

## Sullivan on Gougelmann and Verjus, editors (2016)

Gougelmann, Stéphane, and Anne Verjus, editors. *Écrire le mariage en France au XIXe siècle*. PU de Saint-Etienne, “Des deux sexes et autres,” 2016, pp. 462, ISBN 978-2-86272-691-5

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In spite of all its promises of happiness and fulfillment, marriage in the nineteenth century normally offered more *misères* than *splendeurs*, at least as novelists, journalists, caricaturists, and memoirists represented it. More often than not, as Claudie Bernard asserts: “La conjugalité promet toutes les satisfactions, et se révèle éternellement insatisfaisante” (295). In spite of the unhappiness it often caused, the social, judicial, and economic norms of the century ensured its continuing predominance. This is why “on ne s’est jamais autant marié qu’en littérature” as Stéphane Gougelmann and Anne Verjus explain in their introduction to *Écrire le mariage* (24). Marriage served as the ultimate plot generator for novelists, poets, playwrights, artists, and musicians struggling for ways to begin their next masterpiece, and this volume of twenty-five essays first delivered as papers at two colloquia (2013 and 2014) largely reflects this variety.

The tripartite volume features a comprehensive introduction that examines literary works, letters, and journals from the Restoration until the eve of World War I. The first section contains eight essays examining the institution in the first quarter of the century. In his essay on the debate surrounding divorce, Paul Kompanietz asserts that in the revolutionary period, writers depicted divorce as an essential component to the happiness of women whereas in the early 1800s, novelists portrayed it as a dangerous law that promoted the exact opposite. According to Maurizio Melai, the fact that *Inès de Castro* was rewritten several times reflects the post-revolutionary view that individual merit counts more than birth. Patricia Mainardi’s examination of marriage in caricatures and François Kerlouégan’s examination of *manuels conjugaux* speak both humorously and didactically to the hopes, fears, and anxieties surrounding the ways social norms shape expectations about the institution. Rebelling against the prescribed role of the dutiful daughter, wife, and mother, many women shunned the wishes of their families that they marry and become nuns, which allowed them, as Jennifer Popiel notes, to take on important public roles working in schools and hospitals. Verjus deftly examines the diplomacy (given the financial stakes, not to mention the prospective happiness of the young couples) that three bourgeois families had to deploy when negotiating marriage contracts early in the First Empire. If we are to believe Fabienne Bercegol’s reading of M<sup>me</sup> de Krüdener’s *Valérie* (1803), even the best parental efforts to arrange a future of passion and contentment did not always succeed. Not all marriages were unhappy, though. In fact, Claudine Giacchetti insists that most aristocratic women’s memoirs in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries depicted matrimony as a pivotal adventure.

With eleven essays, the second part of the volume covers works from the Restoration through the Second Empire. Although ideally a source of “security and love,” marriage in the “roman frénétique” of the 1820s and 1830s often led to catastrophe, as Émilie Pézard argues (169). Valentina Ponzetto presents Alfred de Musset’s theatrical depictions of marriage as both conservative in the institution’s triumphal preservation and subversive in their promotion of the individual’s desire over societal dictates. Even though he never married himself, Stendhal encouraged his sister to marry, as Philippe Berthier notes, and viewed building a relationship with a man as a woman’s destiny (208). If the Saint-Simonians viewed marriage and divorce within the framework of equality between the sexes in the early 1830s, as Philippe Régner purports, the historian Jules Michelet viewed marriage as the basis of a stable society even when it condemned women to “une quasi-séquestration,” according to Paule Petitier’s interpretation of his 1858 *Amour* (291). Behind the comedic caricatures of Honoré Daumier and J.J. Grandville during the July Monarchy lurks inequality between spouses, as Catherine Nesci aptly underscores in her examination of the caricaturists’ critique of Article 213 of the *Code civil*. In “Le mariage musulman vu par une voyageuse chrétienne,” Sarga Moussa dissects the critiques the Countess de Gasparin penned based on her encounters in Egyptian harems. Véronique Bui weighs in on Honoré de Balzac’s conception of gender roles within marriage in the volume’s longest treatment of *La Physiologie du mariage*. Bernard explains why Louis-Edmond Duranty’s *Malheur d’Henriette Gérard* falls within the longstanding literary tradition of women suffering from marital dissatisfaction. Luckily, for some adolescents during the Second Empire, marriage represented the possibility of new horizons as Caroline Muller demonstrates in her examination of young bourgeois women’s journals. Writing was one way of recording hopes and fears about pending nuptials to a virtual stranger. Steeped in ignorance and devoid of any ambition outside of marriage, young women often complained of boredom and uselessness before marriage, as Brigitte Diaz demonstrates. Disappointment and a failure to thrive frequently followed the wedding.

Fortunately, for men and women seeking a life outside of the prescribed “norme conjugale,” the advent of feminism and the reinstatement of divorce in 1884 opened more avenues for happiness (343). Two of the six essays in the volume’s final section

focus on Guy de Maupassant's depiction of marriage. While Pascale Auraix-Jonchière interprets his "La Parure" as an unhappy modern rewriting of Charles Perrault's *Cendrillon*, she interprets "Le Bonheur" as an ambiguously utopic tale of a happily if socially mismatched couple in Corsica. A brothel owner achieves happiness in *La Maison Tellier* by successfully negotiating a second marriage; however, Sophie Ménard argues, this "mésalliance" comes at a high cost to the owner's relatives. Not all depictions of marriage were serious and heavy handed, as Violaine Heyraud demonstrates in her essay exploring the vaudeville theater of Eugène Labiche and Georges Feydeau. As the question of equality in marriage made its way to public debate thanks to feminist organizations pushing for "une individualisation politique des femmes," so too did anxieties about women asserting themselves in the public sphere (402). Marion Mas reads Paul de Kock's efforts to put women back in their place in his novel *Madame Pantalon* as one way of alleviating this fear. While the volume features many variations of the unhappy wife, Gougelmann makes a strong case for a fin-de-siècle genre he labels "fictions du mari malheureux" (406). In the volume's final essay, Sarah Al-Matary analyzes the argument made by the weekly *L'Anarchie* in favor of a *union libre* born of love and individualism.

At 462 pages, the volume is a hefty and at times bleak read given all the marital woes portrayed. To its credit, it addresses a wide variety of topics and pays heed to voices readers do not often hear, such as adolescents girls on the verge of marrying, or future nuns eschewing marriage. All in all, graduate students and professors will find it a rich resource, particularly those looking to better contextualize more canonical texts.

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