

## *Dramatist's tips*



### *Themes and style*

The naturalism of seventeenth-century art is inextricably bound up with a metaphysical view of the world. It is for this reason that the familiar objects of visible reality may be looked on as emblems of a higher invisible reality.

*John Rupert Martin*

**Drama:** strong emotions, the poetic, the spectacular. Baroque is all about higher volumes, exaggerated decorations, opulence, colossal sculpture and furniture. Sense of movement, energy, and tension are dominant impressions. Strong contrasts of light and shadow often enhance dramatic effects. Religious conflict is intense, affecting everything from war to verse style – and people take it with deadly seriousness.

**Theatrum mundi:** The world is a play. This is the age where theatre is central to culture. People are theatrical:

Mme de Brissac had colic today. She was in bed, beautiful and bonneted in the most sumptuous fashion. I wish you could have seen what she made of her pains, and the use of her eyes, and the cries, and the arms, and the hands which trailed over her bed-clothes, and the poses, and the compassion which she wanted us to have. Overcome with tenderness and admiration, I admired this performance and I found it so beautiful that my close attentiveness must have appeared like deep emotion which I think will be much appreciated.

*Madame de Sévigné, Letter to her daughter May 21, 1676*

Yet people work hard at *honnêteté*: one should act with ease, directness and a lack of affectation in manner. One should carry oneself in a way that is the perfect picture of the genuine, casual and unpretentious. Yet the *honnête homme* distinguishes himself from his peers not by the absence of art in his carriage and aspect, but by making it exceptionally difficult for observers to catch that art - just like the artist should not show the means used to make the image.

The seventeenth-century notion of *honnêteté* has two dimensions, both of which are relevant to the present discussion. On the one hand, it denotes ease, directness. This species of man had no apparent recourse to artifice or self-composition in his bearing or social interaction, but in a way that parallels certain tenets of baroque aesthetic theory, the individual in social interaction was never to reveal the constructive means he deployed to make his image.

**Maraviglia** (wonder, astonishment): Spectacles abound, be they intricate mechanical contraptions, nightmares summoned to the battlefield or grand events.

**Virtuosity**: if you can excel, do it.

**Intimacy and realism**: show the world as it is, in all its grandeur and horror.

**Horror vacui**: the fear of a vast empty, meaningless world that is hinted by the new science and the Abyss. This is not Lovecraftian tentacle horrors, but Lovecraftian nihilism. What if the universe really is as grand as it looks, but humans are not central?

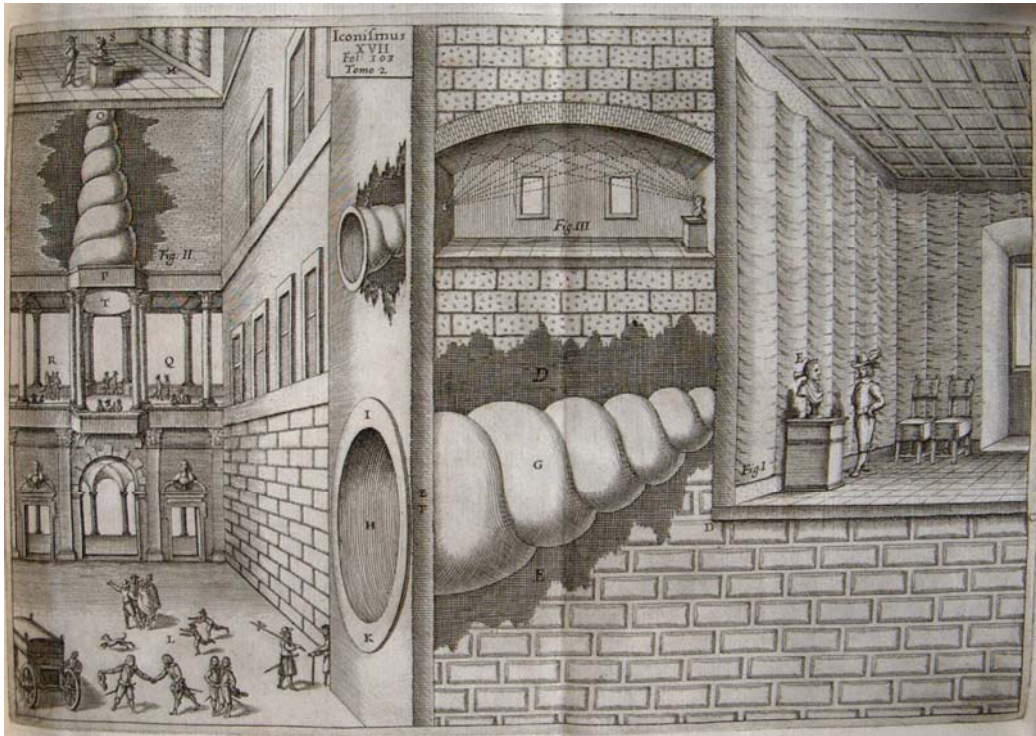
**Plays within plays**: This is the golden era of stories within stories, plays within plays or paintings showing other paintings or scenes reflected in mirrors (*mise en abyme*).

**Masks and disguise**: decadent masques, nobles playing shepherds, people hiding true allegiances, religion and their nature as something else.

**Les bienséances** (*decorum*): matters of style and taste have arbiters, and breaking the rules of polite society has definite penalties.

**Metaphors and allegories**: In dreams, art and speech people often use allegories to express themselves.

## Storytelling tricks



To describe dreams, you can choose random letter entries from the dream dictionary

<http://www.thecuriousdreamer.com/dreamdictionary/>

<http://www.tehillah.org/dreams5.shtml>

<http://www.dreammoods.com/dreamdictionary/>

or use emblems from

Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia* (1593)

<http://emblem.libraries.psu.edu/Ripa/Images/ripatoc.htm>

Alciato's *Book of Emblems*

<http://www.mun.ca/alciato/order.html>

<http://www.mun.ca/alciato/>

<http://www.netnik.com/emblemata/alciatbook/alciatcontents.html>



## Further reading



Neil Gaiman, *Sandman*, DC Comics. Plenty of material for the greater Dreaming.

Nigel Cawthorne, *The Amorous Antics of Old England*, London, Portrait 2006. An endless parade of debauchery, human frailty and perversion. Very entertaining, and the summary of Lord Rochester's play *Sodom* begs to be used.

Guy Davis, *The Marquis*, Dark Horse Press. Decadent, demon infested nobility and an insane inquisitor.

Neal Stephenson, *The Baroque Cycle* (*Quicksilver*, *The Confusion*, *The System of the World*)

*Samuel Pepys' Diary*. See [www.pepysdiary.com](http://www.pepysdiary.com) for much useful information about everyday Restoration life and politics.

John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*. A classic religious allegory, filled with symbolic scenery for pious dreams.

Alexandre Dumas, *The d'Artagnan Romances* (*The Three Musketeers*, *Twenty Years After*, *The Vicomte of Bragelonne: Ten Years Later*) The classics that ruined cardinal Richelieu's reputation. French (and British) court intrigue and swashbuckling.

Rebecca Sean Borgstrom, *Nobilis*, Hogshead Publishing 1999. Useful not so much for content as for style: this is how a mannered baroque game should look. While the flower language flourished in Victorian times, it existed during and was very suitable for the baroque too.

Jennifer Wick, John Wick, Kevin Wilson, *7<sup>th</sup> Sea*, Alderac Entertainment Group, 1999. Swashbuckling adventures set in a not too distant era.

Peter C. Spahn, David Griffin & Michael Patton, *Dreamwalker*. While the game is set in the modern era some ideas are possibly useful. The Taenia are not too different from predatory dreams, and denouements may be useful in this game too.

*Paprika*. Although set a few centuries in the future the complex life of the protagonist has many Cambion-like elements.

Peter Seddon, *Law's strangest cases: extraordinary but true stories*. Bizarre court cases from all ages, with two from 1670's London showing the often arbitrary justice of the time.

Robin Raybould, *The Symbolic Literature of the Renaissance*,  
<http://www.camrax.com/symbol/index.php4>

Early Modern Web

<http://www.earlymodernweb.org.uk/emr/> Numerous links and resources about the era.

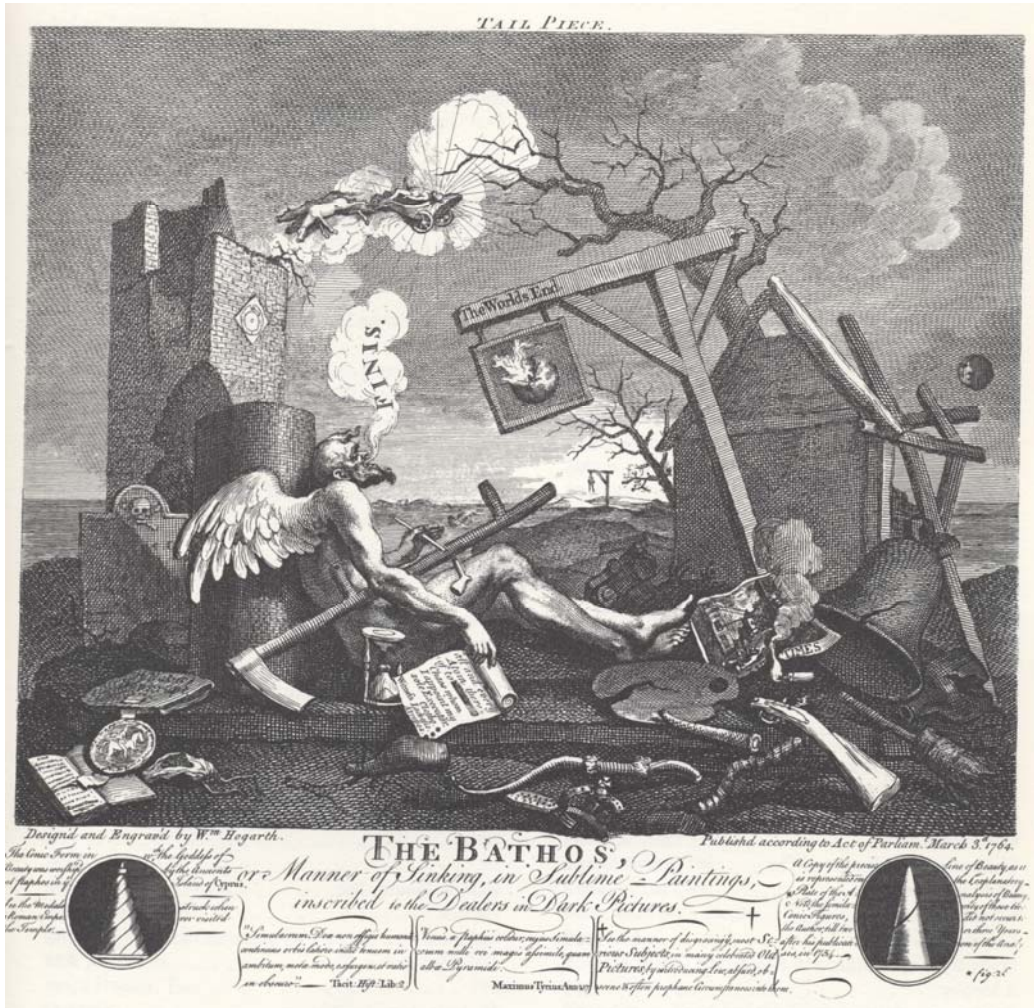
<http://mapoflondon.uvic.ca/map.php> Interactive map of mid 1600 London

Jessica A. Browner, *Wrong Side of the River: London's disreputable South Bank in the sixteenth and seventeenth century*.

<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/journals/EH/EH36/browner1.html>

Occupations in Bradford

<http://www.bradfordhistorical.org.uk/antiquary/third/vol04/occupations.html>



Philosophy, that lean'd on heaven before,  
 Shrinks to her second cause, and is no more.  
 Physic of Metaphysic begs defence,  
 And Metaphysic calls for aid on Sense!  
 See Mystery to Mathematics fly!  
 In vain! they gaze, turn giddy, rave, and die.  
 Religion, blushing, veils her sacred fires,  
 And unawares Morality expires.  
 Nor public flame, nor private, dares to shine;  
 Nor human spark is left, nor glimpse divine!  
 Lo! thy dread empire, Chaos! is restored;  
 Light dies before thy uncreating word:  
 Thy hand, great Anarch! lets the curtain fall;  
 And universal darkness buries all.

*Alexander Pope, The Dunciad*