James Gillray’s Hogarthian Progresses
Sequential narration in satiric prints is most closely associated with the famous “modern moral subjects” of William Hogarth (1697–1764): *A Harlot’s Progress* (1732), *A Rake’s Progress* (1735), *Marriage A-la-mode* (1745), and *Industry and Idleness* (1747) among others. Hogarth’s enormous commercial and aesthetic success inspired a broad spectrum of legacy “progresses” across subsequent generations of printmakers. James Gillray (1756–1815) was among the most accomplished printmakers to adopt Hogarthian narrative strategies even as he transformed them.

Gillray engaged with the possibilities of sequential narratives from the very earliest stages of his career as a satirical artist. Although there is a long history of sequential narration in popular prints, Hogarth’s example provided the most immediate foundation for Gillray’s work. *Wife & No Wife, or A Trip to the Continent* (1786) and *The Morning after Marriage, or A Scene on the Continent* (1788) depict two stages of the morganatic marriage of the Prince of Wales and Mrs. Fitzherbert. Although published separately, these two prints reveal the artist’s movement toward the format of companion prints, not only in the narration of sequential events across the two images but also in the common

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James Gillray, *Wife & No Wife, or A Trip to the Continent*, 1786

James Gillray, *The Morning after Marriage, or A Scene on the Continent*, 1788
language of the titles that links them. This pairing on the royal marriage recalls Hogarth’s pair of prints Before and After (1736). Some years later, Gillray published Harmony before Matrimony and Matrimonial Harmonics, issued as a more deliberate pairing on the same day, October 25, 1805. Rather than targeting specific public figures, these prints are more generic, as is Hogarth’s model. Although simplified and reduced, the pair recognizably shares the Hogarthian story line of an ill-fated couple in Marriage A-la-mode (1745).

Gillray’s deployment of sequential narration appears too in single-plate prints gridded to accommodate multiple episodes. John Bull’s Progress (1793) traces the unhappy fate of the imaginary hero, a personification of a common British farmer, as he confronts the French Revolution. John Bull’s domestic comfort is disrupted when he enlists and marches off to war, leaving his bereft family to suffer in his absence. He returns gaunt, crippled, and one-eyed to find his starving family huddled in a hovel. Gillray also produced narrative sequences based on specific topics and particular individuals. Democracy, or A Sketch of the Life of Buonaparte (1800) sets forth with decided irony six imaginary episodes lampooning the origins, life, and military career of the French general.

Despite the success of the single-plate Napoleonic “progress,” Gillray abandoned this format. He continued nevertheless to produce sequential narration as multi-plate sets. At the height of the first French invasion scare in 1798, Gillray was engaged by Sir John Dalrymple (1726–1810) to execute an ambitious set of plates forecasting the dire consequences of such an invasion. Originally planned to comprise no fewer than twenty prints,

James Gillray, Harmony before Matrimony, 1805
James Gillray, Matrimonial Harmonics, 1805
the project produced just four. Dalrymple subsidized this ambitious set of large, complex images so that they could be sold cheaply and thus reach a wider audience. Sharing Hogarth’s conviction that graphic art might exert moral or political influence, Gillray effectively evoked Hogarth’s own depictions of political topics decades earlier in *The Invasion, Plate 1 (France)* and *Plate 2 (England)*. Hogarth’s *Four Prints of an Election* may well have been on Gillray’s mind as well.

In 1809 Gillray published a complete set of eight plates on the life of political writer William Cobbett (1763–1835) that the artist claims, in a farcical inscription on the print, was based on an autobiographical account: “Vide, my own memoirs in the *Political Register* of 1809.” Gillray’s representation of Cobbett as a boy cruelly encouraging a dog to attack a cat recalls Hogarth’s depiction of the youthful Tom Nero, who tortures a dog in the first plate of *Four Stages of Cruelty*. Later scenes of drunkenness and trial from the life of Cobbett recall Hogarth’s depiction from *A Rake’s Progress*, *Plate 3*, in which the profligate gambles his inheritance and cavorts with prostitutes, or from *Industry and Idleness*, *Plate 10*, which portrays the idle apprentice brought before the alderman and impeached. At other times, Gillray’s language signals his homage to Hogarth in progressive narratives, as in the title of the five-plate series *A Rake’s Progress at University* (1806), which chronicles the life and misadventures of a freshman.

Gillray, however, remains true to his own genius. His political and social narratives reveal a master of ironic detachment, a temperament perhaps better suited to the single-plate format that he ultimately preferred. Yet Gillray’s forays into Hogarthian progresses kept the idiom relevant for further development by later graphic satirists including Richard Newton, Charles Williams, and William Elmes, whose works are also represented at the Lewis Walpole Library.
CHECKLIST

All items from the Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University, except where otherwise indicated.

James Gillray
Wife & No Wife, or A Trip to the Continent
Etching with stipple engraving
Published March 27, 1786 by W. Holland
786.03.27.01++

James Gillray
The Morning after Marriage, or A Scene on the Continent
Etching with stipple engraving
Published April 5, 1788 by W. Holland
788.04.05.01++ Impression 1

William Hogarth
Before and After, State 1
Etching and engraving
Published December 15, 1736 by William Hogarth
Kinnaird 33k (a & b)

James Gillray
Harmony before Matrimony and Matrimonial Harmonics
Etching with hand coloring
Published October 25, 1805 by H. Humphrey
805.10.25.02+ and 805.10.25.01+ Impression 1

Bernard Baron (1696–1762) after William Hogarth
Marriage A-la-mode, Plate II
Etching and engraving
Published April 1, 1745 by William Hogarth
Sotheby 17 ++ Box 300

James Gillray
John Bull’s Progress
Etching with hand coloring
Published June 3, 1793 by H. Humphrey
793.06.03.01+

James Gillray
Democracy, or A Sketch of the Life of Buonaparte
Etching with hand coloring
Published May 12, 1800 by H. Humphrey
800.05.12.01+ Impression 2

James Gillray
Four Prints of Consequences of a Successful French Invasion
Etching with engraving and hand coloring
Published March 1798 by J. Gillray
798.03.01.03—798.03.01.05++ and 798.03.06.02++;

George Cruikshank (1792–1878)
Consequences of a Successful French Invasion, Plate 2
Etching with hand coloring
Published (1818?) by John Miller
818.00.00.03

William Hogarth
The Invasion, Plate 1 (France) and 2 (England), State 3
Etching
Published March 8, 1756 by William Hogarth
Sotheby 73++ and 74++

James Gillray
A Rake’s Progress at University, No. 1
Etching and aquatint with hand coloring
Published October 22, 1806 by H. Humphrey
In “The Caricatures of James Gillray” Auchincloss Collection. Miscellaneous Series, vol. 11, page 42

Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale University

James Gillray
The Life of William Cobbett, Written by Himself, Nos. 1–8
Etching with hand coloring
Published September 29, 1809 by H. Humphrey
809.09.29.01–809.09.29.08 Impression 1

William Hogarth
First Stage of Cruelty
Etching and engraving
Published February 1, 1731 by William Hogarth
Kinnaird 53k (a) Box 215

William Hogarth
A Rake’s Progress, Plate 3
Etching and engraving
Published June 25, 1735 by William Hogarth
Kinnaird 8k (b) Box 205

William Hogarth
Industry and Idleness, Plate 10
Engraving
Published September 1747 by William Hogarth
Sotheby 53 Box 100

William Hogarth
Midnight Modern Conversation
Etching with engraving
Published March 1732 by William Hogarth
Sotheby 28++ Box 305
William Hogarth  
*Four Prints of an Election, Plates 1 and 4*  
Etching and engraving  
Published 1755–1758 by William Hogarth  
Sotheby 39++ and 42++

William Hogarth  
*First Stage of Cruelty*  
Etching and engraving  
Published February 1, 1751 by William Hogarth  
Kinnaird 53k (a) Box 215

William Hogarth  
*A Rake’s Progress, Plate 3*  
Etching and engraving  
Published June 25, 1735 by William Hogarth  
Kinnaird 8k (b) Box 205

William Hogarth  
*Industry and Idleness, Plate 10*  
Engraving  
Published September 1747 by William Hogarth  
Sotheby 23 Box 100

William Hogarth  
Midnight Modern Conversation  
Etching with engraving  
Published March 1732 by William Hogarth  
Sotheby 28++ Box 305

**Sources**

- The British Museum. Collection Online.  
  www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/search.aspx
- Draper Hill. *Mr. Gillray: The Caricaturist.*  

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*James Gillray, The Life of William Cobbett, Written by Himself, No. 7, 1809*
Above: William Hogarth, First Stage of Cruelty, 1751

Front: Detail, James Gillray, The Life of William Cobbett, Written by Himself, No. 1, 1809