

William Hogarth
English, 1697–1764

A Rake's Progress, plate 1

The Heir

1735

Engraving

Purchase, Friends of Art

10204b

Tom Rakewell has just inherited a fortune left to him by his miserly father. In this scene, set in his late father's shabby and overcrowded home, Tom rejects his ancestor's penny-pinching ways. Oblivious to the family steward who is stealing his money, Tom, who is being measured for a fashionable new suit, attempts to pay off his pregnant fiancée, Sarah Young. She stands weeping at the door holding a wedding ring in her hand while her mother angrily rejects the handful of gold coins Tom offers.

Can you find evidence of his father's penny-pinching ways in this scene? Hints: Locate the thin cat, which looks as if it never had enough food to eat or find his father's portrait hanging above the fireplace, which depicts him counting money.

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A Rake's Progress, plate 2

The Levée

1735

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10204c

In direct contrast to his father's miserly lifestyle, Tom Rakewell has quickly adapted to a life of luxury. In this scene, the young Rakewell imitates a fashionable aristocrat and practices the morning *levee*—dressing among an audience of visitors and tradesmen while preparing for the day. The crowd of people vying for Tom's attention, including those in the adjoining room, is meant to appear absurd, and satirizes both the taste and entertainments associated with high society and those members of the middle class, like Tom, who indiscriminately aspire to it.

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A Rake's Progress, plate 3

The Orgy

1735

Engraving

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10204d

This chaotic scene is set in the notorious Rose Tavern, a brothel and pub located in London's Covent Garden. In contrast with Tom's studied elegance in the last plate, in this image, Tom is seated to the left, drunk and disheveled. He is surrounded by prostitutes, one of whom has stolen his pocket watch and passes it off to her accomplice located behind Tom.

What other clues suggest that Tom is at a house of ill repute?

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A Rake's Progress, plate 4

The Arrest

1735

Engraving

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10204e

This scene, set in St James's, Mayfair, depicts Tom travelling by sedan chair on his way to St James's Palace to be presented at court. Unfortunately, he has been stopped by a bailiff who is about to arrest him for unpaid debts. He has been saved by the timely intervention of Sarah Young, whom Tom rejected in plate 1. Here she offers the bailiff her hard-earned wages demonstrating her generous spirit and enduring, if misplaced, love for Tom.

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A Rake's Progress, plate 5

The Marriage

1735

Engraving

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10204f

The scene is set in Marylebone Old Church, north of Hyde Park, which was renowned for clandestine weddings. Having squandered his own fortune, Tom marries an ageing, one-eyed heiress. The ever-faithful Sarah, who enters the church holding Tom's child, attempts to interrupt this shameful ceremony but is prevented by a brawl between her mother and an overzealous church attendant. Any hope of Tom's salvation appears to have gone.

Whom do you think Tom is looking at?

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A Rake's Progress, plate 6

The Gaming House

1735

Engraving

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10204g

In this scene, Tom is depicted in White's Club, a popular gaming room located in Soho, London. Wigless and cursing, having just gambled away his second fortune playing dice, Tom falls on one knee pleading with the Almighty, who does not come to his aid. Tom is not the only man down on his luck in this image. On the right side of the scene sits a dejected highwayman, whose pistol and mask protrude from his pocket. On the left side of the scene, a nobleman eager to continue playing, pleads with a moneylender for an advance. Only two men notice the smoke curling in from behind the paneling while everyone else gambles on, unaware of the impending danger.

William Hogarth

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A Rake's Progress, plate 7

The Prison

1735

Engraving

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10204h

In this scene, Tom is incarcerated in the notorious Fleet debtors' prison, where Hogarth's own father had been incarcerated. Tom, who squandered his wife's fortune attempted to earn it back by writing a play, which has been rejected by the publisher. His emaciated, elderly, one-eyed wife gestures angrily at Tom while a boy and the prison warden wait impatiently to be paid. To the left of this pitiful scene, the faithful Sarah has fainted at the sight of the ruined Tom Rakewell. Two women try to revive her with smelling salts while Sarah and Tom's daughter scolds her, demanding to leave this deplorable place.

Why do you think the artist included angel wings in the upper left-hand corner of the image?

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A Rake's Progress, plate 8

The Asylum

1735

Engraving

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10204i

In this final scene set in Bethlehem Royal Hospital (Bedlam), an institution for the poor and insane, Tom lays in the foreground almost stripped of his clothes and his social pretensions. Sarah weeps by his side knowing that Tom is beyond her help. While some of the details in this picture may appear disturbing to 21st-century eyes, hospitals like Bedlam were open to paying visitors. Notice the aristocratic woman and her maid amused and disgusted by the poor unfortunate people. Ironically, while Tom had set out to mimic the aristocratic lifestyle, he ends his life by being one of its entertainments.