

= The Four Stages of Cruelty =

The Four Stages of Cruelty is a series of four printed engravings published by English artist William Hogarth in 1751 . Each print depicts a different stage in the life of the fictional Tom Nero .

Beginning with the torture of a dog as a child in the First stage of cruelty , Nero progresses to beating his horse as a man in the Second stage of cruelty , and then to robbery , seduction , and murder in Cruelty in perfection . Finally , in The reward of cruelty , he receives what Hogarth warns is the inevitable fate of those who start down the path Nero has followed : his body is taken from the gallows after his execution as a murderer and is mutilated by surgeons in the anatomical theatre .

The prints were intended as a form of moral instruction ; Hogarth was dismayed by the routine acts of cruelty he witnessed on the streets of London . Issued on cheap paper , the prints were destined for the lower classes . The series shows a roughness of execution and a brutality that is untempered by the funny touches common in Hogarth 's other works , but which he felt was necessary to impress his message on the intended audience . Nevertheless , the pictures still carry the wealth of detail and subtle references that are characteristic of Hogarth .

= = History = =

In common with other prints by Hogarth , such as Beer Street and Gin Lane , The Four Stages of Cruelty was issued as a warning against immoral behaviour , showing the easy path from childish thug to convicted criminal . His aim was to correct " that barbarous treatment of animals , the very sight of which renders the streets of our metropolis so distressing to every feeling mind " . Hogarth loved animals , picturing himself with his pug in a self @-@ portrait , and marking the graves of his dogs and birds at his home in Chiswick .

Hogarth deliberately portrayed the subjects of the engravings with little subtlety since he meant the prints to be understood by " men of the lowest rank " when seen on the walls of workshops or taverns . The images themselves , as with Beer Street and Gin Lane , were roughly drawn , lacking the finer lines of some of his other works . Fine engraving and delicate artwork would have rendered the prints too expensive for the intended audience , and Hogarth also believed a bold stroke could portray the passions of the subjects just as well as fine lines , noting that " neither great correctness of drawing or fine engraving were at all necessary " .

To ensure that the prints were priced within reach of the intended audience , Hogarth originally commissioned the block @-@ cutter J. Bell to produce the four designs as woodcuts . This proved more expensive than expected , so only the last two of the four images were cut and were not issued commercially at the time . Instead , Hogarth proceeded to create the engravings himself and announced the publication of the prints , along with that of Beer Street and Gin Lane , in the London Evening Post over three days from 14 ? 16 February 1751 . The prints themselves were published on 21 February 1751 and each was accompanied by a moralising commentary , written by the Rev. James Townley , a friend of Hogarth 's . As with earlier engravings , such as Industry and Idleness , individual prints were sold on " ordinary " paper for 1s . (one shilling , equating to about £ 7 @.@ 10 in 2016 terms) , cheap enough to be purchased by the lower classes as a means of moral instruction . " Fine " versions were also available on " superior " paper for 1s . 6d . (one shilling and sixpence , about £ 10 @.@ 60 in 2016 terms) for collectors .

Variations on plates III and IV exist from Bell 's original woodcuts , bearing the earlier date of 1 January 1750 , and were reprinted in 1790 by John Boydell , but examples from either of the woodcut printings are uncommon .

= = Prints = =

= = = First stage of cruelty = = =

In the first print Hogarth introduces Tom Nero , whose surname may have been inspired by the

Roman Emperor of the same name or a contraction of " Nero " . Conspicuous in the centre of the plate , he is shown being assisted by other boys to insert an arrow into a dog 's rectum , a torture apparently inspired by a devil punishing a sinner in Jacques Callot 's Temptation of St. Anthony . An initialled badge on the shoulder of his light @-@ hued and ragged coat shows him to be a pupil of the charity school of the parish of St Giles . Hogarth used this notorious slum area as the background for many of his works including Gin Lane and Noon , part of the Four Times of the Day series . A more tender @-@ hearted boy , perhaps the dog 's owner , pleads with Nero to stop tormenting the frightened animal , even offering food in an attempt to appease him . This boy supposedly represents a young George III . His appearance is deliberately more pleasing than the scowling ugly ruffians that populate the rest of the picture , made clear in the text at the bottom of the scene :

The other boys carry out equally barbaric acts : the two boys at the top of the steps are burning the eyes out of a bird with a hot needle heated by the link @-@ boy 's torch ; the boys in the foreground are throwing at a cock (perhaps an allusion to a nationalistic enmity towards the French , and a suggestion that the action takes place on Shrove Tuesday , the traditional day for cock @-@ shying) ; another boy ties a bone to a dog 's tail ? tempting , but out of reach ; a pair of fighting cats are hung by their tails and taunted by a jeering group of boys ; in the bottom left @-@ hand corner a dog is set on a cat ; and in the rear of the picture another cat tied to two bladders is thrown from a high window . In a foreshadowing of his ultimate fate , Tom Nero 's name is written under the chalk drawing of a man hanging from the gallows ; the meaning is made clear by the schoolboy artist pointing towards Tom . The absence of parish officers who should be controlling the boys is an intentional rebuke on Hogarth 's part ; he agreed with Henry Fielding that one of the causes for the rising crime rate was the lack of care from the overseers of the poor , who were too often interested in the posts only for the social status and monetary rewards they could bring .

Below the text the authorship is established : Designed by W. Hogarth , Published according to Act of Parliament . 1 Feb .. 1751 The Act of Parliament referred to is the Engraving Copyright Act 1734 . Many of Hogarth 's earlier works had been reproduced in great numbers without his authority or any payment of royalties , and he was keen to protect his artistic property , so had encouraged his friends in Parliament to pass a law to protect the rights of engravers . Hogarth had been so instrumental in pushing the Bill through Parliament that on passing it became known as the " Hogarth Act " .

= = = Second stage of cruelty = = =

In the second plate , the scene is Thavies Inn Gate (sometimes ironically written as Thieves Inn Gate) , one of the Inns of Chancery which housed associations of lawyers in London . Tom Nero has grown up and become a hackney coachman , and the recreational cruelty of the schoolboy has turned into the professional cruelty of a man at work . Tom 's horse , worn out from years of mistreatment and overloading , has collapsed , breaking its leg and upsetting the carriage . Disregarding the animal 's pain , Tom has beaten it so furiously that he has put its eye out . In a satirical aside , Hogarth shows four corpulent barristers struggling to climb out of the carriage in a ludicrous state . They are probably caricatures of eminent jurists , but Hogarth did not reveal the subjects ' names , and they have not been identified . Elsewhere in the scene , other acts of cruelty against animals take place : a drover beats a lamb to death , an ass is driven on by force despite being overloaded , and an enraged bull tosses one of its tormentors . Some of these acts are recounted in the moral accompanying the print :

The cruelty has also advanced to include abuse of people . A dray crushes a playing boy while the drayman sleeps , oblivious to the boy 's injury and the beer spilling from his barrels . Posters in the background advertise a cockfight and a boxing match as further evidence of the brutal entertainments favoured by the subjects of the image . The boxing match is to take place at Broughton 's Amphitheatre , a notoriously tough venue established by the " father of pugilism " , Jack Broughton : a contemporary bill records that the contestants would fight with their left leg strapped to the floor , with the one with the fewest bleeding wounds being adjudged the victor . One

of the advertised participants in the boxing match is James Field , who was hanged two weeks before the prints were issued and features again in the final image of the series ; the other participant is George " the Barber " Taylor , who had been champion of England but was defeated by Broughton and retired in 1750 . On Taylor 's death in 1757 , Hogarth produced a number of sketches of him wrestling Death , probably for his tomb .

According to Werner Busch , the composition alludes to Rembrandt 's painting , Balaam 's Ass (1626) .

In an echo of the first plate , there is but one person who shows concern for the welfare of the tormented horse . To the left of Nero , and almost unseen , a man notes down Nero 's hackney coach number to report him .

= = = Cruelty in perfection = = =

By the time of the third plate , Tom Nero has progressed from the mistreatment of animals to theft and murder . Having encouraged his pregnant lover , Ann Gill , to rob and leave her mistress , he murders the girl when she meets him . The murder is shown to be particularly brutal : her neck , wrist , and index finger are almost severed . Her trinket box and the goods she had stolen lie on the ground beside her , and the index finger of her partially severed hand points to the words " God 's Revenge against Murder " written on a book that , along with the Book of Common Prayer , has fallen from the box . A woman searching Nero 's pockets uncovers pistols , a number of pocket watches ? evidence of his having turned to highway robbery (as Tom Idle did in Industry and Idleness) , and a letter from Ann Gill which reads :

Dear Tommy

My mistress has been the best of women to me , and my conscience flies in my face as often as I think of wronging her ; yet I am resolved to venture body and soul to do as you would have me , so do not fail to meet me as you said you would , for I will bring along with me all the things I can lay my hands on . So no more at present ; but I remain yours till death .

Ann Gill .

The spelling is perfect and while this is perhaps unrealistic , Hogarth deliberately avoids any chance of the scene becoming comical . A discarded envelope is addressed " To Thos Nero at Pinne ... " . Ronald Paulson sees a parallel between the lamb beaten to death in the Second Stage and the defenceless girl murdered here . Below the print , the text claims that Nero , if not repentant , is at least stunned by his actions :

Various features in the print are meant to intensify the feelings of dread : the murder takes place in a graveyard , said to be St Pancras but suggested by John Ireland to resemble Marylebone ; an owl and a bat fly around the scene ; the moon shines down on the crime ; the clock strikes one for the end of the witching hour . The composition of the image may allude to Anthony van Dyck 's The Arrest of Christ . A lone Good Samaritan appears again : among the snarling faces of Tom 's accusers , a single face looks to the heavens in pity .

In the alternative image for this stage , produced as a woodcut by Bell , Tom is shown with his hands free . There are also differences in the wording of the letter and some items , like the lantern and books , are larger and simpler while others , such as the man to the left of Tom and the topiary bush , have been removed . The owl has become a winged hourglass on the clock tower .

= = = The reward of cruelty = = =

Having been tried and found guilty of murder , Nero has now been hanged and his body taken for the ignominious process of public dissection . The year after the prints were issued , the Murder Act 1752 would ensure that the bodies of murderers could be delivered to the surgeons so they could be " dissected and anatomised " . It was hoped this further punishment on the body and denial of burial would act as a deterrent . At the time Hogarth made the engravings , this right was not enshrined in law , but the surgeons still removed bodies when they could .

A tattoo on his arm identifies Tom Nero , and the rope still around his neck shows his method of

execution . The dissectors , their hearts hardened after years of working with cadavers , are shown to have as much feeling for the body as Nero had for his victims ; his eye is put out just as his horse 's was , and a dog feeds on his heart , taking a poetic revenge for the torture inflicted on one of its kind in the first plate . Nero 's face appears contorted in agony and although this depiction is not realistic , Hogarth meant it to heighten the fear for the audience . Just as his murdered mistress 's finger pointed to Nero 's destiny in *Cruelty in Perfection* , in this print Nero 's finger points to the boiled bones being prepared for display , indicating his ultimate fate .

While the surgeons working on the body are observed by the mortar @-@ boarded academics in the front row , the physicians , who can be identified by their wigs and canes , largely ignore the dissection and consult among themselves . The president has been identified as John Freke , president of the Royal College of Surgeons at the time . Freke had been involved in the high @-@ profile attempt to secure the body of condemned rioter Bosavern Penlez for dissection in 1749 . Aside from the over @-@ enthusiastic dissection of the body and the boiling of the bones in situ , the image portrays the procedure as it would have been carried out .

Two skeletons to the rear left and right of the print are labelled as James Field , a well @-@ known boxer who also featured on a poster in the second plate , and Maclean , an infamous highwayman . Both men were hanged shortly before the print was published (Maclean in 1750 and Field in 1751) . The skeletons seemingly point to one another . Field 's name above the skeleton on the left may have been a last minute substitution for " GENTL HARRY " referring to Henry Simms , also known as Young Gentleman Harry . Simms was a robber who was executed in 1747 . The motif of the lone " good man " is carried through to this final plate , where one of the academics points at the skeleton of James Field , indicating the inevitable outcome for those who start down the path of cruelty .

The composition of the scene is a pastiche of the frontispiece of Andreas Vesalius 's *De humani corporis fabrica* , and it possibly also borrows from *Quack Physicians ' Hall* (c . 1730) by the Dutch artist Egbert van Heemskerck , who had lived in England and whose work Hogarth admired . An earlier source of inspiration may have been a woodcut in the 1495 *Fasciculus di medicina* by Johannes de Ketham which , although simpler , has many of the same elements , including the seated president flanked by two windows .

Below the print are these final words :

= = Reception = =

Hogarth was pleased with the results . *European Magazine* reported that he commented to a bookseller from Cornhill (a Mr. Sewell) :

there is no part of my works of which I am so proud , and in which I now feel so happy , as in the series of *The Four Stages of Cruelty* because I believe the publication of theme has checked the diabolical spirit of barbarity to the brute creation which , I am sorry to say , was once so prevalent in this country .

In his unfinished *Apology for Painters* he commented further :

I had rather , if cruelty has been prevented by the four prints , be the maker of them than the [Raphael] cartoons , unless I lived in a Roman Catholic country .

In his 1817 book *Shakespeare and His Times* , Nathan Drake credits the representation of " throwing at cocks " in the first plate for changing public opinion about the practice , which was common at the time , and prompting magistrates to take a harder line on offenders . Others found the series less to their liking . Charles Lamb dismissed the series as mere caricature , not worthy to be included alongside Hogarth 's other work , but rather something produced as the result of a " wayward humour " outside of his normal habits . Art historian Allan Cunningham also had strong feelings about the series :

I wish it had never been painted . There is indeed great skill in the grouping , and profound knowledge of character ; but the whole effect is gross , brutal and revolting . A savage boy grows into a savage man , and concludes a career of cruelty and outrage by an atrocious murder , for which he is hanged and dissected .

The Anatomy Act 1832 ended the dissection of murderers , and most of the animal tortures depicted were outlawed by the Cruelty to Animals Act 1835 , so by the 1850s The Four Stages of Cruelty had come to be viewed as a somewhat historical series , though still one with the power to shock , a power it retains for a modern audience .