



## 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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.