-cards, pottery, plaster and more.⁸⁰ Far and away, Garrick was the most popular subject for this theatrical memorabilia. Kenny and Kalman A. Burman, who estimate that there are upwards of 450 extant Garrick-related items, have called this phenomenon 'Garrickmania.'⁸¹ In the ninety painted portraits of Garrick, many of which were composed by prominent painters and reproduced in a variety of other media, he appears as twenty-nine different stage characters. At the Society of Artists exhibition of 1760, Hayman's depiction of Garrick as Richard III (fig. 2.22) became the first of many portraits of the actor in character to be publically displayed.⁸² The German immigrant Johann Zoffany, who arrived in England in 1760, managed to leverage an early commission from Garrick in 1762 into a flourishing career based largely on his 'theatrical

⁷⁹ Hanmer, 1743-1744; Graves, 1907: 114-115; *St. James's Chronicle* (7 May, 1765).

⁸⁰ Robert Halsband, "Stage Drama as a Source for Pictorial and Plastic Arts" in Strum Kenny (ed.), 1984: 149-170.

⁸¹ Strum Kenny (ed.), 1984: 21; Kalman A. Burnim, "Looking upon his Like Again: Garrick and the Artist," in *Ibid.*: 185

⁸² *Ibid.*: 189; Graves, 1907: 114.

conversations,’ many of which featured Garrick in a leading role. Zoffany exhibited with the Society of Artists a total of four paintings of the famous actor, including in 1765, a portrait of Garrick in drunken drag as Sir John Bute from John Vanbrugh’s popular comedy *The Provoked Wife* (fig. 2.24).⁸³ Many other well-known actors were immortalised in paintings that were exhibited as well, but because Garrick was highly involved in the art world, a friend to several artists, and a tireless self-promoter, his image was the most ubiquitous.⁸⁴ So pervasive was his image that artists could be rest assured that Garrick would be recognised in their portraits even without the attributes of his most famous roles. Hence, another way an artist could evoke the theatre and capitalise on the renown of its best-loved performers was to exhibit a portrait of an actor as himself, such as, for example, Angelica Kauffmann’s portrait of Garrick (fig. 2.25) that was displayed at the Free Society’s 1765 exhibition.⁸⁵

However, though clearly linked with the theatre, *High Taste in Low Life* does not fit neatly into any of the aforementioned categories of image. It is neither a theatrical history painting nor conversation piece; nor is it a portrait of a dramatic character or a famous actor. It does not exactly reproduce any of the scenes in Townley’s afterpiece; it does not include any recognisable likenesses of the actors who performed in it; and the characters themselves appear to be products of Collet’s own imagination – two of whom he has named “Miss Snips” and “Miss Suds” according to a discarded letter on the floor. Yet, the fame of *High Life Below Stairs* and its irrefutably similar subject and setting, make it seem unlikely that Collet did not have the stage production in mind when he composed the painting. Most viewers would have recognised the allusion to the play as easily as they

⁸³ *Ibid.*: 291-292.

⁸⁴ Garrick was a friend to Hogarth, Hayman, Reynolds, and Zoffany; he was on the committee that planned the Society of Artists first exhibition; and he personally commissioned many portraits by leading London-based artists. See: Burnim in Strum Kenny (ed.), 1984:182-218; *ODNB*.

⁸⁵ FSA, 1765: x. Horace Walpole wrote ‘Mr. Garrick’ next to Kauffmann’s entry in his copy of the exhibition catalogue; “No Connoisseur” said of the portrait “This gentleman is Mr. Garrick; of whom this portrait would be a very good likeness if it was not larger than Life.” See: Gatty, 1938-1939: 69.

recognised Garrick's face gazing out from Kauffmann's canvas hanging in the same exhibition. In fact, Collet may have been hoping to catch the approving eye of the famous actor himself, who not only managed the theatre at which the farce was regularly performed, but was also at that time believed to be the anonymous author of the play.⁸⁶ Certainly, in a few years' time, Collet would be making a more explicit attempt to associate himself with the theatre's most eminent figure: in 1767, he exhibited the now lost *View of Mr. Garrick's temple, at Hampton*,⁸⁷ depicting the shrine devoted to Shakespeare that had been erected on Garrick's much-loved country property, the same setting chosen for the first commissions Zoffany received from the actor.⁸⁸

Even a tenuous connection with the theatre and with Garrick may have had a curiously legitimising effect on *High Taste in Low Life*. While very few comic paintings were shown in the early years of public exhibition in London, those artists who did offer comic fare often utilised plots derived from successful and well-established stage comedies, or, at least, alluded to the stage. Thus, between 1762 and 1769, Zoffany exhibited no less than ten 'theatrical conversations,' all but one of which were based on popular comedies.⁸⁹ But perhaps the most intriguing figure to exhibit comic-theatrical subjects was William Dawes, an all but forgotten comic painter, whose work is often mistakenly attributed to either Collet or a similarly named contemporary, Philip Dawe. Extremely little is known about William Dawes, but it seems he shared a great deal in

⁸⁶ In Arthur Murphy's 1801 biography of Garrick he says "Early in October [1759], Garrick brought forward that excellent farce called *High Life Below Stairs*. For some private reasons he wished to lie concealed, and, with that design, prevailed on his friend, Mr. Townly, master of Merchant Taylor's School, to suffer his name to be circulated in whispers. The Truth, however, was not long suppressed." The belief that Garrick was the author of the play was a long-lasting rumour, which persisted in spite of the fact that it had been denied in print in Garrick's lifetime. A 1763 advertisement for the seventh edition of the play states "the author of the piece, [...] is neither Mr. Garrick, nor Mr. Ne'wery [?] [...]" See: Murphy, 1801: 222; *Gazetteer and London Daily Advertiser* (19 December, 1763).

⁸⁷ FSA, 1767: 7.

⁸⁸ Zoffany's first commissions from Garrick were: *Mr and Mrs Garrick by the Shakespeare Temple at Hampton* and *A View in Hampton Garden with Mr and Mrs Garrick Taking Tea*, both oil on canvas, 1762, private collection.

⁸⁹ Graves, 1907: 291.

common with Collet: an early career working under Lambert; a similar style; and apparently, according to George Steevens, a friendship.⁹⁰ Also like Collet, Dawes's work is primarily preserved in the form of comic engravings, a few of which were published by Sayer and Smith, the same men behind the majority of the Collet prints published in the early 1770s.⁹¹ The extant catalogues for the Society of Artists and the Free Society of Artists reveal that Dawes exhibited with the former group between 1760 and 1762, and the latter between 1764 and 1774, and that though he worked in a number of genres, the majority of the submissions he made were either theatrical or comic or both. Shakespeare, Jonson, and Spenser were sources for many of his exhibited works.⁹²

At the Free Society exhibition of 1765, Dawes adopted a similar strategy to Collet, using five paintings to showcase his diverse talents. He exhibited two history paintings, two landscapes, and a satire. In his review, "No Connoisseur" assesses Dawes's contribution, avowing that "his serious pieces of the Death of Socrates, and the Martyrdom of St. Stephen prove that he has no great genius for tragedy."⁹³ So, like Collet, Dawes's strength was humour, and thus, the reviewer compares the offerings of the two painters: "As Mr. Collet excels in Character, the *Comedy* of Painting, Mr. Dawes is not without merit in Caricature, the *farce* of paintings." Here, the reviewer is invoking the argument made by Henry Fielding in the preface to *Joseph Andrews* (1742) in which he explains that in both visual and literary comedy, a 'character' portrait necessitates realism and attention to detail, whereas 'caricature,' a less discerning process, involves gross exaggeration.⁹⁴

Despite this unfavourable comparison, "No Connoisseur" concedes that Dawe's satirical

⁹⁰ Nichols and Steevens, 1, 1808: 419.

⁹¹ See prints in the BM Collection: *The Hen Peckt Husband* (1768), BM No. 1869,0213.9 (fig. 3.39); Sayer and Smith pubs., *Statute Hall for Hiring Servants* (1770), BM No. 1869,0213.2; *Captain Bobadil Disgraced*, (1753), BM No. 1880,1113.3386 (this print has been mistakenly ascribed to Philip Dawe in the contemporary inscription, but it was William Dawes who exhibited a painting with this title in the 1761 SAGB exhibition).

⁹² Graves, 1907, 71-72.

⁹³ *St. James's Chronicle* (11 May, 1765).

⁹⁴ Fielding, 1, 1742: viii-x. For further discussion on the difference between 'character' and 'caricature,' see: Chapter 4: 244-245.

work, *The Downfall of Shakespeare, represented on a Modern Stage*, “has some pleasantry in thought and execution.” Fortuitously for our purposes, *The Downfall of Shakespeare* (fig. 2.26) is one of the few paintings by Dawes to survive.

Now in the collection at the Victoria and Albert Museum, this curious work is a copiously detailed yet enigmatic critique of the theatre world of the 1760s, which Iain Mackintosh has made painstaking efforts to decipher.⁹⁵ Generally speaking, Dawes’s painting satirises the fashion for foreign opera and frivolous pantomime at the expense of Shakespeare, the nation’s most hallowed playwright. More specifically, however, it may capture the contemporary rivalry between London’s two licensed theatres and their respective managers. The tenor, who has just slain Shakespeare may represent the performer-cum-manager John Beard, who, after taking over Covent Garden Theatre in 1761, drastically increased the performances of opera, leaving the domain of Shakespeare to Garrick and the Drury Lane Theatre. The spectators witnessing the downfall of Shakespeare may also include referents to specific historical personalities. The enthralled dark-skinned audience member on the left, for example, may stand for Ostenaco, the King of the Cherokees, who visited London in the summer of 1762, and purportedly enjoyed the pantomimes performed for him at Sadler’s Wells, apparently indicating to the satirist Dawes that the theatrical medium was only suitable for ignorant ‘savages.’ According to Mackintosh, *The Downfall of Shakespeare* is unique not only for its “surprisingly accurate representation of the stage and forestage at Covent Garden,”⁹⁶ but also for being one of the only surviving paintings to satirise the Georgian theatre and its audience. He contends:

There are many eighteenth-century paintings of performers, some engravings of the actor-audience relationship, but [...] after Hogarth's suite of *Beggar's Opera* paintings of 1726 to 1730 there are

⁹⁵ Mackintosh, 1990; Mackintosh, 2008.

⁹⁶ Mackintosh, 1990: 92.

few paintings which depict as delicately as does Dawes this the most magical part of our theatre, the part where audience and actor interact.⁹⁷

Consequently, its significance for theatre historians is readily apparent. For this study, however, *The Downfall of Shakespeare* exemplifies the nexus of the theatre, the comic, and the commercial art world at the Free Society exhibition of 1765.

Collet's painting too, seems to have existed at this intersection of art, entertainment, and commerce. Though *High Taste in Low Life* may not be a theatrical subject in the conventional sense, it does evoke the theatre in the manner of Hogarth's "dumb shews." In addition to the fact that the narrative seems borrowed from a contemporary theatrical farce, the composition is also highly suggestive of the stage. The viewer (or audience member) sits on one side of the imagery curtain line, peering into the servant's quarters, an enclosed boxlike space. Bare floorboards, like the planks of the Drury Lane stage, make up the foreground, and meet the viewer at the proverbial 'fourth wall,' while Collet's players perform upstage, against a cluttered backdrop. One player, in particular, the maid having her hair dressed, is redolent of an expressive actress. With one hand she holds up a mirror to admire the footman-*frisiseur*'s work, and with the other she flamboyantly gestures her approval. For the Georgian thespian, deportment was the primary conveyor of emotion, and gestures of the hand were an intricate and essential art form.⁹⁸ In *The Farmer's Return from London* (fig. 2.27), the 'theatrical conversation' Zoffany exhibited with the Society of Artists in 1762, the artist depicts Garrick as a farmer recounting the tale of the Cock Lane ghost to his amazed wife, played by the minor comic actress, Mary Bradshaw, who expresses her surprise with a similarly dramatic hand

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Barnett and Massy-Westropp, 1987: 95-104; Shawe-Taylor, 1997: 9.

gesture.⁹⁹ Unlike Zoffany's work, Collet's *High Taste in Low Life* does not reflect a real and specific performance, but it is, nevertheless a theatrical 'performance' on canvas with strong ties to the contemporary stage.

Throughout his career, Collet produced numerous works which alluded to the stage both directly and indirectly – perhaps a reflection of his formative years training under Lambert, a set designer for the Covent Garden Theatre, but also a clear indication of the pervasiveness of the theatre as a popular cultural referent, understood and appreciated by a huge segment of the population. Several paintings and prints that will be looked at in upcoming chapters also reference the titles and subjects of popular plays.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, there is some suggestion that Collet also painted more explicitly theatrical subjects. According to Thomas Wright in his *History of Caricature and Grotesque* (1875), on the heels of the success of Sheridan's *The Duenna* in 1775, "Collet drew several pictures founded upon scenes in this play," which were afterwards engraved and published by Carington Bowles, including one entitled "Father Paul in his Cups," a particularly famous scene from the third act, which is illustrated in Wright's book in the form of a crude woodcut copy by F.W. Fairholt (fig. 2.28).¹⁰¹ Though no original paintings by Collet are extant, several of Bowles's prints depicting scenes from *The Duenna* do survive (fig. 2.29-2.30); however, they do not credit Collet as the inventor, whereas other prints published by Bowles do; therefore, it is not certain whether they represent the artist's work or not.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ FSA, 1762: 9.

¹⁰⁰ For example: *The Female Orators* (fig. 3.12) recalls the title of Samuel Foote's *The Orators* (1762); *Corporal Cartouch teaching Miss Camp-Love her Manual Exercise* (fig. 4.53) borrows its subject from Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Camp: A Musical Entertainment* (1778); and *An Actress at her Toilet, or Miss Brazen Just Breecht* (fig. 4.30) depicts a cross-dressing actress – possibly the real-life starlet, Margaret Kennedy, known for her controversial 'breeches roles' – and also includes a playbill for John Gay's *Beggar's Opera* (1728).

¹⁰¹ Wright, 1875: 452-453. Wright's supposition that Collet produced the Bowles-published *Duenna* scenes is further promoted in the artist's *ODNB* entry, written by L.H. Crust in 1887, and is upheld by Helen Pierce in her revised entry of 2008.

¹⁰² The BM currently attributes *The Duenna* scenes to Robert Dighton. A curator's comment in the database entry for *Father Paul in his cups, or the Private Devotion of a Convent*, BM No. 1935,0522.1.217, states that an original watercolour by Dighton made for this print was formerly in the collection of Mr Jeffrey Rose, and

Regardless, it is interesting to note that most of the theatrical allusions made by Collet are to eighteenth-century plays, rather than to canonical works by Shakespeare, Jonson, and Spenser, thus further demonstrating the artist's persistent focus on the modern, the fashionable, and the ephemeral.¹⁰³ Intriguingly, Collet's work itself was apparently the inspiration for a short-lived theatrical production. In his "Essay on Comic Painting" of 1788, Francis Grose states that the artist's satire *Grown Gentlemen Taught to Dance* (see: fig. 4.62) was, at some point, the basis for a popular pantomime.¹⁰⁴

III.

When James Townley set to work writing *High Life Below Stairs*, he was fanning the flames of a well-rehearsed debate on the behaviour of English servants, to which Collet's painting, in turn, made a colourful contribution. Recently, social historians of the long eighteenth century have taken greater notice of domestic servants, recognising that their ubiquity, necessity, and intimate proximity to most middling and upper class families made them a powerful source of fascination and anxiety for their contemporaries.¹⁰⁵

Bridget Hill, for one, has observed that: "The 'servant question', as it came to be called in the course of the nineteenth century, existed long before and loomed large from early in the eighteenth century."¹⁰⁶ She points to the many letters, essays, and pamphlets of the period penned by aggravated employers bemoaning the deteriorated quality and attitude of

was sold at Sotheby's, 23 February 1978, lot 43. Thus, it seems likely that these were the works of Dighton, rather than Collet; however, Collet may have illustrated scenes from *The Duenna* that are no longer extant.

¹⁰³ There is an anonymous painting in the collection of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, depicting the 'Boar's Head' tavern scene from Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part I* (App. I, No. 78), which has been loosely attributed to Collet; however, it is my belief that this painting is actually the work of William Dawes, based on both stylistic similarities with known works like *Hen Peckt Husband* (fig. 3.40), and the fact that Dawes was a prolific producer of Shakespearean scenes, six of which he exhibited publicly with the SAGB and FSA, between 1760 and 1774.

¹⁰⁴ Grose, 1788: 26.

¹⁰⁵ For scholarship on eighteenth-century servants, see for example: Hecht, 1956; Hill, 1996; Horn, 2004; Steedman, 2009; Straub, 2009.

¹⁰⁶ Hill, 1996: 2.

servants, whom they believed had once known their station and acted with an appropriate level of humility and reverence for their social betters. There were several hypotheses that attempted to explain this disappointing state of affairs, not least of which was the use and abuse of perquisites and vails; that is, the gifts and tips of food, drink, clothing, and money that servants increasingly expected, or even demanded to receive.¹⁰⁷ Not only did this allegedly result in a voracious and manipulative work force, but also one that indulged in the same luxuriant tastes and activities as their employers. The most commonly proposed solution to this problem, most notably argued by Jonas Hanway, was equally contentious: the discontinuation of vails meant that employers would have to significantly raise regular servant wages, or else face a mutiny of maids and footmen. In 1764, just such a mutiny came to fruition when a group of disgruntled footmen rioted in Ranelagh and attacked several gentlemen who spoke out against the giving of vails.¹⁰⁸

It has been postulated that the idea for Townley's farce came from an early issue of that canonical eighteenth-century source, *The Spectator*.¹⁰⁹ The relevant essay, "On the Misbehaviour of Servants," first published on 30 May, 1711, was written in response to a letter by the pseudonymous "Philo-Britannicus," who complains: "There is no Part of the World where Servants have those Privileges and Advantages as in *England*."¹¹⁰ Richard Steele in the guise of "Mr. Spectator" replies to the observations of "Philo-Britannicus" with an anecdote of his own wherein he describes the most audacious servant misbehaviour of all, the act of imitating the master. He recounts:

Falling in the other Day at a Victualling-House near the House of Peers, I heard the Maid come down and tell the Landlady at the Bar, That my Lord Bishop swore he would throw her out a Window, if she did not bring up more Mild Beer, and that my Lord Duke would have a

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*: 64-88.

¹⁰⁸ *St. James's Chronicle* (10 May, 1764)

¹⁰⁹ *The British Drama...*, 1824: 874.

¹¹⁰ *Spectator*, No. 88 (30 May, 1711).

double Mug of Purle. My Surprize was encreased, in hearing loud and rustick Voices speak and answer to each other upon the publick Affairs, by the Names of the most Illustrious of our Nobility.

The notion of servants usurping their employers' identities was a source of comedy for Townley, who, several decades later, imagined fashionable maids and footmen addressing one another as Lord, Lady, Duke, and Duchess. It was a far more troubling notion, however, for the more sombre social critics of the age.

The increasing difficulty in distinguishing servant from master was a frequent complaint lodged throughout the Georgian period. In his humourless tirade against servants of 1725, *Every-body's Business is No-body's Business*, Daniel Defoe complains of servants' unreasonable consumption of their master's tea, wine, meat, and even their laundry soap, but he is most alarmed by their appearances. He asserts that "it is a hard Matter to know the Mistress from the Maid by their Dress, nay very often the Maid shall be much the finer of the two."¹¹¹ He later recounts his embarrassment in having once mistakenly "kiss'd the Chamber-Jade," at a friend's house, thinking it was a well-dressed acquaintance of his host.¹¹² According to Defoe, mistaken identity brought about by deceptive attire could and would result in more than a merely embarrassing social faux-pas. The consequences were moral laxity, a disrupted textile trade, and an inflated market for domestic help:

Our Woollen Manufacture suffers much by this, for now, nothing but silks and satins will go down with our kitchen Wenches, and it is support for this intolerable Pride, that they have insensibly raised their Wages to such a Heighth, as was never known in any Age or Nation but this.¹¹³

Defoe's solution to this problem, a standardised uniform for female servants much like the livery worn by male servants, is revealing of the underlying social anxiety: a lack of

¹¹¹ Defoe, 1725: 4.

¹¹² *Ibid.*: 15.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*: 4.

physical distinction or sartorial marker of class. Without the sumptuary laws that enforced sartorial order elsewhere in Europe and in England in previous centuries, the nation was endangered by a plague of upstart servants who disturbed England's social hierarchy.¹¹⁴ Even Bernard Mandeville, who so passionately and controversially argued that vanity and "fondness for imitation" were driving forces of the economy, worried that "spoiled" servants posed a threat to society.¹¹⁵

Samuel Richardson, the author behind the period's most famous fictional servant, *Pamela* (1740), penned early in his career a conduct book for young apprentices called *The Apprentice's Vade Mecum* (1734). In it, Richardson echoes the concerns of Defoe and other critics of social emulation. "It is an Evil big with Consequences," he states, "[that] lifts up the young Man's Mind far above his Condition as an Apprentice." Like Defoe, Richardson chastises the members of the lower classes who have "inverted all Order, and destroy'd Distinction" with their deceptive appearances. He remarks:

You shall now hardly step into any Shop, but you shall see a starch'd powder'd Youth, That, but for his Station behind the Counter, your Fathers would have address'd to rather as the Son of a Man of Condition than a Servant put to learn a Trade for his future Subsistence.

Following a vivid textual account of the vain and effeminate apprentices and footmen of the day, Richardson announces: "I wish, to complete the Ridicule, and shame such Foplings into Reformation, the ingenious Mr. *Hogarth* would finish the Portrait."¹¹⁶

Several decades later, it was Collet who answered Richardson's artistic call to arms, but as usual, as will be shown, Hogarth's work served as a conceptual and compositional model.

¹¹⁴ Sumptuary laws dictated the colour, fabric and cut of clothing that could be worn by various professions and ranks in society. These legislations were in decline in England by the early seventeenth century. See: Styles, 2007: 15; Harte, "State Control of Dress and Social Change in Pre-Industrial England" in Coleman and John (eds.), 1976: 132-165.

¹¹⁵ Mandeville, 1755: 274.

¹¹⁶ Richardson, 1734: 33-34.

The widespread denunciation of the vanity and impertinence of servants was actually an extension of a much broader discourse which raged throughout the period: the discourse on luxury. As John Sekora has shown, the term luxury, as it derived from Biblical and Classical sources, was understood to mean “anything unneeded,” but also “anything to which one had no right or title.”¹¹⁷ Thus, throughout history, the philosophical, legal, and moral attacks waged against luxury and those who were guilty of it, were essentially efforts to enforce hierarchy, and ensure the “natural order” of society, which was inherently composed of legislators and subjects, superiors and inferiors, and masters and servants. Though panic over the supposedly degenerative effects of luxury was anything but new in the eighteenth century, it resurfaced in a powerful way thanks to a sustained period of economic growth, urban expansion, and military and political conflict. In Sekora’s words:

Cries against luxury have been loudest when a people is under unusual stress [...] when war or domestic discord appeared to threaten important interests and values, then old theories were respun to clothe new situations. Luxury arose time and again, for it could account for any unwanted or unforeseen shifts in the scales of military, economic, social, political, moral, and even literary forces.¹¹⁸

Sekora cites five periods of stress in the eighteenth century during which panic over luxury spiked, the most dramatic of which, he contends, was the period between 1755 and 1763, the time of the Seven Years War.¹¹⁹ In this period, social commentators, including Tobias Smollett, Oliver Goldsmith, and perhaps most famously, John Brown, pointed to luxury as the cause of a disrupted social order and a decline in national spirit and strength, together posing a great threat to Britain during a time of war.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Sekora, 1977.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*: 66.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ Brown, 1758; Goldsmith, 1759. For Smollett, see, for example: *The Critical Review, Or, Annals of Literature*, Vol. 3 (1757); Smollett, 1760-1765; Sekora, 1977: Chapter 5.

Although they are not usually considered among the anti-luxury texts of the war-time period, Townley's *High Life Below Stairs*, and other contemporary satires and attacks on greedy servants can be seen to express similar anxieties about luxury's power to subvert hierarchy, and weaken men and nations. For example, in his 1760 pamphlet arguing against the practice of vails-giving, Jonas Hanway writes:

The custom of giving money, upon almost every occasion has naturally this consequence; it creates insolence in office, and when a servant is more bold or rapacious than common, he overacts his part, and the master has hardly his own choice to see whom he pleases: the person who gives the most money has the fairest chance, and the master is in a kind of subserviency to the humour or avarice of his own Menial Servants.¹²¹

According to Hanway, this custom effectively reversed the roles of master and servant, thus weakening the power and authority of employers, and indeed, weakening the reputation of the entire nation, for foreigners could "hardly forbear laughing" over the trouble caused by these insolent English servants and their demands for exorbitant tips.¹²²

The only solution, of course, was the abolition of vails. Hanway concludes:

The grand scope of my argument is, that it is the true wisdom of a state, to encourage virtue and industry, by making the servant depend solely on the Master for his pay. We might then naturally expect to see that discipline restored amongst us, which is essential to the good order of society.¹²³

The most obvious interpretation of Collet's *High Taste in Low Life*, then, would be to see it as a pictorial expression of the social anxieties described by Steele, Defoe, Richardson, Hanway, and others. Certainly, most of Collet's contemporary viewers – the majority of whom were likely members of a class that could afford to employ servants of their own – would have read the image in this straight-forward manner, as a mild rebuke

¹²¹ Hanway, 1760: 16.

¹²² *Ibid.*: 43.

¹²³ *Ibid.*: 40-41.

on the pretensions of the servant class. For these viewers, the humour of the painting would be derived from the incongruous clash between the dingy setting and lowly subjects, and their inappropriately fine clothing and fashionable recreations. Hogarth, summarising a prevalent comic theory of the day, explained that: “When improper, or incompatible excesses meet, they always excite laughter.”¹²⁴ In order, perhaps, to elucidate and emphasise the ridiculousness of his subjects, Collet evokes the fourth canvas of the *Marriage a la Mode* series, “The Toilette,” (fig. 2.31) a scene depicting the luxuriant rituals of the recently ascended Lady Squanderfield and her retinue. Though Hogarth, too, attacks the affectations of his modestly born female subject, the same rituals performed by Collet’s plebeian protagonists are even more outrageous. Hogarth’s characters are guilty of appropriating French and Italian customs: the new countess sits at her vanity, having her hair dressed by a Swiss *valet-de-chambre*, in imitation of a French princess at her morning *levée*; her guests are entertained by the dulcet tones of an Italian opera singer, likely based on the real-life, London-based celebrity castrati, Giovanni Carestini and Farinelli; and the walls of the bedroom are adorned with monumental canvases in the style of Italian Old Masters, Coreggio and Michelangelo.¹²⁵ Meanwhile, Collet’s audacious servants attempt to affect the *bon ton*’s own Franco-Italian affectations. In the absence of a sumptuously appointed boudoir, a toilette, and a valet of her own, the lady’s maid makes do with a shabby kitchen, sparsely decorated with reproductive prints, a turned-over basket as a foot stool, and a footman as a hairdresser. If her surroundings are modest, at least her attire is suitably extravagant. Much like the countess, the maid’s hand-me-down gown is a rich, buttery yellow, a shade that Aileen Ribeiro has noted was traditionally associated with prostitution.¹²⁶ The music, meanwhile, is provided by an operatic dog and a pair of

¹²⁴ Hogarth, 1753: 31. For ‘incongruity’ and ‘the ridiculous’ in eighteenth-century comic theory, see: Chapter 3: 173-174; Fielding, 1, 1742: xi-xvi; Hutcheson, 1758.

¹²⁵ Cowley, 1983: 108, 115.

¹²⁶ Ribeiro, 1998: 50.

servants, who perform songs by an imaginary Italian composer, “Sig. Sustenuto,” on the newly popular guitar.

High Taste in Low Life, then, sees the subversive danger of brazen servants defused through a burlesque of the subjects, which emphasises the foolishness of their behaviour and the ignominiousness of their surroundings. Typically, however, Collet’s attitude towards his subjects is not quite so transparent. Compared with Hogarth, his censure is softer; the servants appear relatively naive and ignorant of their wrong-doing. The key to an alternate reading of the painting is the young girl, bathed in a ray of soft sunlight, who gazes up innocently at the footman-*frisiseur*, and attempts to duplicate her mother’s coiffure on her doll’s head. In this reading, the servants are no guiltier than the child, who rehearses behaviour modelled for her by her authority figures. Perhaps then, rather than the servants themselves, Collet was satirising those supposedly superior beings, the vain and capricious members of the *bon ton* as depicted by Hogarth in “The Toilette.” In doing so, he was not the first to assign blame to servants’ employers. In response to Daniel Defoe’s scathing indictment of domestics, there appeared in 1725 a pamphlet called *The Maid Servants’ Modest Defence*, allegedly penned by “A Lady’s Woman,” in which the opponent proposes that the luxurious dress of female servants is actually the effect of their mistresses’ vanity. She challenges:

But supposing the Now-Pride and Dresses of Women Servants are chiefly owing to their Ladies or Mistresses; What will the Squire say to that? I can assure him, there are Ladies and Mistresses who will not take into their Service for Waiting- Women or Chamber-Maids those who have not cloathing suitable to the Families into which they are to be hir’d.¹²⁷

Several decades later, Townley adopted a similar stance when he assumed the identity of a retired footman for the aforementioned *An Apology for Servants*, a clarifying footnote for

¹²⁷ *The Maid-Servants Modest Defence...*, 1725: 11.

his misinterpreted afterpiece. As Oliver Grey, “an old servant in the sixty-third year” of his life, Townley writes:

I am led to this undertaking, not only in defense of the servants of this kingdom, but that I may have an opportunity of observing upon the weaknesses, inadvertencies and misconduct of masters, which have been a fatal source of mischief to their dependents: and I am convinced it will be found that the behaviour of the latter, which has been censured with great vehemence, owes its rise, among other things, to the injudicious conduct of the former.¹²⁸

He maintains that his purpose is not to promote “sots, thieves, gamesters [and] corruptors of children,” but rather to defend “honest, sober, diligent, [and] cleanly” servants, and furthermore, to expose the hypocrisy of employers who criticise, or worse still, dismiss their servants for behaviour of which they themselves are guilty. Card-playing, drinking, and vanity, the author explains, are vices of servant and master alike, but only the former is properly punished for them. In fact, he contends, the latter are usually the worst offenders.

But, if Collet did intend for *High Taste in Low Life* to be a veiled attack on debauched masters and mistresses, he left it deliberately and characteristically ambiguous. Once again, Collet’s painting is open to the interpretation of the individual viewer; it could work to reprove either servant or master, or both. It is interesting to note that both potential targets may have, in fact, viewed the painting side-by-side at the exhibition in Maiden Lane in the spring of 1765. Certainly, the shilling charge for admission and exhibition catalogue would have reduced the number of lower-class attendants in that year; however, it was earlier reported in 1760 and 1761, when admittance was free, that the Society of Arts’ exhibitions were over-crowded with maids and footmen in livery, who allegedly caused a great disturbance.¹²⁹ In 1762, a regulation was implemented that stated “no

¹²⁸ Townley, 1760: 3.

¹²⁹ Hecht, 1956: 136; Whitley, 1968: 177-178.

servant in Livery shall be admitted on any pretence whatever,” but still the servants turned up in droves, much to the chagrin of the more dignified patrons, several of whom wrote to the newspapers to complain.¹³⁰ A particularly vociferous letter, appearing in the *St James’ Chronicle* in May of 1762, which makes a mocking passing reference to the pantomime actors Edward Shuter and Richard Yates, is worth quoting at length:

Who can examine a beautiful picture with advantage or pleasure in a sweating room, choked with clouds of dust and as rudely elbowed as if in Bartholomew Fair? While I was waiting the other day for an opportunity to squeeze through the crowd at the door, one of those gentlemen who, like Joseph, wear coats of many colours¹³¹, was attempting to introduce some of the ladies who twirl the mop so invitingly on a Saturday morning. The man, however, who held the staff of authority at the door stopped him short. ‘Sir, I cannot admit you in that coat.’ ‘Why,’ says he, ‘I have got a ticket.’ ‘If you had ten tickets you should not go on unless you change your coat.’ [...] How the dispute ended I do not know, but I suppose the gentleman went home and put on his thickset coat, or borrowed one from a fellow servant and then saw the *Show*. For Shame! Gentlemen, let your servants wait til Fair-Time, and accommodate them with Pence to see the Exhibitions of Mssrs. *Shuter and Yates*¹³²: And do not affront your Institution by displaying the Fruits of it to the Ignorant [...].¹³³

The presence of servants at these exhibitions was thus seen as further evidence of their audacious appropriation of the genteel interests and recreations of the upper-classes.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ The author is perhaps conflating the biblical Joseph with Henry Fielding’s famous fictional footman, Joseph Andrews.

¹³² Actors Edward Shuter (ca. 1728-1776) and Richard Yates (ca. 1706-1796) performed pantomime at a booth in Bartholomew Fair in the 1760s. See: *ODNB*.

¹³³ *St. James’s Chronicle* (13 May, 1762), partially quoted in Whitley, 1968: 178.

IV.

Like most of Collet's surviving works from this period, *High Taste in Low Life* contains a broad assortment of carefully rendered material objects, including sartorial and decorative items, books, musical instruments, and pictures. This characteristic is not only Hogarthian, but also a typical, if not fundamental aspect of pictorial satire, in general. In Hogarth's progresses, like *Marriage a la Mode*, the narrative is advanced and the message revealed through items scattered throughout – books with punning titles, emblematic signboards, allegorical paintings, and household objects with hidden meanings. Of course, the tendency to focus on minute material detail is also a defining characteristic of Dutch genre and still-life painting of the seventeenth century. A particularly cogent example would be the work of the Leiden-based painter, Jan Steen, whose vibrant, intricate and frequently humorous genre subjects must have been known to Collet, based on the striking compositional and thematic similarities between several of Steen's 'dissolute household' subjects (figs. 2.32-2.34) and *High Taste in Low Life*.¹³⁴ In Steen's work, conspicuously placed objects carry symbolic meaning related to an overall moralising message that would have been quickly decoded by Early Modern viewers, who were well-versed in the reading of emblems. Thus, the pictured clock represented the passage of time and the transience of life; the playing card represented chance and the dangers of gambling; and the bird cage – also to be found in Collet's painting – represented both confinement and conjugal felicity.¹³⁵ The items in *High Taste in Low Life* have the same kind of individual symbolic meaning, and therefore serve a similar function to those found those in Hogarth's and Steen's works; however, the particular prevalence and pride of place of these objects suggest that their significance is manifold.

¹³⁴ For Steen, see for example: Chapman, Kloek, and Wheelock (eds.), 1996; Kloek, 2005; Westermann, 1996.

¹³⁵ Chapman, Kloek, and Wheelock (eds.), 1996: 150, 168, 183.

In particular, I will suggest, *High Taste in Low Life* offers a powerful pictorial expression of the widely felt fears and fantasies that surrounded the practice of conspicuous consumption in the eighteenth century.¹³⁶ Here, we can focus on three types of consumer products pictured in Collet's canvas: fashionable clothing, a modern musical instrument, and engraved prints. A logical starting point would be the sartorial items, as they not only represent a favourite subject for the artist, they also served a vital role in the consumer boom of the period. The first object I will turn to, however, is not actually an item of clothing, but rather, a tool for the dissemination of fashion. The little girl who attempts to mimic her mother's coiffure does so on what was known, variously, as a *Pandora*, jointed-baby, or fashion doll – a dressmaker's dummy, used to transmit the latest designs from the continent to the court to the city and, eventually, to the country.¹³⁷ Real-life, extant fashion dolls dating from the eighteenth century are extremely rare, though some, apparently from Collet's time, do exist in the costume collections at the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Manchester Art Gallery, and elsewhere (fig. 2.35). The history of these dolls is hazy and full of conjecture, but it is generally suggested that from the beginning of the century, wooden mannequins, some life-sized and some miniature, travelled monthly from Parisian *modistes* to the English court for the edification of the Queen and her ladies, and were afterwards sent to London dressmakers.¹³⁸ In the early decades, very few outside of court circles and the very wealthy had access to the dolls, but seemingly, as the years wore on and the momentum of the burgeoning fashion industry strengthened, more consumers were privy to the *Pandora*. It is possible that, gradually, even the middling sorts had possession of such dolls, and when they were finished with

¹³⁶ For scholarship on eighteenth-century consumerism, see: Introduction: fn. 68.

¹³⁷ For fashion dolls, see: Mckendrick, Brewer, and Plumb, 1982: 43-46; Mauger Colbert, Rassuli, and Farlow Dix, 2011; Park, 2010: 103-111; Peers, 2004; Ribeiro, 2002: 51-52.

¹³⁸ A letter to *The Spectator* in 1712 states: “[...] before our Correspondence with France was unhappily interrupted by the War, our Ladies had all their Fashions from thence; which the Milliners took care to furnish them with by means of a Jointed Baby [Fashion Doll] that came regularly over, once a Month [...]” (Issue No. 277, 17 January, 1712).

them, they were passed on to their own or to their servants' children to serve as toys.¹³⁹ By the end of the century, to meet with the rapidly growing demand for knowledge of the latest fashions, English entrepreneurs allegedly manufactured the first paper dolls, a cheaper, transportable alternative to the French wooden versions.¹⁴⁰ Consequently, because of its evolution and eventual ubiquity, McKendrick has seen the fashion doll as an allegory for the commercialisation of fashion in England. He argues that the doll “exemplifies the change from [fashion] which was royal in origin,” and limited in its influence and attainability, to fashion which “was directly aimed at the popular market, indeed which was specifically intended to extend [further] into a *mass* one.”¹⁴¹

But what would the fashion doll have signified to the eighteenth-century viewer of Collet's painting? Again, it might be useful to turn to *The Spectator* for insight. The issue first published on 17 January, 1712 contains a number of letters to “Mr. Spectator” regarding the widely coveted and powerfully influential French fashion doll. These letters are preceded by a telling inscription in Latin, derived from Ovid's *Metamorphosis*: “*Fas est & abhoste doceri*” [To Receive Instruction from the Enemy]. One letter, in particular, signed by “Teraminta,” a fictional “lady” of fashion, now believed to have been written by Eustace Budgell, is particularly revealing:

Mr. Spectator,

I am so great a Lover of whatever is *French*, that I lately discarded an humble Admirer, because he neither spoke that Tongue, nor drank Claret. I have long bewailed, in secret, the Calamities of my Sex during the War, in all which time we have laboured under the insupportable Inventions of

¹³⁹ McKendrick says of second-hand fashion dolls: “For even when discarded by mothers it was taken up by children as a toy, and so could begin the indoctrination of the next generation of fashion consumers – teaching even in infancy the importance and intricacies of fashion awareness.” McKendrick, Brewer and Plumb, 1982: 46.

¹⁴⁰ Max Von Boehn first postulated that the paper fashion doll was an innovation of the English; this is repeated by McKendrick and Peers; however, Barbara Chaney Ferguson suggests the first paper dolls were produced by the French. See: Von Boehn, 1966; Chaney Ferguson, 1982.

¹⁴¹ McKendrick, Brewer, and Plumb, 1982: 43.

English Tire-Women, who, th' they sometimes copy indifferently well, can never compose with that *Goût* they do in *France*.

I was almost in Despair of ever seeing a Model from that dear Country, when last Sunday I overheard a Lady, in the next Pew to me, whisper another, that at the *Seven Stars* in *King-street Covent-garden*, there was a *Mademoiselle* completely dressed just come from *Paris*.

I was in the utmost Impatience during the remaining part of the Service, and as soon as ever it was over, having learnt the Milliners Adresse, I went directly to her House in *King-Street*, but was told that the *French* Lady was at a Person of Quality's in *Pall-mall*, and would not be back again till very late that Night. I was therefore obliged to renew my Visit very early this Morning, and had then a full View of the dear Moppet from Head to Foot.¹⁴²

From this tongue-in-cheek account, the reader can deduce a number of things about the eighteenth-century connotations of the fashion doll. Firstly, the *petite mademoiselle* represented the dangerous hegemony of French taste; secondly, the doll was believed to have an obsessive following amongst women that resembled idolatry; and finally, it was seen as a dubious instrument used to imitate the appearances of others. It is also interesting to note, as Julie Park has pointed out, that "Teraminta" refers to the doll with personal pronouns and proper titles, thus transforming the inanimate object into an autonomous being.¹⁴³ Yet, both *The Spectator* letter and *High Taste in Low Life*, seem also to imply a reverse process, in which the women who imitate the *Pandora* effectively transform themselves into dolls, and their personal identities become subsumed by the lifeless commodities they wear.

In Collet's painting, the fashion doll is part of an extended chain of imitation: the doll is made in imitation of the human form; the little girl uses the doll to imitate her

¹⁴² *The Spectator*, *Ibid.*, partially quoted by Park, 2010: 107-108.

¹⁴³ Park, 2010: *ibid.*

mother; the mother imitates her social betters; and of course, those social betters would have used the doll, before it was relegated as a child's toy, to imitate the stylish French. This network calls to mind a passage from Mandeville's then notorious work, *The Fable of the Bees* (1714), in its ninth edition by Collet's time, which controversially champions vanity and imitation as key components of a thriving economy. Mandeville identifies the seed of mimetic desire in youth, writing:

As children, and even infants, are the apes of others, all youth have an ardent desire of being men and women and become often ridiculous by their impatient endeavour to appear what every body sees they are not; all large societies are not a little indebted to this folly for the perpetuation, or at least long continuance, of trades once established.¹⁴⁴

According to Mandeville, a child's desire to look and behave as if she were grown, matures into a woman's desire to look and behave as if she were high born, and to do so, she acquires sartorial items – perhaps modelled by the *petite mademoiselle* – which were once luxuriously inessential, but now a necessity for any self-respecting lady of fashion. In Collet's painting, the fashion doll and the little girl who styles her can thus be seen as important signifiers of this mimetic desire that fuels material consumption.

We can now turn to the sartorial focal point of the painting, the beribboned hat in the centre of the canvas, which has been delineated so carefully that we can easily identify its real-life counterpart, a silk *bergère* or shepherdess hat of the 1760s – a similar version of which is preserved in the Metropolitan Museum's Costume Institute (fig. 2.36). The blue ribbon curling down from the table and under the hat is clearly evocative of Hogarth's beloved serpentine line of beauty, and therefore exemplifies the younger artist's aesthetic considerations. But like the fashion doll, the ribbon festooned hat operates on another level, beyond the decorative. It should be noted that hats, perhaps more than any other

¹⁴⁴ Mandeville, 1755: 327.

object type, recur frequently in Collet's *oeuvre*. They appear, removed from the head and discarded on the ground, resting isolated, in several of his extant canvases, including two of the four *Love Match* images.¹⁴⁵ Moreover, solitary, disembodied hats feature in over a dozen Collet-based prints, suggesting that this was some kind of artistic trademark.¹⁴⁶ But hats would have also been recognised for their symbolic importance as the item worn on the head – the “seat of the spirit” and intellect – and as a traditional signifier of social position and professional identity.¹⁴⁷ A discarded hat could represent any number of things: the loss of identity; a symbol of intimacy and informality; or a sign of chaos and disarray. In *High Taste in Low Life*, the hat cast to the floor is congruous with the general disorder of the servant's quarters, and may, therefore, contribute to the interpretation of the painting as a world turned-upside-down, in which servants masquerade as their masters. Yet, the hat's particular style may lend it further meaning.

The *bérgere* or shepherdess hat – a flat, wide-brimmed, straw hat, typically decorated with ribbons and flowers – had considerable longevity as fashionable apparel, remaining in style for the female members of a broad cross-section of society, from the 1730s to the end of the century.¹⁴⁸ As its name suggests, the *bérgere* was inspired by the traditional conception of shepherdess's garb, as can be seen in a characteristic pastoral by Jean-Honoré Fragonard dating from the mid-1750s (fig. 2.37). In England, the same hats were frequently referred to as milkmaid's hats, most likely because, as has been earlier established, the English milkmaid was romanticised in a similar manner to her continental counterpart, and because the lower orders, milkmaids among them, were the traditional

¹⁴⁵ Figs. 2.3-2.4, 3.1, 3.35; App. I, nos. 8, 11, 14, 70.

¹⁴⁶ App. II, nos. 1c, 3, 10, 12, 18-19, 20, 22-23, 26, 32, 34, 49, 50e, 50i, 50cc, 56.

¹⁴⁷ In Margaret Powell and Joseph Roach's study on the significance of hair in the eighteenth century, the authors reference Sir James Frazer's anthropological study *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (1915), which establishes the universality of the symbolic importance of the head (and hair). His term is the “seat of the spirit.” For discussions of the head/hair/hats in Early Modern English visual and literary culture, see: Pointon, 1998: 107-140; Postles, 2008; Powell and Roach, 2004; Rosenthal, 2004.

¹⁴⁸ Cumming, Cunnington, and Cunnington, 2010: 20.

wearers of inexpensive straw hats.¹⁴⁹ In *The Connoisseur* of 1756, the author remarks that “the milkmaid’s chip hat [was] rescued for a time from old women and servant girls, to adorn heads of the first fashion.”¹⁵⁰ Thus, in Hayman’s famous Vauxhall painting (see: fig. 1.20), there are literal – albeit romanticised – milkmaids wearing milkmaid’s hats, and later, in portraits by Gainsborough and Reynolds (figs. 2.38-2.39), there are “heads of the first fashion” donning the very same millinery. As a style of headwear that was appropriated by the wealthy attempting to embody a pastoral ideal, and subsequently, re-appropriated by the lower orders, the *bérgere* hat relates back to the theme of sartorial mimesis.

In *High Taste in Low Life*, the lavishly decorated *bérgere* occupies the centre of the canvas. It is propped up onto a table leg, so that the viewer confronts it straight-on, giving it a flattened, almost two-dimensional appearance. The viewer’s gaze then follows a nearly straight line, to the top of the canvas, where another, plainer version of the *bérgere* hangs on the wall (fig. 2.40). This version, the original, rustic milkmaid’s hat, also has a flattened appearance, which may have recalled for the eighteenth-century viewer, the simple, flat insignias used on signboards that hung throughout the metropolis, advertising the wares that could be purchased in the shops below. A trade-card dating from this period, belonging to a Joseph White, proprietor of the *Straw-Hat* of Newgate, the “oldest hat warehouse in London,” features an engraving of a similarly flattened straw hat, viewed from above (fig. 2.41). Before house numbering was standard, businesses were often identified by the emblem on their sign.¹⁵¹ Although this trade-card refers to a numbered address, it also informs prospective customers that the establishment can be found “at the straw hat” in Newgate Street, indicating that the emblem for White’s warehouse was,

¹⁴⁹ Chapter 1: 65-66; Barrell, 1980: 35-50.

¹⁵⁰ Colman, 1756: 210.

¹⁵¹ Hotten and Larwood, 1990.

indeed, a solitary hat, like that on his trade-card. The *bérgere* hats in the painting, then, may have been meant to remind viewers of the physical process of material consumption – for example, an outing to the *Straw-Hat* warehouse to buy some stylish headwear.

To be in fashion, in the eighteenth century, meant more than merely wearing the latest style in hat. As McKendrick, Maxine Berg, and others, have determined, fashionability encompassed a wide range of consumer goods, in addition to clothing, which included furniture, ceramics, glassware, metalwork, wallpaper, and art.¹⁵² Moreover, applications of the terms ‘fashion’ and ‘fashionable’ were diverse, with Johnson’s dictionary devoting nearly an entire page to examples of its use.¹⁵³ One such example is to describe popular “innocent diversions,” which in Collet’s time, surely included the increasingly common practice of domestic music making. This relates to another conspicuous object in *High Taste in Low Life*, the English guitar, one of which is being played by a female servant, and another which acts as a decorative item, hanging on the wall alongside the laundress. A salient choice of object, the English guitar would have been immediately evocative of novelty and fashionability for Collet’s viewers. From its emergence sometime in the mid-1750s, the small, pear-shaped, stringed instrument very rapidly became one of the most popular instruments in Britain.¹⁵⁴ One of the earliest composers for the guitar, Ann Ford, remarked in 1761:

It has been often wondered at, that an Instrument of this kind, should, in so short a Time, have become so universal; but had it been the Fashion when the inimitable *Hogarth* wrote his ingenious *Analysis of Beauty*, I doubt not, but he would have shown [...] this instrument.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² McKendrick *et. al.*; Maxine Berg, 2005: 247-257.

¹⁵³ Johnson, 1, 1755-1756: 777-778.

¹⁵⁴ For the social history of the English guitar, see: Coggin, 1987.

¹⁵⁵ As quoted in Coggin, 1987: 204, from Ford, 1761.

It was, in some part, thanks to the charismatic Miss Ford that the guitar became so fashionable, but like the *Pandora* doll, it developed an equivocal reputation.

From very early on, the English guitar was gendered female. Its compact size and ease of use made it ideally suited for the ‘fairer sex,’ and because women were meant to be both modest and domestic, the instrument was rarely played in public, except in rare instances, by renegades like Ford, whose subscription concerts in Spring Gardens in the early 1760s scandalised polite society and incensed her protective father.¹⁵⁶ Consequently, Richard Leppert has called the English guitar “an icon of the domestic female,” and “an ideal emblem for the representation of the perfect woman, acquiescent and deferential.”¹⁵⁷ Indeed, the guitar is a commonly deployed prop in female portraiture contemporary with Collet’s *High Taste in Low Life*. Perhaps the most familiar depiction of a Georgian woman with an English guitar is Gainsborough’s portrait of Ford of about 1760 (fig. 2.42), but as Michael Rosenthal has established, this image is more of an anomaly, showing a haughty, professional musician, with her legs crossed in an uncommonly masculine manner.¹⁵⁸ A more acceptable and suitably feminine example would be Reynolds’s portrait of Miss Fordyce (ca. 1763-1767) (fig.2.43), as seen in Charles Corbutt’s extant mezzotint, which depicts the contemplative sitter, playing the guitar in the protected confines of an interior draped in sumptuous silk. Francis Cotes, Arthur Devis, Tilly Kettle, Joseph Wright, and Francis Wheatley, were among the other society portraitists to contribute to this trend.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ Rosenthal, 1998.

¹⁵⁷ Leppert, 1988: 162, 167.

¹⁵⁸ Rosenthal, 1998: 649.

¹⁵⁹ For female portraits featuring the English guitar, see: Francis Cotes, *Princess Louisa and Carolina Matilda of Denmark*, 1767, HM the Queen, Buckingham Palace; Arthur Devis, *Lady in Blue*, oil on canvas (1757), Tate Britain, T01884; Valentine Green after Tilly Kettle, *Miss Kettle (?)*, mezzotint (1772), BM No. 1867,0413.576; Francis Wheatley, *Family Group*, oil on canvas (1775), Paul Mellon Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Accession Number 1983.1.43; Joseph Wright of Derby, *Mrs. Robert Gwillym*, oil on canvas (1766), Saint Louis Art Museum, Missouri, Accession Number 72:1965.

In the final scene of the *Love Match* series, a guitar has been cast to the floor, and the couple's young child drags it along behind a toy horse. Here, the broken instrument clearly represents the broken marriage, a now discordant duet; Collet uses the guitar to allude to the common trope in eighteenth-century marital portraits of harmonious music-making. In *High Taste in Low Life*, the guitar has found its way into servants' hands, and thus, the artist once again subverts a motif of conventional portraiture. The accomplished society lady, performing solo, has been supplanted by a flirtatious maid, who gazes longingly into the eyes of her male vocal accompanist. Whereas, for example, George James's roughly contemporary portrait of Sir Edward Walpole's three daughters (fig. 2.44), presents the instrument as an "innocent diversion," suitable for the young progeny of a lord, Collet's guitar is tarnished with libidinous and lowly associations. He was not the only one to evince such associations.

During the artist's lifetime, the English guitar had its share of vocal critics. Because the instrument was portable, relatively inexpensive, and easy to learn, for many consumers, it displaced previously popular domestic instruments, such as the harpsichord and spinet. Some, including the Reverend John Brown, disavowed the neglect of the "nobler" instruments in favour of the most "trifling" one. The guitar, Brown explained, was "a Plaything for a Child," while the "Harpsichord and Lute [required] application."¹⁶⁰ Worse still, were the ruminations of Sir John Hawkins. When Collet was painting *High Taste in Low Life*, Hawkins was busy compiling research for his literary magnum opus, *A General History of the Science and Practice of Music* (1776), a work which allegedly took him sixteen years to complete.¹⁶¹ Though it was published a decade after Collet's work, one provocative passage bears quoting, as it captures the darker contemporary associations of the guitar:

¹⁶⁰ Brown 1758: 77.

¹⁶¹ Stevenson, 1950: 71.

The true English appellation for it is the Cittern, notwithstanding it is by ignorant people called the Guitar: the practice on it being very easy. It was formerly the common recreation and amusement of women and their visitors in houses of lewd resort. Many are the allusions to this instrument in the works of our old dramatic poets: whence it appears that the Cittern was formerly the symbol of a woman that lived by prostitution. Another proof of the low estimation in which it was formerly held in England is that it was the common amusement of waiting customers in barbers shops.¹⁶²

A later history of the guitar, appearing in an encyclopaedia in the early nineteenth century, claimed that, in Collet's time, the instrument was also commonly played by ballad singers and milliners' assistants, making society ladies "ashamed of their frivolous and vulgar taste."¹⁶³ If these accounts are true, then the English guitar is yet another example of an object which passed back and forth between 'high' and 'low' society, carrying with it strangely contradictory associations.

The last objects I will turn to are the reproductive prints that hang on the walls of Collet's servants' quarters, acting as inexpensive surrogates for the kinds of monumental oil paintings to be found in the toilette scene in *Marriage a la Mode*. The idea for this gallery of prints may have actually derived from another Hogarthian source – Plate Three (fig. 2.45) from *The Harlot's Progress*, in which the harlot has adorned her squalid hovel with portrait-prints of Captain Macheath from *The Beggar's Opera*, and the notorious Tory cleric Dr. Henry Sacheverell, which are displayed in loose imitation of the collection of Old Master paintings in the possession of her former keeper, the wealthy Jewish merchant.¹⁶⁴ In Collet's image, the servants' 'art' collection is comprised of a placard illustrating the coronation procession of George III, and a motley crew of portrait heads of monarchs and maids, personifying the tension between the servants' lofty ambitions and

¹⁶² Hawkins, 1776, 4: 113.

¹⁶³ As quoted in Coggin, 1987: 205 from *Rees's Cyclopaedia* (1819).

¹⁶⁴ Paulson, 1, 1965: 145-147.

lowly reality. In the context of this study, the print is a crucial multivalent symbol. These objects represent a product that was imitative in nature, that was available to consumers from ‘high’ and ‘low’ segments of society, and that Collet, himself was tangentially involved in selling.

Together, there are four portrait prints in *High Taste in Low Life*, three of which hang above the musical duo – those of “Elizabeth Canning,” “The Empress of Russia,” and “Moll Flanders” (fig. 2.46) – and one of which is to be seen in the shadows beside the washer woman and beneath the guitar, that of “Cleopatra” (fig. 2.47). Though none of these exactly replicate contemporary portrait engravings, all but one depict subjects that appeared in a wide-range of graphic products sold in the period. Elizabeth Canning, the notorious maidservant who claimed to have been kidnapped in 1754, appeared in at least five prints, ranging from an anonymous broadside illustration that sold for sixpence to a comparatively sophisticated mezzotint by James McArdell after Collet’s fellow exhibitor, William Smith of Chichester.¹⁶⁵ Meanwhile, Daniel Defoe’s fictional servant-cum-convict, Moll Flanders, was depicted in crude woodcut illustrations made for several editions of the book.¹⁶⁶ Cleopatra, of course, a favourite subject for history painters, had recently been used as a guise for the courtesan Kitty Fisher in Reynolds’s portrait of 1759, which was soon after reproduced for public consumption as a mezzotint by Richard Houston.¹⁶⁷ Conversely, the “Empress of Russia,” is a bit of an enigma in that she does not obviously relate to a familiar visual source from the period, though she may refer to the recently

¹⁶⁵ See: Anonymous broadside depicting Elizabeth Canning at her trial, etching/letterpress (1754), BM No. 1851,0308.162; James McArdell after William Smith of Chichester, *Elizabeth Canning*, mezzotint (1754), BM No. K,67.87.

¹⁶⁶ Daniel Defoe’s *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders* was first published in 1722; Woodcuts “suitable to each chapter” were made available for editions published in 1723, 1750, and 1760.

¹⁶⁷ See: Richard Houston after Joshua Reynolds, *Miss Kitty Fisher (as Cleopatra)*, mezzotint (ca. 1758-1765), BM No. 1849,0328.17.

ascended Catherine II.¹⁶⁸ But regardless of her identity and relationship to an existing graphic product, the “Empress” – who appears suspiciously humble given her title – fits nicely with this rogue gallery of heads, which elides the refined and the plebeian, and the real and the fictional.

In his definitive study on the history of the English print, Timothy Clayton determines that, in the eighteenth century, prints were among the most obvious signs of “universal luxury” as an increasingly ubiquitous product type, available to a rapidly broadening customer-base. He states that “the pattern of social imitation was reflected clearly in print publishing where sets of prints published for the affluent and fashionable were copied more cheaply for the middling sort and were sometimes copied even more cheaply for servants, poor craftsmen and misers.”¹⁶⁹ Collet’s painting, and other contemporary images depicting ignoble interiors, such as Hogarth’s *Harlot’s Progress* and Dawes’s *Hen Peck’t Husband* (see: fig. 3.39), are suggestive of working-class ownership and display of inexpensive reproductive engravings. Obviously, one must be wary of using satirical images as straight-forward historical document; however, it seems that the visual evidence is here supported by textual record. John Styles has recently unearthed contemporary court records, documenting petty theft trials, in which the furnishings and contents of the meanest sorts of London dwellings are carefully itemised, and often include references to cheap woodcut prints made after more exalted originals.¹⁷⁰

But even the most eminent connoisseurs were known to have formed immense collections of reproductive engravings in order to appreciate the great works of the Old Masters to which they might not otherwise have had access. In particular, portrait prints

¹⁶⁸ For a contemporary account of the accession of Catherine II, see: *The Annual Register, or a View of the History, Politics, and Literature, of the Year 1762*, 1763: 21.

¹⁶⁹ Clayton, 1997: 129.

¹⁷⁰ Styles, “Lodging at the Old Bailey: Lodgings and Their Furnishings in Eighteenth-Century London” in Styles and Vickery (eds.), 2006: 70-71.

were a widely sought after commodity from the late seventeenth century, with figures such as John Evelyn, Samuel Pepys, and later Horace Walpole and Richard Bull, amassing great hordes of prints depicting monarchs, military heroes, poets, and even criminals.¹⁷¹ Later in the eighteenth century, the collection of portrait heads became a fashionable hobby, now known as ‘Grangerisation.’ Meanwhile, less illustrious consumers purchased reproductive prints in place of the originals because, as an anonymous observer pointed out, it required “a large Fortune to make a fine Collection of Paintings,” whereas copies were much more easily attained.¹⁷² While extremely wealthy virtuosi tended to keep their prints pasted in albums, the middling and lower sorts displayed theirs on the wall. Consequently, print-sellers frequently emphasised that their merchandise could be bought “framed and glazed” and “coloured to the greatest exactness,”¹⁷³ thus transforming a formerly plain print into an almost-convincing imitation of the more expensive original.¹⁷⁴

Eighteenth-century painters were keenly aware of the necessity of reproductive prints for the dissemination of their work.¹⁷⁵ Collet, surely looking to the precedent set by Lely, Kneller, Hogarth, and Reynolds before him, fostered connections with the print market, with 1765 marking his first pseudo-partnership with a publisher, Bradford, who announced the subscription for the *Love Match* series while the artist’s original paintings were still on display at Maiden Lane. Given the accumulated number of prints made after his works, it is clear that Collet recognised the importance of the trade. However, it should be noted, that like the other consumer products discussed, the reproductive print had an ambiguous status. Though they were omnipresent in ‘high’ and ‘low’ society, purchased by princes and paupers alike, and a necessary tool for art dissemination, reproductive prints

¹⁷¹ For the history of engraved portrait head collecting, see: Pointon, 1993: 53-66.

¹⁷² *Sculptura-Historico-Technica* (1747), as quoted by *Ibid.*: 55.

¹⁷³ Bowles, 1784: 116.

¹⁷⁴ Clayton, 1997: 108, 130.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*: 58-59.

were also viewed as a lesser art form – or even a craft - when compared to painting, and by extension, the engraver was reduced to a mere craftsman.¹⁷⁶ In Collet’s time, reproductive engravings were publically displayed at both the Society and Free Society of Artists exhibitions, with John Goldar’s copy of the third scene from the *Love Match* shown at Maiden Lane in the summer of 1766.¹⁷⁷ However, when the Royal Academy was established in 1768, it was determined that engravers would only be admitted as associates, rather than full academicians, thereby excluding them from any participation in the institution’s government. Here, the founders appear to be reaffirming the low opinion earlier expressed by the painter Thomas Atkinson, who wrote in 1736: “Engravers are pretty much Painters’ Copyists.”¹⁷⁸ Thus, engravers and engravings were ubiquitous and necessary, but inferior in the hierarchy of art forms.

Returning to the quartet of prints represented in *High Taste in Low Life* with these issues in mind, it is particularly suggestive to focus on the Elizabeth Canning portrait. Though it was executed with only a few sketchy brushstrokes, this pictorial detail effectively captures the character of a mezzotint print, complete with characteristic tonality, and slightly worn edges, suggestive of its casual display in a dingy kitchen. Collet has also provided just enough sartorial detail – the bonnet and diaphanous blouse – for the viewer to recognise its near-semblance to the McArdell mezzotint portrait of 1754 (fig. 2.48), and so, the artist presents one further chain of imitation; this time, a painting of an engraving that was made after a painting. Of course, *High Taste in Low Life* was, itself, the basis for a reproductive engraving in 1772 – *High Life Below Stairs* – but in this image (fig. 2.49), the picture of Elizabeth Canning, along with the other nearby portraits and the processional poster have been removed; only Cleopatra remains, hiding in the shadows

¹⁷⁶ Gordon J. Fyfe, “Some aspects of the relations between painters and engravers in London 1760-1850” in Palmer and Dobson (eds.), 1996: 196-108.

¹⁷⁷ FSA, 1766: 9.

¹⁷⁸ Atkinson, 1736 as quoted in Palmer and Dobson (eds.), 1996: 200.

beside the washerwoman. We can only speculate as to why the gallery of prints has been omitted. Possibly, by 1772, Canning and the Coronation of George III seemed stale; more intriguingly, Collet's implication that print portraits were a cheap alternative to paintings, suitable only for lowly servants, might not have been a message that the engraver and his publisher wished to emphasise. That engraver, James Caldwell, also saw fit to make one further notable alternation – he updated the musical maids' hairstyle to conform with the towering coiffures of the 1770s, thus ensuring the image remained topical and the servant subjects continued to mimic the “heads of the first fashion.”

V.

In 1772, the same year that saw the publication of Caldwell's engraving *High Life Below Stairs*, Robert Sayer also issued two other Collet-based prints, a pendant pair entitled *The Jealous Maids* (fig. 2.50) and *The Rival Milleners* [sic.] (fig. 2.51). Though the former work focuses on the obviously relevant subject of salacious servants, the latter work offers an especially rich example of the pictorial strategies and cultural concerns discussed in this chapter. Like *High Life Below Stairs*, this mezzotint borrows the title and subject of a popular comic afterpiece – *The Rival Milliners: Or the Humours of Covent Garden*, a bawdy farce by Robert Drury, telling the story of a pair of milliner's apprentices, who compete for the attention of a fashionable lawyer.¹⁷⁹ The play debuted at Haymarket Theatre in 1736, and continued to be performed sporadically throughout the century; it also went through at least three printed editions.¹⁸⁰ Collet's image depicts the interior of a milliner's shop, where a foppish young gentleman sits at a counter, having his wrist measured by an attractive shop girl, dressed in a fashionable flounce-sleeved gown and a

¹⁷⁹ Drury, 1737.

¹⁸⁰ Scouten, 1961: 544-545; Hogan, 1963: 283, 307.

modishly voluminous mob-cap.¹⁸¹ The customer and employee exchange lascivious glances. Behind them, another equally stylish female employee, wearing a lacy ruff and lappet, measures the width of the man's shoulders, as she gazes down at him longingly. Again, the scene does not seem to be taken directly from the earlier play, but it would have certainly reminded viewers of a familiar theatrical narrative. Moreover, it also alluded to a recent public scandal, which is made more explicit in the caption printed beneath the image: "From Sarah Woodcock to the Girl,/ That's doom'd the humble mop to twirl,/ All Milleners delight in show,/ And cry – 'Tis I will have that Beau."

The Sarah Woodcock mentioned in this verse was the most famous milliner of the day, renowned both for her great beauty and for her victimisation at the hands of Frederick Calvert, Baron Baltimore, an extravagantly wealthy and debauched nobleman, who, in the spring of 1768, stood trial for Woodcock's kidnap and rape.¹⁸² Baltimore was ultimately acquitted of the charges, and though much of the public sympathised with the victim, a surprisingly vocal component sided with the accused, believing that Woodcock had encouraged Baltimore's advances. An anonymous pamphlet printed that year went so far as to describe Woodcock's ordeal as "a pretended rape," and questioned nearly every statement made in her testimony.¹⁸³ When she stated, for example, that Baltimore's actions made her tremble, the credulous author remarked, "Might not she tremble with eagerness and desire?"¹⁸⁴ Woodcock's own culpability in the affair was, no doubt, raised because of her dubious profession as a milliner.

In the eighteenth century, a milliner – or *marchande de modes* in French – was a merchant who dealt in fanciful trimmings like ribbons, lace, feathers, and flowers, all of

¹⁸¹ George, 5, 1935: 746, BMSat. 4594.

¹⁸² For Baltimore, see: *ODNB*. For the rape trial, and subsequent press coverage, see: Dickie, 2011: 247-249.

¹⁸³ *Observations on S. W*****k's own evidence...*, 1768.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*: 9.

which were appended in great quantity to the gowns and headdresses of style-conscious consumers.¹⁸⁵ Whereas dressmakers were typically socially respectable male tradesmen, milliners were more often young, lower class women, with little to no formal training, who were thought to possess a mysterious and intangible instinct for fashion, rather than a legitimate technical skill. In addition to their responsibilities as saleswomen, milliners often served as models for the latest trends, enticing customers into their boutiques, much like the glittering displays of merchandise in the shops' windows. Because of their nubile youth and elaborate ornamentation, they were widely seen as glamorous and erotic figures, but their ambiguous social status, their intimate proximity to upper-class clientele, and their active involvement in commercial trade, also made them morally suspect. Much like servants, milliners were an acute source of social anxiety. But to make matters even worse for the milliners, it was common practice in the period for arrested prostitutes to give their profession as 'milliner,' thereby casting an even heavier pall of depravity and distaste on the trade. In the words of Kimberly Chrisman Campbell, milliners became "convenient (if problematic) symbols of class, consumption, and sexuality."¹⁸⁶

Returning to Collet's image, it can now more clearly be seen how it maintains the themes and preoccupations of the artist's earlier social satires. In focusing on the audacious and morally ambivalent milliner, Collet once again opens up issues related to amorphous social identity, affectation, and unmitigated lust. Furthermore, as a beacon of fashion and emblem of emulative consumption, the milliner – located in her natural setting, the millinery boutique – offered another opportunity for the artist to luxuriate in the details of fashionable consumer products. Though, in comparison to *A Love Match* and *High Taste in Low Life*, *The Rival Milleners* is a far less detailed and arguably less Hogarthian composition, this work, nevertheless, gives similar pride of place to a handful of sartorial

¹⁸⁵ For milliners in eighteenth-century art and culture, see: Campbell, 2002.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*: 159.

items. A bandbox, the milliner's conventional attribute in contemporary iconography¹⁸⁷, sits on the counter in the foreground, overflowing with ribbons and lace, some of which cascades onto the male customer's lap, drawing the eye towards his tightly breeched legs and groin. Next to the bandbox is another tool of the millinery trade, a blockhead, onto which the customer has placed his beribboned tri-corner hat; and hanging on the wall behind the man's head, in the very centre of the composition, is Collet's artistic calling card, the *bergère* hat, here suggestively aligned with the male customer, and alluding to the dangerously feminising influence of fashion. Thus, there appears to be an admonitory message to be taken from *The Rival Milleners*, but it is heavily obscured by bawdy humour and decorative delight. Like the artist's earlier social satires, this image can be seen to participate in the wide-spread contemporary criticism of imitation, material consumption, and commercialism; however, it can also be seen to celebrate and embody these very same things.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*: 163.

CHAPTER 3

VIOLENCE, LAUGHTER, AND THE STREET

At the Free Society of Artists Exhibition of 1768, held at Mr Christie's Auction House in Pall Mall in May of that year, Collet exhibited four paintings, once again demonstrating his diverse artist talents. These paintings were a landscape, a "small piece of Lions," and two comic subjects, *The Canonical Beau* (see: fig. 1), discussed in the introduction to this thesis, and *The Female Bruisers* (fig. 3.1).¹ Today, the last of these paintings is housed at the Museum of London, where it fits comfortably into the collection's mandate to preserve images that are significant to the topographical, social, and artistic history of the city. The canvas offers a humorous representation of mid-Georgian London and its ordinary citizens, portraying a violent confrontation between two plebeian women in a crowded urban backstreet. One of these women – the rougher looking of the two, dressed in soiled and tattered rags – has fallen back, having tripped over what Mary Dorothy George identifies as a broom handle, but what I would like to suggest is the figure's own wooden leg.² The recumbent woman shakes her fist furiously at her opponent, as an equally ragged paviour assists her to her feet, taking the opportunity to grope her in the process. The other virago is dressed in a gold, lace-trimmed frock that is oddly incongruous with her dishevelled hair and coarse, ruddy complexion. A small beauty spot on her brow may conceal the ravaging effects of syphilis, implying that she is a prostitute, a profession she likely shares with her opponent, though judging by the disparity in their appearances, they cater to clientele at different social levels. The better-dressed combatant has cast aside her fashionable accessories – an ermine cloak and muff, and a

¹ FSA, 1768: 6.

² Describing the reproductive print by Goldar. George, 5, 1935-1938: 744-745, BMSat. 4592.

bergère hat – and strides forward aggressively, with her fists clenched in front of her. Her assistant – or bottleholder – a butcher whose abandoned stall can be seen in the background, presents her with a small object, which George determines to be a lemon, but which may, in fact, be a coin, as these were allegedly given to female fighters to clutch in their fists to prevent them from hair-pulling.³ Surrounding the women, a crowd of bystanders look on, and react to the contest with a variety of expressions, ranging from shock and anger, to good-humoured mirth, to complete indifference.

This painting, and the subsequent reproductive prints – a mezzotint produced and published by Butler Clowes (fig. 3.2), and a line-engraving executed by John Goldar (fig. 3.3), and published by Thomas Bradford, both released in 1770 – are representative of an important stream of imagery produced by the artist, in which urban violence is portrayed as a form of public spectacle, played out in front of an engrossed street-side audience.⁴ For the most part, the participants of such pictures are lowly, plebeian subjects, such as street sellers, prostitutes, and sailors, while the pictured spectators are drawn from a broader range of urban social types, from ‘high’ to ‘low.’ In all cases, the violence is treated as a source of amusement, seemingly posing little threat to the innocent bystanders, and thus constituting a kind of benign street theatre. These images of comic urban conflict represent a little explored subcategory of the artist’s *oeuvre*, and offer the opportunity of addressing several recurring themes and issues in Collet’s work, including his narrative and interpretive ambiguity, and his evident interest in and ambivalent attitude towards gender and class transgression.

Such images are also of interest in that they seem to operate at odds with contemporary comic theory, and prevailing ideas about the acceptable sources of laughter.

³ Schwartz, 1983: 70.

⁴ For Collet’s comically violent imagery, see: figs. 3.12, 3.18, 3.25, 3.35. He also exhibited a now lost painting entitled “Rake’s Quarrelling with the Watchmen,” at the SEAMC in 1764. See: SEAMC, 1764: 4.

As mentioned in the introduction, the eighteenth century bore witness to what Simon Dickie has recently termed “the great laughter debate,” during which a number of philosophers, writers, and social critics attempted to rescue laughter from its negative Hobbesian connotation (i.e. laughter at the “sudden glory” arising from the recognition of one’s own superiority to others), and redefine it in polite, corrective, and benevolent terms.⁵ Of course, laughter is resistant to censorship, and therefore, inevitably, theory and prescriptive texts do not accurately reflect eighteenth-century laughter. As Dickie has shown, even supposedly polite Georgians delighted in violence, vulgarity, deformity, and lowness, all of which are key ingredients in *The Female Bruisers* and the other images I shall explore in this chapter.⁶ The ubiquity of these elements in jestbooks, as has been Dickie’s focus, and in graphic satire, as has been Vic Gatrell’s, is perhaps less surprising.⁷ These were forms of media that were relatively personal and intimate; a crude jestbook would travel in a gentleman’s pocket, brought out in private or in the appropriate company, while bawdy prints would be pasted in an album, hung in a closet, or used to adorn the walls of a tavern or inn. Collet’s painting of *The Female Bruisers*, however, was displayed in a public exhibition, where it hung alongside portraits of aristocrats and classicising history paintings, and was viewed by men, women, and possibly even children. Furthermore, it was not a diminutive canvas that could easily be overlooked. At 70 by 90 centimetres, *The Female Bruisers* was larger than the average genre subject, measuring roughly the same size as many of Hogarth’s more ambitious ‘comic history paintings.’⁸

In what follows, Collet’s comic street scenes will be understood in relation to a cultural environment that frequently celebrated urban violence, and placed within a well-established artistic tradition that presented the city as a site of chaos, conflict, and comic

⁵ Dickie, 2011: Chapter 4. For eighteenth-century comic theory, see below: 172-177.

⁶ Dickie, 2011: Chapters 1-3.

⁷ Gatrell, 2006.

⁸ See for example: *Marriage a la Mode* (figs. 2.6, 2.12, 2.15).

interaction. I will also offer two potential interpretations of such images as *The Female Bruisers*, and of the man who produced them. In one interpretation, there is Collet, the producer of a populist, Rabelaisian-style world that serves as an expression of British liberty and the artist's own relaxed attitudes towards gender and class transgression; and in the other, there is a more conservative satirist, whose seemingly anarchic city street, in fact, recycles fairly conventional imagery and attitudes towards women and the poor, and reinforces social hierarchy through presenting unruly plebeian behaviour as the object of laughter and scorn.⁹ Like his rural imagery, Collet's urban subjects seem to have been left open to both readings, and as such served to offer a dualistic view of the city and its ordinary citizens.

I.

In order to situate works such as *The Female Bruisers* within a wider pictorial context, it will be helpful to begin by looking at two roughly contemporary works by Collet that illustrate the two prevailing modes of representing urban space and life in the period. The first image, *Covent Garden Piazza and Market* (fig. 3.4), a monumental canvas of about 1770, can be profitably compared with the many topographical views and urban genre scenes of the first half of the eighteenth century, which catered to a thriving market for idealised depictions of recognisable urban locations. Conversely, the second image, *The Female Orators* (fig. 3.12), a line-engraving produced by Martin Rennoldson and published by Sayer and Smith in the same year that the *Female Bruisers* was on public

⁹ In a similar vein, modern scholars of eighteenth-century British art have presented "two different Hogarths." In a review of Ronald Paulson's *Hogarth, Vol. I: 'The Modern Moral Subjects'* (1992) appearing in the *London Review of Books*, John Barrell ruminates on the divergent identities offered by Paulson and David Solkin; the former considers Hogarth to be "irrevocably shaped by the irreverence and dissidence of the street-culture in which he had been brought up," while the latter characterises the artist as "an ambitious social climber[...] a spokesman for the aspirations and attitudes of a rich and newly visible middle class [...]." See Barrell, 1994.

display, follows on from a tradition in comic and satirical art and literature of presenting the city as a place of chaos and cacophony. These respective images demonstrate that Collet worked in both modes, though he typically focused his attention on the latter as part of his continuing efforts to uphold a reputation as a specialist in comic imagery.

Though he would later choose to make the more genteel borough of Chelsea his primary place of residence, Covent Garden was evidently Collet's home¹⁰ during much of the 1750s and 1760s, which is unsurprising given that the area was a mecca for artists and craftsmen, particularly of Huguenot extraction, which Collet likely was, as was his James Street neighbour, the engraver Charles Grignion.¹¹ Once an aristocratic, residential square, Covent Garden had long since transformed into a seamier, bohemian environment, well-known for its coffeehouses, taverns, bagnios, and other rakish resorts; and yet, Inigo Jones's grand piazza and the vegetable market held within it remained a picturesque source of inspiration for painters and engravers. It was, as it is today, one of London's most iconic spaces.¹²

Collet's view of the famed site, *Covent Garden Piazza and Market* (fig. 3.4), appears to have been captured from a first storey window on the East side of the piazza, looking down on the market, and towards St. Paul's – a similar vantage point to the one that the topographical painter Samuel Scott had taken up a decade earlier in his own depiction of the market (fig. 3.5).¹³ From this elevated position, the viewer is able to take in a broad, panoramic view of the market square and its occupants, who are buying, selling, or otherwise loitering. Additionally, this high vantage point, coupled with the band of empty space in the immediate foreground, allows the viewer to remain at a safe and

¹⁰ Sheppard, 36, 1970: 151-152.

¹¹ *Ibid.*: 178; Charles Grignion (c.1721-1810), *ODNB*.

¹² For the popularity of Covent Garden imagery, see: Fox, 1987: 139-146; Gatrell, 2013: 13-15; Hallett, "The View Across the City: William Hogarth and the Visual Culture of Eighteenth-century London" in Bindman, Ogee, and Wagner (eds.), 2001: 146-162.

¹³ Einberg, 1987: 229.

quiet distance from the activity below. However, despite this physical distance, and the fact that, compared to Scott's, Collet's market is relatively sparsely populated, the focus here is clearly on human interaction. Collet's Covent Garden is in the tradition of cityscapes produced in the earlier part of the century by mostly Dutch and Flemish immigrants, such as Pieter Angellis and Joseph Van Aken, who fused together topography and genre painting, thus providing an alternative to the sanitised views by conventional topographical painters.¹⁴

Peppered throughout Collet's canvas are small vignettes illustrating the daily commerce and pleasures of the market (figs. 3.6-3.10). He depicts a broad range of activities, interactions, and social types. Fashionable men and women barter for goods and services; haggard market women organise and dispense their wares; chair menders are consumed in their work; a trio of vagrant musicians perform merrily; a hunch-backed fortune teller reads tealeaves; and a band of drunken rakes are exploited by pickpockets as they stop to rest against the market railing. Many of these figures would have been familiar to viewers as real-life market fixtures, as well as being stock characters from 'City Cries,' a type of graphic product, first emerging in the sixteenth century, which depicted street vendors and other lower-class city dwellers in the form of a series.¹⁵ Sean Shesgreen, who has written extensively on this category of imagery, has said that traditional 'Cries' worked to emblematised the "dazzling new material bounty of cities with their distinctive social orders [...] they celebrate all sorts of goods and services, as well as those who vend them."¹⁶ The urban genre paintings of Collet and his Netherlandish forerunners operate in a similar way, and although they may include the occasional crude joke or brief moment of discord, these paintings generally emphasise the overall harmony of the working city. For

¹⁴ For urban genre painting, see: Hallett in Bindman, Ogee, and Wagner (eds.), 2001: 146-161.

¹⁵ For 'London Cries,' see: Shesgreen, 2002; Shesgreen, "William Hogarth's *Enraged Musician* and the Cries of London" in Bindman, Ogee, and Wagner (eds.), 2001: 125-145; Shesgreen, 1996.

¹⁶ Shesgreen, 2002: 21-22.

example, in a painting of Covent Garden by Angellis (ca. 1726) (fig. 3.11), a corpulent man in the left foreground has collapsed, perhaps after a long night of drinking, while behind him, in the mid-ground, an impish young trader attempts to balance a teetering tower of baskets on his head with minimal success. In a similar vein, Collet's painting includes drunken rakes, noisy musicians, and a band of nefarious pickpockets. But in both of these images, the busy market's vendors and customers carry on with their business, unthreatened and unoffended by these mild insurrections. Everything is as it should be in Covent Garden, a microcosm for the greater city.

Though clearly belonging to an established pictorial tradition, *Covent Garden Piazza and Market* is somewhat anomalous in the context of Collet's *oeuvre*. It is not explicitly a comic or satirical subject; it is one of the few surviving paintings for which there is no corresponding reproductive print; and, at 134 by 189 centimetres, it is far larger than any of the artist's other canvases. All of this might lead to the speculation that this particular work was made to fulfil a private commission. The early provenance of it is unknown¹⁷, but as Mark Hallett has shown, there was significant demand "among the city's aristocratic, mercantile, and professional classes for views of certain urban sites [of which] Covent Garden was clearly the most popular."¹⁸ Another of Angellis's market scenes, for example, was commissioned by a civil servant named Walker.¹⁹ Equally possible, however, Collet's monumental canvas may have been displayed in the artist's studio, serving as a dramatic showpiece, advertising his abilities as a topographical and urban genre painter. In replicating the same vantage point and compositional format used in Scott's earlier painting, Collet announced that he was equally capable of producing urban imagery in this grand, formalised manner.

¹⁷ For the later provenance of this painting, see: App. I, no. 47.

¹⁸ Hallett in Bindman, Ogee, and Wagner (eds.), 2001: 152-153.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

More typical of the artist's urban imagery, however, is *The Female Orators* (fig. 3.12), a reproductive line-engraving of 1768, for which the original painting no longer survives. This image takes the viewer down from their first-storey perch above the square and into the thick of the bustling market – or at least, *a* bustling market, as Collet appears to have conflated the piazza-architecture of Covent Garden and the maritime produce of Billingsgate. Two market women stand, face-to-face, exchanging loud and angry words, which cause a nearby cleric to cover his ears, as he briskly exits his sedan chair. A vagrant musician is annoyed to have his performance interrupted by the commotion, but an urchin and stray dog are happy for the opportunity to pillage the distracted women's goods – strawberries and fish, respectively. A trio of bystanders are equally unbothered; one of the sedan chair carriers looks on smirking, an idle trader leans against the railing and takes in the show, and another laughs, pointing to an ironic sign advertising the Covent Garden Theatre's performance of *Epicaene; or the Silent Woman* (1609), Ben Jonson's comedy about a noise-detesting man who winds up with a loud and shrewish wife.

Certainly, compared with *Covent Garden*, this image is a far less harmonious imagining of the city. Yet, it finds fun in the bustle of the marketplace, and capitalises on the humorous potential of a popular urban stock character. The female fish seller – which at least one of these *Female Orators* appears to be – was a fixture on the streets of the city, and as a result, was one of the canonical characters of the traditional 'London Cries,' appearing in them at least as early as 1640.²⁰ Most of these early 'Cries' idealise their plebeian subjects, and even in Marcellus Laroon's late seventeenth-century version, which Shesgreen describes as combining "social realism and formal intricacy," the spirited mackerel seller is pictured as a smiling, rosy-cheeked woman, who winks playfully at the

²⁰ See: *The Manner of Crying Things in London*, (c. 1640), line-engraving, Guildhall Library, London.

viewer (fig. 3.13).²¹ The dominant perception of the female fish seller in the Early Modern period, meanwhile, was far less appealing. She was located at the very bottom of the street-selling hierarchy, thought to be perpetually stinking of her product and shouting out her incessant ‘cry,’ interspersed with foul language and threats of violence. After all, the term ‘fishwife’ had long been associated with loud and quarrelsome women, while the word ‘billingsgate’ was synonymous with vituperative language.²² Gary Taylor has postulated that, traditionally, women who sold fish developed these traits because of the immense pressure to sell a product that very quickly went bad and lost its value.²³ Paul Sandby, in his ‘London Cries’ of 1760, then, comes closer to capturing the perceived reality of the fishwife with his grotesque mackerel seller (fig. 3.14) screeching at the door of a prospective client. Like Collet, Sandby evidently found humour in the city’s most obtrusive hawker, as did many others, making the noisy fishwife a favourite character of eighteenth-century satire and popular verse.

In *The Billingsgate Contest*, a burlesque poem appearing in the *Muse in Good Humour; or a Collection of Comic Tales* (1757), a jestbook that went through several editions in Collet’s time, two arguing fishwives exhibit their typical behaviour for full comic effect. The dispute between the two market women, written in imitation of Virgil’s third eclogue, provides suggestive dialogue for *The Female Orators*:

OYSTERIA.

Ho! Nan, whose Fish are those that look so dry?

WELFLETA.

Young Polly Melton gave 'em me to cry.

²¹ Shesgreen in Bindman, Ogee, and Wagner (eds.), 2001: 129.

²² The *OED* entry for ‘fishwife’ provides the following quote by J. Davies dating from 1662: “They abuse one another like Fish-wives”; the entry for ‘billingsgate’ provides a quote by E. Hickeringill from 1705: “The Rhetorick of Billingsgate, viz. Lying and Slandering.”

²³ Taylor, 1981: 189.

OYSTERIA.

Unhappy Polly, who thy Stand can leave,
 And with vain Hopes of Love thyself deceive!
 While you Jack-tar will court, but court in vain,
 Fearing that I your Sailor shall obtain,
 Here, Poll, another will thy Gains devour,
 Nor turn a lucky Penny in an Hour;
 Thy Tubs unwash'd, thy Mackarel forsook,
 And Two-pence sunk in ev'ry Groat that's took.

WELFLETA.

No Scandal, Madam, if you come to that,
 Some may be told of you. — We know what's what [...].²⁴

The women continue to trade barbs, attacking one another's business, sexual, and criminal behaviour. They do so, however, in the form of rhyming couplets, and eventually, their conflict dissolves into a boisterous singing contest. This poem – and Collet's image by extension – is illustrative of the perceived entertainment value of urban conflict in the period, as well as the paradoxical identity of the fishwife, who was both a public nuisance and a popular urban character, much admired for her tenacious spirit. In Cindy McCreery's words, the female fish seller was often used in Georgian satire as an "[exemplar] of the English common people's feisty independence and good sense."²⁵ Thus, Collet's combative market sellers could have been seen as humorous yet primarily positive figures who emblematised the coursing energy of the metropolis.²⁶

This pair of divergent images of the market place, *Covent Garden Piazza and Market* and *The Female Orators*, exemplifies the two paradigmatic models of representing

²⁴ *The Muse in Good Humour: or, a Collection of Comic Tales...*, 1757: 183.

²⁵ McCreery, 2004: 48-49.

²⁶ For female market sellers in Georgian graphic satire, see also: Donald, 1996: 115-117.

the city in the Early Modern period. Though one emphasises harmony and productivity, and the other, cacophony and conflict, both can be seen to express the vitality and vibrancy of the city, and both would have been familiar and appreciated by eighteenth-century audiences for their own respective values and purposes. Collet clearly contributed to both categories of urban imagery, but by exhibiting a work like *The Female Bruisers*, he publically aligned himself with the more explicitly comic mode of depicting the city. Indeed, the painting stands as a more ambitious and complex example of the kind of urban imagery that has already been seen in *The Female Orators*. Like *The Female Orators*, this painting offers a street level view of a quarrel between two plebeian women, but where *The Female Orators* features only a few figures in a sparsely detailed setting, *The Female Bruisers* is a comparatively crowded scene, congested with jostling bodies and a profusion of material detail.

II.

The imagery of the London streets found in *The Female Bruisers* aligned Collet's painting with a rich tradition of satirical imagery in the eighteenth century, which, for the sake of humour, novelty, and social critique, presented the city as a place of chaos and conflict. The best-known satirical images of eighteenth-century London are, of course, provided by Hogarth, whose dynamic depictions of the street informed the style and format of both his contemporaries and succeeding generations of English pictorial satirists. Indeed, his quintessential images of the city, like *Beer Street* (fig. 3.15) and *Gin Lane* (fig. 3.16), have, for many, come to embody the Georgian metropolis. However, it is actually the work of one of Hogarth's lesser known contemporaries that offers the most suggestive pictorial precedent for *The Female Bruisers* in terms of both subject matter and

perspective. Anthony Walker's *The Beaux Disaster* (1747) (fig. 3.17) depicts the aftermath of a dispute between a well-dressed gentleman and a group of burly butchers, which has resulted in the poor fop being strung up by his trousers on a meat hook.²⁷ It is one of countless social satires of the period that ridicules the ostentatiousness of contemporary urban fashions, and highlights the tensions and disparities between the polite and plebeian factions of the city. Like *The Female Bruisers*, Walker's print presents a view down an urban street that is obstructed by throngs of people, who spill out from open doors, lean out of windows, and loiter in the thoroughfare in order to catch a glimpse of an amusing confrontation. Though *The Beaux Disaster* depicts a much longer, wider and more congested street – Butcher's Row, near Temple Bar – both images similarly evoke the echoing sounds of laughter and shouting, and both capture the diversity of a city crowd composed of men and women, both polite and plebeian, who have, for the moment, united in their common interest in an unfolding spectacle.

Whereas in images like Collet's *Covent Garden*, the viewer is offered a vantage point that allows them to take in the city's panoply from a safe and quiet distance, in *The Female Bruisers* and *The Beaux Disaster*, the vantage point is that of a pedestrian, immersed in the dissonance of the city – though not quite a part of it, thanks to a shallow foreground, which, in both images, separates the viewer from the crowd. In *The Female Bruisers*, it can be imagined that the viewer occupies a similar position as that of the phantom-like figure on horseback in the background, who seems to have turned up the street, and inadvertently stumbled upon the amusing fracas, which he pauses to watch from several paces back. This vantage point of a detached pedestrian (or equestrian) – what might now be termed a *flâneur*²⁸ – is the same perspective offered in 'ramble' or 'spy'

²⁷ For a fascinating extended analysis of this print, see: Hallett, 1999: Chapter 5.

²⁸ The *OED* defines a '*flâneur*' as "A loungeur or saunterer, an idle 'man about town.'" The entry provides an early example of its use in English in *Harper's Magazine* (2 August, 1854): "Did you ever fail to waste at

texts, a subgenre of literary satire, first emerging in the late seventeenth century, in which a male narrator explores the capital on foot, experiencing the sights and sounds of the city from an ostensibly disinterested viewpoint, offering the reader a humorous and irreverent guide to the city that could be enjoyed from the safety of one's own home.²⁹

Perhaps the most famous and influential example of this kind of text is Ned Ward's *The London Spy*, a periodical first published between 1698 and 1700, and later released as a complete book in 1703, which went on to spawn dozens of imitations and unauthorised revised editions throughout the century.³⁰ The text is presented as the journal of a naïve, rural visitor to the capital, who is guided through the city by a more experienced and knowledgeable friend. At the beginning of the first issue, Ward's spy offers a moralising purpose, claiming that his journal means "to expose the vanities and vices of the town as they should, by any accident, occur to my knowledge, that the innocent might see by reflection what I should gain by observation and intelligence, and not by practice or experience."³¹ This invented persona and proposed purpose allow Ward to remain suitably detached from the people and places he describes, while projecting London as a bewilderingly novel environment.

The spy's tour takes him to many of the grandest and best-known sites of the city, including the Tower of London, the Guildhall, and the Inns of Court, but also to less illustrious settings, like Billingsgate Market, Bridewell Prison, Bedlam, and several sordid taverns and bagnios that would be unlikely to appear in any conventional London guidebook. His journey en route to these respective destinations often proves to be as

least two hours of every sunshiny day, in the long-ago time when you played the *flâneur*, in the metropolitan city, with looking at shop-windows?" Owing to Walter Benjamin, the *flâneur* is now primarily associated with nineteenth-century Parisian literary figures, such as Charles Baudelaire. Benjamin's *Arcade Project* (1927-1940) addresses the Parisian *flâneur*.

²⁹ For 'ramble' and 'spy' texts, see: Corfield, 1990; O'Byrne, 2003 (unpublished).

³⁰ O'Byrne, 2003: 58, 60-68.

³¹ Ward, ca. 1703: 2.

eventful and interesting as the destinations themselves. Around every corner, the spy is confronted with a new crop of colourful urban characters, who are frequently found to be engaging in strange and sensational behaviour. A particularly pertinent passage from the sixth issue of the periodical bears quoting at length:

We moved on till we came to Fleet Bridge [...] Just as we passed by, a feud was kindling between two rival females who, from the brimstone of lust, had blown up such a fire of jealousy between 'em that one called the other adulterous bitch, and charged her with lying with her husband and robbing her of his love [...] And then with teeth and nails she made a violent assault upon her rival, who roared out for help, crying out that she was quick with child. The mob, hearing her plead her belly, were moved to compassion, and so parted 'em, their coifs having received the greatest damage in the frat [...] Just as the squabble was ended, before the rabble was dispersed, who should be stumbling along upon his hidebound prancer, but one of the horse-mountebanks, who, seeing so rare an opportunity to hold forth to a congregation already assembled, spurred up his foundered Pegasus, and, halting in the middle of the crowd, plucked out a packet of universal hodgepodge, and thus began an oration to the listening herd [...].³²

Obviously, this passage is relevant for the fact that it includes a description of a feud between two plebeian women, but it is also significant for the particular way it represents the city and its inhabitants. Here, as in Collet's painting, the city street is cast as an impromptu stage, and the spontaneously occurring events and interactions that take place there serve as a form of spectacle for the great London crowd. The reader, observing the scene through the eyes of the detached narrator, does not belong to this crowd, but rather, bemusedly watches from a distance, only briefly pausing on their rambling walking tour of the city.

³² Ward, ca. 1703: 100-101.

The Female Bruisers thus maintains many of the conventions and concerns of earlier pictorial and literary satires; however, before moving on to situate Collet's painting in its broader cultural context, I would like to point out one conspicuous difference between this work, and the other urban satires that I have been discussing. This is the fact that *The Female Bruisers* illustrates a completely nondescript urban locale, which is without street signs, shop signboards, recognisable buildings, or any kind of distinguishing landmark that might otherwise help to determine where in the city we are located. Conversely, in *The Beaux Disaster* the distinctive arches of Temple Bar can clearly be seen in the background, thus establishing the location, and encouraging the viewer to ruminate on the symbolic contrast between this noble edifice and the modest butcher's shops in the foreground. Similarly, as a kind of satirical walking tour, *The London Spy* is dependent on references to well-known city sites in order for the premise of the narrative to work. This geographic specificity also enables the reader to make pointed connections between the meanings and associations of particular locations and the people and events that are being described. For example, the vicinity around Fleet Bridge, the setting for the brawl between the two plebeian women, was, in Ward's time, a makeshift market, where the lowest class of hawkers sold pastries, fruit, and oysters from wheeled carts, alongside the stinking, open sewer of Fleet Ditch.³³ As such, the characters Ward's spy encounters there could be quickly associated with their odiferous environment, and determined to be the filthy dregs of society. Collet's painting, on the other hand, lacks such vivid contextual detail.

The Female Bruiser's geographic vagueness is typical of Collet's humorous urban imagery, and, indeed, of his comic work more generally. Instead of depicting specific urban locations, the artist more often uses composite settings, such as he does in *The Female Orators*. In the images where he does include signs, the emblematic signboards

³³ "British History Online," <http://www.british-history.ac.uk> (accessed 28 April, 2013).

usually serve as visual jokes, alluding to an overall comic theme, rather than to real-life establishments. These generic settings can perhaps be explained by the fact that, in contrast to the works of his predecessors, Collet's images of the city were intended to be more humorous than satirical, and therefore, depended less on realism and specificity, and more on generalities and stereotypes. However, this lack of specificity may have also served as part of a marketing tactic. In utilising generic settings, Collet's work could be legible and relevant to a broader audience, far beyond the metropolitan clientele who were most familiar with the meanings and associations of specific London locations. Thus, the prints made after *The Female Bruisers* could be widely sold in both urban and provincial markets.

III.

In addition to belonging to a familiar category of satirical urban imagery, *The Female Bruisers* can also be seen to reflect contemporary preoccupations with interpersonal conflict, fist-fighting, and in particular, the novelty of physical violence between women. In the eighteenth century, the sport of boxing gradually evolved from the spontaneous fist-fights that were witnessed by ordinary citizens in the streets into an organised commercial sport which was, from the beginning, participated in by women, as well as men.³⁴ It quickly emerged as an immensely popular form of entertainment for both polite and plebeian spectators, which was simultaneously condemned as a lowly, vulgar pastime, and celebrated as a quintessentially British demonstration of strength and fortitude. As such, *The Female Bruisers* can be read as an amusing, but nevertheless, scornful satire on the uncouth and unnatural behaviour of the types of lower class women

³⁴ For eighteenth-century boxing, see: Boddy, 2008; Downing, 2010; Shoemaker, 2004: Chapter 7.

who engaged in fist-fighting; however, these female subjects can also be related to a primarily positive stock-figure of the period – the feisty British fishwife, who, as previously mentioned, was held up for her characteristic pluck and determination, and who was frequently found to be involved in violent quarrels, and contests of physical strength.

In the Early Modern period, verbal and physical disputes amongst lower-class citizens of London were a common source of entertainment, not only for the voyeuristic members of the upper classes, but also for the friends, neighbours, and colleagues of the opponents, who would often assemble in the streets to cheer, jeer, place bets, take sides, and mediate the conflict.³⁵ Customarily, plebeian women would solve their disputes verbally, and what would begin with a legitimate grievance would inevitably deteriorate into an exchange of insults, usually pertaining to sexual promiscuity. In the words of Bernard Capp, many of these verbal conflicts “possessed something of the flavour of street theatre, and were deliberately staged to inflict a public and dramatic humiliation. An assailant might stand outside the target’s house shouting for her to come out [...]. Speakers would also clap their hands to attract attention,” and “one Londoner even had a horn sounded to summon a crowd, perhaps imitating the methods by which the public were notified of more conventional theatrical performances.”³⁶

Some plebeian women, however, chose to resolve their differences in the same manner as their male counterparts. Working class men, of course, typically used their fists to settle scores rather than engaging in these “verbal prizefights.”³⁷ The boxing match originated as a plebeian equivalent to the duel – a physical fight, agreed upon by the participants, arising from a perceived affront to one or both men’s reputations – but

³⁵ For public disputes in the Early Modern period, see: Capp, 2004: Chapter 5; Shoemaker, 2000; Shoemaker, 2004: particularly Chapters 3 and 7.

³⁶ Capp, 2004: 197.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

differed from the duel in that it was almost always conducted in front of a crowd, rather than in private, and perhaps for this reason, boxing developed into a commercialised spectator sport in the eighteenth century.³⁸ As early as the 1730s, one could visit a purpose-built amphitheatre to watch a professional boxing match fought by celebrity pugilists like James Figg and Jack Broughton; however, spontaneous fights continued to break out in the streets and often attracted the attention of the London press. Eighteenth-century newspapers are littered with reports of scheduled, vaguely planned, and completely impromptu boxing matches, most of which were attended by large throngs of people.

In July of 1760, the *London Evening Post* remarked, “The noble art of Boxing has not only broke out of late amongst Men, but the Females too seem to have caught the Contagion,” thus referring to a favourite novelty to both observe and report – fights between women.³⁹ Throughout the eighteenth century, there were numerous published accounts of women boxers, both amateur and professional. There were famous female counterparts to Figg and Broughton, such as the shadowy figure ‘Bruising Peg,’ and Elizabeth Stokes, who, in the late 1720s, was christened London’s ‘City Championess.’⁴⁰ Their matches would be announced in the newspapers in the form of written challenges, such as one made in the *Weekly Journal* on 1 October, 1726, which states:

I, Mary Welch, from the Kingdom of Ireland, being taught and knowing the Noble Science of Defence, and thought to be the only Female of this kind in Europe, understanding here is one in this Kingdom [...]. Mrs. Stokes, who is titled the famous Championess of England, I do hereby invite her to meet me, and exercise the usual weapons practis’d on the Stage, at her own Amphitheatre,

³⁸ Shoemaker, 2004: 178.

³⁹ *London Evening Post* (5 July, 1760).

⁴⁰ McComb, 2004: 55-56.

doubting not, but to let her and the worthy Spectators see that my judgment and Courage is beyond hers.⁴¹

This challenge – probably a creative promotional strategy used by Stokes’s husband to attract customers to his amphitheatre – characteristically emphasises the curious and singular nature of the female fighter, but in fact, Mary Welch and Elizabeth Stokes were far from being the only females “of this kind in Europe.”

A lot of female fights took place outside of the amphitheatre and on the streets for the amusement of others, and were usually fought for a meagre reward. In the 1760s, there were reports of a particularly brutal match for the prize of “a new shift valued at half a crown,” and another, in which the opponents agreed to “fight in the street for a guinea,” and ended up battling for an hour.⁴² Sometimes bystanders would exploit a personal dispute for their own entertainment, such as was the case of a fight of 1760, which began with one opponent calling the other a “whore” and “continued by some Gentlemen coming up and spiring on the Engagement by depositing a sum of Money in the Hands of a Person to be given to the Victor.” The casualties of this battle included, “the spilling of a deluge of Blood, and the Loss of a few handfuls of Hair.”⁴³ The boxing match depicted in Collet’s canvas appears to be one of these impromptu female fights, which has attracted a crowd of curious spectators, some of whom laugh and cheer for more, while others attempt to intervene.

Unsurprisingly, there were many vocal opponents to this kind of recreational violence, whether performed by men or by women.⁴⁴ For the social reformers, there were two primary grievances: firstly, fist-fighting was traditionally the pastime of the lower

⁴¹ *Weekly Journal or British Gazetteer* (1 October, 1726).

⁴² Biggs Boulton, 1970: 234; *London Chronicle* (7 August, 1764).

⁴³ *London Evening Post*, *ibid.*

⁴⁴ Shoemaker, 2004: 208-210.

classes, and therefore, it was believed to have a debasing effect on the gentlemen who observed and participated in it; and secondly, the great crowds that gathered to watch matches were feared to amass into uncontrollable mobs.⁴⁵ Some official measures were taken to suppress boxing, including the implementation of the act “for regulating places of entertainment,” which was passed in 1754 to control the resorts of “the lower sort of people.”⁴⁶ Nevertheless, boxing remained a popular pastime, enjoyed by the nobleman and labourer alike.

Several foreign visitors to England in the eighteenth century commented upon the English people’s curious fascination with fist-fighting. After visiting a bear garden in 1710, the Prussian visitor Zacharias von Uffenbach, observed that the fights that were staged there were a “truly English amusement.”⁴⁷ The Frenchman Henri Misson concurred with this, remarking in his travel memoir of 1719 that: “Anything that looks like fighting is delicious to an Englishman. If two little boys quarrel in the street, the passengers stop, make a ring around them in a moment and [...] encourage the combatants with great delight of heart.”⁴⁸ In Fielding’s *Joseph Andrews* (1742), a fictional foreigner is likewise bemused by this national pastime. After witnessing a brawl between Parson Adams and an innkeeper and his wife, “the traveller, addressing himself to Miss Grave-airs, desired her not to be frightened: for here had been only a little boxing, which he said to their *disgracia* the English were *accustomata* to; adding, it must be however, a sight somewhat strange to him, who was just come from Italy.”⁴⁹

Its resolute Englishness was also invoked by those Britons who championed fist-fighting in the face of its critics. In Broughton’s *Proposal for Erecting an Amphitheatre for*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Fielding, 1761: 138.

⁴⁷ von Uffenbach, 1934: 88, partially quoted by Shoemaker, 2004: 201.

⁴⁸ Misson, 1719: 304-305.

⁴⁹ Fielding, 1, 1742: 191.

the Manly Exercise of Boxing (1743), the famous fighter identifies pugilism as a brave and patriotic endeavour. He declares that “foreigners tremble less at the Firelock than the Fist of a Briton,” claiming that, in this respect, his brawny, athletic countrymen are the proud “inheritors of Greek and Roman virtues.”⁵⁰ In *The Connoisseur Magazine* of August of 1754, a defender of that “noble science of defence” makes a similar proclamation to that of Broughton:

The dexterous use of the fist is a truly British exercise; and the sturdy English have been as much renowned for their boxing as their beef; neither of which are by any means suited to the watery stomachs and weak sinews of their enemies the *French*. To this nutriment and this art is owing that long established maxim that one *Englishman* can beat three *Frenchmen*.⁵¹

It was this line of thinking that was behind a popular trope in graphic satire of the second half of the eighteenth century, in which burly plebeian Englishmen were pitted against spindly French fops to the delight of surrounding onlookers.⁵² Collet’s *The Frenchman in London* (fig. 3.18) is a perfect example of this conceit. The extant print, engraved by Charles White for Sayer and Smith in 1770, depicts a butcher – a purveyor of that uniquely English “nutriment” – shaking his fists at a tall, sinewy macaroni-type figure, who shrinks away, holding his hands up defensively in front of him. Behind the cowardly Frenchman is a pair of laughing prostitutes, one of whom pulls on his ludicrously long ponytail. Here, the lower class citizens of London are presented as honest, unaffected heroes of the street, who mock the vanity of fashionable fools.

In other prints, various plebeian figures are cast in the same role as the butcher – jack-tars, coachmen, and even market women. I now return to the plucky British fishwife,

⁵⁰ Broughton, 1743: 1-2.

⁵¹ *The Connoisseur*, No. 30 (August 1754): 364.

⁵² For other prints depicting Englishmen threatening Frenchmen, see: fig. 3.29; *The Frenchman at Market* (1770), BM No. 1868,0808.9932 ; *The Frenchman in Distress* (1784), BM No. 1935,0522.1.24; *The French Gentleman in London* (1772), BM No. 1922,0828.3.

who serves as the pugilistic protagonist in several patriotic satires in the final quarter of the century.⁵³ A characteristic example is *The Billingsgate Triumphant, or – Poll Dab a Match for the Frenchman* (fig. 3.19), a mezzotint published by Carington Bowles in 1775.⁵⁴ The fight between a young fishwife and a French coxcomb takes place beneath the signboard of the “Fighting Cocks” public house, and is observed by a small group of bystanders: the host who stands in the doorway; two tavern patrons who lean out the window, laughing; a grinning fishwife who motions to the fighters in a bid to attract more spectators; and an anxious fellow Frenchman, who holds his companion’s coat. While the fighting fishwife is nubile, rosy-cheeked, and plainly yet reasonably well-dressed, her opponent is made to appear foolish and debased. Having removed his coat, he is revealed to be both bare-chested and bare-bottomed, apparently only able to afford the luxurious fabric for the sleeves and collar of his shirt and the legs of his pantaloons. In a hand painted version of the image, the Frenchman is further humiliated through a splatter of blood that drips down his face and onto his white collar, and the odious evidence that he has just released his bowels out of fear.⁵⁵ As in several other prints of this kind, *The Billingsgate Triumphant* casts the pugilistic plebeian woman in a positive light. Her simplicity and fortitude are presented as inherently British values that stand in noble contrast to the weakness, effeminacy, and affectation of the nation’s enemies.

Collet’s work was thus produced in a period in which urban violence was widely considered to be not only entertaining, but intrinsically British. Moreover, in the arena of street-fighting, the members of the lower classes were frequently held up as earthy, no-nonsense heroes who triumphed over their pretentious social betters, often turning them

⁵³ For prints depicting market women threatening Frenchmen, see: *Irish Peg in a Rage...* (1773), BM No. 1877,1013.844; *A Cornish Hugg. Scene Billingsgate* (1781), BM No. 1880,1113.3392 ; *Sal Dab giving Monsieur a Receipt in full* (1786), BM No. 2010,7081.2072, etc.

⁵⁴ Stephens, 4, 1883: 722, BMSat. 4541.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

into the targets of laughter and ridicule. Images like *The Billingsgate Triumphant* can perhaps be read as an expression of the ‘carnavalesque,’ – that is, according to Mikhail Bakhtin, a cultural material that is shaped by the popular traditions of fairs, festivals, and markets, which typically presents a view of society that is subverted through humour and chaos.⁵⁶ Although, in *The Female Bruisers*, the contest is between two members of the same social class and nationality, one can nevertheless, relate these plebeian pugilists to the more positive, populist, and patriotic figures to be found in other contemporary ‘carnavalesque’ satires. The victorious female fighter on the left is visually and conceptually aligned with her brawny bottleholder, the butcher – that traditional emblem of British fortitude – while both women are set in suggestive contrast with the pair of well-dressed gentlemen in the background. These foppish figures, who react to the boxing prostitutes with apparent fear and indignation, seem to anticipate and serve a similar function to the eponymous character of Collet’s *The Frenchman in London*; the cowardliness and effeminacy of the macaronies are presented as the negative opposites to the brute strength and determination of the ‘female bruisers’, thus making the women triumphant figures, rather than mere objects of mockery.

Here, it is interesting to think afresh about the ways in which, at the Free Society of Artists’ exhibition of 1768, Collet’s imagery of brawny fighters played off the imagery of foppish masculinity found in the artist’s painting of *The Canonical Beau* (see: fig. 1), hanging nearby in the same display. Both images focus on figures who blatantly transgress normative gender roles, and as such, both can be read as censures against such behaviour. However, these works are also highly suggestive of the potentially positive, pleasurable,

⁵⁶ For Bakhtin on the ‘carnavalesque,’ see: Bakhtin, Iswolsky (trans.), 1984. For ‘carnavalesque’ readings of eighteenth-century art and culture, see: Castle, 1986; Solkin, 1993: Chapter 4; Stallybrass and White, 1987: Chapter 2.

and entertaining aspects and outcomes of this kind of “gender play.”⁵⁷ In *The Canonical Beau*, a dandified clergyman is made the object of adoring affection for a group of fawning demi-reps; and, in *The Female Bruisers*, a pair of pugilistic prostitutes serve as stalwart championesses of the street.

IV.

Although women pugilists were a real entity in the eighteenth century, the humour of Collet’s painting is obviously based on the incongruity of fist-fighting females. This example of women acting in ways that were more normally associated with men is not an isolated one within the artist’s output; indeed, he was responsible for the designs of over a dozen extant prints that focus on women behaving or dressing in a typically masculine manner.⁵⁸ These images are the focus of Patricia Crown’s aforementioned essay. While *The Female Bruisers* is briefly discussed in her account, Crown’s study is primarily concerned with the series of mezzotint drolls published by Carington Bowles in the late 1770s, depicting mostly attractive and fashionably dressed women engaging in activities like riding, hunting, skating, and bowling. Crown persuasively argues that these prints – which will be examined in more detail in the next chapter – are illustrative of the fact that Collet “possessed what we would call a ‘liberal’ attitude towards various behavioural phenomena that transgressed both class and gender boundaries.”⁵⁹ Here, I do not intend to argue explicitly against this assertion, but rather, I will shift the focus to Collet’s earlier image to see what further insight it might offer into the artist’s attitudes towards masculine women.

⁵⁷ For Dror Wahrman’s concept of “gender play,” see below: 167.

⁵⁸ See: Figs. 4.28-4.30, 4.49-4.50, 4.53; App. II, Nos. 12, 19, 45, 50f, 50k-50m, 50q, 50s-w, 50bb, 56, 58.

⁵⁹ Crown, 2002: 127.

There has been a wealth of modern scholarship on gender identity in the long eighteenth century, much of which argues that attitudes towards gender transgression fluctuated, and that in certain periods and places, traditional boundaries could be pushed with some degree of impunity.⁶⁰ Dror Wahrman, for example, has postulated that, before the final two decades of the century, metropolitan Georgians were generally more relaxed about gender categories, and that, in various contexts, such as the theatre and fashion, the limits of these categories were tested. To illustrate his proposed transition from “gender play” to “gender panic,” Wahrman uses the trope of the Amazon, or warrior woman, which went from having a primarily positive connotation to an undeniably negative one at the turn of the century. Dianna Dugaw has also written about the eighteenth-century warrior woman in the context of popular balladry and has argued that this common stock character was embraced because it combined the positive male attributes of strength and bravery with typically female attributes, like passion and sensuality. However, even in an allegedly more accepting period, warrior women were almost always cast as an oddity. Eighteenth-century descriptions of real-life fighting females, even those that incorporate positive adjectives, usually characterise these women as aberrations. Remember that the advertisement for Stokes’s Amphitheatre proclaimed that the female combatants were the only ones of their kind in Europe; or, consider the Swiss visitor César de Saussure’s description of the “women gladiators” he saw performing at a London amphitheatre:

I witnessed an extraordinary combat, two women being the champions. As soon as they appeared on stage they then saluted each other and engaged in a lively amusing conversation. They boasted that they had a great amount of courage, strength and intrepidity. One of them regretted she was not born a man [...].⁶¹

⁶⁰ For gender identity and gender transgression in the long eighteenth-century, see for example: Dugaw, 1989; Kittredge (ed.), 2004; Nussbaum, 2003; Rizzo, 2002; Wahrman, 1998; Wahrman, 2004.

⁶¹ de Saussure, Van Muyden (trans.), 1995: 277.

These fighting women are shown to be “extraordinary,” “amusing,” and, ultimately, born into the wrong sex. He concludes: “Fortunately, it is very rarely one hears of women gladiators.”

Recently, Betty Rizzo has suggested that the eighteenth-century plebeian woman who engaged in violent sport was perceived to be of a different species from genteel women, and because of this, her strange, unfeminine behaviour and appearance could be explained and rationalised by her ‘otherness.’ So, the fact that upper class men encouraged fights between lower class viragos was not so much evidence of their enlightened attitudes towards gender transgression; rather, it suggests that that they viewed these women as subhuman. Rizzo explains:

Plebeian women [...] to accentuate their difference and to suggest their mere animality, could be pitted against one another physically for public sport. Gambling was a universal preoccupation of the time, and so men pitted cocks, dogs, horses, boxers, plebeian males and plebeian women against each other.⁶²

Indeed, this ignominious process of zoomorphication is implied in *The Female Bruisers* by the parallel drawn between the fighting women and the fighting cocks. While the fallen fighter has been literally lowered to the level of the nearby beasts, the triumphant fighter is further dehumanised by virtue of her strange appearance; the disparity between her pretty gown and her brawny physique results in a grotesque hybridisation.⁶³ Undeniably, there is a freakish quality about these viragos, and the possibility that they are specimens of a curious ‘third sex’ is also suggested by the corresponding pair of macaronies in the background, who, ironically, recoil at the site of the androgynous women.

⁶² Rizzo, 2002: 78.

⁶³ In his theory of the ‘carnavalesque,’ Bakhtin identifies the combination or transformation of human into animal as a characteristic of the ‘grotesque,’ see: Bakhtin, Iswolsky (trans.), 1984: 316.

As Wahrman, Dugaw, and others have shown, the masculine female fighter in all her various incarnations – including those of the Amazon, female knight, and female gladiator – was a popular preoccupation of the Early Modern period. On the one hand, she represented a site of fantasy; an alluring embodiment of the positive attributes of both genders, and as such, she emerged in popular ballads, in the theatre, and at the masquerade.⁶⁴ But she was also, like the fop or macaroni figure, a source of anxiety; a challenge to accepted gender-norms and traditional male authority.⁶⁵ One means of pacifying this anxiety was the use of humour, and thus, throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there were countless comic images that reinforced traditional gender categories through holding up the combative woman as a negative exemplum of femininity.

Brawling women were a recurring motif in graphic satire of the seventeenth century. They appeared, for example, in ‘the battle for the breeches,’ a popular comic conceit of the period, which can be seen in a mid-seventeenth-century Dutch engraving (fig. 3.20) once owned by the English antiquarian and publisher John Bagford.⁶⁶ In it, a tangled mass of market women wrestle for a pair of men’s breeches, symbolising their efforts to usurp male power. Elsewhere, fighting females are used to illustrate the notion that, when left to their own devices and in their own company, women are apt to quarrel. Such quarrelling was associated in particular with the figure of the gossip, one of the most ubiquitous of negative female stereotypes in the Early Modern period. Although the original definition of a ‘gossip’ was a close friend or relation, it began to take on a more negative connotation in the seventeenth century when it was increasingly associated with

⁶⁴ In addition to discussing the female warrior in popular balladry, Dugaw also describes women cross-dressing at masquerades (137-139). For female soldiers and other ‘breeches parts,’ see: Friedman-Romell, 1995; Wahrman, 1998.

⁶⁵ Nussbaum, 2003: particularly Chapter 2. For more general theorising on gender transgression and anxiety, see: Garber, 1992.

⁶⁶ For the ‘battle of the breeches’ motif in Dutch art, see: Moffitt Peacock, 1989: Chapter 3 (unpublished).

female homosocial behaviour.⁶⁷ From this point onwards, a gossip connoted not only a person who gossiped, but more generally, a noisy, disruptive, and independent woman.⁶⁸ Gossips were often made the objects of lighthearted ridicule in broadside ballads and verses, and they sometimes appeared in the woodcut illustrations that adorned them.⁶⁹ An exceptionally sophisticated example is *Tittle-Tattle; or the Several Branches of Gossiping* (fig. 3.21), a woodcut that derives from a much earlier French etching, and which now survives in the form of a seventeenth-century impression in the Pepys Collection, and in a later, mid-eighteenth-century impression in the British Museum.⁷⁰ It also served as the basis for a similar, mid-seventeenth-century print by Wenceslaus Hollar (fig. 3.22) and shares the same title and structure as a contemporaneous etching published in Strasburg, altogether pointing towards the pervasiveness and familiarity of the subject and composition.⁷¹ Illustrating a set of humorous verses below, the image depicts women in their various venues for gossiping, which include the childbed, the church, the market, and the alehouse. At the centre of the composition (fig. 3.23), next to the conduit or town water supply, are two brawling women, surrounded by a group of spectators who spur them on. Fighting females, thus, appear to have been a long-standing source of humour and entertainment.

More than a century after *Tittle-Tattle* was first issued, imprints of the same woodblock were made and sold, and at the same time, the gossip continued to appear in

⁶⁷ The *OED* states that the origin for ‘gossip’ is: “late Old English, *godsibb*, ‘a godfather, godmother, baptismal sponser,’ literally related to one in God [...]. In Middle English the sense was a close friend, a person with whom one gossips [...].” In the seventeenth century, ‘gossip’ was also used to refer to the women who attended a woman during her labour and lying-in, and therefore, it was gendered female.

⁶⁸ For gossips, gossiping, and female homosociability in the Early Modern period, see: Capp, particularly Chapters 2 and 5; Pennington, 2010; Thomas, S.S., “Gossips in Early Modern England,” <http://englishhistoryauthors.blogspot.co.uk/search/label/Samuel%20Thomas> (assessed January 11, 2012).

⁶⁹ For examples of ballads, verses, and satirical broadsides about gossips, see: *Fowre Wittie Gossips... Disposed to be Merry...* (ca. 1632), ballad, Pepys Collection, 1.436-437; *The Seven Merry Wives of London: or, The Gossips Complaint against their Husbands* (ca. 1664), ballad, Pepys Collection, 5.413; *The Ship-Load of Scolding Women...* (London: 1715), satirical broadside, BL; Samuel Rowlands, *Well Met Gossip: or, Tis Merrie When Gossips Meete* (London: 1619), book of verses, BL.

⁷⁰ Jones, 2010.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

new, albeit derivative, publications like *The New Art and Mystery of Gossiping* (1760), a pamphlet containing a crude woodcut of two bickering, foul-mouthed gossips (fig. 3.24). As Sheila O’Connell has demonstrated, the quarrelling gossips – along with other traditional chauvinistic subjects, featuring loud and abrasive female stereotypes – were an enduring mainstay for British print publishers, and belonged to a common visual language, which was read and understood by all factions of English society.⁷²

Returning once again to *The Female Bruisers*, the viewer will immediately recognise the iconography of brawling women as a vestige of a traditional, popular, and unashamedly misogynistic form of humour. From this perspective, the image appears to cast plebeian women in an especially unflattering light. It might be useful to consider these lower-class subjects in relation to the kinds of stock-figures that proliferated the artist’s images of the comic countryside. It will be recalled that, in some respects, Collet’s rustics appeared to fit the hearty, healthy, and primarily positive stereotypes that existed about the rural labouring classes; and yet, these subjects also seemed to be the target of an imperious laughter, which mocked their crude, rude, and ridiculous behaviour. These were, of course, the same boorish subjects of Dutch genre painting, and mock-pastoral poetry. Likewise, Collet’s ‘female bruisers’ were rooted in an old-fashioned mode of comedy, and could similarly be viewed as both feisty figures of fun, and objects of mocking derision.

V.

It has become clear that *The Female Bruisers* was, in many ways, a very conventional comic image of the period, which recycled traditional themes, stock characters, and iconography that would have been familiar and commonplace to most

⁷² O’Connell, 1999: 109-118.

contemporary viewers. At the same time, a vulgar and violent image such as this would have sat uncomfortably with those reformers of comedy, who were attempting to rescue the genre from its traditionally low status by emphasising its beneficial qualities, and by promoting a form of laughter that was amiable and benevolent.⁷³ Literary scholars and historians have charted the evolution of comic theory and criticism over the course of the long eighteenth century, convincingly demonstrating that earlier negative connotations of laughter were gradually replaced with a newer “congenial theory,” which presented laughter, in Stuart Tave’s words, as a “free, kindly, [and] natural expression,” inspired by good nature and empathy, rather than malice and scorn.⁷⁴

The most prominent conception of laughter in the Early Modern period was provided by Thomas Hobbes, who famously proclaimed in his *Leviathan* (1651) that:

Sudden glory, is the passion which maketh those *grimaces* called LAUGHTER; and is caused either by some sudden act of their own, that pleaseth them; or by the apprehension of some deformed thing in another, by comparison whereof they suddenly applaud themselves.⁷⁵

In this formulation, the only benefit of laughter is that it can be used as a weapon against those deserving of ridicule, but Hobbes’s definition is equally suggestive of the possibility that the target could be innocent – his or her deformity unavoidable – and therefore, undeserving of ridicule. In either case, the person laughing can only be characterised as unsympathetic and imperious. This unappealing notion of laughter was perpetuated into the eighteenth century by men like Steele and Addison, who urged their countrymen to strive to exhibit more compassion for their fellow man.⁷⁶ Paraphrasing Hobbes, Steele ruminates

⁷³ For scholarship on eighteenth-century comic theory, see: Billig, 2005: Chapter 4; Dickie, 2011: Chapter 4; Draper, 1938; Tave, 1960.

⁷⁴ Tave, 1960: viii-ix.

⁷⁵ Hobbes, 1651: vi.

⁷⁶ For Steel and Addison on Hobbesian laughter, see: Addison, *The Spectator*, Number 47 (24 April, 1711); Addison, *The Spectator*, Number 249 (15 December, 1711); Steele, 1764: 71.

on the cruelty of laughter in the epilogue to *The Lying Lover* (1703): “Laughter’s a Distorted Passion, born of Sudden Self-Esteem and Scorn [...]. While generous Pity of a Painted Woe Makes us ourselves both more approve and know [...].”⁷⁷

As early as the 1720s, however, efforts were made to promote a new, more positive understanding of laughter. Francis Hutcheson was among the first philosophers of the eighteenth century to devote serious attention to this subject. In the first of three essays published in the *Dublin Journal* in 1725, Hutcheson challenges Hobbes’s influential theory, maintaining that there are many occasions for laughter in which the person laughing does not need to imagine themselves to be superior to some other thing.⁷⁸ It is possible, he argues, to both venerate and find humour in something, giving the examples of *Don Quixote* (1604) and *Hudibras* (1684), which simultaneously honour and parody the epic poetry of Homer and Virgil. Hutcheson also refutes the notion that a feeling of superiority instinctively moves one to laughter. He sarcastically muses: “It must be a very merry state in which a fine gentleman is, when well dressed in his coach, he passes our streets, where he will see so many ragged beggars, and porters and chairman sweating at their labour, on every side of him.”

After having demonstrated the problems inherent with Hobbes’s ‘superiority’ theory, in his second essay, Hutcheson puts forward a different theory of laughter, based upon the concept of incongruity, which would prove to be instrumental in subsequent writings on comedy in the eighteenth century. Drawing on Addison’s ruminations on ‘wit’ and ‘surprise,’ Hutcheson maintains that the most common cause of laughter is the bringing together of two disparate or unexpected ideas or things. “This *Contrast*,” he writes, “between Ideas of *Grandeur, Dignity, Sanctity, Perfection*, and Ideas of *Meanness*,

⁷⁷ Steele, *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Hutcheson, 1758: 5-7.

Baseness, and *Profanity*, seems to be the very spirit of *Burlesque*; and the greatest Part of our Raillery and Jest are founded upon it[...].”⁷⁹

Laughter, then, could be an innocent, natural expression, and moreover, as Hutcheson argues in his third essay, it could be both a mental restorative and a successful means of promoting sociability. He reminds us that: “Everyone is conscious that a state of Laughter is an easy and agreeable state [...]. [T]he recurring or suggestion of ludicrous images tends to dispel fretfulness, anxiety, or sorrow, and to reduce the mind to an easy, happy state,” and that, “laughter, like other affections, is very contagious; our whole frame is so sociable, that one merry countenance may diffuse cheerfulness to many.”⁸⁰

Several of the most influential writers and philosophers of the eighteenth century echoed Hutcheson’s sentiments on laughter, championing a form of comedy that was pure and innocent. In another widely cited work, Fielding’s Preface to *Joseph Andrews*, the author promotes what he calls the “comic epic-poem in prose,” a kind of literary work he compares and contrasts with theatrical burlesque, which he argues, “contributes more to exquisite mirth and laughter than any other; and [...] [is] probably more wholesome physic for the mind [...] than is generally imagined.”⁸¹ Like Hutcheson, Fielding stresses that most respectable people do not laugh at the suffering of others, but instead find humour in affectation, or the vanity and hypocrisy of man, and “from the discovery of this affectation arises the ridiculous – which always strikes the reader with surprize and pleasure.”⁸² Thus, for Fielding, affectation is a form of incongruity. Moreover, he is very careful to show that it is only from affectation that misfortunes and calamities become comical. He argues,

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*: 19.

⁸⁰ Hutcheson, 1758: 26-27.

⁸¹ Fielding, 1, 1742: viii-ix.

⁸² *Ibid.*: xiv.

“Surely he hath a very ill-framed mind who can look on ugliness, infirmity, or poverty, as ridiculous in themselves.”⁸³

The reissuing of Hutcheson’s essays as *Reflections upon Laughter*, first in 1750, and again in 1758, seems to have galvanised a number of thinkers to turn their attentions to laughter. In particular, a generation of primarily Scottish philosophers, which included James Beattie, Adam Ferguson, Alexander Gerard, and Lord Kames, wrote on this subject, and among them, it was agreed that the Hobbesian laughter was a false laughter, while true laughter was innocent and joyful.⁸⁴ As Abraham Tucker put it in *The Light of Nature Pursued* (1768):

[...] every one sees the difference between a hearty laugh of real joy and a scornfull sneer or a grin expressing a claim to superiority: the laugh of contempt is a forced laugh showing signs of gladness in the countenance but not making the heart merry, and encouraged not so much to please ourselves but to vex others.⁸⁵

It was also during this period that Hutcheson’s protégé, Adam Smith, published his first great tome, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). This work expounds on human morality, and its dependence on sympathy between agent and spectator, or in other words, the spectator’s ability to identify with or imagine themselves in the position of the agent. Smith argues that the capacity for sympathy motivates acts of charity and general social harmony. Here, laughter is also addressed briefly, but for the philosopher, it sits uncomfortably with the concept of sympathy. In a throwback to Hobbes, Smith states:

There is, besides, a malice in mankind, which not only prevents all sympathy with little uneasiness, but renders them in some measure diverting. Hence, the delight which we take in raillery, and in

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ For a discussion of these mid-eighteenth-century philosophers’ writings on laughter, see: Tave, 1960: particularly Chapters 3 and 4.

⁸⁵ Tucker, 1768: 87.

the small vexation which we observe in our companion, when he is pushed, and urged, and teared upon all sides.⁸⁶

But for others, like Beattie, for example, these small ‘vexations’ were innocent sources of amusement, and when it really counted, sympathy always triumphed over malice.⁸⁷

The relationship of Collet’s image to such discourses is once again complex and dualised. On the one hand, a strong case can be made for the ‘female bruisers’ being exempla of incongruity – affectation, even – and as such, they would be seen as acceptable sources of laughter in the eyes of someone like Fielding. Though they are women, the bruisers behave as men, and though lewd and low-born, the victorious virago dresses in fine clothing that belies her true social station. On the other hand, it does not seem in keeping with the benevolent-laughter model that the viewer is encouraged to laugh at the downfall of a poor, and possibly crippled prostitute, nor does it seem just that a naïve, slack-jawed young rustic, one of the captive audience members, has been made the victim of a guileful pickpocket. One gets a definite sense of that “sudden glory” arising from one’s own feelings of superiority, and so, it seems that Collet is inviting a rather more ambivalent laughter than the sort that was prescribed by his righteous contemporaries.

In the wake of the contemporary debates on the nature and ethics of laughter, *The Female Bruisers* would, no doubt, have been problematic for some, but for others, laughter would be an instinctual response. Because there was a longstanding and deeply engrained belief that social hierarchies were part of God’s plan, the poor, the disabled, the feeble-minded, and various other ‘low’ members of society were, for many, “habitual and unquestioned” figures of fun.⁸⁸ In Dickie’s words, “the casual pleasures of laughing at the ignorance, vulgarity, or poor personal hygiene of one’s inferiors [...] [was] for a

⁸⁶ Smith, 1759: 91.

⁸⁷ Beattie, 1776: 202-203, 431.

⁸⁸ Dickie, 2011: 112.

significant portion of the privileged classes, [the] sort of laughter [that] heightened the joy of life.” These were, assuredly, the same sorts of people who found pleasure in instigating boxing matches between plebeian women. Thus, in a period in which older, hierarchical views of society coexisted with newer, more enlightened and sympathetic ones, the responses to Collet’s painting surely ranged from laughter to pity, and from disapproval to disgust, or maybe even complete indifference.

VI.

A closer look at two of Collet’s other paintings will serve to demonstrate the extent to which the multifaceted representation of urban violence found in *The Female Bruisers* was duplicated elsewhere in his output. *A Rescue or the Tars Triumphant* (fig. 3.25), a comic canvas illustrating a brawl between a band of sailors and the night watch, was painted and publically exhibited in 1767, and published as a mezzotint engraving (fig. 3.26) by Butler Clowes the following year.⁸⁹ Like *The Female Bruisers*, the exact narrative and intended meaning of *A Rescue* is somewhat ambiguous – or at least it is to the modern viewer. As the title would suggest, the brawl between the sailors and the night watch seems to have been triggered by the sailors’ efforts to liberate a pair of young women from the confines of a coach. These women are in all likelihood the victims of a kidnapper, probably the man who now lies prostrate and disgracefully de-wigged on the cobblestone street in the foreground, where he nurses a bloody gash on his bare head. On the ground, next to this man, is a Middlesex warrant for “J. Seale,” thus indicating he is a known and wanted criminal. For reasons that are unclear, a corpulent “Peace-Officer” and his club-wielding henchmen attempt to intervene on this valiant act, as a gallery of amused

⁸⁹ FSA, 1767: 7.

spectators look down on the scene from the upper-storey windows of a nearby inn. The crowd's sympathies are confirmed in the form of a small piece of paper being held up by one of the female companions of the kidnap victims, which reads "Hearts of Oak are Our Men," a paraphrased line taken from a contemporary song written by Garrick, which lionises the British navy.⁹⁰

Here, Collet employs another popular stock character of eighteenth-century pictorial satire – the common English sailor, or jack-tar.⁹¹ Existing as the male equivalent to the feisty fishwife, the jack-tar was often used in comic prints to symbolise the robust spirit and strength of the English working class. This figure can be recognised even in the most crowded compositions by his trademark rounded hat and baggy (usually striped) pants, such as can be seen in several prints from the first half of the century, including *Greenwich Hill or Holyday Gambols* (fig. 3.27), where a dancing sailor is one of a large party of plebeian revellers, and *The View and Humours of Billingsgate* (fig. 3.28), in which a mischievous jack-tar contributes to the mayhem of the marketplace by tying a dead fish to the queue of a well-dressed gentleman. In the final quarter of the century, the jack-tar increasingly took centre stage. He sometimes served as a stalwart defender of the nation, like in a mezzotint of 1779 (fig. 3.29) which casts the sailor in the familiar role of the patriotic pugilist; and elsewhere he appeared as a vigorous and virile young swain, like in a contemporary mezzotint, which depicts the sailor as the amorous paramour of a cheerful prostitute (see: fig. 5.1). In either case, the sailor was a primarily positive figure, who, in

⁹⁰ David Garrick's poem "Heart of Oak" was set to music by William Boyce for a pantomime called *The Harlequin's Invasion*, which was first performed at the Drury Lane Theatre in 1759. The song was written in honour of the recent British naval victories of the Seven Years' War. The chorus begins: "Heart of Oak are our ships, heart of oak are our men." It was printed in several song books throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Today, it serves as the official march of the British navy. See: *The Muse's Delight...*, 1760: 67-68; Ogasapian, 2004: 100.

⁹¹ The ubiquity of sailors in eighteenth-century graphic satire has been taken for granted in modern scholarship. They are mentioned briefly in the following studies: Atherton, 1978: 53; Donald, 1996: 114; George, 1967: 41-42; McCreery, 2009: 49-50.

McCreery's words, represented the "acceptable, patriotic face of plebeian society."⁹² Notably, Collet seems to have had a particular penchant for this popular stock character, employing the sailor in a half dozen or so of his comic works,⁹³ including for example, the aforementioned prints, *An Holland Smock* (see: fig. 1.51) in which a playful jack-tar dangles on a tree branch, and one of the plates from the *Collet's Designs* series (see: fig. 1.37), wherein a sailor plays the conventional role of the amorous suitor. In the context of Collet's *oeuvre*, the jack-tar is apparently as at home in the countryside as he is in the city.

In contrast to sailors, members of law enforcement, like night watchmen, were more routinely cast as negative figures in contemporary popular culture. Before the existence of an organised police force in England, crime prevention and apprehension were carried out by a combination of low-level civil servants, volunteer constables, and civilian 'thief-takers,' who would assist in solving petty crime for a fee.⁹⁴ Because they were usually poorly paid (or not paid at all) and deeply enmeshed in the city's criminal underworld, these men were widely believed to be motivated by bribes and rewards, rather than by peace and justice.⁹⁵ Even the elite force of professional crime investigators founded by Chief Magistrate Fielding in 1749 (known colloquially as 'Mr. Fielding's People' and later the 'Bow Street Runners')⁹⁶ were viewed with skepticism.⁹⁷ As such, in contemporary graphic satire, men of the law were variously depicted as duplicitous, greedy, inept, and foolish.⁹⁸ A particularly apposite example of this kind of imagery is *The Midnight Magistrate, or the Humours of a Watch House* (fig. 3.30), a frequently reissued

⁹² McCreery, *Ibid.*

⁹³ For Collet's other sailor images, see: App. Nos. 24.1r, 42, 50d, 50i, 50t.

⁹⁴ For eighteenth-century law enforcement, see: Babington, 1969; Beattie, 2012; Friedman, 2005; "Policing in London," <http://www.oldbaileyonline.org/static/Policing.jsp> (accessed 1 October, 2013).

⁹⁵ "Policing in London," *ibid.*

⁹⁶ For the 'Bow Street Runners,' see: Armitage, 1932; Beattie, 2012.

⁹⁷ Shoemaker, 2004: 22, 42-43.

⁹⁸ See for example: *The Constable of the Night's Ramble* (1771), BM No. 2010,7081.2908; *The Hireling-Constable* (1780), BM No. 2010,7081.1139; *Injured Innocence, or the Covent Garden Night Prowler in Limbo* (ca. 1760-1780), BM No. 2010,7081.1161; *The Night Constable* (1785), BM No. J,7.19; *The Well Fed English Constable* (1771), BM No. 1865,0610.1103.

satire designed by Egbert van Heemskirk, which was first published as a line-engraving by William Tingham in 1734.⁹⁹ It depicts the dimly lit interior of a watch-house in which the roles of the night watchmen and their captured criminals are played by anthropomorphised animals. A tremulous young woman, with the face of a cat, is brought before the pompous magistrate, a grinning monkey, who leers at his prisoner, as the light of a candle passes over her fragile form. A rambling doggerel verse appended to the image further elucidates the corrupt nature of the “Midnight Magistrate” and his men, revealing that this woman and her beau (the male cat behind her) have been falsely accused of breaking the watchmen’s lanterns, and must pay handsomely for their exoneration. It dourly concludes: “All Damages, tho’ Shammed, are Paid, and the Hero [is] to his home conveyed.”

It is possible, then, to interpret the night watchmen in *A Rescue* as corrupt characters, who intercede on an act of vigilante justice in order so they can profit from their own arrest of a wanted criminal. The valiant sailors, on the other hand, appear to serve the interests of their fellow citizens. In this respect, Collet’s painting recalls a real-life event in which a band of vigilante sailors took forceful action against crime and corruption in the nation’s capital. This violent protest began on the 1 July, 1749, after a trio of sailors were robbed by a prostitute in a brothel on the Strand.¹⁰⁰ The sailors swore vengeance on this house of ill repute and returned later that evening with an army of fellow tars, who proceeded to ransack the building. The following night, the sailors continued their “expedition against bawdy houses,” which they now determined to be a “Holy War.”¹⁰¹ Rather than being alarmed by the wave of violence, it was reported that most of the local inhabitants were pleased to be rid of their nefarious neighbours, and many of

⁹⁹ Modified versions of this image were sold by several different publishers, see: Elisha Kirkall’s *Midnight Magistrate* (ca. 1740), BM No. 1880,0807.36; Robert Sayer’s *The Constable of the Night* (ca. 1772), BM No. 2010,7081.3009; and Fielding and Walker’s *The Midnight Magistrate* (1779), BM No. 1877,1013.828.

¹⁰⁰ For the ‘Strand’ or ‘Penlez’ Riots, see: Barrett and Harris (eds.), 1998: 163-164; McLynn, 1989: 223-224.

¹⁰¹ Cleland, 1750: 16, 24.

them happily joined the frenzied mob.¹⁰² Because it was widely believed that the city's wealthy brothel owners were protected by corrupt magistrates, ordinary citizens felt compelled to take matters into their own hands.¹⁰³ This episode – now known as the Penlez Riots¹⁰⁴ in honour of one of the tried and convicted participants – was memorialised in a number of satirical prints, including Charles Mosley's *The Tar's Triumph, or Bawdy-House Battery* (fig. 3.31), from which Collet seems to have derived the subtitle for his later painting.¹⁰⁵ In this anarchic scene, a pair of sailors lay waste to an upscale brothel, throwing its lavish contents onto a roaring bonfire, as fashionably dressed prostitutes and their rakish clients fearfully flee for safety. Expressing the popular consensus at the time, the image suggests that the victims of violence are decadent and deviant, and therefore, deserving of their cruel fate at the hands of the unruly tars.

In light of such prevailing attitudes and pictorial precedents, the interpretation of *A Rescue* would seem to be clear. Collet's painting appears to belong to that category of 'carnavalesque' imagery in which earthy plebeian protagonists are shown to turn unsavoury authority figures into the objects of laughter and ridicule. However, once again, there is some room for equivocation when we consider the focal point of the scene – the brutish, craggy-faced sailor with the wooden leg, shown lifting one of the kidnap victims to safety. Though clearly a heroic character, the disparity between his noble actions and ignoble appearance must have struck many contemporary viewers as being particularly comical. Indeed, in the eighteenth century, people with wooden legs were a common source of comic relief.¹⁰⁶ In broadside ballads, for example, peg-legged beggars were traditionally portrayed as amusing harlequin figures, as in *The Beggars' Chorus, or the Jovial Crew*, a

¹⁰² *Ibid.*: 19.

¹⁰³ Donald, 1996: 114.

¹⁰⁴ Bosavern Penlez (c. 1726-1749) was a wig maker who was executed for his participation in the 1749 riots. He was widely seen as a sympathetic figure, whose execution was a miscarriage of justice. For Penlez, see: *ODNB*.

¹⁰⁵ Stephens, 1877, 3: 749, BMSat. 3036.

¹⁰⁶ For 'deformity' comedy in the eighteenth century, see: Dickie, 2001: Chapter 2; Lund, 2005.

popular seventeenth-century song that was still being printed as late as 1750 (fig. 3.32).¹⁰⁷ They also served as clownish ancillary characters in poetry, prose, and the theatre, such as the peg-legged fiddler, Crowdero, in Samuel Butler's famed quixotic tale *Hudibras*, subsequently depicted by Hogarth in his celebrated illustrations (fig. 3.33). Collet himself casts peg-legged characters in a number of his comic works, including for example, the fallen prostitute in *The Female Bruisers*, the scorned suitor in *The Canonical Beau*, and the amorous sailor in *The Mutual Embrace* (fig. 3.34) – a mezzotint published by Sayer in 1774. In life, these same types of figures were often subjected to cruel physical pranks, and were even forced to compete in mock-races for the amusement of others, as in an event that reportedly took place at Newmarket in April of 1762, described as a race between “the wooden leg walker” and a “hamstringed hog.”¹⁰⁸

Peg-legged sailors and soldiers, though they risked their lives in the line of duty, were not wholly immune to such raillery. The sailor's wooden leg served as the punch line in several widely circulated jokes that were frequently reprinted in jestbooks throughout the period. In one humorous anecdote, a sea captain has his wooden leg taken off by a cannon ball, and when a fellow seaman calls for a surgeon, the captain calls out: “No, no, the carpenter will do.”¹⁰⁹ In a similar tale, a “brave tar” with a wooden leg has the other shot off in battle, and “notwithstanding the poignancy of his agonies [...] he could not suppress his joke (saying) ‘It was high time to leave off play, when his last pin was bowled down.’”¹¹⁰ Though typically cast as courageous heroes, peg-legged sailors nevertheless remained comic figures even as they lay mortally wounded. In a similar fashion, the “Hearts of Oak” inscription in Collet's canvas can now perhaps be read as a humorous

¹⁰⁷ See also: *The Beggars Delight* (ca. 1600s), Pepys Collection, 4.253; *The Jovial Beggars Merry Crew* (ca. 1671), BL; *The Merry Beggars of Lincolns-Inns Fields* (ca. 1685), Pepys Collection, 4.252.

¹⁰⁸ *London Chronicle* (15 April, 1762). For practical jokes against the disabled, see: Dickie, 2011: 47, 67-75.

¹⁰⁹ *Yorick: or the King's Jester...*, 1761: 10. The same joke appeared in later publications such as *The Court Jester or Museum of Entertainment* (ca. 1795) and *The City Jester or Festival of Momus* (ca. 1795).

¹¹⁰ *The Covent Garden Jester...*, ca. 1780: 43. The same joke appeared in later publications, see fn 109.

double-entendre, referencing both the bravery of the British sailor, and the material used for his wooden leg.

It is revealing that even the champions of sympathy and benevolent laughter acknowledged that it was difficult to resist laughing at people with wooden legs.¹¹¹ Beattie, for example, admitted in his “Essay on Laughter and Ludicrous Composition” (1776) that “a wooden leg might perhaps appear ludicrous from the striking contrast of incongruity and similitude, and in fact, we find that [Samuel] Butler has made both himself and his readers merry with an implement of this sort [...]”¹¹² Moreover, in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith mused about the difficulty in sympathising with a figure with a missing leg, remarking that “it would be a ridiculous tragedy [...] [if] the catastrophe was to turn on a loss of this kind.”¹¹³ Smith here suggests that the notion of a tragic hero with a wooden leg is inherently ridiculous.¹¹⁴ This seems to be precisely the point of Collet’s triumphant tar – another of the artist’s plebeian subjects that can simultaneously be seen as an earthy working class hero, and an object of condescending mockery.

VII.

A final example of Collet’s canon of comically violent subjects provides what is probably the artist’s most confounding depiction of urban conflict. This painting of 1770 (fig. 3.35), now preserved in the Yale Center for British Art, depicts the aftermath of a swordfight between two well-dressed gentlemen in a crowded London thoroughfare. Its original title is unknown due to the fact that it was apparently never exhibited, nor turned into a reproductive engraving, and it is now known variously as *The Bath Fly* (taken from

¹¹¹ Dickie, 2011: 93-94.

¹¹² Beattie, 1776: 431. Beattie here refers to Crowdero in Butler’s *Hudibras*.

¹¹³ Smith, 1759: 56.

¹¹⁴ Dickie, 2011: 94.

the name inscribed on the passing coach), *The Brawl Outside the Golden Fleece* (referring to the signboard in the background), and simply, and perhaps most appropriately, *A Scene in a London Street*.¹¹⁵ In addition to being one of Collet's most enigmatic works, it is also the most complex and detailed of his street scenes, featuring a vast array of material objects, a crowd of colourful urban characters, and a profusion of emblematic and textual devices. However, despite this abundance of suggestive visual clues, the painting has so far evaded straightforward interpretation, though some modern scholars have made considerable efforts to decipher this painting's tangled symbolism.¹¹⁶

In particular, Collet's conspicuous use of legible signboards has compelled researchers to attempt to assign a real-life location for this fictional fracas. The familiar emblem of the golden sheep on a signboard in the background has contributed to the hypothesis that the scene takes place in Bridges Street, Covent Garden, near where the artist used to live, and where once stood a notoriously dangerous tavern called *The Fleece*.¹¹⁷ However, as Harry Mount has pointed out, this establishment had closed down nearly eighty years before Collet produced the image, and as such, the signboard more likely advertises "the Original Blanket Warehouse" seen below – the 'Golden Fleece' being a traditional insignia used by woollen drapers.¹¹⁸ In fact, Collet's signboard includes the company name "Jason & Co." inscribed beneath the insignia, and thus it is unlikely to have meant to represent the infamous tavern. Because there is no record of any business with this name operating in London at the time, Mount has surmised that this sign and others – "The New Bagnio," "Young Ladies Genteely Educated Up this Court," and "Peter

¹¹⁵ This painting was sold at Christie's in 1958 as *A Brawl outside the Golden Fleece* (25 July, 1958, Lot 108); it was later referred to as *The Bath Fly* in Patricia Crown's exhibition catalogue for *British Art 1730-1830 from the Yale Center for British Art* (Crown, 1988: 18); it is currently catalogued in the YCBA as *Scene in a London Street*, with the subtitle *The Bath Fly* (Accession No. B1981.25.110). See: App. I, No. 14.

¹¹⁶ Crown, 1988: 18; Gatrell, 2013: 231; Mount, 1989 (unpublished).

¹¹⁷ Crown, 1988: 18; this notion seems to derive from an unattributed note in the YCBA's file on the painting.

¹¹⁸ Mount, 1989: 3.

Probe, Surgeon” – refer to a pervading sexual subtext, rather than to existing establishments.¹¹⁹ Though it can be closely associated with the rough and seedy environment of Covent Garden, the location here is probably another of the artist’s imagined urban settings.

The narrative of the painting is similarly elusive, partly because the scene depicts the moment after a violent confrontation, rather than the confrontation itself. Moreover, the composition is muddled with a large cast of characters, many of whom cannot be easily identified by modern viewers, and whose relevance and participation in the primary narrative is unclear. The canvas can be broken down into several subsets of figural groups, the most central of which includes the male combatants. These elegantly attired swordsmen, who are clearly representative of a much higher caste than the fighters found in Collet’s other images, have been speculated by Crown to be a naval officer (the preening victor) and a soldier (the fallen failure).¹²⁰ This would seem to be in keeping with the artist’s tendency to mock foppish soldiers – as previously seen in *A Love Match*¹²¹ – and to valorise members of the navy. But because the opponents appear to be of roughly equivalent ranks, the image resists the ‘carnavalesque’ readings that are possible for the artist’s other violent subjects. At any rate, neither opponent is presented in a particularly positive light. The vanquished soldier, the more degraded of the two, is revealed to be an inexperienced and ineffectual combatant; a book entitled “Peter Parry on the Use of the Small Sword,” pokes out from his pocket, but the instruction manual has apparently been of little help. During the course of the duel, he has collided with a market woman, inadvertently skewering one of her baskets with his sword. In defeat, he is further emasculated by this sturdy street seller, who holds him down, as she wrestles the defused

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ Crown, *ibid.* Mount is sceptical of this identification because the standing figure’s costume is not reflective of any known naval uniform of the period.

¹²¹ See: Chapter 2: 85-86.

weapon from his weakened grasp. The naval officer, meanwhile, is a dubious and decidedly un-magnanimous victor. He, too, has lost control of his sword in battle, and now brandishes a small dagger, which he uses to taunt the watchmen in the background. If it were not for his haughty air and apparent contempt for his fellow citizens – he seems unbothered by the disgruntled market woman in the left foreground – he would appear to serve a similar role to the triumphant tars in Collet's earlier painting.

It has been suggested that these duellers have been fighting over the affections of the attractive young woman, seen exiting the sedan chair behind them.¹²² However, her emotionless expression seems to indicate that she is no more than a casual observer, who has merely stumbled upon the fight in the course of an unrelated errand – not unlike the exasperated cleric seen in a similar position in *The Female Orators*. Due to the fact that she is poised at the entrance of “The New Bagnio,” it can be assumed that this woman is on her way to meet a lover or client – bath houses being notorious sites of assignation in the eighteenth century.¹²³ Above her, a couple whose tryst has been interrupted, lean out the window to observe the commotion below. They are suggestively positioned nearby a playbill advertising Fielding's *An Old Man Taught Wisdom, or the Virgin Unmask'd* (1735), one of the many scraps of text littered throughout the canvas, which have little or nothing to do with the primary narrative.

It is similarly unclear whether the watchmen in the background are implicated in the central action, or whether they, too, have happened upon the fight in the course of their routine patrol. Whatever the case may be, they have now focused their attention on the brazen naval officer, and prepare to charge at him with raised batons. One watchman angrily gestures towards a broken lamp-glass, indicating that it has been damaged during

¹²² Crown, *ibid.*; Mount, 1989: 8.

¹²³ Cowley, 1983: 131-2. A bagnio is the setting for Plate 5 of Hogarth's *Marriage a la Mode*, see: BM No. 1868,0822.1564.

the mayhem of the melee. Nearby, a bloated constable – a near facsimile of the pompous “Peace-Officer” in *A Rescue* – already has another criminal in his custody. Mount has speculated that this dandified delinquent is a pickpocket, thus conferring additional meaning to the signboard above him, perhaps signifying that he has been ‘fleecing’ his victims.¹²⁴ The coins he holds in his outstretched hand may be his stolen profits, or possibly a bribe he is prepared to offer the corrupt constable. His relationship to the central action is equally ambiguous. Vic Gatrell has proposed that the pickpocket’s nefarious activities have been thwarted by the triumphant combatant in the centre, but the fact that he is neither spatially nor symbolically connected with the swordsmen in any way rather more suggests that he is yet another unrelated bystander.¹²⁵

Although this painting has sometimes been referred to as *The Bath Fly*, the passing coach in the mid-ground has nothing to do with the central action, and its passengers are unequivocally casual observers. Peering out the open window of the carriage is a well-dressed lady in a lacy *bergère* hat, who is apparently en route to the fashionable resort town of Bath. The woman’s tidy appearance and expression of shocked disapproval are in stark contrast to the demeanour of the poorer passengers, seen carelessly carousing on the rooftop above her. She might be taken for an embodiment of reason and restraint in the midst of wide-spread chaos, if it were not for the fact that she is clearly being juxtaposed with her kerchief-wearing lapdog. The comparison here seems to be another of Collet’s comments on the folly of imitation, thus suggesting that this priggish figure is not actually as genteel as she pretends to be. Indeed, as Mount has pointed out, the many members of the nobility and gentry who descended upon Bath in this period, travelled there by private carriage, and not by stagecoach.¹²⁶ The prim pretentiousness of this woman is further

¹²⁴ Mount, 1989: 9.

¹²⁵ Gatrell, 2013: 231.

¹²⁶ Mount, 1989: 6.

emphasised in yet another invited comparison. The dainty traveller, safely cloistered in the confines of the coach, is positioned directly above the burly basket seller, who is shown fearfully leaping into the fray in an attempt to disarm a violent assailant. This familiar conceit of contrasting a fashionable fool with a feisty commoner hints at the possibility of a populist message. But, of course, the market woman's brute strength and fleshy form make her a grotesquely comic figure.

Altogether, the myriad of characters and activities depicted in this muddled street scene seem to add up to a confusing and contradictory message about urban violence. The appropriate response to this conflict and the ensuing chaos is decidedly unclear. However, a consideration of the prevailing attitudes towards sword-fighting in this period might offer some insight. As historians Donna T. Andrew and Robert Shoemaker have shown, the practice of duelling – and particularly duelling with swords¹²⁷ – was increasingly viewed as archaic and unnecessary by the second half of the eighteenth century.¹²⁸ Where at one time, self-respecting gentlemen were expected to uphold their reputations by participating in these formal, pre-arranged fights, newly emerging conceptions of masculinity, which emphasised private virtue, politeness, and sentimentality, meant that men no longer needed to engage in duels in order to demonstrate their manhood.¹²⁹ In fact, as one contemporary commentator argued, duelling actually embodied the opposite of honourable manhood, being the effect of “a mistaken, and in truth, unmanly courage [...] exerted against true honour and true religion.”¹³⁰ Indeed, its most vociferous critics saw duelling as an affront to religion, to the law, and to common decency. In the words of an anonymous correspondent in *The Court, City, and Country Magazine* of April, 1764:

¹²⁷ By 1770, the favoured weapon for duelling was the pistol, see: Shoemaker, 2004: 180-185.

¹²⁸ Andrew, 1980; Andrew, 2013; Shoemaker, 2001; Shoemaker, 2002.

¹²⁹ Shoemaker, 2001: 207.

¹³⁰ Umfreville, 1761: 65; partially quoted in Shoemaker, 2001: 204.

There is no necessity so lamentable as where a truly sensible and good man is obliged, from the tyranny of custom to run into those actions, which he both despises and abhors, and is reduced to the dreadful alternative of infamy on his name for life, or bursting at once through the laws of his country, and violating the commands of his God.¹³¹

For these critics, duelling was seen as the barbaric vestige of an outmoded libertine aristocratic culture. Furthermore, the practice of sword-fighting – both recreational and combative – was widely acknowledged to be of foreign, continental origins.¹³² In contrast to the “truly British exercise” of boxing,¹³³ the modern sport of fencing was one of several highly mannered and courtly customs imported to England from France.¹³⁴ Consequently, sword-fighting’s association with the nation’s traditional enemy likely contributed to its increasingly dubious reputation by mid-century.

Yet, in spite of wide-spread criticism, duelling continued to take place –especially amongst members of the military for whom violence and the code of honour were a way of life.¹³⁵ In the 1760s and 1770s, several high profile duels were widely reported in the London newspapers, such as those of Lord Byron and William Chaworth, Charles James Fox and William Adam, and several fought by the pugnacious John Wilkes.¹³⁶ While the reports generally eschewed moral judgement, they conveyed the sense that these modern duels were not traditional private disputes, but rather, dramatic and novel public

¹³¹ *The Court, City, and Country Magazine* (April, 1764): 101-102.

¹³² In *The History of Duelling* (1770), the origins of duelling with swords are traced to Frankish Germany. In *An Account of the Character and Manners of the French* (1770), sword-fighting is credited to the Italians, who passed it on to the French in the sixteenth century. See: Coustard de Massi, 1770: 1-2; Andrews, 1770: 204.

¹³³ Richard Mandell has postulated that the sport of boxing developed in eighteenth-century England as a “constructive response to the European vice of Duelling.” See: Mandell, 1984: 146.

¹³⁴ The most famous and influential fencing master in eighteenth-century England was Domenico Angelo (1717-1802) an Italian-born immigrant, who had been trained in Paris, and subsequently popularised the French school of fencing in England. For Angelo, see: *ODNB*.

¹³⁵ Andrew, 2013: 49-50.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*: 50-55.

performances. For Wilkes, in particular, duelling seems to have been a key ingredient in the “ultra-masculine libertine persona” he was actively cultivating in the public eye.¹³⁷

Given this contemporary cultural context, the male combatants in Collet’s painting now emerge as somewhat antiquated figures, who theatrically perform an old-fashioned, and controversial form of masculinity. Nevertheless, it seems unlikely that these duellers are meant to be viewed through the condemning eyes of the pious coach passenger; nor from the position of the blustering watchmen, nor the cantankerous market woman. Instead, the artist seems to be encouraging a rather more ambivalent attitude towards these combatants and their wake of destruction. Once again, the perspective offered seems to be that of the detached pedestrian for whom violent conflict is an unavoidable, and unavoidably comical spectacle to be witnessed in the streets of the city.

In his exhaustive analysis of Collet’s painting, Mount draws slightly different conclusions, but his sentiments serve to effectively capture and convincingly explain the enigmatic nature of this work. He writes:

Interpreting this picture is like being able to remember the body of a joke but not its punch line – we can appreciate the peripheral incidents, but the point of it all remains mysterious. Sometimes the humour of another time may be as hard to appreciate as a joke translated from a foreign language. Perhaps ultimately *The Bath Fly* is an appropriate title for the picture, since the view we are left with and our understanding of it are as incomplete as that of the passengers on the speeding coach, snatching a momentary sight of a half-understood incident on the corner of a passing street.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Clark, 1998.

¹³⁸ Mount, 1989: 10.

No less mysterious than the painting's meaning is the impetus for its creation. It is not known to have been inspired by real-life events, nor is it derived from a contemporary play or novel. As mentioned, it does not seem to have been turned into an engraving, and it was not exhibited with the Free Society of Artists. However, its ample dimensions – 95 x 125 centimetres, considerably larger than many of the artist's other extant canvases – suggest that, like *The Female Bruisers* and *A Rescue*, this comically violent subject was designed to be seen on display.

VIII.

This chapter began by noting Collet's submission to the Free Society of Artists exhibition of 1768; I will conclude by returning to the setting of that display, and suggesting that *The Female Bruisers* was not quite the anomaly that we might have expected it to be. At the same exhibition, there was, of course, the standard fare of Collet's well-known painterly colleagues: a classicising history painting by Andrea Casali, depicting the Egyptian Queen Cleopatra (fig. 3.36); a characteristic 'fancy subject' by Henry Robert Morland, featuring a pretty ballad singer, sensuously illuminated by the light of a paper lantern (fig. 3.37); and the fashionable portraitist George Romney's monumental Grand Manner painting of the Leigh Family (fig. 3.38).¹³⁹ However, there was also the less familiar work of Collet's friend, and fellow comic artist, William Dawes, which in that

¹³⁹ FSA, 1768: 5,11-23.

The exhibited pictures are only very briefly described in the catalogue, and as both Casali and Morland painted several pictures with similar subjects and titles, the illustrations shown here are given as examples only; however, Romney's portrait of the Leigh Family, now in the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, is known to have been the portrait he exhibited in 1768, based on contemporary commentary. The painting is recognised as one of Romney's greatest achievements, receiving unprecedented attention from his contemporaries, including Horace Walpole, who admiringly described the work at length in his copy of the exhibition catalogue. See: Kidson, 2002: 66, cat. no. 19.

year included the now lost painting, *The Statute-Hall*,¹⁴⁰ as well as a mezzotint (fig. 3.39) by Butler Clowes, entitled *The Hen Peckt Husband*, engraved after an original painting (fig. 3.40) that Dawes had exhibited the year before.¹⁴¹ This latter work – which has, in the past, been mistakenly attributed to Collet – shares a great deal in common with *The Female Bruisers*.¹⁴² Not only does it possess a similar visual style, featuring grotesquely comic faces and a conspicuous interest in material detail, but it also seems to derive its humour from a similar stock subject, and its iconography from the same kinds of traditional, stereotypic sources.

The Hen Peckt Husband depicts a poor tailor, who has just come home to his ramshackle hovel to discover his wife's lover in his bed. His scissors, the tool of his trade, which he has dropped in surprise, have fallen open to symbolise the sexual availability of his adulterous spouse, who flies at him angrily, wielding her shoe as a weapon. Like *The Female Bruisers*, this painting rehearses an age-old comic conceit that derives its humour from the subversion of conventional gender roles. Related to the aforementioned gossip, we have the 'scold' or 'shrew,' another ubiquitous negative female stereotype, known for badgering her weak and ineffectual male counterpart, the 'henpecked' husband, who was usually the victim of adultery, and therefore also referred to as the 'cuckold.' We can trace these comic characters as far back as the Middle Ages,¹⁴³ but a more recent broadside ballad, dating from the mid-1600s, entitled *The Victorious Wife or Hen Peckt Husband*, presents a particularly suggestive pictorial precedent for Dawes's painting. In the rudimentary woodcut illustration appended to the verse (fig. 3.41), we find a brutish wife, brandishing a cudgel, as she looms over her entreating, cuckold-horned husband. Though

¹⁴⁰ This painting was almost certainly the source for the extant print, *Statute Hall for Hiring Servants*, a line-engraving by John Goldar, published by Sayer and Smith in 1770, which, up until very recently, was mistakenly attributed to Philip Dawe. See: BM No. 1869,0213.2.

¹⁴¹ FSA, 1767: 7; FSA, 1768: 6.

¹⁴² Stephen states that the mezzotint version belongs to the collection of works of John Collet in the BM. See: Stephens, 4, 1883: 495.

¹⁴³ For the 'scold' and 'henpecked husband' in medieval literature, see: Perfetti, 2003.

her cudgel has been replaced with a shoe, Dawes's raging scold is powerfully reminiscent of this crude, seventeenth-century forerunner. The coarse nature of Dawes's painting prompted a reviewer of the 1767 exhibition to remark: "The Hen-Peckt Husband [is] well painted [and has] a great deal of humour, but [it is] highly unfit for the inspection of ladies."¹⁴⁴ Here, the subject matter is deemed questionable, but the humour, apparently, is undeniable.

The presence of works like *The Female Bruisers* and *The Hen Peckt Husband* at the Free Society's display serves to sharpen our perception and understanding of the nascent exhibition culture of London in the 1760s. As has been noted in earlier chapters, these first exhibitions have been widely imagined to be dominated by serious, academic-minded painters with lofty ambitions for the future of the English School of art. Yet, evidently, there was space at the exhibitions not only for Grand Manner portraits and history paintings, but also for broadly humorous compositions that relied on old fashioned characters and conventions derived from broadside ballads, satirical prints, and other materials of popular culture. Notice that Dawes's reviewer, though mildly reproachful, does not recommend that the painting be removed from the display altogether, but merely, that the ladies should be rushed passed the canvas, lest it offend their delicate sensibilities. Was anyone genuinely offended by these types of works? Though one reviewer writing to a newspaper expressed his disapproval for Dawes's painting's subject, the work hardly incited controversy. It is very likely that these subjects were too familiar and well-rehearsed to elicit any real shock. As Dickie has recently discovered, genteel and intellectual members of both genders owned and enjoyed jestbooks containing vulgar and violent humour that has hitherto been assumed to be the domain of the lower classes.¹⁴⁵ If this is so, then it seems reasonable to suggest that the majority of visitors to the Free

¹⁴⁴ *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* (7 May, 1767).

¹⁴⁵ Dickie, 2011: 26.

Society's display would have found the paintings of Collet and Dawes fully worthy of their position on the exhibition's crowded walls, and appreciated both works as accomplished and entertaining forms of comic painting.

CHAPTER 4

FEATHERS, FASHION, AND FEMALE BEAUTIES

At some point in the late 1760s, Collet, by then probably in his early 40s, relocated from the bohemian environs of Covent Garden to the more staid and genteel neighbourhood of Chelsea. In January of 1771, the artist's father, John Collet senior, a man the *General Evening Post* described as "a formerly eminent portrait painter," died in Chelsea, leaving his son as the sole executor and a primary beneficiary of his estate.¹ As mentioned in the introduction, later biographers of the younger Collet have maintained that the inheritance from his father – or possibly a bequest from an even wealthier relative – meant that the artist had no real need to work. However, he continued to paint, supplementing a regular income based on rental property and a comfortable annuity.² Indeed, he would carry on painting and exhibiting for the rest of his life, despite Joseph Strutt's later supposition that the artist "retired to Chelsea."³

After the Free Society of Artists display of 1768, Collet took a one year hiatus, before returning to the Society to exhibit in 1770; thereafter, he made annual submissions until 1776. However, he sent in only eleven pictures in this six year period, less than half the number he had shown between 1761 and 1768.⁴ As usual, he exhibited comic subjects, as well as animal pictures, but the majority of his submissions in the 1770s were actually landscapes.⁵ Unfortunately, none of these exhibited landscapes have ever been identified; in fact, only one oil painting exhibited by Collet in this period is known to be extant – a

¹ *General Evening Post* (17 January, 1771); Will, Prob 11/963.

² *The Repository of Arts*, 8, 1812: 131; *ODNB*; Strutt, 213.

³ Strutt, *ibid.*

⁴ App. III, nos. 25-35.

⁵ App. III, nos. 26, 27, 30, 31, 34.

rustic genre subject in the Dutch tradition called *The Travelling Musician* of 1770 (fig. 4.1).⁶

Contrary to initial appearances, however, the 1770s was not a period of decreased activity for the artist, nor was he turning his back on comic subjects in favour of landscape. Instead, Collet appears to have been focusing his attention and efforts on an artistic medium and method of self-promotion with which he had already experienced some success – reproductive engraving. In the second half of the 1760s, a dozen or so satirical prints were made after Collet's work.⁷ Several of these were based on oil paintings which were exhibited to some acclaim at Free Society shows, and thus, were almost certainly published to capitalise on the success of the originals. Between 1770 and 1780, more than sixty Collet-based line-engravings and mezzotints were published – including his aforementioned series *Collet's Designs Both Serious and Comic* – suggesting that both print publishers and the artist himself now fully recognised the profitability of his name.⁸ It remains unclear what kind of relationship Collet had with his publishers and what financial stakes he had in print sales. It is also difficult to be sure about exactly how many of these prints were based on finished oil paintings, and how many were based on watercolour or pen and ink sketches. Certainly, it would help to explain the low number of extant oil paintings dating from this period if many of these prints had been based on studies in a different medium. But regardless of his methods and business arrangements, it is obvious that Collet had an increasingly direct involvement with the print trade in the final decade of his life. Evidence that the artist was now composing images with the express intention of having them engraved can be found in the form of a notice in the *London Evening Post* of 25 September, 1770:

⁶ FSA, 1770: 16; App. I, no. 21.

⁷ App. II, nos. 1-15.

⁸ App. II, nos. 16-56.

We hear that the ingenious Mr. Collet, who has trodden so closely on the heels of the great Hogarth is now busy in designing two sets of capital engravings after the manner of that celebrated master. The first set is to be called *Royal Amusement* and the second *The Careful Servants*.⁹

It appears that these two series never came to fruition; nevertheless, dozens of other designs by Collet did find their way onto copperplates and into print shops throughout London and beyond.

As outlined in the introduction, there were three print publishers who supplied the majority of the Collet-designed graphic satires of the 1770s: Thomas Bradford, Robert Sayer, and Carington Bowles.¹⁰ Bradford, the picture dealer and publisher who had been responsible for the *Love Match* series, as well as a handful of other line-engravings after Collet's works in the late 1760s, issued two more prints in the 1770s – *The Female Bruisers* in 1770 and *The Travelling Musician* in 1772 – both of which were based on exhibited paintings, as were most of his earlier publications.¹¹ Bradford owned a number of Collet's original paintings, and after his death in 1774, his print inventory and art collection were put up for auction, at which point Robert Sayer seems to have acquired some of Bradford's stock, including several of his Collet paintings and prints.¹² Sayer – who worked in partnership with John Smith in the late 1760s and early 1770s, and John Bennett from 1774 until 1784 – was a well-established print publisher and map dealer with

⁹ *London Evening Post* (25 September, 1770).

¹⁰ See: Introduction: 5-6.

¹¹ App. II, nos. 1-3, 10, 15, 19, 35

¹² The notice for the auction of Bradford's inventory appeared in the *Daily Advertiser* of 17 February, 1774, and Collet's name was mentioned as one of the artists whose works were included in the sale. Sayer bought several of Bradford's Collet-based plates, including *The Mutual Embrace* and *The Unlucky Attempt*, both of which he and his then-partner John Bennett published with inscriptions that read: "Engraved after the Original Picture designed & painted by Mr John Collett in the possession of Mr Bradford." See: Alexander, 200: 137; App. II, nos. 42-43.

Sayer also bought at least one of Collet's original paintings as evidenced by the fact that Sayer issued a mezzotint called *The Refusal* in 1774 with an inscription that read "From an Original Picture of Mr. John Collett in the Possession of Mr. Sayer." A line-engraving of the same subject and name was earlier issued in 1768 with an inscription that indicated the painting was then in Bradford's possession. For these prints, see: App. II, nos. 3 and 41.

a history of taking full advantage of the death and bankruptcy of his fellow publishers. His business started in the 1740s when he acquired the extensive inventory of the late Philip Overton, a progeny of the Overton publishing family. Susanna Fisher has observed that Sayer's success was "based on commercial rather than creative skills," and that "he was shrewd and cautious [...] spotting trends in popular taste [...] building his vast collection of plates by buying plates which had already proved successful."¹³ Clearly, Sayer recognised a safe and lucrative investment in Collet because he published over fifty Collet satires in all, the majority of which were issued in the early 1770s.¹⁴ In addition to Bradford's old plates, Sayer offered a wide range of other Collet-related products to suit varying tastes and budgets. There were small, relatively cheap line-engravings and larger, comparatively expensive mezzotints, and styles and subjects which ranged from coarse and rustic to stylish and urbane. Characteristic examples from both ends of the spectrum include the aforementioned *An Holland Smock* (see: fig. 1.49), an unsigned line-engraving of 1770, measuring roughly 26 by 37 centimetres (this size is often referred to a 'posture' print), which was listed at a cost of 1 shilling in Sayer's catalogue of 1774; and *Grown Gentlemen Taught to Dance* (fig. 4.62), a mezzotint by Butler Clowes, measuring approximately 43 by 51 centimetres, which was first issued in 1768, and listed at a cost of 5 shillings in the same 1774 catalogue.¹⁵ There were numerous stand-alone pieces like these, as well as pendant-prints and more extensive sets, as in the example of the twenty-four plate *Collet's Designs* series.

After Bradford's death, Sayer might have had a monopoly on Collet's prints if it had not been for the interference of Carington Bowles, a competing publisher who also had an extensive stock and a keen eye for emerging trends. Bowles was a member of another

¹³For Sayer (ca. 1724-1794), see: *ODNB*.

¹⁴ App. II, nos. 4-14, 16, 20-26, 28-32, 34, 36-45, 48-49, 51-52, 54, 56.

¹⁵ Sayer, 1774: 5, 73.

successful print publishing dynasty that had originated with his grandfather, Thomas, in the 1690s.¹⁶ Carington specialised in comic imagery, and particularly in a brand of decorative and gently satirical mezzotints known as ‘mezzotint drolls.’ In 1777, he published the first in a series of thirty-four anonymously engraved, ‘posture-sized’ mezzotints which would later be described in his catalogue of 1784 as follows:

The Following 34 new and elegant humorous Prints, are finely executed from the capital Paintings of that eminent Artist the late John Collet, Esq. in the Possession of Carington Bowles. Each Print is 10 inches wide and 14 inches deep. When Framed and glazed they make a handsome Appearance and Fashionable Furniture and are always kept ready furnished. Price 2s. plain, or finely coloured from the paintings, 3s. each.¹⁷

The advertisement suggests that these prints were especially fine and particularly desirable commodities, costing a shilling more than the average mezzotint of the same size. It also reveals that, in this case, there *were* finished paintings on which these prints were based, and it is very likely that prospective buyers had the opportunity to come to Bowles’s “Print Warehouse” in St. Paul’s Churchyard to view the originals.¹⁸ All the prints are inscribed with similar captions: “From the Original Picture by John Collet in the Possession of Carington Bowles,” or “in the Possession of the Proprietors,” the latter variation being a change made by Bowles’s successors, Henry Carington Bowles II (Carington’s son) and Samuel Carver, who still kept the Collet series in stock at the turn of the century.

Like Sayer’s *Collet’s Designs*, The “34 New and Elegant Humorous Prints” set is not a series in the narrative, Hogarthian sense, but rather, it is a collection of loosely related images executed in a similar style and format. The humour in these images is almost always based on one of three themes (or a combination thereof): extremes or

¹⁶ For Bowles (1724-1793), see: “Bowles Family,” *ODNB*.

¹⁷ Bowles, 1784: 116; App. II, no. 50.

¹⁸ A few of these canvases have come up for auction in the two decades, see: App. I, nos. 29, 34, 36-39.

oddities of dress; female misbehaviour; or bawdy sexual innuendo. As Patricia Crown has noted, the censure here is mild, and Collet's attitude towards his subjects is fairly ambivalent, often appearing to err on the side of indifference, tolerance, or even pleasure in the transgressive behaviour he describes.¹⁹ As I will demonstrate, this is strongly in keeping with the bulk of Bowles's mezzotint drolls, which seem to treat the admonitory function of satire as an afterthought, giving primacy to a kind of visceral appeal based on a combination of humour, sexual titillation, and visual pleasure. Most of the prints in this series depict young, attractive, and fashionably dressed women. These women are usually the focal points in relatively simple compositions, which when compared with the artist's earlier works, contain fewer details, and figures that are larger and closer to us in space; close enough for the viewer to properly luxuriate in the sensual female form. For a shilling extra, customers could enjoy their ladies in full colour, which was achieved by applying thick layers of gouache by hand, acting to obscure any wear from the copperplate's overuse, and resulting in a dazzling if somewhat garish piece of "fashionable furniture."

The prints in this series are noteworthy for a number of reasons. Firstly, they clearly express Collet's heightened interest in the print trade. The prodigious number of designs (possibly all finished oil paintings) the artist produced and supplied to a single publisher in the period of only a few short years, is suggestive of a single-minded focus on the artist's part, and a close working relationship with a publisher. Secondly, the images demonstrate not only the changed formal style of Collet's work in the late 1770s, but also a new specialisation in a sub-category of social satire which combined humour, fashion, and female beauty. The Bowles series was actually one of many similar products in an expanding market for fashion satire, and thus, Collet's work can also be seen to be reflective of broader trends in graphic art. Finally, the prints dating from this period, and

¹⁹ Crown, 2002: 123-124.

particularly those published by Bowles, are the images in Collet's *oeuvre* that have emerged as the most popular and familiar with modern audiences due to the fact that they have been frequently used as illustrations in books on a wide variety of topics related to eighteenth-century history and culture.²⁰ They have presumably been selected because of their vibrancy, cheerfulness, and ability to evoke a very specific period in time.

These images will be the focus of the present chapter. In particular, I will offer a close reading of a print from the series called *The Feather'd Fair in a Fright* (fig. 4.2), which depicts a pair of fashionable young women with large feather headdresses in a landscape setting, fleeing from two ostriches, as a barking lapdog jumps at their feet. This is the first print in the set listed in Bowles's catalogue of 1784, and was, in all likelihood, the first in the series to be issued. However, it is not known when exactly it was published. As is the case with many of Bowles's prints, the only surviving examples of the mezzotint version of this image are actually later impressions made by Bowles and Carver, who have erased the original publication date from the inscription. Based on Mary Dorothy George's system of using other extant Bowles-mezzotints that have retained their original inscriptions, as well as the sequential catalogue numbers that appear in their bottom left-hand corners, the British Museum have given *The Feather'd Fair in a Fright* an estimated publication date of 1777.²¹ There is also, however, a larger line-engraving of same image (fig.4.3) in the British Museum's collection that is dated 24 June, 1779, possibly indicating

²⁰ For example: *An Actress at her Toilet, or Miss Brazen just Breecht* (1779) (fig. 4.30) is used as the cover illustration of Laura Engel's *Fashioning Celebrity: Eighteenth-Century British Actresses and Strategies for Image Making* (2011); *The Rival Milleners* (ca. 1778) (fig. 2.51) is the cover illustration of Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace's *Consuming Subjects: Women, Shopping, and Business in the Eighteenth Century* (1996); *Miss Tipapin Going for All Nine* (1779) and *Ladies Shooting Ponies* (1780) (App. I, Nos. 50o, 50u) are used to illustrate a discussion of the unladylike pastimes of Georgian women in Paul Langford's *Eighteenth-Century Britain: A Very Short Introduction* (2005); *Corporeal Cartouch Teaching Miss Camp-Love* (1780) (fig. 4.53) is used to illustrate a discussion of women's masculine fashions in the 1770s in Dror Wahrman's *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (2006); *Tight Lacing or Fashion Before Ease* (ca. 1777) (fig. 4.37) is used to illustrate a discussion of eighteenth-century corsets in Norah Waugh's *Corsets and Crinolines* (1990).

²¹ George, 5, 1935: 786. The date is deduced from George's calculations though she does not actually list the print in the appendix entitled "Key to Dating Carington Bowles Mezzotints."

that George's dating system is inaccurate, but more likely suggesting that the publisher first issued the mezzotint, and following its success, released the larger engraved version a couple of years later.

What *is* known for certain is that Collet submitted a painting of the same name to the Free Society's exhibition of 1776.²² It was his only submission for that year, and, as it turns out, it was a particularly shrewd choice. Not only did it manage to showcase the artist's specialities – humour, animals, and landscape – but it also captured a sartorial phenomenon that was, at the time, an obsession with the public, and a trademark style of an especially famous society beauty, Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire. The impact of Collet's picture is nicely suggested by the review of an anonymous critic who attended the exhibitions of the Royal Academy, the Society of Artists, and the Free Society of Artists in 1776, and who offered his detailed observations of the three displays in the May issue of the *Westminster Magazine*. Comparatively speaking, the Free Society is given short shrift in this review, being overshadowed by its long-standing rivals, the Society of Arts, and the prestigious Royal Academy. However, the critic's comments on this less illustrious group are particularly relevant, and as such, I quote his review of their show in full:

From Pall-Mall I proceeded to St. Alban's street – But, “Oh What a falling off was there!” – In consideration, however, of the fund for which this Exhibition is supported, I shall not enter upon a severe critique on those Pictures which I could not commend. There was ONE which well repaid me for the trouble I had taken to review them. *The Lady and the Ostrich* by Collet: This Picture contains an elegant satire on the prevailing passion among the fair sex, to carry their head-dress to an enormous height, and to decorate it with feathers of an enormous length – Two Ladies, walking in a Gentleman's park, and drest in the *highest* style, are supposed to be attacked by two Ostriches (stripped of their ornamental feathers) and requested to restore the plumes which they had

²² FSA, 1776: 4.

borrowed of them. The principal Female in this Picture is so beautiful that one is apt to pardon the extravagance and false taste of her coiffure, and the terror into which her feathered, or rather, unfeathered, antagonist has thrown her only serves to make her look handsomer. A pretty little dog looks as if he had barked himself out of breath in her defence. The Landscape part is charming, and the whole Picture is conceived with humour, and executed with spirit and taste.²³

It is tempting to think that this effusive praise was actually a ‘puff’ piece, planted by Collet or his associates. Yet, the same letter also provides extensive commentary on a number of other paintings produced by other artists, and exhibited at other venues. It thus appears to be a genuine review, and in this critic’s opinion, *The Feather’d Fair* was the stand-out piece in an otherwise underwhelming show. To his eyes, at least, Collet’s painting was tasteful, topical and, above all, beautiful. This suggests a comic work that was seen as very different to the sort of painting that the artist had been exhibiting in recent years – comparatively crude works like *The Female Bruisers*.

Here it is worth noting that, in 1771, a critic named Robert Barker claimed that Collet had lost the wit and delicate touch he had first exhibited with *A Love Match*, declaring that he had “since fallen into [...] ridiculous exaggerations.”²⁴ “Ugliness,” proclaimed Barker, “is false humour, and excessive exaggeration is the poor refuge of those who want skill to represent things with propriety and justness. Let me advise this painter therefore to throw off this absurd habit into which he has [lately] fallen.” By the late 1770s, Collet seems to have heeded Baker’s warning, having abandoned grotesque exaggeration in favour of prettier, more whimsical subjects that were, in the anonymous reviewer’s words, “executed with great spirit and taste.” *The Feather’d Fair in a Fright*

²³ *Westminster Magazine* (May, 1776): 238.

²⁴ Baker, 1771: 7. The exhibition catalogue for this year lists one subject exhibited by Collet: “The Street Syrens,” an untraced work. See: FSA, 1771: 5. Baker also identifies two previous submissions as examples of Collet’s “contemptible” work: “his *teaching grown people to dance*, [and] his *master kissing the servant-maid*,” which presumably are *Grown Gentlemen Learning to Dance* (fig. 4.62) and *An Essay on Woman*, both exhibited in 1766. For prints after these now lost paintings, see: App. II, nos. 7, 8, 50b.

thus announced to the exhibition-going public Collet's reinvention as a painter of decorative social satires. And so, even if Carington Bowles had not commissioned the painting himself, he too must have seen it at the Free Society's show, and recognising its suitability as a subject for one of his signature mezzotint drolls, selected it as the first in his "34 New and Elegant Humorous Prints" series.

I.

If the mezzotint version of *The Feather'd Fair in a Fright* were to be folded diagonally in half, obscuring from view the comically menacing birds, the viewer would be left with two attractive – albeit alarmed – young women in modish attire, and their lively lapdog set against a backdrop of lush foliage and a sky blanketed in clouds. This half of the image (fig. 4.4), particularly when viewed on its own, is reminiscent of two different types of eighteenth-century visual material, both of which emphasise female beauty and fashionability, and both of which were familiar and desirable commodities amongst Collet's contemporaries. The first, and perhaps most obvious, is the fashion plate, which in the second half of the eighteenth century was appearing with increasing regularity in women's pocketbooks, magazines, and other style-conscious publications of the day.²⁵ These commodities fulfilled both practical and ornamental purposes; they were used as visual guides for staying in fashion, but were also frequently removed from their textual sources and pasted into albums to be enjoyed for their aesthetic value. An especially germane example of this type of image is an engraving (fig. 4.5) that was published in the *Lady's Magazine* entitled "Two Ladies in the Newest Dress Taken at Ranalegh May, 1775," depicting a pair of full-length figures who provide front and back views of the latest

²⁵ For eighteenth-century English fashion plates, see: Buck and Matthews, 1984; Holland, 1955: 48-53; Moore, 1971: 40; Rothstein (ed.), 1987.

look – a look that will be immediately recognised from Collet’s *Feather’d Fair*. In both images, the female subjects wear *Polonoise* dresses – a type of gown that was particularly popular in the mid-1770s, characterised by an overskirt that is draped or swagged at the back²⁶ – and wear their hair piled high atop their heads, ornamented with bundles of large white feathers, and finished with what the *Lady’s Magazine* describes as “two drop curls at the ears.”²⁷ Unlike the *Feather’d Fair*, however, the fashion plate presents the models set against a stark white background, in spite of the fact that their real-life setting was purportedly the Ranelagh pleasure gardens. While this is a familiar and logical format for costume illustration that acts to eliminate any potential distraction from the relevant sartorial detail, it was not the format that was most commonly employed in the eighteenth century – many of the fashion plates of the period show figures in lavishly appointed interiors, elegantly manicured gardens, and landscaped parks (figs. 4.6-4.8).²⁸

Interestingly, Collet himself produced a handful of non-satirical images of this kind in the 1770s, including a set of designs that were engraved by Charles Grignon, Robert Pranker, and Martin Rennoldson, which were first published in 1770, and later advertised in Sayer’s catalogue of 1774 as “Six Whole Length Figures, cloathed in the Modern Taste.”²⁹ Here, Collet illustrates full-length subjects of both genders modelling their fashionable apparel in a variety of suitable and appealing locations. A dandified gentleman (fig. 4.9) in an extravagantly embroidered greatcoat, saunters down an orderly urban street; a young lady (fig. 4.10) in a lacy dormouse cap steals a moment alone to lounge on a

²⁶ Ribeiro, 1995: 66.

²⁷ *The Lady’s Magazine or Entertaining Companion for the Fair Sex...*, No. 4 (1775): 235.

²⁸ According to Buck and Matthews, many of the extant fashion plates of the second half of the eighteenth century derive from the annually published women’s pocket books and almanacs, which usually included one or two fashion-related engravings. The authors describe these engravings as follows: “The full-length figures of the small plates are set in a room or have a garden or landscape background, suggestive of the type of dress worn. Plates showing court dress, mainly of the 1770s, sometimes have St. James’s Palace for the background. Larger folding plates combine architecture and dress in a fashionable scene. The groups of figures in 1770s and 1780s plates often include men and children.” See: Buck and Matthews, 1984: 41.

²⁹ Sayer, 1774: 74. These were priced 6d. each. These same images were included in the volume *Designs by John Collett Both Serious and Comic : Engraved on 36 Plates* (1770), see: App. II, no. 24.2.

floral-patterned sofa and read a novel, as her curious greyhound looks on; and a woman (fig. 4.11) in a quilted gown and fur-lined tippet and muff, stands in front of a late-autumnal vista of bare trees and a cool, crystalline lake. This latter image, as well as one other (fig. 4.12) from the series depicting a female subject and her dog in a parkland setting, clearly allude to the Grand Manner, full-length portraits of aristocratic beauties which were then being exhibited by celebrated portraitists like Reynolds and Gainsborough, and which were afterwards engraved and sold to the masses by enterprising publishers like Sayer and Bowles. These portraits usually placed their elite subjects in what Mark Hallett describes as “terrace-like spaces that are marked by the architectural and material attributes of the great country house or palace, but that also allow a view of the landscape beyond” or else in “more explicitly pastoral settings that are characterised by such details as a thicket of trees, a stream, a statue, or a pedestal.”³⁰ Most often, these women appear alone, lost in fashionably sentimental reverie, but occasionally they are provided with an equally attractive and well-born companion (fig. 4.13) or possibly a beloved pet; dogs, in particular, had a ubiquitous presence in both male and female portraiture of the period, representing fidelity and affection, but also serving as a fashionable status symbol for the sitter.³¹ It is interesting to note that Joshua Reynolds’s portrait of Mrs. Elisha Matthews (fig.4.14), painted in 1777, includes a leaping spaniel that is powerfully reminiscent of the dog pictured in Collet’s aforementioned print of 1770 (fig. 4.12), suggesting a mutually-reinforcing relationship between fashion plates and female portraiture in this period.³²

³⁰ Hallett, forthcoming.

³¹ For discussion of dogs in eighteenth-century portraiture, see: Rosenthal and Myrone, 2002: 196; Mannings, 2000: 329.

³² Mannings speculates that this motif of the spaniel jumping with its head turned up may be derived from Van Dyck’s *A Boy Standing on a Terrace* (ca. 1623), National Gallery of Ireland, NGI 809. See: Mannings, *ibid.*

Collet was surely thinking of these kinds of images when he was designing *The Feather'd Fair in a Fright*, though his subjects, of course, lack the characteristic grace and composure of their non-satirical counterparts. In a stroke of synchronicity, the artist chose to exhibit what might be construed as a parody of the aristocratic-beauty portrait at the same moment that Reynolds was exhibiting his own image of the most famous aristocratic beauty of the day. One of two sumptuous, full-length, female subjects he submitted to the Royal Academy in the spring of 1776, Reynolds's painting (fig. 4.15) of Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire shows her leaning against a marble balustrade, apparently pausing to acknowledge the viewer before descending the nearby staircase, and into the leafy landscape below.³³ For this portrait, Reynolds has eschewed his usual practice of clothing his elite female subjects in timeless, classicising garb³⁴, and instead depicts his sitter with a modishly high headdress crowned with pink and white feathers, and dressed in a diaphanous cream gown accented with a gold fringe; a kind of Turkish-inspired fancy-dress, appropriate for one of the many masquerade balls the Duchess would have attended.³⁵

The relaxed air of the sitter and the densely foliate backdrop would have been evocative of the Duchess's famously natural and unaffected manner, but it was her fashionable appearance that contemporary viewers would have most immediately

³³ The other female portrait Reynolds exhibited that year was of Mrs Joanna Lloyd. See: RA, 1776: 21; Mannings, 1, 2000, cat. no. 327.

³⁴ In his fourth discourse delivered to the Royal Academy in 1771, Reynolds stated: "[...] if a portrait painter is desirous to raise and improve his subject he has no other means than by approaching it to a general idea. He leaves out all the minute breaks and peculiarities in the face and changes the dress from a temporary fashion to one more permanent." He tended to follow his own advice, particularly when painting women; however, his painting of the Duchess of Devonshire is one of several portraits he produced in the mid-1770s of women with fashionably high hairstyles. See: Reynolds, 1772: 27.

³⁵ "Georgiana (Spencer) Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire," *The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens*, <http://emuseum.huntington.org> (accessed 18 September, 2012).

identified with her public persona.³⁶ One year earlier, in April of 1775, the *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser* ran a story about the then-seventeen-year old Georgiana, which read:

The Duchess of Devonshire is the most envied woman this day in the Ton, not for her personal charms, tho' they are many, nor for her fortune, title, or equipage tho' they are splendid to a degree, but for a delicious Ostrich feather lately presented her by Lord Stormont on his arrival from Paris, measuring exactly one yard and three inches:- the *topple-crown'd* pallets of inferior plumage now look contemptible in her Grace's presence.³⁷

A forerunner of modern celebrity journalism, this news item, which somehow manages to combine adulation, gossip, and subtle mockery, is typical of the myriad reports about the young noblewoman that regularly circulated the capital after her entrée into the *bon ton*. Following her June, 1774 marriage to the wealthy and powerful William Cavendish, 5th Duke of Devonshire, Georgiana became what we today might call an 'it girl'— a shining star of fashionable society, possessing an intangible quality which made her a continual source of fascination to those around her. In the words of one of her contemporaries, the French diplomat, Louis Dutens: "When she appeared, every eye was turned towards her [and] when she was absent, she was the subject of universal conversation."³⁸ Though she was apparently not a conventional beauty by the standards of her day, her effervescent personality seems to have charmed most of those who met her. According to Horace Walpole, "[the Duchess's] youth, figure, flowing good nature, sense and lively modesty, and modest familiarity, make her a *phenomenon*."³⁹ However, as the *Morning Post* makes clear, many others believed it was not her "personal charms," but her extravagant sense of fashion, and particularly her penchant for over-sized feathered millinery, that truly made her a phenomenon. For this, the Duchess was both idolised and lampooned; the same issue

³⁶ For Georgiana Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire (1757-1806), see: Foreman, 1998.

³⁷ *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser* (7 April, 1775).

³⁸ Dutens, 1806: 209, quoted in Foreman, 1998: 3.

³⁹ Walpole to Lady Ossory (1 February, 1775), quoted in *Ibid.*: 35.

of the *Morning Post* that acknowledges her to be “the most envied woman” of the day, elsewhere compares her appearance to a shuttlecock, an amusing notion that was exploited in a print (fig. 4.16) attributed to the playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan – a friend of the Duchess’s, who would later allude to her and her fashionable friends in his wildly successful comedy, *The School for Scandal* (1777). Although, as I will later discuss, there were some very vocal critics of the Duchess and her signature style, most of the mockery of her was benign and affectionate, for as her modern biographer, Amanda Foreman puts it: “On the whole, society took Georgiana’s fashion excesses in good part.”⁴⁰

The famous feathered duchess must have at least crossed Collet’s mind when he set out to paint *The Feather’d Fair in A Fright*. It is not necessarily meant to be a personal caricature of Georgiana – and if the caption of the later engraving is to be believed, the subjects are not even meant to be aristocratic⁴¹ – but the artist was almost certainly attempting to exploit the kinds of narratives associated with the celebrated beauty, and capitalise on her fame, fashionability, and enigmatic allure. Moreover, by exhibiting this piece, Collet was not only playfully thumbing his nose at the eminent members of the Royal Academy who painted and exhibited polite portraits of women like Georgiana; he was also participating in a form of benign and good-natured raillery that was then being directed at the duchess and her feathery followers.

Intriguingly, a practical joke reportedly played by one of Georgiana’s male peers at a masquerade ball in the spring of 1775 seems to have been the specific inspiration for Collet’s satire. In the *Middlesex Journal and Evening Advertiser* of 23 May, it was reported that the most remarkable and unusual attendee of a recent ball at the fashionable Pantheon assembly hall was:

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*: 39.

⁴¹ See: Fig. 2, and discussion below, 214-215.

An Ostrich sent as an Ambassador from his distressed brethren in Africa, to sue to the Ladies of Great Britain for their pity [...]. In order to represent their sufferings the more strongly his tail was plucked clean of all his flowing plumes [...] to show his resentment against those ladies who were the causes of his and his brethren's misfortunes, he ran violently and pecked at the nodding crest of those ladies who were adorned with the borrowed spoils of his country [...].⁴²

According to the author of this report, the ostrich costume “was admirably well-devised, executed, and supported,” and apparently, unlike the flustered ladies in Collet's satire, the female guests at the Pantheon took these attacks in their stride, and carried on enjoying the evening's decadent festivities.

II.

The giant ostrich feather headdress made famous by the Duchess of Devonshire was a short-lived fashion that emerged in England in early 1775, and quickly captured the attention of a chorus of bemused commentators. Some regarded the ornament as a relatively harmless object of amusement; others saw it as a more troubling sign of a decadent and senseless age.⁴³ For such a seemingly innocuous item, the feather, in this period, conjured up a number of equivocal connotations and elicited a range of dramatic responses. According to one contemporary, Lady Louisa Stuart, “the unfortunate feathers were insulted, mobbed, hissed, almost pelted wherever they appeared, abused in the newspapers, nay even preached at in the pulpits and pointed out as marks of reprobation.”⁴⁴ *The Feather'd Fair in a Fright* thus both exploited and contributed to the frenzied interest in this ephemeral fashion. It will therefore be useful to take a take a brief

⁴² *Middlesex Journal and Evening Advertiser* (23 May, 1775), see also: *Westminster Magazine* (May 1775): 230.

⁴³ This section has been adapted from my article on the emblem of the feather in fashion satire of 1776, see: Blackwell, 2013.

⁴⁴ As quoted in Foreman, 1998: 38.

look at the history of the trend for wearing such feathers in order to establish where it originated, who participated in it, and why it was considered so problematic.

According to fashion lore, the feather headdress was the innovation of the French Queen, Marie Antoinette, who, upon arriving in France from Austria in 1770, attempted to transform her appearance, which had been deemed too foreign for French tastes.⁴⁵ So as to distract attention from her high ‘Hapsburg forehead’ – or so it was alleged – the young dauphine piled her hair in pyramidal form, crowning it with tall feathers and mountains of ribbon, thus drawing the eye upwards. So devoted was she to feather headwear that her brother supposedly nicknamed her “feather-head.”⁴⁶ Unsurprisingly, across the channel, this imported fashion was associated with the French, as a mock verse appearing in the *London Magazine* in April, 1775 attests, in which ladies are urged “to Gallia return this toy,” for it was “Gallia who sent it hither.”⁴⁷ Consequently, the feather headdress was one of many styles that represented the dangerous influence of French taste. But, as established, it was also commonly associated with the Duchess of Devonshire. As a highly visible member of fashionable society, the Duchess came to be seen as the inspiration behind the feather trend, as well as a target of criticism against it. William Combe, the author of *A Letter to her Grace, the Duchess of Devonshire* (1777) even went so far as to declare the feather as the Duchess’s emblem, symbolising her perceived “levity, vanity and folly.”⁴⁸

Georgiana’s female peers quickly followed suit, becoming what the London press dubbed the ‘feathered race’ or the ‘feathered sex.’ The women of the *bon ton* soon competed for the highest head. In early 1775, Mrs. Delany reported: “The three most elevated plumes of feathers are the Duchess of Devonshire, Lady Mary Somerset and Lady

⁴⁵ Hosford, 2004: 184.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *London Magazine, Or Gentleman’s Monthly Intelligencer* (April 1775): 176.

⁴⁸ Combe, 1777: 7.

Harriet Stanhope, but some say Mrs. Hubert's exceeds them all."⁴⁹ Contemporary papers and periodicals are replete with accounts of this 'feathered race' at masquerades, pleasure gardens, and even the theatre, where they infuriated fellow audience members by obscuring their view. From October 1775, David Garrick regularly mocked the ladies on stage in his cross-dressing scene in *The Provok'd Wife*, in which he wore a 'high head' ornamented with feathers and fruits.⁵⁰ This was perhaps intended to embarrass the 'feathered race' into submission, but they persisted in spite of this and other forms of public ridicule. Upper class women defined themselves as an exclusive and defiant group through the adoption of 'high heads' and feathered headdress, which Gillian Russell has persuasively compared with the Mohican hairstyles of the twentieth century that similarly proclaimed affiliation with a transgressive, subcultural group.⁵¹ However, the 'feathered race' was not an exclusive club for long as women further down the social scale soon attempted to ape this distinctive style with mixed results. Some contemporaries complained that the hairstyle acted to dissolve important signs of social distinction, while others mocked the lacklustre efforts of lower class women to emulate their betters. One facetious commentator remarked: "I am told that the wings of Geese, which used to be kept to dust the house are converted into ornaments for the heads of the Cooks and the House-Maids."⁵² Evidently, the 'feathered race' was rapidly expanding.

In the spring of 1775, Queen Charlotte banned the wearing of feathers at court. One report speculated that the Queen had prohibited the trend out of jealousy, claiming that "her Majesty once dressed in feathers, but has lately forbid them [...] owing, we suppose to her being eclipsed in length."⁵³ The Queen, however, may have had more practical

⁴⁹ As quoted in Manfield, 1980: 107.

⁵⁰ Russell, 2007: 196; *The Oxford Magazine, or, Universal Museum...*(February, 1776): 355.

⁵¹ Russell, 2007: 180.

⁵² *Westminster Magazine* (April 1775): 177.

⁵³ *Middlesex Journal and Evening Advertiser* (15 April, 1775).

reasons: enormous headdresses were burdensome for the wearer and took up a tremendous amount of space. One contemporary print satirises the fact that women were forced to crouch on the floors of their carriages in order to fit inside (fig. 4.17). Moreover, the plumes occasionally proved to be more than just a nuisance, and were even cast as a hazard to one's safety. Allegedly, in 1776, a lady in Bath was killed after her headdress collided with a chandelier and went up in flames.⁵⁴ This horrifying incident was satirised in at least one contemporary print (fig. 4.18), as well as in a poem by Christopher Anstey, who quipped:

Yet Madge at her rooms/Must beware of her Plumes/For if Vulcan her feather embraces/Like poor Lady Laycock/She'll burn like a haycock/And Roast all the Loves and Graces.⁵⁵

Alternatively, the Queen may have forbidden ostrich feathers due to vague notions of noble prerogatives in dress. Three of the highest chivalric orders in England – the Order of the Garter, the Order of the Thistle, and the Order of the Bath – all incorporated large plumes of exotic birds as part of the ceremonial garb (fig. 4.19).⁵⁶ Furthermore, a trio of white ostrich feathers emerging from a golden coronet comprised the heraldic badge of the Prince of Wales, used as the insignia of the heir apparent to the throne since the sixteenth century.⁵⁷ The women who dared to wear ostrich feathers, then, were making a bold statement indeed. They effectively usurped a royal – and male – sign of distinction. *The Feathers* (1775), a popular contemporary verse, acknowledges this usurpation in the line: “With Feathers nodding to and fro; Like plumed knights of the Bath.”⁵⁸ Here, the traditional context for the feathers is conflated with a newer one – a fashionable spa town.

⁵⁴ Stoomberg, 1999: 29.

⁵⁵ Anstey, 1776.

⁵⁶ Mansfield, 1980: 50-71.

⁵⁷ Siddons, 2009: 186-188.

⁵⁸ *The Feathers*, 1775: 1.

One further context for feathers is worth mentioning: their use as pens. While in practical terms, the quill was a quotidian item that would have been used on a regular basis by virtually all literate members of society, emblematically, it was aligned with the lofty, intellectual, and masculine world of letters. This association is plainly illustrated in any number of eighteenth-century portraits of writers and great minds, wherein the sitter is shown clutching the tool of his learned trade. An especially apposite example is William Hoare's 1776 portrait of Christopher Anstey (fig. 4.20), a celebrated writer known for his satirical poems on the fashions and recreations at Bath. The poet is depicted being interrupted in his work by his young daughter, a playful sprite in pink and white, who proudly shows off her elaborately dressed doll – actually a dressmaker's dummy, modelling the latest style. The doll represents the inspiration behind Anstey's satires, and also serves to divide the painting in two: on one side we find colour, caprice, and feminine beauty; and on the other, sombreness, sobriety, and masculine intellect. The plumed headdress of the doll is positioned suggestively above Anstey's quill, perhaps intimating that the woman of fashion has appropriated and trivialised an object that was once the domain of knights and sages.

Having established the history of the feather trend and the controversy it incited, we can return to Collet's satire and read it in the context of these swirling debates. The clouds hovering over the 'feather'd fair' and their attackers may now seem just a little darker and more foreboding than they first appeared; in fact, the preparatory study (fig. 4.21) in pen and watercolour now preserved in the British Museum reveals that the artist had originally sketched out a stormy sky, perhaps intended to reflect the turmoil caused by the controversial style, or the doomed fate in store for these blind followers of fashion. Furthermore, the line-engraved version of *The Feather'd Fair* (fig. 4.3), includes a twelve-line doggerel verse printed beneath the caption that suggests the satire was intended as a

rebuke on the low-born followers of the feather trend. It begins:

Two Lasses who would Like their Mistress Shine/
On their Heads clap some feathers to make them
look fine/
When two Ostriches Suddenly came within sight, and put the poor girls in a terrible
fright.

The violent attack that these women are about to endure can thus be seen as penance for their insolence in attempting to ape the style of their social betters – a favourite satirical target for the artist. Moreover, the pairing of human and animal subjects offers a further comment on the women’s foolish behaviour. At the height of the feather craze, it was often intimated that the notoriously negative traits of the ostrich would rub off on the women who donned their feathers. For example, Thomas Marryat’s *Sentimental Fables Design’d Chiefly for the Use of Ladies* (1772) included a prescriptive tale called “The Dove and the Ostrich,” which warned ladies of the objectionable nature of the exotic bird, through its contrast of the loyal Dove and the fickle Ostrich.⁵⁹ William Combe expressed similar sentiments when he addressed the Duchess of Devonshire:

I should have solicited your attention to the Bird whose spoils you were about to wear. I should have told your Grace that the Ostrich is remarkable for being a foolish bird, and that its insensibility is particularly known by its total destitution of that tenderness which almost all Animals discover for their young.⁶⁰

Collet’s satire seems to rehearse this trope, alluding to a kind of zoomorphic metamorphosis, wherein the feathered ladies assume the fickleness and folly of their animal counterparts. However, this metamorphosis is only partial, for although the viewer is encouraged to compare man and beast, the physiognomy of the female subjects remains resolutely human, and decidedly attractive. It will be recalled that Collet’s reviewer in the *Westminster Magazine* declared that the principal female subject was so beautiful that he

⁵⁹ Marryat, 1772.

⁶⁰ Combe, 1777: 7- 8.

was “apt to pardon the extravagance and false taste of her coiffure.” Ultimately, therefore, any serious admonitory message can be seen to be undercut by the attractiveness of the satirical targets.

III.

The Feather'd Fair in a Fright is one of several images in Bowles's “34 New and Elegant Humorous Prints” series that possesses a thinly-veiled sexual subtext that would have been quickly detected by Collet's contemporaries. In most examples from the series, this innuendo is just as flagrant to the modern eye, but in the case of *The Feather'd Fair*, it is somewhat more inscrutable. On the face of it, Collet's feather satire does not seem to be a particularly erotic image at all; it depicts two fully-clothed – some might even say over-dressed – women, in an outdoor setting, who are without male companions or pursuers (aside from a pair of irate and ridiculous-looking birds). For the Georgian viewer, however, all of this would have had vaguely seedy and lascivious undertones. Although an image of fashionably-dressed women set against a bucolic backdrop would have reminded viewers of polite portraits of aristocratic ladies posing on the grounds of their private landscaped estates, it would have also reminded them of women of a much lower status, loitering in a far more public place. The landscape setting in Collet's image may have been intended to represent one of London's many pleasure gardens or public parks, both of which attracted visitors from all social classes, and both of which were widely known as popular sites for sexual assignation. In other words, these were the notorious resorts of prostitutes looking for patrons. Two contemporary mezzotint drolls engraved by John Raphael Smith allude to this common associational link between public parks and prostitution. The first, *All Sorts* (fig. 4.22), depicts four different types of prostitutes, each catering to a different level of clientele, posturing in a landscape setting, which Cindy McCreery has speculatively

identified as St. James's Park.⁶¹ The fact that they are prostitutes is made clear in the caption below, in which they are described, from left to right: "the luscious Tid-bit, to the bouncing Jack Whore, From the Bunter in Rags to the gay Pompadore." The second image, *A Bagnigge Wells Scene, or No Resisting Temptation* (fig. 4.23), is set in the tea garden of a popular resort in suburban London that was notorious for attracting loose women and lecherous men.⁶² Ellen G. D'Oench has observed that the beauties in this image "might be taken for elegantly dressed society women, were it not that one holds a rose in a strategic location while the other looks sidelong at the viewer and hikes up her skirt."⁶³ In both prints, thanks to subtle visual cues and descriptive textual captions, the attractive and modishly dressed female subjects are revealed to be women of ill-repute. However, as is the case with many satirical depictions of prostitutes of the period, the satire is partially based on the apparently ambiguous outward distinctions between the fashionable upper-class ladies and the demi-reps who rubbed shoulders at socially heterogeneous venues like St. James's and Bagnigge Wells.

There is no clear indication that the 'feather'd fair' in Collet's print are meant to be prostitutes, and indeed they need not be for the lascivious interpretation of the image to work. Regardless of their real identity, the artist's contemporaries would have questioned the modesty and virtue of any woman who would promenade around a public park in elaborate finery without a respectable male chaperone. As Fanny Burney's *Evelina* learned by accident, this kind of behaviour turned even a virginal young girl into fair game for roving libertines.⁶⁴ In such a perilous environment, the naïve, incautious, or imprudent woman risked becoming the sexual prey of unscrupulous men. Ironically, it may have been

⁶¹ McCreery, 2004: 53-54.

⁶² D'Oench, 1999: 14.

⁶³ *Ibid.*: 40.

⁶⁴ Illustrating the danger of navigating pleasure gardens unchaperoned, the eponymous heroine of Burney's novel is accosted by a group of lecherous gentlemen when she is separated from her party at Vauxhall Gardens. These men think (or pretend to think) that *Evelina* is a courtesan or actress (professions that were often considered to be one and the same). See: Burney, 1779: 121-123.

their seeming innocence and vulnerability to unintentionally solicited sexual advances that made Collet's female subjects especially titillating to the contemporary male viewer. The anonymous critic from the *Westminster Magazine* claimed, somewhat disturbingly, that the "terror" displayed by the woman in the foreground "serves to make her look handsomer." This vaguely sadistic reading of an image of a frightened woman fending off an aggressive, animal attacker (who, it will be noted, thrusts a suspiciously phallic-looking neck and head towards its victim) would seem to be the product of a culture that habitually aestheticised and glamorised sexual violence against women in both literature and high art.

Clarissa and Pamela, two of the most famous fictional characters of the period were the victims of rape and attempted rape, respectively. Although Richardson intended for these scenarios to evoke sympathy and admiration for his virtuous heroines, a few modern literary critics have observed that not only is there potential for reader-pleasure in these rape narratives, but the victimhood of these characters can be seen to strongly contribute to their appeal, particularly in the case of Clarissa.⁶⁵ Dorothy van Ghent, for example, has classified Clarissa Harlowe as a kind of erotic martyr; the perfect mixture of physical beauty, virginal purity, and feminine fragility, making her the ideal woman of the "Puritan middle class of the English eighteenth-century."⁶⁶ Ghent characterises the quality with which Richardson has imbued his heroine as "an erotically tinged debility which offers, masochistically, a ripe temptation to violence [...]." William Warner, meanwhile, has acknowledged a mixture of excitement and guilt that attends the reading of Clarissa's victimisation at the hands of the nefarious Lovelace, drawing a parallel between the act of rape and the act of reading:

⁶⁵ See for example: Warner 1983; van Ghent, 1953; Rajan, 1993.

⁶⁶ van Ghent, 1953: 49.

As readers we share the desire to enter private correspondence that Lovelace expresses; our sense of violating a taboo is paired with the pleasure of doing so [...]. The ‘rape of Clarissa’ as an imagined event which is cruel and uncalled for drifts toward, and becomes entangled with, ‘the rape of Clarissa’ that we enjoy in reading [...] [it] has become – in spite of every conscious critical effort – something extravagant, overdetermined [and] pleasurable.⁶⁷

Ra Sunder Rajan tentatively agrees with this, conceding that, while there is a clear alignment between the author and the female protagonist, the reader is offered the subject-position of Lovelace, “the secret reader/rapist.”⁶⁸ Ellen Moody, on the other hand, points out that, although readers might identify with Clarissa’s rapist, Richardson himself was attempting to make a point about a society that valorised rakish behaviour. Moody states: “I read *Clarissa* as a book intended to make visible our and Richardson’s societies’ appetite for violence [and] admiration for competitive aggression, which includes predatory and cruel behaviour, especially in males [...]”⁶⁹ Regardless of its intended effect, then, there was – and apparently remains – a contingent of Richardson’s readership that would have seen Clarissa’s rape as ambivalent at best, and arousing at worst.

There is no such equivocation with the rape imagery of high art. The canon of Western art history abounds with traditional and endlessly revisited rape subjects taken from Classical myth, ancient history, and parables from the Old and New Testament. Many of the most famous and highly venerated artists in history have experimented with these subjects, subsequently creating masterworks which continue to be appreciated for their formal beauty and sensuality, in spite of their gruesome subject matter, and the efforts

⁶⁷ Warner, 1983: 31-32.

⁶⁸ Rajan, 1993: 76-77.

⁶⁹ Moody, “‘What right have you to detain me here?’: Rape in Richardson’s *Clarissa*,” A Paper Delivered at a meeting of the *American Society for Eighteenth Century Studies* conference, Albuquerque, New Mexico, March 26-29, 2010, *Ellen Moody*, <http://www.jimandellen.org> (accessed 1 November, 2012).

made by feminist and revisionist scholars to draw attention to this subject matter, which they argue, has historically been down-played and under-interrogated.⁷⁰

Among the most canonical of the rape narratives of Classical, Renaissance, and Baroque art is the myth of Apollo and Daphne. Although, as I will soon demonstrate, this is not necessarily the most obvious source for *The Feather'd Fair*, the immense popularity of this myth as an artistic subject, and the particular iconography associated with it make it relevant to the present discussion. In this tale, the God Apollo, after having been shot by the mischievous God Eros with a golden arrow, falls madly in love with the nymph Daphne, who in turn has been shot with a lead arrow, causing her to spurn her obsessive admirer; the love-sick God gives chase after the terrified nymph, eventually catching up to her, but before he can subdue her, she transforms into a laurel tree, thus escaping defilement. The penultimate moment, just as Apollo closes in on Daphne, but before she fully transforms into a tree, is the moment that is conventionally chosen for depiction, such as, for example, in an eighteenth-century mezzotint (fig. 4.24) by John Smith after a painting in Blenheim Palace, which was then attributed to Titian.⁷¹ Here, Daphne is shown with her mouth open as if screaming, her arms stretched out in defense, and her body twisting violently away from her pursuer, though her head turns back to see how closely he follows. In Collet's work, though the dramatic urgency is significantly reduced, the viewer can clearly see the echoes of this frightened nymph in the 'feather'd fair.'

⁷⁰ For recent work on rape imagery in art, see for example: Margaret D. Carroll, "The Erotics of Absolutism: Rubens and the Mystification of Sexual Violence" in Broude and Garrard (eds.), 1992: 139-159; Yael Even, "The Loggia Dei Lanzi: A Showcase of Female Subjugation" in *Ibid.*: 127-137; Even, 2001; Wolfthal, 1999.

⁷¹ This mezzotint is part of a series called "The Loves of the Gods," engraved and published by John Smith between 1708 and 1709. According to the title page for the series (BM No. 1878,0914.52) the prints were made after "the Celebrated Paintings of Titian in the Duke of Marlborough's Gallery at Blenheim," but according to G. Scharf these were actually painted leather wall hangings, since destroyed in a fire of 1861, which were already doubted to be Titians by the late 1770s. They are now known to have derived from engravings by Caraglio after Perino del Vaga. See: Scharf, 1862: 85.

It is interesting to note that, in his retelling of the myth in *Metamorphoses*, Ovid states that Daphne's beauty is "enhanced by flight," which is essentially the same sentiment expressed by the *Westminster* reviewer about the 'feather'd fair.'⁷² Leo Curran has observed that *Metamorphoses* – which served as the inspiration for the mythological subjects of most Early Modern artists – showed sexual desirability to be "enhanced by disarray of clothing or hair, by discomfort and embarrassment, or by fear."⁷³ He elsewhere notes that "flight for Ovid was the consummate means for the expression of the terror of his rape victim, the predatory appetite of the rapist, and the dehumanising reduction of a woman to the level of a hunted animal [...]."⁷⁴ Thus, many later artists emphasised the fear, violence, and non-consensual nature of the sexual relationships in these myths in order to stay true to Ovid's vision, and also, surely, to emit a sadistic kind of erotic appeal.

Some artists, on the other hand, sanitised these mythic rape narratives, electing to minimise the violence, while others still, chose gentler myths that featured "seduction" rather than explicit rape.⁷⁵ One of these seduction myths, which first emerged as a popular pretext for the depiction of graphic sexuality in Cinquecento Italy, was the story of Leda and the Swan, in which the God Zeus disguises himself in the form of a graceful swan in order to allure the Spartan Queen, Leda.⁷⁶ The visual representation – or suggestion – of bestiality was surprisingly unproblematic for Early Modern viewers, owing to the fact that the subject was legitimised by a Classical source, and perhaps because it was more acceptable to show a woman copulating with a bird than a human man. For painters, printmakers, and sculptors who selected this myth, it was an appealing exercise in harmonious forms – the smooth, voluptuous curves of the typically naked Leda could be

⁷² Ovid, Miller (trans.), 1916: 39.

⁷³ L. Curran, "Rape and Rape Victims in the *Metamorphoses*" in Peradotto and Sullivan (eds.), 1984: 275.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*: 280.

⁷⁵ For the distinctions between these types of rape images, see: Wolfthal, 1999: Chapter 1.

⁷⁶ For Leda and the Swan in art, see: Draper, 1971; Medlicott, 1970; Reid, 1953: 378-389.

mirrored in the serpentine neck of her swan-seducer, such as can be seen in Valentine Green's luscious mezzotint (fig. 4.25) after George Willison's painted original, published by Sayer in 1771. Juxtaposing this roughly contemporary print with Collet's satire, *The Feather'd Fair* can now be best understood as a humorous perversion or parody of the traditional motif of Leda and the Swan. Collet's image – which replaces a classical nude with a pair of fashionable demi-reps, and a graceful swan with an ungainly ostrich – works to distort a kind of 'high' art-erotica that was then being collected by the most eminent connoisseurs in the kingdom. The Earl of Pembroke, for example, had in his illustrious collection at Wilton House a particularly sensuous rendering of *Leda and the Swan* (fig. 4.26), which was then believed to be the revered work of Leonardo da Vinci.⁷⁷

I will conclude here with the brief mention of one final detail which contributes to the strong sexual subtext of Collet's satire, and which provides further evidence that the central female subject is meant to represent unwilling sexual prey. The placement of the woman's partially-closed fan between herself and her animal aggressor may seem to be an incidental detail to the modern eye, but to the eighteenth-century viewer, this gesture was potentially loaded with meaning. In her fascinating study on the symbolism of fans in Hogarth's work, Angela Rosenthal recounts the history of the ladies' handheld fan in the eighteenth century, and the "secret" language that developed around it.⁷⁸ The fan was apparently used not only as a prosaic tool for cooling oneself, but also as a means of directing and reflecting the male gaze. When opened, it could serve as a protective shield, or a flirtatious toy used, in Rosenthal's words, "to trap the gaze" of a desired suitor, and when snapped shut, it could serve as a sword-like weapon. Moreover, in visual culture, the fan could be used as a potent sexual metaphor – a fully opened fan symbolising a woman's

⁷⁷ Kennedy, 1758: 79. Now attributed to Cesare da Sesto (1515-1520).

⁷⁸ Angela Rosenthal, "Unfolding Gender: Women and the 'Secret' Sign Language of Fans in Hogarth's Work" in Fort and Rosenthal (eds.), 2001: 120-141.

unrestrained sexuality and availability, and a closed fan suggesting chastity or sexual repression, which, as Rosenthal points out, is illustrated in “Morning” and “Evening” of Hogarth’s *Four Times of the Day* (1738).⁷⁹ Given this context, I interpret Collet’s satire and his use of the fan as follows: the beautiful, yet naïve young ‘feather’d fair,’ were, but a moment earlier, carefree and audacious, enjoying their afternoon promenade around a fashionable public park – much like the modish beauties seen in one of Bowles’s contemporary mezzotint drolls (fig. 4.27) – when suddenly they are accosted by a pair of fearsome, predatory animals. The lady in the foreground begins to close her fan, indicating, firstly, that she intends to use it as a weapon to fend off the ostrich, but also that she is now closing herself off to sexual activity (as echoed in the crossing of her legs, and the pivoting of her body away from her attacker). However, she inadvertently remains open for sexual objectification; in holding her fan away from her face and chest, it becomes ineffectual as a shield against the unwanted gaze, and in twisting away from the ostrich, she faces the viewer head-on, allowing a full, unobstructed view of her shapely form, and bare décolletage. This poorly positioned fan can thus be read as the source and symbol of the female subject’s physical and sexual vulnerability. Though defenceless, the ‘feather’d fair’ are apparently deserving of their cruel fate, at least according to the anonymous author of the verse appended to the engraving. He callously declares: “Let them squeak, scamper, scream, squabble, scramble or fight,/ You may laugh at their figures, for they’re in a fright.”

⁷⁹ See: Fig. 4.73; BM Nos. 1868,0822.1546 and 1868,0822.1548.

IV.

So far, this chapter has considered *The Feather'd Fair in a Fright* as an independent image; I would now like to situate the print in the context of the pictorial series to which it belongs. Fortunately, there are extant examples of all thirty-four mezzotints advertised in Bowles's 1784 catalogue, and though some of these are later impressions, there are enough original dated examples to indicate, firstly, that the prints were published between 1777 and 1781, and secondly, that they were listed in chronological order, meaning that *The Feather'd Fair* was in all likelihood the first in the set to be published. While differing in some ways from the images that followed, this first print appears to have set the tone for the rest of the series. The following survey of the "34 New and Elegant Humorous Prints" set will reveal it to be a heterogeneous graphic product, which combined and exploited the various desirable qualities of bawdy Dutch drolls, seductive 'fancy subjects,' decorative fashion plates and furniture designs, and topical social satires.

Although, as mentioned, there is no overall, unifying narrative or theme for this series, there is nevertheless very little variation in terms of style, subject matter, and setting. The compositions are typically bold and minimal, with two or three, and rarely more than four figures incorporated into generic, nonspecific settings. The exterior spaces tend to be pastoral landscapes or country villages, while the interiors exhibit slightly more variety, ranging from rustic taverns to well-appointed drawing rooms. The social types depicted seem to mostly fall into one of two categories: idealised rustic subjects, or, fashionable subjects who are of an indeterminate, though likely middling class. There are no obviously aristocratic or noble subjects, and there is only one print that explicitly refers

to an identifiable public figure.⁸⁰ Female figures appear in all but three of the prints, and are typically the dominant focus, and thus, a preoccupation with the appearance and behaviour of women can perhaps be seen as the common thread that holds the series together.

In her article on Collet's satirical work from this period, focusing on what she terms "sporting women," Patricia Crown looks at a number of prints from the Bowles-published series. Within the series, there is a sub-set of images – twelve in total – which depict women engaging in typically masculine activities, or dressing in masculine-inspired attire. These include *Miss Wicket and Miss Trigger* (fig. 4.28), *The Pleasures of Skating* (fig. 4.29), and *The Actress at her Toilet, or Miss Brazen, just Breecht* (fig. 4.30). These are probably the most recognisable images from the series, owing not just to Crown's pioneering study, but also to the social historians, theatre scholars, and others, who have reproduced Collet's colourful, androgynous subjects in their works.⁸¹ In contrast to *The Feather'd Fair in a Fright*, the women in these prints appear confident, commanding, even brazen, as one of the print's titles suggests. There are, however, a number of images, perhaps less familiar, which, like *The Feather'd Fair*, depict meeker women, who are usually – but not always – of a lower social order, such as can be seen in *The Proverb Revers'd* (fig. 4.31), *The Victim* (fig. 4.32), and *The Pretty Waterwoman* (fig. 4.33).

Though the prints of brazen women clearly work to satirise the transgressive appearance and behaviour of the subjects, they nevertheless present the women as beautiful

⁸⁰ This print is *Paul Jones Shooting a Sailor who had attempted to strike his Colours in an Engagement* (ca.1777), App. II, No. 50t. It is a depiction of the Scottish-born, American naval officer Paul Jones (1747-1792), who, during the Revolutionary War, was a hero to the Americans and a villain to the British. According to Mary Dorothy George, the print probably shows "the incident during the encounter of the 'Bon Homme Richard' with the 'Serapis', when a gunner shouted for quarter till Jones knocked him down with the butt of a pistol. In the manner of history rather than satire, and tending to the glorification of Jones." It is an anomaly in the series in that it is a personal caricature, focusing on a male subject. See: George, 5, 1935: 339, BMSat 5566.

⁸¹ See: fn. 20.

and alluring. These women share the same physical characteristics as their more modest counterparts – porcelain-skin, flushed cheeks, heart-shaped lips, aquiline noses, and doe-eyes; all the attributes of the conventional eighteenth-century beauty. The two different categories of women seen in Collet’s prints represent two different types of female attractiveness: the demure-type is the innocent and potentially vulnerable beauty, who can likewise be seen in the contemporary ‘fancy subjects,’ published by Bowles, such as *The Oyster Woman* (fig. 4.34), one of several “Candlelight and Domestic Pieces,” engraved by Philip Dawe after Henry Morland, which were advertised in the same 1784 catalogue; while the brazen-type is related to the beguiling sirens who make direct eye-contact with the viewer in images like *The Bird of Paradise* (fig. 4.35), one of a series of sixteen mezzotints by John Raphael Smith, which appear in Bowles’s catalogue directly after Collet’s set, and are described as “new and elegant Prints of Ladies in fashionable Dresses and enchanting Attitudes.”⁸²

Bowles, in fact, sold a number of different print series that offered a succession of pretty female faces – some of which were designed for customers who preferred an innocent beauty, while others catered to those who were looking for a more rebellious demi-rep. These series included the Morland set of “Candlelight and Domestic Pieces,” featuring ballad sellers, chamber maids, and other idealised lower-class subjects; the Smith set, which depicts elaborately dressed courtesans and other fashionable women of questionable virtue and social status; several decorative, allegorical ‘Times of the Day’-type series after artists like Rosalba, Hayman and Mercier; a set of “Ladies of Quality and

⁸² The Morland/Dawe “Candlelight and Domestic Pieces” appear in Bowles’s catalogue under the heading “Sets and Single Prints of Miscellaneous Designs Represented by Portraits of Ladies, in fashionable Dresses and Attitudes.” These were 1s plain, or, 2s coloured, and also included series after Rosalba, Mercier, Hayman, and others. The “new and elegant Prints of Ladies in fashionable Dresses and enchanting attitudes,” were 2s plain, or, 3s coloured, indicating they were slightly finer products. Bowles’s 1784 catalogue lists these prints anonymously; however, as Ellen G. O’Dench has discovered, these were based on Smith’s drawings, but were not publically acknowledged to be his work until the Bowles and Carver’s catalogue of 1795. See: Bowles, 1784: 106-108, 117-118; D’Oench, 1999: 45.

Celebrated Beauties,” which include both historical and modern female subjects from high society, many of which were engraved after works by celebrated portraitists, like Kneller, Hudson, and Reynolds; and of course, Collet’s “34 New and Elegant Humorous Prints” set, which includes both brazen and demure models of female attractiveness, and which introduces humour to the convention of the female beauties series.⁸³

In Collet’s images of both brazen and demure beauties, there is often a distinct sense of exposure; the women are frequently shown to be physically exposed, as well as being exposed to the unmitigated gaze of the viewer and the male figures within the compositions. For example, in *The Proverb Revers’d* a pretty haymaker has fallen asleep in a field, and has unwittingly exposed her luxuriant, reclining form to a young hunter and his dog who have fortuitously stumbled upon her; in *The Actress at her Toilet*, the masculine-attire of the cross-dressing performer ironically reveals her feminine form – her low-cut smock exposes her cleavage, and her tight-fitting breeches and stockings cling to her shapely legs; and, of course, in *The Feather’d Fair*, the lady’s posture and poor positioning of her fan allow for a clear view of her curvaceous body.

In other images, the act of looking at the female form is made especially conspicuous. In *The Pretty Bar Maid* (fig. 4.36) a group of tavern patrons surround their attractive server, all admiring the view, with one particularly nervy customer leaning in just inches away from the woman’s chest to get an especially close look. Two other images, *The Pretty Waterwoman* and *The Pleasures of Skating*, feature men who actually employ optical devices to examine their female specimens. The former depicts a pretty young lady in a low-cut dress and feathered hat and an older, lecherous naval officer sitting face-to-face in a rowboat. The blushing woman is forced to lean forward as she

⁸³ For the “Times of the Day” series, see: Bowles, 1784: 106-108. For the “Ladies of Quality,” see: *Ibid.*: 105-106.

manoeuvres the oars, but she coyly cocks her head to the side, half turning away from her leering admirer, whose gloved hand holds a monocle up to his lascivious eye to inspect her bare décolletage. In the latter image, a party of fashionably dressed men and women skate on a frozen pond on what appears to be the country estate of a manor house that can be seen in the background. Ironically, the female subjects excel at the sport as their male companions struggle; the woman in the foreground glides gracefully and confidently across the frozen surface, while two men lie prostrate at her feet, one of whom is taking the opportunity to peek up her skirt as she lifts her leg in the process of propelling herself forward. A smiling voyeur behind them peers through a monocle, inspecting the woman's scandalously exposed ankle. In all of these images, there is an emphasis on the pleasure of viewing, and even in those that depict audacious women, the scopic control and authority of men is shown to be indisputable.

Visual pleasure is something that is stressed in the advertisement for the series in Bowles's catalogue – the images are described as “elegant” and “when framed and glazed they make a handsome appearance and fashionable furniture.” Thus, one of their primary functions seems to have been a form of interior decoration. Of course, the detailed rendering of ornate fashions, and the bright hand-painted gouache would have contributed to this function. The images that depict interior spaces, with fashionable items of furniture, patterned textiles, and ornamental curios, would have had an added decorative dimension, which perhaps mirrored the contents of the real-life rooms in which they were displayed. The soft, swirling forms of the rococo mode – as articulated in curving cabriole-chair legs, arabesque-patterned carpets, and bell-shaped porcelain vases – were particularly well-suited to the sensuous, silken medium of mezzotint, as is illustrated in several images from the series, including *Tight Lacing or Fashion Before Ease* (fig. 4.37), *The Amorous Thief, or Lover's Larceny* (fig. 4.38), and *An Actress at her Toilet*, as well as in other

contemporary Bowles-published drolls, which similarly combine mild humour and decorative appeal, like *Lady Betty Bustle and Her Maid Lucy Preparing for the Masquerade at the Pantheon* (fig. 4.39), *Miss Rattle Dressing for the Pantheon* (fig. 4.40), and the aforementioned *Bird of Paradise*. While the ornate rococo style was ostensibly falling out of vogue by this period, making way for the sober linearity of the neo-classical, it apparently still appealed to the purchasers of these prints.

As I have established, the persistence of the rococo in Collet's work can be convincingly explained by his exposure to this aesthetic at the St. Martin's Lane Academy. Many of Collet's classmates were also influenced by this exposure, including Thomas Linnell, a skilled draughtsman, who went on to become a prominent furniture designer, specialising in rococo-style pieces.⁸⁴ Intriguingly, one of Linnell's designs for a pier-glass frame for Kedleston Hall (fig. 4.41), dating to about 1765, bears a striking resemblance to one that Collet reproduces in three of the prints from the series (figs. 4.30, 4.37, 4.38). Perhaps Collet had seen Linnell's design; or perhaps he had seen the mirror itself; or, more likely still, it was a particularly popular and ubiquitous style of furniture. Similarly, the ornate chair-backs and girandoles seen in *Lady Betty Bustle* and *Miss Rattle* are reminiscent of designs that can be found in pattern books of the period (figs. 4.42-4.43), which like fashion plates, were purchased for both decorative and prosaic purposes. Bowles himself published several of these volumes, including *A New Book of Pier-Frames, Ovals, Gerandoles, Tables, &c.*, *A New Book of Ornaments*, and *Borders*, all of which are advertised in his 1784 catalogue, and which further demonstrate his efforts to corner the market in ornamental print publishing.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Hayward and Kirkham, 1980.

⁸⁵ Bowles, 1784: 165.

In addition to adorning the walls of private homes, select examples from the “34 New and Elegant Humorous Prints” series may also have been put on display in public places. Since at least as early as the seventeenth century, prints were commonly used to decorate the walls of taverns, victual-houses, and inns,⁸⁶ and Collet may have designed certain images with these spaces in mind. Likely candidates for such a role include the aforementioned *Pretty Bar Maid*, which, of course, takes place in a tavern; *Bachelor’s Fare, or, Bread and Cheese with Kisses* (fig. 4.44), which depicts a sailor in the room of an inn attempting to seduce a young woman into whose hands he is depositing gold coins; and *Fielding’s Myrmidons Spoiling Bob Booty’s Morning Draught* (fig. 4.45), a print loosely based on the seventh plate of Hogarth’s *Industry and Idleness*⁸⁷, depicting three ‘Bow Street Runners,’ bursting into the room of an inn or bagnio, where a highwayman is entertaining a pair of prostitutes. Interestingly, in the latter two images, framed prints are prominently displayed on the walls: in *Bachelor’s Fare*, it is an engraving of two ships, bearing the caption “The Free Briton closely engag’d with the Charming Sally”; and in *Fielding’s Myrmidons*, it is a print depicting the famed robber, Jack Shepherd on the floor of a prison cell. Collet’s ‘public house’ themed prints seem to have offered an upscale version of the cruder Dutch genre scenes that Bowles also sold, such as *The English Coachman* after George van der Mijl (fig. 4.46), *The Waggoner and the Fisherman* after Adriaen van Ostade (fig. 4.47), and *Dutch Amusement* after Adrian Brouwer (fig. 4.48), all of which may well have been found displayed in similar locations.⁸⁸

Finally, as well as offering both erotic and decorative appeal, many of the prints in the series also provided humorous commentary on recent trends and events. For example, several prints featuring women dressed in masculine riding costumes and military-inspired

⁸⁶ For prints in taverns/inns, see: Donald, 1996: 19; O’Connell, 1999: 17-18; Watt, 1991: 196-197.

⁸⁷ See: BM No. 1868,0822.1578.

⁸⁸ These prints were 1s plain, 2s coloured. Bowles, 1784: 112.

regalia first began to appear in 1778, coinciding with recent developments in the escalating war with America. In February 1778, France entered the conflict on the American side, consequently whipping the English nation into a panicked, yet patriotic frenzy. Responding to the threat of invasion, the government set up two temporary military camps to protect the capital – one at Coxheath in Kent, and the other at Warley in Essex, both of which began to attract flocks of curious sightseers who came to see the dazzling military spectacle. Part of this spectacle was the aristocratic officers' wives, who showed their support by parading around the camps in costumes inspired by their husbands' regimental uniforms. One of the most prominent of these female patriots was the Duchess of Devonshire, who, according to the *Morning Post*, appeared "every day at the head of the beauteous Amazons at Coxheath who [were] all dressed *en militaire*."⁸⁹ Thus, with images like *Miss Wicket and Miss Trigger, An Officer in the Light Infantry, Driven by His Lady to Cox-Heath* (fig. 4.49), and *The Female Fox Hunter* (fig. 4.50), all dating from 1778, Collet was once again alluding to the fashionable influence of women like Georgiana, as well to the contemporary fashion plates (fig. 4.51), and Grand Manner portraits (fig. 4.52) that exploited the *en militaire* craze. While these prints really only address the prevalent sartorial style and its associated masculine behaviour, in an extant painting dating from the same year, entitled *Corporal Cartouche Instructing Miss Camplove in her Martial Exercises* (fig.4.53), the artist makes much more explicit reference to the widely publicised antics taking place at Coxheath. In it, a corporal dressed in an opulent crimson uniform guides a woman in a lacy yellow gown and military-inspired headdress in an ambiguous martial exercise, which apparently gives him license to reach out and touch her delicate face, lifting her chin, ostensibly to correct her posture. Here, Collet simultaneously recalls the stories of extra-marital affairs carried on between officers and their colleagues' wives,

⁸⁹ *London Chronicle* (16-18 July, 1778).

and the subsequent theatrical satire by Sheridan, *The Camp: A Musical Entertainment*, which debuted in October of that year to glowing reviews.⁹⁰ William W. Burke and Linnea M. Bass have speculated that the scene depicted is actually the actress Charlotte Walpole preparing for her role in the play.⁹¹ Although the painting did not become one of the “34 New and Elegant Humorous Prints,” and instead was reproduced and published by Sayer and Bennett a couple of years later, its style, subject, and format would have made it a suitable addition to Bowles’s series.

The “34 New and Elegant Humorous Prints” set, we can now suggest, represents a particular kind of graphic product in which Bowles and Collet seem to have specialised. These bawdy, beautiful, and modish prints can be understood as a kind of eccentric hybrid, combining the coarse humour of the Dutch droll, the feminine beauty of the contemporary ‘fancy subject,’ the decorative quality of the fashion plate or pattern book, and the topicality of the ephemeral social satire. The recurring motifs of the series – the transgressive behaviour and appearance of women, sexual innuendo, and the latest trends in fashionable clothing and interior décor – were, of course, career-long fixations for the artist. However, by the late 1770s, these intertwining themes seem to have become for Collet an almost exclusive focus. The “34 New and Elegant Humorous Prints” series functioned as a flashy advertisement for the artist’s rebranding as a producer of decorative social satires, and complemented the existing inventory of his print publisher, Bowles. Moreover, the series’ emphatic emphasis on the feminine can be seen to be more broadly reflective of its cultural and historical milieu. Recently, historians like Dror Wahrman and Gillian Russell have identified the 1770s as a critical period in which anxieties about the

⁹⁰ For Sheridan’s play and the role of women in military culture of the late eighteenth-century, see: Jones, 1997.

⁹¹ Burke and Bass, 1995: 2.

cultural influence of women reached a particular highpoint.⁹² At this time, British society seems to have been acutely fascinated with prominent female public figures like the Duchess of Devonshire. On the one hand, these highly visible members of the *bon ton* served as scapegoats for the crisis of empire; they personified the decadence and effeminacy at the metropolitan centre, which was believed to have contributed to a weakened hold on the American colonies. On the other hand, the exploits of such women offered a form of whimsical escapism for an empire embroiled in conflict. Much like the plethora of newspaper reports on the “Beauteous Amazons at Coxheath,” Collet’s graphic series seems to have expressed the widespread fears and fantasies about the feminisation of British culture, and simultaneously offered both mild censure, and humorous diversion.

V.

Clearly, Bowles and Collet’s series had much to offer a diverse customer base. Although such mezzotints are sometimes characterised as ‘popular’ prints, catering to the lower end of the market, this is not quite accurate.⁹³ Their prices alone would have excluded the lower classes, and there is evidence in the form of surviving print collections that wealthier clientele did, in fact, purchase prints of this kind.⁹⁴ But the “34 New and Elegant Humorous Prints” were not exactly at the top end of the market for graphic art,

⁹² Russell, 2007: particularly Chapter 8; Wahrman, 2004: Chapter 6.

⁹³For example: Cindy McCreery describes Bowles’s business as “part of old tradition of ‘City’ printsellers that sold a variety of prints, including mezzotint drolls, at the lower end of the print market.” She suggests that lower-middle class consumers, such as “small tradesmen” and “skilled artisans,” would be among Bowles’s clientele; however, these consumers would likely be buying the smaller, lower-end, 6d mezzotints, rather than the Collet-designed ‘posture’-sized mezzotints that cost between 1s and 2s. Sheila O’Connell uses both the *Feather’d Fair* and *The Sudden Explosion in Fording the Brook*, another print from the “34 New and Elegant Humorous Prints” series as examples of ‘popular’ prints. Although she employees a deliberately broad definition of the term ‘popular,’ she states that the focus of her book is “the mass of *cheap* print production,” which should, therefore, preclude Bowles’s ‘posture’ mezzotints. She does acknowledge that these prints were at the “expensive end” of the market for popular prints. See: McCreery, 2004: 20-21; O’Connell, 199: 62-64, 114, 118.

⁹⁴ For these collections, see below: 245.

either. Rather, as I will now go on to explore, they seem most likely to have been designed with a broad, middling audience in mind; an audience with some money, some awareness of ‘high’ art, an interest in the latest fashions and trends, and the desire for something pretty and mildly amusing to decorate their walls. To better understand this imagery’s distinctive appeal, we can usefully compare the output and business model of Collet’s publisher Carington Bowles with that of another leading purveyor of fashion satires, Matthew Darly.⁹⁵

Unlike Bowles, the scion of an established and well-known printselling dynasty, the origins and early life of Matthew – or Matthias – Darly are shrouded in mystery. The first public record of this engraver-publisher is his documented apprenticeship to the clockmaker Umfraville Sampson in 1735. He then disappears from the records for several years, re-emerging again in 1749, as one of several printsellers who were questioned by the government about a number of slanderous satirical prints that attacked the Duke of Cumberland. By this point, Darly had a shop in St. Martin’s Lane, and seems to have been earning a steady yet modest living engraving political satires, trade cards, bookplates, and ornamental designs, and teaching drawing and etching. In the 1750s, he played an instrumental role in the flowering of English furniture design by not only engraving and publishing his own designs – *A New Book of Chinese, Gothic, and Modern Chairs* (1751) and *A New Book of Chinese Designs* (1754) – but also contributing ninety-eight of the one hundred and forty-seven plates in Chippendale’s *The Gentleman and Cabinet Maker’s Director* (1754), perhaps the most influential furniture pattern book of the century. He also briefly lived with Chippendale and his family, and helped to sell the *Director*, indicating that he too, like Bowles, was heavily invested in the business of ornamental design. Darly

⁹⁵ For Matthew Darly (ca. 1720-1780), see: Clayton, 1997: 215; *ODNB*; Stroomberg, 1999; West, 2001.

would later style himself “Professor and teacher of Ornament.” However, he also continued to produce political satires throughout this period, and into the late 1760s.

In 1766, Darly and his wife, Mary – who worked as his partner – relocated to 39 Strand, in the heart of the fashionable commercial district of London, and from here, they increasingly focused their attention on social satire aimed at a polite, urbane audience. They successfully attracted this type of clientele both by producing satires on popular metropolitan fashions and recognisable urban types, and by encouraging amateurs from the leisured classes to submit their own satirical drawings to be engraved and published. One of the Darlys’s advertisements from 1771 announced:

Ladies and Gentlemen sending their Designs may have them neatly etch’d & Printed for their own private Amusement at the most reasonable rates, or if for publication, shall have every grateful return and acknowledgement for any comic design, Discriptive prints in writing (not political) shall have due Honor shewn ‘em & be immediately Drawn and Executed.⁹⁶

The Darlys capitalised on a fashionable pastime, providing all the tools and services for caricature-hobbyists, while simultaneously tapping into an abundant source of free satirical designs, which they engraved, published, and sold back to the same clientele in bound volumes, such as *24 Caricatures by Several Ladies, Gentlemen, Artists, etc.* (1771) and *Darly’s Comic Prints of Characters: Caricatures, Macaronies, etc. Dedicated to D. Garrick* (1776). So, whereas Bowles exclusively employed professional engravers, like Dawe and Smith, many of the Darly satires were furnished by anonymous amateurs, several of whom have later been revealed to be aristocrats and famous public figures, such as Brinsley Sheridan, Henry William Bunbury, Richard St. George Mansergh, and George Townshend. It is also interesting to note that many of the Darlys’s genteel suppliers were women, like Elizabeth Brigetta Gulston, the daughter of Sir Thomas Stepney, indicating

⁹⁶ Darly, 1771: 1.

that caricature-sketching was an acceptable pastime for well-bred ladies. It was not, however, acceptable for either ladies or gentlemen to produce and submit “low or political Subjects” for publication, as was made explicitly clear in another of the Darlys’s advertisements of 1772.⁹⁷

Illustrative of their lofty ambitions and keen instincts for self-promotion, the Darlys staged an exhibition of amateur caricatures in the spring of 1774, around the same time that the Royal Academy, Society of Artists, and Free Society of Artists were holding their own shows. The exhibition space was their shop on the Strand, and the entrance fee was one shilling – thereby excluding the rabble, yet inexpensive enough to encourage a strong turnout – and included a free catalogue, which, afterwards, could be exchanged for “any print not exceeding one shilling value.”⁹⁸ This was a brilliant marketing ploy that effectively lured the exhibition participants’ friends and acquaintances, as well as the curious public, into the Darlys’s shop, where they could be tempted into making additional purchases. A ‘puff’ piece, likely planted by the Darlys, which appeared in the *Morning Chronicle* of 29 April, is suggestive of the success of the show. It read:

Many Inhabitants of the Strand present their Compliments to Mr. Darly, and beg he will take some method to remedy the inconvenience arising to them from the great concourse of the coaches of those real patrons of the polite arts who attend his exhibition. They are not envious of Mr. Darly’s rising fame, nor do they repine his good fortune, but both his neighbours and friends, rejoice to see his merit crowned with such success, and his serviceable ingenuity so celebrated; yet they are persuaded they would not do justice to Mr. Darly’s disposition to oblige the public, were they not to point out to him the impropriety in the present situation of his great room in the Capital thoroughfare. They have not therefore a doubt but that Mr. Darly will attend to this hint of his

⁹⁷ *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser* (18 May, 1772).

⁹⁸ *Public Advertiser* (28 April, 1774).

sincere admirers to remove his exhibition of capital drawings, &c. for the next year into some more private and adjacent street.⁹⁹

Just before this exhibition closed, the Darlys issued one final advertisement in the *Public Advertiser* of 11 June, which notified “the nobility and gentry” who had “not already seen these diverting and entertaining Comic subjects, Characters and Caricatures,” that the exhibition room would be open for additional hours in order to accommodate them, once again demonstrating the Darlys’s efforts to appeal to an elite audience.¹⁰⁰

In contrast to the ambitious upstart Darly, Bowles spent less time courting the metropolitan *bon ton*. His “Map and Print Warehouse” was located in St. Paul’s Church Yard in the city, the traditional centre for print-publishing, which was some distance away from the newer locus for fashionable artistic production in the West End. He advertised far less frequently in the London newspapers; and, in his catalogue of 1784, he notified the public that his stock was available for “Merchants Exports, and Shop Keepers Country Trade,” illustrating his efforts to supply a demand for graphic products outside of the bustling metropolis. This, of course, was in marked contrast to Darly’s predominantly urban focus. Bowles did, however, make some attempt to attract the eye of a local, London audience through the implementation of colourful, seasonally changing window displays. It was increasingly common practice in this period for printsellers to install temporary exhibitions of their wares in the large, projecting bow windows of their shops, and both Bowles and Darly are known to have done this thanks to anecdotal record – Charles Lamb reminisced about the displays of his “old friend Carington Bowles of St. Paul’s Churchyard,” which he described as “exhibition[s] as venerable as the adjacent cathedral”¹⁰¹ – as well as a number of extant prints which depict spectators loitering in

⁹⁹ *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser* (29 April, 1774).

¹⁰⁰ *Public Advertiser* (11 June, 1774).

¹⁰¹ Lamb, 1840: 331.

front of their shop windows (figs. 4.54-4.55).¹⁰² These prints would have functioned both as satires on oblivious victims of fashion, and as self-referential marketing tools that advertised the printsellers' respective places of business. In both prints, the viewer can identify in the fictive window displays real examples of contemporary products that the publishers had on offer. In Bowles's *Spectators at a Print-Shop in St. Paul's Church Yard*, a 1774 mezzotint attributed to John Raphael Smith, there can be found the aforementioned *Miss Rattle Preparing for the Pantheon* (fig. 4.40), *The Paintress of Macaroni's* (fig. 4.54a), *Beau Mordecai Inspired* (fig. 4.54b) and several of his other trademark mezzotint drolls, as well as a number of portraits of clerics and divines, like John Wesley (fig. 4.54c) and George Whitefield (fig. 4.54d), advertising that he also kept in stock traditional, non-satirical prints, as well. Meanwhile, Darly's *The Macaroni Print Shop* of 1772, engraved by Edward Topham, promotes only one type of graphic product, the eponymous macaroni print, and reproduces examples such as *The Clerical Macaroni* (fig. 55a), *The Fly Catching Macaroni* (fig. 4.55b), and *The Unfortunate Macaroni* (fig. 4.55c).

'Macaroni prints,' the Darlys' signature product of the early 1770s, were satirical depictions of male figures of various vocations and backgrounds dressed in the fashionable yet controversially androgynous macaroni style, which incorporated large wigs, tight breeches, delicate shoes, and oversized swords.¹⁰³ Although, as Shearer West points out, these prints were published individually, they were obviously seen as a kind of series, as evidenced by the manner in which they were apparently displayed in the printshop window, and by the fact that they were compiled together in albums, both by consumers and by the publishers themselves in volumes like the aforementioned *Darly's Comic Prints*

¹⁰² For discussion of shop window displays in the eighteenth century, see: Mui and Mui, 1989: 221-222; Walsh, 1995.

¹⁰³ For 'macaroni prints,' see: West, 2001; Rauser, 2004: 101-117; Ribeiro, 1978: 463-468.

of Characters.¹⁰⁴ In this respect, they can be seen as Darly's male-focused equivalent to Bowles's "34 New and Humorous Elegant Prints," which could likewise be purchased and appreciated separately, or could be brought together to form a cohesive set. Like Bowles's mezzotints, Darly's macaroni prints were more-or-less uniform in size, format, and medium: they were all roughly 13 by 18 centimetres; they typically featured a single figure in isolation set against a blank white background; and most of them were done in etching, or in a combination of etching and line-engraving.

Etching was a relatively fast process that lent itself well to topical satire, and, in this period, it continued to enjoy its traditionally high status in the hierarchy of printmaking processes, known as the method of choice for European Old Masters like Rembrandt and Callot, who selected it for its immediacy and expressive quality. Mezzotint, on the other hand – though it was appreciated for its tonal effects, and was widely regarded as an art form that British printmakers particularly excelled at – was still seen as a primarily reproductive technique that required less training and skill than other intaglio methods like line-engraving and etching. John Evelyn and George Vertue had extolled line-engraving as a nobly laborious process that required “plowing” or digging into the copper plate in order to liberate the image; mezzotint, conversely, involved wiping ink off the plate's surface, and therefore, could be thought of as a comparatively superficial process.¹⁰⁵ There were, of course, respected mezzotint-engravers, such as James Watson, James McArdell, and John Raphael Smith, who produced highly valued prints after the exalted works of artists like Reynolds, but these men were the exception in a profession that was dominated by anonymous, jobbing engravers like those that executed the Collet-Bowles prints.

¹⁰⁴ West, 2001: 171.

¹⁰⁵ See: Myrone, “Graphic Antiquarianism in Eighteenth-century Britain: the Career and Reputation of George Vertue (1684-1756)” in Myrone and Peltz (eds.): 43-44.

Darby's etchings were, in fact, less expensive than Bowles's mezzotints, costing sixpence a piece, but this is owing to the fact that they were half the size of the 'posture'-sized drolls, and were primarily designed to be pasted into albums or passed around amongst friends, whereas Bowles's products were heavily marketed as interior furnishings, to be framed and glazed, and hung on the wall. But Darby also sold larger, more costly pieces, like Bunbury's *View on the Pont Neuf at Paris* (1771), which was roughly 'posture'-sized and sold for 5 shillings plain, and 8 shillings coloured.¹⁰⁶ The macaroni prints could also be purchased in colour for 1 shilling. While there seem to be fewer surviving examples of the hand-painted macaronies, those that do survive form an interesting point of comparison with the rival publisher's coloured mezzotints. We have to be cautious when it comes to Bowles's exceptionally vibrant drolls, as many of these actually date from the end of the eighteenth century, when the plates were so worn out that the subsequent prints had to be coated in especially thick layers of gouache, but even in the examples that can be more confidently dated to the 1770s, the paint is often more liberally applied, and the colour richer than in the macaroni prints (figs. 4.56-4.57). While this is partially because thicker, brighter paint was required to cover the darker tones of the mezzotint, they were also, of course, being dressed-up to put on display. The result, particularly when compared with the subtlety of the thin wash used in many of the macaroni prints, is garish. One cannot help but wonder what a conservative Georgian would have thought of the 'painted ladies' displayed in Bowles's shop window. Unfortunately, there is no contemporary record of such encounters, but William Henry Pyne later remarked in the early nineteenth century that Bowles's successors continued his

¹⁰⁶ *Public Advertiser* (18 December, 1771).

trade in mezzotint drolls, which were still available “either plain or coloured in all the gaudy tints of the peacock or the paroquet.”¹⁰⁷

Bowles and Darly often released satires on the same subjects in relatively close succession, suggesting that they were responding not only to the same topical trends, but also to their competition within the market for graphic social satire. Though Darly was the more prolific producer of macaroni prints, Bowles offered his own versions (fig. 4.58); and when the mania for macaronies cooled down by the middle of the decade, both publishers focused much of their attention on women’s fashions, like unusual or extravagant headwear (figs 4.59-4.60). In some instances, it seems that one publisher was directly referencing the work of the other, like in the case of *Tight Lacing or Fashion Before Ease* (fig. 4.37). It is not known when exactly the Collet-based, Bowles-published print was issued, but a Darly print (fig.4.61) bearing a strikingly similar title and composition was published in March of 1777. Although George’s estimated date for the Collet version is later – June of the same year – I theorise that Collet’s image was known to the designer of the Darly version, which appears to be the work of a sloppy amateur, lacking training in linear perspective, who may have admired the professional artist’s satire, and wished to attempt a version of his or her own. This kind of practice was not unheard of – in 1769, an anonymous gentleman wrote to the editors of the *Oxford Magazine*: “Having seen an excellent print of Mr. Collet’s entitled *Grown Gentlemen Learning to Dance* (fig. 4.62), it furnished me with a hint for a drawing of *Grown Citizens Learning to Dance* (fig. 4.63), in which all their movement are adapted to court tunes and measures. I trust you will favour the public with an engraving from it.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ *Somerset House Gazette and Literary Museum*, No. 28, 1824: 347.

¹⁰⁸ *Oxford Magazine* (June, 1769): 283.

In the same month that Collet exhibited *The Feather'd Fair in a Fright*, Matthew Darly issued *The Extravaganza or the Mountain Headdress of 1776* (fig. 4.64), one of the publisher's several satires on feather headdresses from that year, indicating that he too attempted to capitalise on the feather frenzy. This particular example – a delicately and precisely etched piece that was almost certainly the work of Darly himself and not an untrained amateur – presents a three-quarter length view of a fashionable woman, dwarfed by a mountainous headdress, ornamented with swags of flowers, jewels, birds, fruits and vegetables, and of course, two giant, intertwining ostrich feathers that function like capricious, rococo-style ornaments. Clearly, beauty of design is a key ingredient in this graphic product, and like Collet, Darly seems to similarly delight in the minute details of the extravagant fashions of the day. However, for his satire, Darly has exaggerated his lady's stylish coiffure to such monstrous proportions that the figure is made to appear not just foolish, but practically nonhuman. In rendering his subject this way, the artist sends a fairly blatant message to his female viewers about the dangers inherent in excessive personal adornment.

In comparing Darly's *Extravaganza* and Bowles's mezzotint version of Collet's *Feather'd Fair*, it is clear that they share a great deal in common: they both respond to the same controversial trend; they both, in some way, register the acute anxieties that surrounded this trend; and they both manage to balance humour and decorative appeal. And yet, their visual styles and comic tones are divergent, and ultimately, they can be seen to represent two subtly distinct forms of fashion satire. An eighteenth-century viewer may have understood the difference between these two prints as the difference between 'caricature' and 'character.' Caricature – though it is a term that is often liberally applied to graphic satire of all kinds – is a mode of visual depiction that ludicrously exaggerates or distorts a person's physical appearance for comic or satirical effect, and as such, it can only

be properly used, in this instance, to describe Darly's print, which inflates the subject's 'high head' and feather ornaments to a scale that is unlikely to have ever existed in real life; whereas the Bowles-Collet print offers a reasonably accurate representation of the female hairstyles of the period, such as have been seen in contemporary fashion plates and portraits.¹⁰⁹

The art of caricature was a relatively new practice in mid-Georgian England, which enjoyed a somewhat mixed reputation. Imported from Italy in the first half of the century by wealthy Englishman who had encountered it on the Grand Tour, caricature quickly became a fashionable hobby for the middling and upper classes.¹¹⁰ As has been established, this immensely popular pastime proved to be the making of Darly's lucrative career. However, it was certainly not without its critics; caricature was often cited as an example of weak comedy, sloppy artistry, and generally poor taste. It was caricature that Robert Baker was alluding to when he cautioned Collet that "excessive exaggeration is the poor refuge of those who want skill to represent things with propriety and justness." Joshua Reynolds had produced several adroit caricatures of his travel companions while on tour in Italy as a young man, but according to his former pupil James Northcote, he later felt it "absolutely necessary to abandon the practise; since it [corrupted] his taste as a portrait painter, whose duty it becomes to aim at discovering the perfections only of those whom he is to represent."¹¹¹ But the most famous opponent of this medium was Hogarth, who regarded caricature as an affected foreign fashion that was produced by vacuous amateurs,

¹⁰⁹ 'Caricature': a picture, description, or imitation of a person in which certain striking characteristics are exaggerated in order to create a comic or grotesque effect; mid-18th century: from French, from Italian *caricatura*, from *caricare* 'load, exaggerate', from Latin *carricare* (*OED*).

The word caricature was not included in Johnson's dictionary, but the Italian derivation *caricatura* was in relatively common usage by mid-century. John Barrow defines it in 1758 edition of his *Dictionarium polygraphicum* as: "In painting, as to make caricature is to exaggerate the defects, and conceal the beauties in a person's faces, however preserving the resemblance." See: Barrow, 1758: 82.

¹¹⁰ For the history and development of caricature in eighteenth-century England, see: Donald, 1996: 9-15; Godfrey, 1984: 10-75; George, 1967: 13-14.

¹¹¹ As quoted in Godfrey, 1984: 31-32.

and purchased by pretentious connoisseurs. The artist responded to the critics who erroneously and egregiously labelled him a caricaturist with his illustrated subscription ticket of 1743, now known as *Characters and Caricaturas*,¹¹² which juxtaposes a series of grotesque faces with more naturalistic ones.¹¹³ Beneath the image, Hogarth includes a footnote, which reads: “for a further Explanation of the Difference Betwixt Character and Caricatura see ye preface to Jo^h Andrews,” and thus, once again, I turn to Henry Fielding’s classic text for further insight. He writes:

Let us now examine the Works of a Comic History Painter, with those Performances which the Italians call *Caricatura*; where we shall find the true Excellence of the former, to consist in the exactest Copy of Nature; insomuch that a judicious Eye instantly rejects anything outré, any Liberty which the Painter hath taken with the Features of that Alma Mater – Whereas in the *Caricatura* we allow all Licence. Its aim is to exhibit Monsters, not Men; and all Distortions and Exaggerations whatever are within its proper Province.¹¹⁴

In Darly’s print, he exhibits a “monster,” albeit an aesthetically pleasing one, executed in a skilfully delicate hand, which would have appealed to a caricature-collector with a discerning eye. The Collet-Bowles print, on the other hand, represents both a different kind of satire, and a different kind of graphic product. By avoiding grotesque exaggeration and preserving the attractiveness of his subjects, Collet not only encouraged a more sympathetic and light-hearted response to the much maligned followers of the feather trend, he also pandered to a demographic with prurient interests, rather than wholly aesthetic ones. The mezzotint version of *The Feather’d Fair*, though it is a polished, professionally-engraved product, would seem to be geared towards the kind of viewer who was more concerned with female beauty than artistic beauty. While its naturalism and

¹¹² See: BM No. 1848,1125.209.

¹¹³ Paulson, 1965: 188-189.

¹¹⁴ Fielding, 1, 1742: viii-ix.

comparative restraint ostensibly fit the criteria for caricature's opposite, Hogarth and Fielding likely envisioned that the art of 'character' would be used to serve far nobler purposes than this.

Based on the comparison of these two prints, and the output of Bowles and Darly, more generally, it is tempting to draw sweeping conclusions – that Darly's prints would have been collected by cultured and cosmopolitan connoisseurs, while Bowles's prints would have been purchased by consumers with comparatively less taste and money. However, Sarah Sophia Banks, the sister of the botanist Sir Joseph Banks (the subject of Darly's *Fly-Catching Macaroni*), who was an avid collector of a wide variety of antiquarian items and eighteenth-century ephemera now held in the British Museum and British Library, owned several of Bowles's mezzotint drolls, including *Slight of Hand by a Monkey* (fig. 4.65), *A Morning Visit –or the Fashionable Dresses for the Year 1777* (fig. 4.60), and the aforementioned Collet-based print, *Miss Wicket and Miss Trigger* (fig. 4.28). Also, Elizabeth Percy, Duchess of Northumberland, a courtier, diarist, and collector of prints, whose collection is also in the British Museum, seems to have had a particular penchant for coarse drolls in the Dutch tradition, and owned several of Bowles's mezzotints after Netherlandish genre painters, including the previously mentioned *The English Coachman* and *The Waggoner and the Fisherman* (figs. 4.46-4.47), as well as some of Bowles's more fashionable satires, like *Spectators at a Print Shop in St. Paul's Church Yard* (fig. 4.54). The interests and tastes of these women may have been the exception to the rule, rather than the norm, but there is no reason to believe that Darly's and Bowles's products were mutually exclusive, and that a print collector would only purchase one or the other. And yet, I do believe it is revealing that, in a collection of graphic satire now in the New York Public Library that was compiled in the second half of the eighteenth century by Horace Walpole – that aristocratic arbiter of taste and vociferous

champion and collector of British art – there is only one Bowles mezzotint, *Slight of Hand by a Monkey*, while the vast majority are etchings published by Darly. Apparently, the cheerful, decorative, and bawdy satires of Collet and Bowles were of little interest to the aristocratic art historian.

VI.

Roughly a year after Bowles published *A Feather'd Fair in a Fright*, he issued four more Collet-based mezzotint drolls (figs. 4.66-4.69), which similarly combined fashion, female beauty, and bawdy humour. This quartet of about 1778 – later listed in Bowles's 1784 catalogue as *The Four Seasons of the Year* – constituted another sub-set of images within the larger "34 New and Elegant Humorous Prints" series.¹¹⁵ As the title suggests, these images are genre scenes that emblematised the four seasons, depicting activities and modes of dress associated with particular times of the year. Like the other images in the series, this set features attractive (and mostly modishly dressed) women, who are inserted into light-hearted, gently satirical scenarios. *The Four Seasons of the Year* can be seen as being particularly representative of the kinds of works Collet was producing for Bowles in the late 1770s. However, it can also be seen as an index of the artist's career-long preoccupations with subjects and motifs like mock-pastoral imagery, fashionable clothing, and Hogarthian allusions. As such, I will conclude this chapter with a brief examination of this exemplary series.

The first plate in the set, "Spring," is a rural scene depicting a young maid beneath a tree, alongside a country squire, who gestures to a pair of nuzzling doves. Behind them, an old woman scowls at their romance, and a mischievous boy teases a nest of fledgling

¹¹⁵ Bowles, 1784: 117; Stephens, 4, 1886: 732-734, BMSat. 4564-4567.

birds. This composition appears to be a slightly altered mirror image of a print that originally appeared in the earlier *Collet's Designs* series (see: fig. 1.38). The next plate, "Summer," takes place in London's suburban sprawl, nearby the popular tea-garden White Conduit House, which is sign-posted in the background. The woman wears an elaborate hat adorned with feathers and ribbons, and a *robe a la polonoise*. She scolds the overloaded page who has just dropped one of her slippers, as her slovenly husband mops sweat from his bald head. In plate three, "Autumn," Collet returns to the countryside, where a group of women are picking apples in a cottage garden. A pretty maid, carrying a bushel of fruit in her folded apron, descends a ladder, and in doing so, exposes her stocking-ed leg to the young hunter who assists her. In the final scene, "Winter," a mother and daughter walk down a city street, closely followed by an older gentleman, who presses a fur muff to his wind-reddened face. The woman, dressed in a modish fur-lined cloak and muff – an updated version of the costume worn by a model in one of Collet's earlier fashion plates (fig. 4.11) – looks on as her compassionate daughter drops a coin in a beggar's collection plate. In the background, a pair of rough-housing boys tumbles down the icy road. Altogether, it is a playful vision of daily life for the middling to lower orders of Georgian society, which vacillates between bucolic countryside and modern urban and suburban locales.

This set combines the themes and conventions of a number of popular graphic products – both traditional and modern – all of which were available for sale from the publisher Bowles in the early 1780s. Most obviously, Collet's series belongs to a long-standing visual tradition involving the depiction of cyclical events, such as seasons, times of day, and ages of man.¹¹⁶ In his 1784 catalogue, Bowles advertises 'four seasons cycles' engraved after the works of French and Italian rococo artists, such as Giacomo Amiconi,

¹¹⁶ Shesgreen, 1983.

Noel Coypel, and Nicolas Lancret.¹¹⁷ However, a more traditional and archetypal example would be the early seventeenth-century work of the Dutchman Crispijn de Passe. In his engraving of “Summer” (fig. 4.70), a copy of which was in Horace Walpole’s collection, Ceres, the Goddess of Agriculture, reclines beneath a tree, holding a sickle and cornucopia, while in the background, farmers harvest wheat, a crop commonly associated with the season. Whereas de Passe’s farmers are an industrious group, all but one of Collet’s “Summer” peasants have abandoned their wheat-harvesting duties to frolic naked in a lake; and instead of a serene goddess, the season is represented by a fashionable, yet graceless woman, on her way to a pleasure garden – a distinctly modern summer recreation.

Though Collet had effectively updated a centuries-old tradition, he was not the first to substitute a fashionable female beauty for a timeless deity in a ‘four seasons cycle.’ In 1644, the Bohemian-born, London-based draughtsman Wenceslaus Hollar produced a seasons set (fig. 4.71) in which the times of the year are embodied by attractive, fashionably-dressed female figures, standing in profile, against landscapes with low-horizons – much in the manner of the artist’s contemporaneous costume studies. Rather than being conventional allegories of the seasons, these women are essentially fashion-plates, who model up-to-date, seasonally appropriate attire. This kind of series would prove to be an appealing and long-lasting format. Throughout the eighteenth century, many artists contributed to the lucrative market for what Timothy Clayton has described as “seductive decorative prints,” which featured fashionable or fancifully dressed women in the guise of allegorical subjects or traditional themes.¹¹⁸ It is from Mercier that we get both the term ‘fancy subject’ and a prime example of this type of product.¹¹⁹ His series of four paintings depicting female embodiments of the times of day were produced in the first half

¹¹⁷ Bowles, 1784: 84, 86, 87.

¹¹⁸ Clayton, 1997: 146

¹¹⁹ Clayton claims that Mercier coined the term ‘fancy print,’ but provides no source.

of the century, and were engraved and published by at least two different print firms.¹²⁰ Later, Mercier's series was advertised in Bowles's 1784 catalogue, indicating its continued popularity nearly three decades after its inception.¹²¹ Like Hollar's images, the mezzotints (fig.4.72) made after Mercier's series depict attractive women in relatively sparse settings, which present little in the way of pictorial or narrative detail to distract the viewer from the sensuous female bodies and sumptuous clothing. For Hollar and Mercier, the allegorical subjects seem to have been little more than a pretext for luxuriating in the female form.

In Collet's series, the artist similarly lavishes attention on female beauty and sartorial detail. However, in addition to offering decorative and sensual appeal, Collet's *Seasons* has the added appeal of humour. In this respect, the set is much like the many contemporaneous Bowles-published fashion satires that have been discussed at length in this chapter. But it also harkens back to a series of well-known comic images produced by Hogarth – *The Four Times of the Day*, a satirical reinvention of another traditional cyclical theme, which was painted in 1736, and first engraved in 1738.¹²² Along with the two *Progresses* and *Marriage a la Mode*, this series would go on to become one of Hogarth's most celebrated works, and thus, it could still be purchased (in pirated form) from the publisher Bowles in the early 1780s.¹²³

When he set out to produce his own comic cycle, Collet clearly had Hogarth's series in mind. There are broad similarities between the two sets – both employ modern stereotypic subjects to stand in for traditional allegories, and both poke fun at the folly of these subjects, while projecting a primarily humorous, rather than didactic view of Georgian society (though, characteristically, Hogarth's view is far grittier). There are also

¹²⁰ Robert Sayer (ca. 1750), John Bowles (ca. 1750).

¹²¹ Bowles, 1784: 107.

¹²² For *The Four Times of the Day*, see: Shesgreen, 1983: 89-160; Paulson, 1965: 178-182.

¹²³ Bowles, 1784: 91.

very direct parallels between two particular images: Hogarth's "Evening" (fig.4.73) and Collet's "Summer" (fig.4.67). In Hogarth's image, a finely dressed middle class family amble alongside a manmade waterway, nearby the popular resort, Sadler's Wells, in the London suburb of Islington. It is surely no coincidence that Collet's couple – the reverse of Hogarth's heavy set wife and diminutive husband – also take their summer stroll in Islington; nor is it happenstance that their destination is White Conduit House, which like Sadler's Wells, enjoyed a reputation as a resort for the pretentious middling sorts.¹²⁴ Such details help confirm the extent to which, even at this late stage of his career, Collet was still engaging with the pictorial templates provided by the work of his celebrated predecessor – an engagement which helped give his own, far more bold and brightly coloured comic imagery a character that was both endearingly familiar and strikingly original.

¹²⁴ For a satirical verse on Sadler's Wells, see: Ward, 1701. For White Conduit House, see: Woty, 1763: 23-24. The latter is also referenced in Burney's *Evelina* as a favourite resort of Evelina's crass cousins, see: Burney, 1779: 113.

EPILOGUE

THE DEATH OF THE COMMERICAL COMIC ARTIST

After exhibiting *The Feather'd Fair in a Fright* in 1776, Collet took a three-year break from public exhibition, but returned in 1780 for one final show.¹ At the Free Society of Artists exhibition held in April and May at the Society's rented room in Pall Mall, the artist showcased a large and eclectic body of work. He submitted eight pieces in total, the same number he had shown in his break-out year of 1765. These works included comic subjects such as *An Actress at her Toilet* (see: fig. 4.30) and *The Victim* (see: fig. 4.32), both of which had recently been published as engravings by Bowles; landscapes, like the now lost "A View of Turnham Green, a stained drawing"; and a curious genre-melding hybrid, described in the catalogue as "A Portrait of a Dog which Lost its Fore-Leg at the battle of Bunker's Hill, while he was watching the dead body of his master, who was an officer in the 47th Regiment" – a work which seems to have infused the conventional animal picture with the pathos and topicality of a modern history painting.²

Though nothing was said about this diverse repertory of images in the press, it ultimately constituted a fitting retrospective for an artist who had spent the past two decades cementing a reputation as a leading producer of landscapes, animal pictures, and, of course, comic subjects. On 30 July, just over a month after the Free Society's exhibition had closed, Collet died at his home in Chelsea.³ The public was notified of his passing by way of a brief but laudatory obituary, which was reprinted in several London newspapers and periodicals in the following week. It read: "On Sunday night died at Chelsea, Mr John Collet, well-known as an Artist for his many ingenious and moral compositions in the

¹ There was no FSA exhibition in 1777; Collet was absent from the 1778 and 1779 shows.

² FSA, 1780: 6.

³ The exhibition closed on 27 May, see: *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* (26 May, 1780).

comic line of painting.”⁴ With the news of his death still fresh, Collet was eulogised for his genius, morality, and comedy – but this would not be the artist’s enduring legacy.

In the first few years after his death, it seemed that Collet was destined to slowly fade into a respectable obscurity, with nothing further said of him in print, and the only reminder of his prolific career being the extensive catalogue of reproductive engravings that were still available for purchase in the printshops of Sayer and Bowles.⁵ However, in the spring of 1783, the artist may have briefly resurfaced in public consciousness when one of his paintings was exhibited posthumously at what would be the final exhibition of the Free Society of Artists. Lamenting the fact that it was unable to compete with the hegemonic authority of the Royal Academy’s annual shows, a spokesman for the Free Society stated in its last catalogue that “this Society claim[s] the merit of being the first who produced an Exhibition in this country; it ranked amongst its Exhibitors the most respected Painters, Engravers, and some of the first Architects; but the fascinating charm of the Royal Exhibition induced many to desert it.”⁶ In a last ditch effort to save their floundering organisation, the few remaining members of the Free Society implored prominent former exhibitors, such as Gainsborough, Kauffmann, and Joseph Wright of Derby to contribute to their show works which they hoped would help to recapture the attention of the exhibition-going public.⁷ It was under these circumstances that an unknown individual submitted for exhibition a work by Collet, which was listed in the catalogue as “Return from Finchley.”⁸ The title of this unknown painting makes direct reference to Hogarth’s *March of the Guards to Finchley* (1750), indicating that the exhibited piece was a comic subject in the Hogarthian vein, and therefore served as a

⁴ *London Chronicle* (5 August, 1780).

⁵ See: Bowles, 1784: 116-117; Sayer, 1786: 12, 17, 67-68, 75-76.

⁶ FSA, 1783: 2.

⁷ *Ibid.*; Whitley, 1968: 189-190.

⁸ FSA, 1783: 9.

quintessential example of the work of one of the Free Society's best-known members.⁹ Unfortunately, this painting, and the other artworks exhibited that year, failed to pique the public's interest, and thus the exhibiting society to which Collet had remained faithful for his entire career, collapsed three years after his own death.¹⁰ For the purposes of this study, this event serves as a significant marker, representing the end of Collet's exhibiting career, and the culmination of an experimental gestation period for London's public exhibitions, during which he had flourished. Thereafter, Collet's artistic legacy and reputation were to enjoy a changeable and uncertain trajectory.

I.

In 1781, the year after Collet's death, Carington Bowles issued *An English Man of War Taking a French Privateer* (fig. 5.1), the first of several dozen light-hearted social satires he published after the watercolour drawings of Robert Dighton.¹¹ Probably the clearest candidate for the position of Collet's comic successor, Dighton quickly took over as Bowles's primary supplier of designs for his trademark mezzotint drolls, producing them in great quantities from 1781 until the publisher's death in 1793.¹² This first print is a representative example of the artist's work, and reflects the relatively seamless transition from Collet's tenure with the firm to that enjoyed by Dighton. It depicts a modishly-dressed milliner – made identifiable by her hallmark bandbox – who is being accosted by an impish jack-tar wearing a dandified variation on traditional sailors' garb. The

⁹ The painting exhibited in this year may have been *March of the Guards Towards Scotland*, a near-replica of Hogarth's *March of the Guards to Finchley*, attributed to Collet, and sold at auction in 2000; or it may have been *Soldiers Approaching a Village* (1748), a signed and dated canvas sold at auction in 1980. See: App. I, Nos. 1, 63.

¹⁰ The FSA ceased exhibiting in 1783, and there is no further evidence of their activities after this point; however, W.T. Whitley found that there was still a charitable organisation affiliated with the former exhibiting society to which the SAGB applied to for a loan in 1786. See: Whitley, 1968: 189.

¹¹ For Dighton (1751-1814), see: *ODNB*; Padbury, 2007.

¹² Padbury, 2007: 24.

fashionable milliner – or prostitute posing as a milliner – cheerfully acquiesces to the advances of the sailor, thus demonstrating her stereotypically loose morals. Here can be found all the same ingredients that were earlier used by Collet in his own Bowles-published designs: familiar stock characters; a focus on female beauty; fashionable clothing; and a bawdy, non-judgmental brand of humour. Furthermore, like Collet's designs, *An English Man of War* belonged to a loosely-connected series of prints, which focused on the humorous and titillating exploits of prostitutes and demi-reps, and whose titles played on euphemistic naval terms such as *An English Sloop Engaging a Dutch Man of War* (fig. 5.2), and *Men of War Bound for the Port of Pleasure* (fig. 5.3). Although these and many of the other Dighton prints were published anonymously,¹³ another series in the Bowles catalogue, entitled *Twelve Elegant and Humorous Prints of Rural Scenes, adorned with Comic Figures* (ca. 1784) proudly advertised Dighton's name, suggesting that his fame eventually approached the level of his predecessor.¹⁴ This latter series, depicting the amusing pastimes of country peasants (fig. 5.4-5.5), is essentially Dighton's equivalent to *Collet's Designs Both Serious and Comic*.

Obviously, there are very clear parallels between the work of Collet and Dighton. Both artists specialised in a cheerful and decorative form of social satire; both artists forged strong connections with the London print trade; and consequently, both artists' work is best-known in reproductive form. But in other ways Collet and Dighton are divergent figures, who followed somewhat different career paths. The younger artist – born in Holborn in 1751 to the print-seller John Dighton and his wife, Hannah – came from a mercantile background, and was probably raised with the expectation that he would carry

¹³ Though published anonymously, many of Bowles's mezzotint drolls dating from the 1780s and 1790s can be confidently attributed to Dighton based on the roughly 150 signed watercolours and drawings that were preserved in an album by the Bowles family. This collection remained intact until the album was dismantled and sold in separate lots at a Sotheby's auction in 1978.

¹⁴ Bowles, 1784: 143.

on in the family trade.¹⁵ In 1772, Dighton entered the Royal Academy schools to study drawing. Following his training, he set up as a drawing master and painter of miniature portraits, while moonlighting as a singer at pleasure gardens. Though he exhibited miniatures and watercolour comic subjects regularly with the Free Society, and sporadically with the Royal Academy, Dighton was always more keenly focused on the print market.¹⁶ In the 1770s, he drafted portrait engravings of famous thespians for John Bell, Thomas Lowndes, and William Richardson, and in the 1780s and 1790s he worked almost exclusively for Bowles. By the end of the 1790s, Dighton had stopped exhibiting altogether, and earned his living by drawing, etching, and publishing caricature portraits from his home in Charing Cross until his death in 1814. Unlike Collet, Dighton is not known to have ever produced large-scale oil paintings, and he gained fame not as an exhibiting artist, but as a caricaturist, singer, and art thief – he infamously stole a number of Old Master prints from the British Museum.¹⁷

There were, however, a few other artists who made their names by publically exhibiting genre subjects, which were occasionally humorous, and which were firmly rooted in the same artistic traditions that had shaped much of Collet's work. One such example is George Morland¹⁸, a painter of animal pictures and rural scenes, who flourished in the 1780s and 1790s alongside Francis Wheatley, William Redmore Bigg, and other artists who specialised in sentimental genre paintings. Morland – the son of the artist Henry Robert Morland, a specialist in candle-light subjects – was something of a child prodigy, first exhibiting with the Royal Academy in 1773 at the age of ten. He attended the Academy school in the late 1770s, and continued to exhibit regularly throughout his career, contributing both oil paintings and drawings to the annual displays of the Academy, the

¹⁵ *ODNB*.

¹⁶ Padbury, 2007: 21; Graves, 1907: 77-78.

¹⁷ Padbury, 2007: Chapter 3.

¹⁸ For Morland (1763-1803), see: Barrell, 1980: 89-131; Gilbey and Cuming, 1907; *ODNB*.

Society of Artists, and the Free Society of Artists. Many of these exhibited pieces were solemn yet picturesque renderings of poor country-folk, gypsies, and ramshackle farmsteads (figs. 5.6-5.7).¹⁹ Others, however, were infused with a light-hearted playfulness that recalled Collet's earlier vision of the comic countryside. A particularly apposite example is *The Ass Race* (fig. 5.8), a painting Morland exhibited with the Society of Artists in 1790 in what would be the Society's penultimate show.²⁰ This work, which survives in the form of a mezzotint engraved by William Ward in 1789, depicts a group of boisterous villagers who have gathered in front of a thatched-roof inn to watch the traditional country sport of donkey-racing. The subject, of course, immediately recalls the plate from the *Collet's Designs* series which illustrates the same rural recreation (see: fig. 1.43). Intriguingly, however, Morland's composition seems to be loosely modelled after another of Collet's rural scenes: *An Holland Smock* (see: fig. 1.49), an image that is similarly framed by a gnarled tree on the left and a pitched-roof structure on the right, and that likewise includes errant dogs, tripping villagers, gesticulating audience members, and a mischievous male tree-climber. Morland was surely aware of this pictorial precedent and in *An Ass Race*, he seems to have been making a concerted effort to keep the mock-pastoral tradition alive.

Like Collet, much of Morland's work was reproduced in graphic form. According to John Barrell, about 300 prints after Morland's paintings and drawings were published, indicating that he too fostered strong ties with the print market.²¹ Among the most popular of these Morland-based prints was the series *Laetitia, or a Harlot's Progress*, a modernised re-telling of Hogarth's famed moral progress, which was engraved in 1789 by

¹⁹ The paintings illustrated are typical examples of Morland's exhibited work. Fig. 5.6 was exhibited at the SAGB in 1791; Fig. 5.7 was exhibited at the RA in 1794. See: Gilbey and Cuming, 1907: 285-287.

²⁰ The SAGB held no exhibitions between 1784 and 1789; their final two shows were held in 1790 and 1791. See: Graves, 1907: 326-327.

²¹ Barrell, 1980: 95.

the fashionable mezzotinter John Raphael Smith.²² In keeping with contemporary tastes and mores, *Laetitia* is steeped in a saccharine sentimentality, and is neither comic nor satirical. Instead of telling a brutal cautionary tale, Morland's eponymous heroine – a naïve country lass who is corrupted by male seduction and urban vice – is allowed a happy (albeit humourless) ending (fig. 5.9), wherein she returns home, and is forgiven by her puritanical parents. Partly thanks to the success of such works, Morland was not widely considered a comic artist, in spite of the fact that, like Collet, he was a prolific producer of humorous genre subjects in the tradition of Teniers.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, there was a renewed interest and appreciation for genre painting, which manifested itself both in the raised prices for seventeenth-century Dutch and Flemish Masters, and the conspicuous presence of several contemporary British genre painters at the Royal Academy exhibitions.²³ The most prominent of these artists was the Academy-trained Scottish painter, David Wilkie²⁴, who, in 1806, exhibited the much-talked-about *Village Politicians* (fig. 5.10), a small canvas of about 60 by 75 centimetres, depicting a group of Scottish peasants debating current affairs in an ale house. Despite its modest dimensions, crude subject matter, and muddy palate, this painting was seen as a fascinating novelty in the context of public exhibition, and attracted great crowds of spectators and extravagant praise in the London press.²⁵ It was triumphantly declared that the artist showed “all the truth of Teniers and the humour of

²² D'Oench, 1999: 125-130.

²³ Solkin, “Crowds and Connoisseurs: Looking at Genre Painting at Somerset House” in Solkin (ed.), 2001: 160.

²⁴ For Wilkie (1785–1841), see: *ODNB*; Solkin, 2008; Tromans, 2002.

²⁵ Solkin, 2001: 160-165.

Hogarth.”²⁶ Hence, *The Village Politicians* ushered in a brief, but triumphant era for Wilkie and his fellow exhibitors of scenes from everyday life.²⁷

In comparing Collet’s earlier genre subjects with the characteristic work of Wilkie and his contemporaries, the latter seem to more often convey a grandeur and gravitas that belie their diminutive size and lowly subjects. Nevertheless, they frequently employ the same comic tropes, and mine the same artistic sources. For example, in Wilkie’s *The Village Holiday* (fig. 5.11), exhibited at his own one-man show in Pall Mall in 1812, we find a drunken man (fig. 5.12), staggering in a tavern courtyard, who is pulled in one direction by his carousing cronies, and in the other by his long-suffering family. A similar figural grouping can be found in a plate from the *Collet’s Designs* series (see: fig. 1.45). Both images were undoubtedly derived from Teniers (see: fig. 1.50).²⁸ However, as David Solkin has pointed out, Wilkie manipulated this iconography in order that it also alluded to another, perhaps more exalted source: Reynolds’s *Garrick between Comedy and Tragedy* (fig. 5.13), which in turn, referred to the paradigmatic image (fig. 5.14) of Hercules choosing between the personifications of virtue and vice, designed by the Third Earl of Shaftesbury, and used to illustrate his influential treatise *A Notion of the Historical Draught or Tablature of the Judgement of Hercules* (1714).²⁹ Thus, in *The Village Holiday*, a familiar comic motif is transformed into a rather more lofty and serious meditation on the choice between bacchanalian pleasure, and parental responsibility. But Wilkie was not unique in attempting to elevate and repurpose a traditional genre subject. Three years earlier, Thomas Heaphy exhibited at the newly-formed Society of Painters in Watercolours, *The Fish Market* (fig. 5.15), a grand, highly polished piece, which includes,

²⁶ *Morning Herald* (6 May, 1806).

²⁷ Wilkie’s contemporaries in genre painting included: Edward Bird (1772-1819); William Collins (1788-1847); Thomas Heaphy (1775-1835); and William Mulready (1786-1863). For genre painting in the early nineteenth century, see: Solkin, 2008.

²⁸ *Ibid.*: 154. Solkin states that Lindsay Errington was the first to note the similarities between the work of Wilkie and Teniers.

²⁹ *Ibid.*: 153-155.

in the upper right hand corner (fig. 5.16), a pair of battling fishwives, who are strongly reminiscent of Collet's *Female Orators* (see: fig. 3.12). Here, however, the stereotypic scenario is made real and poignant by the addition of a little girl, who desperately attempts to dissuade her mother from fighting. As is the case with Wilkie's work, the comedy remains, but it is now in a diluted and morally-sanitised form.

Though Wilkie and his followers occasionally exhibited genre subjects containing humorous vignettes, and were sometimes lauded for their Hogarthian humour, they too were not principally thought of as comic painters. They were most highly valued for their verisimilitude and careful rendering of individual physiognomy, not for their comic sensibility. When they did exhibit works that contained comic motifs derived from artistic sources that were traditionally viewed as 'low' and vulgar, these artists were not immune to criticism. In spite of their popularity, Dutch drolls and their modern British equivalents were still maligned by many critics, such as Robert Hunt, who, after seeing Wilkie's exhibited painting *The Rent Day* (1807), disdainfully remarked: "Familiar life admits of a sufficient variety of comic incidents without imitating [the] low Dutch taste. A glutton is as disgusting an object as the fighting fish-woman of HEAPHY."³⁰

The artists I have been looking at – Dighton, Morland, Wilkie, and Heaphy – are among the few artists who exhibited humorous paintings in the first few decades after Collet's death. But, with the exception of Dighton, these artists were not seen as specialists in comic art. It seems, then, that Collet's vacancy in London's exhibiting community was never adequately filled. The reason for this, in all likelihood, has to do with the maturation of the Royal Academy, and the consequently changed nature of exhibition culture in the late eighteenth century.

³⁰ *Examiner* (21 May, 1809): 332.

Since its first display in 1769, the Royal Academy had dominated the press coverage generated by London's annual exhibition season.³¹ The Academy's cultural significance was clear from the beginning. The year 1780, however, was an important landmark for the institution, in which it moved into the newly constructed Somerset House, an imposing edifice designed by William Chambers to replace the shabby and outdated palace that had, until recently, stood in its place on the Strand.³² This building housed the Academy's library and school, as well as the formidable Great Room in which their annual exhibitions were held from 1780 until 1836. In Solkin's words, this fifty-seven year span at Somerset House "effectively defined the centre of the London art world," and during this period, "the display at the RA was known simply as 'The Exhibition,' in implicit acknowledgement of its uniquely important status."³³ Thus, the Royal Academy arose to become the foremost exhibiting group, while its older competitors, the Society of Artists and the Free Society of Artists, faded away.³⁴ Though new societies and exhibition venues would emerge, the Academy remained the nation's official, authoritative exhibiting body.³⁵

The ascension of the Royal Academy did not mean that all exhibiting artists dispensed with commercial concerns in order to meet the lofty objectives of conservative Academicians, like Reynolds, who encouraged artists to produce works in the exalted Grand Manner. Far from it. There were plenty of inventive, sensational, and highly spectacular bids for the exhibition-going public's attention. Yet, under the aegis of the

³¹ For the RA, see: Hoock, 2003; Saumarez Smith, 2012; Solkin (ed.), 2001.

³² Solkin (ed.), 2001: xi.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ For the dissolution of these groups, see: Graves, 1907: 301, 327-328, 340-341.

³⁵ In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, many artists expressed dissatisfaction with the RA, and wished to exhibit their works at alternative venues. Some of these artists participated in the exhibitions of the Society of Painters in Watercolours, formed in 1804; many others staged their own one-man shows, including, for example: William Blake; John Singleton Copley; Joseph Wright of Derby; Thomas Gainsborough; Benjamin West, Wilkie, etc.

For the Society of Painters in Watercolours, see: Fenwick and Smith, 1997.

Academy, there was surely a greater pressure on artists to display some level of decorum – more so than there had been in the earlier, more unregulated public exhibitions of the 1760s and 1770s. Given such circumstances, artists may have been more reluctant to exhibit the kinds of humorously bawdy works that Collet had regularly displayed at the height of his career. It is interesting to note that even comparatively chaste works like *The Village Holiday* and *The Fish Market* were shown at alternative venues, and not at Somerset House; and when, in 1809, William Mulready exhibited at the Academy a similarly ‘low’ comic subject entitled *Returning from the Ale-House*, he incurred the wrath of a legion of outraged critics.³⁶

There were also practical reasons that made the Academy an uncondusive environment for the exhibition of comic painting. As a subset of genre painting, comic subjects were typically modest in scale, and more minutely detailed than the monumental portraits and landscapes that were given prime-viewing positions on the uppermost level of the gallery’s walls. Smaller pieces and lesser-genres were relegated to positions below eye level.³⁷ With the wall-space crowded with pictures, and the Great Room perpetually packed with jostling spectators, comic subjects like Collet’s were in danger of escaping notice at Somerset House. As such, few artists took the risk of potentially being overlooked.

It is in some sense ironic that comic art failed to find a comfortable home at the nation’s foremost exhibition space. After all, according to the conventional narrative, the history of British art properly commenced with the figure of William Hogarth, the widely acknowledged father of pictorial satire, and harbinger of the English school. Indeed, it has often been claimed that, before Hogarth, England had no native-born artistic talents to

³⁶ Solkin, 2008: 152-153.

³⁷ Solkin, “‘The Great Mart of Genius’: The Royal Academy Exhibitions at Somerset House, 1780-1836” in Solkin (ed), 2001: 1-8.

boast of, and no stylistic tradition to call their own; but, largely thanks to Hogarth's innovative *oeuvre* and tireless efforts to promote modern British art, the nation soon emerged as one of the most artistically progressive countries in the world, with a school of painting that was recognised and respected across the globe.³⁸ Nevertheless, by the final decades of the eighteenth century, there was very little evidence of this trailblazing artist's influence on the walls of the Royal Academy. Instead, Hogarth's artistic legacy – and Collet's by extension – could be located elsewhere.

II.

In the period immediately following Collet's death, comic art was largely absent from public exhibition; however, at the very same time, it was being produced in unprecedented quantities for the booming trade in graphic satire. It is this thirty year stretch, from 1780 to 1810, that has been treated by modern scholars as the pinnacle of the 'golden age' of pictorial satire in England.³⁹ This epoch witnessed the emergence of a new generation of prolific professional etchers of political and social satire, some of whom earned reputations that rivalled that of celebrated portraitists and exalted history painters. In particular, Thomas Rowlandson⁴⁰ and James Gillray⁴¹ have come to embody this 'golden age.' Their work, in many ways, represents a jarring break from the previous generation of pictorial satirists. It is spontaneous, surreal, expressive, and grotesque in a way that is completely unlike the mezzotint practice of such older contemporaries as Dighton, who must have been seen, at the time, as a vestige of an outmoded style and

³⁸ For such sweeping statements about Hogarth's place in the history of British art, see for example: Antal, 1962: 175-176; Simon, 2007: 1-5; Vaughan, 1999: 25.

³⁹ Alexander, 1998; Donald, 1996; and Gatrell, 2006.

⁴⁰ For Rowlandson (1750-1811), see for example: *ODNB*, Paulson, 1972; Payne and Payne, 2010; Phagan, Gatrell, and Rauser, 2010.

⁴¹ For Gillray (1756-1815), see for example: Godfrey, 2001; Hill, 1972; *ODNB*.

medium of graphic satire. Undeniably, this new wave of satire was markedly different from the kind of work Collet was producing a few decades earlier; nevertheless, it retains distinct traces of a shared artistic lineage.

It is particularly suggestive to compare the work of Rowlandson to that of his comic predecessor, Collet, as they both predominantly focused on social satire, and shared a similarly cheerful and benevolent comic tone. Rowlandson was a draughtsman, watercolourist, and etcher, who trained at the Royal Academy in the 1770s. Early in his career, he exhibited a handful of elegant, yet amusing watercolour genre scenes, including his well-known *Vauxhall Gardens* of 1784 (fig. 5.17).⁴² However, by the end of the century, the artist was insolvent after gambling away a considerable inheritance, and was forced to abandon any hopes of leading a leisured life as a gentleman-watercolourist.⁴³ From this point onwards, Rowlandson laboured as a caricaturist and book illustrator, with much of his work being issued by the art publisher, Rudolph Ackermann. Several of the graphic products published by Ackermann proved to be very successful, including, in particular, Rowlandson's extensive series of comic etchings made to illustrate William Combe's doggerel satire *The Tour of Doctor Syntax in Search of the Picturesque* (1812).⁴⁴

In many of his designs, Rowlandson revisits familiar comic tropes that had been earlier used by Collet. For example, *A Little Tighter* (fig. 5.18), an etching published by S.W. Fores in 1791, is an updated version of Collet's fashion satire, *Tight Lacing or Fashion Before Ease* (see: fig. 4.37). In Rowlandson's version, however, the figures have been pared down, the background stripped bare, and the female fashion-victim made grotesque – her monstrous obesity is set in amusing contrast to the gangly frame of her foppish husband. This corpulent corset-wearer must have appeared all the more misguided

⁴² Paulson, 1972: 25-30.

⁴³ ODNB.

⁴⁴ Paulson, 1972: 87-89.

in a period when truly stylish women had abandoned tight-fitting bodices in favour of a more natural silhouette. Another image that suggests the affinities between the two artists' work is a plate (fig. 5.19) from the Ackermann-published series *Miseries of London* (1807), in which Rowlandson rehashes the stock subject of brawling market women in a scene that is not dissimilar from Collet's *The Female Bruisers* (see: fig. 3.1). But this time, instead of offering a simplified variation, Rowlandson introduces many more figures, resulting in a much more chaotic and claustrophobic streetscape. The mass of cartoonish characters are executed in a spirited, sketchy style, and again, the female protagonists are made grotesque. Their bodies are doughy and misshapen; their hair is stringy and matted; and their globular breasts are ignominiously bared. The closest that Rowlandson ever came to Collet's example, however, was in a relatively polished and graceful watercolour rendering of a country smock-race (fig. 5.20).⁴⁵ Like Morland, Rowlandson must have been aware of Collet's *Holland Smock*, for he too uses a similar compositional format, and many of the same details, including a male figure hanging in a tree, a female racer who has tripped over a dog, and a nearby competitor who is similarly highlighted in angelic white. Though this latter figure remains youthful and attractive, many of the others have been grossly exaggerated. Thus, the difference between Collet and Rowlandson, is, again, the difference between 'character' and 'comedy.'

Gillray, though he shares much in common with his friend and contemporary Rowlandson, is often treated as something of an autonomous entity in the history of British satire. He is widely viewed as a great innovator, mad genius, and artistic talent beyond all compare.⁴⁶ Unquestionably, Gillray did push the limits of the genre, producing works of unprecedented verve and savagery; yet, of course, he too was informed by artistic tradition,

⁴⁵ A similar scene etched by Rowlandson was issued as part of publisher Thomas Tegg's series *Rural Sports* (1811). See: BM No. 1935,0522.9.86.

⁴⁶ See, for example: Gatrell, 2006: Chapter 9; Godfrey, 2001: 1-22; Gombrich, 1960: 120-2.

and he too responded to the tastes and trends of the market. Like Rowlandson, Gillray trained as a draughtsman at the Academy in the 1770s, at which point he harboured ambitions to be a serious engraver of portraits, landscapes, and history subjects.⁴⁷ Finding little success in this field, he quickly set up as a book illustrator and satirical etcher, working freelance for a number of publishers in the 1770s and 1780s, before settling into an exclusive arrangement with Hannah Humphreys in 1791. Gillray was incredibly prolific and expedient, often producing one or two satires in a single week.⁴⁸ Many of these were quite famous in his time – particularly the ones that offered both topical commentary and brutal mockery of prominent public figures. An example of such works is *Political-Dreamings! – Visions of Peace! – Perspective Horrors!* (1801) (fig. 5.21), a feverish dreamscape which variously alludes to the war with France, to a histrionic speech recently delivered by a member of parliament, and to a well-known painting by a Royal Academician.⁴⁹

Although he is best known as a political satirist, Gillray also produced a steady stream of social satires, in which he frequently trod the same territory as Collet. In the aforementioned pendant prints *Harmony Before Marriage* (see: fig. 2.18) and *Matrimonial Harmonics* (see: fig. 2.19), Gillray satirises the modern marriage using the same ‘before’ and ‘after’ format that Collet employed for *A Love Match*. Gillray similarly depicts the courting couple as blissfully naïve dilettantes, who are surrounded by the fashionable trappings of middle class life. But where Collet’s satire is a prescriptive lesson, warning young lovers to take heed of practical considerations and parental advice, Gillray’s is a less didactic and more generally pessimistic view of the institution of marriage, which for him,

⁴⁷ Godfrey, 2001: 12-13.

⁴⁸ Gatrell, 2006: 266.

⁴⁹ The print was made in response to William Windham’s attack on Pitt’s peace negotiations with France. Windham famously asked, “Are these idle dreams the phantoms of my disordered imagination?” The nightmare trope is also likely a nod to Henri Fuseli’s *The Night Mare* (1781), which was exhibited at the RA in 1782, and widely circulated in an engraving by Thomas Burke (1783). For more on Gillray’s print, see: Gatrell, 2006: 281-283; George, 8, 1947: BMSat 9735.

begets nothing but boredom and annoyance. Though less exaggerated than the artist's typical monstrosities, Gillray's figures in *Matrimonial Harmonics* offer unappealing caricatures of an abrasive, aging wife, and a gouty, cantankerous husband. Elsewhere, Gillray's caricatures are more extreme. In a satire of 1794 (fig. 5.22) – which responded to the newly stylish empire-waist gown, and the return of the giant feather headdress – Gillray lampoons his subjects with merciless vigour. While Collet's earlier 'feather'd fair' (see: fig. 4.2) are foolish but attractive figures, Gillray's are barbarous aberrations. Set against a blank background, isolated like strange scientific specimens, Gillray's subjects are presented as a curious contrast of grotesque bodily extremes. As a caricaturist, Gillray, like Rowlandson, is concerned with the comedy of corporeal disfigurement, and thus has little room for the kinds of female beauties that proliferated Collet's satires. One notable exception is a print of 1793, entitled *Fashion before ease;-or,-a Good Constitution Sacrificed, for a Fantastick Form* (fig. 5.23), which was etched by Gillray after a design by the amateur caricaturist George Moutard Woodward. This print appropriates the title, subject, and figural arrangement of Collet's aforementioned *Tight Lacing, or Fashion Before Ease*, and applies them to a political subject. Here, the primary satirical target is not the female fashion victim, but rather, the red-faced, bulbous-nosed man shown tightening her stays, who represents Thomas Paine, the stay-maker turned political activist known for penning *The Rights of Man* (1791).⁵⁰ The corset-wearer is, of course, the allegorical figure of Britannia, who is allowed to remain classically beautiful.

In his recent study *City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in Eighteenth-Century London* (2006), Vic Gatrell uses the exemplary work of Gillray and Rowlandson as evidence of a ribald form of humour that flourished in England in the late Georgian period.⁵¹ Though, as a social historian, Gatrell is most interested in what their work says about the society that

⁵⁰ George, 7, 1942: BM 8287.

⁵¹ Gatrell, 2006.

produced and consumed them, he does touch on some of the art-historical issues with which this study is principally concerned.⁵² He quite rightly emphasises the stark contrast between the pictorial satire produced at this time, and the period immediately preceding it, observing that earlier satirists worked in the “shadow of Hogarth,” and were heavily reliant on “old-fashioned emblematic literalism,” and didactic moralisation, while later satirists exhibited a more self-indulgent and uninhibited freedom.⁵³ Gatrell may have over-stated the differences when, in reference to Rowlandson’s *London Miseries* series, he claimed, “Never before had a major artist thus applied himself to street-life simply to celebrate its vitality and not to judge it” – thereby ignoring the earlier contributions of Collet.⁵⁴

Nevertheless, Gatrell astutely acknowledges a significant shift in pictorial satire in this period, and gestures towards, what I believe, is a key explanation. By contrasting Gillray’s work with that of prominent Royal Academicians, and underscoring the satirist’s feelings of disenfranchisement from the academic community, Gatrell alludes to the fact that there was now a more tangible divide between the worlds of ‘polite’ art and pictorial satire.⁵⁵

Thus, artists like Gillray dispensed with the conventions of mainstream art, and were freer to explore the grotesque extremes of pictorial comedy – a freedom that was further abetted by the spontaneity and expressiveness of the newly preferred medium of etching. While similar forms of artistic rebellion resulted in the Romantic movement of painting – which, of course, was well-represented at the Royal Academy – crude and subversive comedy was the exclusive reserve of graphic satire, a form of art that was increasingly segregated from the ‘official’ art seen at public exhibition. Had Collet been alive in this later period, it is

⁵² Gatrell has also recently published a book more specifically focused on Georgian artists, and the cultural environment of Covent Garden in the eighteenth century, see: Gatrell, 2013.

⁵³ Gatrell, 2006: 9-10; 40-41; 104-106; 258-259.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*: 40-47. Gatrell is insistent that pictorial satirists in Collet’s period only produced negative and/or moralising images of the city. I categorically disagree with his following assessment: “Carington Bowles’s mezzotints [...] repeatedly show metropolitan street-life both high and low; yet none convey much pleasure in it.” He does briefly acknowledge Collet’s contribution to urban pictorial satire in his later work, see: Gatrell, 2013: 231.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*: Chapter 9.

difficult to envision how he would have negotiated the gulf between these two clearly demarcated worlds.

III.

There is one further comic artist who is worthy of note here, and who is especially significant because he, too, became known as ‘the second Hogarth.’ Henry William Bunbury⁵⁶ was a contemporary of Gillray and Rowlandson’s, but in many ways, was a markedly different figure. Rather than being a trained, professional draughtsman and etcher, Bunbury, the son of a Baronet, was a gentlemanly amateur, whose earliest works were caricatures and comic sketches that he produced in the late 1760s as a young Fellow of St. Catherine’s College, Cambridge. He had already gained public notice within Collet’s lifetime, when, in the 1770s, he began exhibiting his humorous drawings at the Royal Academy. In spite of being ‘lowly’ comic subjects, these works were not only deemed acceptable, but were well-received.⁵⁷ This was in part, perhaps, because they eschewed lewd and lascivious subject matter, and because they were executed by a high-born amateur. A characteristic example of his exhibited work is *Pot Sellers, Cambridge* (fig. 5.24) of 1776, a lively and detailed depiction of a pottery fair, in which caricaturised customers and vendors are set against a picturesque backdrop, featuring the majestic spires of King’s College Chapel. Despite the burlesque caricatures, this composition somehow manages to remain elegant and restrained. In this respect, it is a typical design by Bunbury, an artist who enjoyed a four-decade-long career producing fashionable social satires and sentimental designs for publishers such as Matthew Darly, James Bretherton, and Thomas

⁵⁶ For Henry William Bunbury (1750-1811), see: *ODNB*; Riely, 1975; Riely, 1983.

⁵⁷ Riely, 1975: 32-33.

Macklin. His prints were collected by Horace Walpole, the Earl of Charlemont, and the Duke and Duchess of York, among others.⁵⁸

Bunbury had an undeniable talent for drawing and comedy, but he also had just the right connections to gain him entry into elite culture – David Garrick, Oliver Goldsmith, Samuel Johnson, and Joshua Reynolds were all friends. It was probably this perfect combination of wit, artistic skill, and good social standing that caught the attention of Walpole, who quickly became an ardent supporter of the amateur artist. Walpole first made special note of Bunbury in his catalogue for the 1770 Academy exhibition, commenting that in the artist's *La Cuisine de la Poste* (fig. 5.25): "All the characters are most highly natural, and his drawing perhaps excels the *Gate of Calais* by Hogarth, in whose manner it is composed."⁵⁹ In a letter of 1776, he told the Countess of Upper Ossory that he was "pasting Henry Bunbury's prints into a volume."⁶⁰ Over the years, he would continue to add to this collection, and one large folio album eventually grew into two, together containing over 280 items. In the October 1780 advertisement for the final volume of *Anecdotes of Painting in England* (1762-1782), his magnum opus on British Art, which edited and expanded upon the manuscript notes earlier made by George Vertue, Walpole announced: "There will be recorded the living etchings of Mr. H. Bunbury, the second Hogarth, and the first imitator who ever fully equalled his original."⁶¹ As thanks for the grandiose compliment, Bunbury gifted Walpole the original drawing for *Richmond Hill* (ca. 1780), which he received with the "warmest and most grateful thanks,"⁶² and hung with pride and pleasure along the main staircase of Strawberry Hill.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*: 38-39.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*: 32-33.

⁶⁰ Walpole to Countess of Upper Ossory (13 July, 1776), *Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence, LWL Collections*.

⁶¹ Walpole, 4, 1782: x.

⁶² Walpole to Bunbury (28 April, 1781), *Yale Edition of Walpole's Correspondence, Ibid.*

But how did Walpole feel about that other, earlier anointed ‘second Hogarth,’ Collet? His silence speaks volumes. There is no mention of the artist in *Anecdotes of Painting in England*, though his father’s obituary appears in a supplementary appendix at the end of the fourth volume.⁶³ In the material books in which Walpole amassed letters, newspaper clippings and other fragments of arts and culture-related ephemera, much of which was incorporated into the *Anecdotes*, there is only one Collet-based item - the younger artist’s obituary. There is no mention of the artist in any of Walpole’s extant correspondences; and there are no surviving works by Collet in the print collections compiled by Walpole in the New York Public Library, the Lewis Walpole Library, and Strawberry Hill. While the personal preferences of a single collector might ordinarily be less consequential, Walpole was a particularly prominent and vocal arbiter of taste, and thus, with his support, Bunbury became one of the most celebrated comic artists of the day. Collet had now, it seems, lost the illustrious title as ‘the second Hogarth’ to Bunbury, and the memory of his work slowly faded.

IV.

Several decades after the final volume of Walpole’s *Anecdotes of Painting in England* was published, the artist Edward Edwards compiled a work entitled *Anecdotes of Painters who have Resided or been Born in England* (1808), which was intended as a supplement to Walpole’s original. This volume rectifies the earlier author’s omission of any reference to Collet, providing a lengthy, four-paragraph entry on the artist’s life and career. I referred to this entry in the introduction to this thesis, but it will now be used to introduce the shifting attitudes towards Collet and his work at the beginning of the

⁶³ Walpole, 4, 1782: Addenda.

nineteenth century. While Walpole had remained silent on the subject of Collet, Edwards made his feelings resoundingly clear. He states:

[Collet] was the pupil of Mr. Lambert, and painted in a variety of ways; but the favourite subjects of his pencil were pieces of humour, somewhat in imitation of Hogarth, less satirical than narrative, more ludicrous than witty, and oftentimes displeasing, without conveying any moral instruction.⁶⁴

Though critics within Collet's lifetime had already expressed uneasiness about the artist's dubious subject matter, Edwards was the first to accuse him outright of lacking moral purpose. He was also, significantly, the first to suggest that Collet was a weak imitator of Hogarth.

Edwards's perception of Collet was undoubtedly coloured by his own artistic background. As a painter of mostly conservative history subjects, and a teacher of perspective at the Royal Academy, Edwards may have been biased against the less serious endeavours of a comic painter.⁶⁵ Conversely, his younger contemporary William Henry Pyne, who sometimes produced comic works himself, expressed a more relaxed and accepting attitude towards Collet, writing about him in mostly positive and nostalgic terms in the series of anecdotes on British art that he published in the *Somerset House Gazette* in the early 1820s. In one essay Pyne documents a lengthy conversation with a group of his artist friends, in which it was agreed that "[Collet] had a very good notion of the humorous traits of physiognomy, and like his prototype [Hogarth], for he was obviously an imitator of the 'great little man,' he did not exaggerate the expression, as does the modern caricaturist."⁶⁶ This, however, was one of the last compliments Collet was ever paid. In the ensuing decades, the few writers on British art who bothered to acknowledge Collet mostly shared the negative opinion of Edwards. In fact, Edwards, in many ways, had the final

⁶⁴ Edwards, 1808: 67.

⁶⁵ *ODNB*.

⁶⁶ *Somerset House Gazette* (12 June, 1824): 142.

word on the artist, as most of the subsequent writers either paraphrased his scathing remarks, or else quoted him directly.⁶⁷

In the final quarter of the nineteenth century, Collet's name suddenly cropped up in a number of publications. For the most part, their authors were not kind. Thomas Wright, in his aforementioned *A History of Caricature and Grotesque in Literature and Art* (1875), criticises the artist for not "possessing Hogarth's power of delineating whole acts and scenes in one picture."⁶⁸ In his *Dictionary of Artists of the English School* (1878), Samuel Redgrave states that Collet "painted humorous subjects and plagiarised Hogarth, but missed his deep moral."⁶⁹ The author goes on to note, bemusedly, that Collet "was a shy man, of grave habits and conversation, yet his pictures were sometimes displeasingly vulgar. His 'Female Bruisers' is of this class."⁷⁰ And, in L.H. Crust's entry on Collet in the *Dictionary of National Biography* (1887), it is claimed that the artist's work "did not possess the force and deep moral of Hogarth's work, and his pictures are often mere plagiarisms, appealing only to a vulgar taste."⁷¹ The only non-critical assessments of Collet's work appeared in an arts column in the popular weekly magazine *Bow Bells* in January and June of 1872. The two essays about Collet focus on his prints *Grown Gentlemen Being Taught to Dance* and *An English Man in Paris*, two of his satires of fashionable high society, both of which are used by the author to illustrate a bygone era, and not to debate the relative merits of the artist who produced them.⁷² These were the only writings on Collet that even acknowledged his images of the *bon ton*; most authors were convinced that he specialised in scenes from 'low life.'

⁶⁷ For writers on Collet who quote Edwards directly, see: Blunt, 1918: 149; Faulkner, 1829: 211-212; Paston, 1905: 78; Pyne, 2, 1824: 54-55. (Note that even Pyne quotes Edwards's disparaging comments about Collet in a footnote in his book *Wine and Walnuts*).

⁶⁸ Wright, 1875: 451-453.

⁶⁹ Redgrave, 1878: 91.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Stephen (ed.), 1887: 334-335.

⁷² *Bow Bells*, Vol. 16 (1872): 36, 468.

The two charges most routinely brought against Collet in the late nineteenth century were that his works were vulgar and immoral, and that he was a vastly inferior imitator of Hogarth. The former charge is not surprising given that Collet's 'lowly' subjects had been problematic even within his own lifetime. Large-scale oil paintings of boxing prostitutes and the like would have seemed all the more crass and indecorous in an era when such imagery was heavily marginalised, even in graphic art.⁷³ As Gatrell has argued, Victorian bourgeois consumers had little taste for the kind of crude, 'carnavalesque' comedy that had prevailed in Georgian pictorial satire.⁷⁴ However, while the reputations of satirists like Rowlandson and Gillray similarly suffered in the late nineteenth century, Hogarth continued to be considered the great champion of British art.⁷⁵ His sometimes bawdy subject matter was seen to be justified by his admirable moralising agenda. Thanks to the fact that Collet's works were seen to lack Hogarth's "deep moral" messages, they were deemed to be inherently weaker. But this was just one of several ways in which Collet fell short of his celebrated progenitor. It was also asserted that he lacked Hogarth's dramatic force, his clarity of expression, and, most notably, his artistic originality.

At the height of Collet's career, the artist's relationship to the work of Hogarth was mostly talked about in positive terms. It was frequently remarked that he "imitate[d] the manner of Hogarth with great success."⁷⁶ By the late nineteenth century, however, the general consensus on Collet had not only changed, but the word 'imitation' had now taken on far more negative connotations. Moreover, 'imitation' was frequently substituted with

⁷³ For the 'taming' of graphic satire, and the end of the Georgian satirical tradition, see: Bills, 2006: Chapter 6; Donald, 1996: Epilogue; Gatrell, 2006: Chapters 14-18; Miller, 2009.

⁷⁴ Gatrell, 2006: 190-191.

⁷⁵ For Hogarth's reputation in the nineteenth century, see: Bindman, 1997: 66-70; Hallett, 2000: 321-322; Gatrell, 2006: 429; Riding and Hallett, 2000: 33-37. For Gillray's reputation, see: Hill, 1972: xviii-xxix; Gatrell, 2006: 417, 430-431; Miller, 2009: 269-270; *ODNB*. For Rowlandson's reputation, see: Falk, 1949: 189-190; Gatrell, 2006: 430-431; Miller, 2009: 271-273; *ODNB*.

⁷⁶ *Gentleman's Magazine* (May, 1767): 239.

the even more damning term ‘plagiarism.’ In this respect, the nineteenth-century criticism of Collet is reflective of changing cultural attitudes about the nature of artistic creation, and the issues of imitation and originality – issues that were particularly pertinent when evaluating an artist who forged a career imitating the work of another, and whose compositions were best known in reproductive form.

Modern scholarship on the idea of artistic originality is immense, and the long and nuanced history of the concept is beyond the scope of the present study.⁷⁷ However, some salient points can be briefly summarised. As many theorists, art critics, and art historians have noted, attitudes about imitation and originality have varied in different periods and places, and today’s prevailing beliefs are largely the product of modernity’s bias toward innovation, autonomy, novelty, and ephemerality. Yet, for centuries in the West, a great deal of emphasis was placed on the importance of copying traditional or authoritative art models, as both a crucial component of artistic education, and as a means of elevating and legitimising a newer object of art. Though this practice has never fully ceased, artistic individuality has arguably become more highly valued in the last two centuries. The ideological seeds of change were already in place in Collet’s lifetime⁷⁸; his own role model, Hogarth, for example, vehemently argued against the servile copying of Old Masters in favour of looking, instead, to nature. Moreover, several eighteenth-century writers⁷⁹ turned their attention to the concepts of imitation, originality, and artistic genius. These authors included Edward Young, who, in 1759, poetically rhapsodised:

[the Original] out of a barren waste calls a blooming spring: Out of that spring an Imitator is a transplanter of Laurels, which sometimes die on removal, [and] always languish in a foreign soil.

⁷⁷ For modern scholarship on the concepts of ‘imitation’ and ‘originality’ in art, see for example: Gazda (ed.), 2002; Goldblatt, 1983; Goodman, 1976: Chapter 3; Jaffe, 1980; Muller, 1989; Piccolomini, 1992; Pressly, 2007; Shiff, 1984; Zorach and Rodini (ed.), 2005.

For more on the theoretical discourse on ‘originality,’ see below: 277, fns. 84-85.

⁷⁸ For ‘originality’ and eighteenth-century British art, see: Pressly, 2007.

⁷⁹ For the concept of ‘originality’ in eighteenth-century literary criticism, see: Buelow, 1990.

An Imitator shares his crown, if he has one, with the chosen Object of his Imitation; an Original enjoys an undivided applause. An Original may be said to be of vegetable nature; it rises spontaneously from the vital root of Genius; it grows, it is not made: Imitators are often a sort of Manufacture wrought up by those Mechanics, Art, and Labour, out of pre-existent materials not their own.⁸⁰

By the late nineteenth century, the conditions were prime for the reevaluation of artistic originality. After a century of political and technological revolutions that collectively represented a break with the past, Western Europe bore witness to an age of optimism, progress, and innovation on many different fronts. As Ruth Weisberg has recently posited, in this period “voices arose that not only questioned the value of emulating the past but also saw in the past a threat to present progress.”⁸¹ Weisberg uses as an example the distinctive voice of Charles Baudelaire, the French writer and art critic, who championed innovative artists over traditional ones, and who famously declared: “Woe to him who studies the antique for anything else but pure art, logic and general method. By steeping himself too thoroughly in it, he will lose all memory of the present, offered by circumstances for almost all our originality comes from the seal which time imprints on our sensations.”⁸² The ideologies that emerged in this period informed various avante-garde artistic movements – the ‘isms’ of the early twentieth century – and shaped the modern conception of the artist as original genius.

Obviously, the writers who criticised Collet in the late nineteenth century were far from being cutting-edge art critics, and were undoubtedly more traditional and conservative than the likes of the bohemian Frenchman, Baudelaire. Nevertheless, they

⁸⁰ Young, 1759: 10-11.

⁸¹ Weisberg, “Twentieth-Century Rhetoric: Enforcing Originality and Distancing the Past” in Gazda (ed.), 2002: 29.

⁸² *Ibid.*; Baudelaire, “The Salon of 1846: On the Heroism of Modern Life” in Frascina, Harrison, and Paul (eds.), 1982: 17.

were immersed in a culture that increasingly privileged artistic innovation and individuality. Collet could never be thought of as a true innovator, and it is primarily for this reason, I believe, that he has been written out of the history of British art. Twentieth-century writers on art, who were even more enamoured and indoctrinated with the notion of the original genius, have mostly ignored him. Indeed, Collet is absent from nearly every major text on the history of British art that has been written in the last one hundred years.

Two centuries after Collet's death, Ellis Waterhouse did allow him a brief entry in his *Dictionary of British Eighteenth-Century Painters in Oils and Crayons* (1981). It is strikingly disproportionate to the artist's prolific output and fame within his own lifetime. His life and work is reduced to only a few truncated sentences, which bear the prejudices of the late nineteenth-century writers who seem to have been Waterhouse's primary sources. It reads:

Collet, John, ca 1725-1780. Painter of low life subjects. Born London; died there 6 August 1780. Studied at St. Martin's Lane Academy, was a pupil of Lambert. He exhibited every sort of picture at the [Free Society] 1761-1780 (and posthumously 1783!). Some of his pictures are rustic landscapes, but his speciality was rather vulgar scenes of urban low life (e.g. 'Female Bruisers' and 'The Recruiting Sergeant') many of which were popularised by engravings by Goldar. They owe something to Hogarth but are wholly lacking in social criticism.⁸³

And so, when he is remembered at all, this has been Collet's enduring legacy and reputation.

⁸³ Waterhouse, 1981: 83.

V.

The time is now right for a reassessment of this artist. Indeed, it is long overdue. It has been more than a quarter century since the first voices began to loudly question the modernist ‘cult of originality,’ thus opening the door for the potential reevaluation of a figure like Collet. Building on the earlier ideas of continental philosophers like Walter Benjamin and Roland Barthes⁸⁴, art critics and theorists in the 1980s and 1990s not only challenged the dogmatic importance of artistic originality, but also questioned what it meant to be original, and whether it was even possible in an age of mechanical reproduction, and heavy visual-media saturation.⁸⁵ In contemporary artistic practice – the ‘re-photography’ of Shirley Levine, for example – artists openly acknowledge and emphasise their appropriation of existing artworks, thereby challenging traditional notions of authorship, copyright, and plagiarism. Collet and his blatant appropriation of Hogarth and other forms of self-conscious intertextuality would thus seem to have renewed significance and appeal in a postmodern world. In fact, the Georgian artist’s work can be seen to engage with a number of typically postmodernist themes and concerns, making him an unlikely mascot for an ideology that developed some two hundred years after his death.⁸⁶ Like an eighteenth-century Andy Warhol, Collet blurs the lines between ‘polite’ and ‘popular’ art, exploits the forms and methods of commercial marketing, resists straightforward narratives and interpretations, and ultimately offers a type of playful pictorial product that is as irreverently kitschy as any Pop Art masterpiece.

More recently, trends in several interrelated fields of historical research have set the stage for Collet’s comeback. In art-historical scholarship of the last two decades there has

⁸⁴ Particularly influential are Benjamin’s essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936), and Barthes’s thoughts on mimesis in *S/Z* (1970). See: Barthes, Miller (trans.), 1974: 54-56; Benjamin, Zohn (trans.), 1968: 211-245.

⁸⁵ See for example: Crimp, 1980; Krauss, 1984; Lovejoy, 1990; Wang, 1990. For a useful survey of the concept of ‘originality’ in postmodern art and theory, see: Van Camp, 2007.

⁸⁶ For more general works on postmodern art, see: Heartney, 2001; Sandler, 1997; Poli, 2008.

been a considerable growth of interest in Georgian graphic satire, exhibition culture, and the symbiotic relationship between painters and printmakers.⁸⁷ In the fields of social and cultural history, there has been a resurgence of attention paid to the sordid and less sentimental and polite facets of Georgian society, and to the body of cultural materials that expressed this seamier side of eighteenth-century life.⁸⁸ And in economic history and the study of material culture, there has been a barrage of work done on the rapid and dramatic commercialisation of Georgian England.⁸⁹ As this thesis has attempted to demonstrate, Collet serves as the perfect case study for these various overlapping subjects of current scholarly inquiry.

In the summer of 2010, as I was in the very early stages of researching and writing this dissertation, Tate Britain staged a major exhibition of British comic art from the eighteenth century to modern times, entitled *Rude Britannia*. This display introduced to a popular audience a wide selection of humorous, frequently bawdy, and often subversive objects of various media, which came together to form an informative and entertaining chronology of the art of comedy in the British isles. The fact that Collet's work was omitted from this exhibition was a considerable oversight; however, the project's dominant premise underscores the importance of rewriting the artist back into the history of British art. In the foreword to the exhibition catalogue, Tate Britain's director, Penelope Curtis, explains:

The exhibition's foundations lie squarely in the eighteenth century, and in many ways it is the association of British art with the persons of Hogarth, Gillray and Rowlandson, that provokes the question at the heart of the exhibition. What is it about British culture that has produced artists of

⁸⁷ For scholarship on Georgian graphic satire, see: Introduction: 15-17. For scholarship on Georgian exhibitions, see, for example: Hallett, 2004; Hargraves, 2006; Solkin (ed.), 2001. For scholarship on the relationship between painters and printmakers, see: Introduction: fn. 21.

⁸⁸ See for example: Dickie, 2011; Gatrell, 2006; Gatrell, 2013; Mackie, 2009.

⁸⁹ Introduction: 26-27, fn. 68.

the calibre of Hogarth, working within a context that draws as much upon low life as high art, and yet transcends those potentially limiting origins to create works of enduring satisfaction?⁹⁰

Head curator Martin Myrone, in his subsequent essay in the catalogue, continues this line of thought, remarking that “[there is] an enduring idea that there is something distinct about British comic art, and that [...] the comic is a singularly important element in the make-up of the British national character.”⁹¹ Given the national and historical significance of comic art in Britain, and its perceived origins in the eighteenth century, a prolific and ambitious early practitioner like John Collet demands to be returned to view, and given the art-historical attention he deserves. This thesis has, I hope, made a contribution to this process of scholarly rehabilitation and investigation.

⁹⁰ Batchelor, Lewisohn, and Myrone (eds.), 2010: 6.

⁹¹ Myrone, “What’s So Funny about British Art?” in *Ibid.*: 8.

APPENDIX I

Catalogue of Extant Original Works

The works in this appendix are extant original pieces (i.e. oil paintings, watercolours, drawings, etc.) by or attributed to John Collet, which are listed in roughly chronological order. Approximate dates for undated works are based on exhibition catalogues, prints, and/or style. Information relating to corresponding prints, exhibition history, provenance, and significant reference material is included where applicable. For abbreviations, see: 302-303.

Pre-1760

1. *Soldiers Approaching a Village*, 1748, location unknown (Christie's, British Pictures Sale, 27 June, 1980, Lot 74). Oil.
2. *May Morning*, ca. 1760, Museum of London, Docklands, London. Oil, 84.166 (attributed).

1760-1765

3. *High Taste in Low Life* (or *High Life Below Stairs*), 1763, CWF. Oil, 1991-175. Former Collection: Cora Ginsburg (ca. 1970-1980). Exhibited: FSA 1765, Print: App. II, no. 34.
4. *The Love-Match* (or *Modern Love*), Series of 4 Paintings ("The Courtship," "The Elopement," "The Honeymoon," "The Discordant Home"), ca. 1764, CWF. Oil, 1969-48, 1-4. Former Collection: William Randolph Hearst (pre-1950); Thomas Bradford (ca. 1765). Exhibited: FSA 1765, Prints: App. II, no. 1a-d.
5. *George Whitefield Preaching*, ca. 1765, Private Collection. Oil (attributed).
6. *Rake's Party*, ca. 1765, location unknown (Bonhams London, Sale 18875, 6 July, 2011, Lot 43). Oil.
7. *Rake's Party*, ca. 1765, The Courtauld Gallery, London. Graphite and india ink, D.1952.RW.4068. Former Collection: Sir Robert Clermont Witt (pre-1950, donated 1952). Related to oil painting, see above.

1765-1770

8. *A Recruiting Sergeant Persuading a Countryman to Enlist*, 1767, Hackney Museum, London. Oil, CH 1996.16. Former Collection: Alexander Chalmers (ca. early 20th century, donated to Hackney Museum as part of the Chalmers Bequest in 1927); Mr. Parker (?) (ca. 1770). Exhibited: FSA 1767, Print: App. II, no. 15.
9. *A Rescue or the Tars Triumphant*, ca. 1767, location unknown (Christie's, British Pictures Sale, 16 July, 1998, Lot 57). Oil. Exhibited: FSA 1767, Print: App. II, no. 9.

10. *The Canonical Beau, or Mars in the Dumps*, ca. 1768, Tate Britain, London. Graphite and watercolour, T08824. Former Collection: Paul Oppé (ca. mid-20th century), purchased as part of the Oppé Collection with assistance from the National Lottery through the Heritage Lottery Fund, 1996). Print: App. II, no. 10. A work of the same name/subject was exhibited FSA 1768, but was presumably a completed oil painting, and not this unfinished sketch.
11. *The Female Bruisers*, 1768, Museum of London, London. Oil, 2001.64. Former Collection: Thomas Browne Esq. (ca. 1770). Exhibited: FSA 1768, Prints: App. II, no. 18-19.
12. *In Place – Ha! Ha! Hah!*, ca. 1769, YCBA. Watercolour, graphite, B1977.14.5419, Print: Appendix II, no. 13, pendant: App. II, no. 14.
13. *At the Inn Door*, ca. 1770, BM. Watercolour, BM No. 1890,0512.25, Print: App. II, no. 24.1s.
14. *A Scene in a London Street (or The Bath Fly)*, 1770, YCBA. Oil, B1981.25.110. Former Collection: Sold at Christie's in 1958 to Sabine Galleries, London; purchased by Paul Mellon in 1960.
15. *On the River Bank (or Boy Leading a Donkey)*, ca. 1770, BM. Watercolour, BM No. 1890,0512.24 (attributed).
16. *The Englishman in Paris (or Dr. Johnson with his Barber)*, ca. 1770, location unknown (Sotheby's, London, British Paintings 1500-1850, 14 July, 1993). Oil, Print: Appendix II, no. 16. Pendant: App. II, no. 21.
17. *A Farmyard Scene*, ca. 1770, Wichita Art Museum, Wichita. Watercolour, ink, 1987.15, Print: App. II, no. 24.1g
18. *A Game of Bowls*, ca. 1770, YCBA. Watercolour, B2001.2.723 (attributed).
19. *Peasants Dancing*, ca. 1770, BM. Watercolour, BM No. 1890,0512.27, Print: App. II, no. 24.1o.
20. *Mind the Old Goat*, ca. 1770, Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, San Marino. Pen and watercolour, 72.3, Print: App. II, no. 24.1h.
21. *The Travelling Musician (or The Hurdy-Gurdy Player)*, 1770, location unknown (Bonhams London, Sale 18965, 6 March 2012, Lot 120). Oil, Exhibited: FSA 1770, Print: App. II, no. 35.

1770-1775

22. *A Kitchen Scene (or The Jealous Maids)*, ca. 1772, Royal Collection. Pen, ink and watercolour, RCIN 913625, Print: App. II, no. 31. Study for painting or reproductive print.
23. *The Bold Attempt*, ca. 1773, location unknown (Bonhams London, Sale 18875, 6 July, 2011, Lot 43). Oil, Print: App. II, no. 38. Former Collection: JS (ca. 1770s)
24. *The Bold Attempt*, ca. 1773, V&A. Watercolour, 138-1890. Study for oil painting or reproductive print, see above.

25. *The Mutual Embrace*, ca. 1774, Royal Collection. Pen, ink and watercolour, RCIN 913626, Print: App. II, no. 42. Study for oil painting or reproductive print (attributed).
26. *The Unlucky Attempt*, ca. 1774, location unknown (Sotheby's London, 6 July, 1983, Lot 301). Oil, Print: App. II, no. 43.
27. *A Squall (or The Military Extinguisher)*, ca. 1775, Royal Collection. Pen, ink and watercolour, RCIN 913624, Print: App. II, no. 47. Study for oil painting or reproductive print. Former Collection: Probably purchased by George IV when Prince of Wales (Royal Archives Invoice 27138, 6 March, 1800).

1775-1780

28. *The Embarkation*, ca. 1776, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich. Oil, BHC4155 (attributed).
29. *The Feather'd Fair in a Fright*, ca. 1776, location unknown (Sotheby's London, British Paintings 1500-1850, 8 March, 1989, Lot 103). Oil, Print: App. II, no. 50a. Former Collection: CB (ca. 1770s)
30. *The Feather'd Fair in a Fright*, ca. 1776, BM. Watercolour, BM No. 1962,0714.21. Study for oil painting or reproductive print, see above.
31. *A Lady of Fashion with Black Shawl and Red Shoes*, ca. 1778, YCBA. Pen, black ink and watercolour, B1977.14.4966.
32. *A Lady of Fashion with Black Shawl and Red Shoes*, ca. 1778, location unknown. Pen, black ink and watercolour. Similar to watercolour currently in the YCBA, see above. Former Collection: according to an annotated facsimile at the Paul Mellon Centre for British Art, this watercolour was formerly at the Colnaghi Gallery, London, and later, it was in the collection of Paul Mellon.
33. *Corporal Cartouch teaching Miss Camp-Love her Manual Exercise*, 1778, The Guards Museum, London. Oil, Print: App. II, no. 56.
34. *The Manchester Hero, or Arts yield to Arms*, ca. 1778, location unknown (Sotheby's London, British Paintings 1500-1850, 14 July, 1993, Lot 100). Oil, Print: App. II, no. 50g. Former Collection: CB (ca. 1770s).
35. *An Officer in the Light Infantry, driven by his Lady to Cox-Heath (or The Drive to Coxheath)*, ca. 1778, location unknown (Sotheby's New York, 7 June, 1978, Lot 267). Oil, Print: Appendix II, no. 50l. Former Collection: CB (ca. 1770s).
36. *The Pleasures of Skating – Or a View in Winter*, ca. 1780, location unknown (Christie's London, 22 November, 1974, Lot 134). Oil, Print: App. II, no. 50w. Former Collection: Bearsted Collection, Upton House (ca. mid-20th century, see: Alexander, 2002: 137); CB (ca. 1770s).
37. *The Pretty Waterwoman, or Admiral Purblind just Run A-Ground by Peggy Pullaway*, ca. 1780, location unknown (Sotheby's London, British Paintings 1500-1850, 14 July, 1993, Lot 100). Oil, Print: App. II, 50x. Former Collection: CB (ca. 1770s).

38. *Lofty Riding, or Miss Folly's Head Exalted*, ca. 1780, location unknown (Waddington's Toronto, 15 June, 2005, Lot 1104). Oil, Print: App. II, no. 50cc. Former Collection: CB (ca. 1770s).
39. *The Sudden Explosion in Fording the Brook*, ca. 1780, location unknown (Waddington's Toronto, 15 June, 2005, Lot 1104). Oil, Print: App. II, no. 50bb. Sold at auction as a pair with *Lofty Riding*, see above. Former collection: CB (ca. 1770s).

Date Unknown

40. *The Affiliation* (after Hogarth), date unknown, V&A. Oil, DYCE.21. Former Collection: Alexander Dyce (ca. late 19th century, bequeathed in 1869) (attributed).
41. *Asylum for the Deaf*, date unknown, V&A. Watercolour, 1694-1871. Former Collection: William Smith (ca. late 19th century) (*formerly attributed, now believed to be Paul Sandby).
42. *Brahmin bull in a landscape*, date unknown, location unknown (Sotheby's London, British Watercolours from the Collection of Cornish Torbock, 14 April, 1994, Lot 165). Pen and watercolour. Former Collection: Cornish Torbock (ca. late 20th century) (attributed).
43. *Card Players in an Interior*, date unknown, location unknown (Sotheby's New York, 12 June, 1975, Lot 49). Oil (attributed).
44. *Cassowary*, date unknown, Huntington Library, San Marino. Pen and watercolour, Object Number: 78.6.
45. *Citizen Soldiers*, date unknown, Royal Collection. Pen, ink, and watercolour, RCIN 917646 (attributed).
46. *A Couple Merrymaking in Tavern*, date unknown, Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen. Chalk, graphite (attributed).
47. *Covent Garden Piazza and Market*, date unknown, Museum of London, London. Oil, 55.72, bequeathed by Ernest E. Cook, 1955 (attributed). Former Collection: possibly in the collection of a Mr. Steers, proprietor of Wells House, a spa hotel in Malvern (ca. 1817), see: Chambers, 1817: 184.
48. *Dancing Gentleman with Seated Lady*, date unknown, Private Collection. Oil (attributed). Formerly attributed to Hogarth; possibly the canvas auctioned as *A Musical Evening* at Bonhams in 1770, see below.
49. *The Denunciation* (after Hogarth), date unknown, Osterley Park, Middlesex. Oil (attributed).
50. *The Doctor's Pill*, date unknown, YCBA. Watercolour, graphite, B1977.14.5418 (attributed).
51. *The Dull Sermon* (after Hogarth), date unknown, Michael Gillingham Collection. Oil (attributed).
52. *Ecclesiastical Ruins beside the Thames*, date unknown, YCBA. Watercolour, B1977.14.4964 (attributed).

53. *Elstead Church, Surrey*, date unknown, location unknown (Sotheby's London, Contents of the Westbrook House, 19 September, 1995, Lot 506). Ink and watercolour (attributed).
54. *Evicting Publican*, date unknown, location unknown (Sotheby's Colonade, British Pictures from 17th to 20th Century, 3 February, 1993, Lot 44). Oil (attributed).
55. *Figures and Animals in a Landscape, a Castle and Abbey Ruins Beyond*, date unknown, location unknown (Bloomsbury Auctions, London, Sale 13401, Lot 2). Oil.
56. *Figures on a Bank Near a Haystack*, date unknown, location unknown (Christie's London, 20 June, 1978, Lot 103). Watercolour and ink. Probably a study for Plate 23 in *Designs by John Collett Both Serious and Comic* (attributed).
57. *Figures by a Lake*, date unknown, location unknown (Bonhams London, Sale 10350, Lot 217). Ink and wash (attributed).
58. *Figures in a Wooded Landscape by Cave*, date unknown, location unknown (Christie's London, 24 March, 1987, Lot 20). Pencil and watercolour (attributed).
59. *Gourmet Supper*, date unknown, location unknown (Sotheby's London, Old Master Paintings & British Paintings 1500-1850, 28 February, 1990, Lot 265). Oil (attributed).
60. *Interior of Sporting Club*, date unknown, location unknown (Bonhams London, 13 July, 1978, Lot 74). Oil (attributed). This painting is attributed to C.L. Junker (d. 1797) in Ayers, 2003: 57.
61. *Lion-tailed macaque from Southern India*, date unknown, location unknown (Sotheby's London, Fine English Drawings & Watercolours, 16 July, 1970, Lot 32). Watercolour (attributed).
62. *Lord and Lady Ranelagh of Chelsea*, date unknown, location unknown (Christie's London, English Pictures and Prints, 3 April, 1962, Lot 99). Watercolour (attributed).
63. *March of the Guards Towards Scotland*, date unknown, location unknown (Koller Auktionen, Zurich, Modern and Swiss Art, Sale A117, 12 December, 2000, Lot 1012). Oil (attributed).
64. *A Musical Evening*, date unknown, location unknown (Bonhams London, 7 August, 1780, Lot 171). Oil (attributed).
65. *Near Windsor, the Keeper's House*, date unknown, Royal Collection. Pen, ink, and watercolour, RCIN 917460.
66. *The Night Musicians*, date unknown, V&A. Watercolour, 508-1892 (attributed).
67. *The Oaks, Near Epsom*, date unknown, BM. Watercolour, BM No. 1875,0814.961 (attributed). Formerly attributed to John Wootton; attribution to Collet comes from: Sloan and Joyner, 1994-1995: 101-2.
68. *The Oaks, Near Epsom*, date unknown, BM. Watercolour, BM No. 1970,0919.19 (attribution). For attribution, see above.
69. *Old Sea Dogs*, date unknown, location unknown (Sotheby's Billingshurst, Oil Paintings and Watercolours, 2 May, 1995, Lot 142). Oil (attributed).

70. *The Press Gang*, date unknown, The Foundling Museum, London. Oil, FM 18 (attributed). Former Collection: Charles Devon (ca. mid-19th century, donated in 1872).
71. *Promenaders in St. James's Park*, date unknown, V&A. Watercolour, 111-1873 (attributed).
72. *Rake's Progress*, four paintings (after Hogarth), date unknown, location unknown (Christie's London, 18 November, 1983, LOT 25). Oil (attributed).
73. *Red-Plumed Bird of Paradise*, date unknown, YCBA. Watercolour and gouache, B1975.4.1810 (attributed).
74. *The Rich Man's table and The Poor Man's Repast*, pair, date unknown, location unknown (Sotheby's London, Old Master Paintings & British Paintings 1500-1850, 28 February, 1990, Lot 269). Oil (attributed).
75. *River Scene*, date unknown, V&A. Ink and wash, E.957-1936 (attributed). Former collection: Herbert A. Powell (ca. 1900-1936), purchased with an aid from the Art Fund in 1936.
76. *River Scene with Church, Cottage, and Windmill*, date unknown, YCBA. Watercolour, B1977.14.5508 (attributed).
77. *Rustic Lovers in a Farmyard*, date unknown, location unknown (Sotheby's London, 18th & 19th Century British Drawings & Watercolours, 3 April, 1996, Lot 92). Watercolour. Probably a study for Plate 10 in *Designs by John Collett Both Serious and Comic*, RS/JS 1770(attributed).
78. *Scene in the 'Boar's Head Tavern' from William Shakespeare's 'Henry IV, Part I,'* date unknown, Shakespeare's Birthplace Trust. Oil (attributed).
79. *The Sleeping Congregation* (after Hogarth), date unknown, location unknown (Sotheby's New York, Old Master and 19th Century European Paintings, Drawings, and Sculpture, 17 July, 1997, Lot 129). Oil (attributed).
80. *Stable Boy Holding a Horse in a Landscape*, date unknown, YCBA. Watercolour, B2001.2.724 (attributed).
81. *Stable Boy Leading a Horse in a Landscape*, date unknown, YCBA. Watercolour, B2001.2.725 (attributed).
82. *Street Scene*, date unknown, Leeds Museums and Gardens, Leeds. Ink, pencil, and watercolour (attributed).
83. *Temple Bar and the Law Courts*, date unknown, Royal Bank of Scotland, Edinburgh. Oil (attributed).

APPENDIX II

Catalogue of Extant Prints

The works in this appendix are reproductive prints made after designs by or attributed to John Collet, which are listed in roughly chronological order. This is an updated and revised version of the list compiled by David Alexander, appearing in *Eighteenth-Century Life* (Alexander, 2002: 136-146). Unless otherwise stated, prints are to be found in the British Museum. For abbreviations, see: 302-303.

* *Not in Alexander's List*

1765

1. Series of 4 prints called *Modern Love* (or *the Love-Match*), John Goldar sculp., TB 1765-1766, JB 1782 (reissue). All insc. "Original Picture in the Possession of Mr. Bradford." Paintings exhibited FSA 1765, see: App. I, no. 4.
 - a) *Courtship*, 25 January, 1766. Engr., BMSat. 6148, V&A.
 - b) *The Elopement*, 14 August, 1765. LE, BMSat. 6149, V&A.
 - c) *The Honey-Moon*, ca. 1765. Engr., BMSat. 6150, YCBA. Unfinished print exhibited by Goldar FSA 1766.
 - d) *Discordant Matrimony*, ca. 1765. Engr., BMSat. 6151.

1767

2. *The Sacrifice*, John Goldar sculp., TB 15 October, 1767. Insc., "Engraved after an Original Picture of Mr. John Collett, in the Possession of Mr. Bradford." Engr., BMSat. 4184, LWL, YCBA.

1768

3. *The Refusal*, John Goldar sculp., TB 1 February, 1768. Insc., "Engraved after an Original Picture of Mr John Collett, in the Possession of Mr. Bradford." Engr., BMSat. 4266, LWL, YCBA.
4. *The Vicar going to Dinner with the Esquire*, T. Stayner sculp., RS/JS 1 June, 1769. Insc., "Engraved from an Original Picture by Mr John Collet." Engr., BMSat. 4257, LWL.
5. *A Taylor riding to Brentford*, T. Stayner sculp., RS/JS 10 June, 1768. Insc., "Engrav'd from an Original Picture Painted by Mr John Collett." Engr., BMSat. 4259, LWL.

6. *Grown Ladies &c Taught to Dance*, Martin Rennoldson sculp., RS/JS ca. 1768. Insc., "Engraved from an Original Picture painted by Mr. John Collet." Engr., BMSat. 4251.
7. *Grown Gentlemen Taught to Dance*, anonymous sculp., RS/JS 20 August, 1768. Insc., "Engraved after an Original Picture of Mr John Collett, in the Possession of Mr., Smith." Engr., BMSat. 4250, LWL. Reissued as a Mezz., see below. The painting was exhibited FSA 1766 (no longer extant).
8. *Grown Gentlemen Taught to Dance*, Butler Clowes sculp., RS/JS 30 September, 1768. Insc., "Engraved after an Original Picture of Mr John Collett, in the Possession of Mr. Smith." Mezz., BMSat. 4250, LWL, Royal Collection.
9. *A Rescue or the Tars Triumphant*, Butler Clowes sculp., RS/JS 12 June, 1768. Insc., "From an Original Picture Painted by Mr John Collett." Mezz., BMSat. 4258, LWL, Royal Collection, YCBA. Painting exhibited FSA 1767, see: App. I, no. 9.
10. *The Canonical Beau, or Mars in the Dumps*, John Goldar sculp., TB 25 October, 1768. Insc., "Engraved after an Original Picture of Mr., John Collett, in the Possession of Mr., Bradford." Engr., BM, LWL. Painting exhibited FSA 1768, see: App. I, no. 10 (preparatory sketch, painting no longer extant).
11. *The Quiet Husband*, John June sculp., RS/JS 20 November, 1768. Insc., "Engraved after an Original Picture Painted by Mr Jno. Collet." Engr., BMSat. 4255.
12. *The Female Orators*, Martin Rennoldson sculp., RS/JS 20 November, 1768. Insc., "Engraved from an Original Picture Painted by Mr John Collet." Engr., BM, LWL, YCBA.

1769

13. *Out of Place and Unpension'd*, anonymous sculp., RS/JS 9 November, 1769. Engr., BMSat. 4338, LWL.
14. *In Place – ha! Ha! Ha!*, anonymous sculp., RS/JS 9 November, 1769. Engr., BMSat. 4337. Pendant to *Out of Place and Unpension'd*, see above. For preparatory sketch see: App. I, no. 12.
15. *The Recruiting Serjeant*, John Goldar sculp., TB 1 September, 1769. Engr., BMSat. 4336, LWL, YCBA. Painting exhibited FSA 1767, see: App. I, no. 8. Print exhibited by Goldar FSA 1769.

1770

16. *The Englishman in Paris*, James Caldwell sculp., RS/JS 10 May, 1770. Engr., BMSat. 4478, LWL. Painting: App. I, no. 16.
17. *The Sweets of Liberty*, Samuel Okey sculp., 31 May, 1770. Mezz., Royal Collection (not in BM). Republished as *The City Chanters*, see below.
18. *The Female Bruisers*, Butler Clowes sculp., 11 July, 1770. Mezz., BMSat. 4592, LWL, Royal Collection. Also published as line-engraving, see below.

19. *The Female Bruisers*, John Goldar sculp., TB/Henry Parker, 10 October, 1770. Insc., “After an Original Picture in the Possession of Thos Browne, Esq.” Engr., BMSat. 4592, LWL. Painting exhibited FSA 1768, see: App. I, no. 11.
20. *The Coaxing Wife*, Frederick Morris sculp., RS/JS, 25 October, 1770. Engr., BMSat. 4596, LWL.
21. *The Frenchman in London*, Charles White sculp., RS/JS/William Darling, 10 November, 1770. Engr., BMSat. 4477, LWL. Pendant to *The Englishman in Paris*, see: App. II, no. 16.
22. *The Gipsies*, James Caldwell sculp., RS/JS, 10 November, 1770. Insc., “Engraved from an Original Painting by Mr Jn Collett in the Possession of Mr Smith.” Engr., BMSat. 4597. Painting exhibited SEAMC 1762 (no longer extant). Print exhibited by Caldwell in 1771.
23. *An Holland Smock to be Run for...*, anonymous sculp., RS/JS, 1770. Engr., BMSat. 4598, LWL.
24. *Designs by John Collett Both Serious and Comic : Engraved on 36 Plates*

Series of 36 engravings, numbered 1-36, various engravers, RS/JS, 1770, KAL (not all in BM). Intended for use as a drawing manual, and sold as a set in boards for 1 guinea; comprised of three sub-sets of images that were also sold separately, see below (23.1, 23.2, 23.3).

Title page Insc.: “Designs by J^on. Collett Both Serious and Comic : Engraved on 36 Plates by Mes^{rs} Rooker, Grignon, Mason, Canot, Goldar, Byrne, Taylor, Pranker, Smith &c. &c. Intended for the Use of Artists as well as Gentlemen & Ladies. Printed for Rob.^t Sayer, No. 53 Fleet Street and John Smith, No. 35 Cheapside. According to the Act Dec. 15 1770. One guinea in boards.”

24.1 “Collet’s Designs both Serious and Comic,” set of landscapes and genre scenes, numbered 1-24, and first issued in 4 parts (as indicated by an extant title page in the collection at Burton Constable Hall), various engravers, RS/JS, 1770. Subsequently served as the first 24 images in the *Designs by John Collett* set; also later advertised in RS’s 1774 catalogue as “Twenty-Four Delightful Views, embellished with pleasing Groups of Serious and Comic Figures” for 6d each. Some were later reissued as illustrations in RS’s drawing manual, *All Draughtsmen’s Assistant* (1786).

- a) Plate 1, ruined gateway, Edward Rooker sculp., ca. 1770. Engr., KAL, Burton Constable House (not in BM).
- b) Plate 2, woman and child in front of round tower, Samuel Smith sculp., 1 February, 1770. Engr., KAL, V&A (not in BM).
- c) Plate 3, bridge, and fisherman in foreground, Samuel Smith sculp., 1 February, 1770. Engr., BM, KAL, Burton Constable House.
- d) Plate 4, coach in front of an inn, Samuel Smith sculp., ca. 1770. Engr., KAL,

Burton Constable House (not in BM).

- e) Plate 5*, rustic couple between a cottage and river, Samuel Smith sculp., ca. 1770. Engr., KAL (not in BM).
- f) Plate 6, lovers in the moonlight, William Byrne sculp., 1 February, 1770. Engr., BM, KAL, Burton Constable House.
- g) Plate 7*, milkmaids in a farmyard, James Mason sculp., ca. 1770. Engr., KAL (not in BM).
- h) Plate 8, older squire seducing pretty haymaker, Samuel Smith sculp., 1 February, 1770. Engr., BM, KAL.
- i) Plate 9*, gentlemen hunters beneath a tree, Samuel Smith sculp., ca. 1770. Engr., KAL (not in BM).
- j) Plate 10*, rustic lovers at the entrance to a barn, Samuel Smith sculp., ca. 1770. Engr., KAL (not in BM).
- k) Plate 11*, farmer fencing with a gentleman, John June sculp., ca. 1770. Engr., KAL (not in BM).
- l) Plate 12*, rustic and a dog in a rowboat next to a mill, Pierre Charles Canot sculp., ca. 1770. Engr., KAL (not in BM).
- m) Plate 13, young gentleman seducing pretty milkmaid, William Mason sculp., 10 June, 1770. Engr., BM, KAL.
- n) Plate 14*, gypsies in a storm, Samuel Smith sculp., ca. 1770. Engr., KAL (not in BM).
- o) Plate 15*, peasants dancing, John June sculp., ca. 1770. Engr., KAL, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich (not in BM). Preparatory sketch: App. I, no. 19.
- p) Plate 16*, donkey race, Robert Hancock sculp., ca. 1770. Engr., KAL (not in BM).
- q) Plate 17*, milkmaid resting under a tree, S. Sparrow sculp., ca. 1770. Engr., KAL (not in BM).
- r) Plate 18, sailor seducing pretty milkmaid, Samuel Smith sculp., 10 June, 1770. Engr., BM, KAL.
- s) Plate 19, drunken man outside an inn, Isaac Taylor sculp., 15 December, 1770. Engr., BM, KAL. Preparatory sketch: App. I, no. 13.
- t) Plate 20*, snowball fight, Samuel Smith sculp., ca. 1770. Engr., KAL (not in BM).
- u) Plate 21*, donkeys next to a cottage, William Pye, 15 December, 1770. Engr., KAL (not in BM).
- v) Plate 22*, lion, James Peake, 15 December, 1770. Engr., KAL (not in BM).
- q) Plate 23*, figures on a bank near a haystack, S. Sparrow sculp., 15 December, 1770. Engr., KAL (not in BM).
- r) Plate 24*, tiger, Samuel Smith, 15 December, 1770. Engr., KAL (not in BM).

24.2 “Six Whole Length Figures, Cloathed in the Modern Taste...,” set of 6 fashion plates, numbered 1-6, various engravers, JS/RS ca. 1770. Appeared after “Collet’s Designs Both Serious and Comic” in the *Designs by John Collett* set. Later advertised in RS’s 1774 catalogue for 6d, each. All were later reissued as

illustrations in *All Draughtsman's Assistant* (1786).¹

- a) Plate 25*, lady in a winter landscape, wearing a quilted dress, and fur muff, Charles Grignion sculp., ca. 1770, KAL (not in BM).
- b) Plate 26*, gentleman in a rural setting, carrying a walking stick, accompanied by a dog, Thomas Cook sculp., ca. 1770. Engr., BM, KAL, LWL.
- c) Plate 27, lady on a sofa reading, with a dog seated beside her, Robert Pranker sculp., undated. Engr., BM, KAL.
- d) Plate 28, gentleman in a tricorner hat, with long sword at his hip, seated on a bench in a garden setting, with a dog at his feet, Robert Pranker sculp., ca. 1770. Engr., KAL (not in BM).
- e) Plate 29, lady in a garden setting, wearing formal dress, accompanied by a dog, M. Rennoldson sculp., ca. 1770. Engr., KAL (not in BM).
- f) Plate 30, gentleman standing on pavement, wearing greatcoat and carrying long sword at his hip, Robert Pranker sculp., ca. 1770. Engr., BM, KAL.

24.3 "Six Whole Length Naked Figures..." set of six nudes, numbered 1-6, various engravers, RS ca. 1765-1774. Appeared after "Six Whole Length Figures, Cloathed in the Modern Taste" in the *Designs by John Collett* set. Later advertised in RS's 1774 catalogue as "Six ditto, naked Figures 6d each." Plates 32 and 33 were reissued in *All Draughtsman's Assistant* (1786), renumbered 13 and 12.

- a) Plate 31, female nude in a garden, leaning against a wall, seen from behind, Charles Grignion sculp., ca. 1770. Engr., BM, KAL.
- b) Plate 32, female nude in a garden, seen from behind, turned to right with head in profile, leaning on a pedestal with urn, William Byrne sculp., ca. 1770. Engr., BM, KAL.
- c) Plate 33, female nude in a garden, leaning against a wall, John Goldar sculp., ca. 1770. Engr., BM, KAL.
- d) Plate 34, female nude in a garden, leaning against a pedestal with an urn, John Goldar sculp., ca. 1770. Engr., BM, KAL.
- e) Plate 35, female nude descending steps into a pool, James Caldwell sculp., ca. 1770. Engr., BM, KAL.
- f) Plate 36, female nude in a garden, leaning against a pedestal with an urn, Charles Grignion sculp., undated. Engr., BM, KAL.

¹ Alexander erroneously describes the series as comprising of 3 plates by Pranker and 3 by Rennoldson, and states that only 4 of the 6 were published in *All Draughtsman's Assistant*; in fact, all 6 appeared in the manual.

1771

25. *The Cotillion Dance*, James Caldwell sculp., RS/JS 10 March, 1771. Engr., BMSat. 4599, LWL, YCBA. Painting was exhibited FSA 1772 (no longer extant).
26. *The Ladies Disaster*, James Caldwell sculp., RS/JS 2 April, 1771. Insc., “Engraved from an Original Picture Painted by Mr Jn Collet.” Engr., BMSat. 4595, LWL, YCBA.
27. *The City Chanters*, Samuel Okey sculp., ca. 1771. Mezz., BMSat. 4433, Royal Collection, YCBA. Originally published in 1770 as *The Sweets of Liberty*, see: Appendix II, no. 17.
28. *January and May*, Charles Grignion sculp., RS/JS 16 April, 1771. Engr., BMSat. 4606.
29. *The Country-Man in London*, Alexander Bannerman sculp., RS/JS 1 September, 1771. Engr., BMSat. 4600, LWL.

1772

30. *Troops Forging a Brook*, anonymous sculp., RS/JS 25 January, 1772. Engr., BMSat. 4608.
31. *The Jealous Maids*, Robert Laurie sculp., RS 2 March, 1772. Insc. four lines of verse in two columns beginning, “ ‘His Lordship loves the Amourous Game; ... The Footman apes his Master too...’ ” Mezz., BM, LWL, V&A. Likely pendant to *The Rival Milliners*, see below.
32. *The Rival Milleners*, Robert Laurie sculp., RS undated, ca. 1772. Insc. four lines of verse beginning: “From Sarah Woodcock, to the Girl ... And cry – ‘Tis I will have that Beau.’ ...” Mezz., BMSat. 4595.
33. *The Rival Maids**, John Theodore Heins Jr. sculp., undated, ca. 1772. Mezz., BM, LWL. Simplified and slightly altered version of Laurie’s *Jealous Maids*, see: Appendix II, no. 31.
34. *High Life Below Stairs*, James Caldwell sculp., RS/JS 20 May, 1772. Engr., BM, LWL. The painting was exhibited FSA 1765 as *High Taste in Low Life*, see: App. I, no. 3.
35. Hurdy-gurdy player in front of an inn, Thomas Cook sculp., TB 6 June, 1772. Engr., BM. Painting exhibited as *The Travelling Musician* FSA 1770, see: App. I, No. 21.
36. *A Macarony taking his Morning Ride in Rotten Row Hyde Park*, James Caldwell sculp., RS/JS 12 June, 1772. Engr., BMSat. 4612, LWL.
37. *The Unwelcome Customer*, James Caldwell sculp., RS/JS 17 August, 1772. Engr., BMSat. 4605.

1773

38. *The Bold Attempt*, James Caldwell sculp., RS/JS 1 January, 1773. Insc., “Engraved from an Original Painting by Mr Jn Collett in the Possession of Mr Smith.” Engr., BMSat. 4607, LWL. Caldwell exhibited the print FSA 1773.
39. *The Spirit is Willing but the Flesh is Weak*, John Goldar sculp., RS/JS January, 1773. Engr., BMSat. 4609, LWL.
40. *The Country Choristers*, John Goldar sculp., RS/JS, 20 March, 1773. Engr., BMSat. 4611, Library of Congress.

1774

41. *The Refusal**, Philip Dawe sculp., RS, 25 February, 1774. Insc., “From an original picture of Mr. John Collett in the possession of Mr. Sayer.” Mezz., BMSat. 4184, LWL. Altered version of Goldar’s earlier engraving, see: App. II, no. 3.
42. *The Mutual Embrace*, John Goldar sculp., S&B 10 March, 1774. Insc., “Engraved after the Original Picture designed & painted by Mr John Collett in the possession of Mr Bradford.” Engr., BMSat. 4613.
43. *The Unlucky Attempt*, John Goldar sculp., S&B 10 March, 1774. Insc., Engraved after an Original Picture by Mr Jn. Collett in the possession of Mr Bradford.” Engr., BMSat. 4614.
44. *The Discovery*, John Goldar sculp., S&B 10 March, 1774. Engr., BMSat. 4615. Painting exhibited as *The Discovery, or Virtue in Danger* FSA 1767 (no longer extant).
45. *The Guards of the Night Defeated*, James Caldwell sculp., S&B 1 July, 1774. Engr., BMSat. 4616.

1775

46. *The Disbanded Soldier (So Shall Desert in Arms be Crowned)**, James Caldwell sculp., 30 May, 1775. Engr., Wellcome Trust, London (not in BM).
47. *The Military Extinguisher**, James Caldwell sculp., 30 May, 1775. Engr., BM. Preparatory sketch: App. I, no. 27.

1776

48. *The Continnence of a Methodist Parson, or Divinity in Danger**, anon. sculp., S&B 10 June, 1776. Mezz., BMSat. 4610, LWL. Mezzotint version of Goldar’s *The Spirit is Willing*, see: App. II, no. 39.
49. *Good Entertainment for Man and Horse*, S. Sparrow sculp., RS/JS 15 October, 1776. Engr., BMSat., 4617, LWL.

ca. 1777-1781

50. "34 New and Elegant Humorous Prints..." set of comic 'posture-sized' (approx. 36 x 25 cms.) mezzotints, CB ca. 1777-1781. Unless otherwise stated, insc. "From the Original Picture by John Collet, in the possession of Carington Bowles."

Prints were sold individually and published over several years, but were advertised in CB's 1784 catalogue as a series, described as: "The Following 34 new and elegant humorous Prints, are finely executed from the capital Paintings of that eminent Artist the late John Collet, Esq. in the Possession of Carington Bowles. Each print is 10 inches wide and 14 inches deep. When framed and glazed they make handsome Appearance and Fashionable Furniture and are always kept ready finished. Price 2s plain, or finely coloured from the paintings, 3s. each." The prints are listed below in the order they appear in the catalogue.

N.B. CB's successors Bowles & Carver reissued many of these prints at the beginning of the 19th century, at which point they erased the original publication dates. In many cases these later imprints are the only extant copies. The publication dates for undated works are based on M.D. George's estimates (see: George, 5, 1935: 786).

- a) *The Feather'd Fair in a Fright*, anon. sculp., CB ca. 1777. Mezz., BMSat. 4550, LWL, YCBA. Painting exhibited FSA 1776, see: App. I, no. 29.
- b) *The Unfortunate Discovery*, anon. sculp., CB 24 July, 1777. Mezz., BMSat. 4614. Painting probably exhibited FSA 1766 as "An Essay on Woman" as indicated by pamphlet in man's pocket that reads "An Essay on Woman" (no longer extant).
- c) *Tight Lacing, or Fashion Before Ease*, anon. sculp., CB ca. 1777. Insc., "From the original picture by John Collet, in the possession of the Proprietors." Mezz., BMSat. 4552, LWL, YCBA.
- d) *Bachelor's Fare, or Bread and Cheese with Kisses*, anon. sculp., CB 10 November, 1777. Mezz., BMSat. 4573, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich.
- e) *The Amorous Thief, or Lover's Larceny*, anon. sculp., CB ca. 1777. Mezz., BMSat. 4554, LWL.
- f) *Miss Wicket and Miss Trigger*, anon. sculp., CB 1 January, 1778. Insc. beneath the title, "Miss Trigger you see is an excellent shot, And forty five notches Miss Wicket's just got." Mezz., BMSat. 4555, LWL, YCBA.
- g) *The Manchester Hero, or Arts yield to Arms*, anon. sculp., CB ca. 1778. Mezz., BMSat. 4556, LWL, YCBA. Painting: App. I, no. 34.
- h) *The Pretty Bar Maid*, anon. sculp., CB 2 July, 1778. Mezz., BMSat. 4558, LWL.
- i) *The Sailor's Present, or the Jealous Clown*, anon. sculp., CB 2 July, 1778. Mezz., BMSat. 4559, LWL, YCBA.

- j) *The Proverb Revers'd - or, a Bird in the Bush worth Two in the Hand*, anon. sculp., CB ca. 1778. Mezz., BMSat. 4560.
- k) *The Female Fox Hunter*, anon. sculp., CB 1 September, 1778. Mezz., BMSat. 4561, LWL.
- l) *An Officer in the Light Infantry, driven by his Lady to Cox-Heath*, anon. sculp., CB 9 November, 1778. Mezz., BMSat. 4562, LWL, YCBA. Painting: App. I, no. 35.
- m) *Kitty Coaxer driving Lord Dupe, towards Rotten Row*, anon. sculp., CB ca. 1779. Mezz., BMSat. 4569, LWL, YCBA.
- n) *The Four Seasons of the Year*, in 4 prints, anon. sculp., CB 1 January, 1779. Mezz.
 i. "Spring," BMSat. 4564, LWL.
 ii. "Summer," BMSat. 4565., LWL
 iii. "Autumn," BMSat. 4566, LWL.
 iv. "Winter," BMSat. 4567, LWL.
- o) *Miss Tipapin going for all nine*, anon. sculp., CB 7 February, 1779. Mezz., BM, LWL, YCBA.
- p) *Reynard's Last Shift*, anon. sculp., CB 24 June, 1779. Mezz., BM.
- q) *An Actress at her Toilet, or Miss Brazen just Breecht*, anon. sculp., CB ca. 1779. Mezz., BMSat. 5622, LWL, V&A. Painting exhibited FSA 1780 (no longer extant).
- r) *The Church Militant*, anon. sculp., CB 15 September, 1779. Mezz., BMSat. 3752.
- s) *A Soft Tumble after a Hard Ride*, anon. sculp., CB 25 March, 1780. Mezz., BMSat. 5816, LWL.
- t) *Paul Jones Shooting a Sailor who had Attempted to Strike his Colours in an Engagement*, anon. sculp., CB ca. 1780. Mezz., BMSat. 5566, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich.
- u) *The Ladies Shooting Poney*, anon. sculp., CB ca. 1780. Mezz., BMSat. 5817.
- v) *A Morning Frolic, or the Transmutation of Sexes*, anon. sculp., CB ca. 1780. Mezz., BM, LWL, YCBA.
- w) *The Pleasures of Skating - or, a View in Winter*, anon. sculp., CB ca. 1780. Mezz., BMSat. 5818. Painting: App. I, no. 36.
- x) *The Pretty Waterwoman, or Admiral Purblind just run aground by Peggy Pullaway*, anon. sculp., CB ca. 1780. Mezz., BMSat. 5817, LWL. Painting: App. I, no. 37.
- y) *The Triple Plea*, anon. sculp., CB 15 May, 1780. Insc. beneath the title, four lines of verse in two columns, beginning, "Law, Physick, and Divinity, ... They'll be Ass ridden by All Three." Mezz., BMSat. 3761.
- z) *The Victim*, anon. sculp., CB ca. 1780. Mezz., BMSat. 5822. Painting exhibited FSA 1780 (no longer extant). Altered version of Goldar's engraving *The Sacrifice*, see: Appendix II, no. 2.
- aa) *Deceitful Kisses, or Pretty Plunderers*, anon. sculp., CB 12 February, 1781. Mezz., BMSat. 5946.

- bb) *The Sudden Explosion in Forging the Brook*, anon. sculp., CB 27 February, 1781. Mezz., BMSat. 4500. Painting: App. I, no. 39.
- cc) *Lofty Riding, or Miss Folly's head exalted*, anon. sculp., CB ca. 1781. Mezz., BMSat. 3787. Painting: App. I, no. 38.
- dd) *Fielding's Myrmidons Spoiling Bob Booty's Morning Draught*, anon. sculp., CB 1 May 1781. Mezz., BMSat. 5947, YCBA.

1778

51. *The Favourite Footman, or Miss Well Mounted*, anon. sculp., S&B 6 April, 1778. Insc., "From an Original Picture Painted by John Collett." Mezz., BM.
52. *Shop-Lifter Detected*, anon. sculp., S&B 27 May, 1778. Insc., "From an original Picture Painted by Mr John Collett." Mezz., BM, LWL.
53. *The Unfortunate Discovery**, anon. sculp., CB 29 September, 1778. Insc., "From the Original Picture by John Collet, in the Possession of Carington Bowles." Engr., BM. Engraved version of CB's earlier mezzotint, see: App. II, no. 44b.

1779

54. *Miss too much for him, or John not Master of Sixteen Stone*, anon. sculp., S&B 27 May 1779. Mezz., Huntington Library, San Marino, Art Gallery of Ontario (not in BM).
55. *The Feather'd Fair in a Fright*, anon. sculp., CB 24 June 1779. Insc., "From the Original Picture by John Collet, in the possession of Carington Bowles," and below twelve lines of verse in three columns, beginning "Two Lasses who wou'd like their Mistresses shine..." Engr., BM. Engraved version of CB's earlier mezzotint, see: App. II, No. 50a.

1780

56. *Corporal Cartouch teaching Miss Camp-Love her Manual Exercise*, anon. sculp., S&B 9 May, 1780. Insc., "From an Original Picture Painted by Mr. Collett." Engr., BM, LWL.

1781

57. *The Rising Woman and the Falling Man*, anon. sculp., CB 12 February, 1781. Insc., "From the Original Picture by John Collet, in the possession of Carington Bowles." Mezz., BM. Painting exhibited as *The Joys of the Chase or the Rising Woman and the Falling Man* FSA 1780 (painting no longer extant).

1790

58. *A Soft Tumble after a Hard Ride**, Richard Earlom sculp., ca. 1790. Mezz., YCBA (not in BM). Later version of CB's earlier mezzotint, see: App. II, no. 50s.

ca. 1800-1860

59. *Reynard's Last Shift**, John Harris sculp., ca. 1806-1856. Etching and aquatint, BM. Later version of CB's earlier mezzotint, see: App. II, no. 50p.
60. *Out of Place and Unpension'd**, William Davison sculp., ca. 1812-1817. Etching, BM. Later version of RS's earlier print, see: App. II, no. 13.

APPENDIX III

List of Exhibited Works

The works in this appendix are original paintings and drawings exhibited by Collet with the Free Society of Artists at various exhibiting venues between 1761 and 1783. Information is derived from exhibition catalogues (i.e. catalogue and page numbers, titles, addresses), which are listed in the bibliography. Extant prints and paintings are referenced where applicable. For abbreviations, see: 302-303.

1761

1. *A Landscape* (SEAMC, 1761: 4, cat. no. 26)
2. *Two Landscapes in Indian Ink* (*Ibid.*: 8, cat. no. 121)

Ven.: Great Room of SEAMC, the Strand, London.

1762

3. *A Gipsy Telling Some Country Girls their Fortune* (SEAMC, 1762: 4, cat. no. 91)
Print: App. II, no. 22.

Ven.: *Ibid.*

Add.: "Opposite the Chapel, the end of Bedford Row."

1764

4. *Rake's Quarelling with the Watchmen, etc.* (SEAMC, 1764: 4, cat. no. 29)

Ven.: *Ibid.*

Add.: "At Mr. Belmont's, Hair Merchant, James Street, Covent Garden."

1765

5. *A Series of Pictures called a Love-Match* (FSA, 1765: 6, cat. nos. 58-61)
 - a) *1st Courtship*
 - b) *2nd An Elopement*
 - c) *3rd The Honey-Moon*
 - d) *4th Matrimony*

Paintings: App. I, no. 4.
Prints: App. II, nos. 1a-d.
6. *A Landscape with a Watermill* (*Ibid.*: cat. no. 62)

7. *High Taste in Low Life* (*Ibid.*: cat. no. 63)
 Painting: App. I, no. 3.
 Print: App. II, no. 34.
8. *A Cat* (*Ibid.*: cat. no. 64)
9. *A Portrait of a Lady* (*Ibid.*: cat. no. 65)

Ven.: Moreing's Auction House, Maiden Lane, Covent Garden.
 Add.: "At Mr. Walker's James Street, Covent Garden."

1766

10. *A Modern Sacrifice* (FSA, 1766: 5, cat. no. 55)
11. *The Lazy Lover; Its Companion* (*Ibid.*: cat. no. 56)
12. *An Essay on Woman* (*Ibid.*: cat. no. 57)
 Print: App. II, no. 50a.
13. *Grown Gentlemen Learning to Dance* (*Ibid.*: cat. no. 58.)
 Print: App. II, nos. 6-7.
14. *Portrait of a Gentleman* (*Ibid.*: cat. no. 59)

Ven.: *Ibid.*
 Add.: *Ibid.*

1767

15. *A Lyon and Lyonesse* (FSA, 1767: 7, cat. no. 77)
16. *A View of Mr. Garrick's Temple at Hampton* (*Ibid.*: cat. no. 78)
17. *A Landscape with Cattle* (*Ibid.*: cat. no. 79)
18. *The Discovery, or Virtue in Danger* (*Ibid.*: cat. no. 80)
 Print: App. II, no. 44.
19. *A Recruiting Sergeant Persuading a Countryman to Enlist* (*Ibid.*: cat. no. 81)
 Painting: App. I, no. 8.
 Print: App. II, no. 15.
20. *A Rescue, or the Tars Triumphant* (*Ibid.*: cat. no. 82)
 Painting: App. I, no. 9.
 Print: App. II, no. 9.

Ven.: Christie's Auction House, "Two New Great Exhibition Rooms in Pall Mall, next to the bottom of Hay-Market."
 Add.: *Ibid.*

1768

- 21. *A Landscape* (FSA, 1768: 6, cat. no. 57)
- 22. *The Female Bruisers* (*Ibid.*: cat. no. 58)
 Painting: Appendix I, no. 11.
 Print: App. II, nos. 18-19.
- 23. *The Canonical Beau* (*Ibid.*: cat. no. 59)
 Print: App. II, no. 10.
- 24. *A Small Piece of Lyons* (*Ibid.*: cat. no. 60)

Ven.: *Ibid.*

Add.: Chelsea.

1770

- 25. *The Travelling Musician* (FSA, 1770: 16, cat. no. 281)
 Painting: App. I, no. 21.
 Print: App. II, no. 35.
- 26. *A Landscape* (*Ibid.*: cat. no. 282)
- 27. *A Small Landscape* (*Ibid.*: cat. no. 283)

Ven.: "Mr. Christie's New Great Room, next Cumberland-House, Pall Mall."

Add.: *Ibid.*

1771

- 28. *The Street Syrens* (FSA, 1771: 5, cat. no. 55)

Ven.: *Ibid.*

Add.: *Ibid.*

1772

- 29. *The Cotillion Dancers* (FSA, 1772: 5 cat. no. 57)
 Print: App. II, no. 25 .

Ven.: *Ibid.*

Add.: *Ibid.*

1773

30. *A Landscape* (FSA, 1773: 5, cat. no. 40)

Ven.: *Ibid.*

Add.: *Ibid.*

1774

31. *A Landscape* (FSA, 1774: 5, cat. no. 49)

Ven.: *Ibid.*

Add.: *Ibid.*

1775

32. *The Court Candidate and Patriotic Cobler* (FSA, 1775: 6, cat. no. 63)

33. *A Lioness Seizing a Bull* (*Ibid.*: cat. no. 64)

34. *A View of Calais; taken from the side of the canal leading from thence to St. Omer's* (*Ibid.*: cat. no. 64)

Ven.: "Exhibition Room and Academy in St. Alban's-Street, Pall Mall."

Add.: *Ibid.*

1776

35. *The Feathered Fair in a Fright* (FSA, 1776: 19, cat. no. 46)

Painting: App. I, no 29 .

Print: App. II, no. 50a.

Ven.: *Ibid.*

Add.: *Ibid.*

1780

36. *A Landscape* (FSA, 1780: 6, cat. no. 52)

37. *An Actress at her Toilet* (*Ibid.*: cat. no. 53)

Print: App. II, no. 50q.

38. *The Victim* (*Ibid.*: cat. no. 54)

Print: App. II, no. 50z.

39. *The Joys of the Chase, or the Rising Woman and the Falling Man* (*Ibid.*: cat. no. 55)

Print: App. II, no. 57.

40. *A Lion Seizing a Boar* (*Ibid.*: cat. no. 56)

41. *Dead Game* (*Ibid.*: cat. no. 57)

42. *A Portrait of a Dog which Lost its Fore-Leg at the battle of Bunker's Hill, while he was watching the dead body of his master, who was an officer in the 47th Regiment* (*Ibid.*: cat. no. 58)

43. *A View of Turnham Green, a Stained Drawing* (*Ibid.*: cat. no. 59).

Ven.: *Ibid.*

Add.: *Ibid.*

1783 (posthumous)

44. *Return from Finchley* (FSA, 1783: 9, cat. no. 250)

Ven.: "Great Rooms, No. 28, in the Haymarket."

ABBREVIATIONS

Add.	Artist's Address
App.	Appendix
BL	British Library, London
BM	British Museum, London
BM No.	British Museum Item Registration Number
BMSat.	British Museum Satire Number, Catalogue Reference (Stephens, 1877-1883; George, 1935-1947)
Cat. No.	Catalogue Number
CB	Carington Bowles (print publisher)
CWF	Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Virginia
Engr.	Line-Engraving
FSA	Free Society of Artists
Insc.	Inscribed (inscription included in print title)
JB	John Boydell (print publisher)
JS	John Smith (print publisher)
KAL	Kohler Art Library, University of Wisconsin
LWL	Lewis Walpole Library, Yale
Mezz.	Mezzotint
ODNB	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i> (Online Edition)
OED	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i> (Online Edition)
RA	Royal Academy, London
RS	Robert Sayer (print publisher)
RSA	Royal Society of Arts, London
S&B	Sayer and Bennett (print publishing firm)
SAGB	Society of Artists of Great Britain (or Society of Artists)

Sculp.	Engraved by
SEAMC	Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce (or Society of Arts)
TB	Thomas Bradford (print publisher)
V&A	Victoria and Albert Museum, London
Ven.	Exhibition Venue
YCBA	Yale Centre for British Art

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PRIMARY SOURCES (PRE-1800)

Newspapers/Magazines

I have consulted a wide range of eighteenth-century newspapers and magazines. Specific issues are cited where relevant in the footnotes. Comprehensive listings of these types of publications can be found on the following online databases: *17th and 18th Century Burney Collection Newspapers*, <http://www.jisccontent.ac.uk/collections/17th-and-18th-century-burney-collection-newspapers>; and *British Periodicals Collection*, http://www.proquest.co.uk/products_pq/descriptions/british_periodicals.

Exhibition Catalogues

A Catalogue of the Pictures, Sculptures, Models, Drawings, Engravings, &c. Now Exhibited in the Great Room of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce (London, 1760) [SEAMC, 1760].

A Catalogue of the Paintings, Sculptures, Models, Drawings, Engravings, &c. Now Exhibiting in the Great Room belonging to the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce, in the Strand (London, 1761) [SEAMC, 1761].

A Catalogue of the Pictures, Sculptures, Models, Drawings, Prints, &c. Exhibited by the Society of Artists of Great-Britain, at the Great Room in Spring-Garden, Charing-Cross (London, 1761) [SAGB, 1761].

A Catalogue of the Paintings, Sculptures, Models, Drawings, Engravings, &c. Now Exhibiting at the Great Room of the Society Instituted for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce (London, 1762), [SEAMC, 1762].

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A Catalogue of the Paintings, Sculptures, Architecture, Models, Drawings, Engravings, &c. Now Exhibiting under the Patronage of the Society, for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, at their Great Room in the Strand (London: 1764), [SEAMC, 1764].

A Catalogue of the Paintings, Sculptures, Architecture, Models, Drawings, Engravings, &c. now Exhibiting by the Body of the Artists Associated for the Relief of their Distressed Brethren, their Widows and Children at Mr. Moreing's Great Room in Maiden-Lane, Covent-Garden (London, 1765) [FSA, 1765].

- A Catalogue of the Pictures, Sculptures, Models, Designs in Architecture, Prints, &c. Exhibited by the Society of Artists of Great Britain at the Great Room in Spring-Garden, Charing Cross (London, 1765) [SAGB, 1765].*
- A Catalogue of the Paintings, Sculptures, Architecture, Models, Drawings, Engravings, &c. Now Exhibiting by the Artists, Associated for the Relief of their Distressed Brethren, their Widows, and Children, at Mr. Moreing's Great-Room, in Maiden-Lane, Covent-Garden (London, 1766) [FSA, 1766].*
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- A Catalogue of the Paintings, Sculptures, Designs in Architecture, Models, Drawings, &c. now Exhibiting by the Free Society of Artists Associated for the Relief of their Distressed and Decayed Brethren, their Widows and Children, at the Great Room in Pall-Mall (London, 1768) [FSA, 1768].*
- A Catalogue of the Paintings, Sculptures, Architecture, Models, Drawings, Engravings, &c. now Exhibiting by the Society of Artists, Associated for the Relief of their Distressed Brethren, their Widows and Children, at Mr. Christie's New Great Room, next Cumberland-House, Pall-Mall (London, 1770) [FSA, 1770].*
- A Catalogue of the Paintings, Sculptures, Designs in Architecture, Models, Drawings, Engravings, &c. now Exhibiting by the Society of Artists, Associated for the Relief of their Distressed Brethren, their Widows and Children, at Mr. Christie's New Great Room, next Cumberland House, Pall-Mall (London, 1771) [FSA, 1771].*
- A Catalogue of the Paintings, Sculptures, Designs in Architecture, Models, Drawings, Engravings, &c. now Exhibiting by the Society of Artists, Associated for the Relief of their Distressed Brethren, their Widows and Children, at Mr. Christie's New Great Room, next Cumberland House, Pall-Mall (London, 1772) [FSA, 1772].*
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- A Catalogue of the Paintings, Sculptures, Designs in Architecture, Models, Drawings, Engravings, &c. now Exhibiting by the Society of Artists, Associated for the Relief of their Distressed Brethren, their Widows and Children. At Mr. Christie's Great Room, next Cumberland House, Pall Mall (London, 1774) [FSA, 1774]*
- A Catalogue of the Paintings, Sculptures, Designs in Architecture, Models, Drawings, Engravings, &c. now Exhibiting by the Society of Artists, Associated for the Relief*

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A Catalogue of the Paintings, Sculptures, Designs in Architecture, Models, Drawings, Prints, &c. now Exhibiting by the Free Society of Artists, (Associated for the Relief of their Distressed Brethren, their Widows and Children;) at the Great Rooms, No. 28, in the Haymarket for the Year 1783 (London, 1783) [FSA, 1783].

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