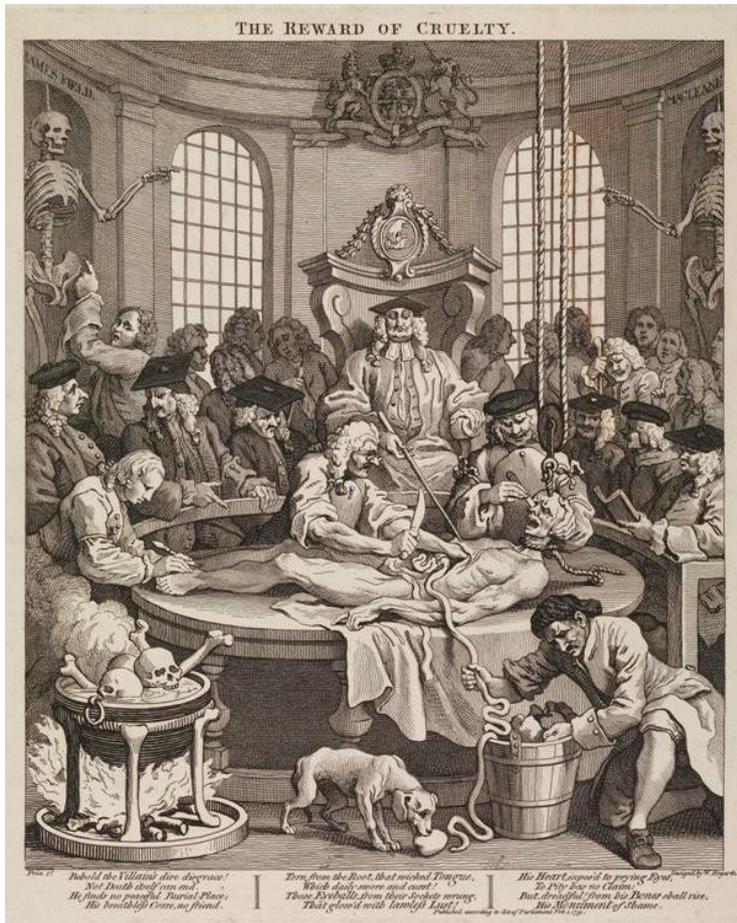


## The reward of cruelty, by William Hogarth

Baillieu Library Print Collection, University of Melbourne



William Hogarth (1697–1764)  
**The reward of cruelty**, 1751  
from series *Four stages of cruelty*  
engraving  
38.8 × 31.8 cm (plate)  
66.5 × 47.5 cm (sheet)  
Purchased 1995  
Baillieu Library Print Collection  
University of Melbourne  
1995.3210

*The reward of cruelty* is the dramatic finale to Hogarth's moralising series *Four stages of cruelty*, based around fictional character Tom Nero.

In Nero's early years, he tortures and beats animals, and in the penultimate scene, *Cruelty in perfection*, he commits murder and theft. *The reward of cruelty* (a reworking of the frontispiece to the 1543 medical book *On the fabric of the human body*) shows the body of Nero, who has been tried, found guilty and hanged, being dissected in public. This sarcastic 'reward' – denial of a proper burial and mutilation of the body – was in line with Britain's new *Murder Act*, introduced in the same year as this print.

This new legislation sought to have murderers executed almost immediately upon being found guilty, at which point, 'in order to impress a just horror in the mind of the offender', the perpetrator's body was to be anatomised or hung in chains, but 'at no point whatsoever ... to be buried'.

Nero's final fate would be similar to that of the skeletons in the niches behind. His remains would be boiled down (indicated by the cadaver's left hand pointing towards the steaming cauldron) and reassembled as an anatomical specimen, and thus refused a burial altogether.

## Teaching ideas

The University of Melbourne's curriculum is rich and varied, and changes from year to year. For more teaching ideas, [contact a collection manager](#).

### Animal Law

*"The Four Stages of Cruelty" were done in hopes of preventing in some degree that cruel treatment of poor Animals which makes the streets of London more disagreeable to the human mind, than anything what ever, the very describing of which gives pain.'* (William Hogarth)

With animal law a relatively recent discipline, historically situate Hogarth's views on animal cruelty. Was he unique in his strong stance in the 18th century?

### Young People, Crime and Justice

Studies have found that murderers and serial killers often have a history of violence towards animals at a younger age, usually recounting it as their first violent act. Using the character Tom Nero from *The reward of cruelty* and the other works from *The four stages of cruelty* as an early example of this, outline the development or descent of the character from cruelty to murder.

### Punishment and Social Control

Discuss the new *Murder Act 1751* as illustrated in *The reward of cruelty* and its changes to punishment for those found guilty of such a crime, redirecting their bodies away from burial towards public dissection, thus not allowing their remains to rest.

### Graphic Narratives

Examine *Four stages of cruelty*, *Beer Street* and *Gin Lane* alongside the more playfully humorous *Marriage a-la-mode*, *A harlot's progress* and *A rake's progress*, all in the Baillieu Library Print Collection. In this form of 18th-century comic-strip, how does the artist carry the narrative almost entirely within the pictures?

### Body, Mind and Medicine: A Dissection

Situate *The reward of cruelty* in the history of anatomical study.

### The Print Room

Discuss how successfully William Hogarth's narrative series translate into a contemporary print exhibition setting. For works imbued with moral messages, jokes, homages and symbols, to what extent do today's audiences need to be informed about contemporaneous political and social events in order to properly appreciate the artist's vision?

## Intersecting objects



Johannes Pieter de Frey (Dutch, 1770–1834)  
after Rembrandt van Rijn (Dutch, 1606–1669)

### **The anatomy lesson, 1798**

etching

28.1 × 36.2 cm (sheet trimmed to image)

Gift of Dr J. Orde Poynton, 1959

Baillieu Library Print Collection

University of Melbourne

1959.4361



Attributed to David Wilkie (Scottish, 1785–1841)

### **Academy study of a male nude, 19th century**

black chalk on paper

30.8 × 49.3 cm (sheet)

Baillieu Library Print Collection

University of Melbourne

1995.2007.002

To learn more, visit the website of the [Baillieu Library Print Collection](#).

## References

Miranda Stanyon, 'Dissecting the establishment', in Kerriane Stone (curator), *Radicals, slayers and villains: Prints from the Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne*, University of Melbourne Library, 2014, p. 71.

## Further reading

Piers Beirne, *Hogarth's art of animal cruelty: Satire, suffering and pictorial propaganda*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

Jonathan Sawday, *The body emblazoned: Dissection and the human body in Renaissance culture*, London & New York: Routledge, 1995.

Ronald Paulson, *Hogarth*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991–93.

Thierry Smolderen, *The origins of comics: From William Hogarth to Winsor McCay* (translated by Bart Beaty & Nick Nguyen), Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014.

*A body of knowledge: The University of Melbourne in celebration of 150 years of Melbourne Medical School 1862–2012*, University of Melbourne, 2012.

Andreas Vesalius, [De humani corporis fabrica](#) (On the fabric of the human body, 1543), digitised interactive version, with interpretive rollover text.