

MELISSA J. GANZ. *Public Vows: Fictions of Marriage in the English Enlightenment*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2019. Pp. 292. \$45.00 (cloth).
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In *Public Vows: Fictions of Marriage in the English Enlightenment*, Melissa Ganz explores the legal aspects of eighteenth-century marriage plots in more than a dozen novels, among them those by Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, Frances Burney, Amelia Opie, Eliza Fenwick, and Mary Wollstonecraft. Generations of literary scholars have analyzed these English writers' preoccupation in their novels with domesticity, desire, sensibility, interiority, psychology, self-awareness—the largely emotional components of a bourgeois private sphere. Ganz instead positions marriage—both in fiction and in law—at the legal threshold between the private and the public, the home, and the state. Ganz's focus is not on whether English novelists treated marriage as a metaphor for or model of the state. Instead, she describes how the public and legal status of characters shaped fictional marriage plots. In so doing, authors examined how women could best protect themselves in patriarchal marriage. Moll Flanders, Clarissa Harlow, and other female protagonists may have fallen in and out of love or found themselves sexual victors or victims, but their fate was governed and limited by the state and the law.


Whether seduced, abandoned, deceived, or simply unhappy in marriage, English wives could not escape the marital contract. But the contract they entered was not like others in English social and economic relations. In political theory, legal practice, and commercial exchange, “contract law reflected and fueled the idea that obligations originated in individual wills and that one party was bound to fulfill his promise only as long as the other party fulfilled his part of the agreement” (13). But this was not the case with marriage. Ecclesiastical courts and Parliament did not treat marriage as mutually dissoluble, nor did they offer a legal solution to husbands' failure to fulfill their promises. “As contractual principles assumed an increasingly important place in political thought and commercial relations, they came to play a smaller and smaller role in conjugal life” (13). Parliamentary legislation did not redress gender inequality in marriage, but rather affirmed it by granting fathers greater authority. The key development in Ganz's analysis is that of Lord Hardwicke's 1753 Clandestine Marriages Act, which prohibited minors from marrying without paternal consent and which required couples to marry publicly in the Church of England after posting bans or obtaining a license.

We might expect that contemporaries sympathetic to women, including novelists, would decry the state's increased authority over marriage and fathers' and husbands' patriarchal control in wedlock. Ganz's novelists indeed critiqued patriarchy, but none of them (other than Wollstonecraft) repudiated the state's regulation of marriage. They also did not propose the reform of English marital laws to align with those of other Protestant nations that treated marriage as a dissoluble civil contract. And other than Wollstonecraft, none of them promoted the full dissolution of marriage through divorce. Ganz describes each author's critique of some aspects of English marriage law. For instance, Defoe suggested that deserted wives should eventually be allowed to remarry, and Richardson and Burney suggested that Hardwicke's Marriage Act could allow fathers to abuse their authority.

Ganz's portrayal of eighteenth-century marriage is formed through canonical novels. She references the opinions of contemporary clerics, political figures, moralists, and philosophers as the ground upon which novelists framed their marriage plots. Unlike nonfictional sources as Parliamentary debates and clerics' polemics, the eighteenth-century novel vocalized female subjectivity. Whether written by male or female novelists, these canonical works revealed women's subordinated status under English nuptial law. Presumably because the eighteenth-century novel represented the world as it was, not as it could be, authors' solutions to marital misery tended to be “extra-legal” (197). For example, Defoe emphasized “the importance of repentance and forgiveness on the part of both spouses” (49). Richardson “shows the

importance of involving neutral third parties in nuptial negotiations” (110). Frances Burney’s novel *Cecilia* “shows the importance of marrying for love, while demonstrating the practical necessity of obtaining both maternal and paternal assent” (132). Amelia Opie “affirms the importance of maternal love and female ties” (186) to counter unhappy wedlock. Mary Wollstonecraft is the exception who “shows the need to change the law so as to enable women legally to end unwanted unions” (192). It would be interesting to incorporate in greater detail some less well-known fictional sources, such as John Shebbeare’s *The Marriage Act* (1754), which did provide more pointed critiques of English nuptial law than did most of these novels.

As a literary scholar, Ganz foregrounds representations of marriage rather than the historical context. For example, she leaves historiographical debates questioning the prevalence of clandestine marriage before Hardwicke to endnotes but asserts that until 1753 “couples could form binding unions by exchanging vows in private” (1). Among historians, this is a more contested matter. Rebecca Probert has demonstrated that Hardwicke did not mark as radical a break in marital law as contemporary polemicists (and some twentieth-century social historians) suggested. In *Marriage Law and Practice in the Long Eighteenth Century: A Reassessment* (2009) Probert argues that the vast majority of English couples conformed to Church of England procedure before this legislation. Incorporating historical and legal scholarship in more detail would further develop Ganz’s interest in “the striking and largely overlooked connections between the development of the English novel and the emergence of modern nuptial law” (197). That said, *Public Vows* nicely illuminates the cultural understanding of eighteenth-century English marriage, particularly its benefits and costs to women, both in literature and life.

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RAYMOND GILLESPIE, JAMES KELLY, and MARY ANN LYONS, eds. *Politics and Political Culture in Ireland from Restoration to Union, 1660–1800: Essays in Honour of Jacqueline R. Hill*. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2022. Pp. 224. \$74.50 (cloth).

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Politics and Political Culture in Ireland from Restoration to Union, 1660–1800 is an impressive volume and a terrific tribute to Jacqueline Hill. Hill is well known for her publications on Irish history in the long eighteenth century (from the Stuart Restoration and to the early Victorian period), particularly her work on the corporation of Dublin and her explorations into how politics played out at the local level and across social boundaries. A founding member of the Irish Federation of University Teachers Committee on Women to promote the rights of women within Irish academia, she has also edited *Irish Historical Studies* and the volume of the *New History of Ireland* for the years 1921–1984; managed the project for creating an online bibliography of Irish history (funded by the Irish Research Council for Humanities and Social Sciences); and trained generations of undergraduates and PhD students at Maynooth University (she continues to teach graduate students to this day, despite officially retiring in 2013). In recognition of her achievements, she was elected a member of the Irish Royal Academy of 2013. I first met Jackie (as she is known to friends and colleagues) at a conference in England in 1997: I was just venturing into Irish history myself at the time and was shortly to embark on my first research trip to Dublin. She urged me to attend a conference she was organizing at Maynooth, arranging for me to stay in university accommodation (where I was welcomed with traditional Irish hospitality), and then during my subsequent week in the archives she invited me to her Dublin home to discuss my research and to offer advice about sources.