

<p>William Hogarth, <i>Marriage A-la-Mode</i> in six scenes, 1743-45, oil on six canvases, each 70 x 91 cm (28 x 36")</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Initial analysis <i>The Marriage Settlement</i></p> <p>This is the first of the six part series. The name on the frame of the painting is <i>The Marriage Settlement</i>. Hogarth called this <i>The marriage contract</i>.</p>	<p>The title of the series could be from John Dryden's play, but its content appears to be quite different. The paintings were commissioned by Mary Edwards of Kensington in 1742.</p>
<p>The walls of the room have been given a false perspective which cramps the occupants and makes the room feel very busy.</p>	<p>Construction of the Earl's new mansion, visible through the window, has stopped and a usurer negotiates payment for further construction at the centre table. There are four paintings on the wall to the left of the window. The largest is a portrait of Earl Squanderfield in the style of Van Loo. The Earl's portrait shows him wearing the French Order of Saint Esprit (an honour an Englishman could never have been awarded). On the lower left a painting of <i>St Sebastian</i> (after Titian). Above this <i>David and Goliath</i> and below to the right <i>Judith and Holofernes</i> (both after Titian).</p>	
<p>There are five paintings on the lefthand wall. The centre picture shows a <i>Medusa's head</i> (after Caravaggio). To the right of the <i>Medusa</i> a painting shows <i>Prometheus gnawed by a vulture</i> and below this <i>Cain killing Abel</i> (both after Titian). On the upper left <i>The Martyrdom of St. Agnes</i> (after Domenichino) and below this the <i>Martyrdom of St Lawrence</i> (after Le Sueur, originally after Titian). Viscount Squanderfield, admires himself in a mirror as he takes a pinch of snuff. He wears the latest Paris fashion including shoes with high red heels. The black patch on his neck indicates that he has syphilis. Behind him the bride, the daughter of the wealthy but miserly city merchant, listens to the lawyer Silvertongue, while polishing her wedding ring on a handkerchief. He is sharpening his quill pen. Two dogs chained to each other in the corner mirror the situation of the young couple.</p>	<p>On the ceiling a painting of <i>The Destruction of Pharaoh's army while crossing the Red Sea</i> from a copy of a woodcut by Titian.</p> <p>The burning candle in the centre of the table indicates that legal documents are about to be signed and then sealed using the candle flame to melt the sealing wax. When the candle burns down the document is considered ratified. Standing behind the table the usurer helps with the negotiations between the merchant on the left and the Earl on the right. Behind the usurer a man compares 'A Plan for the New Building' with the progress of the building project seen in the window.</p>  <p>The merchant, who is also an alderman, is comparatively plainly dressed in a red coat and blue breeches. He holds the marriage contract. He wears spectacles and his chain of office. Near his feet are bags of coins, some spilling out. Some are already on the table.</p> <p>The six paintings of the series are in the National Gallery, London</p>	<p>Behind the Earl is an ostentatious canopied and curtained bed area, crowned with a coronet.</p> <p>The gouty Earl with a bandaged foot on a stool, his crutches leaning each side of him on the chair, proudly points to a picture of his family tree, rising from William the Conqueror. The tree has a broken branch designating a marriage to a commoner. Hogarth has depicted the Earl in flamboyant dress that has been identified as that of Lord Portmore who, at the Queen's birthday party in 1731, 'was said to have the richest Dress.' (<i>Gentleman's Magazine</i>, 121, 1731.)</p>

The Earl's collection of paintings.

The paintings referenced in *The Marriage Settlement* are reported as copies of master paintings, mainly from Titian, but also from Caravaggio and Domenichino. One of the paintings is in the style of the eighteenth century Carle van Loo. Hogarth parodies the Rococo 'conversation piece' paintings by Jean François de Troy and others.

The paintings on the walls are:

Medusa's head, after Caravaggio, 1597, Uffizi.

Prometheus gnawed by a vulture, after Titian, ca. 1580s, Hermitage, St. Petersburg.

Cain killing Abel, after Titian, 1546, Isola, Venice.

The Martyrdom of St. Agnes, after Domenichino, 1621, Bologna.

The Martyrdom of St. Lawrence, after an engraving by Girard Audran, 1686, of a painting by Eustache Le Sueur and originally after Titian, 1560s, Escorial, San Lorenzo.

The Destruction of Pharaoh's army while crossing the Red Sea from a woodcut by de la Greeche, after Titian, 1514, survived in impressions from 1549, British Museum.

A Portrait of Earl Squanderfield, in the style of Carle van Loo, is said to be 'in the pose of Jupiter *Furens*'.¹ An alternative identification of what he wears around his neck is the the Order of the Golden Fleece. The painting down the right edge appears to suggest a snake.

St. Sebastian, after Titian, 1581, Hermitage, St. Petersburg.

David and Goliath, after Titian, 1546, Isola, Venice.

Judith and Holofernes, after Titian, ca. 1580, Detroit.²

The paintings initially serve to demonstrate the Earl's appetite to have a prestigious collection of art and thus to improve his status. The subject of the paintings metaphorically dramatises the depicted scene. The arrows in the body of Sebastian, link directly to the lawyer Silvertongue who is sharpening his quill and is in love with the merchant's daughter, and thus implies pain of unrequited love and the arrows of Cupid. The agonies and terrors around the scene, from the tortures and destructions depicted in the subjects of Prometheus gnawed by a vulture, Cain killing Abel, the martyrdoms of St Lawrence, St Agnes, and St Sebastian, David and Goliath and Judith and Holofernes exaggerate and satirise the consequences of the marriage contract being ratified. Hogarth produced the engraving *Characters and Caricatures* as his subscription ticket for the prints based on the paintings. It is supposed that Mary Edwards, who commissioned the paintings, also made suggestions about the subject and the prominent people who should be satirised. The following five paintings in *Marriage A-la-Mode* lead from this ratified contract to the murder of the Earl's son and suicide of the merchant's daughter.

There are other metaphorical connections provided by the painting. For example in his satirical treatment of the marriage, the bed behind the Earl relates to the grid on which St Lawrence is martyred in the painting above the Earl's son. Similarly the painting of St Sebastian is placed above the head of the 'in-love' lawyer, sharpening his quill. All of this is happening under *The Destruction of Pharaoh's army while crossing the Red Sea*.

¹ The suggestion that the pose is from 'Jupiter *Furens*' was made by Ronald Paulson without visual support, and I have not been able to confirm that this is correct.

² I am skeptical about whether or not all of these paintings, proposed as copies of Titian's work, are in fact copied from Titian, but the subjects have been correctly identified. For example, the only *Judith* painting I know of by Titian, now in Detroit, has a different visual arrangement from that depicted by Hogarth.