



FOUR POEMS

Dr. Gladys Cardiff

The Four Stages of Cruelty

Wanting a strong representation,
and to be plain-spoken,

Hogarth aspirated the sublime
of all its gloss.

The suction tube clacks
with bust fragments.

To give a disrelish to vice
he pressed down hard.

Deep cuts.

Schabkunst (“scraped art”)

“The copper-plate it is done upon, when the artist first takes it into hand, is wrought all over with an edg’d tool, so as to make the print one even black, like night: and his whole work after this, is merely introducing the lights into it; which he does by scraping off the rough grain according to his design, artfully smoothing it most where light is most required . . .”

—WILLIAM HOGARTH, *THE ANALYSIS OF BEAUTY* (1753)

and, sometimes, the reading structure of the modello
is reversed

so when you awaken in a strange room
to the sound of someone scraping

and light is darting in where once
everything was dark

that’s you on the other side
riding the back of your dream’s high allegorical charge.

The Art of Closure

Hogarth, old and ailing, loving beauty,
inclined to observation

in a history both public and private
spoke to a general deterioration

a dark time when wit tilted to jeering
and cruel jabs, gross cruelties, and war unending.

He witnessed the era's manners
in his own face and revised the smile out.

He drew his final painting, "Inscribed
to the Dealers in dark Pictures,"

a dark print called *Finis*
with Time drawing his last breath
and sinking, and the sun setting,
the moon darkened, the painter's palette
broken. Doomsday, the end of all things,

notwithstanding, in the 21st century
would we be inclined to err in *that* grandiosity?
Mightn't we prefer that the cello player play
the notes a little dryer?

Tailpiece:

It Flows Well

is what my students say when they finish
and like a painting or a poem.

What does that mean? I ask. By this

they do not mean a meander or a waterfall,
something, it seems, to do with grace,
a fluid launching out that tells as it shows
the rescue and return; something, perhaps,
like the S of Hogarth's Line of Beauty.