
The Harlot's Progress

A series of misfortunes, based on the work of William Hogarth and his character, Moll Hackabout

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This project was birthed from an accident, when, searching for 17th century engravings of Diana and Minerva, I found the “The Harlot’s Progress” nestled at the bottom of a box in the Special Collections and Archives. A series of six etchings, “The Harlot’s Progress” is a single story – the tale of a young girl, Moll Hackabout, gone to London and the hardships that follow her there. The artist, William Hogarth, was an 18th century English painter, a satirist, influenced by French style engravings. Hogarth drew extensively from reality – some of the characters his series are candidly based on real people, and the narrative pulled from infamous tales of harlots, bawds, and rakes.

Intrigued by the name, the story, and the style, I perused the James B. Duke Library, surprised to find a wealth of academic writing about “The Harlot’s Progress.” In an attempted change of pace, however, I endeavored not to write an analysis of Hogarth as an artist, but to write the story of Moll Hackabout in my own style, drawing directly from the resources at hand. What follows is the result of my research. Much of the story is a twice-told tale – grounded in the original etchings and research – but much of it is my own vision, my own details, my own dialogue.

I have included some follow-up reading, should the reader like to know more about William Hogarth or Moll Hackabout.



Hogarth, William. "Plate 1," from *The Harlot's Progress* series, plate 1 of 6. From the Collection of Catherine W. Snow and Douglas A. Knight, on loan to Furman from Douglas A. Knight. Acc. 2017-035, Special Collections and Archives, James B. Duke Library, Furman University.

In Tem Streets

She sat atop the trunk, tracing the initials *M. H.* carved into the lid, wood stain rubbing away under her fingertips. She leaned her back against the wall of the inn, settled the heavy folds of her skirt in a neat circle around her. The uniform pleats created the illusion of stripes under the noonday sun. A white rose clung to her chest, the stem tucked between the laces of her bodice. Mary picked at the velvet petals, staring off in the distance down the street.

Dust clouds rose from between the rows of wilted taverns and crumbled slums with rotten wooden doorways. Clotheslines crisscrossed above, tying each building to one another – hanging cotton shifts, woolen socks, and ribbon garters dripped down onto the street. The inn behind her was an unmarked stretch of brick, boxed in by alleyways at either end. A sign, hung above the single doorway, sported no name or title, only a church bell etched into the wood. Even in the afternoon, the muffled clamber of activity roared within – Mary heard raised voices, glass shattering, a sharp rap against the wall. She was parched under the sun, but unwilling to leave her post, she silently sweat, collecting dust.

The door to the inn opened behind her. Two men fumbled down the steps. The taller man, dressed neatly and drooping slightly, surveyed Mary with drooping eyes as he passed. “Ma- madum,” he hiccupped. She nodded politely. The pair slowly made their way down the street, laughing and glancing back at Mary, before turning into an alleyway past the inn.

Mary thought of asking a passerby for the time, but the street was nearly empty and anyone who passed lowered their eyes from Mary’s open, melancholy face. A woman leaned from her balcony, a pair of stockings clutched in her hands. A pastor slunk by on a skeletal horse, reading a folded pamphlet. The rider’s face was hidden by an enormous hat,

the brim drooping, brushing his shoulders. The horse lurched forward, its head bent low to the ground. Neither the man nor the animal paid her any mind. Across the street, the horse's swinging neck knocked over a stack of wooden buckets which scattered noisily, clanking into one another on the road. The rider did not raise his head. One bucket tumbled toward Mary. She kicked it away with her boot.

No need to move along just yet, she thought. Surely a few more minutes and he might arrive. She pictured her cousin – homely, fair haired, almond eyes pinched together above his nose – imagined him emerging from the sunlit dust. She sighed heavily, bent over her corseted waist, rearranged the goose in its basket as though it were flying – neck stretched outwards, wings resting on the rim. A tag was noosed tight around its neck – *For my Lofing Cosen in Tems Street in London*. Just a moment more.

A shadow emerged from the alleyway. At first, Mary thought it was the drunk coming to gawk at her, but as the shape drew nearer, she saw the distinctive silhouette of a lady. Her eyes followed the path of the lady, as she made her way towards Mary. She seemed to float, but with some difficulty, as though the many petticoats ballooning out from her waist were the only thing weighing her feet to the ground. A woolen red hood was drawn about her shoulders, lined with embroidered lace, tied at the front with a cream satin ribbon. She kept the fabric close to her face, a stiff bonnet poking out underneath. The lady crossed up to the step, nodded her covered head at Mary. "My dear," she sang, "What is a pretty bird like you doing here on the street corner?"

Mary stood, curtsied, tugging at her apron ties. "Mary Hackabout, ma'am. I have just arrived in London this morning."

“Have you no escort?” The lady pulled the hood back and smiled. Bright white pustules dotted her face like stars. Mary watched the large swollen mound on her forehead, the two below her left eye, and the one lodged between the folds of her chin.

“I- I was meant to meet a relation of mine. I am not sure as to when he might arrive, so I have decided to wait here until he does.”

“How long have you been waiting?”

“All morning, ma’am.”

“And you are quite sure he will come?”

“I have no reason to believe that he will not.” Mary wrung her hands in discomfort. The boils seemed to blink at her.

“What a place to ask a woman to wait.” Her eyes scaled the walls of the inn. “In such a case, perhaps you would not mind a moment of female company?”

“Certainly, ma’am. Would you care to sit?”

“No, but thank you, child. You may sit.” She gestured with a hand. Mary resumed her place on the trunk.

The madam slowly plucked at the fabric around each of her fingers, sliding a silk glove from her hand. Her eyes seemed to trail the length of Mary’s form, inspecting her waist, bodice, and face in turn. “What were your plans, had your relation arrived on time?”

“Well,” Mary crossed her ankles beneath her skirt, pushed her shoulders back, “I am from Dunwall, you see, and my father thought it prudent to send me into town in search of work. I had hopes of becoming a seamstress. I have previous experience with sewing and mending, and I have some materials in my possession.” She adjusted the parcel on her arm.

“Yet you have no true connections? Propositions?”

“No, ma’am.” Dejected, Mary cast her eyes down to stare at her boots.

“Pity.”

A pause.

“Still, you do have potential,” the madam reached down. Her bare, upturned palm raised Mary’s chin. “You speak well enough. Your color is good – a bit freckled perhaps – but your eyes are bright. You certainly know how to dress–”

“Thank you, ma’am,” Mary started.

“–For a country girl. And you’ve a good-sized bosom.” The madam’s hand trailed down the curve of her neck, her thumb fussing with her lace slip.

“Pardon me?” Mary leaned way.

“Your breasts, dear. Perky, round. In interest of your silhouette, however, you would require a lesson in stay lacing. Possibility for more lift.” She removed her hand, began replacing the glove.

Mary tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. “Ma’am–”

“And, of course, there is the nature of your name. There are so many Mary’s stumbling about.” She paused, cocked her head to the side, pursed her lips. “‘Moll’ suits your face better – sweet, less stern. You could go by ‘Molly,’ if you wish, though I do say it is a trifle girlish.”

“Madam,” Mary spoke quietly, “You must excuse me, but I have been soaking in the sun all morning – without shade, or food, or company – and I am afraid I am a bit out of sorts. I do not understand. Of what are you speaking?”

“The query you should be asking, dear, is ‘of whom?’” The madam smiled coyly.

“Francis Charteris – Colonel Charteris to you or me, or sometimes he simply prefers ‘sir.’ If he asks you to call him ‘Francis,’ I suggest you pay attention.”

“Is it a job you are offering, ma’am?”

“Perhaps.” The madam slid a hand beneath her cinched cloak, pulled a sterling pocket watch from her waistband. “London is a sea of men, dear. There aren’t many ways for a woman to make a living here. One *could* attempt to be an innkeeper, a shopkeeper, or,” she glanced down at Mary, “A seamstress. But the bitter truth is that you would be doing a man’s job. Child, you will be swallowed by the men of this city.”

She observed the hands of her watch as she spoke. “I have found that the best way to live is to float. Find a man and cling to him, ride him to the surface. Seeing as though you are new – no name, no pedigree, no *reliable* relations – there is little chance of you marrying at present. But, lucky for you, Colonel Charteris is a generous man, always looking for young, pretty faces.”

Mary squinted against the sunlight glare of the engraved watch. “What might the job entail?”

“Maid work, mostly. Pressing clothes, serving food – the kind of thing a man leaves a woman to do. But, you shall be paid for it, at the very least. Most importantly,” she bent her face down, inches away from the brim of Mary’s hat, “You will be taking orders from Colonel Charteris himself. Take heed of his requests, dear, for it is vital he is pleased.”

The madam straightened her back, replaced the watch, adjusted the cloak about her shoulders. Mary remained seated, then, realizing the madam meant to leave, stood and curtsied. “Ma’am, I thank you for your kindness, however–”

“What was that, dear?”

“Pardon—” Mary cleared her throat behind her hand. “Pardon me. I had planned to relay with my cousin here. I fear it would alarm him if he were to arrive and I was not where I promised.”

“And had he not *promised* to be here himself? A shame.” The madam shrugged under her heavy cloak.

“I have appreciated your company.” Mary raised her skirts, bowed her head again.

“Of course.” The madam waved her gloved hand dismissively, drew the hood around her bonnet, casting her profile in shadow. “Should you truly decide to stay,” she stepped down into the dusty street, “Do be wary of those young brutes off Clavering Boulevard. You know the type? They wear their caps turned inside out and fancy themselves a gang. A bit juvenile for my taste. But, perhaps, they are more to yours. However, they have been known to ravage pretty birds, like you. Be careful, dear.” Her teeth shown white in the dark shadow of her hood, a crescent slice of smile. “Farewell.”

Mary watched her drift down the street into the dust. After a moment, she stood and called out, “Excuse me, ma’am, you never shared your name.”

At the entrance of the alleyway, the madam turned. “Elizabeth Needham. Find me if you need me, dear. I have faith that you will.” She disappeared into the shadowed lane.

Mary slumped again on the trunk, resting her elbows on her knees, her chin in her hands. She looked about the street, now still and empty, the dust itself settling and the sun hanging unobstructed in the sky. Just a moment more.



Hogarth, William. "Plate 2," from *The Harlot's Progress* series, plate 2 of 6. From the Collection of Catherine W. Snow and Douglas A. Knight, on loan to Furman from Douglas A. Knight. Acc. 2017-035, Special Collections and Archives, James B. Duke Library, Furman University.

Masquerade

Moll leaned her head back against the engraved crown of her chair, contemplated the painting upside down – the saint dangled like a bat from the rock while a heavenly light struck him in the chest. She traced the wallpaper pattern – the blooming filigree designs – ran her eyes along the dark mahogany trim. She sighed heavily, feeling her chest inflate freely in the unlaced corset. Her other clothes were strewn across the floor – her bonnet, garters, and shoes were flung on the ornate rug, along with the blankets and cushions, which had been so neatly laid out earlier that day.

Her companion sprawled beside her in an identical chair. He had not yet replaced his shoes, saber, or belt, which lay scattered amongst Moll's possessions before the fire. He smoked from her delicate clay pipe, filling the bowl with tobacco from a sterling snuff tin. Smoke blew from his lips in concentric rings, drifting in the air towards Moll. She waved away the tendrils. His hand reached out to catch hers.

“You know, Molly, we could always run away–”

“I told you not to call me Molly–” she pulled her hand away.

“Escape to the countryside. I have an estate to the north. I was to travel there come this summer–”

“I have seen quite enough of the English countryside, sir. I am perfectly content here in London.” Moll turned her head, gazed out the window. The silence of the still night slipped into the room. In the far distance, a yellow light blinked rapidly through the trees. Moll drug her fingers through the silky folds of the curtains.

The gentleman puffed at the pipe. “I was simply attempting to facilitate conversation.”

“I did not invite you here for your conversational skills.”

“Certainly not.” The gentleman smiled, pipe in his teeth. He leaned over the chair arm, placed a hand on Moll’s skirts. “I am here for an altogether different reason.”

Moll looked at her companion, his eyes bloodshot from the Indian weed, twitching slightly. She did not stop him as he lifted her skirts.

The door flung open in the corner of the room, jostling the paintings against the wall. A maid entered, bouncing nervously from foot to foot. “Miss—” she cried.

“Charlotte, my gracious, you must knock before you—” Moll startled.

“Forgive me, Miss,” the maid curtsied. “But the Master will be arriving any moment. I have just heard his carriage down the drive, and I thought—” she blinked rapidly, eyes shifting between Moll and her companion.

The gentleman craned his neck, looking towards the maid at the door, then turned to Moll. His eyelids drooped as he spoke, “Whatever shall we do?” He chuckled, sucking on the pipe. “If he catches me with his beloved, he will surely duel me on the spot. A dangerous risk, even if he is an idiot.”

“An unnecessary risk,” Moll said coolly. “You shall not be discovered.” She stood, moved over to the standing mirror, resting in the mahogany frame. She began to pin her hair, curling strands close to her head. “Gather your things and hide behind the door, in the shadow, just there.”

The rumbling thunder of the carriage passed by the window. The gentleman continued to lounge, smoking. “Go on – do it now.” Moll watched him in the mirror. He took another drag, then replaced the pipe and snuff tin on the tea tray. The fretful maid spun in

circles. The gentleman fumbled with his belt. Moll rouged her cheeks and upper lip in the mirror. All three jolted at the abrupt sound of the front door opening.

“Take his shoes, Charlotte, and remove your own.”

“Miss—” Charlotte squealed.

“Goodness, what an exciting moment. I do enjoy a scandal.” The gentleman cradled his belongings under his arm, danced over to the door.

“Hush, both of you.” Moll stooped to retrieve her bonnet from the rug. “I will distract the oaf. Charlotte, lead the gentleman through the back scullery – be sure to lock the door behind him. Darling,” she addressed her companion, “You remember the way. I will send a summons at my earliest convenience.”

“It has been a delight as always, madam.” The gentleman grinned, bowed low to the ground. He folded himself into the space behind the door.

“Ambati!” Moll called into the hall. She slipped into her shoes without replacing her stockings.

A small Indian boy tumbled into the room, a monkey running about his legs, screeching. “Yas, Miss?” He stood before her, back arched, fingers playing with the feather in his head wrap. His eyes were wide beneath a broad, dark brow.

“Fold those up, quickly now.” Moll waved a hand at the rug, crumpled blankets, and cushions. “Place it all in the trunk. Then, I require tea for two. Take the tray, and make sure to use the painted set, with the green stripes. Do not serve the blue china. Do you understand?”

“Yas, Miss.” The boy folded the rug, flung it atop the trunk. He grabbed the silver tray and tromped out the door, watching the hidden pair as he passed. The companion pressed

a finger to his lips. The maid shifted against the wall. The sound of muffled voices and footsteps echoed down the hall.

Moll positioned both chairs to face the fire, angling each away from the doorframe. She sat and settled the folds of her skirt. The monkey wrapped a discarded woolen stocking around its neck, then ran and jumped onto the table. Squatting in front of the mirror, it played with a masquerade costume, held the white, molded mask up before its face – a toothless smile, hollow eyes – and turned to grin at Moll. She glared at it. Nasty thing, she thought.

“Madam, where might you be?” Heeled shoes clomped through the hall.

“I am here, dear, in my drawing room.” Moll smoothed out her bonnet, as the merchant stood in the doorway, grinning stupidly. “Leave the door ajar, please – I have called for tea to be made. Come sit, here, next to me.” She patted the cushioned seat as she sat in the opposite.

A squat, jovial man walked through the door, wearing a powdered wig and heavy blue coat. He strode past the hidden couple – the maid looked on the verge of tears, the gentleman beamed, highly amused – sat with his back to the doorway, crossed his legs in the direction of Moll. He removed his velvet hat, balanced it atop his knee, before unbuttoning his coat. The Indian boy returned, set the tray on a table between the two chairs, poured the tea from a bright silver kettle.

Dispensing a generous amount of cream and sugar into his tea, the merchant swirled the mixture with a spoon and raised the cup to his mouth. He smacked his lips. “Madam, how have you managed without my company?”

Moll curled fallen strands of her hair with a finger. "I have anxiously been awaiting your return. It has been quite dull. You were in town far too long this time."

"I do apologize for my prolonged absence. Awful business, you know. Be glad you are a lady, and that you avoid the life of a man's labor."

Moll withheld a scowl. Placing the cup in the saucer, the merchant scanned Moll from head to toe, his eyes lingering at her exposed breast. "Your corset has come undone."

Moll glanced down. "You say I am lucky to be a woman – and yet I am the one wearing this dreaded corset. One could not expect me to keep it tied all day. Just sitting here for a lonely fortnight has left me quite unstimulated, with no company but my own."

She reached her arms into the air, glided a hand down her neck, tugged at the collar of her bodice. The merchant uncrossed his legs, leaned towards her, eyes wide. Moll craned her neck, glancing at the pair in the shadows, motioning with her head in the direction of door. "Ambati," she addressed the boy standing by the fireplace, "Leave us, please."

The boy's eyes were plastered to the gentleman and maid. As the pair crept out of the room, the gentleman loudly struck the corner of the door with his saber. They froze just out of the shadows. The maid began crying quietly, her head in her hands. The boy dropped the silver kettle on the carpet and pointed to the corner. His lips parted, as though he meant to speak.

"Quiet, child," Moll snapped.

"Goodness, silly boy! The rug could be ruined. Whatever is the matter—" The merchant began to turn, swinging his head to see where the boy pointed.

Moll swept her leg from under her skirt and promptly kicked the underside of the table. The tea set, tray, and hat tumbled to the floor, glass shattering at the merchant's feet.

His head snapped back. The monkey, still wearing the costume, jumped up and down on the mirror frame, hooting, baring its teeth through the mask.

In the confusion, the hidden pair rushed out the door – the maid shoved the gentleman, urging him to run, as he sauntered down the hall, waving goodbye. Moll let out a sigh, as they disappeared from sight.

“My God – now the carpet is surely ruined!” The merchant stared down at the cream soaking into the carpet. “What is going–” As he made to stand, the monkey leapt down and swept up the merchant’s hat. It ran between his legs and out the door, whooping rowdily. The boy followed into the hall, calling after the creature. The merchant crouched above his seat, looking about. “My hat!”

“Let it be, dear.” Moll snapped her fingers, “Stimulate me.”



Hogarth, William. "Plate 3," from *The Harlot's Progress* series, plate 3 of 6. From the Collection of Catherine W. Snow and Douglas A. Knight, on loan to Furman from Douglas A. Knight. Acc. 2017-035, Special Collections and Archives, James B. Duke Library, Furman University.

Gentlemen

The magistrate walked, his hand gripping his saber, with a band of three following closely behind. Each one held an unlit torch brandished as a pikestaff, thrown over the shoulder. A cool breeze streamed through the thoroughfare, kicked up dust from the stone-paved road. Stucco – flaked from the brick façade – floated in the wind. Windows glowed incandescently in the night, a deep swirling green and blue, as if an ocean churned just within the door.

People milled about the street – groups of dirty children running amok, couples nestling in the shadowed corners of archways. Hordes of young men, their caps turned inside out, lined the entrances of alleyways, stood posted at the threshold of taverns. They passed flasks amongst themselves, smoked foul-smelling tobacco rolled in brown paper. Heads turned as the magistrate and his men trooped down Cheapside.

“Take heed, men, for a woman is a dangerous thing,” the magistrate preached, ignorant of prying eyes and curious listeners. “When left to their own devices, they become so inflated with such sin and self-loathing that they must lash out at the world.” His saber bounced against his hip as he strolled. The wind whipped at his tailcoats. Under his feet, the ill-laid stones shifted like loose teeth.

Glass shattered down the road. Light and noise poured out a broken windowpane. A worn, leather boot sat crumpled on the street. Inside the tavern, a drunken rabble echoed.

They marched on. “That is why matrimony is such a vital and sacred act. It not only produces heirs, but also saves our women from themselves, from the evils to which they might have been subjected – without husbands to protect them, that is. Of course, sons, we

are all righteous men.” The magistrate looked over his shoulder and grinned. “We know this to be true, and we all protect our women.” The men snickered under their breath.

The troop turned from the street, walked beneath an archway down a crooked alleyway. The street narrowed further down the run, ending in a tight circle of cobblestone street. Their own tall shadows rode the walls. Isolated lamps were posted above the doorways of windowless buildings – the glass, tinted red, gave off a warm, seductive glow. A man, wearing a red cap, looked down from a raised balcony, smoking a slender wooden pipe. Upon their passing, he rushed inside, covering his face with a hand.

The magistrate pointed to the far end of the lane, waved his men forward. “It gives women a purpose, you see. A wife is a fine profession, dependent on the delicate attention of a true lady. We employ them lads, for without husbands, women are left destitute and empty. For what is a woman if not a wife, a mother?”

They arrived at the final door of Drury Lane. The whole house seemed to slope, as if battered by a constant wind. The heavy wooden door wore no number, no plate with an inscribed name, but above the doorknob, a carefully drawn cursive *M* was etched into the wood.

“And this is what we are here to do.” The magistrate stood tall, his hand resting on the saber sheath. “Gather your courage, men. Disregard your sympathy for this creature. She is of evil nature, and it is our duty to rehabilitate her.”

The magistrate placed his hand on the doorknob. The door, left unlocked, seemed to swing down and out towards them. The men murmured quietly behind the magistrate, looking about nervously.

The door opened into a bedchamber. The room smelled heavily of lilac and perfume, hiding subtle undertones of tobacco and gin. The plaster cracked like lightning on the walls and ceiling. A large, four poster bed filled most of the space. The folds of the heavy garnet curtains, drawn back in a knot, looked like a weeping face.

Atop the bedframe, a wig box was perched. The side was decorated in scrawling hand – *James Dalton his Wigg box*. “So, the rumors are true. The infamous highwayman,” one of the men whispered.

On the wall, a pointed black hat and birch rod hung on the wall. “Witchcraft!” another man hissed, pointing to the masquerade costume.

The ladies did not turn. Dressed in a petticoat and cotton shift, buttoned above her swollen belly, Moll sat on the bed with her back to the door, playing with the cord of a timepiece. She hummed to herself a sour, solemn tune.

The bawd – a fat, hunched woman – transferred steaming liquid from a kettle to a teapot. A ruddy, tabby cat rubbed its back against the bawd’s skirts. She kicked it away and turned to see the men standing in the doorway. She grinned to reveal a set of stained and missing teeth. “Moll, you have guests.”

“Mistress Hackabout–” the magistrate cleared his throat.

“My apologies, gentlemen.” Moll turned and bowed her head. “I only entertain parties with previous arrangements.” The men watched her face, saw the boils blooming below her left eye, caught in the light of a candle. “However, I could make an exception for you, magistrate, and your boys.” She swung the timepiece around a finger.

The magistrate ground his teeth. “Madam, you dare accuse me of wishing to acquire your services? Such would be a grave error, if you knew to whom you are speaking.”

“But of course not, Sir Gonson,” Moll smiled coquettishly. “I know you. You paid a visit to my good friend, Katherine, just a week past. Took her to Brideside Prison, if I’m not mistaken. How good of you,” she rolled her eyes. “Please, pardon my manners. Perhaps, instead, you might like some tea and a friendly chat? It costs nothing to simply look.” She pulled the hem of her shift down below her breasts. One of the men began to whimper. The cat wagged its rear at the magistrate.

“M- Madam!” The magistrate fiddled with the scarf around his neck. “You disrespect us. We have come to arrest you.”

Moll paused, gazed at the magistrate with placid eyes. “Arrest me, you say?” She faced the bawd. “Elizabeth, friend, if you would not mind.” The bawd bowed her head and scuttled out of the room, suppressing a chuckle as she went.

Facing the magistrate again, Moll tucked the timepiece in her waistband. “And, if I might inquire, what are the charges?”

The men piped up in chorus. “Solicitation! Infidelity! Public indecency!”

“Dear me-” her face fell as she spoke.

“Witchcraft,” one cried, again pointing to the masquerade above her head.

“Consorting with a criminal!” another gestured to the wig box. “You soil the reputation of decent women, the reputation of our own wives! Confess to your sins, madam – we wish to help you.”

“Sir, you go too far-” Moll knit her eyebrows.

“Attempting to seduce an agent of the Church,” the magistrate tucked a hand in his frock pocket. “Do you deny these allegations?”

Moll adjusted her shift. “I have the right to refute such claims.”

“Resisting arrest!”

“Hush, son.” The magistrate waved a hand over his shoulder.

Standing, Moll cast her skirts behind her. “How dare you storm into my quarters and accuse me of such blasphemy – soil the reputation of decent women?” She scoffed, “It is *men* who have soiled *me*. Since the moment I entered this dreadful city, there has not been a moment of respite, of kindness. Abandoned by my escort, blindly deceived into the service of a pompous rake, I was a young girl, defiled and cast out on the street, into this roiling sea of men. Oh yes, *men*. They flood this room and leave without a word, only some coppers left by the bedside–”

“Are you confessing to–”

“No! Hold your tongue! Do you understand nothing, Sir Gonson, nothing beyond the scope of your own sight? Of course not. For you are a man, and men are incapable of sympathy for the other sex–”

“Headstrong child, I do this for your own good–”

“Sir, I plead you to listen! You must understand, I have done what I must.” Moll paused, crossed her arms over her chest, turned from the magistrate. “But, you shall not, I think, for you are a fool.” She sat down again at the edge of the bed, hung her head. “Then again, so am I.”

For a moment, the room was still. In the silence, the men heard Moll’s uneven breathing, the purring of the cat beneath the bed, the shuffling of their own feet on the threshold.

“Sir, what are we to do now?” one of the men whispered.

“Just a moment, son.”

They waited.

The magistrate stepped forward, "Madam, I will repeat myself. Do you confess to these crimes which we have laid before you?"

"Well, magistrate," Moll stood, crossed the room and gathered a folded skirt from a chair. "Once again, I find myself drowning in men. I will go with you. You may wait for me on the doorstep, for I wish to dress in privacy."

The magistrate bowed deeply. The men all stooped in turn. "Certainly, madam," he grinned, "We are gentlemen, after all."



Hogarth, William. "Plate 4," from *The Harlot's Progress* series, plate 4 of 6. From the Collection of Catherine W. Snow and Douglas A. Knight, on loan to Furman from Douglas A. Knight. Acc. 2017-035, Special Collections and Archives, James B. Duke Library, Furman University.

The Whore in the Hemp Line

A velvet hood clung to her head. The curls in her hair hung limp, her face plastered with sweat. Her hands were worn – callouses burst on her palms, splinters nestled in her skin. She picked at them with her teeth, spitting the shards on the stone floor.

The bawd – she had followed Moll to Brideside Prison – stood across the row, her hammer discarded. Catching Moll's eye, she slumped to the floor, and while sneering, propped her feet up on the trunk before her.

“Back to work,” the jailer pointed down to the hemp, ignoring the bawd.

Moll scowled, gazed down the row.

A dull rhythm echoed in the hall, like piano key mallets striking their taut strings, ricocheting off the stone walls and vaulted ceiling. Drawn on the wall in charcoal, a cartoon visage of Sir Gonson hanged from a gallows. None of the guards had found it prudent to remove the image, nor had the artist been discovered.

The male prisoner next to Moll, an aged cardsharp, flailed his hammer against the hemp weakly. She had seen the man brought in yesterday, wailing and fighting against the guards. His small hound squatted in the center of the floor, licking at the pad of a paw.

Women were lined against the wall, standing behind great barrels of tree trunks, their hammers rising and falling. An older lady, her hair pulled tightly into a bun below her bonnet, leaned her head against the hammer shaft to gawk at Moll's dress – her billowing floral skirts, the embroidered bodice. The young girl beside the lady struggled to lift her hammer. She fumbled, dropping it as she brought the head down. She began to cry.

At night, prisoners whispered through the doors, gossiped as if they were not in Brideside, but in a salon, their shabby beds replaced with embellished couches, windows

not barred with iron rods but filled with colored glass. The small girl was said to be the niece of a prosperous Baron in the north. She had been incarcerated by her uncle for seducing and defiling his son. The girl claimed it was a false account, that her cousin had been the first to make advances, that it was he who defiled her. She was not yet sixteen. She spent each night crying herself to sleep, and each day she awoke calling out for her mother.

Further down the line, a dark-skinned woman rested a hammer on her sloped shoulders, her distended belly swelling beneath her petticoats. She would not speak even when addressed, especially by the guards and their relentless profanities. None of the prisoners knew who she was, or who had fathered the child. It was rumored she would go into labor any day now. The female prisoners waited in anticipation, though births were not uncommon in Brideside.

Moll thought of her own son, thought of the long, hot night in her cell, the burdened eyes of the wet nurse, as she pried the child from Moll's frail arms. She had not seen the child's face – what color were his eyes, his hair? Did he look like her, his father?

Just behind her, a man hung from the stocks, from his wrists, his boots barely scraping the ground. He had been there since morning, hooting at the guards but growing quiet as the afternoon passed. Now, the prisoner swung his head, murmuring unintelligibly to himself. His wrists twisted in the wooden holes – Moll saw the skin rubbed raw and bleeding. She had seen others with scabs ringing their wrists, picking at them as they worked, just as she had picked at her own until they bled and stained her sleeves. Above him, carved into the wood, she read the words, *Better to Work than Stand thus*.

Better indeed, thought Moll. There were stories told of men and women who disfigured themselves to avoid the work, bringing a splintered hammer down on a finger or

wrist. Yet they returned the next day, their appendage broken and bandaged, forced to work despite the injury. Men showed more damage, beaten, their faces bruised purple and blue. Women wore no physical wounds and never spoke of what befell them. Even the most vigorous women reappeared disheartened, often not speaking for a full day.

Moll never asked what transpired in the infirmary – though she had her suspicions – nor had she found it wise to disfigure herself, if only to avoid further attention from the guards. They walked in pairs, ogling her, clicking their tongues to the rooves of their mouths, fingering the folds in her skirts.

“Work, girl,” the jailer growled.

Moll beat at the hemp. Her strokes joined the rhythm of thumping hammers. The man in the stocks sobbed. The cardsharp’s hound stood, lifted its leg against a trunk, pissed.

The day passed slowly, bled into evening. The man in the stocks was taken down, led to the infirmary. He returned within the hour, his arms bandaged to the elbow, immediately picked up his hammer. The dark-skinned woman was carried off to her room, wailing, grasping her abdomen. She was not seen again for the rest of the evening.

As the light faded, Moll’s arms weakened. She let the hammer fall, stared down at the hemp, at the damp pile of plant fibers to be woven together into rope. This will be a noose, she thought, this will be someone’s end.

Moll felt the fabric around her collar loosen and slip out of place. She turned to see the jailer’s wife waving the sheer tuck with one hand, giggling. The woman wrapped the fabric around her own neck, tucked the ends into her bodice.

“Quite becoming, do you not think?” She winked at her husband. He brooded silently, tapping his switch against his shoulder. She flashed her yellow grin. “It suits me, would you not agree, Miss?”

Moll held her tongue, whacked her hammer against the hemp.

“Oh, come now, Miss Moll. You of all people must have an opinion. What do you think of my new shawl?” The woman struck a pose.

Moll beat the hemp. “I find it unnecessary to share.”

“No, by all means, please do.”

Moll paused, watching the hemp. “I cannot abide by the theft of my own belongings.”

“*Your* belongings? Do not make me laugh,” the woman taunted. “Sweetheart, this prisoner is acting out of turn.”

The jailer’s switch struck the trunk at Moll’s feet. “Know your place, girl.”

The woman danced around Moll, picking up her skirts, swishing them around her legs. “I dare say you are a pretty thing. You speak well, and certainly dress the part. Pray tell, where did you learn to parrot, for did you not come from a sordid little country town? Waking before dawn, milking cows, tromping through the mud, browning in the sun. Positively medieval.”

Moll stared down the shaft of her hammer.

“And how did you learn your craft? Did you practice on your cousins? Your brother perhaps?” The woman leaned her elbows against the trunk in front of Moll. Her fingers drummed the pile of hemp. “It certainly did you no favors coming to London. A farmer’s daughter, and now the best dressed whore in a hemp line.”

Laughter could be heard beneath the beat of hammers down the row. The woman gazed up at Moll's fallen face, mocking her pout. The hound snarled, teeth drawn back. The jailer slapped his switch into the palm of his hand.

Moll felt her arms raise – the mallet wavered just above her head. The woman's eyes widened. The hound snapped its teeth, haunches raised. "I will not be idle as my possessions are stolen–"

The jailer flicked his wrist. The switch struck Moll across the face. The hammer clattered to the floor. All faces turned to stare. Hammers froze midair.

"Such insolence," the woman crowed.

"To the whipping post," the jailer's face twisted into a devious smile, "Unless you have something to offer instead."

"Sir, you know very well that I have no money." Moll nursed her swollen cheek.

"In such a case, if you wish to have that welt looked after," he moved towards her, whispered in her ear, "I shall escort you to the infirmary, personally."

As he led her by the arm, the prisoners fell silent. The rhythm of hammers resumed.



Hogarth, William. "Plate 5," from *The Harlot's Progress* series, plate 5 of 6. From the Collection of Catherine W. Snow and Douglas A. Knight, on loan to Furman from Douglas A. Knight. Acc. 2017-035, Special Collections and Archives, James B. Duke Library, Furman University.

Waiting Room

Moll crumpled in the bawd's arms, wrapped in a sheet like a specter. Her pale face, devoid of rouge, was splotted with circular lesions, the color of copper coins. Her features sank into her skull, retained no semblance of the open, round face which had garnered so much attention and ridicule. She sweat terribly beneath the heavy, sopping blanket.

The bawd unwrapped the sheet from around Moll's head. Several deep gauges on her collar had yet to be bandaged. Moll winced, as the bawd drew a cloth strip around her neck. Blood soaked into the white cloth.

"You must let her sweat it out. No need to tamper with her," Doctor Misaubin chided.

The bawd replaced the sheet around her head, closed her gaping mouth. She felt the girl's chest swell laboriously beneath her hands.

"Doctor, you know very well this sweating business will be of no help." Doctor Rock contested. "My methods are much more affective—"

The two doctors had been arguing for hours, inattentive to the sick girl. Rock – a stout, freckled man – waved his cane before the Misaubin like a whip. Lanky, fair, young Misaubin shook a jar of herbs in Rock's face.

"You give no consideration to my methods, Doctor. We must wait to see the results—"

Sickness seemed to linger in the room. A heavy, dank smell filled the space, rising from the various herbs and opiates strewn across the tea table. Firelight danced on the walls and ceiling beams. Bits of wood paneling shown through the plaster like members of a ribcage. The bed, left untouched for months by any other than Moll, stood with curtains drawn, as an empty mausoleum waiting for its future occupier.

A makeshift clothesline hung from the ceiling above the fireplace. The boy's wet oversized clothes hung limp from the string, steaming above the rising heat. The boy himself, no longer an infant, squatted before the fireplace, picked at the lice hidden in his thick crop of blonde hair. He sat beside his mother on the floor, gazing into the fire. He looks nothing like her, the bawd thought. The heavy-set face, off-center features, the squat form all reminded her of a sack of flour, with none of the pretty delicacy of his mother.

Water boiled in a kettle above a roaring fire. The boy seemed mesmerized by the flames, by the steam rising from the pot. He reached out a stubby hand, a louse pinched in his fingers.

"Child, come away from the fire. It will burn you."

The boy retracted his hand. He examined Moll with blank eyes. "Is mother a ghost?"

"No, your mother is just ill."

"She dresses like a ghost."

The bawd sighed and resigned to let the boy throw his lice into the flames.

Perhaps it would have been better for her to be a poor seamstress, the bawd thought. The boy was no compensation for her current state – a difficult, boisterous child, heedless of instructions and manners. The bawd dreaded the idea of guardianship – she would certainly be the one asked to take care of the boy. Even if she knew who the father was – Moll herself claimed to be ignorant – what man would care for a dying whore and an unmindful child?

Moll's remaining belongings were folded away in a trunk engraved with her initials. Rumpled petticoats, tattered gowns, frayed lace tucks, all her apparatus for appearing a lady, unused for months, now collecting dust and moth holes. A nurse hunched over the

trunk. She flung torn stockings and buckled shoes over her shoulder. "Goodness, there is nothing of value at all. Where did you keep your stays, girl? Lined with baleen, if I'm not wrong. Even a damn petticoat--"

The bawd spoke up, "Doctors, she is only breathing faintly."

Rock spread his legs wide, leaned back in his chair. "Your alternative medicine reeks of foreign witchcraft. No oriental hoo-doo is going to cure this girl. Such foul herbs and ointments," he scrunched up his nose.

Misaubin snorted. "How dare you insult my devices." He pointed to Rock's bag on the tea table. "Doctor, it is you and your primal methods who have sealed this girl's fate. Look at the poor thing – face paler than the moon, eyes bloodshot and yellowing. She's dying as we speak."

"Because you believe she can sweat the disease out her pores like a horse," Rock cast Misaubin a smug look. "It would be much more sensible to bleed her once more."

"Sweat is a much less invasive procedure. But bleed her again if you wish! She'd not survive the night. I say she has more of a chance of dying from blood loss than the disease."

"Yet your solution offers no better alternative. No, according to you, we must continue to stuff more steeped leaves and potions down her throat--"

"Yes, for it is better than carving her up like a whale--"

"Doctors, if I may--" the bawd piped.

"Ah, yes, Madam," Dr. Rock turned to the bawd. "How does the misses intend to pay our commission?"

The bawd scowled and grit her teeth, "How could you ask that of her? You must understand, there is no money."

“The wildly popular Moll Hackabout?” The nurse chimed in. “Impossible.”

“Have you taken leave of your senses?” The bawd wrapped her arms around Moll’s haggard form. “Mistress Moll has not had income in months.”

“Posh,” the nurse smirked, leaned against the trunk. “This is the famous Harlot of Drury Lane. I am having a difficult time believing she is out of coin. Surely there are some funds tucked away, in a purse, or the lining of a shoe perhaps.” The nurse shoved her hand into the pocket of a wrinkled petticoat.

“Ma’am, we sold it all for cures – none of which worked, mind you. And the child must be cared for. Now, if you would not mind, refrain from tampering with my Mistress’ belongings!”

The nurse continued to rummage. “Miss Moll, fallen so low. How pathetic–”

“Pathetic? She’s dying. If you had a shred of sympathy–”

“Sympathy aside,” Rock interrupted, “A doctor must be paid for his services.” He tapped his fingers against the blood-filled vial in his hand.

“Services? You drained her of her life, you daft–” Misaubin stood suddenly, toppling over his chair.

Steam screamed from the spout of the kettle. The boy, no longer under the bawd’s protective gaze, reached his hand into the fire, attempted to grasp onto a fiery tongue. He fell away, held his scorched hand to his chest, wailing, writhing on the ground.

Rock continued to argue, “You know very well the chances of her survival were limited to begin with, and that your rank pills did nothing to check the disease, only to foster it. If anyone is to blame, it is you, Doctor! You have poisoned–”

“The audacity! You blame me–”

“You damned rotten sadists!” The bawd yelled, “You are both to blame. It would be better if you both simply quitted us altogether.”

“Do not be hasty, Madam!” In his rage, Misaubin kicked over the tea table. The contents flew from the mouth of the Rock’s bag, vials shattering on the floor. Blood pooled on the wood, sank between the planks. Opiates floated atop the molten liquid.

Everyone fell silent, stared at the mess. The boy continued to cry, grabbing at the bawd’s skirts with his uninjured hand.

“Ah! Here it is!” The nurse held up an embroidered stay, the panels bent and crinkled. “A little worse for wear, but it shall do.” The bawd stared incredulously as the nurse tucked the stay under her arm, stood and placed a hand on Doctor Rock’s shoulder. “Let us go, we are wanted here no longer. We can return for payment.” She looked to the bawd, “Best wishes for your health, Madam.”



Hogarth, William. "Plate 6," from *The Harlot's Progress* series, plate 6 of 6. From the Collection of Catherine W. Snow and Douglas A. Knight, on loan to Furman from Douglas A. Knight. Acc. 2017-035, Special Collections and Archives, James B. Duke Library, Furman University.

The Child's Eulogy

The boy's hat drooped, covering his eyes. He flipped the brim with his fingers, then began fiddling with a pocket watch on a chain – his mothers', the clasp bent out of shape, would not open but halfway. He placed the rim of the watch close to his face, crossed his eyes at the glass plate, then watched the hands travel around the circle, elongating as they swung past his nose, which blurred before his vision.

The bawd brooded next to his mother's coffin, hand grasping the neck of a decanter. She wore, as she always did, a disapproving gaze, watching the boy. He crouched beneath the coffin, innocent to the inattentiveness of the people around him, just as innocent of his own.

The hot, cramped funeral parlor featured a single window, closed to the evening outside, save for a few broken panes left empty. Two stools propped up the coffin in the center of the room, without pomp or ceremony – no flowers, no bouquets, and only half the patrons wore mourning shawls. A general clamor filled the rented room – rowdy bantering and furtive, hushed seductions. Most of the people were already drunk, even before the eulogy, as the two clergymen – swaggering and ill-mannered – had yet to begin the speech, distracted as they were.

As the door opened, the boy crept under the coffin, peered out from the other side, laying on the ground, chin held in his hands. Cloaked in gray and black, a professional mourner strolled through the door. A clergyman fisted her a small drawstring sack. The sack jingled beneath her skirts, as she took her position by the coffin and promptly began to weep, handkerchief to her cheek. The mourner stood beside a lady – more handsome than the rest – woefully resting her hand on the edge of the coffin.

Two other mourners, similarly clothed in dark shawls, took turns pinching from a snuff tin, their faces hidden behind an elaborate black fan, decorated with embroidered roses. Their eyes rolled in the backs of their heads, giggling with one another.

A woman, her long neck trimmed with lace, stood with her back turned to the coffin. She faced the far wall, her face caught in the angle of a mirror like a portrait. She dragged a finger across her lips, wiping away the smeared rouge on her mouth. She caught the boy's eye in the glass, smiled pleasantly, winking at him. The boy did not return the smile, looked away.

One of the clergymen sat next to the boy on a stool, beside a lady wearing a black feathered hat. The boy saw their grinning faces reflected on the watch face, distorted as crescent moons. The clergyman's hand tipped. Wine splashed onto the floor, onto the boy's shoes. When he looked up, he saw the tilted glass in the priest's hand, the other preoccupied beneath the lady's skirts, fumbling with the many folds. The lady's eyes were cast off to the ceiling, glazed over. She seemed oblivious to the priest next to her.

The boy crawled over on his hands and knees, tugged at the lady's skirts with a gloved fist. "Womin, that man is trying to steal from you."

The lady smiled down at him humorously, "How darling!" Scowling, the priest attempted to shoo the boy with his foot. "Move along, child."

The boy pointed. "But, womin, his hand is in your dress."

The clergyman removed his hand from under the lady's skirts, made to kick the child away.

"Boy," the bawd's head peeped over the coffin, peered down, "Hold your tongue. Come here and stand with me."

The boy crawled out from under the coffin. "He was trying to steal from her!" He stomped his foot. "I did not do anything wrong."

"If I teach you anything, unruly child, it will be to respect women. You are now my responsibility," she gently grasped his shoulders, "Listen to me, you cannot just call a lady 'woman.' You must call her Miss Flanders."

He looked to the sitting couple. The clergyman's hand had found its way up the lady's skirts again. "Is every woman called Miss Flanders?"

"No, everyone has their own name. But it is important that you say Miss."

"What do I call you?"

"You will call me 'ma'am.'" She held onto his hand.

"Miss mam. Silly name."

"No, just ma'am."

The boy scrunched up his face. "What is a mam?"

"Someone who looks after you. When you answer me, you say 'yes, ma'am.' Understand?"

The boy remained silent while watching the clergyman.

The bawd shook her head. "What am I going to do with you?"

After a moment, she let go of his hand, tapped him on the shoulder. "Would you like to see your mother?" The boy nodded his head. The bawd picked him up, wrapping her arms around his chest, laid him on the lid of the coffin – his body parallel with his mother's. He looked down at the corpse, leaning over the lid as though it were a cliff.

She did not seem his mother. Her face was, to him, uncommonly colorful and serene. Her cheeks and lips were doused with rouge, eyelids powdered with a chalky blue. Her

hair, instead of loose and messy, was fixed up in pinwheel curls close to her face. A simple bonnet, made of white lace, lined the crown of her head and neck.

“Is she still sick?”

“No, not anymore.”

“Is she a ghost now?”

“Yes.”

“She does not dress like a ghost anymore.”

Her white dress was tailored simply with a lace slip lining her collarbone. Her hands laid neatly, folded over her waist. Her skin – milky white and thin as parchment. To the boy, she seemed to glow with translucency. He reached over the lid with a hand.

The bawd snatched his wrist. “You must not touch, boy.” She made a strange noise, like a yelp. He turned to look at her. As she regarded the body in the coffin, her face softened, then fell into a frown, her lips slightly quivering.

The boy pressed his fleshy hand on her cheek. “Yes, mam,” the boy said. A tear trickled from her eye. The bawd sighed, patted the boy’s cheek gently, adjusted his hat. They looked back into the coffin, as though scrutinizing a painting.

The handsome lady returned to the coffin-side, bent over next to the boy. “She was so beautiful,” she started, placing her fingers to her lips. The boy contemplated the face of his mother – unrecognizable. The lady’s delicate hand moved to his shoulder. She continued, “I am sorry, dear. You must miss her terribly.”

The bawd placed her hands on her hips, resumed her grimace, looking as though she had smelled something altogether foul. She spoke with distaste, “He hardly knew her.”

Follow-up Reading

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