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Hogarth moralized

Hogarth, William

London, 1831

The Enraged Musician.

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THE ENRAGED MUSICIAN.

AMIDST all the follies of the age, there never was a greater than the immoderate passion of the people for music. Though amusement and recreation are sometimes necessary, yet when carried to excess they become vicious and shameful. Now, so far did the luxury of this kingdom extend at the time when this plate was first published, which was in the year 1741, and which seems at present rather to encrease than diminish, that Italians (as being supposed to be the greater proficient) were brought over at the greatest expence, and the poorest and least skilled among them, who had not sufficient merit, and who were not able to continue in their own country, soon discovering our folly, gathered here in flocks, and took possession of the place. When here they were encouraged, and their wretched abilities looked upon as supernatural; they introduced a new style of music, which suited well the growing levity of this nation. The noble and elevated was immediately transformed into the trifling and insignificant, and the solemn and majestic sounds of heart-felt British harmony, gave place to the tinkling frippery airs of Italian sing-song. Such was, and such still continues to be the depraved state of the English!

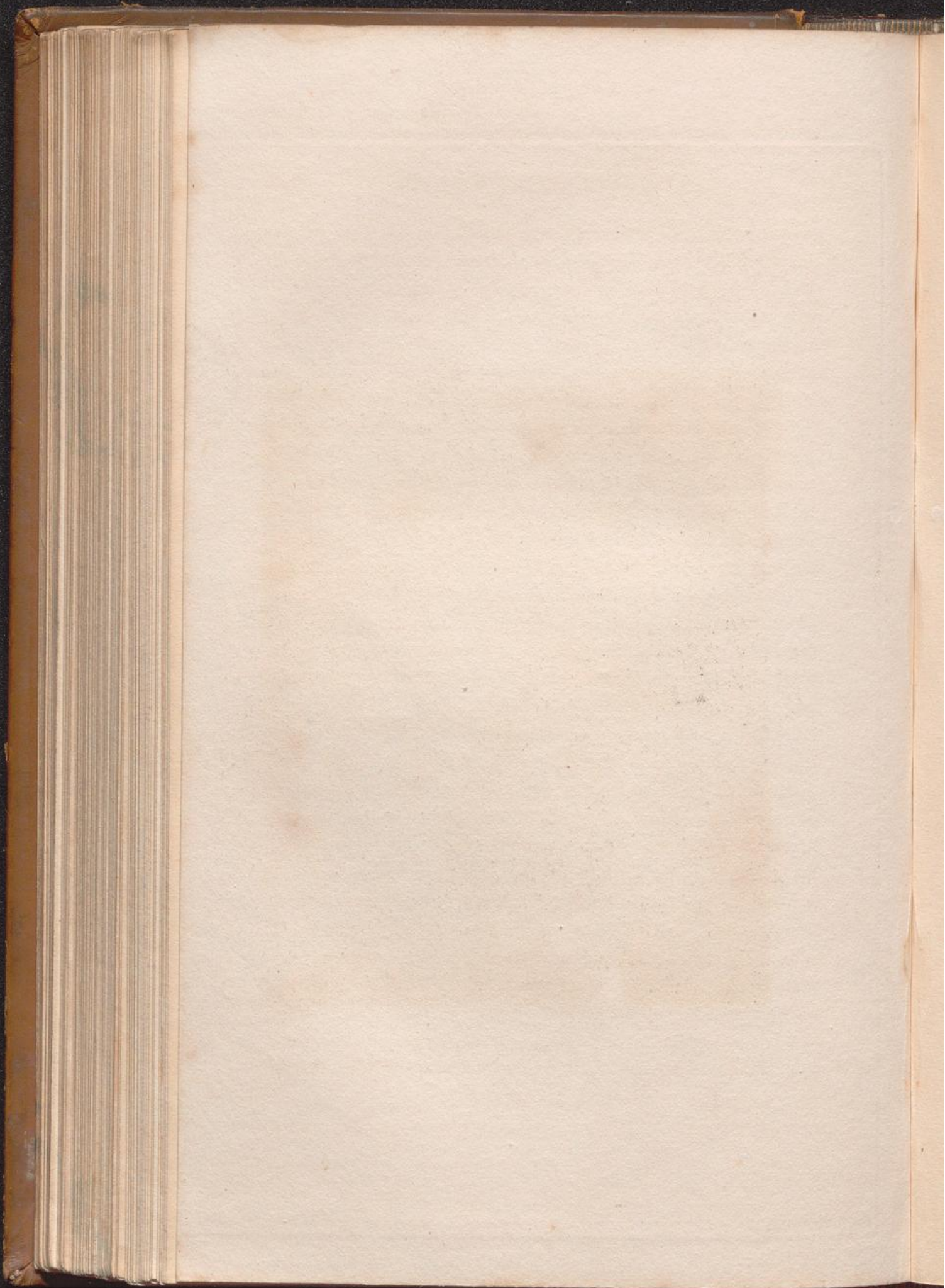
To ridicule this degeneracy of the age, Mr. Hogarth published the print before us; wherein he has represented an Italian professor of music at his study, enraged to the greatest degree at the collection of noises beneath his window,



W. H. Wood, sc.

THE ENRAGED MUSICIAN.

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which seem gathered in order to annoy him. He is, by the inscription on the house over the way, supposed to live in the neighbourhood of a pewterer, whose constant hammering is no small disturbance. Our author seems here to have let none of the most material or customary noises of London streets escape him. In front are some children at their noisy sports, one of whom is hollowing and beating a drum; another dragging a tile upon the stones, and another winding a racket. In one place is a ballad-singer bawling out "the Lady's fall," with a squalling infant in her arms; in another, a man grinding a cleaver, whose machine standing on the foot of a dog, sets him yelping. Here we see a girl crying her milk, and there a sow-gelder sounding his horn; here, a fellow dissonantly blowing his hautboy, there another crying of fish; in one place a paviour ramming down the stones, in another a dustman ringing his bell. To these are introduced the chattering of a parrot and the squalling of cats; and to complete all, from the top of the chimney is heard the cry of the sweeper, and from the tower of the church the ringing of bells, it being by the flag supposed to be a day of rejoicing. One thing more I must not omit taking notice of, which is the play-bill against the house, acquainting us that the Beggar's Opera was performed that night for the sixty-second time, Miss Fenton* playing the part of Polly, Mr. Walker that of Macheath, and Mr. Hippisly, that of Peachum. This serves to commemorate the great success of that dramatic performance, and in that success the extraordinary taste of the town. Thus by filling the plate, by properly disposing the different figures, and by preserving a beautiful contrast in the various persons and faces, Mr. Hogarth has not only pleased the under-

* Afterwards Duchess of Bolton.

standing and accomplished his design, but has also ravished the eye with a pleasing group of lively characters.*

[* Mr. Walpole, who loves to point out the *dramatic* powers of our author, very consistently remarks upon this print—"The Enraged Musician tends to *farce*." But, says Mr. W., speaking of his lighter subjects,—“When his topics were harmless, all his touches were marked with pleasantry and fun. He never laughed like Rabelais at nonsense that he imposed for wit; but like Swift, combined incidents that divert one from their unexpected encounter, and illustrate the tale he means to tell.” The remarks of Mr. W. are well exemplified in this one-act farce. Rich as it is in *situations*—as dramatists say—there is no violation of probability in bringing so many and so various annoyances together at one point of time.

The hero of this print, Mr. Ireland informs us, was a Mr. John Festin, eminent for his skill in playing upon the German flute and hautboy, and much employed as a teacher of music. He himself gave Hogarth the story to work upon. “At nine o’clock in the morning” said he “I once waited upon Lord *Spencer*, but his lordship being out of town, from him I went to Mr. V——n, now Lord V——n. It was so early that he was not arisen. I went into his chamber, and opening a shutter, sat down in the window-seat. Before the rails was a fellow playing upon the hautboy. A man with a barrow full of onions, offered the piper an onion if he would play him a tune. That ended, he offered a second for a second tune, the same for a third, and was going on: but this was too much; I could not bear it; it angered my very soul—“Zounds!” cried I, stop here! This fellow is ridiculing my profession; he is playing upon the *hautboy* for onions.”

Hogarth would naturally think that these *airs* of the professor deserved nothing but ridicule. He ought rather to have admired the *relish* for music demonstrated by the humble patron of his humble brother—an *onion* was as much to either of the latter, as a *guinea* to a fashionable amateur. “The whole” says Mr. I, “of this *bravura scene* is admirably represented. A person quaintly enough observed, that it *deafens* one to look at it. The scene seems to be taken from the lower end of St. Martin’s-lane; it is certainly intended to represent the steeple of St. Martin’s Church.”]