



I, Hogarth

Michael Dean

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He was London's artist par excellence, and his work supplies the most enduring vision of the eighteenth century's ebullience, enjoyments, and social iniquities.

From a childhood spent in a debtor's prison to his death in the arms of his wife, *I, Hogarth* follows the artist's life as he makes a name for himself and as he fights for artists with his Copyright Act.

Through Hogarth's lifelong marriage to Jane Thornhill, his inability to have children, his time as one of England's best portrait painters, his old age and unfortunate dip into politics, and his untimely death, *I, Hogarth is the remarkable story told through the artist's eyes. Michael Dean blends Hogarth's life and work into a rich and satisfying narrative, recommended for fans of Hilary Mantel and Peter Ackroyd.*

I, Hogarth Details

Date : Published January 10th 2013 by The Overlook Press (first published September 1st 2012)

ISBN : 9781468303421

Author : Michael Dean

Format : Hardcover 272 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Fiction, Art, Literature, 18th Century, European Literature, British Literature

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From Reader Review I, Hogarth for online ebook

Monica Williams says

As an art historian I am always drawn (pun fully intended) to books about artists. Hogarth is something of an unusual subject as he is not someone who is super popular (unlike the art rock stars like Monet and VanGogh). He was a British artist who worked in the 18th century. The world he inhabits is a rollicking good one. He starts with his childhood and his relationship with his father who was a scholar and transcriber of books, who was always in debt. Hogarth's father is put into debtors prison and his mother relies on one Moses da Costa, a Jewish moneylender for help. Hogarth is apprenticed to an engraver where he first really begins to learn to draw. He is never quite as good as his fellow apprenentices, but in some way knows that he will go on to other things. Like most young men of that time Hogarth frequents the brothels where he makes the acquaintance of one John Rakesby, who is really Sir John Thornhill, son of Sir James Thornhill one of Hogarth's artist heroes. Hogarth works his way into the Thornhills, both artistically- he becomes an assistant to Sir James and a far more closer connection. Hogarth falls in love with Jane Thornhill and after a long and complicated courtship they marry. Their marriage is happy in the beginning, but a disastrous encounter with a prostitute infects Hogarth with syphilis. Hogarth's artist output is not neglected, but its creation is woven into the story like threads with a complex tapestry. A smart fun romp through an England where the poor and the rich freely mingle in the streets, the taverns, and the theatres. Hogarth has his flaws, but remains likable and always engaging as his makes his way through life.

Stephanie Tournas says

I have been interested in Hogarth since I saw prints from his Rake's Progress at a rare books library where I once worked. This fictional first person account of his life does a great job of recreating 18th century London and the pleasures of life available to one who goes from rags to riches on his own merits. Hogarth was an inventive artist with an interest in making money, but on his own terms. He broke with the classicist orientation of "good art" and excelled in portraying all of London's citizens with zeal and individuality, from the lowest of the low, to the King.

Kelly says

An overly verbose beginning with too-detailed phrases coupled with disconnected extensions ... and an ending full of new starts which thus had to culminate in a too-abrupt, incomplete, rather cliché conclusion. I've more the notion of a 2.5, but I give it a 3 because I appreciate the time and effort it takes to develop any composition to novel length of quasi-decent quality. Pretty dissatisfied with the time invested in this overall, however.

Brian says

While not the equal of Barry Unsworth's Sacred Hunger and Quality of Mercy, nor Richard Flanagan's Gould's Book of Fish, this is a worthy addition to modern novels attempting to re-create the 18th century, and easily on par with Arabella Edge's The Company. On second thought, it's not so far removed from Quality of Mercy.

Going in, I was familiar with the name, William Hogarth, but I didn't know much about him, nor his art. However, while reading this "autobiographical" novel, I found myself investigating his work and enjoying it. Of historical significance to all visual artists were his efforts to effect copyright protection for illustrated works, as had been previously extended to written works.

This is far from a dry read and is actually quite ribald, and often humorously so. But there are also poignant results to what seemed inconsequential acts perpetrated when he was young and ascendant.

I also think anyone invested in creative endeavors, particularly painting but not necessarily limited to that medium would find it interesting to see the process and concomitant anxieties expressed so insightfully.

Highly recommended.

Shannon says

I have always been intrigued by Hogarth; his style, his subject matter, his seeming obscurity despite his status as a world-class artist.

This book was definitely a bawdy, raucous narrative which never pretended to be anything less than true to its era (1697-1764.) Yes, there were some lurid descriptions that I tended to skim over, but they were relatively few & far between. Also, such scenes were, at least, very pertinent to the plot and subject of Hogarth's actual life events. They were mercifully short and non-repetitive. While I would be careful in recommending this book, (wise, mature audiences only!) yet it provides a vivid look at the social, political, economic, legal and artistic aspects of the 18th century.

Two things stand out to me about William Hogarth as a person after reading this novelized version of his life: his abiding love for his father and his wife.

I still like Hogarth and I agree with the author that England has let him down badly by not providing a fitting memorial of him.

Lynn says

What a wonderful, bawdy, exciting "autobiography" of a painter whose work has indeed stood the test of time. The sad part is that he thought his work would be forgotten because of a late-life character assassination. Indeed, I felt very sad at the end to think of how he thought history would remember him. Good thing he was wrong because his work showed such insight into 18th century society.

Before the sad part, though, there's lots of fun and some good insights into the development of an artist. That reminded me a bit of "Blindspot," which I also really enjoyed. It's exciting for a non-artist to watch how an artist sees and internalizes his craft. He begins hesitantly trying some new techniques, and at the end, he is just using what he learned.

It's also a wonderful portrayal of a boy from the wrong side of the tracks making good. He'd never be the "right sort," but he could earn respect. Plus, it's an affectionate portrait of a fallible, kind, fun guy. Highly recommended.

Rachel Knowles says

'I, Hogarth' is a very readable book which tells the story of William Hogarth, the famous Georgian painter and engraver. It vividly describes 18th century London and gives a background to many of the scenes that Hogarth represented in his work. Described as a 'raucous novel of a raucous age', in places I found it a little too coarse for my taste. It was easier to read than a traditional biography and gave me a real taste of what Hogarth was like. But at the end I had to ask, was it the right flavour?

The author's note explains that 'I, Hogarth' "is a work of fiction, so some real events have been bent to the demands of the narrative: others omitted altogether, others invented." And therein lies my problem. I do not know which parts of what I have read were true, and which were not.

Though this was, for the most part, an entertaining read, I find the genre of a fictional account of a historical person's life confusing and dissatisfying. As a historian, I want to know fact. I don't mind that fact being acted out for me with scenes that could have been true, but to change the truth, without any indication of what has been altered in the author's note, leaves me with too many unanswered questions.

See the full review on my Regency History blog.

David Kenvyn says

This is a rumbustious rollicking tale, supposedly the memoirs of one of the greatest of our artists. The details are lurid, the language soars, the pages turn themselves. You will be enthralled by a story in which our first Prime Minister, the composer of the "Water Music" and Sir Francis Dashwood and the Hellfire Club all have walk-on roles of one kind or another. This is "The Rake's Progress" brought to life in the alleys of "Gin Lane". Michael Dean has obviously steeped himself in the period, and has produced a book that reflects Georgian London. This book gave me a greater appreciation of the paintings and engravings of William Hogarth, and I hope that it will lead hundreds of readers towards the discovery of a great artist.

Stanley Moss says

This is the second historical/biographical novel I've read by Michael Dean. The first, which concerned the odd friendship between Spinoza and Rembrandt, was quite lively and animated and kept my interest throughout. But I felt that the author (sort of like Steven Spielberg, forgive me) did not know quite how to conclude a work. Much the same this wonderful romp through Hogarth's London. I did love the descriptions, the characters and petty rivalries, the artful rise and fall of our central character. But the enthusiasm of the first 80% of the book seemed to falter in the last 20%. This in no way faults the work as a whole. If you like your history vivid, uncensored, ribald, flavorful, gritty and realistic, then "I, Hogarth" will not disappoint. When a book makes me research the real story, as this one did, I know it has done its work well. I am looking forward to the next title from this master of fiction.

Jim Leffert says

I wanted to read Thorn by Michael Dean but since my library system doesn't have it, I read I, Hogarth

instead. This well-written, colorful autobiographical novel about the 18th century English painter and satirist provides a window on the striving and competition among artists and aristocrats in that time.

Hogarth came from a poverty stricken but well-educated family. According to Dean, from an early age, young Hogarth had to negotiate on behalf of his scholarly but hapless father. After his father ended up in debtors' prison, Hogarth, bored by toiling as an apprentice engraver, catapulted himself onto the art scene as someone who was an innovator in his creative profession.

Hogarth eschewed the static, classical modes of portraiture popular at the time, using his artistic medium instead to tell contemporary stories about the wild and dissolute life surrounding him in London. At times his work flattered and at other times it lambasted highborn people. He also portrayed lowborn people such as convicted murderers, catering to popular curiosity about these notorious individuals.

The problem with this book is with the main character. Born into poverty and striving to become rich and famous, he comes across as massively self-centered, fiercely competitive, and even narcissistic. He spends much of his time carousing and whoring. Often his foremost thought about others is what can he get from them. He does nothing to hide his contempt for all but a couple of his contemporary artists and Peers. Although he is married to a pearl of a woman, he continues his nocturnal escapades and after he catches venereal disease, his marital life takes a nosedive.

There are a few redeeming things to be said about Hogarth: 1) remembering his early poverty, he devoted himself to the cause of establishing residential schools for children born out of wedlock; 2) he was loyal to a couple of people that he admired; 3) if we are to believe him, many of the artists and aristocrats he mingled with were even more dissolute and reprehensible; 4) the qualities he had are recognizable human frailties. Still, this does not make for an inspiring book!

Roger Neilson says

I found this very interesting because of the detailed art material and the capturing of Georgian life.

Lauren says

A caveat to this review: Before reading this book, I knew next to nothing about William Hogarth. I'm reviewing this strictly as a novel and not in regards to historical accuracy.

Written as an autobiography of William Hogarth, *I, Hogarth* is unrelenting. Hogarth is a larger-than-life character (despite his short stature) and the book centers on that personality and its ability to tell the story. It also begs the question of how truthful Hogarth is as a narrator.

My biggest quibble is that the format – which works so well for most of the book – falls apart a bit at the end. Not because Mr. Dean misses a beat – he doesn't – but because the format is dependent on Hogarth's mental facilities and, by the end of the book, his mental facilities are questionable. If anything, it's to Mr. Dean's credit that he crafts such a believable narrative. As a reader, though, I was frustrated by the increasing unreliability of the narrator.

I've read a few biographies and autobiographies that were published around the same time as Hogarth's

fictional one is set, and I couldn't get over how authentic this one felt. At the same time, Mr. Dean updated it enough to be more accessible to a modern audience. Recommended.

Lyazzat says

When all you visits to exhibitions and galleries got into the whole picture. Knowing his art, it was also interesting to discover real characters.

Steve M says

An enjoyable enough romp through 18th century London, especially for fans of Hogarth.

Andrew says

A good piece of historical fiction about artist William Hogarth, who became popular in London during the decades before the American Revolution. It is a story of brothels, bathes, bribery, bastards and debtors' prisons written by an English author who thinks that Hogarth should be recognized as a "national artist". Hogarth would popularize modern moral tales -- and fight to have copyright laws expanded to cover artists as well as writers during the reign of King George II.

It is a Dickensian tale, but about an era full century earlier.
