

# Literature review on hogarths marriage à la mode

[Art & Culture](#), [Painting](#)



William Hogarth's six paintings – known as 'Marriage à la Mode' – tell the story of an unsuccessful upper-class marriage in England in the mid 18th century.

### **Painting 1 – The Marriage Settlement**

This shows the final negotiations between a nobleman who has a lot of debt (seated on the right) and wealthy business man (seated in the middle) to marry their children off. The aristocrat needs the money; the business man wants his daughter to marry into a noble family. The couple are not interested in each other: the girl is crying (comforted by her lawyer); the young man has syphilis shown by the black spot on his neck. The chained dogs in the corner of the picture show what this marriage will be like.

### **Painting 2 – The Tête à Tête**

This title is ironic. The husband is exhausted, having been out all night visiting women and gambling. The dog sniffs an unfamiliar lady's cap that hangs from his pocket. The wife seems very happy too: she too has been seeing someone else – who had to leave quickly when the husband returned – note the upturned chair.

### **Painting 3 – The Inspection**

This is in a doctor's surgery. All the characters have signs of syphilis – black spots and sores on the mouth. There was no effective cure for this STD in the 18th century.

### **Painting 4 – The Toilette**

The husband's father has died. The crowns on the table suggest the wife has become the new countess. There is a child's teething ring visible, but no child – perhaps suggesting a lack of maternal care. The husband is not in this painting. On the wall the paintings depict scenes of sex and seduction from the classical world and this is used to suggest that the wife and her lawyer are having an affair.

### **Painting 5 – The Bagnio**

A bagnio was a cheap place where you could rent rooms by the hour for sex. The lawyer and the wife have been interrupted by the husband, who has received a death wound in the ensuing sword fight. The lawyer is escaping through the window.

### **Painting 6 – The Lady's Death**

Back at her father's house the wife is dying from an overdose, having heard of her lover's execution for murder. The baby shows signs of having syphilis. The wife's father, the businessman, shows his practical nature by pulling the wedding ring from his daughter's hand.