An Analysis of Hogarth’s *Industry and Idleness*

‘The Fellow ’Prentices at Their Looms’, first in a series of a twelve print series entitled 'Industry and Idleness' by William Hogarth, illustrates an 18th century moral attitude concerning the cardinal virtues of work as a condition of prosperity. Hogarth created series such as this to appeal to a mass audience, and therefore made his imagery quite accessible to the ‘common man.’ Hogarth was also concerned about the “influence, which a representation of this kind might have upon the manners of Youth of this great Metropolis (London)...” (Paulson, p.62), and often encouraged active participation among his viewers by creating contemporary recognizable personalities.

In ‘The Fellow ‘Prentices,’ we are introduced to two protagonists – each representing a distinct personality, and each identified with a corresponding behavior.

Francis Goodchild: Industry – Good – Hardworking
Tom Idle: Idleness – Evil – Folly

The setting and related objects, within the image, juxtaposes the contrast in values of the two characters.

The pre-industrial setting, a silk weavers cottage in Spitalfields (suburban London), is outfitted with two handlooms. Weaver’s cottages, such as this, were common in 18th Century England, and hand weaving was most mostly a man’s occupation. A Master weaver, as illustrated by the gentleman in the doorway, often took on young men as apprentices. A weaver, in pre-industrial England, was a highly respected craftsman.

Take a look at ‘The Fellow ‘Prentices at Their Looms’. Click on a detail for further information.
Items for Discussion

Hogarth gives us visual clues to understand what is happening within the picture frame. How many figures are there in the image? What are the two central characters doing? Describe them: Age (how old are they?) Apparel (what are they wearing?) Body position (standing, sitting – how?) Activity (what are they doing?) Expression, characterization (smiling, frowning, etc.) Position, placement (where are they, what surrounds them?) Lighting (any windows?) What is the third character doing? Who is he? What are the clues? How does his position influence the composition? What are some of the other objects that are found within the composition? Where are they placed in relationship to each of the main characters? What do they represent? Hogarth: His Life, his Art and times Paulson, Volume 2

Shackles: near Tom Idle, indicates Idle being shackled to his work.
**Scepter:** near Frances Goodchild. Scepter a symbol of Royal power. Goodchild, through industry and dedication, eventually becomes Lord Mayor of London.

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**Tom Idle asleep at his loom:** Scowl on his face, worn out coat, uncombed hair. Inattentive to his master and his interests.
**Pint jug:** resting on Idle’s loom. Indicative of source of Idle’s sleep.

**Pipe:** jammed into mechanism while Tom Idle sleeps at his loom.

**Moll Flanders:** bawdy, raucous novel.
**Window:** Light. Physical division of the composition. Light in this instance equals good. The window’s light bathes Frances Goodchild in ‘heavenly’ light, yielding approval.

**Master Weaver/Merchant:** oversees activities of Goodchild and Idle. Closer to Goodchild, favoring him for his work and positive attitude.
**Wool winder:** full of yarn. Goodchild will work to continue weaving at his loom.

**The ‘Prentices Guide:** carefully opened. Used, but not abused, by Goodchild to learn the craft of weaving.
The ‘Prentices Guide: used and abused in reckless abandon. Indicative of Idle’s future.

Francis Goodchild: serene face, bathed in light. Busy at his loom, weaving diligently.
Light wall: behind Goodchild- eventual business sense, order and eventual higher status in life.
**Spinning wheel:** empty of wool and fibers. Diagonally points to Idle, equates with Idle’s attitude and lack of activity.

**Dark wall:** behind Idle – no window. Indicative of poverty and failure.
Cat: playing with Idle’s shuttle, as it is not in use.

Proverb: under Idle – the moral refers to his inactivity.
Proverb: under Goodchild – the moral refers to his diligence.