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En hommage à ma directrice de thèse, et en remerciement pour sa constante bienveillance depuis le début de ma carrière.

ANIMALS, BEAUTY AND MORALITY IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ART. CROSSING INTER-SPECIES BOUNDARIES

Only a few decades ago, it would have struck the eighteenth-century scholar as rather daring to speak of the crossing of interspecies boundaries in an age that was still largely anthropocentric. But recent research carried out in the thriving field of animal studies has brought to light substantial zones of contact between two not so discrete areas: the human and the non-human. The work of scholars such as Erica Fudge for the early modern age, or Diana Donald for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, has done a lot towards revealing the porosity of a dividing line between species. Diana Donald in particular, with her focus on issues of representation, has brought to the fore the unique role of British artists in confronting old assumptions, exposing contemporary usages, and conveying new ideas at a time when sensibility worked towards the recognition of a closer bond between men and animals. What seems to be missing still — notwithstanding the insightful *Artists and Animals* edited by Lippincott and Blühm[1]— is interrogation into why these artists took it upon themselves to promote these challenging ideas. What feeling of a special relationship with non-human animals, one wonders, drove so many of them to lavish so much of their creative time on the portrayal of their companions, and even sometimes pick up the torch of animal rights ?

Building on previous research into the presence of animals in artists' portraits and self-portraits,[2] this paper further explores the intellectual substrate of this newly felt bond with the other species by looking at a variety of documents, some intimate, others theoretical,

[1] The catalogue takes ours as a period of particular interest, but looks more broadly at European art.

[2] See my "Hogarth's *Self-Portrait with Pug Dog*: Initiating a British Tradition of the Animal as Connoisseur." Conference paper given at *Representing Animals in Britain*. Université Rennes 2 (October 20-1, 2011).

others still pictorial. It will start by showing how, under the pen and brush of the Society painter Thomas Gainsborough, animal imagery was also used to foreground the anxieties of artists chafing under the heavy yoke of commercial imperatives. If animals were so readily resorted to, it was, as we will then see, because new and influential writings on aesthetics presented them as endowed with not just bodily perfection, but with some sort of ensuing moral fitness that artists felt their liberal art had to relay. The final part of this paper will highlight the fact that what we choose here to call moral fitness — and is intricately linked with a physical one — in no way ran foul of animals' instinctive taste for chasing, an activity often described as mobilising the senses in a similar fashion to art. This study will thus end on a brief analysis of William Hogarth's monumental children's portrait, *The Graham Children* (1742): the presence of a preying cat in the dark recesses of the work will be there to support a reading of the picture as illustrative of the sensualist mechanics of the painter's trade. Very much akin to the art of hunting, as Hogarth himself was wont to present it in his writings, we will see how this creative animality also allowed British artists to reach back to a world of nature which they felt was dying out under the pressure of an increasingly commercial society.

Chafing under the yoke

In a weary undated letter to his friend William Jackson, Thomas Gainsborough came up with an unusual and rather unflattering image of himself:

> But these fine Ladies & their (~~'D-mnd'~~) Tea drinkings, Dancings, Husband huntings &c &c &c will fob me out of the last ten years, & I fear miss getting Husbands too – But we can say nothing to these things you know Jackson, we must Jogg on and be content with the jingling of the Bel(ls), only d-mn it I hate a dust, the kicking up a dust; and being confined in Harn(ess) to follow the track, whilst others ride in the Waggon, under cover, stretching their Legs in the straw at Ease, and gazing at Green Trees & Blue Skies without half my Taste That's d-mnd hard. (Gainsborough 68)

What the painter was reacting to as he compared his lot to that of the cart horses of many of his rustic scenes was not only the social chores which came with having two daughters to marry off, but also the constant demands of society portraiture. The economic yoke that

he found himself brought under and the type of dusty track he had to follow while others, less gifted than he was, could indulge in their passions (or idleness) are made quite clear by this other extract from the same letter: "I'm sick of Portraits, and wish very much to take my Viol da Gam and walk off to some sweet Village where I can paint Landskips and enjoy the fag End of Life in quietness & ease." (Gainsborough 68)

In a commercial society ruled by fashion, this "run-away horse which trampled all and everything on its way" (Gainsborough 107),[3] painters had few other options if they wanted to sustain their families but to follow its dictates. Thomas Gainsborough was no exception and spent most of his career producing the wonderfully sensitive portraits that are so admired today and which the upper crust of British society relentlessly commissioned from him. As often, private correspondence is there to shed some light on a slightly different story of personal aspirations and dreams. Gainsborough's late life letters indeed reveal an ageing artist who seems to have very much resented having to do portraits — or "pick(ing) pockets in the portrait way," as the artist himself put it (Gainsborough 152) — as a main occupation for a living, and secretly yearned to depict the world of nature in which he had grown up: a world peopled not only by working men and women, but also toiling animals.

For all these economic imperatives and the private moaning and groaning about them, the Sudbury native did find the time and energy to indulge his favourite *genre* and create works which John Barrell's 1980 seminal study of the rural poor in English painting between 1730 and 1840, *The Dark Side of the Landscape*, helped bring to the fore.[4] And Gainsborough's landscapes were full of the jogging, harnessed cart horses and donkeys of his epistle to Jackson, animals often shown pulling hard at heavy wagons or sinking under the weight of the peasants they were carrying on their backs. Let us just mention the 1767 *Harvest Wagon* in which the merry-making at the back of the convoy puts into sharp and sad relief the shadowy figure of the last cart horse, its head bent in resigned submission and

[3] The letter was addressed to the actor David Garrick in 1772.

[4] In fact, as Gainsborough reminded the Reverend Henry Bate-Dudley on March 11, 1788, it was a very early landscape, painted as a schoolboy, which allowed the artist's father to send his son to study in London (Gainsborough 168).

possibly exhaustion. Animals also featured largely as moral metaphors in the correspondence of Gainsborough, whose letters regularly drew comparisons between patrons or artists and puppies, cats, geese, turkeys, dogs, cock sparrows and, of course, jack asses and donkeys. They were, in fact, almost always resorted to to deprecate — and often self-deprecate—, and generally served as a means of conveying emotions and feelings that were thought to be purely and foolishly human.[5] Whether it featured "fat turkeys", "wild geese", or "iron-faced dogs", animal imagery helped the artist proffer comments of a moral nature on the world in which he had to work and fight his way, often declaring himself to be no more than an "impudent scoundrel" and "an Ass".[6] After all, the great painter of the natural world was known, having once more strayed from the path of marital virtue, to write letters of apology to his wife which he addressed to her dog and signed with his own dog's name (Rosenthal and Myrone 202).

As is evidenced by his many portraits of beloved pets (suffice it to look at the double portrait of the messenger dogs mentionned above, *Tristram and Fox*, c.1770), Thomas Gainsborough certainly stands out for his unique characterization of animals and a deep concern for their individuality. Yet he was not alone in empathising with the fate of these companions. As David Perkins's study on Romanticism and animal rights shows, many British artists — poets but also painters— actively contributed to a collective awakening which led to the precocious passing of protection laws. The race horses, with stories that went from high-profile and profitable victories to infamous deaths at the knacker's hand, certainly made more attractive tragic figures and more easily identifiable victims of a commerce than geese or jack asses (Donald 199-232). But Thomas

[5] In 1763, in a letter written to James Unwin, Gainsborough had these wonderful words about the figure of a jack ass blissfully sleeping on the mouldering edge of a bank, unaware of the danger of slipping to its death: "Don't you think a Jackass three quarters asleep upon the ridge of a Bank undermined and mouldring away is very expressive of the happiness of not seeing danger?" (Gainsborough 25). In an accompanying footnote, the letters' editor, John Hayes, refers us to an Ipswich landscape in which such an animal is shown dozing away (Hayes cat. n58).
[6] These words and expressions are extracted from a letter to David Garrick, dated August 22, 1768 (Gainsborough 60).

Gainsborough's overloaded donkeys may also be regarded as illustrative of a world where the mythologisation of hard work and a certain rural innocence (Barrell 35-88) could not entirely conceal a darker reality, that of a rapidly industrialising and commercialising economy based on the exploitation of the weaker players — poor peasants and city workers, of course, but also ageing artists in search of financial security on a thriving but highly competitive art market.

Moral fitness

If the bond with animals that can be teased out of Thomas Gainsborough's letters lamenting his own fate and deploring his all but too human weaknesses was, for the most part, of a humorous nature, the sense of kinship that emanated from his portraits of animals seemed of a less derivative kind. It may, we believe, be accounted for by an imagined common moral ground between humans and non-humans that the nascent British literature on the arts contributed to mapping out for ever more sensitive readers. In the many treatises and essays that the eighteenth-century newly-found interest in aesthetics had started to spawn before the great portrait and landscape painter even put brush to canvas, the physical fitness of animals was indeed often shown to resonate with some sort of innate moral goodness — a disturbing association which still found its earliest expression within the framework of civic humanism itself.

Indeed, with the notable exception of Edmund Burke, the bodily fitness that nature had supposedly endowed its creatures with comes out as the first and foremost characteristic which animals were praised for by artists and art lovers. Partly due to the influence of natural theology, numerous instances of a fascination with their perfectly adequate proportions can be found in art writings of the first half of the century. The Scottish philosopher Francis Hutcheson, for one, in his 1725 *Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, made extensive use of animals' physiques in his attempts to define original and absolute beauty. They were, to his eyes, perfect exemplars of a beauty presented as a combination of variety (of bulk, colour, and shape) and that "*vast Uniformity among all the Species that are known to us*, in the Structure of those Parts, upon which Life depends more immediately." (Hutcheson 32). There was, he added, "a further Beauty in Animals, arising from a certain Proportion of the various Parts to each other, which still pleases the Sense of the Spectators." These natural proportions were deemed all the more

agreeable to the viewer as they ultimately created a "Mechanism, apparently adapted to the Necessitys and Advantages of any Animal; which pleases us, even tho there be not Advantage to our selves." (Hutcheson 33-4)

Fitness, construed here as the ability to adapt to the necessities of life, either in the wild or in early eighteenth-century cities (which must have looked rather similar to the animals themselves, considering the many forms of ill treatment they were subjected to in cities), [7] was just as central to William Hogarth as it had been to the Scotsman. It hence comes as no surprise that it should have been the first pictorial element the artist explored in his 1753 *The Analysis of Beauty*. As even an artist as keen as Hogarth to bring his trade into the fold of liberal high culture had to admit, the mechanics of beauty had much to learn from animals who could boast dimensions and muscular structures that perfectly fitted their missions in this world. As he explained how "fitness of the parts … is of greatest consequence to the beauty of the whole" (Hogarth 25), the celebrated engraver made a point of turning to the animal realm, writing of the different types of beauty embodied by the war and race horses where others before him had chosen to rely on the time-honoured binary of race runner and wrestler:

> The race-horse, having all its parts of such dimensions as best fit the purposes of speed, acquires on that account a consistent character of one sort of beauty. To illustrate this, suppose the beautiful head and gracefully-turn'd neck of the war horse, instead of his own awkward straight one: it would disgust, and deform, instead of adding beauty; because the judgment would condemn it as unfit. (Hogarth 26)

By the time Hogarth was writing, and partly thanks to the influence of Hutcheson's ideas, the assumption that morality could effectively be grounded in the body — then understood as a mechanism of nerves, fluids, tissues and senses — had gained considerable ground. It had even been turned into a sense itself, a sixth one. So where the Frenchman René Descartes had dismissed animals as mere automata, soulless machines deprived of any moral sense, the comparison that Hutcheson made in 1725 between animals and smoothly running mechanisms did not, across the Channel, stand

[7] On the subject of cruelty to animals in the eighteenth century, see Shevelow.

in the way of an association of non-human animals with a certain moral sense. In fact, literary scholar Alex Watmore has recently shown how, by blurring the line between liberal and mechanical pleasures, the Protestant philosopher had allowed mechanical phenomena to be brought back within the pale of not only aesthetic beauty, but also moral virtue (Watmore 94-7). As perfect mechanisms held up as exemplars of beauty, animals too were allowed to fall within the purview of traditional morality.

Intriguingly, this insistence on right proportions had been abroad even before Hutcheson and Hogarth made it theirs. Even though it had appeared in writings in which the body was viewed in a very different light and with substantially more diffidence, this practical point had already been presented as folding in a larger narrative on moral virtue. The Earl of Shaftesbury's entire *Inquiry concerning Virtue or Merit*, first published in 1699, is informed by considerations on proportions and fitness.[8] Indeed, for all his aristocratic, man-centered idealism, the Lockean philosopher had animals feature extensively in his economy of the passions and affections; even if they were denied access to the higher virtue of civilised disinterestedness, God's humbler creations were still posited as models of natural "goodness and seen as capable of acting in such a way as might ensure not just their own survival as individuals, but also that of their entire species" (Shaftesbury 199). If there may not have been such thing as a virtuous animal in Shaftesbury's neo-classical worldview, the impression is that there was none either that could have aptly been declared vicious. Writing from an admittedly distinct vantage point from Bernard Mandeville in his infamous tale of private vices and public good (where, though morally corrupt, the tiny insects of the 1714 *Fable of the Bees* operated towards some sort of common weal), the Earl still urged his readers to look around in the world of nature for edifying examples to follow:

> In the other species of creatures around us, there is found generally an exact proportionableness, constancy and regularity in all their passions and affections, no failure in the care of the offspring or of

[8] Ronald Paulson, in his introduction to the 1997 edition of *The Analysis of Beauty*, indeed pitted Hogarth's practical aesthetics against "the theoretically pure aesthetics of Shaftesbury, where the human body can only be beautiful if divorced from function, fitness, and utility" (Paulson, Introduction xxxiii). This paper takes a different view.

> the society to which they are united, no prostitution of themselves, no intemperance or excess of any kind. The smaller creatures, who live as it were in cities (as bees and ants), continue the same train and harmony of life, nor are they ever false to those affections which move them to operate towards their public good. (Shaftesbury 199)

In the transparently somatic world of animals, these benevolent affections, Shaftesbury sustained, were directly predicated on the physical characteristics of a given species, which would all the better thrive as its regular, hence beautiful shapes and proportions "afford(ed) advantage to activity and use." (Shaftesbury 415). To the utter dismay of the great moralist, though, the only species to which "harmony of life" —no more than bodily grace, as it happened— did not come as naturally was mankind:

> even those creatures of prey who live the farthest out of society maintain, we see, such a conduct towards one another as is exactly suitable to the good of their own species, while man, notwithstanding the assistance of religion and the direction of laws, is found to live in less conformity with nature and, by means of religion itself, is often rendered the more barbarous and inhuman. (Shaftesbury 199-200)[9]

As has been made clear by Ronald Paulson in *Breaking and Remaking*, Hogarth did not see eye to eye with the philosopher on the connection between beauty and morality when it came to men and women. Yet, many of his painted and engraved works foreground a similar belief that a certain moral fitness lay on the side of animals, while humans were too often found to be lacking in the moral sense earlier defined by Shaftesbury and Hutcheson. This moral blindness, or perversion of the right affections, is nowhere better illustrated than in the first two plates of his series *The Four Stages of Cruelty*, in which animals are presented as the hapless victims of a corrupted humanity.[10] Yet, for all their readiness to recognise that mankind could be the most barbarous of all species, it looks as if eighteenth-century British artists did not always see it fit to play down the more

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[9] The italics are the author's.
[10] On this, see Warren.

savage or offensive instincts of animals in order to spin a moral tale.[11] For animals, if contemporary artists were to believe Shaftesbury, were "in no way unnatural or vicious in them," and whatever aggressiveness they might display in their interaction with other creatures, it was through no fault of their own, but should be put down to a natural order of things. The British thinker indeed explained that "*for creatures who are able to make resistance and are by nature armed offensively*, be they of the poorest insect kind, such as bees or wasps, *it is natural to them to be roused with fury and, at the hazard of their lives, oppose any enemy or invader of their species*." (Shaftesbury 198)

It looks as if fury at a potential threat as justified by Shafestbury is precisely what is being acted out in Thomas Gainsborough's *Two Shepherd Boys with Dogs Fighting*, a late-life painting from 1783.[12] The sheepdogs were probably watching over two different flocks, which in all probability is the reason why they are at each other's throat; in other words, they were most likely acting out of a concern for the safety of their charges, driven by an animal instinct of an almost civic humanist kind that had them care for others at the risk of their own lives. There would have been little untoward here for an eighteenth-century art lover familiar with the writings of earlier decades, no matter how sensitive he or she was. What clearly went against the rules of nature, and looked like "a little madness" to the painter himself, was the conspicuously incompassionate behaviour of one of the two shepherds, shown as preventing his friend from putting

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[11] On how to put the other species to sound didactic use, it may incidentally be noted that the following age would sometimes take a vastly different view, as the Victorian poet and critic William Cosmo Monkhouse's comparison of Edwin Landseer and William Hogarth's respective treatment of dogs in their self-portraits makes quite clear. "The trenchant look of Hogarth's unsympathetic face is not more different from the kindly intelligence of Landseer's, than Hogarth's cynical pug from Landseer's good-tempered connoisseurs. The one was a satirist in grain, the other a humorist only. The one was always deeply, almost savagely, in earnest, cutting down to the bone of society, like a moral surgeon; the other did not even try to cut, he did not even treat diseases; he was only spectator of human life, and only cared to draw such follies as were amusing, and to draw them in such way that the satirised could join in the laugh." (Monkhouse 143)

[12] Thomas Gainsborough. *Two Shepherd Boys with Dogs Fighting*. Oil on canvas. 1783. 223x167 cm. The Iveagh Bequest, Kenwood House, London.

paid to the scuffle in order to enjoy it. The cruelty of the scene stems from this element of moral perversion, all the more disturbing as it involved young boys, and it even made Thomas Gainsborough quite apologetic about the whole scene. As he was writing to William Chamber on the subject of the painting, he saw it fit to add that "(d) next exhibition (he) would make the boys fighting & the dogs looking on" and entreated his friend to "think (him) right as a whole, & can look down upon Cock Sparrows as a great man ought to do with compassion" (Gainsborough 152).[13] The distance that the liberal artist was there keen to demonstrate was in fact not one from animals who, after all, acted quite in keeping with their true nature —and would probably not have relished the sight of two fightings boys—, but from the young and morally thwarted shepherds wanting the compassion of true men of feeling.

Hounds of a good nose

In fact, not only did eighteenth-century artists seem to have been little reluctant to acknowledge the variety of natural, instinctive reactions in non-human species, but they also willingly compared themselves to hunters, or hunting animals sharing the instinct of the chase with the rest of God's creation.

This acknowledgement of the animal within even stands out as one of the defining traits of a new British aesthetics which gradually veered away from continental discourses on art. The latter had traditionally been intent on playing down the role of the senses, thus keeping men at a safe remove from animals. Quite on the contrary, most of the art writing produced in eighteenth-century England was shaped by a Lockean sensualism which had for a side effect to draw men and animals increasingly closer. John Locke's cognitive model, whose lingering imprint was still noticeable in Joshua Reynolds's *Discourses* (delivered between 1769 and 1790), posited that ideas are raised in our minds by external objects and perceived through our senses. This ability to gain knowledge through sensation was, as he explained in his *Essay on Human Understanding* (1689), a quality that man had in common with animals, just as both humans and non-humans displayed the capacity to retain ideas in the storehouse of their memory (though to a far lesser extent in the latter's case)

[13] The letter was addressed to William Chambers on April 27, 1783.

(Locke 65).

It has repeatedly been explained that William Hogarth's groundbreaking aesthetics was one of the senses, and it thus comes as little surprise that he should have called animals in support of the tenets of his artistic theory. Indeed, animals' unique form of intelligence, usually described as "sagacity", was thought to consist mainly of instinct —as distinct from elaborate rational thought—, and directly result from raw sensual experience. In keeping with his taste for provocation and a reluctance to prettify, the animal instinct that Hogarth brought to the fore in his writings on art was not the motherly urge to protect and nurture that had so impressed Joseph Addison's *Guardian* journalist in 1711 (the writer had indeed reported seeing a hen safeguarding a brood of ducklings in a purely disinterested move, as the little ones were obviously not hers).[14] It was rather the instinct of the chase which man had evidently in common with animals and which, by stimulating his senses, filled him with pleasure, while also answering a useful purpose. Hogarth made much of this common ground between human and non-human species in his development on the importance of intricacy in composition and form. "Intricacy in form," he indeed declared in *The Analysis of Beauty* "to be that peculiarity in the lines, which compose it, that *leads the eye a wanton kind of chace,* and from the pleasure that gives the mind, entitles it to the name of beautiful." For the London artist, this love of pursuit, this uncontrollable penchant for the chase — "the business of our lives", as he put it— was "implanted in our natures and designed, no doubt, for necessary, and useful purposes". It was a trait, he believed, that men shared with animals, who "have it evidently by instinct" (Hogarth 32-3).

The evocation in similar terms of the pleasure produced by the pursuit of an object of beauty was not exactly new. Another enthusiastic populariser of Lockean philosophy beside Shaftesbury had been the aforementioned London journalist Joseph Addison. In his essays on the pleasures of the imagination, he too had singled out the pleasure of the chase as central to a reflection on the mechanism of beauty and used it to flesh out his definition of a new aesthetic

[14] "The Young, upon the sight of a Pond, immediately ran into it; while the Stepmother, with all imaginable Anxiety, hovered about the Borders of it, to call them out of an Element that appeared to her so dangerous and destructive." (Addison 122, 367).

category called “novelty”. In so doing, he was directly borrowing from John Locke’s opening lines of his *Essay on Human Understanding,* in which the philosopher had declared to the reader that the mind’s “searches after truth, are a sort of hawking and hunting, wherein the very pursuit makes a great part of the pleasure.” (Locke 1) In his weekly papers, Addison formulated his conception of curiosity in terms that partially recalled Locke’s image: in describing the pleasure created by the experience of novelty, he explained how “it is this that recommends Variety, where the Mind is every Instant called off to something new, and the Attention not suffered to dwell too long, and waste itself on any particular Object.” (Addison 412, 280) Most middle-class art lovers would have had to rely on works by one of the fashionable sports painters of the period to get the full flavour of the simile, in which the human mind is compared to an animal whose attention is easily caught and as easily diverted by some other prey. John Wootton’s portrayal of Robert Walpole’s hounds with their companion magpie, for instance, convincingly captures the restlessness of animals whose natural sagacity, in the context of the hunting party, would keep them on track to the bitter end of the chase. In this carefully composed conversation piece gathering canine and avian participants, most dogs have their noses pointed up, as if sniffing a scent they will follow as swiftly as a magpie flitting through the air.[15] Unlike the urbanite Addison, the Earl of Shaftesbury could draw on first-hand experience of the aristocratic pastime of the hunt as he likened the man of taste to a hunter turned hound in the heat of what was then called sport. In a note to “Miscellany III”, he came up with a comparison that he might well have borrowed from his teacher John Locke, although the hawk had been dispensed with and the hound was now the sole protagonist of the chase. To a young philistine who airily questioned Vitruvius in an imaginary dialogue, the Greek author brought back to life by the British philosopher answered:

> Only Sir, to satisfy myself that I am not alone or single in a certain fancy that I have a thing called beauty, that I have almost the whole world for my companions, and that each of us admirers and earnest

[15] Like most of Robert Walpole’s impressive art collection, *Hounds and a Magpie* (oil on canvas. 152x128 cm, date unknown) can today be seen in the State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg.

> pursuers of beauty (such as in a manner we all are), if peradventure we take not a certain sagacity along with us, we must err widely, range extravagantly, and run ever upon a false scent. We may, in the sportsman's phrase, have many hares upon foot and shall stick to no real game nor be fortunate in any capture which may content us. (Shaftesbury 416 fn. 25)

This did not preclude Shaftesbury from carrying on with dismissive comments on the infatuation of young aristocrats with the very same animals whose instinctive, unerring quest made them into enviable models for art lovers. The disparagement, quite in keeping with the moral imperative of aligning fitness and beauty, stemmed from the fact that these creatures –horses, hounds, and hawks– would be idolised, "set apart from use and only kept to gaze on and feed the enamoured fancy with highest delight!" (Shaftesbury 416 fn. 25). The metaphor that brought art lovers and hunting animals in close sensual proximity as they went about their very distinct occupations was to prove popular with later art theorists too. The print connoisseur William Gilpin, in his influential *Essay on Picturesque Beauty* (1792), elected to compare the picturesque art lover to a sportsman "follow(ing) nature through all her walks" and "pursu(ing) her from hill to dale" as she took the shape of a variety of gorgeous-looking animals (Gilpin 48) while, a couple of years earlier, the Royal Academician James Barry had used the image of the poor artist as "hound of a bad nose" in his *Lecture on Design* (Barry, Opie and Fuseli 154).

For William Hogarth, the commercially-savvy artist whose sensualist bias affiliated him with Shaftesbury in more ways than he would have cared for, it was a similar animal sagacity to that of the civic humanist thinker's hunting dogs that transformed artists into hounds of taste. As sportsmen, whether aristocratic horsemen or middle-class anglers, go about their business of pursuing and eagerly anticipate the final catch, so artists irresistibly head for beauty, chase it in the natural world in an often joyful way, capture it, to then freeze it on canvas for the similarly sensual enjoyment of art lovers. Hogarth's paintings of children have often been read as illustrative of the transience of life, and of early and innocent years not meant to last. Yet, it seems to us they are just as much about this innate, pleasurable movement that engulfs the artist as he or she engages in the act of creating, and aligns them not only with children, but also with animals who display a similar spontaneity in the pursuit of their

desires. This is beautifully rendered in the London painter's monumental portrait of the McKinnon children, for instance, where the little boy is shown trying to catch a fluttering butterfly while, in the lap of her dress, his sister holds a collection of seashells that make up an exotic but still life —a pointer maybe to the fate awaiting the pursued butterfly.[16]

The link with the figure of the artist is, we believe, even more clearly articulated in yet another large scale and contemporary children's portrait by Hogarth, a more complex one, with more discernable allusions to artistic practice. The portrait of the Graham children was painted at the request of the children's father, Royal Apothecary Daniel Graham.[17] By the time it was completed, the youngest son had died, an unhappy circumstance signalled by the presence of a wooden bird near him. The eldest son, on the contrary, looks very much alive and engrossed with a living bullfinch flapping wildly in its cage. The bird's excitement seems to be due to the music Richard is playing on a small mechanical organ on which, as some sort of ironic counterpoint, Orpheus is represented taming the wild beasts with the sound of his lyre. A young artist in the making, Richard, whose broad grin speaks of ecstatic infantile joy, is under the delusion that the bullfinch is responding to the beauty of his music, and it takes the viewer some time too to understand the real cause for the bird's state of panick. A cat is perched on the back of Thomas's chair, ominously ogling the caged animal with undisguised appetite. Music, like art in general, was no tamer of the wildness within for Hogarth. On the contrary, its reception set what Joseph Addison had, in his papers on the imagination, called the "animal spirits" running through the veins of its receptacle, here the unfortunate bird. Thus everything is right here, and as it should be in the state of nature in which the artist instinctively partakes: the joy of the young boy, the frustrated urge of the preying cat, the reaction of the bullfinch. And the momentary confusion of a viewer who is tricked into making the same mistake as Richard highlights, in a most playful yet persuasive way, the similarity of the sensorial processes

[16] William Hogarth. *The McKinnon Children*. Oil on canvas. c. 1742-3. 182x143 cm. The National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin.
[17] William Hogarth. *The Graham Children*. Oil on canvas. 1742. 160x181 cm. The National Gallery, London.

underpinning both artistic practice and reception, and animals' hunting drive.

Isn't this exactly what Thomas Gainsborough was yearning for towards the end of his career as an artist: a connection with the animal within achieved by giving free rein to an instinct of the chase that comes so naturally to children? Couldn't this, he felt, effectively shield him from the taxying demands of a commercial society —a society whose springs have been shown to be as sensualist as child's play? In a moving excerpt from a late-life letter, the sick and ageing artist looks back on his Sudbury years, a time when the young boy he once was was trying his hand at imitating small Dutch landscapes. The thought of these early works seems to have momentarily led him to retrieve some of childhood's "innocent" pleasures, pleasures that speak of freedom, but also movement and pursuit: flying a kite as adults would fly hawks, catching birds as his daughters would chase butterflies,[18] building and floating toy ships. And, of course, painting the world of nature.

> 'tis odd how all the Childish passions hang about one in sickness, I feel such fondness for my first imitations of little Dutch Lanskips that I can't keep from working an hour or two a Day, though with a great mixture of bodily Pain – I am so childish that I could make a Kite, catch Gold Finches, or build little Ships. (Gainsborough, 68)

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[18] Thomas Gainsborough. *The Painter's Daughters Chasing a Butterfly*. Oil on canvas. c. 1756. 113.5x105 cm. The National Gallery, London.

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