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The Unmarriageable Artist: the History Paintings of Edgar Degas

ABSTRACT

In this paper Edgar Degas' history paintings are read as the painter's reflection on the irreconcilability of married life and artistic vocation, a major theme of discussion among artists and writers in nineteenth-century France. In *The Young Spartans Exercising* (1860-62) we see bachelors being banned from participation in the Gymnopaediae. In *The Daughter of Jephthah* (1859-60), *Semiramis Building Babylon* (1860-62) and *Scene of War in the Middle Ages* (1863-65), Degas shows famous unmarried women, *femmes fortes* who have chosen to pursue spiritual rather than mortal passions, all alter-egos for the *artiste célibataire* who chooses devotion to art over a family-centred bourgeois life. This article contributes to the view that Degas was neither a misogynist nor a narrow-minded bourgeois. Far from having preconceived patriarchal ideas on marriage and women, Degas choose to remain an *artiste célibataire* in accordance with the more extreme aspects of the nineteenth-century French cult of the artist as genius. It is the idea of the exceptional status of the artist that Degas elaborates in his history paintings, and that rendered him unmarriageable.

There are only a few history paintings by Edgar Degas (1834-1917) and they were all executed during the formative years of the painter, between 1859 and 1865. In *The Young Spartans Exercising* (1860-62) bachelors are being banned, following a Lycurgan law, from participation in the Gymnopaediae. In *The Daughter of Jephthah* (1859-60), *Semiramis Building Babylon* (1860-62) and in the so-called *Scene of War in the Middle Ages* (1863-65), Degas depicts forceful females who are also great spinsters. For its subject, the denigration of bachelors in Lycurgan Sparta, *The Young Spartans* seems disconnected in meaning from the three representations of strong females. But, at a closer reading, the four paintings are brought together by a unifying theme loaded with autobiographical references to the *artiste célibataire*. The presence of forceful women in these history paintings does not speak for Degas' concern with the social condition of women in his time. It speaks for the cause of the *artiste célibataire*, through Degas' choice to depict such exceptional women as Semiramis, Jephthah's daughter and Mademoiselle d'Orléans, the French princess who, as I will suggest, may be figured as the archer in the *Scene of War in the Middle Ages*.¹ That these women of history should be not simply heroic but also transgressive women is an important consideration for our understanding of why Degas chose them to represent his individualism and artistic bachelorhood. To hold up these figures as ideals was not to suggest a broader endorsement of women in general or models to be emulated: on the contrary, it was perfectly compatible with a position of indifference toward the actual condition of women in society at large. But, as each of these figures pointed simultaneously to the

I wish to thank Anthony White for reading an earlier draft of this paper.

¹ This is in keeping with Mary Sheriff's argument that 'the exceptional woman is a traditional discourse of masculinist discourse, tolerated, even admired in her originality'. The term 'exceptional woman' points in two directions: 'first, toward the exceptional person – that individual who achieved something considered out of the ordinary, an individual whose success historians or contemporaries valorized. And second, toward the exceptional woman – that woman whose achievement required a dispensation from and strengthening of the laws that regulated other women.' Sheriff, 1996, p. 2.

concept of sacrifice and to the motif of marginality or exceptionality, they resounded profoundly with the circumstances of the bachelor artist in France in the nineteenth century who, in his unmarried state, stood apart from what was perceived to be the natural order of society.

In the interpretation of Henri Loyrette, Degas' history paintings may have political meanings, dissimulated under the archaeological themes: *The Daughter of Jephthah* is read as a critique of Napoleon III's foreign affairs policy with regards to the Italian Risorgimento; *Semiramis Building Babylon* deplores Haussmannian urbanism; and *Scene of War in the Middle Ages* evokes the cruelty of the American Civil War.² Loyrette's interpretation identifies in Degas' history paintings the following motives of interest to my argument: first, these artworks by Degas express political meanings, and secondly, that Degas was critical of the social and political order of his times. This supports my argument that Degas' history paintings highlight the theme of the artist as an exceptional and unmarried individual.



Fig. 1. Edgar Degas, *The Daughter of Jephthah*, 1859-60. Oil on canvas, 195.6 x 298.5 cm, Smith College Museum of Art, Northhampton, Massachusetts, Drayton Hillyer Fund, SC 1933:9-1.

Settled in the studio at 13, rue de Laval, Degas set to work on his first and largest history painting, a biblical subject: *The Daughter of Jephthah* (Fig. 1). As we read in Judges, 11, Jephthah, the son of Galahad and a prostitute, was exiled by his half-brothers. Recalled to lead the Galadites in a war against the Ammonites, Jephthah vowed that, in order to secure his victory, he would offer to God the first person coming out of the door of his

² Loyrette, 1991, p. 165.

house at his return from the war. Victorious, Jephthah returned to his house at Mizpeh, where his daughter, his only child, was the first to come forth to greet him, playing tambourines and dancing. On seeing her, Jephthah tore his clothes apart lamenting that his vow to God could not be revoked. His daughter accepted her destiny and asked only to be given two months, during which she would wander across the mountains with her companions and weep over her maidenhood. She returned to her father and Jephthah's vow was fulfilled.³ For his painting, Degas imagined a green country setting as a background and chose to represent Jephthah returning from the war, his horse led by a servant. Seeing his daughter, dressed in white, approaching in the midst of a group of women, he lifts his arm in a desperate gesture, remembering his vow. Degas' canvas recalls the warm colours he had seen in Eugène Delacroix's *Pietà*. For the *motif* of Jephthah on his horse with an arm upraised, he recalled *Attila and his Barbarians Trampling Italy and the Arts*, from the murals executed by Delacroix in the 1840s at the library at the Palais Bourbon.⁴ According to Theodore Reff, among Degas' sources of inspiration for this work we find a poem by Alfred de Vigny, *La Fille de Jephté* (1820).⁵ Henri Loyrette has emphasized that in Degas' time the story of Jephthah's daughter was undoubtedly taken to imply her human death in sacrifice to God.⁶ Indeed, in the poem by Vigny the virgin returns from her wandering in the mountains to offer herself 'to her father's knife'.⁷ The Book of Judges, however, does not say whether Jephthah's sacrifice of his daughter to God meant her death or that she remained unwed and childless. Both interpretations of Jephthah's vow have been offered.⁸ The exact fate of Jephthah's daughter was probably beyond Degas' concern. For the artist the interest of this Biblical story resided in the superhuman destiny of the daughter of Jephthah, a destiny of spinsterhood and chastity. For Degas it was the story of a life that must be devoted to a superior cause and thereby challenges the expectations of society. In the painting, Jephthah in the foreground despairs of the end of his line because Judaism condemns celibacy except pre-marital female celibacy.⁹

From early on in his career, Degas was interested in figures of exceptional women. A notebook of 1856 reveals that he gave a significant amount of thought, in the form of compositional studies, to the subjects of Candaules' wife, taken from Herodotus, and of Medea, as he sketched during a performance of Ernest Legouvé's *Médée* in April that year, with Adelaide Ristori acting in the role.¹⁰ Fascinated by heroic women with great destinies, in a notebook used in Florence in 1858-59 Degas copied excerpts from the *Vies des dames illustres françaises et étrangères* (1665-66) by the Abbé de Brantôme, noting down a long passage describing Mary Stuart's farewell to France.¹¹ The Romantic element in Degas' preoccupation with illustrious women of history and literature is also

³ Segond, 1928, pp. 225-7.

⁴ Notebook 15, in Reff, 1976b, vol. 1, pp. 87-9.

⁵ Notebook 19, in Reff, 1976b, vol. 1, pp. 102-7 and 'The Artist and the Writer', in Reff, 1976a, pp. 147-99.

⁶ Loyrette, 1984, pp. 150-57.

⁷ Vigny, 1950, pp. 2-4.

⁸ Moore, 1958, pp. 301-4.

⁹ On the Judaic view of celibacy, see Abbott, 2000, pp. 192-3.

¹⁰ Notebook 6, in Reff, 1976b, vol. 1, pp. 49-53.

¹¹ Notebook 12, in Reff, 1976b, vol. 1, pp. 73-8.

apparent in his history paintings. The theme of the destiny of the exceptional individual, signified by the strong female, emerges as Degas evokes the fate of Jephthah's daughter to remain a virgin, the accomplishments of Queen Semiramis, thriving in her newly-found unmarried state, and the bellicose Mademoiselle d'Orléans whose dreams of marrying Louis XIV are dismantled by her going to war.



Fig. 2. Edgar Degas, *The Young Spartans Exercising*, 1860-62. Oil on canvas, 109.5 x 155 cm, The National Gallery, London. Courtauld Fund, 1924, inv. NG3860.

In 1860 Degas undertook *Semiramis Building Babylon* and *The Young Spartans Exercising*. The latter work raises a separate theme from that of exceptional women: the issue of the bachelor taboo. Numerous drawings and studies exist for *The Young Spartans Exercising*, and two painted versions. The earlier one, of about 1860, shows a group of girls on the left and a group of boys set against tree trunks on the right. Spartan mothers and children appear around a temple with Lycurgus the lawgiver. Sparta spreads behind them, and Mount Taygetos is outlined on the left. This work was left unfinished by Degas.¹² The second version of the painting (at the National Gallery of London, Fig. 2) was begun sometime around 1860-62 and repeatedly reworked by Degas, in the late 1870s and possibly later.¹³ In comparison to the first version, the temple and the trees

¹² Oil on canvas, 97.4 x 140 cm, Art Institute of Chicago.

¹³ Martha Lucy has discussed the reworking of the canvas and observed that sometime after 1879, Degas removed the classicizing architecture from the middle background of the composition (which we see in the study for the *Young Spartans* at the Art Institute of Chicago) and painted over the profiles of the figures, erasing their idealised heads to give them what Lucy terms animal and aggressively bestial features and

have disappeared and the two groups of figures now dramatically confront each other. In the background we see the Spartan mothers with the lawgiver Lycurgus, and the houses of Sparta far in the distance.¹⁴

This work has prompted a range of readings by various scholars. *The Young Spartans Exercising* has generally been read as a scene of conflict between women and men, taken by Degas from both Plutarch's *Life of Lycurgus* in *Parallel Lives* and from the *Voyage du Jeune Anacharsis en Grèce* (1787) by the Abbé Barthélemy.¹⁵ For Carol Salus, the painting represents a Spartan courtship ritual, in which 'men were enticed to marry and women were exercising', with Spartan costumes and hairstyles accurately depicted according to their symbolism. For example, the short-haired girl 'is either ready for marriage or already married,' while the long-haired girl would be understood by the Spartans as a virgin.¹⁶ For Norma Broude the work depicts 'a challenge that would lead to an ensuing athletic competition', representing Degas' positive response to contemporary French feminism, which intensified in the late 1870s, when Degas decided to rework the painting.¹⁷ However, as Linda Nochlin has objected, this painting is about antagonism and hostility. Degas himself referred to the work either as 'Young girls fighting in the Platanistas under the eyes of the old Lycurgus and the mothers' or as 'Young Spartan Girls Provoking Boys'. In fact, what is ultimately disturbing in the painting, for Nochlin, is 'the provocative gesture of the girl on the left and the unbridgeable distance' between the group of girls and the group of boys, separated by a wide space.¹⁸ Nochlin attributes this tension not to Degas' misogyny, a myth that she considers laid to rest by Norma Broude, but to what she defines as 'a more general nineteenth-century French ideology about women and sex, unconscious for the most part, and peculiarly rich in reticence and ambiguities in the case of Degas' representations of the relations between men and women'.¹⁹ We read in Plutarch that the Spartan courtship ritual consisted of the 'games, dances, and gambols, that girls performed all naked in the presence of men: not for the sake of well-thought out geometry, as Plato states, but for the sake of lovemaking'.²⁰ In Degas' painting, however, it is not the girls who are naked, but the boys. This suggests that Degas is illustrating the passage from Plutarch's *Life of Lycurgus*, which mentions the ritual punishment that befell Spartan bachelors: they were banned from the parade ground where Spartans performed their exercises and subjected to public humiliation.²¹

poses. For Lucy, 'the body itself can be understood as the painting's subject'. This body is jeopardized in its status by modern evolutionary Darwinian discourse, by means of which Degas displaces 'the ideal with an evolutionary, and altogether modern, body'. Lucy, 2003, pp. 1-17.

¹⁴ See the detailed discussion of the work in Bomford et al., 2004, pp. 68-81. Also see Notebook 18, in Reff, 1976b, vol. 1, pp. 92-102 and Burnell, 1969.

¹⁵ Cooper, 1954, pp. 119-22.

¹⁶ Pool, 1964, pp. 306-11 and Salus, 1985, pp. 501-6.

¹⁷ Broude, 1988, pp. 640-59.

¹⁸ Nochlin and Salus, 1986, pp. 486-7.

¹⁹ Nochlin and Salus, 1986, pp. 486-7.

²⁰ 'Jeux, danses et esbatements, que faisoient les filles toutes nues en la présence des hommes : non point par contrainte de raisons géométriques, comme dit Platon, mais par attrait d'amour'. I rely here on Jacques Amyot's version of Plutarch's *Les Vies des hommes illustres de Plutarque*, Paris, n.d., pp. 233-4. Author's translation from the French.

²¹ 'However, besides those attractions, he [Lycurgus] also established a mark of infamy to the address of those who did not want to marry because they were not allowed to be in those places where these games

Single men were excluded from the Gymnopaediae and humiliated by women at this gymnastic festival sacred to Apollo, which was held at Sparta every year after 670 BCE. The term Gymnopaediae has traditionally been translated as either 'the naked boys' dance', 'the festival of the naked boys' or 'the Festival of the Naked Youths'.²² It is the ritual humiliation of young bachelors at the Gymnopaediae that we see in Degas' painting, where the girls are clearly hostile to the naked boys and prevent them from taking part in the dance. In this painting Degas alludes to, and questions, the morals and the structure of his own society. Nineteenth-century French society was, not unlike Sparta, adverse to those who undermined the institution of the bourgeois family / State by exempting themselves from the essential duties of the citizen: marriage and procreation. The bachelor was considered to be unpatriotic and immoral because he was wifeless and childless, and was deplored as a threat to the social order and to the notion of public good founded on bourgeois morals that centred on the familial institution.

A measure of the hostility towards bachelors in French society in the second half of the nineteenth century is evidenced by the *Proposition d'un impôt sur le célibat. Lettre à Monsieur le Ministre des Finances*, a proposal to tax bachelors advanced in 1871 by Dr Tardieu, under the pseudonym Démophile.²³ In the second half of the nineteenth century, medical and social literature in France opposed celibacy, and espoused the democratic and progressive theories developed at the time by the 'grands prophètes du progrès'. In the writings of Auguste Comte, Jules Michelet, Victor Hugo, Emile Zola and Proudhon, bourgeois society is so safely grounded in the values of the family that the familial institution becomes identified with the State itself. Here, the ideal citizen is spouse and father.²⁴ But there were artists and writers who defended bachelorhood as an alternative model of masculinity. Among the mid nineteenth-century French avant-garde, Eugène Delacroix, Camille Corot, Gustave Courbet and Gustave Moreau had chosen celibacy as a way of negotiating the demands of life and the demands of art.²⁵ Bachelorhood represented 'the tensions between man and artist as well as the compatibility of these two identities'.²⁶ In the 1860s, convinced that married life obstructed creativity, Edmond and Jules de Goncourt and Gustave Flaubert discussed what Jean Borie termed the question of the 'célibat de l'artiste.' This is treated by the Goncourts in two novels, *Les Hommes de lettres* (1860), better known under the title of its second version, *Charles Demailly*, published in 1868, and *Manette Salomon* (1865). Demailly, a writer gifted with a 'sensitivité nerveuse' and entirely taken by his writing, lives *maritalement* with the book he is writing. He proclaims that marriage is forbidden to writers, who are men 'outside

and public pastimes were performed in the naked; furthermore, the officials of the town forced them to be in the vicinity of the square, naked in the middle of winter: and as they walked they had to sing a certain song made for them, which said in summary that they were being justly punished for not obeying the laws.' Plutarch, n. d., pp. 233-4 (author's translation). The admonition is also found in *Les Dicts notables des Lacedémoniens*, in the *Moralia*, which I have consulted in a reprint of Amyot's 1571 translation: Amyot, 1971, pp. 209-29.

²² Cartledge, 2002, pp. 38-9; also see Licht, 1931, pp. 34-5 and pp. 115-6.

²³ Borie, 1976, pp. 68-9. Bachelor taxes were also often advocated in Britain and America, on the grounds of the 'Spartan principle'. Snyder, 1999, p. 4 and pp. 22-4.

²⁴ Borie, 1976, pp. 112-28.

²⁵ Martin-Fugier, 2007.

²⁶ I am borrowing here K. V. Snyder's words for Henry James, in Snyder, 1999, p. 106.

the social law, outside the conjugal law. After all bachelorhood is necessary to thought'.²⁷ He lives by this belief until he falls in love with Marthe, a dancer, and marries her. One day, as Demailly is concentrating on a watercolour, Marthe offers a distracted comment on his achievement: 'There! It's pretty what you are doing ... it is coloured'.²⁸ These words reveal to Demailly the vacuity of his married life, as he realizes that an irreparable mistake has consumed his creative life, bringing madness in the trail of existential failure.²⁹ The same fate befalls the painter Naz de Coriolis in *Manette Salomon*. At the brilliant start of his career, Coriolis 'has promised never to marry, not that marriage repelled him; but marriage seemed to him happiness denied the artist'.³⁰ The demands of art, 'the pursuit of invention, the silent incubation of the work, the concentration in the effort', cannot accommodate the '*fonctionnarisme* du mariage'.³¹ For the real artist is 'a kind of savage and a social monster',³² and bachelorhood the only condition 'that left the artist his freedom, his forces, his brain, his conscience'.³³ When Coriolis meets Manette, a painter's model, he develops for her a passion that affects him both as a man and as an artist. As she moves in with him, and after the birth of their child, Coriolis' creative power is negatively affected by the 'slow and gradual infiltration of the feminine influence'.³⁴ Over the years, Manette changes his life, his habits, his working space: 'It was like being slowly dispossessed of himself', and only too late Coriolis realizes that he has traded his talent and career for the demands and petty pleasures of conjugal life.³⁵

In *L'Education Sentimentale* (1869), Gustave Flaubert describes Frédéric Moreau's arrival from the provinces in the Paris of Louis-Philippe. At eighteen, Moreau, embarking on legal studies, is full of literary and artistic ambition until he falls in love with Mme Arnoux, the wife of an acquaintance. For years he loves her in secret, while his fantasies of love and his fantasies of a career in politics feed each other in his conviction that 'Love is the food and almost the atmosphere of genius. Extraordinary emotions produce sublime works of art'.³⁶ But rather than pursuing these, he passes his lifetime cultivating emotions and lovers and, finally, fails to marry. Moreau cannot really love a woman. At the end of his egotistic life, the sentimental education he has accomplished is one of hopeless cynicism.

²⁷ 'Un homme qui passé sa vie à attraper des papillons dans un encrier est un home hors la loi sociale, hors la règle conjugale ... D'ailleurs le célibat est nécessaire à la pensée...'. Goncourt, 1868, pp. 71-2. Author's own translation.

²⁸ Marthe's words in the original: 'Tiens! C'est joili ce que tu fais ...cela a de la couleur...': Goncourt, 1868, pp. 190-1. Author's own translation.

²⁹ Goncourt, 1868, p. 228.

³⁰ Coriolis 's'était promis de ne pas se marier, non qu'il eût de la répugnance contre le mariage ; mais le mariage lui semblait un bonheur refusé à l'artiste.' : Goncourt, 1865, p. 154. Author's own translation.

³¹ '...la poursuite de l'invention, l'incubation silencieuse de l'œuvre, la concentration de l'effort': Goncourt, 1865, p. 154. Author's own translation.

³² '...espèce de sauvage et de monstre social': Goncourt, 1865, p. 154. Author's own translation.

³³ '...qui laissât à l'artiste sa liberté, ses forces, son cerveau, sa conscience': Goncourt, 1865, p. 155. Author's own translation.

³⁴ '...lente et progressive infiltration de l'influence féminine': Goncourt, 1865, p. 155. Author's own translation.

³⁵ 'Ce fut comme une longue dépossession de lui-même': Goncourt, 1865, pp. 154-5, p. 213.

³⁶ 'L'amour est la pâture et comme l'atmosphère du génie. Les émotions extraordinaires produisent les œuvres sublimes.': Flaubert, 1951, p. 26. Author's own translation.

In this literature, however, bachelorhood is rarely an explicit topic. As Borie has observed, the discourse on the *artiste célibataire*, the quintessential outsider, was conducted in disguise: the bachelor in nineteenth-century French art and literature appears only when protected by a mask or another identity or is hardly distinguishable among the secondary characters in a novel. The word bachelor, for instance, never appears in such examples of the *littérature célibataire* as Flaubert's *Correspondance* and the *Journal* of the Goncourt brothers. For these authors, bachelorhood is not a 'choix originel', but the consequence of another primal choice, in favour of the 'freedom of imagination and rigour of creation', of a '*vocation enivrante*', a '*carrière monacale*' which leaves no time for other obligations.³⁷ The occultation of the bachelor narrative has also been observed by Katherine V. Snyder in British and American pre-modernist and modernist fiction.³⁸ A similar attempt at concealing moral and marital themes is observed in painting. As Patricia Mainardi has discussed in her *Husbands, Wives, and Lovers*, adultery themes found their way into nineteenth-century French painting, but were 'mediated, sometimes even obfuscated, by classical or literary references', with the effect of attenuating painting's relation to social history. Classicists such as Ingres, who was married for fifty years, chose 'moral themes redolent of the *exemplum virtutis*' and themes where 'no adultery actually took place' (Phaedra and Hippolytus, Antiochus and Stratonice, Paolo and Francesca), but Romantics such as Delacroix, a lifelong bachelor, openly acknowledged 'this taboo subject and even dwelt on its unpleasant consequences'.³⁹ In history painting, marital topics could also take an autobiographical meaning: in her analysis, Mainardi uncovers the autobiographical relevance of the Byronic theme of Mazeppa in the work of Théodore Géricault, where the image constructs the unhappy circumstances of the painter's illicit relationship with his aunt Alexandrine Caruel. Eugène Delacroix treated the same subject in relation to his love affair with the mistress of a friend.⁴⁰

To return to Degas, in *The Daughter of Jephthah*, *Semiramis Building Babylon* and *Scene of War in the Middle Ages* the bachelor is offered the mask of a heroic female whose marital status is peculiar: these great spinsters embody the incompatibility of marriage and artistic vocation as well as the transgression of the social rule. In *The Daughter of Jephthah*, the sense of the story is in the virgin, who stands out as the victim as much as the agent of the victory: the life of the senses must be sacrificed to divine designs. Similarly, for Degas, the genuine artist will relinquish such social customs as marriage to pursue his or her vocation. For his picture of the warrior-goddess Semiramis (Fig. 3), city founder and queen of Babylon, Degas found his literary source in Book II of Diodorus Siculus' *Bibliotheca Historica*. Semiramis, a semi-goddess, is abandoned by her mother and cared for by doves until she is adopted by Simmas, the shepherd of the King's flock. One day, Onnes, a member of the royal council, notices the girl and, struck by her beauty and other qualities, decides to marry her. They have children. The events take place during the reign of King Ninos, intent on the conquest of the whole of Asia. After

³⁷ '...de la liberté de l'imaginaire et de la rigueur de la création': Borie, 1976, pp. 23-4 and p. 27. Author's own translation.

³⁸ Snyder, 1999, pp. 2-3.

³⁹ Mainardi, 2003, p. 179.

⁴⁰ Mainardi, 2003, pp. 179-81.

seventeen years of successful war campaigns, the royal army arrives in the Bactrian. The siege of the city of Bactres proves so long that Onnes decides to call for Semiramis to join him. She departs on a long journey from her native Assyria, dressed in a manner that would not betray whether she was man or woman. She looked like a young man, we read in Diodorus. Once in the Bactrian, during her observation of the siege, she notices that all military actions take place on the plains, with no attempt made to conquer the fortified acropolis of Bactres. So she takes soldiers and she scales the walls to take the acropolis. Impressed by the courage of the woman, the King falls in love with Semiramis, and forces Onnes to commit suicide. Semiramis becomes queen but soon King Ninus dies, leaving her to reign in glory. She assembles architects and two million men to found Babylon, a city of magnificent palaces, temples, statues, gardens and bridges, protected by triple fortifications. Semiramis, founder of towns and leader of armies, lives luxuriously in splendid palaces and refuses to marry, 'fearing she might be deprived of her power.'⁴¹ She prefers the company of soldiers, whom she subsequently dispatches to death. This is the Queen that Degas imagines overlooking the city she has created from the heights of her palace: she is surrounded by attendants in a variety of dress and with different hairstyles, and is followed by a horse drawing a chariot. Degas' iconographical sources for *Semiramis Building Babylon* are an eclectic synthesis of Italian, Greek and, above all, Persian, Assyrian and Indian motifs from art he had seen in the Louvre and in books.⁴²



Fig. 3. Edgar Degas, *Semiramis Building Babylon*, 1860-62. Oil on canvas, 150 x 258 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris. © RMN-Grand Palais (Musée d'Orsay) / Hervé Lewandowski.

⁴¹ Cf. Book II of Diodore de Sicile, 1991.

⁴² Notebook 18, in Reff, 1976b, vol. 1, pp. 92-102 and Monnier, 1978.

The misfortunes of the city of Orléans or the misfortunes of Mademoiselle d'Orléans?

My purpose in the second part of this paper is to relate the so-called *Scene of War in the Middle Ages* (Fig. 4) to Degas' other history paintings. Considered cryptic by most scholars, this piece of historical genre may in fact represent Mademoiselle d'Orléans, also known as Mademoiselle de Montpensier. The unmarried Mademoiselle d'Orléans, *frondeuse*, *amazone* and autobiographer, would fit comfortably alongside Semiramis and Jephthah's daughter as an exemplary life that Degas appropriated as an alter ego for the artist as exceptional being.



Fig. 4. Edgar Degas, *Scene of War in the Middle Ages*, 1863-65. Peinture à l'essence, 145 x 83 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris. © RMN-Grand Palais (Musée d'Orsay) / Gérard Blot.

The work, painted about 1863, is known by more than one title. In French it is known as either *Les Malheurs de la ville d'Orléans*, *Les Malheurs de la Nouvelle Orléans*, or *Scène de guerre au moyen âge*. In English, the work is called either *Scene of War in the Middle-Ages*, *The Misfortunes of the City of Orleans* or *Archers and Young Girls (Scene from the Hundred Years' War)*. The two titles that most often appear in the literature are *Scène de guerre au moyen âge*, under which the picture was exhibited at the 1865 Paris Salon, and *Les Malheurs de la ville d'Orléans*, a title that was described as 'erroneous' in the catalogue of the 1988 Degas exhibition. How did the various titles arise?

The painting figures under no. 124 in Pierre-André Lemoisne's catalogue of Edgar Degas' works.⁴³ It is signed *Ed. De Gas* on the lower right-hand side and consists of

⁴³ Lemoisne, 1946, cat. 124.

pieces of paper painted *à l'essence*, joined and mounted on canvas. Degas executed many preparatory drawings for the work and an oil study, which are conserved at the Département des Arts Graphiques of the Musée du Louvre. The painting was shown once during Degas' lifetime, at the 1865 Paris Salon, where it was mistakenly given as a pastel, and subsequently remained in the artist's studio, where it was found at his death in September 1917. There is another first-hand indication of a title for this painting. On 16 January 1881, during a discussion about Degas, Emile Durand-Gréville told Jean-Jacques Henner, Berthon, and Alidor Delzant that a few days earlier he had seen, presumably in Degas' studio, 'les dessins des *Jeunes Spartiates*, des *Horreurs de la Guerre* et de la *Sémiramis fondant Babylone*'.⁴⁴ Degas may have designated his work as the *Horreurs de la Guerre*.

The work figured in the catalogue of the posthumous sale of the contents of Degas' atelier under the title *Les Malheurs de la ville d'Orléans*, by which it also appeared in 1924 at the Galerie Georges Petit, before its acquisition by the French State for the Musée du Luxembourg in 1947. Pierre Cabanne was the first writer to address the mismatch of the picture's titles and subject. His research into the history of the city of Orléans failed to identify any historical events that could be regarded as 'malheurs' with the exception of the Norman invasion of the ninth century and the 1428-29 siege of Orléans by the English, events which presented no episodes that could correspond to the painting. Cabanne concluded that, if the painting did refer to an episode of the history of Orléans, it could be considered as homage to the native city of René-Hilaire Degas, the artist's grandfather.⁴⁵

For Hélène Adhémar the scene is an evocation of the tragic days lived by the women of New Orleans during the American Civil War. This historical circumstance did affect Edgar Degas' maternal family, who were from New Orleans. In November 1862 Degas' uncle, Michel Musson, sent his wife and three daughters to safety in France after New Orleans had been taken by General Butler on 1 May. For Adhémar, the tales of the American atrocities told by his relatives (who stayed in France until the spring of 1865) would explain the painting, but not wishing to recall these episodes directly, Degas decided to transform the *Malheurs de la Nouvelle Orléans* into a medieval scene. According to Adhémar, the title *Les Malheurs de la ville d'Orléans*, given in 1918 on the occasion of the sale of the contents of Degas' atelier, was a result of the misreading of a no longer existing source: 'A list or document must have said: *Les Malheurs de la Nlle Orléans*: "nouvelle" shortened, as sometimes Degas used to write it, would have read "Ville"'. The title *Les Malheurs de la ville d'Orléans* came to be attached to the painting, instead of *Les Malheurs de la Nlle Orléans*.⁴⁶

The authors of the 1988 catalogue of the Degas exhibition held in Paris, New York and Ottawa suggest that no one really knows how the painting came by this title. For these writers the work is not a history painting proper, but an allegory in the tradition of enigmatic Renaissance paintings for which 'Degas did not do any special research.' The

⁴⁴ Durand-Gréville, 1925, pp. 102-3.

⁴⁵ Cabanne, 1962, pp. 363-6.

⁴⁶ Adhémar, 1967.

authors also noted ‘many anachronisms in the picture.’⁴⁷ However, it is unlikely that Degas would not have done any special research for a history painting destined for the Salon.⁴⁸ Furthermore, it is important to point out that the *Scene of War in the Middle Ages* is not exactly a history painting, but a piece of historical genre. Paul Duro’s articulation of the difference between these two genres in the hierarchy of the genres in nineteenth-century France is useful:

Unlike history painting, which sought to represent a morally elevating theme drawn from the Bible, mythology, or the classical past – and as such transcend the particular in order to arrive at a more ideal notion of the historical truth – historical genre focused on the incidental, the particular and the private.⁴⁹

The *Mémoires* of Mademoiselle d’Orléans could be the literary source for the subject matter of Degas’ painting, that is, ‘les malheurs de Mademoiselle d’Orléans’.⁵⁰ The painting presents an incidental, particular and private subject. When compared to *The Daughter of Jephthah*, in which the action depicted is as clearly defined as it is in the Bible, Degas’ *Scene of War in the Middle Ages* is an impure image which, because it transcends the boundaries of the genres, appears like an ‘episode’. It is what Duro calls a ‘textual image’.⁵¹ In his painting, I suggest, Degas presents another extraordinary and unmarried woman: Mademoiselle d’Orléans, heroine and *amazone*, in an

⁴⁷ For instance, the men-at-arms wear costumes that can be dated about 1470, ‘riding stirrup-less horses whose harnesses are barely sketched in, and are using fanciful bows (the bows of that time actually measured about six feet, or nearly two meters, and could not possibly have been used by men on horseback) to shoot their arrows at naked women in an indistinct, ravaged country setting with a vaguely Gothic church’: Paris, 1988, pp. 105-7.

⁴⁸ We know some detail of what Degas read. Among the authors and works mentioned, cited or illustrated in Degas’ notebooks, one finds: Dante, Virgil, Plutarch, Poussin, George Sand, Charles Baudelaire, Barbey d’Aurevilly, Théophile Gautier, Alfred de Musset, Edmond de Goncourt, Brantôme, Torquato Tasso, Proudhon and many books on the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71. Also see: Reff, 1976a, pp. 147-99.

⁴⁹ Duro, 2005, p. 695.

⁵⁰ The thread that should be reconsidered here is Hélène Adhémar’s suggestion that the title *Les Malheurs de la ville d’Orléans* is due to a misreading of *Les Malheurs de la Nlle Orléans*. Adhémar reasoned that the title must have figured on a list or document that existed and is now lost, and that the misreading may have originated from Degas’ frequent shortening of the word *Nouvelle*, for which *Nlle* was read *Ville*. Hélène Adhémar rightly supposed the existence of a document indicating that title for the painting. How else could the title have originated if not from a first-hand source, perhaps a list or inventory found in Degas’ atelier, or compiled in Degas’ company or following Degas’ hint in conversation about the painting? Such a document no longer exists or has not been found. It is possible, though, that the paper may have read ‘Les Malheurs de Mlle d’Orléans’ and that this title was misread and printed in 1918 as *Les Malheurs de la Ville d’Orléans*, then readjusted in 1967 by Hélène Adhémar to *Les Malheurs de la Nlle Orléans*. The hypothesis of a first-hand source reading ‘*Les Malheurs de Mlle d’Orléans*’ where ‘Mlle d’Orléans’ stands for Mademoiselle d’Orléans, would explain both the appearance of the title and the subject of the painting.

⁵¹ Duro writes that ‘whereas history painting renders text into image, historical genre reverses this direction to create a textual image,’ that is, ‘a narrative that is little more (and sometimes less), than a pictorial representation of an event (whether fact or fiction matters not at all).’ While ‘both offer human action as the basis of their primary narratives (unlike, obviously, still life or landscape), in their different approach to the representation of history, history painting will find its *istoria*, a plot-driven ‘mimesis of poetry’, in the Bible and in ancient history and mythology, while the historical genre will find its themes in anecdotal, event-driven narratives: Duro, 2005, pp. 690, 701.

undistinguished moment of the civil war that agitated France during the Fronde des Princes, in 1652. For loyalty to her father, Gaston d'Orléans, she joined the war against Louis XIV on the side of such aristocrat rebels to the crown as Condé, Chevreuse, Retz, La Rochefoucauld, Beaufort, as well as their wives, *amazones* such as the Princesse de Condé and the Duchesse de Chevreuse.

Degas was well acquainted with seventeenth-century French history and the history of the royal house of the Orléans, who were the French patrons of Anthony van Dyck, a painter he revered. In the spring of 1859, on his way back to France after three years in Italy, Degas stopped at Genoa and then Turin. A few days later, in Paris, Degas would describe in a letter to Gustave Moreau the highlights of his journey. In Genoa, at Palazzo Brignole, he had seen 'les beaux Van Dyck'. At Turin, he had first visited Palazzo Madama and then the Castello del Valentino:

built by Cristine de France, widow of Victor Amédée I, daughter of Henri IV and Marie de Medici. It sits among trees, all alone. Tell me if it is not the palace of a widow, sad after a brilliant youth, looking at the Alps covered with snow that separate her from France. I had sat on the grass, quite tired from running around the town all morning, and I had fallen in this daydreaming that you know. I have to say that the place was conducive to it.⁵²

The French princess about whom Degas daydreamed so romantically was Madame Royale, Christine de France, who had married Victor Emmanuel duke of Savoy.⁵³ As sister of Monsieur, Gaston d'Orléans, Christine was the aunt of Mademoiselle d'Orléans, a piece of knowledge that would not have escaped Degas and which would help to contextualize Degas' choice of an episode from the life of Mademoiselle d'Orléans as the subject-matter for the so-called *Scene of War in the Middle Ages*. The painting is full of references to Degas' travels across Piedmont. For his depiction of Mademoiselle d'Orléans at war, Degas found inspiration in a large painting he must have seen at Palazzo Madama: Charles Dauphin's *The Massacre of the Niobids* (Fig. 5), which then adorned the entrance hall of the Pinacoteca Reale.⁵⁴ This painting may have suggested to Degas the idea of using a horizontal format as well as providing him with inspiration for the overall composition. Degas appears to have followed Dauphin's work for the disposition of the figures: in both works, the victims appear by the tree on the left, while bodies are strewn in the foreground. For the naked body on the right, Degas borrowed Dauphin's motif of the fallen Niobid on the left with his left arm outstretched over the corpse of his brother clothed in red. Degas also took Dauphin's horse-rider galloping on the right and the central figure of the shooting Apollo, who has become Degas' Artemis, Mademoiselle d'Orléans.

⁵² '... bâti par Christine de France, veuve de Victor Amédée Ier, fille d'Henri IV et de Marie de' Médicis. Il est au milieu d'arbres, tout seul. Dites-moi si ce n'est pas le palais d'une veuve, triste après une brillante jeunesse regardant souvent les Alpes pleines de neige qui la séparent de la France. Je m'étais assis sur l'herbe, assez fatigué de courir depuis le matin à travers la ville, et j'étais tombé dans ces rêvasseries que vous savez. Il faut dire que les lieux y portaient bien'. Letter 225, in Capodieci, 2002, pp. 504-6.

⁵³ On Christine de France, see Spione, 2009, pp. 60-65.

⁵⁴ On Charles Dauphin, see Macco, 1984, pp. 323-41.



Fig. 5. Charles Dauphin (1620-77), *The Massacre of the Niobids*, n.d. Oil on canvas, 213 x 350 cm, Galleria Sabauda, Turin. © Su concessione del Ministero dei Beni Culturali.

But why is Mademoiselle shooting at women like herself? This cruel detail has nothing enigmatic or contradictory if we keep in mind that in his piece of historical genre, Degas, through the citation of Charles Dauphin, has suggestively introduced a clear mythological reference to Artemis, the goddess of chastity. As Degas knew, essential to the identity of Artemis the virgin huntress, whose companionship is confined to nymphs, is the fact that she punished brutally the men as well as the women who transgressed the vows of chastity that bound them to her.⁵⁵ Degas used both male and female models for the naked figure lying on the foreground to the right-hand side, as well as for the archer in yellow, whom we see in a drawing at the Louvre (Fig. 6).

In nineteenth-century historiography, Mademoiselle d'Orléans was a well-known name. A version of her *Mémoires* was published in Paris in 1838. Louis Philippe commissioned many portraits, or copies of portraits, of Mademoiselle for the Musée Historique at Versailles.⁵⁶ In March 1851 one of Sainte-Beuve's *Lundis* in *Le Constitutionnel* featured a literary portrait of la Grande Mademoiselle, which was subsequently republished in 1862 in the thirteen-volume collection of the *Causeries du lundi*.⁵⁷ In 1858-59 a version of Mademoiselle's *Mémoires*, faithful to the seventeenth-century original, was published

⁵⁵ On Artemis, see March, 2008, pp. 84-9.

⁵⁶ See the portraits of Mademoiselle by Joseph Albrier (1838), Jean-François Alluys (1835), Auguste de Creuse (1839), Pierre Poisson III (1840) and Jean-Pierre Franque (1838).

⁵⁷ Sainte-Beuve, 1851-62, vol. 3, pp. 503-25.



Fig. 6. Edgar Degas, *Study for Archer*, 1865. Black pencil and estompe on paper, cm 22.9 x 35.6, Département des Arts Graphiques, Musée du Louvre, Paris, RF 15 522. © RMN-Grand Palais (Musée d'Orsay) / Thierry Le Mage.

by Charpentier in four volumes edited by Pierre-Adolphe Chéruel.⁵⁸ This edition may have been seen by Degas, and there is no doubt that he would have been familiar with the iconography of the Grande Mademoiselle from both the printed portraits of her conserved at the Cabinet des Estampes and from such works as Jean Nocret's *Allegorical Portrait of the Royal Family* (1670) in the Salon de l'Oeil de Boeuf at Versailles or Pierre Bourguignon's *Portrait of Anne-Marie-Louise d'Orléans Holding the Portrait of Her Father* (1671-2) (Fig. 7).

The *Scene of War in the Middle Ages*, consistently with the subject of the other history paintings by Degas of the early 1860s, shows an exceptional and unmarried woman. The arrow-shooter dressed in yellow and wearing a plumed hat may well represent Mademoiselle d'Orléans, *amazone*, *frondeuse* and *précieuse* who took part in the enlightened *salons* of Madame de Rambouillet and Madeleine de Scudéry. Banned from the court of Louis XIV for her activity in the Fronde, Mademoiselle d'Orléans retired in exile to Saint Fargeau, where she began work on her *Mémoires*. Anne-Marie-Louise d'Orléans, born in Paris in 1627, was the daughter of Monsieur, Louis XIII's brother Gaston, Fils de France and Duc d'Orléans, and his first wife Marie de Bourbon, Duchesse

⁵⁸ For a detailed discussion of the versions and editions of the *Mémoires de Mademoiselle de Montpensier* see Cholakian, 1986.

de Montpensier, who, by dying after giving birth, left la Grande Mademoiselle as the richest heiress in France.⁵⁹



Fig. 7. Pierre Bourguignon, *Portrait of Anne-Marie-Louise d'Orléans Holding the Portrait of Her Father*, 1671-72. Oil on canvas, 175 x 148 cm, Musée National du Château et des Trianons, Versailles. © RMN-Grand Palais (Château de Versailles) / Gérard Blot / Christian Jean.

If the rank and wealth of this princess of the blood destined her for the throne, these circumstances also resulted in Mademoiselle never marrying. Brought up to believe that she would marry a great prince by virtue of her birth, Mademoiselle had to come to terms with the failure of such expectations.⁶⁰ The failure of her plans to marry was a source of

⁵⁹ Montpensier, 1858-59, vol. 1, p. 2.

⁶⁰ Of all the many prospects of marriage Mademoiselle was presented with, some of which were only the product of her own imagination, none was ever realized: the Comte de Soissons, her cousin Louis XIV, Philip IV King of Spain, the Emperor Ferdinand III as well the latter's brother the Archduke Leopold, the Grand Condé, the Elector of Bavaria, the Prince of Wales and future Charles II, Alphonse VI the mad King of Portugal, and Charles Emmanuel of Savoy, all were at some point considered as suitable pretenders to

bitterness and frustration, the *malheurs* at the origin of the writings that made her one of the most important *mémorialistes* of the seventeenth century. Mademoiselle's *Mémoires* are among the earliest autobiographical accounts in western literature. However, the aspect that would have caught Degas' attention in Mademoiselle's story would have been her disdain of love. Mademoiselle was not entirely a victim of Louis XIV and Mazarin's despotic machinations not to marry her.⁶¹ According to her biographer she relegated love to 'the second rung', below such 'male' passions as 'ambition, vengeance, aristocratic pride, and "glory"'.⁶²

Like Semiramis, Mademoiselle was a sexually ambiguous warrior. Mademoiselle is remembered for her military exploits in two episodes of the civil war that occurred during the Fronde: the expedition to, and taking of, Orléans in March 1652, and the battle of the Porte Saint-Antoine, in Paris, in July 1652. On this occasion, Mademoiselle d'Orléans ordered troops or, some say, proceeded herself to open fire from the cannons of the Bastille on Louis XIV. After this, the possibility of her marrying Louis XIV was impossible and she was exiled to Saint-Fargeau, her château in Burgundy, for five years.⁶³

The four history paintings discussed here all demonstrate Degas' view of the irreconcilable nature of marriage and artistic vocation, delivered by the painter through an original choice of subjects taken from a wide range of literary sources: from mythology and the scriptures and from Greek and French history. It is plausible that by her noble nature Mademoiselle d'Orléans was assigned a place in Degas' gallery of *femmes fortes* who were intended to symbolize the exceptional modern artist. It is possible that there was another aspect of Mademoiselle's exemplary life that would have seemed to Degas to be close to his own endeavour: Mademoiselle's literary achievements, which would have been read as sympathetic to the rise of Realism in the concerns of artists and writers in mid nineteenth-century France. As Marc Fumaroli has written, Mademoiselle's tale of her own *malheurs* hastened the end of the fashion for heroic novels and was one of the origins of the modern novel.⁶⁴ One also imagines that Mademoiselle's tale of 'the images of things as one ordinarily sees them happen' could have prompted Degas' decision to abandon history painting in favour of portraits and genre scenes. In that case, the *Scene of War in the Middle Ages* begs not to be dismissed as Degas' strange and last history painting: it is, rather, an enactment of Degas' advance into (the painting of) modern life.

Degas was not a misogynist. Women populate his life and his work. Rather than assuming Degas' identity as that of a misogynist *tout court*, I have tried to look more

Mademoiselle's hand, but the marriage simply did not happen, either refused by her in her actual wish to marry her cousin Louis XIV or forbidden by Louis XIV. When Mademoiselle finally fell in love with the Comte de Lauzun, Louis XIV did not approve the marriage. See Barine, 1901.

⁶¹ Her marriage was opposed on the ground that her wealth and rank would have turned her spouse into a threat to the French monarchy.

⁶² Barine, 1901, p. 162.

⁶³ There she wrote the first part of her *Mémoires*. She went back to court in 1657. Later she returned to the second part of her *Mémoires*, the third part of which was written in 1689-90. She died in 1696.

⁶⁴ Fumaroli, 1998, pp. 209-10.

closely at Degas' masculine identity and at his early representations of women.⁶⁵ The history paintings of the early 1860s constitute essential study material for a revision of the stereotypical image of Degas as a narrow-minded bourgeois and a misogynist. They throw a new light upon Degas' artistic, sexual and political identity, against modern notions of masculinity. I suggest that Degas' history paintings construct a controlled autobiographical discourse on the unmarriageable modern artist, camouflaged as *femme forte*. Questions of women, love and marriage in the painter's biography are confounding but inescapable for scholars of Degas. When did Degas begin to seriously commit to bachelorhood? A mostly illegible note in a notebook used by the painter between April and May 1856 reads as follows: 'I couldn't say how much I love this girl since she has... Monday 7 April. I can't refuse ... to say how shameful ... a defenceless girl. But I'll do that as little as possible'. This piece of evidence about the young Degas' ability to conceive love or devotion for a woman remains difficult to contextualize, as it alludes to an incident of which we have no further detail. In the same notebook, however, Degas notes that 'the heart is an instrument that rusts if it doesn't work. Can one be an artist without a heart?'⁶⁶ The latter statement presents to us an image of Degas meditating on the complications of love in an artist's life. Degas' commitment to bachelorhood must have grown with his commitment to art, but Degas need not be consistent on the subject. It is the argument of this paper that Degas' commitment to bachelorhood underpins his history paintings of 1859-65. However, from his letters, Degas appears undecided about marriage throughout his life: he could define himself as a 'célibataire incorrigible', as well as find himself 'meditating on the state of celibacy, and a good three quarters of what I tell myself is sad', as he wrote to Henri Rouart in 1896.⁶⁷ There is no inconsistency between Degas defining himself as an incorrigible bachelor and Degas making a point of the sadness of bachelorhood: as Katherine Snyder tells us, melancholy is 'necessary' in the *mise en scène* of the modernist bachelor artist, functioning as 'a self-defining sense of pervasive loss coupled with a refusal to recognize that loss'.⁶⁸

Degas' ambivalent thoughts on marriage, passed on to his acquaintances, could serve a self-fashioning purpose of building the reputation of an artist torn by the life-or-art dilemma. Ambroise Vollard relates that Degas had told him: 'Vollard, you have to get married. You don't know what solitude is when one ages'. But when asked why he had not married himself, Degas replied: 'Oh! me! It's not the same thing. I was too afraid, when I had finished a painting, of hearing my wife telling me: "it's really pretty what you have done there"'.⁶⁹ While Degas' famous anecdote, pertinently, comes directly from *Charles Demailly*, the story is an instance of the 'necessary melancholy' in the modernist

⁶⁵ In this I follow Robert Nye, where he invites us to consider not only the truth that historically 'men have imposed various forms of subjugation on women', but the truth that in the history of men's experience this 'familial and amatory regime that has brought suffering to women' also implied ideal and perverse prescriptions and constructions of manliness and masculine identity and sexuality. If women's roles were confined to the domestic sphere, men's roles were equally confined to the public sphere and to rooted prescriptions and constructions around virility, which served social and political institutions. See Nye, 1993, p. 12.

⁶⁶ Notebook 6, in Reff, 1976b, vol.1, pp. 49-53.

⁶⁷ Degas, 1947, p. 197.

⁶⁸ Snyder, 1999, p. 174.

⁶⁹ Vollard, 1938, p. 118.

bachelor's narrative, whereby the artist 'is promoting the institution of marriage while avoiding it himself'.⁷⁰ Degas' aversion to marriage was not founded on misogyny. It stemmed instead from practical considerations on the nature of marriage in French society, which assigned to women a predominant role in domestic life.⁷¹ What Degas did not wish to confront was precisely the traditional category of power, the wife, and the family it entailed, which in his view threatened the artist's identity and the very space of his work.⁷² By choosing artistic bachelorhood, Degas was taking a marginal position in his times; he was taking a 'conduite d'avant-garde' contemplated by such writers and artists as Gustave Flaubert and the Goncourts, as well as by such marginal characters as dandies, bohemians and vagabonds. Degas was neither a misogynist nor a narrow-minded bourgeois. Quite the contrary: by choosing a life centred on urban sociability and refusal of property, a life, that is, morally and materially at the margins of a bourgeois society based on the familial institution, Degas lived a 'contre-modèle de la vie privée bourgeoise'.⁷³

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⁷⁰ Snyder, 1999, p. 181.

⁷¹ Perrot, 1987a, pp. 121-85, and Martin-Fugier, 1987, pp. 193-261.

⁷² Vollard reports that one day Degas and he were commenting on Edouard Manet's *Execution of Maximilian*, of which Degas had just bought a fragment at auction. Degas exclaimed: 'What a pity, can you believe it? They dared to cut this painting! It is the family that did this! Never get married ... I have found this fragment but where are all the other pieces?' The *Execution of Maximilian* had probably been cut into pieces by Manet himself. He often cut up paintings to render them more suitable to his taste. For instance, Manet cut up the double portrait of himself and his wife Suzanne that Degas had painted and given to him. Manet did so because he did not like the likeness of Suzanne. For this habit, Degas termed him 'cet animal.' Vollard, 1938, p. 123.

⁷³ Perrot, 1987b, pp. 287-303.

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