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THE BOOKS AND BOOK ILLUSTRATION OF Ralph STEADMAN WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO *I, LEONARDO*

BY

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INTRODUCTION

I have chosen as my area of debate, the book illustration of Ralph Steadman (b. 1936), more specifically his book *I, Leonardo*, which he both wrote and illustrated. The reason I came upon this subject owes a lot to Steadman's ability to grab your attention. While searching for a thesis topic I stumbled across an illustration of his. The originality of composition and colour in the work intrigued me and begged further examination. Consequently, I found that Steadman is more noted for his work in cartoon and in caricature and his books and illustrations are largely undiscussed. I felt impelled to examine them and so an arduous task lay before me.

To my delight I discovered that Steadman is not only a book illustrator but an author as well, which interested me as a prospective book designer. It seems he is quite a prolific artist and my discussion could have taken a number of different directions. However, I've chosen *I, Leonardo* for special consideration because it appears to me to be an embodiment of all that is wonderful about Ralph Steadman - his talent as a writer, his humour and, above all, his dynamic and compulsive illustrations. In my opinion, *I, Leonardo* is a landmark in a vast body of work. It signals the climax of Steadman's exploration into books and their illustrations while at the same time acting as a springboard, directing him down even more diverse avenues. Hence, an indepth critical analysis of *I, Leonardo* will form the main body of my discussion, the work placed in context with what Steadman has achieved before and after.

The assignment was by no means an easy one. Material relevant to my subject was extremely difficult to obtain, simply because it doesn't exist. Aside from some articles and reviews, there is no comprehensive study of his work apart from his autobiography. Information and facts have been compiled largely from articles written on Steadman and his contemporaries. Regarding the analysis of his work, the vast bulk of this is original. Perhaps the lack of solid material has been fortunate for it ensures one

thing - the work must speak for itself, and I hope to do it justice.

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND AND INFLUENCES

THE EARLY DAYS

Ralph Steadman was born in 1936 in Wallasey, in Cheshire, England. As a child growing up in North Wales, being an artist was not number one on his list of priorities. He entertained a number of possible career options from a pilot to a Bank Manager. Unusual being Steadman's forte, he busied himself at a variety of jobs such as store boy in Woolworths, a swimming pool attendant, gardener and a wall of death motorbike cleaner! (Manton, 1983, p.26). His interest in aeroplanes led him to technical college to study aircraft engineering and it was here he felt an inkling to meddle a little more with the drawings, to twist them and see what happened. This training is evident in his work today as he tends to use the straight line and compass a lot (Marantz, 1992, p.218). 1954 - 56 saw him serving in the Royal Air Force and following that he studied part-time at the London College of Printing from 1958 - 1962. At some stage in his art education he took a Percy V. Bradshaw Press Art correspondence course which had lessons on both general art and cartooning. Following Bradshaw's advice, Steadman spent many hours drawing from life in the pub, with nothing but the odd pint for his trouble (Manton, 1983, p.26).

While studying he was offered a London-based job as a cartoonist for the Northern Group of Kemsley newspapers. That was the last full-time job he ever accepted. He felt he needed something better, and if he didn't leave then, he'd get trapped (Manton, 1983, p.26). As he'd become more involved he realised there was a lot more to cartooning than just a funny little picture in the corner of a newspaper. The idea of telling stories accompanied by drawings intrigued him and probably explains why he has become so involved with books since then. As he was studying art at the same time, he felt that the more he learned to draw, the more difficult it became for him simply to draw a funny face with a big nose that was the the same face he'd drawn yesterday and the day before

(Steadman, 1984, p.11).

However, Art School is not something Steadman is too enamoured with. Contrary to what you may imagine, he reckons the whole art school system lacks discipline and direction. When he was a student, "Basic Design" was in vogue and academic drawing was deemed obsolete (Steadman, 1984, p.20). He argues that first one should absorb and learn as much as possible, letting creativity take second place. Drawing, Steadman argues, is one of the finest disciplines there is and therefore should be slavishly administered to for 2/3 years. Basically he feels that, if you're an artist, drawing is something you should be able to do with the ease of thinking(Steadman, 1984, p.20). For someone endowed with an apparent spontaneous nature, this is an interesting comment.

Education was important to Steadman, he speaks highly of two tutors - Stanley Squires and Leslie Richardson. Squires made Steadman aware of the aesthetic quality of line, indeed of anything, and his work is evidence that he learned well. Richardson taught both Steadman and Gerald Scarfe (who has a style arguably similar to Steadman's) life-drawing at the Victorian and Albert Museum. Scarfe met Steadman at the Cartoonists Club in 1962 and the two became great friends, discovering they had a lot in common (Manton, 1983, p.26). Indeed it was Steadman who introduced Scarfe to Richardson and the three of them used to get together and discuss everything from photography, drawing, sculpture and architecture to politics and the connections between them all. Richardson had a profound effect on both artists. Steadman writes in his autobiography "Dedicated to my teacher Leslie Richardson". Scarfe pays tribute to Richardson by saying he was the only man who ever taught him anything about art and who encouraged him to think as an artist (Scarfe, 1986). However, more about Scarfe later.

INFLUENCES AND CONTEMPORARIES

The climate in which an artist develops is extremely important as many ideas and values are shaped in the first few decades of an artist's life. Steadman grew up during the

Second World War when all art was at a standstill. People in England were tired of the depression and rationings and looked forward to a return to the arts. Ronald Searle's drawings of Japanese POW camps and Henry Moore's drawings of Underground Shelter scenes made their way into the minds of people and remained there (Martin, 1989, p.11). Strangely, drawings seem to have a greater sense of immediacy and reality than photographs. Line-drawing fitted the bill - it was stark reality; it hid nothing; it wasted nothing. Perhaps we can speculate and suggest that it was during these years that Steadman gained an appreciation for this frank form of communication and a compulsion for honesty at all times.

As regards artists who Steadman acknowledges as having influenced him, he singles out George Grosz for special mention. Also alluded to are John Heartfield and the Dada movement, whose rejection of political values had a resounding effect on him (Steadman, 1984, p.13). Steadman found these a real stimulus. They had the courage to condemn society's values on the grounds that any society that promoted wars was corrupt. The spirit of Marcel Duchamp, their unofficial leader, in Steadman's opinion still inspires artists today (Steadman, 1984, p.14).

Among his contemporaries, I think Steadman was mostly influenced by Ronald Searle and Gerald Scarfe, especially in the early days of the '60s. A decade of major upheaval was underway. The world was changing against a backdrop of revolution, the hippie movement, the Beatles and the Vietnam War. As I mentioned previously, Steadman and Scarfe attended life-drawing classes together. The satire boom was beginning and both believed they could change the world. Steadman worked with conviction and dared to imagine that each new drawing completed was a nail in the coffin of old values (Steadman, 1984, p.142). Steadman and Scarfe first worked with *Punch* and *Private Eye*, which Steadman felt gave him great scope and freedom. They became associated with each other and were discussed as a pair (Manton, 1983, p.26). Stylistically, both were similar and people found it hard to tell them apart. Looking at their work, it's easy to

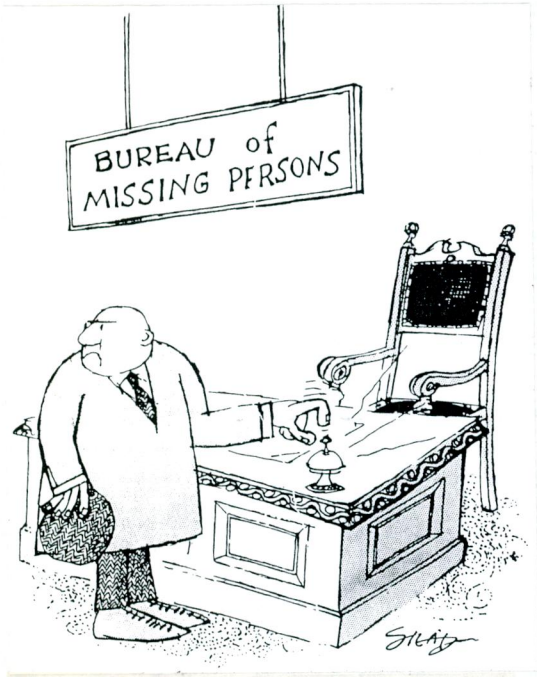


Plate 1. *The Bureau of Missing Persons*, 1961.

Plate 2. *Untitled*, 1960.

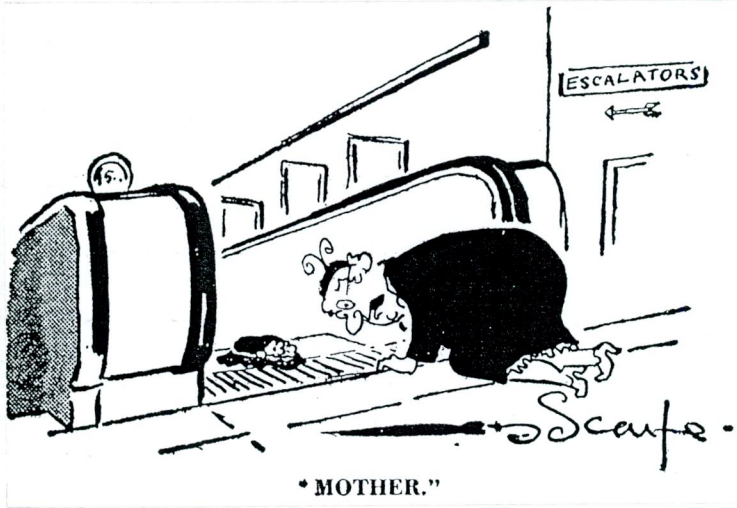


Plate 3. *Mother*, 1957.

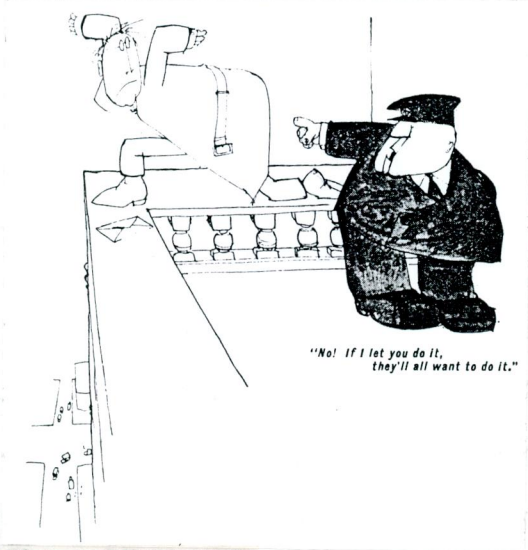


Plate 4. *Officials*, 1962.

see the problem (See Plates 1, 2, 3 & 4).

Two cartoons by each artist from the early '60s are shown here: Steadman's "The Bureau of Missing Persons", Plate 1 (criticised by *Punch* on account of the boxing boots being too distracting), and his debut in *Punch* in 1960 ("Untitled", Plate 2). From Scarfe we see "Mother", 1957 (Plate 3) and "Officials", 1962 (Plate 4). We can see clearly that the artists share the same sense of humour, and the similarity in concept is unmistakable. Both take a slightly eerie and frightening situation and render it comical, Scarfe dwelling more on the macabre. Steadman's early cartoons sparkle with wit and are timeless in their humour. "Untitled" (Plate 2) is one of my favourites. It proves his ability as a draughtsman and the strong lines show a confidence and energy to capture the situation economically. The situation in itself is brilliantly observed. Note the perfect position of tables and chairs, achieved without the drawing looking laboured. Here Steadman satirises day to day life in an average household and confronts the all too common problem of non-communication between people, especially couples in a long-term relationship. The couple are elderly, have probably been married for years and have come to the point where everything is taken for granted. We sense the drudgery of routine hinted at by the household slippers, the husband engrossed in his paper, held at length to compensate for his bad eyesight. His wife, apparently unperturbed, pours his tea over the top of the newspaper and by some miracle aims correctly into the cup which has probably occupied the exact same position on the table every morning for as long as they both can remember. He is interested in what's happening in the world, but oblivious to the events in his own house. She accepts it. It's life, it's the way things have always been and probably always will be.

Scarfe shows a similar adeptness but I will refrain from discussing his work in depth as I feel the relationship between the two sets of cartoons is self-evident. Before I move on, however, I have included Scarfe's "Officials" cartoon (Plate 4) because I think the style of drawing in it is remarkably similar to Steadman's, especially in relation to the figures. Both favour angular shapes to describe the bodies (this is particularly obvious in

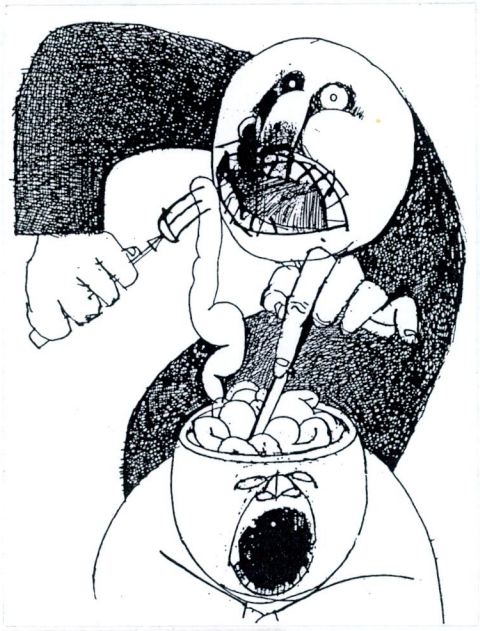


Plate 5. *Plagiarism*, 1961.

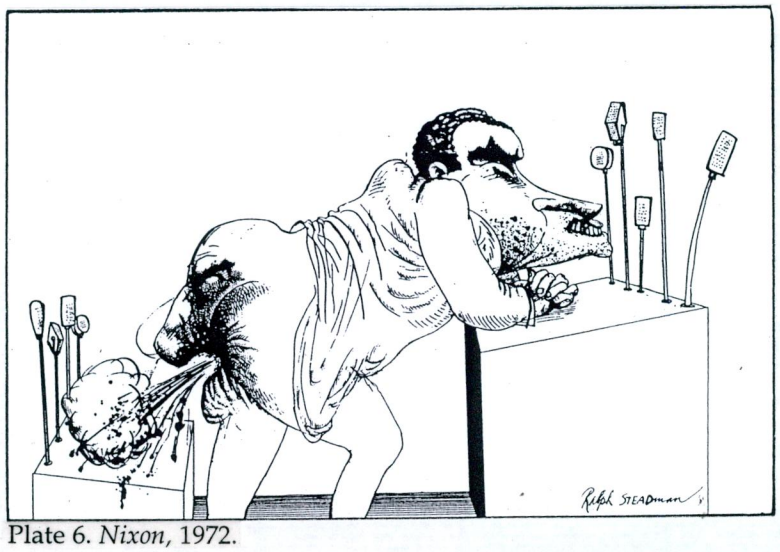


Plate 6. *Nixon*, 1972.

Plate 7. *Die Pleite*, 1920 - 21.

Plate 8. *Pillars of Society*, 1926.

the "Bureau" cartoon, Plate 1). Note the stubby fingers and geometry of the faces. The only difference is that Steadman tends to favour a more circular head while Scarfe uses the rectangular form.

Vulgarity is also something which is common to both. "Plagiarism", a 1961 cartoon by Scarfe (Plate 5) and Steadman's 1972 caricature of Nixon (Plate 6), done while in America working with Hunter S. Thompson, both show how they have been influenced by George Grosz (Plates 7 & 8). Grosz (1893 - 1959) was one of the most deadly satirists in Berlin during the Nazi years. He detested Nazism and his economy of technique - using simple outlines combined with a blatant and savage honesty - were enough to make his disgust at the regime clear (Davies, 1990, p.169). Steadman and Scarfe, and indeed Searle whom I have yet to discuss were all extremely influenced by him. Both the cartoons in Plates 5 and 6 are brutally frank but hard to look at. The connection with Grosz is simply the courage the works show to be savagely vulgar, sparing no mercy in exposing the person or thing in all its repugnance. Grosz inspired them to disregard authority and to speak out.

There's no doubt that Scarfe had a profound impact on Steadman. Quite serious comments have been made on this subject. Alan Coren, editor of *Punch,* acidly remarked that Steadman is extremely argumentative and spends his life attempting to convince people he is as good as Gerald Scarfe. He says it all stems from the '60s when people would commission him if Scarfe was unavailable, hence the nick-name Ralph Insteadman (Manton, 1983, p.26). Richard Ingram, editor of *Private Eye,* had similar comments to make and claimed Scarfe deserves greater fame. I don't doubt Scarfe's brilliance as a caricaturist and would regard him the superior artist in this field. Steadman's strength, however, lies in the variety and strong command of colour in his work. Ingram points out that he sees Steadman as an illustrator and felt his ideas were very crude if not aided by editorial assistance (Manton, 1983, p.44). I feel Ingram has a point here. Steadman is too strongwilled to toe the line and he himself points out in his autobiog-

raphy that he couldn't believe in the motives behind newspapers and was frustrated by the editorial control (Steadman, 1984, p.142). What compelled him to do political drawings was, in my opinion his conscience. He felt the nagging urge to comment on society's "bloody nonsense" - "That's my job - to moralise and to be piously indignant" (Steadman, 1984, p.142). Despite the negativity of both Ingram and Coren, some would commend Steadman on his ability to evoke a strong emotional response without always resorting to savagery. I don't think mere satire was sufficient to sustain Steadman. While he felt a moral obligation to expose injustices, the ironic dependence of a caricaturist on the world's vices depressed him (Steadman, 1984, p. 142). For a man, according to Matthew Gwyther, possessed by a "savage and angry humanity" (Gwyther, 1986, p.14), the sense of frustration and desperation deeply bothers him. For example, *Spitting Image*, while a great satirical masterpiece, destroys everything and leaves nothing in its place (Gwyther, 1986, p.14). Steadman wanted to do more, to leave humanity with something a little more constructive than despair. He wants people to think for themselves and use their own imaginations, an underlying theme which I feel runs through all his books.

It would be a mistake to ignore Ronald Searle in a discussion on the contemporaries and their influences on Ralph Steadman. Searle, (born 1920) is the foremost graphic artist of the modern age, according to his biographer Russell Davies. He is possessed with remarkable versatility and ability to draw using the highest quality of line (Davies, 1990, p.11). Searle is a more ponderous artist than Scarfe or Steadman but he too was inspired by George Grosz. Searle's drawings of the Second World War are legendary and, as I mentioned previously in this chapter, were rooted in everyone's minds at the time. I would imagine they did not go unnoticed by the maturing Steadman. Searle, creator of the St. Trinian girls, is no stranger to cartoons and I think he greatly influenced the young Steadman. "The Child-Hater", (Plate 9), a 1954 cartoon for *Punch*, revels in the macabre and is proof of Searle's ability to tell stories through pictures. This one cartoon tells such a haunting tale. The innocent children queue to buy balloons from the

Plate 9. *The Child Hater*, 1954.

Plate 10. *Full Fruity Character*, 1983.

Child-Hater, who looks chillingly at them from the corner of his eye. When each happy child receives his balloon, they round the corner and are whisked away, never to be seen again. Steadman's cartoons of the early '60s are resonant of these qualities - the ability to tell a story in the simplest form possible and the fascination with eerie situations which leaves you not quite sure what will happen. In fact, Steadman won the Black Humour Award in France in 1986. Steadman's "Bureau" (Plate 1) strikes me as being of similar concept to "The Child-Hater". There are other common traits - the pointy feet and big noses all appear in Searle's early cartoons and in Steadman's later ones.

I can see a startling likeness to Steadman in the later work of Searle, especially with regard to colour and technique. The comic element has already been alluded to, but Searle also has an astounding talent for capturing reality. He does not make the world look funny, he experiences it as funny (Davies, 1990, p.95). This influence is evident in a lot of Steadman's work but especially in his illustrations for *Sigmund Freud* and *I, Leonardo*. Returning to the question of colour and technique, my favourite Searle cartoon, "Full Fruity Character" (Plate 10), done in 1983 for the illustrated *Winespeak*, London, is astonishingly Steadmanlike. The technique used, a line-drawing followed by colour applied with ink and watercolour is practically the same, the only difference being that Steadman is more exuberant with colour and not so hesitating with line. The facial expressions are excellent and the simplicity yet cleverness of the cartoon is breath-taking. Due to the date of this work, it's hard to say who influenced who.

Obviously there are others who have influenced Steadman in many different ways. For example, Steadman is a great admirer of Picasso and believed Picasso was a perfect example of someone who saw in the cartoon way (Marantz, 1992, p.219). He has done 380 Picasso-esque drawings for a ballet. Probably Steadman's greatest influence and inspiration is Leonardo da Vinci whom he reckoned was also a cartoonist, using caricature to invent the ideal Renaissance face (Marantz, 1992, p.219). In his biography he admits that when confronted with a dilemma, he asks himself what Leonardo would

have done and acts accordingly (Steadman, 1984, p.237). However, more on Leonardo and Steadman later.

To close this chapter, Steadman quit *Private-Eye* and left for America to work with Hunter S. Thompson. Their collaboration produced some powerful work in cartoon and caricature. This work's relevance with regard to the main focus of my thesis, Steadman's books and book illustration, shall form part of the discussion in the following chapter.

Plate 11.

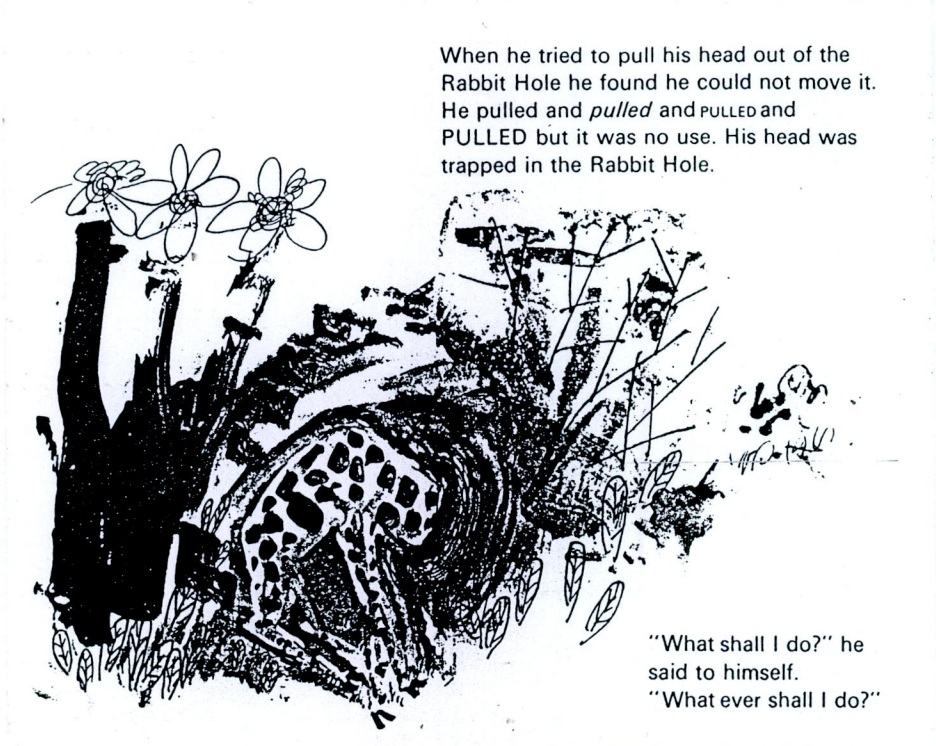


Plate 12.

CHAPTER TWO

BOOK ILLUSTRATION BEFORE *I, LEONARDO*

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

During the '60s, cartoons and caricatures were not Steadman's only interest. Every so often he had enough of newspaper work and turned his back on it, preferring to lose himself in the world of children's books (Steadman, 1984, p.142). While acknowledging the marvellous vivacity found in caricature, he is aware of the other kinds of drawing and is intrigued by what could be done if one reflected more (Luck & Flaw, 1985). Children's books provided an outlet for his energies - a world of bright colours and simple morals. "The children must go to sleep with happy thoughts" says Steadman, and what better motivation for working could there be? (Steadman, 1984, p.142).

One of the first books illustrated by Steadman was *Fly Away Peter* a tale for children written by Frank Dickens in 1964. Its interesting to see how Steadman's technique has changed since then. The illustrations in this book are quite primitive when compared with his later work, although a certain charm is undeniably present. The first indication that it is his work is the rendering of the book title and details in Steadman's hand - that familiar inky, scratchy style (Plate 11). This is a much tighter version, the unjoined letters resembling a childlike scrawl. However, the similarity is still indisputable. It's interesting to see this element so early on, as Steadman's calligraphic hand plays a major role in his work later. Usually the Steadman touch is obviously his but the illustrations for this book are the exception (Plate 12). There are no familiar ink spatterings here; this is drawn in a very childlike fashion. Notice the broad sweeps representing flower stems on the left and the bizarre position of the giraffe with his head down the rabbit hole which adds an element of humour. The leaves hurriedly sketched in with penline and the scribbly flowers supply the only clues as to the identity of the artist. Although it's hard to tell from this photocopy, I would say that colour in these illustrations is used tentatively compared to now. The forms are drawn extremely loosely - no outlines, just

Plate 13.

Plate 14.

pools of watercolour with barely enough detail to render the shapes recognisable.

The illustrations do have a certain enchantment and most certainly would appeal greatly to children. There are flashes of brilliance, my favourite being this illustration of the bird in the story (Plate 13). It's delicately simple, yet wonderfully expressive and Steadman has captured its squawky movement perfectly. Strength of composition is also evident here and as we'll see later on, this is an important feature of Steadman's work.

The Tale of Driver Grope, another children's story written by Richard Ingrams in 1969, provides another insight into the development of Steadman's illustrative techniques. "Children", Steadman insists, "like little surprises, very simple surprises" and he reckons Maurice Sendak is one of the best people to do them (Marantz, 1992, p.222). So his children's books are by his own admission, very simple.

Driver Grope resembles *Fly Away Peter* in that the illustrations are primitive but differs as they're more powerful and colourful. Steadman draws in a very childlike fashion, without the sophistication of his style today (see Plate 14). The forms and figures are described with a bold line, the pieces almost geometric in shape. In this respect they call to mind both Steadman's and Scarfe's cartoons. Everything is in blocks with blocks of colour in it or behind it. Steadman creates a real feeling of a children's colouring book, the constraint of keeping inside the lines. Absent here are the uncontrollable bursts of colour breaking the boundaries of shape and outline although they are hinted at in the childlike scribbles brimming over into the heavy black line. Here Steadman uses different media than we'd normally associate with him - oil pastels and crayon fill in the areas of colour and collage is used sporadically. Everything is strong about these illustrations and there are no subtleties of colour. The figures are drawn crudely, in a manner reminiscent of George Grosz. The use of the inky black lines are characteristic of Steadman, as is the 'Steadman face', recognisable in the features of Driver Grope himself. Humour

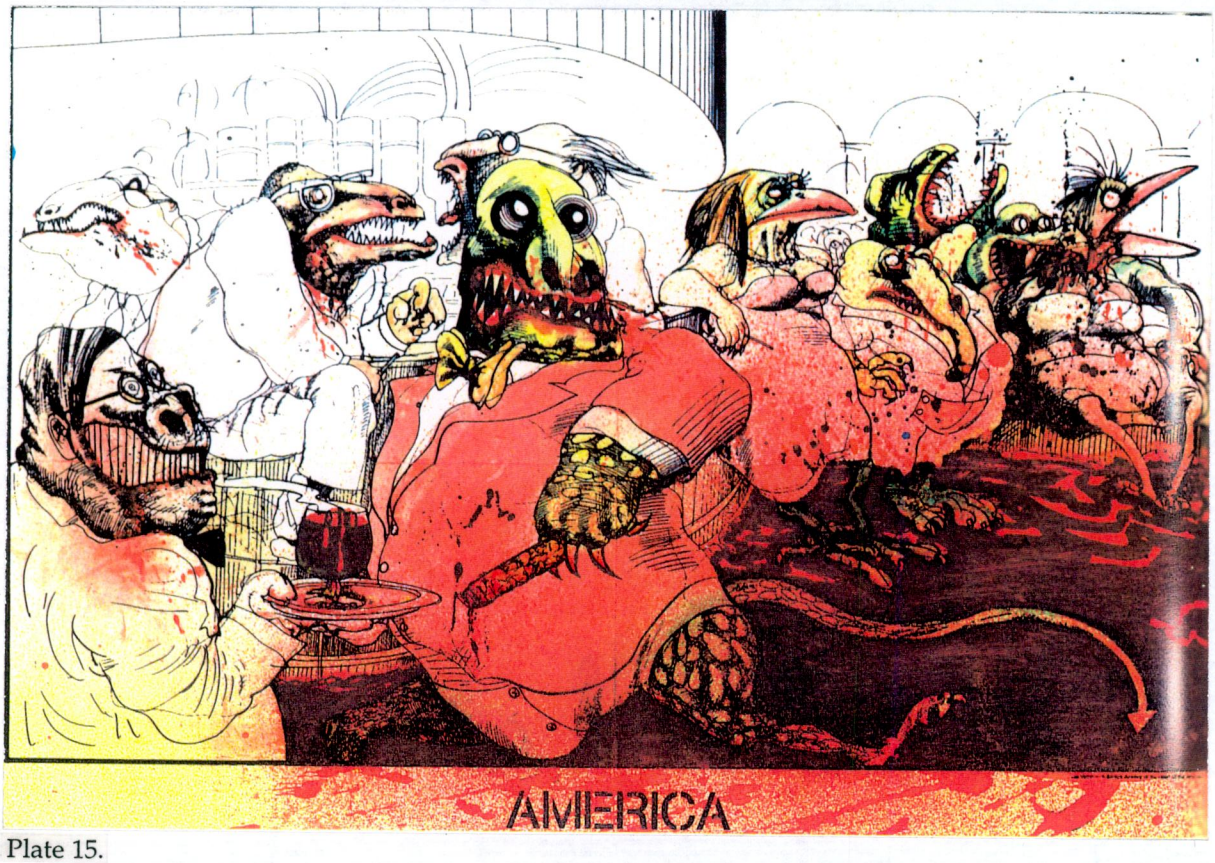


Plate 15.

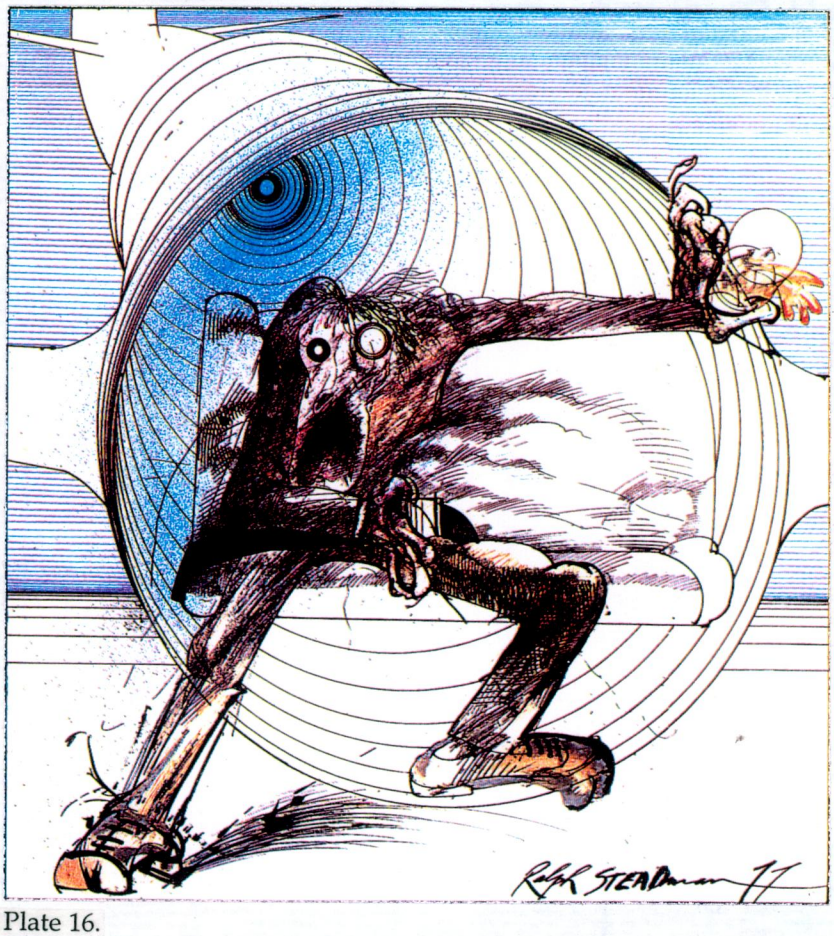


Plate 16.

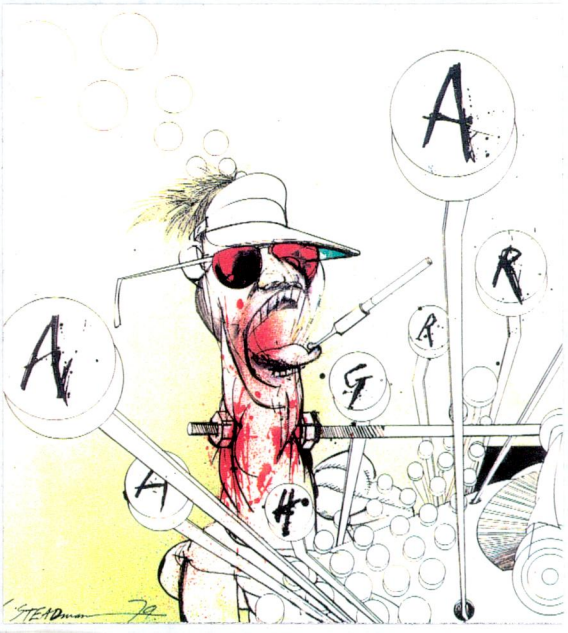


Plate17.

is a significant factor here, as it is in practically all of Steadman's work. The notice "Please do not sniff at this train" (Plate 14) is typical of his wit as is Driver Grope standing proudly, though lopsided, in front of the object of his affections. There is no Steadmanesque scrawl whatsoever in the book or on the cover. In another illustration in this book we see evidence of those familiar splashes of ink. This could have been the beginning because they're used tentatively, not central to the image as in later work.

The first book Steadman wrote and illustrated himself was *The Jelly Book*, written while his daughter was in hospital over Christmas. He painted it in the hospital, inspired by the constant consuming of Jelly and icecream by the children. Steadman reckons that the book was done the right way, with the emphasis on what the kids would like rather than what would sell (Steadman, 1984, p.142). In 1969 Steadman left for America and began an explosive partnership with the writer Hunter S. Thompson, who exposed him to the screaming lifestyle of America. Plate 15, 1971, is an illustration from Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas, A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream*. It is exactly what it says - savage and violent, Steadman's bloody use of red capturing the ruthlessness of the gambling lifestyle perfectly. Plate 16, a cartoon from 1977 deals with Steadman's fear of flying and Plate 17, 1979, is a caricature of Hunter S. Thompson. In these cartoons Steadman goes for the jugular, striving for dramatic impact above all else and indeed the result is most effective. The raw violence of the country had a strengthening effect on his drawing (Steadman, 1984, p.63). Perhaps it was here he began to seriously think about writing. "It always annoyed Hunter when I said I could write better then he could draw..." Steadman is quoted as saying (Manton, 1983,p.26). It is the books written and illustrated by Steadman that really fascinate me as they offer an invaluable insight into the mind and character of the artist. Finally Steadman gets the chance to illustrate exactly what he wants to, knowing there will be no editor telling him that the boot is too long or that a head is too small. For him its a release and his creative imagination is finally on the loose.

Plate 18.

Plate 19.

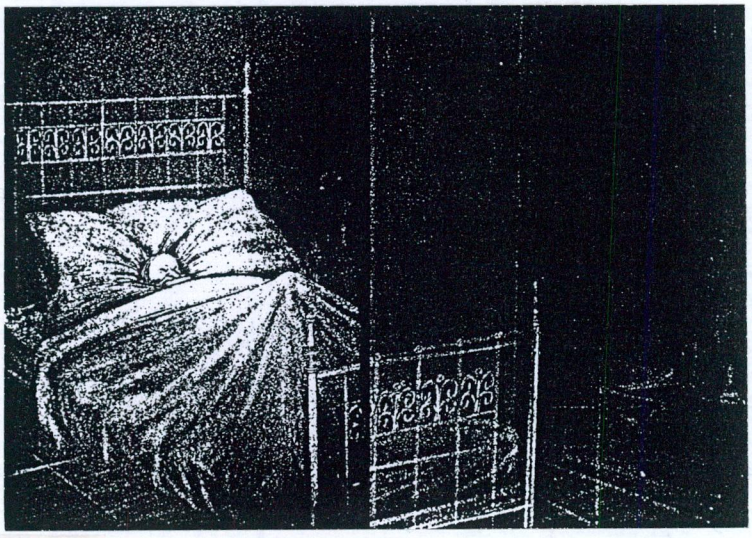


Plate 20.

ADULT'S BOOKS

Before we move on to the main purpose of my thesis - an analysis of *I, Leonardo*, I feel it is important to mention Steadman's book *Sigmund Freud*, published in 1979. This is the first major book for adults written and illustrated by Steadman, and thus is interesting in relation to *I, Leonardo*. The book is Steadman's adaptation of Freud's *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*. It contains a series of jokes categorised by Freud, each one accompanied by a drawing which injects hilarity into what would otherwise be a very cumbersome subject (Burn, 1991, p.205). Steadman's treatment of Freud is sympathetic, presenting him to us as a man of passion, loves and weaknesses, similar to his treatment of Leonardo, as we will see later on. *Sigmund Freud* is entirely in black and white and Steadman's style is now much more sophisticated. His characteristic scrawl adds another dimension to his work, evident in Plate 18. In this illustration we see how the handwritten notes help to convey a sense of intimacy, as if Steadman had actually experienced the situation first hand and jotted down notes on the spot. Throughout the book the narrative is handled well, written in a non-academic way and with humour in mind. Steadman uses a lot of imaginary dialogue and speculates, giving little comments about elements included in his illustrations.

Everything about the book is big! Most of the illustrations take up either one side of the page or a double page spread. The media used are pen, ink and sometimes charcoal and his admirable draughtsmanship is again evident. Black is used aggressively, creating a lot of contrast (Plate 19). There is an occasional change of pace when Steadman uses outlines to describe the figure. In general the illustrations are extremely reminiscent of his caricatures and cartoons. The heads are big, almost grotesque, maximising effect and resembling George Grosz in places. An exuberant and energetic style is contrasted with clean, precise architectural drawings. Steadman sketches the figures in the background in line and black is added to bring the main subjects to the forefront. He finishes the book with a double-page spread of Freud on his deathbed and the effect created is mystical (Plate 20). It's rendered in charcoal and in contrast to the other illustrations, is very

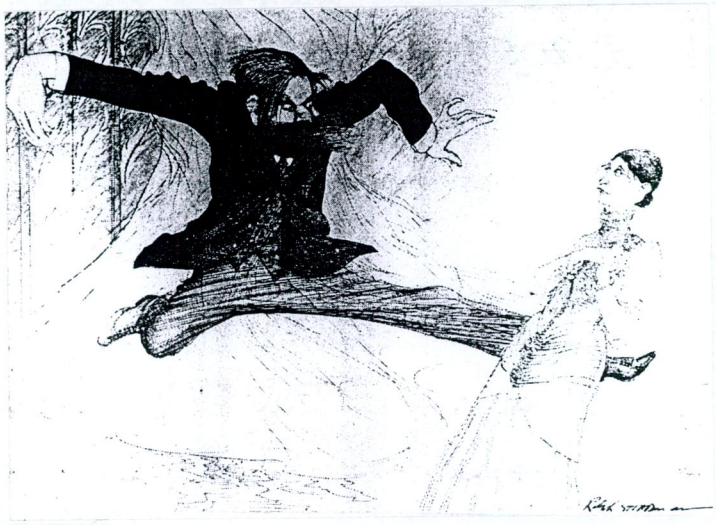


Plate 21.

delicate and subtle. The details are picked out in hazy white, helped a little by a pen line. It's a beautiful drawing, proving Steadman's talent to vary his techniques.

Overall, Steadman injects vigour into a subject normally guilty of being over-dignified and stuffy. According to Martin Bright, his drawings "display an impressive ability to see the world through the eyes of a participant in the scenes depicted" (Bright, 1982, p.595). One of the most dynamic illustrations in the book is "Double Entendre" (Plate 21). The scene illustrates the phrase "It's been so long", spoken at the meeting of two lovers who have been apart for some time. Steadman's illustration is breathtaking. Freud leaps out from behind the curtains, arms outflung and eyes alive, surprising his dear Martha. As Guy Burns comments in his review, "It is a strangely powerful design" (Burn, 1991, p.205). Steadman captures characters very well, the facial expressions memorable. Despite the humour, the book is not a satire, but rather a tribute and goes a long way to improving Freud's image. Freud suffered from being taken too seriously and he himself would surely have appreciated these sparkling drawings (McCullough, 1982, p.500). There are more comparisons I would like to make between *Sigmund Freud* and *I, Leonardo* but those I will mention while discussing the latter.

CHAPTER THREE

THE MOOD OF *I, LEONARDO*

In the mid '80s Steadman called a halt to political caricature, preferring to concentrate on illustration instead. I imagine he became disillusioned with the futility of it all and the lack of visible improvement in the world. He is committed to certain values and does not see violence as ever being justified. Above all, he wants his work to make a difference (Manton, 1983, p.26). He illustrated occasionally for *Radio Times* under the art direction of David Driver. Driver persisted in using illustration and thus, not only showed everyone what illustration could do, but also showed illustrators what they could do (White, 1980, p.46). I think he may have helped instil in Steadman a confidence to pursue his own ideas. Steadman opted to do this by writing and illustrating books.

Books are more powerful than they're given credit for. Stories unite every nation and culture - in fact the very essence of being human is perhaps story-telling (Marantz, 1992, p.220). People relate to characters in books. As C.S. Lewis tells us in the 1994 film Shadowlands, "we read to know we're not alone". Through this form of communication Steadman has the opportunity to reach out to people and make them aware as well as brightening up their lives with humour and the beauty of his drawings. So, between 1980 and 1983 the normally flamboyant Steadman turned down nearly all editorial commissions and kept himself under lock and key, the reason being his devotion to writing and illustrating the life of Leonardo (Manton, 1983, p.26). "This book gives my life a meaning..." says Steadman and persists, "...I am not interested in working for a living, for a career" (Manton, 1983, p.26). *I, Leonardo* is a culmination of Steadman's talent and the result is a contemporary masterpiece. In the next few chapters I hope to convince any doubting Thomas's that this is so.

The cover and opening pages set the scene for the entire book. Their content causes us to make unconscious decisions regarding our approach. We would imagine that a book

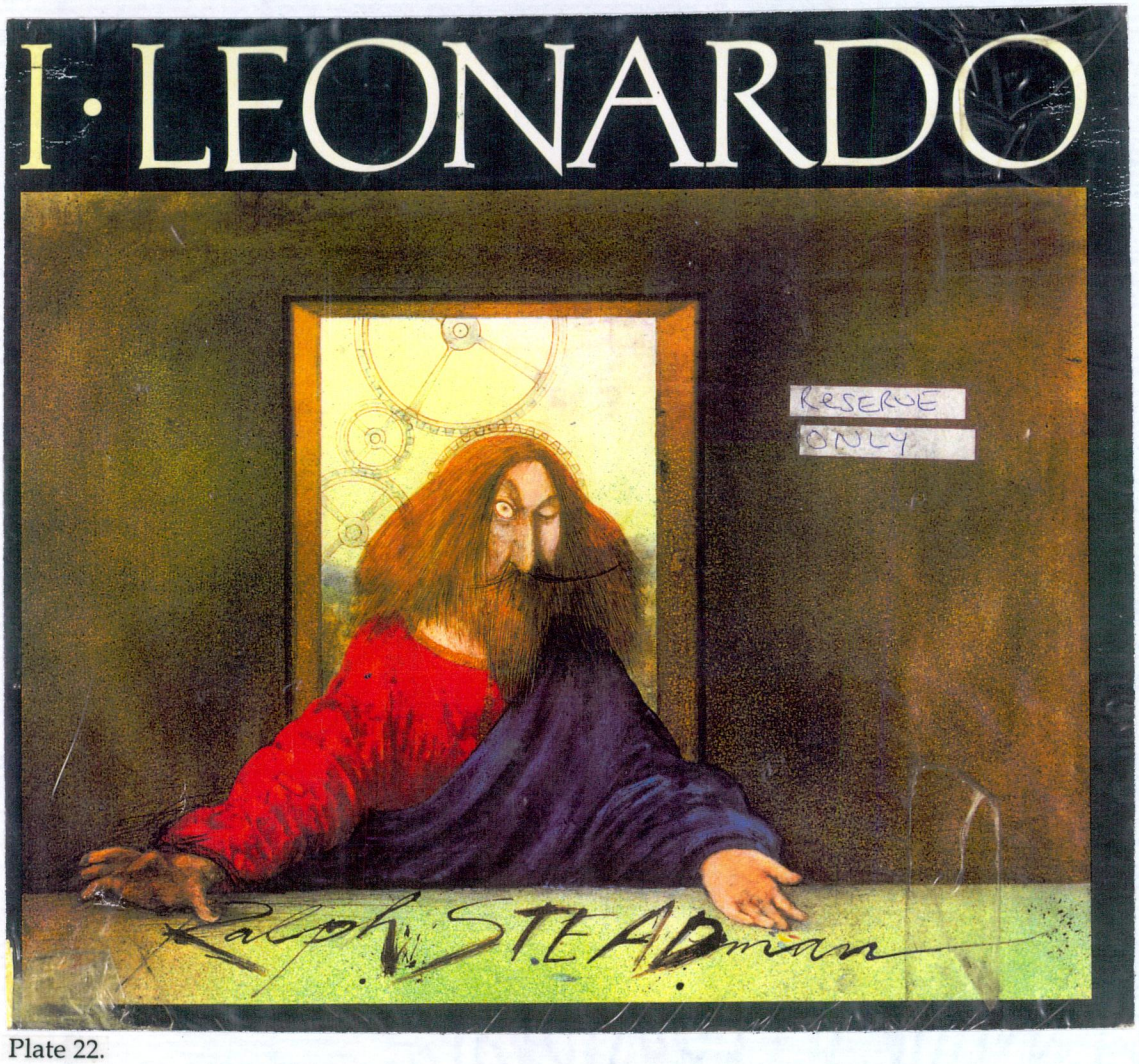


Plate 22.

Plate 23.

on the life of Leonardo da Vinci would be like every other book written on him - serious, intellectually interesting but heavy. However, picking up *I, Leonardo,* it's obvious we're in for a few surprises.

The title of the book is suitably set in a classic serif typeface. The cover illustration is an adaptation of Leonardo's painting "The Last Supper", according to Steadman (Plate 22). He has, if we look closely, given us clues as to the mood of the book. A figure resembling Christ is sitting at the table with arms outstretched as though giving a blessing. However, look more carefully. The figure is actually in two halves. The right side is serene, with palm calmly outstretched from the peaceful blue of the figure's garments, his eye shut in prayerful meditation. I'm not sure whether he is Jesus or Leonardo, probably both. If we look at the left side of the figure it is in direct contrast to the right. Jesus/Leonardo's eye is staring madly out at us, his hair bristling with energy. The left palm is facing downwards, fingers outstretched and the feeling is one of barely suppressed emotions. This side of the figure is dressed in startling red, the colour of passion and rage. Jesus/Leonardo's head is framed against an open window depicting a typical Venetian landscape, rendered not so typical by Steadman's sketch of cogwheels, one of them irreverently forming Jesus/Leonardo's halo. And so we have a whimsical blend of tradition and science, as that manic eye challenges us to explore further.

It is testament to Steadman's ability that he considers the back cover and spine also. A book is a piece of 3d design and should be treated as such. An illustration of dark mountains and a vast expanse of sky occupies the back of the book (Plate 23). What looks at first glance like a bird flying overhead is on closer scrutiny, a figure with wings strapped on, attempting to fly. Leonardo's skill as an inventor is brought to mind and yet again our curiosity is stirred. On the spine of the book, the title and the author are set in the same typeface as the front, both interestingly in the same point size and colour. In practically all of Steadman's other books it is his signature which is usually used on the spine, to differentiate from the book title.

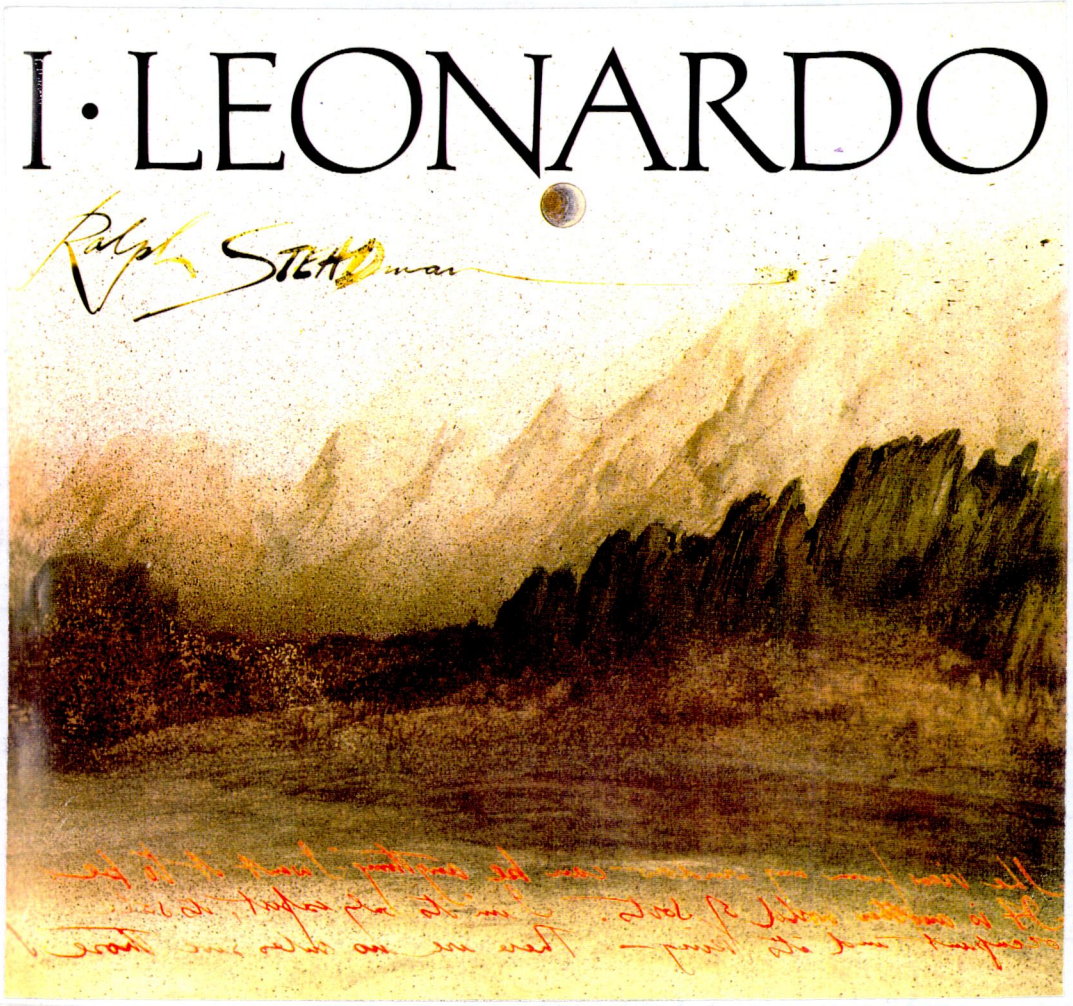


Plate 24.

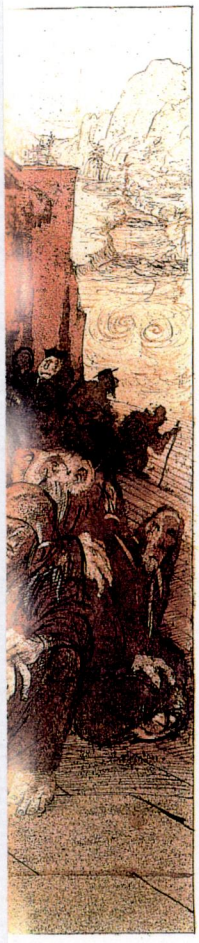
The inside page is white with the title again set in the type-face of the front. Notice Steadman chose to call the book not Leonardo, but *I, Leonardo* which, of course, tells us that we're about to be addressed by the illustrious genius himself, and not some stuffy old professor. It was in 1982 that Steadman got the idea of approaching the book in the first person. If he were Leonardo then he'd know what it really felt like - no experts could tell him (Steadman, 1984, p.235). Having taken this step it allowed him control to tell his life-story without the doubts which accompany biographies. Of course this poses problems regarding the handling of historical facts. Steadman uses Leonardo's actual inventions as the foundation for the book but it is Leonardo's thoughts, motives and reactions to the inventions and life that are fictitious. I will discuss this further in Chapter 5. Another touch on the afore-mentioned inside page is a few brown ink blots veering across the pristine white, beautifully messy, echoing the verve and spontaneity which is the illustrations themselves.

The following double page spread is an illustration of dark mountains accompanied by three lines of narrative (Plate 24). Running across the bottom, the script is written backwards in a beautiful hand, in red ink, illegible but apt, as Leonardo wrote in his notebooks this way for secrecy. In the interests of research I attempted to decipher the writing using a mirror and this is what I found:

> The view from my window can be anything I want it to be. It is another world of sorts. I am its expert, its sole occupant and its King. There will be no rulers save those I write down on large sheets of paper backwards! fold into aeroplanes and throw away. All political parties are banned though I know they are hiding between the first surge of mountains, waiting to takeover. The Fools!

The excitement of trying to find out what this said made me feel like a spy revealing a secret message or code. You can imagine how those in possession of Leonardo's notebooks must have felt trying to interpret them for the first time. I'm sure it was Steadman's intention here to recreate that feeling of revelation. The results are thought-provoking. It seems like a very defiant Steadman/Leonardo staking claim to his rights, daring anyone to oppose his supremacy. I get the feeling Steadman is getting his own back on those who ever doubted him and, of course those egotistic politicians, the bane

of his life. So finally the scene is set. There is nothing left but the dedication page. As regards the mood of this book we now know not what to expect, but what not to expect (realms of heavy scientific analysis). We are about to experience illustrated creative literature for adults and the anticipation is intoxicating. We're put on hold for just one more double page spread. The purpose is to introduce us to the superstition and alchemy rife in the Middle Ages - the crazy world of church zealots and trade routes, the Black Death and self-indulgent princes and kings. Accompanying the introduction is an illustration depicting the insane but hilarious theory that the earth rested on the backs of four elephants! It's no wonder Sigmund Freud once remarked that Leonardo was a man who woke up in the dark (Steadman, 1983, p.1). What must his life have been like? We're about to find out.



I remember little of my mother before birth save the inside of her womb which served me well for nine months long. A closed, comforting world of darkness and warmth which finally delivered me into another world of darkness and uncertainty. She could give me no succour and I was wet-nursed by a goat.

I loved my mother. She spoke with gentle reasoning of right and wrong. She rarely talked of family as of some impenetrable bastion. These were people she knew, that was all – even my father, Ser Piero – but she was not blind either to their virtues or their faults. She instilled in me a sense of openness – a larger world than family confines – a place of possibilities.

Plate 25.

CHAPTER FOUR

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEXT AND ILLUSTRATION

I have already discussed the design and content of the cover, and the initial pages in Chapter 3 but I must add just one other comment concerning the first double page spread (Plate 24). When Steadman signs his signature he does so with tremendous flair. His inky, calligraphic style of handwriting is extremely original and acts as instant identification. However in this book the Steadmanesque scrawl is limited to three lines written at the bottom of the page (Plate 24). In the books he illustrated and wrote after *I, Leonardo* this writing plays a bigger role in the design, especially in *Treasure Island* and *The Big I Am*, where it is used in the titles and chapter headings. There are no chapters in *I, Leonardo* so we are not as aware of this aspect in Steadman's work. Scarfe and Searle both have similar handwriting, especially Scarfe, who also uses it in booktitles and in captions.

DESIGN

The general design of the book is highly commendable. It works as a series of double page spreads, containing an illustration and a block of relevant text per spread. Each section of narrative has a different anecdote to tell and this idea is carried through so well that it is not absolutely necessary to read the book in sequence. The result is that you can open the book at any stage and enjoy the contents. There are no page numbers or chapters, which reflects this intention.

Each double page spread has an illustration which usually fills one side of the book and more than occasionally jumps the gutter. Most of the illustrations are framed by a fine line and inset about a centimetre from the page's edge, though sometimes the drawing is allowed to bleed off the page. Negative space is used to great effect, created by the accompanying small narrative being located in a corner or to one edge of the page (Plate 25). Some pages have too much text to allow for this luxury which means that the white

space created comes as a welcome breather and contrasts well with the illustrations. The book is designed very spaciously and a claustrophobic sense in thus avoided.

Some spreads also contain little thumbnails relevant to the main illustration, accompanied by scribbled notes. These are present for a purpose which will become apparent in the next chapter.

THE NARRATIVE

The entire concept for this book was dreamed up by Steadman and hence the narrative too. At this stage in his career he has had quite a bit of experience writing books including *The Jelly Book* and *Sigmund Freud* (1979), the latter one completed just before *I, Leonardo*. You would imagine that the young Steadman would've been an avid English student but he actually feels quite bitter at the way it was taught in school. He believes it is not exams that are important, but the endless possibilities the language presents us with. Steadman feels that a child should be shown how humour can be constructed and taught, with something funny that they can relate to (Steadman, 1984, p.11). All the material written by Steadman that I have read has a humourous content so this is obviously important to him. And so onto *I, Leonardo*.

The narrative is quite complex as Steadman uses a poetic prose to express himself as Leonardo. The language is infinitely rich in descriptive content and is thus quite complicated. However, one must bare in mind that it is Leonardo da Vinci telling us his story, probably "The Greatest Genius" the world has ever seen, so I'm sure he makes no apologies. The book progresses and so Leonardo's character develops.

As is the way with autobiographies Leonardo recalls to us stories from his childhood. The opening sentence of the book reads like this: "I remember little of my mother before birth save the inside of her womb which served me well for nine months long". Steadman creates humour by writing so matter-of-factly about things which us lower

beings would regard as absurd. Leonardo's mind is such that he considers the possibility that he may have pre-birth memories and indeed does claim to remember being in the womb. It's comical, not because Leonardo tells a joke but because he sees this as natural and rambles on with other bizarre notions which are quite alien to us. You can almost imagine Leonardo talking to a group of 'normal' people and they throwing glances at each other as if to say "who is this guy?"

In contrast to this, Steadman portrays Leonardo as being incredibly naive regarding matters of sex. This is a fair enough assumption to make as Leonardo's mind was so occupied with higher notions that he was regarded as asexual, and was once accused of as being homosexual. The young Leonardo was too intelligent to be a child. He operates on a higher level and attempts to rationalise the activities of his peers as in the following extract: "...I am certain that their struggles and boundless energies were inspired more by strong instinct than strong sense. Nevertheless I did my best to be a boy".

So far Steadman has portrayed Leonardo as being a youngster who preferred the wonders of the outdoors to school and who resolved to seek knowledge only through experimentation much to his mother's distress. He makes no secret of loving his mother and designs many "eventful devices" to help her with her housework. Humour, of course, is ever present as Leonardo makes the mundane wonderful. One of his chores was to put out the cats at night. Steadman describes that Leonardo's task "...was to eject from the house of an evening some of our more domesticated animals for the good of themselves". The accompanying illustration is of the unfortunate cats sitting in a basket about to be catapulted into nowhere!

So far Steadman portrays Leonardo as being different, but also lonely, lovable and irresistibly mischievous, though he doesn't seem conscious of it. He grows into adolescence and his naivety again provides an opportunity for one of the finest spreads in the book (Plate 26). Leonardo begins to grow a beard and becomes alarmed: "Nevertheless I

During this time I was growing in many new ways and the outward signs of manhood had begun to sprout upon my countenance. These signs develop at an alarming rate and one is often taken unawares by the strangeness of bodily sensations that come upon one's sensibilities.

Nevertheless I countered this assault upon my being by devising a way to eradicate unwanted hair. This was accomplished by means of a straight serrated drive bar which engages with a cog and when pressed causes a disc with tiny cutting teeth around its perimeter to revolve at great speed.

It became a lesson to me in the futility of vanity. I strove for many years into manhood to maintain a pride in my appearance. I finally allowed nature to take its course and never cut my hair again.

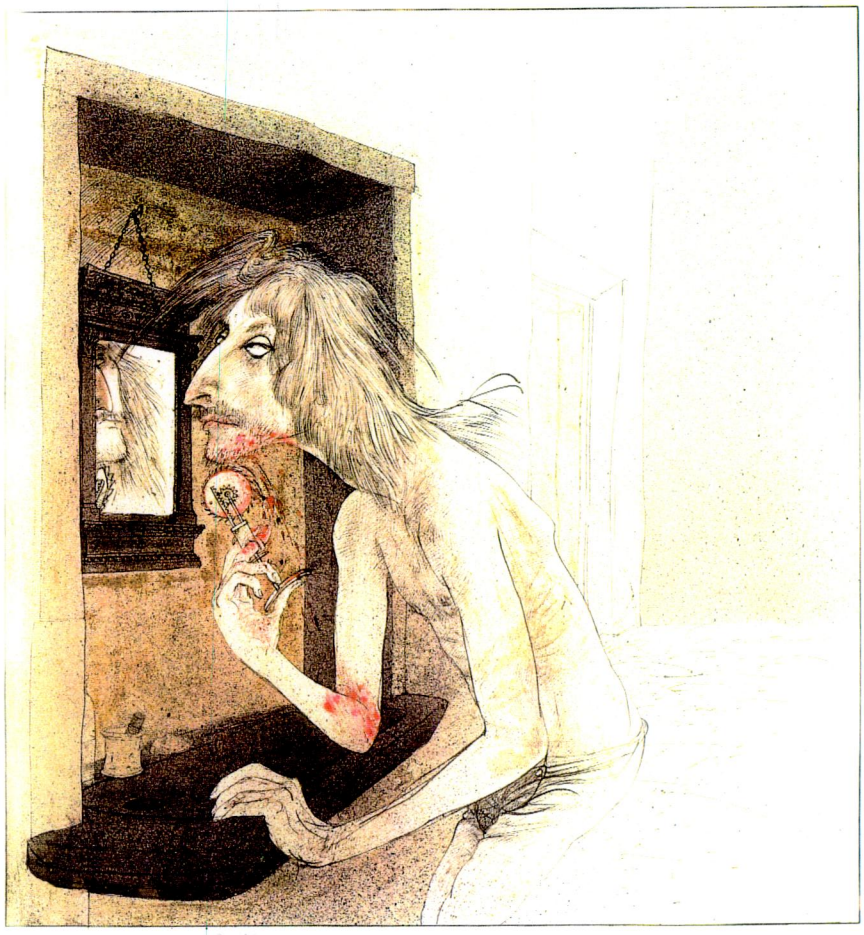


Plate 26.

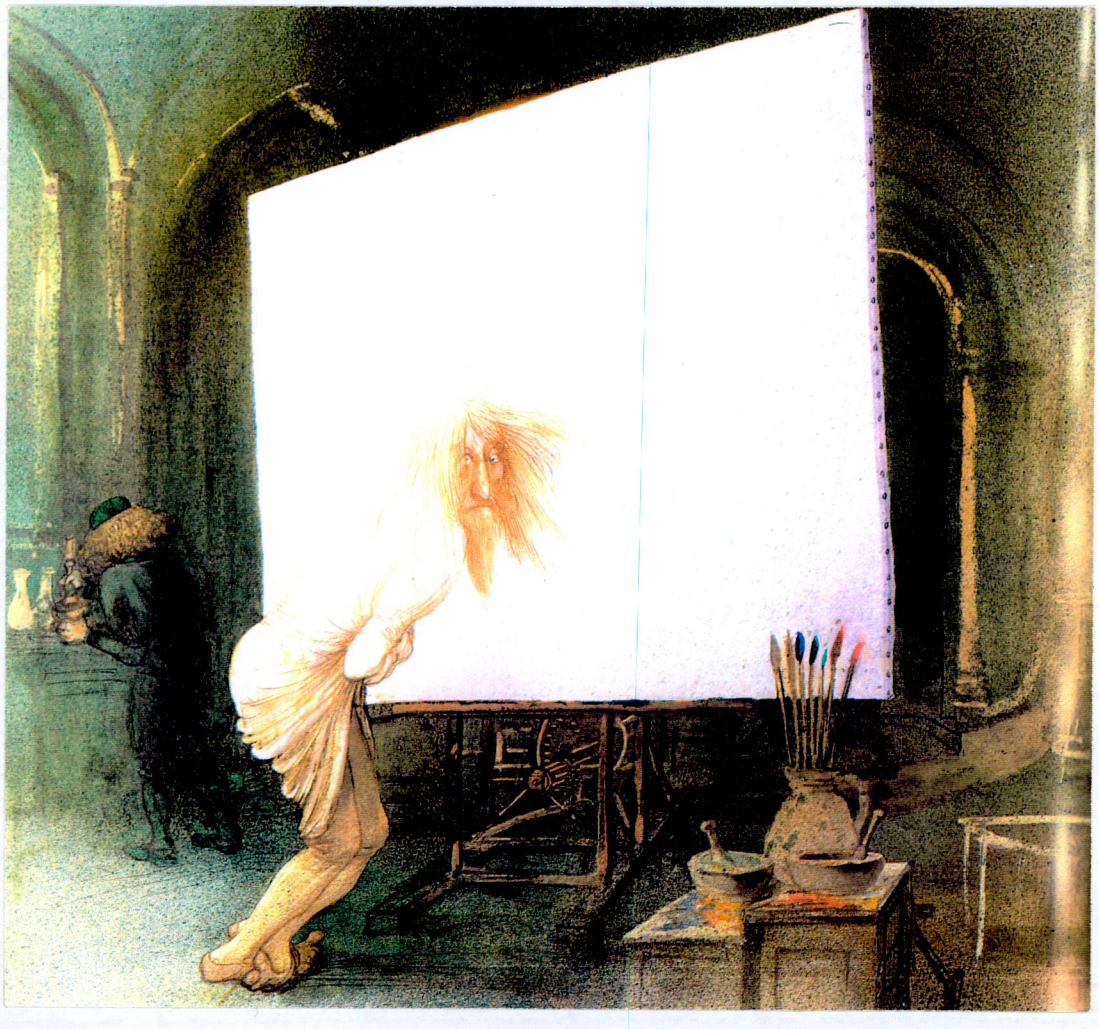


Plate 27.

countered this assault upon my being by devising a way to eradicate unwanted hair". The illustration speaks for itself. Notice Steadman's gory use of red here. (I will discuss this in Chapter 6). The comedy of the whole situation is capped off by the inclusion of an early scribble Steadman made for his illustration. Accompanying it is the caption "He was such a good-looking boy - and bright too!"

Steadman uses the understatement to great comic effect. When discussing Leonardo's "Mona Lisa", arguably the most famous painting of all time, Leonardo tells us how he encouraged the most famous smile of all time: "To entice her and keep her contented I did hire some minstrels..." Leonardo appears so sincere rather than smart and eager to please. The earnest and lofty sentiments expressed in the captions accompany a medley of near disasters and triumphs (Phillpotts, 1983, p.727). As Leonardo matures, so too the narrative becomes more complex as he fills us in on the historical debates forming the backdrop to his life. We learn of his hurt at being charged with homosexuality, his isolation at the hands of his step-brothers, his fondness for Verrocchio and his capacity for great human warmth and tolerance, especially when faced with Michelangelo's insatiable jealousy and hostility. There is a good balance between the serious topics and more lighthearted ones. Occasionally the text becomes so intricate it must be reread to be understood. Steadman deals with the rambling mind of Leonardo brilliantly. Leonardo tends to get sidetracked and so too does the prose. He mutters away to himself, his mind working overtime. He regrettably forces himself back to the business at hand with the phrase "But I digress...", used often in the book to end his rantings.

Steadman becomes so involved with the personality of Leonardo that we wonder where Leonardo stops and he begins. He allows himself to identify with Leonardo in matters such as insecurity. In the book there is a marvellous illustration of Leonardo standing shivering before a large white canvas looking at his paintbrushes as though he feared them (Plate 27). An extract from the accompanying narrative explains: "At times I was overcome with desperate fear and dared not mar the whiteness there before me".

Then came the deluge: my mind was filled with torment.

I et the dark, gloomy air be seen beaten by the rush of opposing winds wreathed in perpetual rain mingled with hail, and bearing hither and thither a vast network of the torn branches of trees mixed together with an infinite number of leaves. All around let there be seen ancient trees uprooted and torn in pieces by the fury of the winds. Fragments of mountains, which have already been stripped bare by the rushing torrents, fall headlong into these very torrents and choke up the valleys, until the pent-up rivers rise in flood and cover the wide plains and their inhabitants. Huddled together on the tops of the mountains are many different sorts of animals, terrified and subdued at last to a state of tameness, in company with men and women who have fled there with their children. And the fields which are submerged by the waters have their waves covered over in great part with rafts, bedsteads, boats and various other kinds of rafts, improvised through necessity and fear of death, upon which are men and women with their children, massed together and uttering various cries and lamentations, dismayed by the fury of the winds which cause the waters to roll over and over in mighty hurricane, bearing with them the bodies of the drowned; and there is no object that floats on the water but is covered with various different animals who have made truce and stand huddled together in terror, among them being wolves, foxes, snakes and creatures of every kind, fugitives from death. And all the waves that beat against their sides are striking them with repeated blows from the various bodies of the drowned, and the blows are killing those in whom life remains.

Some groups of men you may see with weapons in their hands defending the tiny footholds that remain to them from the lions and wolves and beasts of prey which seek safety there. Ah, what dreadful tumults you may hear resounding through the gloomy air, stormed by the fury of the thunder and the lightning flashes forth speeding through it, bearing ruin, striking down whatever withstands its course! Ah, how many may you see stopping their ears in order to shut out the loud uproar caused through the darkened air by the fury of the winds mingled together with the rain, the thunder of the heavens and the raging of the thunderbolts! Others are not content to shut their eyes, but place their hands over them, one above the other, covering them more tightly in order not to see the pitiless slaughter made of the human race by the wrath of God.

Ah me, how many lamentations! How many in their terror have flung themselves down from the rocks! Huge branches of the giant oaks laden with men are borne along through the air by the fury of the impetuous winds. How many boats are capsized and lying, some whole, others broken in pieces, on the top of men struggling to escape with acts and gestures of despair which foretell an awful death. Others with frenzied acts are taking their own lives, in despair of ever being able to endure such anguish; some of them are flinging themselves down from the lofty rocks, others strangle themselves with their own hands; some seize hold of their own children, and with mighty violence slay them at one blow; some turn their arms against themselves to wound and slay; others falling upon their knees commend themselves to God.

Alas! how many mothers are bewailing their drowned sons, holding them upon their knees, lifting up open arms to heaven, and with divers cries and shrieks declaim against the anger of the gods! Others with hands clenched and fingers locked together gnaw and devour them with bites that run blood, crouching down so that their breasts touch their knees in their intense and intolerable agony.

And above these horrors, the atmosphere is seen covered with murky clouds that are rent by the jagged course of the raging thunderbolts of heaven, which flash light hither and thither amid the obscurity of the darkness.

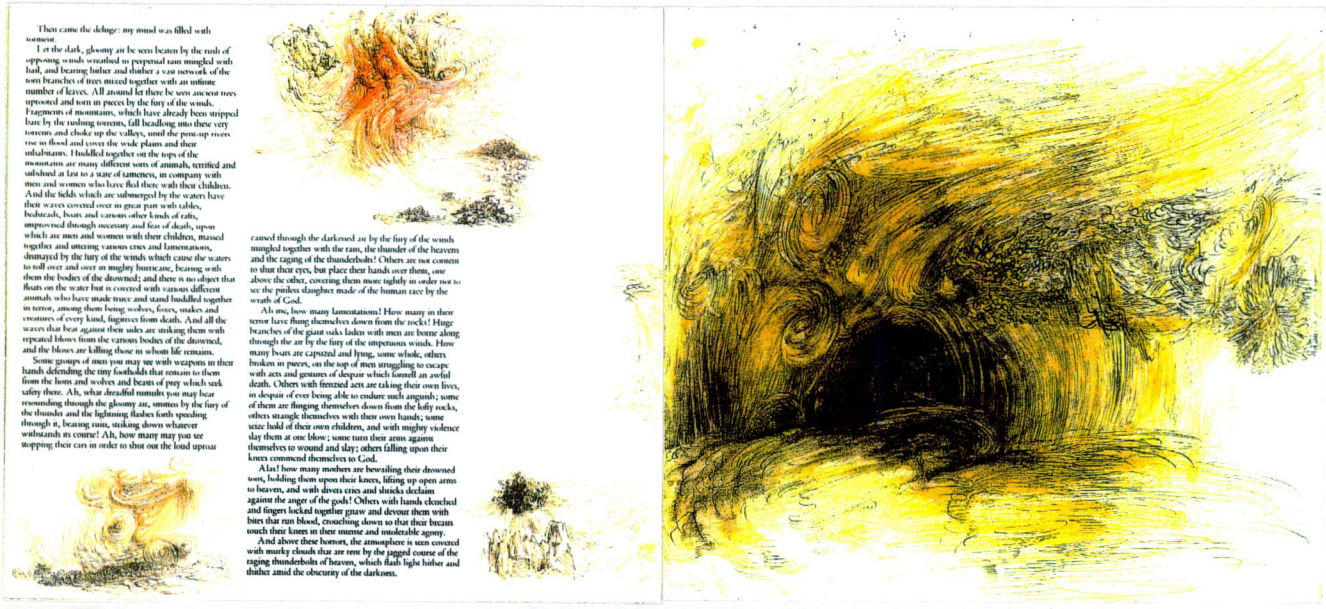


Plate 28.

I put my hands together but they feel nothing.

My papers – I must arrange my papers. Francesco will help.

Maturina. What now – a visitor? The King? Show him in at once.

No sire, you cannot buy my Madonna Lisa.

Friday morning one florin to Salai for expenses – he had three soldi left. For bread, wine, eggs, mushrooms, fruit, bran, for the barber and for shoes … Francesco! Have you called the notary?

Man is a lesser world breathing like an ocean of blood.

The sun does not move. In nature nothing is lacking and nothing is superfluous. Movement can acquire infinite degrees of slowness.

Why bring a crucifix into the room? Not yet! Save my papers first, Francesco. Then I will do as you ask. Call the priest. I will confess and take communion if it pleases you.

Flying creatures will support men with their feathers. The body gives expression to the inner spirit.

Do not weep, Francesco – wisdom will build your house.

Have we done the will? Care for Zoro, Francesco.

Why do the circles of water not break when they intersect?

If you would keep healthy, Francesco, do not eat unless you feel inclined, and sup lightly; chew well, and let what you take be well cooked and simple. Rest your head and keep your mind cheerful; shun wantonness.

Those who have done best will be most beaten. Alas! Whom do I see? The Saviour crucified again? All Madonnas weep inside a smile.

Why is my will not completed? Francesco, wax candles for the churches – more candles – give my brothers light – do not blame them.

Read to me, Francesco. Just one more time.

And feel the swallow.

Who fires cannon balls at this late hour? Must I do more painting? As the great Master willed it so … close the windows – all that noise – surely the festival is over!

The great bird will take its first flight … eternal glory to the nest where it was born. Quick, Zoro, climb on the back of the swallow – he will take you to the eagles.

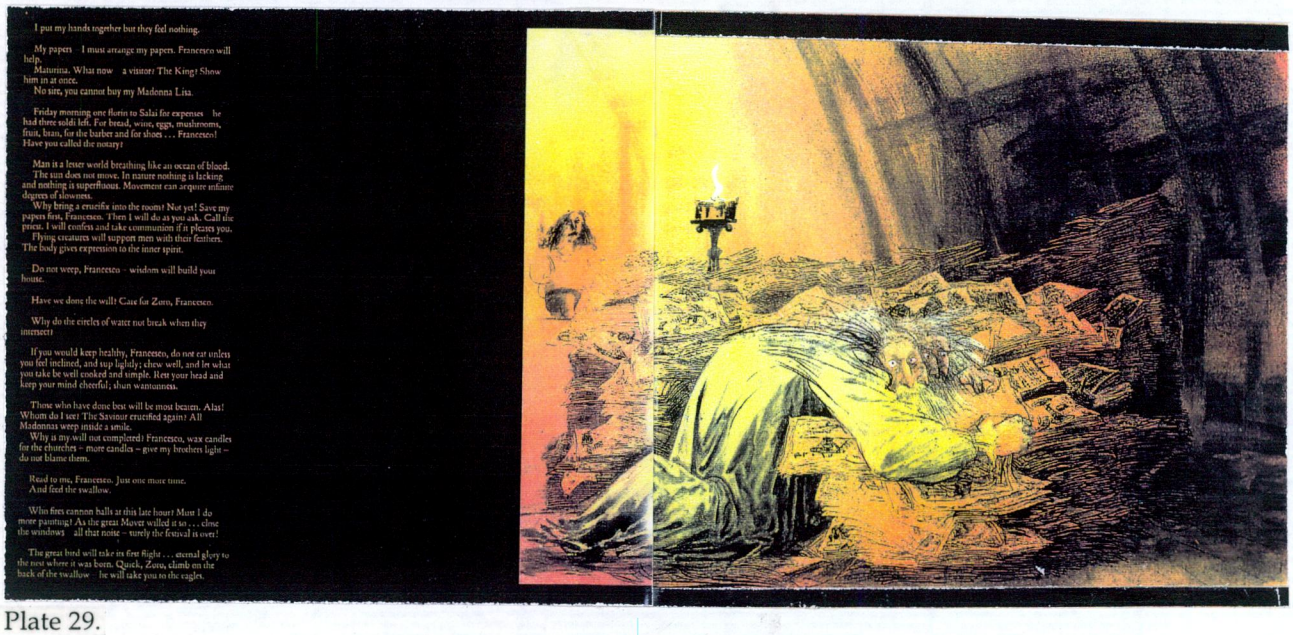


Plate 29.

Similarly, Steadman did a series of paintings called "Heads of State" and admits he wanted to do it to use up clean canvases (Marantz, 1992, p224). "Otherwise" he explains, " you have a canvas sitting there staring at you, its terrible. The longer you leave it there, the worse it gets. It's the fear of white space..." This insecurity allows us to see not the untouchable universal genius, but the vulnerable human being who is constantly disappointed with his own efforts. Also dealt with is Leonardo's tendency not to finish things and his great affection for his assistant Zoroastro, his servant boy Salai and his housekeeper Maturina. Francesco Melzi, Leonardo's young companion, was also highly favoured and it is he who inherits Leonardo's notebooks. And so reluctantly we come to the end of the book. The drama of the last three pages captures the feverish mind of Leonardo in death. The second last double page spread is crammed with complicated text to intentionally create a claustrophobic feel as Leonardo senses death nearby (Plate 28). The last spread is printed in block, the only other page similar is the introduction. The narrative now begins to break up as Leonardo slips in and out of consciousness (Plate 29). His mind races - is his will made? Are his notebooks alright? Will Maturina and Zoro be cared for? He tells Francesco to keep himself healthy and even still ponders over science and those questions which truly fascinated him. It is such an emotion-packed page.

And then, suddenly, it's the last page (Plate 30). Leonardo is dead. On this final page the words become the illustration, written in caps and centred on the page. It says simply: I HEARD AND SAW NOTHING ELSE, THEREFORE THERE IS NOTHING. NOW I AM FORSAKEN". It's a tribute to Steadman's ability to create a truly credible character that we feel the loss. Steadman is no stranger to effective endings. In *Sigmund Freud* he ends the book equally memorably. He uses a style of drawing in direct contrast to those used throughout the book to maximise the shocking effect. The black void of this final page *(I, Leonardo)*, emphasises how destitute the world is without the great light that was Leonardo da Vinci.

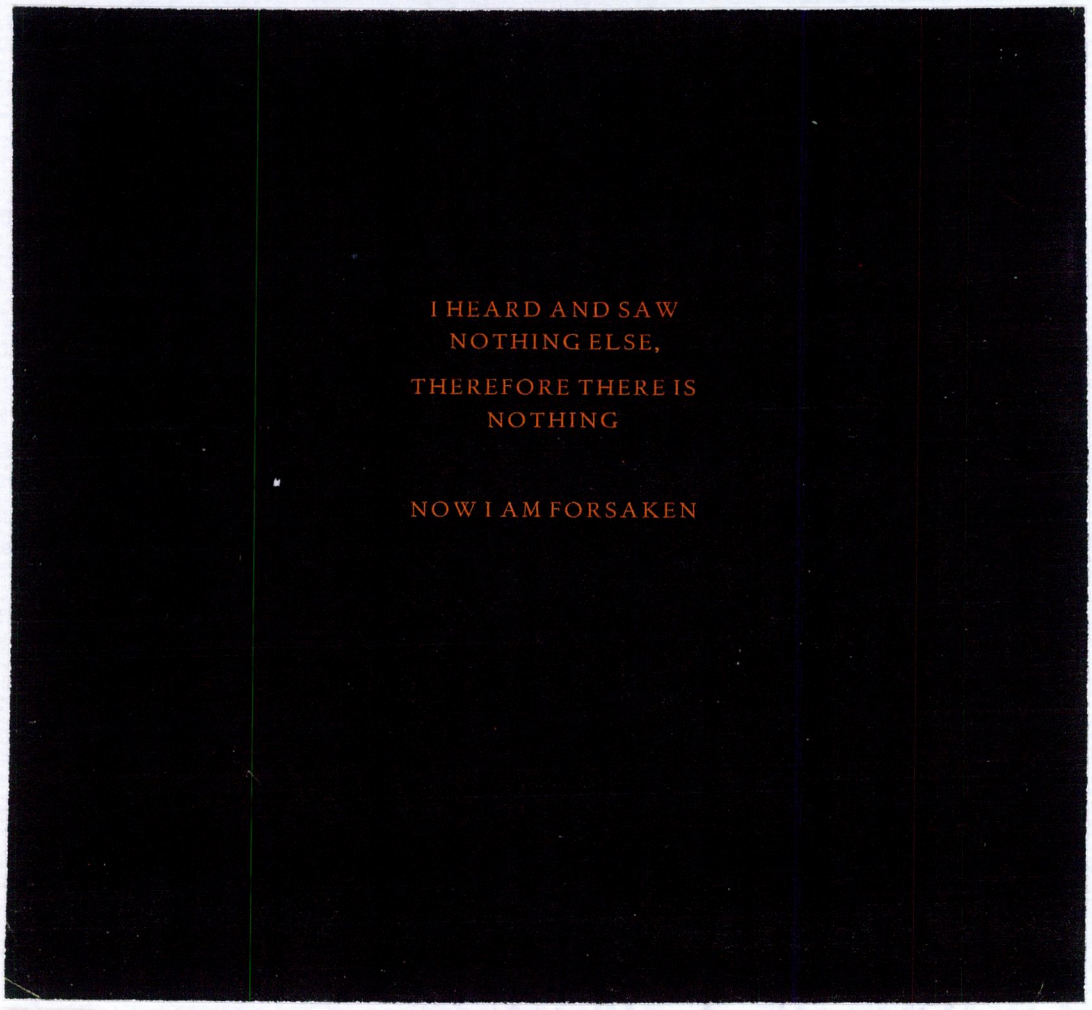

I HEARD AND SAW
NOTHING ELSE,
THEREFORE THERE IS
NOTHING
NOW I AM FORSAKEN

Plate 30.

CHAPTER FIVE

I, LEONARDO AND LEONARDO DA VINCI

My first impressions described, *I,Leonardo* as being explosive, humourous, fascinating yet serious. The book is successful because it approaches the subject of Leonardo da Vinci in a totally new way. The technicalities of his paintings are not the main focus, which makes the book basically different. As I mentioned previously, it inflames your curiosity and encourages you to find our whether or not Steadman got it right.

Despite the comical element, I found *I Leonardo* to be remarkably accurate. It does have an actual historical basis. Steadman went to all those places. He sat for a day in the little house where Leonardo was born and walked down the hill to the village of Vinci. He explored the places where Leonardo used to play as a boy and travelled around Florence and Tuscany (Marantz, 1992, p.219). Leonardo was Steadman's passion and so he threw himself into the research with tremendous gusto.

As a child Leonardo had a dream which he remembered for the rest of his life. He lay in his cradle "...and it seemed as though a kite descended on me. It opened my mouth with its tail feathers and moved about between my lips" (Rowden, 1977, p.56). In *I, Leonardo* Steadman interprets this as being a memory rather than a dream and instead of a kite, illustrates it as a shirt on the line blowing into the baby's cradle. He tells us how Leonardo preferred Aristotle to Plato which meant favouring nature over idealism. He believed that the five senses are our only valid source of knowledge (Rowdon, 1977, p. 23).

There is some confusion over Leonardo's sexuality. Rowdon tells of one or two homosexual scrapes he may have been involved in but says there is no evidence of how he practised homosexuality or with whom (Rowdon, 1977, p.33). Leonardo himself wrote in his notebooks "Whoso does not curb lustful desires puts himself on a level with the

beasts" (MacCurdy, 1977, p.208). In the introduction to volume one of his notebooks we are told that his name is not connected with any woman in the way of love and that the tenderness of a human relationship seemed alien to an artist's supreme purpose (MacCurdy, 1977, p.40). Steadman does not judge him but rather chooses to dwell on how hurt Leonardo felt when his step-brothers accused him of being a homosexual as well as a practising magician and an atheist. "I felt at once the harshness and brutal indifference of man's inhumanity". The only companion with whom he admitted any degree of personal intimacy was Francesco de Melzi, who seems to have been father and son to him at the end of his life (MacCurdy, 1977, p.40). When Leonardo died his notebooks passed into the possession of Francesco (MacCurdy, 1977, p.44). All of this coincides with that in *I, Leonardo*. Leonardo says of Francesco "...In this boy...I saw all manner of qualities that I would like to see within a son of mine".

There are many other similarities which suggest the authenticity of *I, Leonardo*. Fra Luca Pacioli, a mathematician in the employ of Ludovico Sforza was reportedly a good friend of Leonardo's. Steadman refers to this friendship a number of times in the book: "I talked at length to Luca Pacioli, a mathematical professor ...and he became my friend". Savonarola was burned at the stake on 23 May 1498. In *I, Leonardo*, Leonardo tells us of "Fra Girolamo Savonarola - a monk of fearful ideas... But then the fire took him, finally..." The French army entered Milan in September 1499 and used Leonardo's unfinished equestrian statue, his Sforza horse, for target practice (Rowdon, 1975, p.47). Leonardo recalls "...Gascon archers ...used the modelled horse, my own Colassus, as a target for their bows". References are made throughout the book to an assistant of Leonardo's with a strange name: "Zoroastro, my sturdy helper..." "Zoroastro accompanied me for his desire to fly was sometimes stronger than my own". This character does seem to have existed. Rowdon mentions a friend of Leonardo's, Tomaso Masino who called himself Zoroastro di Peretta and was interested in magic (Rowdon, 1975, p.45).

Even the most bizarre anecdotes in Steadman's *I, Leonardo* seem to have more than a

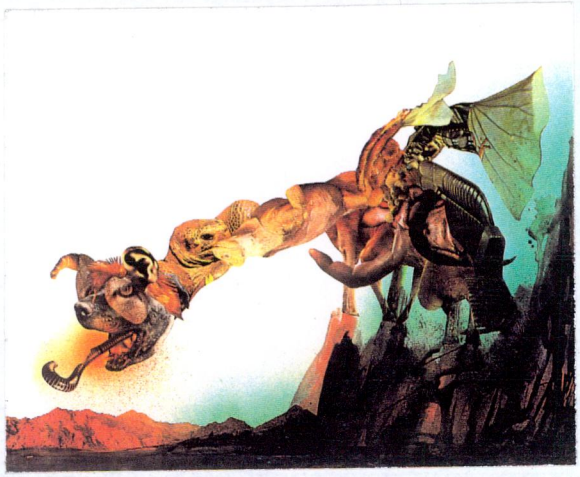


Plate 31.

Plate 32.

grain of truth in them. Leonardo is said to have entertained Mona Lisa with six musicians and installed a kind of musical fountain where the water played on small glass spheres. She came to sit for him in the late afternoon with her sister Camilla, who sat apart with her missal (Rowdon, 1975, p.56). All this Steadman has written and illustrated, even Camilla gets her moment of glory! The mechanical lion which opened its breast to display a bouquet of lilies is fact. A peasant brought a strangely shaped lizard to Leonardo who fastened wings made out of other lizards scales to its back with a mixture of quicksilver. He made special eyes for it, horns and a beard and kept it as a pet, frightening people with it (Rowdon, 1975, p.112). Steadman's accompanying illustration of this in the book is a collage of photographs of different parts of animals stuck together (Plate 31). While it is an impressive illustration on its own, it seems out of place among all the others and is one of the few small criticisms I'd make of the book. There is a hilarious illustration of a huge bladder being inflated by a mischievous looking Leonardo, and it enlarges so much it forces the people in the room against the walls. This surely seems to be fictitious but Vasari reports that Leonardo inflated the guts from a bullock which squashed his friends (Rowdon, 1975, p.51).

It would be a mistake to presume that Steadman has chosen just to dwell on the more whimsical events in Leonardo's life. I believe, contrary to some of the reviews, that the book has a serious context underlying the humour. I get the impression Steadman has deep respect for Leonardo. He gets quite involved with his "Last Supper" and goes to great lengths to explain the concept behind it. Steadman took his role as Leonardo so seriously that he painted a reproduction of "The Last Supper" on an upstairs bedroom wall using homemade egg-tempera paints (Plate 32) (Manton, 1983, p.26). This is included in *I, Leonardo* and also seems slightly out of place due to the different media and style. However, if faced with a decision whether or not to include it, I would. Also documented is the ill-feeling between Michelangelo and Leonardo. Leonardo tells us in the book that Michelangelo "...chided me by telling all that I could not cast my work when it was done and am not worthy to be trusted with another work however insignif-

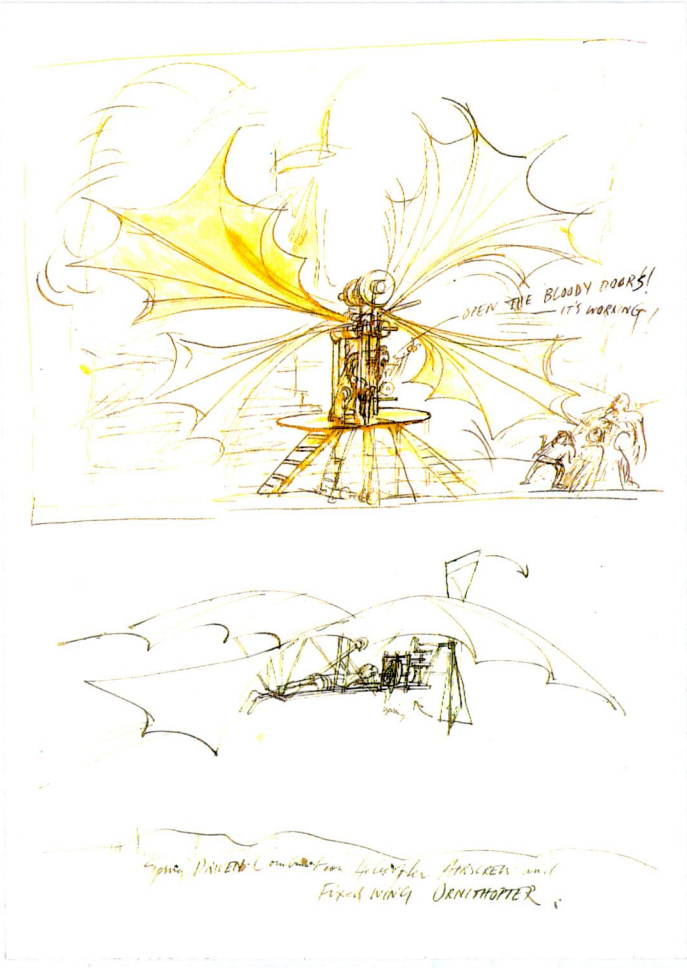
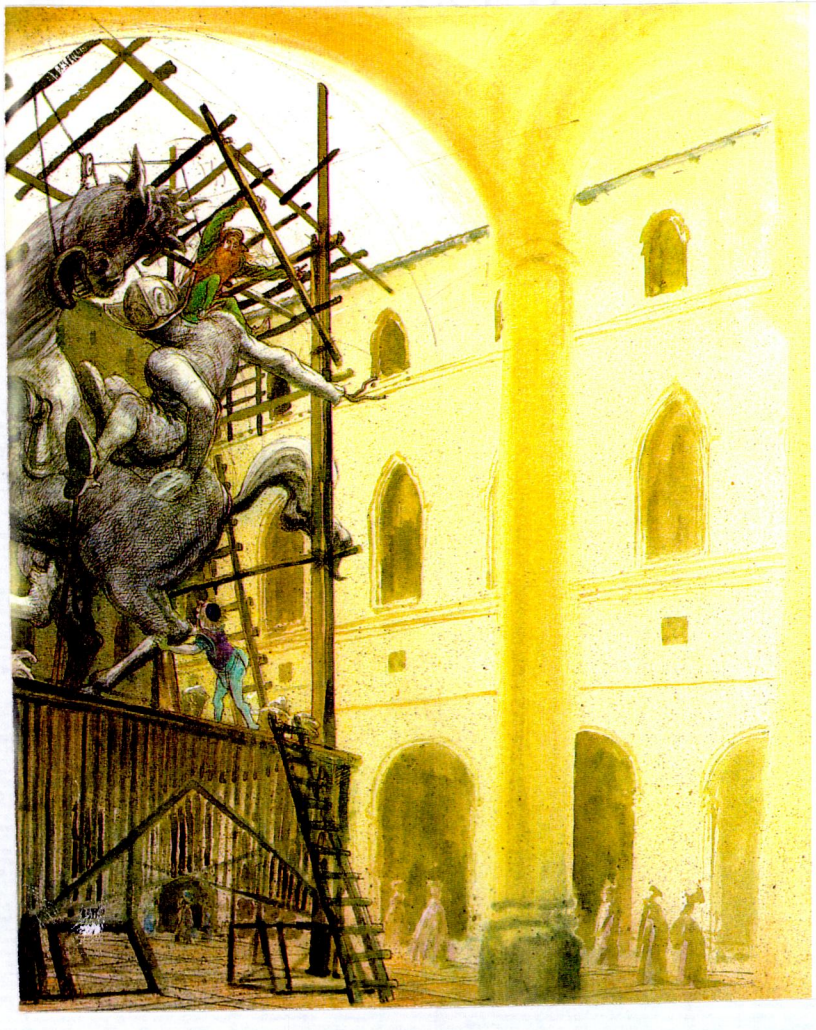


Plate 33.



But in matters of money I remained at a loss and greater as the power of Lodovico grew, so smaller grew my hope of ever wresting remuneration for my labours from his treasurer Gualtieri, who thought perhaps that I was wealthy on my growing fame alone.

For thirty-six months I fed six mouths and all I got for it was 50 ducats. I implored the Duke to help me but he took no heed.

Plate 34.

icant". Then, of course, there are all those experiments in flight, one which ended in remorse when Zoroastro crippled himself testdriving one of Leonardo's creations.

The layout of *I, Leonardo* is extremely important in reflecting aspects of Leonardo's life and work. I mentioned in Chapter 4 the absence of page numbers and chapters in this book. This reflects the fact that Leonardo's notes were, by his own admission, "a collection without order" (MacCurdy, 1977, p.22). Throughout the book, as I again mentioned in Chapter 4, we see not only the finished illustration but the thumbnails as well. This gives the impression of quickly drawn sketches observed while the situation happened, and recorded for future reference. Examples of this can be found throughout the book (see Plates 33 and 34). These little drawings are characteristic of Leonardo and so they aid the impression of the book as one of Leonardo's personal notebooks or diaries. A child's drawing by the young Leonardo is included by Steadman for this purpose also. Steadman includes finished illustrations which are adaptations of sketches found in Leonardo's notebooks, the sketches seen in Plates 36 and 37. Plate 35 illustrates the birth of Leonardo. Also similar to the masters work are the 'undesirable sorts' (Plate 38), which I will talk about in Chapter 6. These are taken from Leonardo's drawing of five grotesque heads (Plate 37).

Leonardo wrote in his notebooks backwards, from right to left. This fact is paid homage to in the first double page spread (Plate 24) and is deciphered in Chapter 3. The lengthy prose which constitutes the narrative is justified as Leonardo is said to have displayed "a remarkable power of lucid expression" and a wise sense of humour (MacCurdy, 1977, p.45).

Many books have been written concerning the life of Leonardo da Vinci but surely this is one of the most original. Not only informative, *I, Leonardo* is also funny, clever, warm and intriguing.

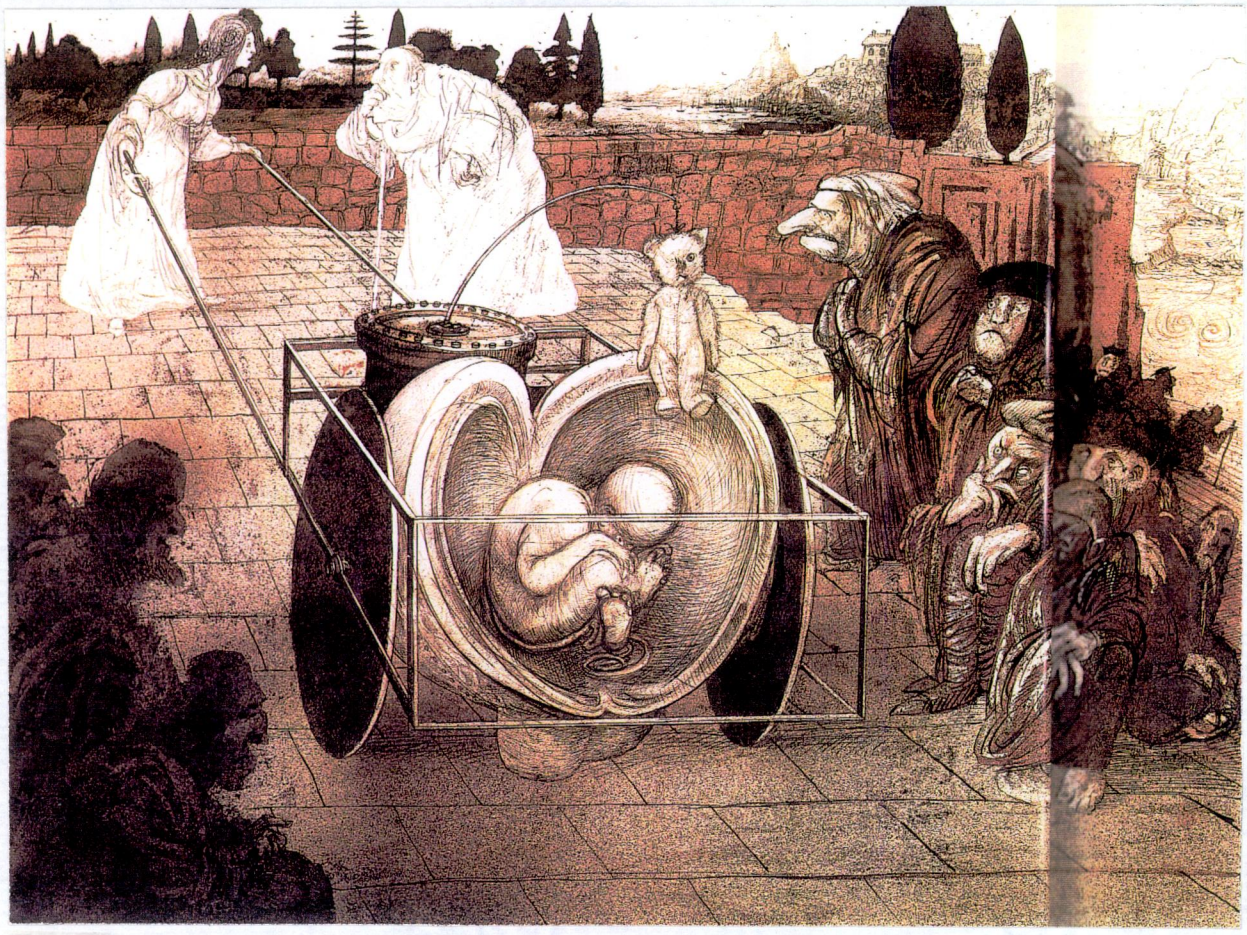


Plate 35.

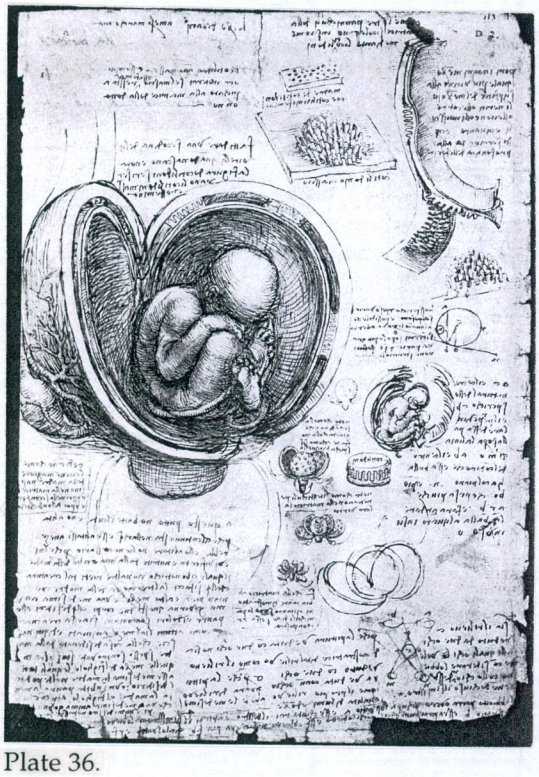


Plate 36.

Plate 37.

CHAPTER SIX

I, LEONARDO - THE ILLUSTRATIONS

The illustrations are perhaps the single most important element in determining our perception of this book. They have an immediate impact on us because we are influenced by them before we have a chance to digest the narrative. My intention in this chapter is to explore what it is that makes these illustrations successful.

Steadman's illustrations capture the frenzy of Leonardo's breathtaking ability and desire to "draw, paint, fly, submarine, navigate, move mountains, catapult, orchestrate, automatically scythe, make striped paint, walk on water, dissect, invest perspective, sculpt, invent corkscrews, helicopters, talk with the dead, cycle and divine the perfect smile" (Newport Museum and Art Gallery, 1984, p.476). Not only this, but Steadman offers us, for the first time ever, the opportunity to get to know Leonardo the person. It's fascinating to imagine what kind of personality a 'Universal Genius' would have, and when dwelt upon, it becomes intriguing. History books and encyclopaedias will not tell you if Leonardo was grumpy, friendly, jolly or blunt. However, Steadman with his original approach and his illustrations speculates and presents us with possible answers. Through bizarre and hilarious situations and wonderful facial expressions Leonardo's character emerges. Right or wrong, it doesn't really matter. What is important is that it inflames your curiosity and reaches out to those of us who would normally never bother ourselves with such matters.

Around 60 large drawings and countless small ones were completed for the book, as well as a reproduction of the Last Supper on an upstairs wall in authentic homemade egg tempera paints (Manton, 1983, p.26). Each one is worthy of mention. Unfortunately this would be impossible so I've made a selection, discussing each illustration under a different heading. The purpose of this is to allow you to see a wider range of the work in the book and also helps me to avoid repetition.

GENERAL TECHNIQUE

The illustrations in *I, Leonardo* convey what I would consider to be Steadman's fully developed style. In Chapter 1 we looked at how Steadman's technique has evolved from his newspaper cartoons and caricatures to the primitive style in his early children's books, the blatant savagery of the '70s and finally a slightly more restrained approach in *Sigmund Freud*. The illustrations in *I, Leonardo* are the most sophisticated yet in terms of quality, draughtsmanship and sheer excellence. The Freud illustrations, which are very direct and aggressive, are in contrast to *I, Leonardo* where we see a much more subtle approach. The effect is elegant as well as energetic and humourous. The *Sigmund Freud* illustrations are harder to appreciate because they are so big and overpowering in size. *I, Leonardo* has variations in both the size and type of illustration. Then, of course, *Sigmund Freud* is in black and white, whereas *I, Leonardo* is in full colour.

Steadman draws in a cartoon way and *I, Leonardo* is no exception. All cartoons have a common thread running through them - the unexpected surprise and the impulse to express. Steadman believes cartoonists should be given more status and considers that once a drawing is not slavishly realistic, then it is a cartoon (Marantz, 1992, p.219). The origin of cartoons was cave-painting, where cavemen drew a line around a woolly mammoth to encapsulate their fear, thus freeing them. Steadman thinks that all creative expression is a form of exorcism and regards this as his major thesis (Marantz, 1992, p. 219). That's definitely true regarding his political caricatures but what of *I, Leonardo*? Perhaps Steadman, though greatly inspired by Leonardo da Vinci, is also intimidated by his incredible genius and the book is an attempt by him to exorcise that fear and bridge the gap.

The power of illustration is no secret. It has muscle, the ability to communicate complex information and establish a cosy sense of intimacy (White, 1980, p.46). However, it's not all easy. Although there is a marvellous feel of spontaneity in Steadman's work, we

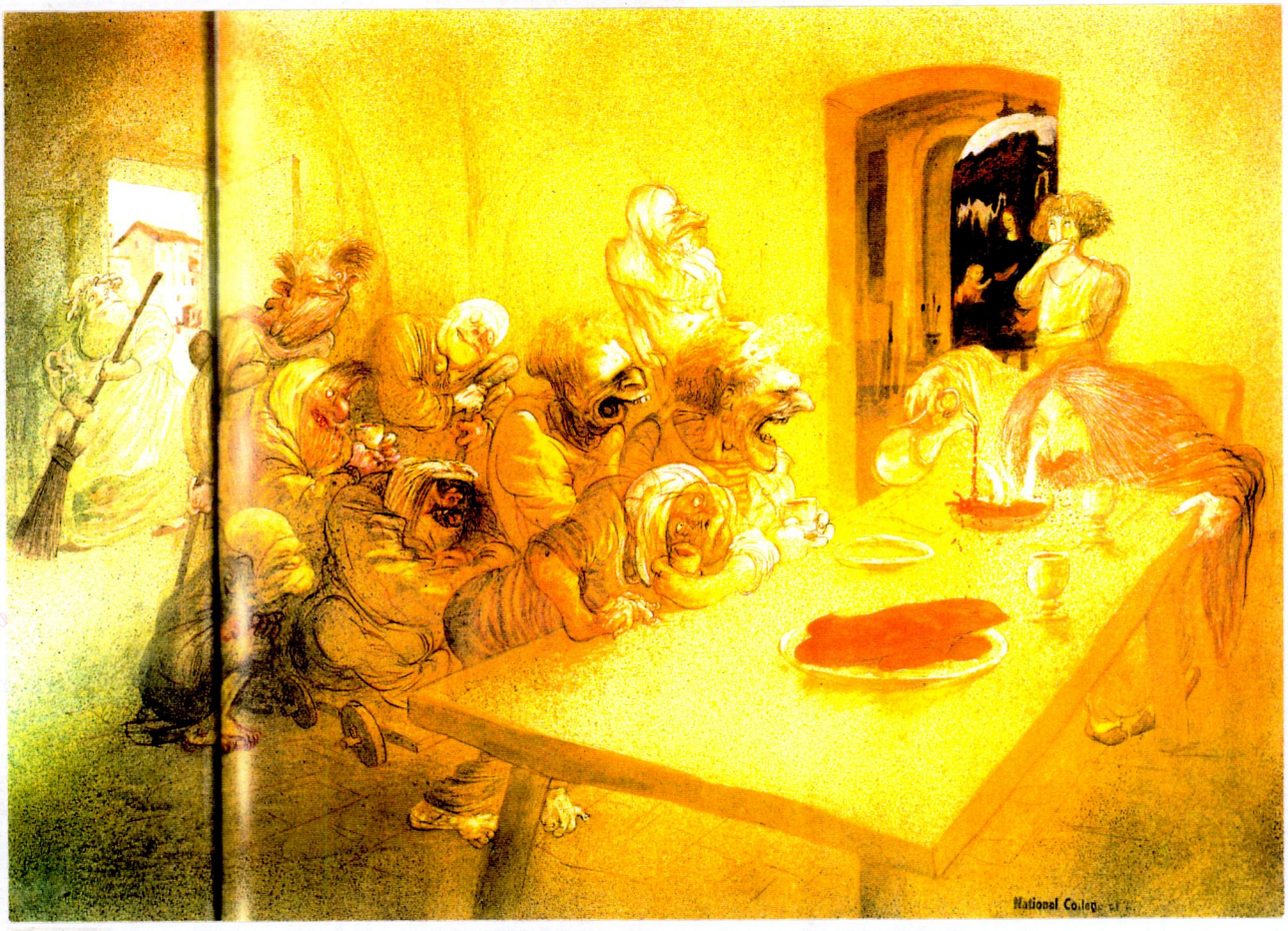


Plate 38.

would be wrong to presume it is produced totally on impulse, without undue stress and exertion. Steadman puts pressure on himself, striving always for perfection (Gwyther, 1986, p.14). Voicing his frustration over a drawing for the American magazine *The Nation* he raves "... I just can't draw the bloody thing ...I've got to do it all again. I'm stuck with a...drawing that isn't working" (Gwyther, 1986, p.14). His problems and frustration helps him to identify with Leonardo. We'll see an example of this later on. Steadman finds that he only gets satisfaction from his work when he enjoys what he's doing. Things he's really hated, like certain advertising jobs, turned our ugly and wrong, according to him. "It comes out as if I can't draw" (Marantz, 1992, p.226). The illustrations in *I, Leonardo* definitely do not suffer from lack of enthusiasm. They evoke a wonder in the joy of living and open up a world of excitement and adventure. Steadman does not endeavour to explain his work. He remarks that what's done is often subconscious and is left for those who analyse to tease out (Steadman, 1984, p.142). Hence, the work speaks for itself and many conclusions I have and will come to are my own.

SPECIFIC TECHNIQUE

COLOUR

I've included two illustrations which show different aspects of Steadman's use of colour (Plates 38, 39). The first, (Plate 38) illustrates the part where Leonardo's servant boy, Salai (little devil), invites beggars and various undesirables into Leonardo's house, promising them food and drink in exchange for posing in the master's studio. Leonardo felt obliged to tell them "coarsest anecdotes to please their fractured minds" and entertained them with tricks. Here Leonardo is pictured pouring wine into a bowl of heated oil, causing the alcohol to flare up and burn before their eyes. They thought he was a wizard.

The illustration crosses the gutter, taking up more than one page. Steadman always does the pictures large as he reckons if they were designed for the book they would lose

a lot of the "gutsy feeling, the essence", (Marantz, 1992, p.222). He is afraid that if he becomes too involved in the technicalities, the drawings will suffer. Having said that he does account for the gutters, placing the focal point off to the right in Plate 38, so no important action or character is interfered with. The focal point of the illustration is a large kitchen table with Leonardo at the end furthest from us conducting his experiments. The grotesque people pile up to the left of the table, grasping their goblets of wine and clamouring for a better view. Behind Leonardo, Salai stands against the wall, and through the archway into what is possibly Leonardo's studio, we see "The Virgin of the Rocks" which Leonardo had begun eight years earlier. Maturina, the housekeeper, sweeps the floor beside the open door on the left.

Back to colour, the focus is on the fire leaping from the bowl as Leonardo pours the wine, the flames casting a warm, golden glow on the surroundings. It's daylight so the shadows aren't too dramatic and the fire adds warmth to the cold blue of day. Colour is used here with a remarkable delicacy and subtlety. There is no excessively strong or thick application of paint, though the work still strikes me as vibrant. Looking closely at the illustration we can see all the original lines due to the transparent quality of the ink Steadman uses. His technique is described in *Arts Review* as "a chattering, spattering ink technique, forcing the fluid into dynamic qualities, spurting, ejecting,splashing and scratching onto the sprayed surface" (Newport Museum & Art Gallery, 1984, p. 476). The tones here are built up with tiny dots and spots of ink, creating a speckled egg effect. This recalls a much earlier and more primitive use of ink splashes in Steadman's illustrations for *The Tale of Driver Grope* (Chapter 2). Where shadows fall the ink speckles are dense, tones created by layering a darker colour on top using the same technique. Areas of extreme whiteness, such as the sky visible through the open door, the leaping flames and the features of those nearest the fire must have been masked out when Steadman went through the process. Watercolour or ink applied with a brush solidifies shapes and shadows in the folds of the clothes worn by Maturina and the ugly characters. The same method describes the subdued lighting of the hallway, the handle of

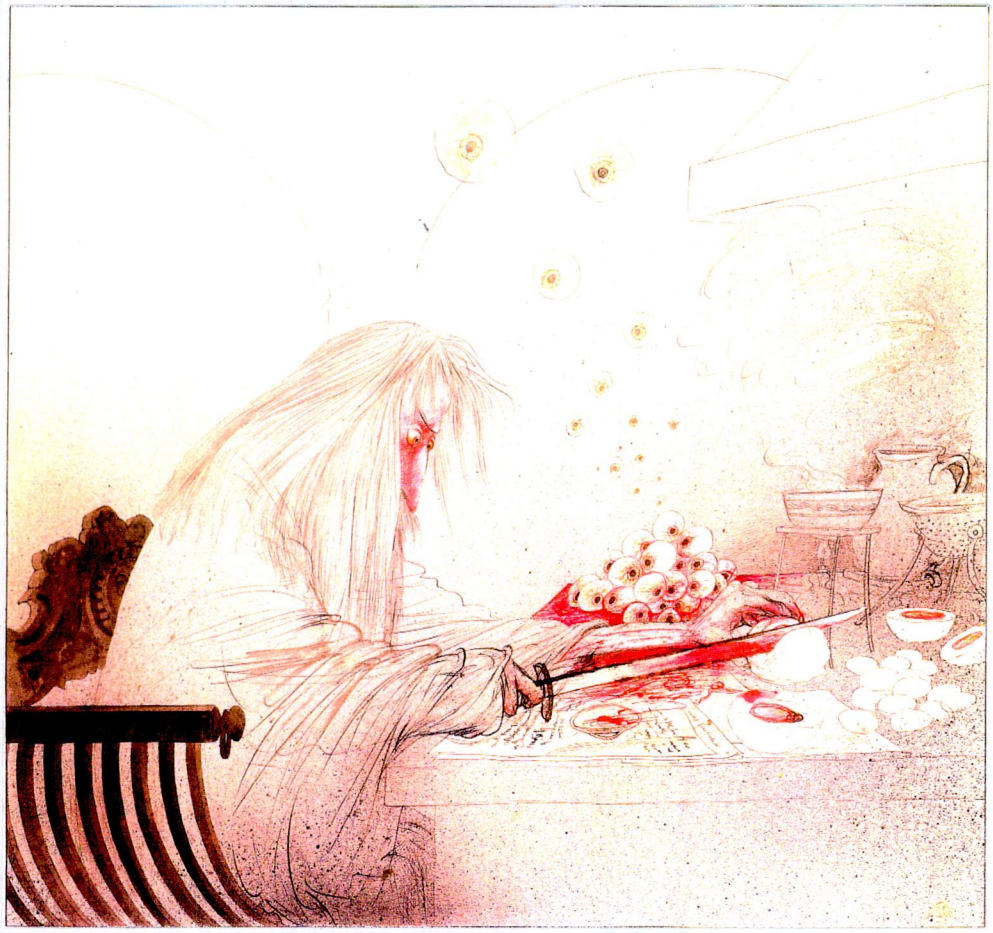


Plate 39.

Maturina's sweeping brush and Leonardo's shoes under the table. Again, Steadman uses brush applied colour to paint "The Virgin of the Rocks" in the background and a fiery brick-red describes the loaves on the plate and the heated oil in the bowl. A restrained use of crimson red is applied to great effect in picking out details such as the bloody eye and teeth of one of the undesirables, and the hands and feet of another. Also notice crimson wine pouring from the jug, splashing as it hits the surface of the oil, the fire spitting characteristic spots of wine out onto the table. Dense penlines form the orange of Leonardo's hair and the brown of the bristles on Maturina's sweeping-brush. Lovely shades of olive greens, browns and even light blues are created to the left side of the picture by the natural light entering the doorway, partially blocked by Maturina's bulk, and fusing with the shadows cast by the firelight. Incidentally, the features of the man standing behind the others, nearest Maturina, reminds me of portraits Steadman has drawn of himself in the past! One wonders is the likeness intentional or merely coincidence.

Plate 39 is an illustration of Leonardo in the midst of his experiments. Here he is dissecting eyeballs, but first, he explains that they must be boiled solid in the white of eggs to enable him to cut transversely through the eye without losing any of the middle part. Hence the eggs and boiling apparatus on the table. I have chosen it because I feel it shows an aspect of Steadman's work which props up again and again. This is the violent use of red to create a dramatic and bloody effect. The drawing includes the barest of essentials. Background detail is merely hinted at with a minimum of line. Leonardo is sketched with furious energy, the brown frame of his chair preventing his figure from becoming lost in the background. He stares with mad, intense concentration at his task - as he slices open an eye with what looks like a sword. The starkness of his surroundings, his scrawny looking arms and fingers and the coldness of the air reflects the fact that Leonardo is a man whose mind is so occupied with a myriad of ideas that eating and sleeping are neglected. The same speckled ink technique creates the subtle colours and shadows. However, notice the excessiveness of red ink forming the gore under the

pile of eyeballs and the bloody stains on the knife, on Leonardo's fingers and on the pages of his notes. This is reflected in the redness of Leonardo's face, as his eyes almost pop out of his head with the fierce excitement of discovery. One would think Steadman was a bloodthirsty, raving lunatic, especially when they realise that this theme recurs throughout all of Steadman's work. I would think he illustrates violence so savagely, not because he loves it, but because he despises it. It's something similar to what I mentioned earlier in this chapter - cartoonists drawing to exorcise their fears. This angry red is also evident in Gerald Scarfe's later work and I would suggest that Scarfe was influenced by Steadman. I think this because colour is more Steadman's forte than it is Scarfe's.

Looking at Plate 38 and 39, one could be classified as warm, the other cool. The former (Plate 38) is Leonardo in company - animated and content to entertain. The latter (Plate 39) shows the intensity with which he works. Steadman uses a balance of warm and cool colours throughout the book, which contributes to the changes in pace. Golden yellow is one colour which features a lot. It creates, in my opinion, an atmosphere of nostalgia, giving the impression of photographs yellowing with age. This aids the idea that the book documents the reality of the late 15th century. There is a recurrence of a melodramatic red throughout which Steadman uses to grab our attention. It is employed to emphasise the focal point, as in Plate 39, thus forcing us to look hard at the story the illustration is telling. This continuous use of certain colours unifies the book and helps it work as a whole.

LINE

Strong line-drawing is the basis of Steadman's technique. As I explained in Chapter 1 he grew up at a time when strong draughtsmanship and economy went hand in hand, especially in the drawings of Ronald Searle. Line is extremely important to Steadman and therefore figures more prominently in his drawings due to the iridescence of the ink (Marantz, 1992, p.222). He feels if the line is lost, something is gone out of the work. He

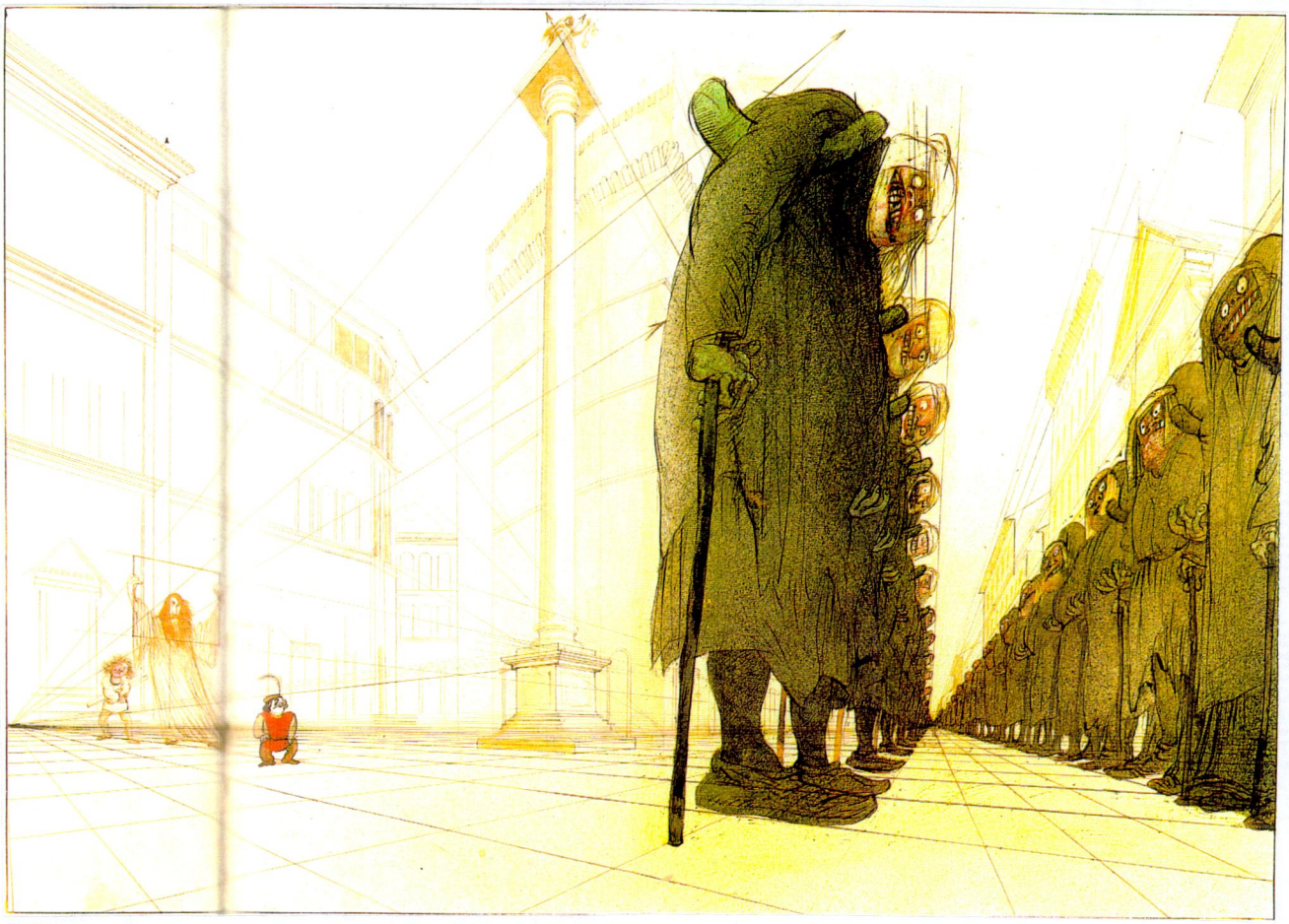


Plate 40.

found it a bit difficult to keep that linear strength in paintings which is why he favours inks - for their characteristic transparency (Marantz, 1992, p.222). Steadman's quality of line is an intricate part of all his illustrations. I have picked the one in Plate 40 because it shows strong evidence of Steadman's ability to draw perspective.

This illustration (Plate 40) is technically and creatively brilliant. It has all the scientific and mathematical exactness of an architect's drawing and Steadman's time spent studying as an aircraft engineer has stood to him here. He tends to use the straight line and compass a lot (Marantz, 1992, p.220) and though not always as obvious as in this drawing it shows how many of his illustrations have a strong technical foundation even though they appear so spontaneous. In this drawing Steadman forms buildings and paving stones, doorways and pillars with incredible precision. There is a great sense of space in this piece which is what Steadman is aiming at as he's illustrating Leonardo's explorations into perspective. It works almost like a virtual reality film - the double vanishing points creating a feeling of motion as the lines shoot from the vanishing point on the left to the one on the right. Leonardo, Salai and a dwarf are standing in the perspective grid, Leonardo holding a pane of glass up to the scene and looking extremely knowledgeable. Then those lines carry our eyes back to the centre of the picture where monstrous green figures of "wretched disposition" stand in lines and recede so far back that they meet as a dot in the distance. The Steadman line is continuously on the move - dashing and darting, molding the figures and shapes with an astonishing deftness. It hesitates here and there to furiously scribble in some detail, moving on to form the clothes with a wide sweep of the pen, at once creating movement and life. The energy and animation of the line is almost tactile, rendering the whole effect exquisite.

The size and head angle of the creature nearest us (Plate 40) is expertly portrayed. He leers down at us with demonic, staring eyes and a toothless grimace and we feel about two inches tall, cowering and terrified. Steadman has an excellent command of figure-drawing. His life-classes with Leslie Richardson in the early '60s have obviously helped

Plate 41.

tune his skill to impressive heights. This illustration in particular shows Steadman's ability to deal competently with the entire figure. In a life class he gave during a brief teaching period in the '60s he got the students to draw the model from the feet up - an extremely difficult thing to do. He rightly observed that they had been starting from the head so that they hardly ever got to the bottom, so therefore they weren't realising the figure in three dimensions. He told them to imagine the model as a statue that had fallen over and they must put the pieces back one on top of the other (Marantz, 1992, p. 221). One can see this being put into practice in Plate 40. Equal attention is given to all parts of the figure. Steadman also succeeds in making his figures come alive. As contemporary cartoonist Willy Fawkes, better known as 'Trog', comments: "When they start looking back at you - that's when you know you're alright" (Luck and Flaw, 1985). The characters Steadman creates certainly do this. Look no further than the terrifying stares of those green monsters with the crutches! (Plate 40).

COMPOSITION

The illustration I've chosen for discussion of composition is where Leonardo explains to the court of Ludovico Sforza about oceans that are now mountains (Plate 41). It's one of the most successful and could equally be used as a fine example of Steadman's mastery of colour and line. In fact the strength of colour is quite fascinating here. Steadman also has an excellent command of composition. The elements in all of his illustrations work together exceptionally well, without the drawing looking laboured. This one is no exception (Plate 41). To the foreground of the drawing we see Leonardo losing himself is animated argument, his eyes intense with his beliefs and his lengthy fingers thrown into a peak to symbolise those magnificent mountains. His figure sweeps diagonally to the right, the flow of his garments reflecting the great movement as he endeavours to convince them he tells the truth. He steps back to the drawing's edge, immediately creating an energetic tautness, like a wound-up spring. Steadman artfully reflects this in the reaction of those knowledgeable scholars of Il Moro's (Ludovico Sforza's) court. At

Plate 42.

the moment Leonardo throws his hands into the air, they shrink back, unsure what to expect from this unconventional being. Steadman is a genius at capturing facial expressions. Notice how bemused, agitated and plain gob-smacked they look! Their movement to the left creates a tremendous tension and the negative space generated allows for clever use of the background.

Sketched in line and not dramatically coloured, a whole array of personalities occupy the court. Ludovico Sforza's wife leans forward on her throne looking at the same time angry, bored and confused. Two of her servants loiter near her throne totally dis-interested. They are given a hint of ochre colouring to prevent them getting lost against the pink of the background. There is an irresistible sense of humour in this illustration and the subject of it is the remaining two characters in the drawing. Sitting on his throne is the ugly but eminent Ludovico Sforza, a great ruler and the whole purpose of this intellectual gathering. His interest is held not by Leonardo's spell-binding theories but by the unattractive Lucrezia, a lady friend whom Il Moro is obviously taken with . The two stare at each other in oblivious love. The explanation for this comes from a thumbnail for the drawing which Steadman places to the left of this illustration in the book (Plate 42). It has two arrows sketched between the pair, accompanied by a love heart and a written note. Returning to the case at hand, Il Moro and his lover's faces are clearly visible due to their whiteness. This piece brings the Sigmund Freud illustrations to mind. For example in Plate 19, Steadman uses strong colour to bring the main subject to the foreground. The background is all but dismissed save for the bare essentials like the architecture and the audience. In Plate 41 and 43 there is a similar approach. There are recurring compositional devices throughout the book. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, Steadman composes some illustrations around a double vanishing point. I have already discussed this in relation to Plate 40. Although not as obvious, the same device is employed in Plate 38. The door opening out to the street supplies the left vanishing point and the right is a view through Leonardo's house into his studio.

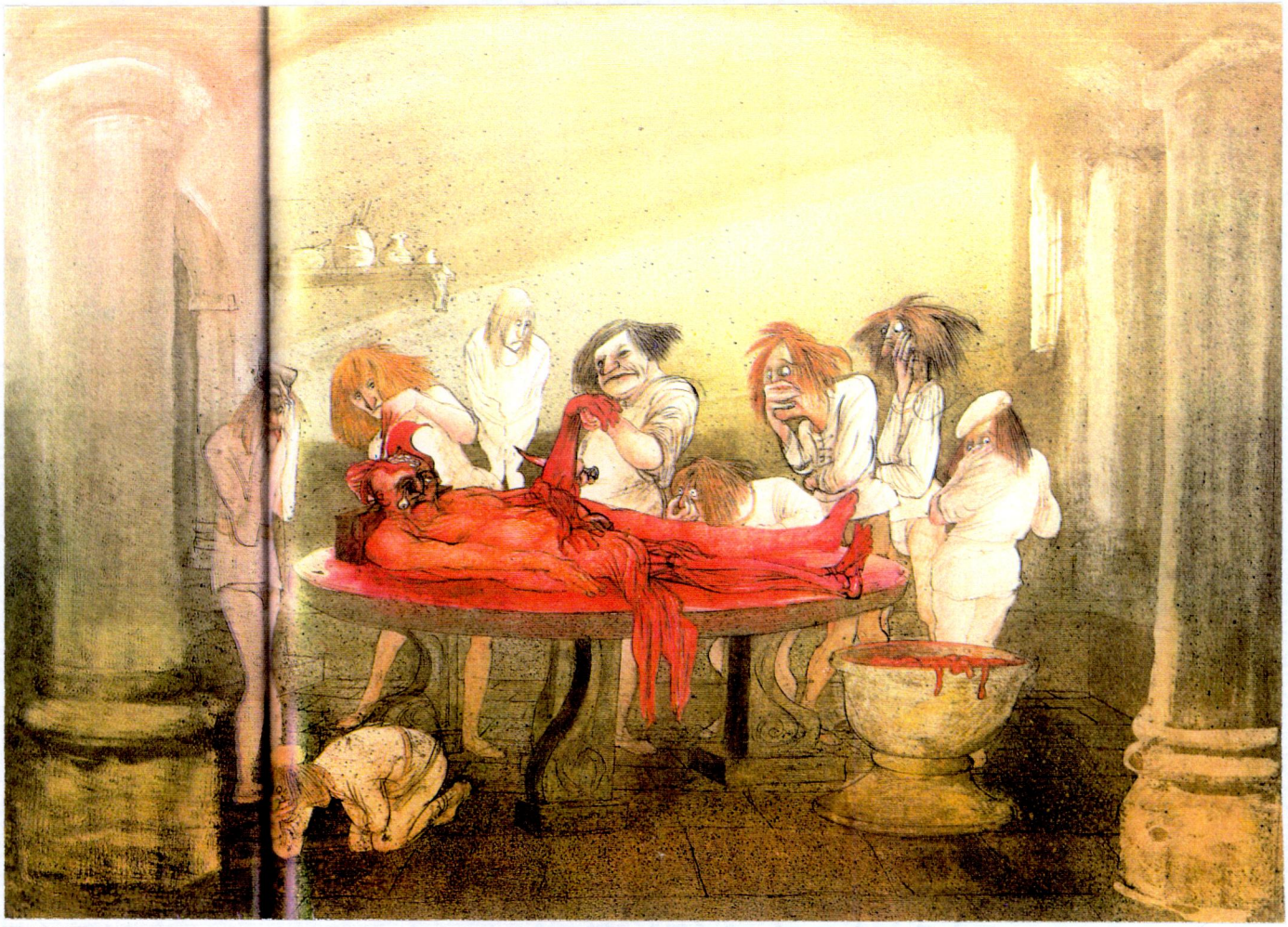


Plate 43.

TEXTURE AND DETAIL

Texture and detail are elements which Steadman uses selectively. He tends to include them only when necessary and where they benefit the story told by the illustration. I've chosen a drawing depicting the controversial dissection of bodies which Leonardo attended (Plate 43). He was inhibited by qualms at first due to the strong belief in resurrection prevalent at the time. The composition and subject reminds me of "The Anatomy Lesson by Dr. Tulp" - a painting by Rembrandt in the 18th century. The students in this drawing are gathered around the table where a corpse has been partially dissected in his own pool of blood. Steadman saves details for those parts that need it most - the corpse and the facial expressions on the students. The background and surroundings are treated sparsely, nothing but a vague suggestion of a pillar and a few utensils on a shelf at the back. The corpse itself is drawn in all its gorey horror-its head is propped against a wooden block, its skin flapping open revealing the brain, as Leonardo, with bloody fingers undergoes his examination. It is in danger of losing an eye as one hangs distended from its socket. Another more experienced man grasps the red-stained knife in one hand and the skinned arm of the corpse in the other. The leg nearest us is also skinned and Steadman chooses to convey the bone and tendons in considerable detail. Adding to the reality of the event is a stone basin containing the entrails. Steadman is economical with detail. He includes just enough to communicate the desired message and thus contributes a lot to the impact of his illustrations.

What's really impressive is the detail and humour in the facial expressions. They all react differently. From left to right - in the foreground at the bottom left one student has had enough and kneels with his back to the table clutching his stomach, almost green from the effort of controlling his retching. He stares in horror at the floor, scarcely believing what he's just seen. The next youths expression is practically hidden by the gutter, but we can see his tongue sticking out in a contortion of disgust. Leonardo proceeds with the dissection with half reluctance. A craving for knowledge justifies his unpleasant task. A youth in the background glances away, and bends over, afraid to

look. The next man seems quite qualified at the job. He wears an apron and wields a knife like a professional butcher. Someone else bends over, holding his nose from the stench. The next stands knock-kneed, arms clutching over his mouth ready to throw up at any second. Another youth stands with his hand over his mouth but appears fascinated and lastly, the short fellow with the cap has his back turned to the bowl of entrails but tentatively sneaks a horrified look. Steadman captures, by the detail on all their faces, the unconventional nature of the dissection.

Texture is not really something Steadman puts tremendous importance on. The speckled ink effect creates texture in the floor, table and background and it's absence of the ink that renders the clothing of the youths. He does sufficiently convey the liquid mess of blood in which the corpse lies. The ink looks wet to the touch as do the remains in the basin. Fine penline describes the stringy texture of hair, some protruding from the young chaps' heads in tufts. The pillars, though not drawn in detail, are given their smooth and strong effect by the apparent use of masking fluid (acts as a resist to the ink). A subtle inclusion in this drawing is a window, barely visible behind the pillar on the right, which literally throws light on the proceedings.

HUMOUR

Humour is an underlying theme in all of Steadman's illustrations for this book. A good indication of this is the description in the opening of Beatrice Phillpott's review. She tells us how the unexpected sound of wild giggling echoing in the hushed atmosphere of Level One at the Royal Festival Hall pointed the way to the exhibition of the *I, Leonardo* drawings (Phillpotts, 1983, p.726). In Plate 38 the misshapen, grotesque beings with their gruesome countenances are enough to introduce a comic element, as are Salai's eyes thrown up to heaven as if to say he's seen it all before. Even the thoughts of Leonardo entertaining these bizarre creatures in entertaining. In Plate 39, as Leonardo furiously dissects the eye, Steadman eerily draws the eyeballs floating up out of nowhere, perhaps wittily addressing the impracticality of the situation - where did

Leonardo come upon so many eyeballs in the first place? The ludicrous monsters with their horrific faces standing in line provides the amusement in Plate 40. Also farcical is the inclusion of the dwarf with his eyes askew and Salai with hair on end, in mockery of the technical perfection of the drawing. Plate 41, of course, includes a lusty Ludovico Sforza locked in a loving gaze with Lucrezia, oblivious to Leonardo's earth shattering theories. Finally, Plate 43 is not without its comedy. The hilarious antics and expressions of the students have already been discussed in detail. This humourous element juxtaposed with the gore of the corpse is reconciled by the corpse's anonymity. It is not a familiar character so we are not emotionally attached to it. The illustration is cartoon-like, the features caricatured and not slavishly realistic. The slumped position of the corpse and the expression on its face borders on the ridiculous, so although it depicts a grisly event, we can laugh at it. It brings to mind the macabre humour of the earlier cartoons discussed in Chapter 1.

Chapter 1
The Old Sea Dog at the Admiral Benbow

SQUIRE TRELAWNEY, Dr Livesey, and the rest of these gentlemen having asked me to write down the whole particulars about Treasure Island, from the beginning to the end, keeping nothing back but the bearings of the island, and that only because there is still treasure not yet lifted, I take up my pen in the year of grace 17—, and go back to the time when my father kept the Admiral Benbow inn, and the brown old seaman, with the sabre cut, first took up his lodging under our roof.

I remember him as if it were yesterday, as he came plodding to the inn door, his sea-chest following behind him in a hand-barrow; a tall, strong, heavy, nut-brown man; his tarry pigtail falling over the shoulders of his soiled blue coat; his hands ragged and scarred, with black, broken nails; and the sabre cut across one cheek, a dirty, livid white. I remember him looking round the cove and whistling to himself as he did so, and then breaking out in that old sea-song that he sang so often afterwards:

"Fifteen men on the dead man's chest—
Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum!"

in the high old tottering voice that seemed to have been tuned and broken at the capstan bars. Then he rapped on the door with a bit of stick like a handspike that he carried, and when my father appeared, called roughly for a glass of rum. This, when it was brought to him, he drank

Plate 44.

Plate 45.

CHAPTER SEVEN

AFTER *I, LEONARDO*

I, Leonardo is the main focus of my thesis but I feel it is important to place it in the context of Steadman's career to date. Hence, this chapter.

Music plays quite a part in Steadman's life so the next step after *I, Leonardo* was a musical on the same theme. Around 1984 this was emerging as only a masterpiece can, painfully but inevitably (Steadman, 1984, p.236). Steadman reckons Leonardo would've enjoyed it, being a rock 'n' roll man (Gwyther, 1986, p.15). He has also written and illustrated an operetta for television, *The Plague and the Moonflower*. "The characters", he says "...have all got my visual stamp and my spiritual characteristics - disease, violence, even a touch of beauty here and there" (Johnson, 1955, p.50). Music interests him because it adds a different dimension to his work and allows him to explore cartoons in other forms (Marantz, 1992, p.225).

Steadman is also investigating the realms of sculpture. He collects pieces of junk which he can't bear to throw away and puts them together with plaster. He likes the idea of drawing into wet plaster and yearns to do more of this kind of thing (Marantz, 1992, p. 224).

Regarding books, the first one Steadman wrote and illustrated after *I, Leonardo* was his autobiography *Between the Eyes*. Obviously he too felt he had reached some sort of a milestone in his career. In 1985 he illustrated the classic *Treasure Island* by Robert Louis Stevenson. There is a tremendous power in the illustrations; they have a manic and expressive quality. Steadman creates a wonderful sense of anticipation. He uses his calligraphic style of writing to great effect in the title and headings of all the chapters (Plate 44). The splashes and blotches are suitably angry and agitated but there's an order in the chaos - that innate sense of composition. Compared to *I, Leonardo* some of the illus-

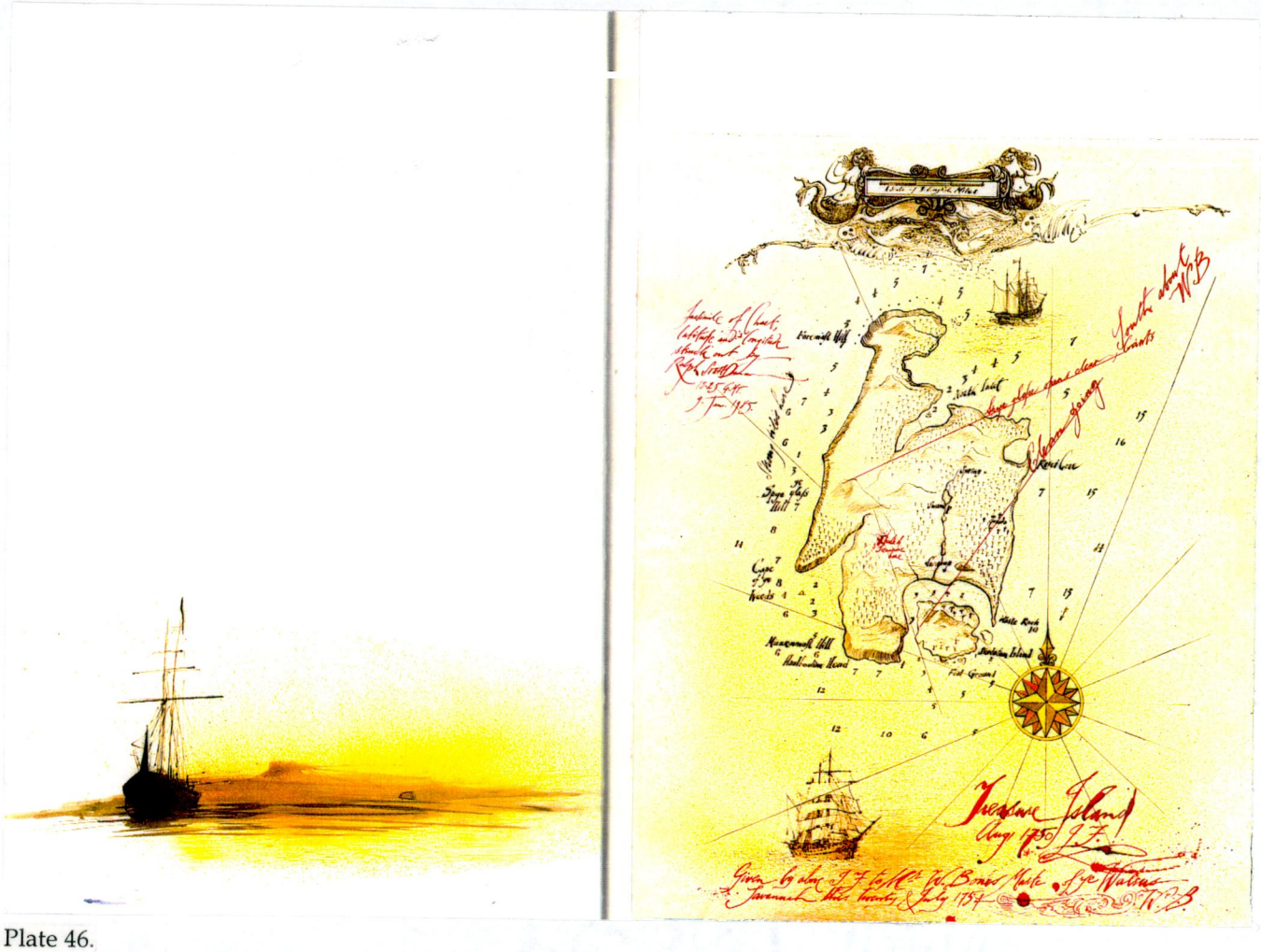
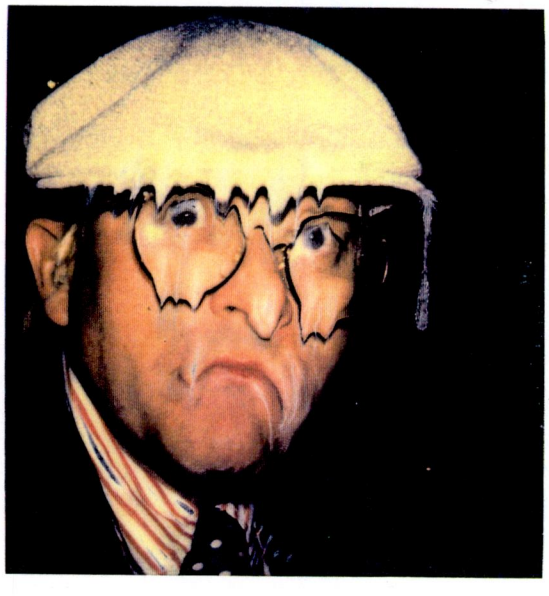


Plate 46.



David Hockney

Plate 47.

trations are more violently expressive, but then the story is a dark one (Plate 45). In the past the mistake has been made of classifying Robert Louis Stevenson as a writer of cute, nice children's stories. Not so. This is a tale of avarice and violence (Chester, 1994, p.16). However Steadman is beautifully elegant when the time calls for it - the opening double page spread is breathtaking (Plate 46). When this book was completed, Steadman stated that he's not going to illustrate other people's stories anymore - he wants to concentrate on his own (Gwyther, 1986, p.15).

Two books of caricatures and cartoons followed. They were *Paranoids* and *Scar Strangled Banger*. In *Paranoids* he creates caricatures by drawing into the developing gelatine of polaroid pictures (Lambirth, 1994, p.16). Plate 47 shows a caricature of David Hockney.

The Big I Am (1988) was the next major project undertaken by Steadman. It is a book written and illustrated by him on God, inspired by an all too close encounter with death. Steadman suffered an internal haemorrhage and as a result his feelings of indestructibility were shattered (Gwyther, 1986, p.15). He thought if God was going to be so vindictive he was going to have a go at Him. He wasn't going to let Him get away with it! (Gwyther, 1986, p.15). The book is a deep one, concerning the beginning of time according to Steadman. Similar to *I, Leonardo*, God tells us His story. "Arrogance and complaint", Steadman says " from the original bastard" (Steadman, 1988, Introduction). God's wife gave birth to the earth and to the planets but they were all stillborn. The earth was regurgitated by God and vomited out into a void. "...the old place hasn't done too badly at all from such a filthy start", quips Steadman, tongue-in-cheek (Steadman, 1988). The narrative is approached almost like a one way interview between God and Steadman, the latter acting as interpreter. As the prose is extremely hard to follow, we need someone to translate. Every so often he stands back and updates us, like a soliloquy in Shakespeare's plays. The book is wonderfully imaginative but sharply satirical and bitter - Steadman tells us God is self righteous and pompous - not as virtuous as we imagined Him to be (Steadman, 1988). Some of the illustrations are reminiscent of *I,*

Plate 48.

Plate 49.

Leonardo, as is the design of the book. There is a similarity in the size of the illustrations and the inclusion of thumbnails here and there (Plate 48). However his use of colour is not as subtle; in fact it's mindblowing. Fantastic blues, fiery reds and intense yellows explode from the deep black of space (Plate 49). Inky purple landscapes are silhouetted against the blue sky of nightfall. It may be bitter in places but it is also exhilaratingly beautiful. I feel Steadman has gained confidence from *I, Leonardo* and he builds on this, really enjoying himself here with venomous energy. However, because its concept is so elaborate, the book doesn't have the mass appeal of *I, Leonardo*.

In 1987 Gordon Kerr from Oddbins approached Steadman to illustrate their new wine catalogue. The plan was to make it more like a magazine that people would like to keep (Lambrth, 1994, p.15). To their delight "the wielder of the most colourful and widely imaginative paintbrush" has become synonymous with them (Atkins, 1992, p.22). It has proved to be a very successful partnership, responsible for Oddbins winning Best Winelist Award in 1992. *The Grapes of Ralph*, a book on wine written as a consequence, is compared by reviewer Susy Atkins to *I, Leonardo* and I would wholeheartedly approve of the comparison. Both are extremely similar in their curious, irreverent mood and "cocktails of send-up and seminar" which surely appeal to all but the tremendously stuffy (Atkins, 1992, p.22). It's written from a highly personal point of view and, typical of Steadman, the subject of wine is pushed to the limits of reality. This book provides an opportunity for Steadman to build on his magnificent skills as an inventor of personalities, displayed in all its glory in *I, Leonardo*. Again in *The Grapes of Ralph* we see Steadman's ability to conjure up characters of tremendous wit and presence - Plate 50 and 51 being just two examples. Steadman has the ability to tap into the mind of the masses, coming up with something to which we all respond. The illustrations are rich in content and diverse - from caricature to architectural details and reality in breath-taking landscapes (Wilson, 1992). The narrative is a mirror of Steadman's visual talents, massive and enthusiastic, although it does get a little wordy. But as Wilson says "he's enjoying himself" and describes the book as a triumph in prose and illustration (Wilson,

Plate 50.

Plate 51.

Plate 52.

1992).

Oddbins have continued to employ Steadman, the reason being his ability to constantly reinvent himself (Lambirth, 1994, p.16). They have been a sort of patron of the arts for Steadman, enabling him to revel in his restless imagination and produce works with other media such as printmaking. He is exploring a lot of new techniques like collage, making up faces with photographs he has taken (Plate 52). He now tends to frame his pieces with a thick black line because it provides him with shapes in which to write (Lambirth, 1994, p.17). His writing of course, still plays a big part in his drawings.

I am of the opinion that *I, Leonardo* marks the pinnacle of Steadman's early career - from his uneasy beginnings in newspaper caricature through to his tentative first steps in book illustration, culminating in this masterpiece. Its completion prompted a biography from Steadman, who finally felt a sense of achievement after years of being unfavourably compared with Scarfe. In 1987 *I, Leonardo* won the W.H.Smith Illustration Award for the best book of the last five years. *I, Leonardo* marked for him a new method of working - the combination of his writing and illustrative skills, directed by his powerful imagination. It gave him the belief in himself and the inspiration to produce work such as *The Big I Am* and his marvellous guide for wine-lovers - *The Grapes of Ralph*. Today Steadman lives happily with his wife in Wales. He still illustrates for Hunter S. Thompson and at 58, is as prolific as ever (Johnson, 1995, p.50).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

My aim in this thesis was to analyse *I, Leonardo* thus examining Steadman's ability as an author and illustrator of books, while confirming my theory that the book is a highlight in his career, marking the culmination of his talents.

Initially I explored the possible sources of Steadman's style. Line-drawing is a major feature of his work and I perceived it to be the most common form of artistic expression while Steadman was growing up. Steadman found George Grosz, Marcel Duchamp, John Heartfield and the Dada Movement to be a real stimulus - their courage in condemning society's values being the reason. I discovered that Ronald Searle and Gerald Scarfe, especially Scarfe hold very similar styles to Steadman and were influential to him in the past. In the field of caricature I deemed Scarfe to be the superior artist, his influence visible in the figure drawings and vulgar content of Steadman's cartoons. However Steadman is the superior illustrator due to his strong sense of colour and his ability to vary his approach. Caricature's lack of solutions left Steadman cold. I believe he wished through his books to challenge people to think and to use their imagination and humour to cope with the idiosyncrasies of the world.

In Chapter 2 I discussed the development of Steadman's style through his book illustrations before *I, Leonardo*. We saw how primitive his earlier technique was in *Fly Away Peter* and *The Tale of Driver Grope*. However both contain elements still visible today. Even Steadman's sense of humour is prevalent at this early stage.

I believe Steadman's experience in America working with Hunter S. Thompson strengthened his drawing making it a lot more direct, a fact obvious from the cartoons of this period. During a short analysis of *Sigmund Freud* I reveal how sophisticated Steadman's style then became and how he uses contrast effectively to create drama at the end of the book.

Steadman creates the mood of *I, Leonardo* - surprise and intrigue - in the cover and initial pages of the book. Through observation I point out how the cover illustration, based on "The Last Supper", is actually in contrasting halves, representing in my opinion, that this is a pun on the fact that Leonardo painted Jesus. An analysis of the first double page spread reveals an interesting quote written by Steadman in Leonardo's secretive mirror writing. Deciphered, I interpret it as being a defiant Steadman getting his own back on politicians and critics. I also point out that it was most likely included to recreate the feeling of revelation in Leonardo's notebooks.

The relationship between text and illustration is discussed in Chapter 4. I discovered how the book can be opened at any stage and the contents enjoyed, an aspect reflected by the lack of page numbers or chapters. It is designed very spaciously and thus avoids a claustrophobic sense.

The narrative is quite complex and poetic in places which I believe is intended to reflect the rambling mind that is Leonardo da Vinci. Humour is created by the understatement - Steadman writes so matter of factly about things we would consider bizarre. Leonardo has an irresistibly deadpan attitude to the most wonderfully exciting events. On occasion Steadman identifies with Leonardo in matters such as insecurity. Leonardo's character is portrayed as a vulnerable genius with whom we can relate. The ending of the book, like that in *Sigmund Freud* is dramatic as it captures the feverish mind of Leonardo in death. The words became the illustration on the last page, re-confirming Steadman's ability to deal with endings effectively. It's a tribute to Steadman's competency to create a truly credible character that we feel the loss.

In Chapter 5 I explore the relationship between *I, Leonardo* and the real life of Leonardo da Vinci. Despite the comic element I found it to be remarkably accurate. Steadman interprets certain events to suit. He does not judge Leonardo on personal matters but rather dwells on his humanity and vulnerable nature. A deep respect for Leonardo

underlies the humour. The inclusion of thumbnails and mirror writing aid the impression of the book as one of Leonardo's notebooks or diaries. Some finished illustrations are actual adaptations of Leonardo's sketches.

An exploration of the origin of cartoons led me to the hypothesis that Steadman, though greatly inspired by Leonardo, is also intimidated by him, and the book is an attempt to exorcise that fear. In Chapter 6 I reveal how Steadman's approach to the *I, Leonardo* illustrations is more subtle than that in *Sigmund Freud*. He uses colour with a remarkable delicacy while still retaining a vibrancy in the work. A dramatic and violent red , used to pick out details and add emphasis is an aspect of his work that props up time and time again. One would think that Steadman was a bloodthirsty, raving lunatic but I believe he illustrates violence so savagely, not because he loves it but because he despises it. There is a balance between warm and cool colours. Golden yellow is also used frequently which unifies the book and helps it work as a whole.

Line is an intricate part of Steadman's illustrations and the transparent quality of the ink means that the line isn't lost. All Steadman's drawings have a strong technical foundation and he handles perspective more than competently. Despite this precision the energy and spontaneity of his drawing is not lost. I note his excellent command of figure drawing and how the Steadman line plays its part in this. I also discuss composition which I think Steadman has an almost innate sense of. He creates movement in his drawings with apparent ease. Texture and detail are elements he tends to use selectively. Humour is a central theme in all the illustrations and is conveyed mainly by the variety in characters and their expressions. Steadman speculates on Leonardo's personality - whether he gets it right or wrong is not the important thing. What I feel Steadman hopes to do through his books is to inflame one's curiosity and make us think when we normally wouldn't. *The Big I Am*, though it doesn't get off to an optimistic start is perhaps even more thought provoking as it concerns God and challenges our perceptions of time and the meaning of life.

In Chapter 7 I looked at the work completed by Steadman since *I, Leonardo*. I believe Steadman has now built on the experiences gained. *The Big I Am* shows a braver use of colour and *The Grapes of Ralph* contains memorable characters of tremendous wit and presence. Steadman has gone on to explore new techniques such as collage and drawing into the developing gelatine of polaroid pictures.

The intention of this thesis was to examine what it is that makes a book by Ralph Steadman so successful. In my opinion *I, Leonardo* best represents Steadman's talent as an author, illustrator and comedian and thus stands out in the vast body of his work. I believe Steadman is at his most effective writing and illustrating his own books. They have the power to make you ponder, wonder, laugh and gasp in awe at the beauty of colour and cleverness of concept. In short *I, Leonardo* has the ability to educate and entertain, appealing to people on many different levels. It is these qualities which I feel make it worthy of the title "Contemporary Masterpiece".

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