

Exposing the Baillieu Library's radicals, slayers and villains

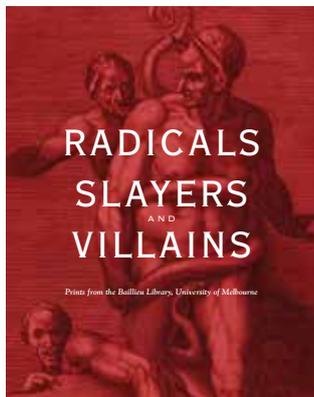
Kerriane Stone

Behind the scenes of the Baillieu Library, in collection storage areas, is a horde of dangerous and powerful individuals. These controversial figures from mythological, biblical and historical times have emerged to reveal themselves in 2014, both inside the library and beyond its walls. *Radicals, slayers and villains* is an exhibition drawn from the Baillieu Library Print Collection, currently showing in the newly refurbished Noel Shaw Gallery on the first floor of the Baillieu, and which will then tour regional Victoria, to be seen in the Art Gallery of Ballarat, Hamilton Art Gallery and Latrobe Regional Gallery. The prints have only rarely been seen in the library before now, as display spaces were not available to show these extraordinary works of art to such effect. The exhibition presents figures who have helped shape Western culture, interpreted in a way that makes them relevant to audiences today.

The loosely defined groupings of 'radicals', 'slayers' and 'villains' in the exhibition show that the individuals transcend these broad terms and can be perceived by different viewers in complex ways. Visitors to the exhibition are invited to react personally to the prints and create their own relationships with the figures depicted in the powerful

woodcuts, etchings and engravings. The exhibition features seminal artists including Dürer, Rembrandt and Goya and others from the old master period (1500–1850). The radicals group includes identities such as Cleopatra, Napoléon, Galileo and Martin Luther, while all kinds of beheadings, stabbings and flayings are happening among the slayers and villains. Soldiers of war and religion wreak havoc and monsters abound. Satan emerges as a major protagonist who manifests himself in the library in surprising guises.

The exhibition is accompanied by an edgy and informative publication (illustrated below) depicting the 66 works of art, 60 of which are explained in essays by 30 contributors who have been inspired by the collection. These authors include academics, museum professionals and students.



A series of tantalising public talks to further explore the themes introduced by the authors of the catalogue is being offered in the Baillieu Library throughout the duration of the exhibition. A children's program has been specially devised, in which visitors choose their own interactions with the radicals, slayers and villains. This program is available as an iBook and aspects of it are also in printed formats.

New media art and technology innovations have been used to reinterpret the old masters and demonstrate how relevant they are today. An animation that brings the masterful works to life through movement has been created by University of Melbourne Library staff member Andrew Brown. This animation is playing in the exhibition space and will continue to be available on the exhibition website. Andrew Brown has also created a YouTube video, which promotes the exhibition to vast audiences of technology-savvy people around the world.

The Baillieu Library Print Collection has been emerging through social media sources such as the University Library's and Special Collections' new Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Flickr pages. The radicals, slayers and villains are now exposing their faces to the latest

Opposite: The book accompanying the exhibition, designed by Janet Boschen.

Below: Hendrick Goltzius, after a painting (1588) by Cornelis Cornelisz. van Haarlem, *The dragon devouring the companions of Cadmus*, 1588, engraving (first state), sheet (trimmed to image): 25.1 × 31.7 cm. Reg. no. 1959.2534, gift of Dr J. Orde Poynton 1959, Baillieu Library Print Collection, University of Melbourne.



digital trends. Contemporary artists, such as projectionist Freya Pitt, will also be engaging with the collection.

The exhibition has given students and academics the opportunity to interact with the Baillieu Library Print Collection, influencing, for example, current thought about how collections can be used for teaching. The exhibition will be visited by medical students (as well as students from a variety of disciplines) who will use visual analysis techniques to examine the works of art so that

they may better learn empathy skills relevant to clinical practice. Such radical programs have been running at the university through the Ian Potter Museum of Art.¹

Some works in the exhibition recently received conservation treatment so that they can be displayed to their best advantage. This much-needed work was generously funded by the Russell and Mab Grimwade Miegunyah Fund. Original research, such as the attribution by student Marguerite

Brown of an 18th-century drawing, has also been achieved.²

Radicals, slayers and villains also presents an opportunity to expose the Baillieu Library Print Collection beyond the university and for the University Library to collaborate with regional institutions and audiences. This exciting project has all been made possible by the generous support of the Gordon Darling Foundation, the Besen Family Foundation, Museums Australia (Victoria), the University of Melbourne's Cultural and Community Relations Advisory Group, the Russell and Mab Grimwade Miegunyah Fund and donors to the University Appeal.

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For full details about the exhibition *Radicals, slayers and villains*, its public programs and activities, see <http://library.unimelb.edu.au/radicals/>. The exhibition catalogue is available for \$20 from the Co-op Bookshop, see www.coop.com.au.

1 See for example Heather Gaunt, 'Medicine and the arts: Using visual art to develop observation skills and empathy in medical and dental students', *University of Melbourne Collections*, issue 11, December 2012, pp. 37–9.

2 See article on pages 46–50.