

# *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide*

a journal of nineteenth-century visual culture

Raymond Jonas

book review of

*Husbands, Wives, and Lovers: Marriage and Its Discontents in Nineteenth-Century France* by Patricia Mainardi

*Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 3, no. 2 (Autumn 2004)

---

Citation: Raymond Jonas, book review of *Husbands, Wives, and Lovers: Marriage and Its Discontents in Nineteenth-Century France* by Patricia Mainardi, *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 3, no. 2 (Autumn 2004), <http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/autumn04/husbands-wives-and-lovers-marriage-and-its-discontents-in-nineteenth-century-france-by-patricia-mainardi>.

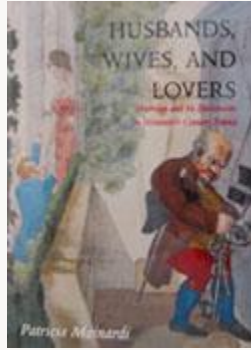
Published by: [Association of Historians of Nineteenth-Century Art](#)

Notes:

This PDF is provided for reference purposes only and may not contain all the functionality or features of the original, online publication.

License:

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#) [Creative Commons License](#).



Mainardi, Patricia

*Husbands, Wives, and Lovers: Marriage and Its Discontents in Nineteenth-Century France*

New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003

256 pages

98 black and white illustrations

Index and bibliography

ISBN: 0-300-10104-X

Price: \$45.00 Retail

It used to be that no one cared much about the Restoration. For drama, it paled in comparison with the Napoleonic era that preceded it and the Revolution of July 1830 that brought it down. Its leading political personalities are so bland, so inept, so retrograde (think of Charles X), that it's difficult to take them seriously. It's hard to escape the conclusion that the Restoration represented a breathing space, an imposed pause, until the debates launched by the Revolution could be resumed.

By focusing our attention elsewhere, specifically the pleasures and resentments of conjugal life and their cultural representations, Patricia Mainardi shows us a Restoration teeming with conflict and intrigue. The result is a very fine book that links the legal reforms of the Revolution with gender and generational conflicts of the nineteenth century. *Husbands, Wives, and Lovers* represents something of a surprise for readers already familiar with Mainardi's work. It wouldn't be a Patricia Mainardi book if it weren't full of smart observations for historians who like to think about art. But while *Husbands, Wives, and Lovers* is definitely a Mainardi book, it begins with a detailed exploration of the impact of the Enlightenment and the Revolution on conceptions of gender relations as well family and inheritance law. Following the work of Lynn Hunt and others, Mainardi shows how the Enlightenment sustained impatience not only with patriarchy in its political form (that is, monarchy) but also within family and gender relations. The Revolution validated the sense that legal equality for men and women, particularly in matters of inheritance, ought to be part of a movement toward liberty, equality, and fraternity. The Napoleonic Civil Code consolidated some gains of the revolutionary era, notably equal inheritance for daughters as well as sons, but also secured the rule of fathers and husbands in a manner befitting the self-image of Napoleon as dynastic ruler and *paterfamilias*.

The result, for women as well as jurists of the Restoration, was a tangle complicated by the abolition of divorce after the fall of Napoleon but the retention of adultery as a criminal

offense. By exploring Restoration court cases and *causes célèbres*, Mainardi opens up to historical scrutiny the unhappy world of arranged marriages or *mariages de raison*, wherein the accumulation and transmission of property was all. When older, wealthy men took younger wealthy wives, the possibilities for mischief were many. The interests of family and property were served by such May-December marriages, but romance was not. The man enjoyed wealth and power, as well as a young and lovely spouse. For the woman, however, the outlook was often much grimmer. With the most important life decisions made for her by her father and her husband, the choice of a lover was among the few significant personal choices left for her to make.

Equal inheritance, meanwhile, had greatly raised the stakes in the game of adultery. As David Hume delicately put it in his "Treatise of Human Nature" (1740) "the principle of generation goes from the man to the woman, an error may easily take place on the side of the former, tho' it be utterly impossible with regard to the latter." In other words, only a woman knows for certain that a child is her own. Under a regime of equal inheritance, a child born of a wife's adulterous liaison may make an illegitimate claim not only on the husband's love, but also his estate.

Overlaying male anxieties regarding infidelity and property were the grudges of young men against older men in the Restoration years. Young men resented the older men who married "their" women; adultery could be an act in which young men instrumentalized their lovers in an intergenerational gesture of revenge. Young men also resented the political and cultural stodginess of the Restoration that older men seemed to embody and that Grandville and, later, Daumier loved to mock. It goes without saying that older men feared being displaced by younger men both politically and in their conjugal relations; some, such as the Marquis de Cairion, went so far as to pursue their wives and their lovers in court under adultery laws. Mainardi confirms for the Restoration what Lynn Hunt observed regarding the Revolution—that women serve as triangulation points in struggles for power between men.

In succeeding chapters, Mainardi surveys marriage manuals (*Physiology of Marriage*), theater (*Hernani*), literature (Balzac, Stendhal), and, of course, the visual arts. All of this is done persuasively and with keen insight, as one would expect. In the final chapter we realize that, in a sense, this is a book about a painting, or at least the subject for one. Mainardi sets Horace Vernet's *Mazeppa and the Wolves* (1826) as well as other paintings of the Mazeppa story against the backdrop of marriage, property, and gender relations she has set out.

Mazeppa was a member of the Ukrainian gentry in the service of Poland in the 17th century. He was caught in an affair with the wife of a Polish official. For his punishment, he was stripped and tied backwards (spine to spine) to a horse. The horse was whipped and turned loose. The popularity of the Mazeppa subject (Géricault and Delacroix took it on before Vernet) remains rather opaque outside the context Mainardi has developed. She goes on to establish Mazeppa as a proxy for a number of contemporary concerns. Mazeppa represented the injustice that young men might have felt given their legal exposure under adultery law. For both Géricault and Delacroix, he served as a meditation on their personal indiscretions. For readers of Byron, whose "Mazeppa" acquainted the generation of 1820

with the story, Mazeppa represented the Romantic genius, the wages of impulse, the Revolution, or even the exiled Bonaparte.

It might seem churlish to conclude this hymn of praise with a minor complaint, but here goes. When will academics stop referring to one another in their books? Frequent asides to "the work of so-and-so" have their place in scholarly journals, essays, and reviews that sometimes don't include footnotes, and where the intended readership is generally confined to fellow academics. In books, however, insofar as they are intended to reach a broader audience, such references make the non-academic reader feel like an intruder on a private conversation. We need to rely on citations to be gracious in attributing our insights to others, leaving the body of our texts as a place where academics and non-academics feel welcome as part of a single public.

Raymond Jonas  
Professor  
University of Washington  
jonas[at]u.washington.edu