

Representations of the Child, displayed at Vauxhall Gardens and the Foundling

Hospital

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Interesting comparisons can be made between the visual display experienced from the 1740's by the 'pleasure-seeker' at Vauxhall Gardens and the 'polite spectator' at the Foundling Hospital. This essay will discuss the context and a few of the representations of the child chosen by Francis Hayman for his supper-box paintings at Vauxhall Gardens, alongside his possible sources. One of Samuel Wale's prints of the Foundling Hospital and the display of art there will then be considered. I will also explore aspects of the visibility or otherwise of children at each venue, and the disconnect which could occur.

Both venues could form part of a day's pleasurable excursions,¹ as they were for John Loveday who listed them in his diary in 1754.² The venues chosen were enterprises organised in different ways to elicit money from visitors, either for commercial gain or as charitable subscription. Loveday went to the studio of Rysbrack during his day in London, a sculptor who was an influential part of the circle including Hogarth, Hayman and Highmore, all involved in the decorative schemes at Vauxhall Gardens or the Foundling Hospital. He can be characterised as typically part of the developing associative public sphere in the eighteenth century, participating as an informed citizen in the life of the capital.

Recent studies of the visual culture of the Foundling Hospital and Vauxhall Gardens have analysed the subject matter and motivations of the artists within broader intellectual debates about two quite different places of public assembly.³ Many earlier studies of the Foundling Hospital made only short references to links between them, usually in the context of a chronology of the artists' careers or the creation of a national school of art, focusing instead

¹See for example: *London and its Environs described...*, 5 vols.,(London, R.& J. Dodsley, 1761)

²S. Markham, *John Loveday of Caversham, 1711-1789: The Life and Tours of an Eighteenth Century Onlooker* (Michael Russell, Salisbury, 1984), 399

³See D. H. Solkin, *Painting for money. The Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth Century England*, (Paul Mellon Centre, Yale Univ. Press, New Haven & London, 1993); D.Coke & A Borg, *Vauxhall Gardens, A History*, (Paul Mellon Centre, Yale Univ. Press, New Haven & London, 2012)

on the foundation and organisation of the hospital as a charitable institution and on the growth of philanthropic endeavour.⁴ John Brewer dismisses Vauxhall as an early location for artists to display their work, as a '...commercial enterprise that had to struggle against its reputation for private profit and sexual commerce. A less tainted site was needed for modern art'.⁵ However, the Foundling Hospital which he cites as a more appropriate location had to manipulate its image as a worthy place for charitable donations, to overcome a different charge of being 'tainted', that of promoting an undeserving cause.⁶ Tyers at Vauxhall and the Governors at the Foundling thus shared the problem of public perception..

The supper-box pictures are worth consideration because they were designed to please a diverse, changing and critical audience and an extremely astute owner of the venue, and had to suit public taste. A serious commission for Hayman and his workshop, an opportunity for display, they appear to be a hybrid form of French rococo and Flemish genre paintings, but '...robust and decidedly English'.⁷ They were produced in the St. Martin's Lane area, the centre for English rococo production,⁸ which was patronised by the newly wealthy middle class. Tyers' preferred clientele was the same, as is clear from his publicity strategies and efforts to manage and control entry to the Gardens.⁹

The size of the supper-box paintings would make the subject discernible from a short distance, and promenading visitors could also view the diners beneath the pictures without embarrassment. This three-way gaze, of promenaders at diners and at pictures, and diners at

⁴For example: R.H. Nichols & F.A. Wray, *The History of the Foundling Hospital*, (London, Oxford Univ. Press, 1935); B. Rogers, *Cloak of Charity. Studies in Eighteenth Century Philanthropy*, (Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1949); D. T. Andrew, *Philanthropy and Police. London Charity in the Eighteenth Century*, (Princeton Univ. Press, 1989)

⁵J. Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination. English Culture in the Eighteenth Century*, (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997), 226

⁶For example, T. Evans, *Unfortunate Objects. Lone Mothers in Eighteenth century London*, (Palgrave, 2005), 69

⁷D. Coke & A. Borg, *Vauxhall Gardens*, 160

⁸L. Colley, 'The English Rococo. Historical Background', in *Rococo Art and Design in Hogarth's England*. (V&A, 1984), 13

⁹D. Coke & A. Borg, *Vauxhall Gardens*, Ch.5

promenaders, made the Gardens a theatrical experience, and it is appropriate that Hayman and his colleagues were skilled scene-painters. Both artists and visitors were engaged in a performance, either as producers of the 'set' or as appreciative audience. The adults were engaged in 'play' at the Gardens, 'posturing' for each other in a place celebrating play.¹⁰

Visitors might be familiar with treatises on the experience of viewing paintings, such as Du Bos' *Critical Reflections on Poetry and Painting...*, in which he wrote that the passions aroused by an artistic imitation of an object '...ought to stir up within us a copy of the passion which the object itself would have excited...'¹¹ As the imitation does not appeal to our reason, but only to the 'sensitive soul', the impression does not last. The Vauxhall decorative designs played with the real and the illusory, as part of many different staged devices, designed to excite visitors' expectations, and the borderline between them was constantly being subverted.

¹² The loose painted canvases were unrolled in the supper-boxes when the lamps were lit, and anticipated as part of the spectacle.¹³ Visitors were able to engage with large paintings on a scale rarely available to them, with subject matter readily accessible, and so I would suggest that the childhood pastimes depicted would also encourage discussion about their own childhood memories. If they had been to the Foundling Hospital as part of their day's excursion, comparisons might be made. Oliver Goldsmith's satire on a discussion in front of one of the paintings only works because the reader can assume knowing superiority of understanding and taste.¹⁴

¹⁰See R. Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man; On the Social Psychology of Capitalism*, (New York, Vintage Books, 1978), Ch.2

¹¹M. l'Abbé Du Bos, trans. T. Nugent, *Critical Reflections on Poetry and Painting*, (London, 1748), i:22-23

¹²For example, the painted false vistas, and staged 'cascade' display.

¹³D.Coke & A. Borg, *Vauxhall Gardens*, 114

¹⁴Oliver Goldsmith, *The Citizen of the World*, (1762), Letter LXXI, in *The Miscellaneous Works of Oliver Goldsmith*, 4 Vols, (London, Allen Bell & Co., 1834), 3:208-9

Normative art-historical categories of 'children in eighteenth century art' reflect a developing sensibility about the unique innocence of the child, understood through Locke and later through Rousseau.¹⁵ This approach is generally demonstrated by juxtaposing formulaic portraits of families from the 1730's and 1740's by Arthur Devis for example, with a later emotive style of portraiture by artists such as Joshua Reynolds, though these simplistic polarities are being questioned.¹⁶ Hayman's paintings of children for Vauxhall Gardens were not portraits, and cannot be judged in the same terms. No claim can be made that the paintings are 'high art', they were essentially ephemeral and it is fortunate that a few have survived. The children are mainly depicted either playing games in rural settings and within affluent rococo interiors, or located beyond adult supervision and readily interpreted location. Importantly, poor children are part of a different frame of reference, and by looking at two of the paintings in more detail below, I will consider this difference.

Solkin discusses Hayman's May-Day painting as one referencing Spring sexual indulgence, which could be seen as threatening decency.¹⁷ It is not located within an agrarian framework of Spring licentiousness as this dance was a seasonal tradition on the London streets. The



Francis Hayman and Studio, *May- Day, or The Milkmaids' garland*
1741-2, Oil on canvas, 138.5x240cm, V&A, P.12-1947

¹⁵A. Müller, Introduction, in A. Müller (ed.), *Fashioning Childhood in the Eighteenth Century. Age and Identity*, (Ashgate, 2006); D. Shawe-Taylor, *The Georgians, Eighteenth-century Portraiture & Society*, (Barrie & Jenkins, London, 1990), Ch.11

¹⁶Discussed for example by K. Retford, *The Art of Domestic Life. Family Portraiture in Eighteenth Century England*, (Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, Yale Univ. Press, 2006), ch.3

¹⁷D. Solkin, *Painting for Money*, 140

disabled fiddler, perhaps an old soldier, and porter carrying the milkmaid's 'pyramid of silver' were familiar figures in the town. Coke and Borg note that 'This supper-box painting epitomises the happy state of mind that the whole series was intended to induce in its viewers'.¹⁸ However, the figures on the left refer to the darker side of this particular May day ritual, and they are not usually discussed. Below is a nineteenth century amateur painting of the same dance, located in a recognisable London location, but showing the figure representing a form of evergreen bush or 'green man', and the chimney sweeps dancing wildly, brandishing their brushes and shovels.¹⁹ Hayman's sweeps are not easily seen, probably due to over-painting and the condition of the canvas, but it is clear that they are curiously detached from the dance rather than part of it, with one boy drinking from a fountain. They appear older than the usual five or six years of age at which the sweeps began work, and thus further into their apprenticeships, and portrayed as working youths. One reason for the inclusion of sweeps in the May day dance could have been the association of



Thomas Sevestre, *Jack in the Green, May Day celebrations of the Chimney Sweeps of London*, watercolour, 1st May 1850, V&A No. E.651-1965

¹⁸Coke & Borg, *Vauxhall Gardens*, 118

¹⁹This May day ritual is described in: William Hone, *The Every-Day Book: Or Everlasting Calendar of Popular Amusements, Sports, pastimes, Ceremonies, Manners, Customs and Events..*, (London, Hunt & Clarke, 1826), 571; also by Pierre Jean Grosley, in 'A Tour to London', 1766-77, in R. Allen, *The Moving Pageant, A Literary Sourcebook on London Street-Life, 1700-1914*, (Routledge, 1998), ch.18, 76

a soot-blackened face with death, or the old year giving way to the new and rebirth, and this deeper, more disturbing meaning, redolent of folkloric tradition could have subverted the pleasurable purpose of the painting, so the milkmaid dancers are more suitably foregrounded. The sweeps function instead as a compositional balance, perhaps always designed to be undifferentiated. Hayman has chosen a distinctly urban May day celebration. He has relocated it into a semi-rural setting, or maybe one reflecting the Vauxhall environment. Visitors to Vauxhall would have been familiar with the annual dance, the milkmaids and child sweeps.

Unlike the efforts to address the plight of foundlings, chimney sweeps as working children were not viewed sentimentally in the eighteenth century.²⁰ Grosley's account (footnote 19) makes it clear that they were seen as grotesques, disturbing and threatening, not as children. The child as grotesque was often present in popular visual culture such as in chapbook illustrations. When Hogarth later published his *Analysis of Beauty* (1753), his description of an infant's '...uninformed and unmeaning stare...' continues with the point that the child's '...movements and expressions ideots are apt to retain; so that in time they mark their faces with these uncouth lines.'²¹ He is credited with some of the earliest sensitive portraits of children.²² Later he has identified in their features a form comparable to a debased adult type, distinguishable in his prints.²³ Hayman's depiction of the sweeps is unsentimental but not grotesque.

The most helpful genre for comparison with Hayman's Vauxhall images of children is the 'fancy picture', '...among the most original, popular and self-consciously modern art forms to

²⁰See a brief outline in P. Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People, England 1727-1783*, (Oxford Univ. Press, 1992), 502-3

²¹William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty*, R. Paulson (ed.), (Paul Mellon Centre for British Art, Yale Univ. Press, 1997), Ch.15, 'Of The Face', 98

²²For example in *Pictures of Innocence, Children in Eighteenth Century portraiture*, exhibition guide, (Abbot Hall Art gallery, Kendal, Jul-Oct 2005), 6

²³For example in *The Four Times of Day*, 1736-8

have emerged in Britain during the eighteenth century'.²⁴ It was well-known and collected throughout the century, due to energetic commercialisation through print reproductions by Philippe Mercier and Hubert-François Gravelot among others. The subject matter was largely drawn from the poor, labouring classes and children, and crucially 'Its success depended on its ability to confirm prejudices and reinforce clichés. It represented ragged children in small numbers, in ones and twos, going about useful chores...And even if they did not always look entirely happy they never present a threat'.²⁵ Reynolds' *Link-Boy* (below) is a useful example of the genre, combining mythological and sexualised elements with a familiar and everyday subject for an eighteenth century London resident, and depicting one of the working children who would be awaiting their clients outside Vauxhall Gardens. Hayman's sweeps could be readily placed within the subject matter of this type of representation.



Joshua Reynolds, *Cupid as a Link-Boy*,
Oil on canvas, c1773, 76x63.2 cm,
Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo,
NY, USA

One of the differences between the actual children 'on display' at the Foundling Hospital and those in Hayman's Vauxhall paintings and likely to be daily encountered outside by visitors, was the fact that the former were controlled within the philanthropic programme of the hospital, suitably presented as humble, their destiny reassuringly determined; the latter were often the source of anxiety, surviving in a dangerous and unsympathetic adult world. The

²⁴M. Postle, *Angels & Urchins, The Fancy Picture in 18th-Century British Art*, (Djanogly Art Gallery, 1998), 5

²⁵M. Postle, *Angels and Urchins*, 15

phenomenon of the 'sturdy beggar' had existed since at least the sixteenth century. Hogarth's prints however, depicted individual, poor children as opportunistic thieves, observers, victims or participants.²⁶ He used an image of a thieving sweep in the right half of his *March to Finchley*, the chaotic counterpoint to the blond piper on the left, who is uniformed, and disciplined. R.Simon suggests that he preferred to depict poor children within the adult sphere which could determine their survival, rather than as the 'colourful' characters of the fancy picture, '...to gratify fantasies about the pliability of the poor.'²⁷ Hayman's ragged children and youths appear in the supper-box paintings in groups independent of adult supervision, engaged in energetic and rough interaction. Though visual references from fancy pictures, Chardin's emblematic child images, Flemish genre subjects and Murillo's groups of poor children can be identified, his pictures are not easily categorised under an art historical label.

The painting depicting kite-flying, for which only a preparatory drawing survives, belongs to Hayman's group connected by the theme of 'play'. In the 1740's this subject commonly appeared as a rococo decorative theme. Significant developments in print culture were made in the same decade, with the increasingly available children's illustrated literature.²⁸

Newbery's book was published shortly after the supper-box paintings were made, and he

²⁶For example, in *The Four Times of Day* series, 1736-8

²⁷R. Simon, ed., *Hogarth's Children* (Hogarth Arts, The Foundling Museum, 2007), 8-9

²⁸P. Brown, 'Capturing (and captivating) Childhood: The role of Illustrations in Eighteenth-century Children's Books in Britain and France', in *Journal for Eighteenth Century Studies* 31, (issue 3, 13.8.2008)



Francis Hayman, *Flying The Kite*, pen and brown ink with grey and brown wash, c.1740, Centre for British Art, New Haven, Paul Mellon Collection, B1975-4-504



From: John Newbery, *A Little Pretty Pocketbook*, 1744
Woodcut, 'Flying a Kite'

successfully targeted a market for good quality children's books.²⁹ Solkin sees an intrinsic conflict for 'quality' visitors to Vauxhall who wished to reject but at the same time embrace the 'popular'.³⁰ Yet it could be argued that images of pastimes and play, discussed in the context of the growth in children's books, were also part of the new sensibility which informed changes in child portraiture, and thus belonged to the visual frame of reference of an expanding middle class culture. In both Newbery's and Hayman's images, the girls are mainly engaged in indoor activities apart from dancing; the boys are shown '...in more energetic activities in the open air...'³¹ Brown points out that the boys are always '...wearing frock coats

²⁹S. O'Connell, *The Popular Print in England, 1550-1850*, (British Museum Press, 1995), Ch.2, 32-34

³⁰D.Solkin, *Painting for Money*, 139

³¹P. Brown, *Capturing (and captivating) Childhood*, 425

and tricorne hats in even the most energetic of activities, (which) suggests that decorum is necessary even in play'.³² Hayman's designs conform to this convention, and the elegant interiors where children interact with adults resemble other illustrations employed by Newbery. The close similarities suggest that the moral aphorisms which were routinely integral to the books may have been associated with the paintings, by Vauxhall Gardens visitors. The 'moral' printed with Newbery's kite-flying is connected loosely with the subject of unpredictable fate:

Upheld in Air, the gaudy Kite,
High as an Eagle takes her Flight;
But if the Winds their Breath restrain,
she tumbles headlong down again.

RULE OF LIFE

Soon as thou seest the Dawn of Day,
To God thy Adoration pay.³³

Epigrams incorporated below published prints of Vauxhall paintings are similarly simple, descriptive and moralising. It is therefore possible that all the supper-box paintings were interpreted in emblematic terms, and guessing the appropriate ones was part of the entertainment.

From the 1750's, elegant prints by Canaletto and by Samuel Wale were sold, and intended as works to be framed. These are the first images of Vauxhall to include children among the fashionable strollers, part of polite family groups, their viewing being directed and indulged. Along with a changing understanding of childhood as a distinct period, it could be argued that

³²*Ibid.*, 427

³³J.Newbery, *A Little Pretty Pocketbook*, (London, 1744), 25

in the late eighteenth century there was an expanding of the associative public sphere in fashionable society to include young people, '...a compression of the stages of late childhood and adolescence may have been occurring'.³⁴ There is evidence that families visited the Gardens together on Sundays,³⁵ but the inclusion of children in these fashionable prints is less documented observation and more indicative that visitors of taste and sensibility were being represented and flattered. The affluent child shown walking in the Gardens and the poor working child depicted there were equally imagined presences.



J.S. Muller after Canaletto, *A View of the Temple of Comus & in Vauxhall Gardens*, 1751, engraving, hand coloured,

Samuel Wale's *Perspective View*, shown below, was one of a pair of prints, produced to

³⁴P. Borsay, 'Children, Adolescents and Fashionable Urban Society in Eighteenth Century England', in A. Müller (ed.), *Fashioning Childhood.*, Ch.5, 59

³⁵D.Coke & A.Borg, *Vauxhall Gardens*, 198



Charles Grignon & Pierre-Charles Canot after Samuel Wale; *Perspective View of the Foundling Hospital, with Emblematic Figures*, 1749 engraving, hand-coloured

celebrate the purpose of the Foundling Hospital. The verse beneath reinforces the patriotic aspect of the charity. The French may have an older foundling foundation, but '...Their boasted first design/ British Benevolence shall far outshine'. The French figures on the right and the other fashionable visitors are shown promenading as in the Vauxhall prints. The hospital grounds became a popular place of resort.³⁶ Solkin acknowledges the contrasts implicit in this and other presentations of the benevolent institution: the 'polite self was constructed in opposition to a debased other'.³⁷ The emblematic children do not belong to the visitors but dance round a statue of Venus. Here she represents the affection of a mother for her young,³⁸ the 'mother' being the Foundling Hospital itself. The youngest child sits on the pedestal, holding the symbolic white ball of acceptance at the Institution.³⁹ Parallels might be seen with the putto which sits at Handel's feet inscribing his music, on the statue by Roubiliac at Vauxhall Gardens.⁴⁰ The children's dance recalls the maypole dance celebrated by Hayman in one of his supper-box paintings. But this is not a seasonal ritual, one instead of gratitude for having been saved from certain death.

³⁶R.H. Nichols & F.A. Wray, *The History of the Foundling Hospital*, 292

³⁷D. Solkin, *Painting for Money*, 162

³⁸The Lucretian description, discussed in C. Wilson, *Epicureanism at the Origins of Modernity*, (Oxford Univ. Press, 2008) Ch.10, 256

³⁹The process is described in, for example R.H.Nichols & F.A.Wray, *The History of the Foundling Hospital*, 29

⁴⁰Louis François Roubiliac, *George Frideric Handel*, carrara marble, 1738, V&A., A.3-1965

An exhibition catalogue entry for this print focuses only on the children's uniform which Hogarth designed.⁴¹ The colourist of the print above has assumed the children are among the polite visitors, whereas the actual uniform was itself a statement about the national enterprise of the Hospital. Plain brown Yorkshire serge, simple and modest, indicative of the life of labour and service for which the children were prepared, Hogarth set the foundlings apart from other 'Charity children'. They could not be mistaken for the 'bluecoat' charity school children, who were from among the 'deserving poor'. Along with the paintings displayed at the Foundling, the children were themselves on display. Viewed as they worked, ate and prayed, visitors could witness the results of their philanthropy. Renaming meant that the children's identity was representative of their benefactors' generosity. Later names chosen embodied the children within particular examples of popular culture, such as Samuel Richardson's virtuous maid Pamela Andrews.

Hayman's paintings at Vauxhall showed children in a variety of settings, as part of traditional festivals or pursuing childish activities with which visitors could identify. The large canvases in the Court Room at the Foundling Hospital in contrast, represented specific biblical subjects hung within a skilfully managed environment, against a background of intense scrutiny, especially after publication of Bernard Mandeville's second edition of *The Fable of The Bees*.

⁴² Viewers of Hayman's and Hogarth's paintings there would be supposed to make the connection between the foundling Moses and his benefactress, and the foundlings admitted and maintained at the Hospital by subscription. Moses as a baby and as the older child returning from his wet-nurse was a symbolic narrative of the actual foundlings admitted. The

⁴¹R. Simon, *Hogarth's Children*, Cat.5, 34

⁴²B. Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees, or Private Vices, Publick Benefits, with an Essay on Charity and Charity Schools*, (London, 1723.), 2nd edition; see also J.M. Stafford, ed., *Private vices, publick Benefit? The contemporary reception Of Bernard Mandeville*, (Solihull, Ismeron, 1997), general introduction, xi-xvii; E.G. Hundert, *The Enlightenment Fable. Bernard Mandeville and the Discovery of Society*, (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994)

part played in the Hospital's benevolence by the sympathetic visitor was directed and encouraged. Though the idea of the first gallery of English history painting may not have been the original intention of the artists showcasing their work, it is often described as such by art historians.⁴³ The figures of children in the works are thus discussed within this context. There was however no guarantee that the actual experience of visitors conformed to the anticipated one. For example, the governors had to prevent some children from begging from visitors, and Mrs. Thrale's only observation from her visit was that 'I never saw yet one eminently pretty face'.⁴⁴

The 1737 copper season ticket for Vauxhall Gardens which was left as a token with a foundling child suggests a poignant connection between the venue of pleasure and a consequence and dilemma for the mother. The foundlings are still on display, through the tokens which were once filed and concealed and can now be viewed at the Foundling Museum. The children's identities are uniquely tied to a diverse range of objects. The textile tokens have received special attention, and comprise an online exhibition.⁴⁵ The luxury discussed by Mandeville as fundamental to the nation's wealth is frequently evidenced in his work through examples of clothing, used by different classes.⁴⁶ It is worth noting that a perceived overriding concern with the acquisition of material goods and resulting moral decline is an alternative narrative for the preserved tokens of fabric seen now as exemplifying textiles available to the poor in the eighteenth century.

In conclusion, representations of the child were crucial elements of the success of both venues, which developed in the same decade. Hayman used a variety of artistic and

⁴³See D. Solkin, *Painting for Money*, Ch.5

⁴⁴Mrs. Hester Lynch Thrale (Later Mrs. Piozzi), *Thraliana*, (ed.) K.C.Balderston, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1952), 2nd ed., Aug. to Sep. 1777, i:146

⁴⁵www.threadsoffeeeling.com, accessed 8 April 2013

⁴⁶For example, B. Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees*, 128, in a discussion about the cost of buying and cleaning cloth.

emblematic sources to represent different types of children at Vauxhall Gardens, to amuse a diverse mainly adult audience. The children represented at the Foundling Hospital were presented in person and in artistic terms within a strict philanthropic agenda, and the same visitors could be in little doubt about the reactions encouraged and expected of them.

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