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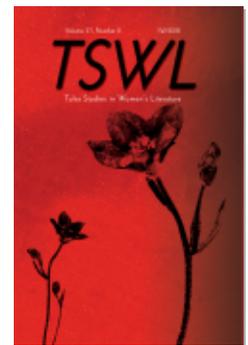
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*Romance's Rivals: Familiar Marriage in Victorian Fiction* by  
Talia Schaffer (review)

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broken heart, or desperate remorse that were their fictional lot in most texts written by men. They made the best of their lives in a profoundly unequal, patriarchal world.

Diana Holmes  
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ROMANCE'S RIVALS: FAMILIAR MARRIAGE IN VICTORIAN FICTION, by Talia Schaffer. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. 352 pp. \$69.00 cloth; \$67.99 ebook.

"How do I love thee? Let me count the ways."<sup>1</sup> Unlike traditional love sonneteers, Elizabeth Barrett Browning does not ask "why do I love thee?" so that she can proceed to a list of her beloved's virtues. Instead, she is interested in examining her own diverse and multiple affective states—*how* she loves. Romance, if it makes her list at all, is merely one among many ways to love. Talia Schaffer's *Romance's Rivals: Familiar Marriage in Victorian Fiction* reminds us of this point so that we can appreciate the affective variety of marriage plots in nineteenth-century fiction, including works by Jane Austen, the Brontës, Charlotte Yonge, Anthony Trollope, George Eliot, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. In Schaffer's view, several approaches to literary criticism in the past few decades have attempted to narrow the meaning of desire to sexual attraction and thereby limit what constitutes authentic reasons for marriage. This critical strategy undermines narrative advocacy for forms of desire much better suited to women achieving happiness under the legal and economic conditions of the nineteenth century. As relative creatures, women survived by cultivating affective ties with family, friends, and benefactors. Ideally, husbands would be drawn from these networks, both to ensure the men were reliable and to allow women to preserve their support systems. Drawing her evidence from narratives focalized by female characters, Schaffer demonstrates the range of women's marital considerations and desires, as well as agency and constraints. She develops her argument over topical chapters, including "Historicizing Marriage," "Neighbor Marriage," "Cousin Marriage," "Disability Marriage," and "Vocational Marriage."

The most important contribution *Romance's Rivals* makes to current critical discourse may be to represent the wide array of scholarship from the past two decades that resists master narratives in favor of the variation and nuance in Victorian marriage plots. These critics include Mary Jean Corbett, Claudia L. Johnson, Elsie B. Michie, Kelly Hager, Sharon Marcus, Kathy Psomiades, and Martha Stoddard Holmes, among others who have maintained a healthy skepticism regarding the monolithic tendencies of psychoanalytic and Foucauldian-influenced accounts of desire.

Schaffer's study returns to two influential 1987 works of criticism: Joseph Allen Boone's *Tradition Counter Tradition: Love and the Form of Fiction* and Nancy Armstrong's *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*. The former Schaffer describes as "the definitive book on the marriage plot in British history" (p. 43). The latter, Schaffer faults for using "'the history of sexuality' to mean 'the history of marriage,'" a conflation of what she considers to be "profoundly different fields" (p. 22). She complains of literary critics who merged an unnuanced version of companionate marriage from Lawrence Stone's 1977 *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* with a Foucauldian-inflected hermeneutics of suspicion in order to produce a teleological narrative of desire that was reductive and anachronistic. This move exacerbated the erasure of women's agency inherent in Ian Watt's equation of the novel's rise with that of an autonomous liberal subject in *The Rise of the Novel* (1957).

Whereas Boone's interest lay in examining how novels elaborated a new idea of romantic love, Schaffer cautions against any tendency to infer that romantic love is the culmination of a teleological history of the novel. This caveat emerges from more recent historical and anthropological research, feminist scholarship, disability studies, and queer studies. But it is also worth noting that Schaffer is recovering a strain of scholarship that never bought into this reductive thinking, for example, that of Ruth Perry, whose *Novel Relations* (2004) she often cites. I would suggest that Carole Pateman's *The Sexual Contract* (1988) be acknowledged as well. Published the year after Boone's and Armstrong's books, *The Sexual Contract* demonstrates that social contract theory depended upon an unacknowledged sexual contract—the marriage contract—with the result that women's inferior legal status became a constitutive feature of liberal democracy. Pateman explains why, as Schaffer often notes, familiar marriage plots may have imagined ways of mitigating marriage contracts but remained fantasies that could not be realized.

The chapters devoted to different kinds of familiar marriages begin with historical context and then proceed through literary texts, typically starting with Jane Austen and often closing with George Eliot, with brief discussions of synchronic historical events. Literary examples come primarily from domestic fiction with little attention to sensation novels, social problem novels, or the gothic. Schaffer's discussion of cousin marriage strikes me as her most original and illuminating. Drawing especially on Corbett's *Family Likenesses: Sex, Marriage, and Incest from Jane Austen to Virginia Woolf* (2008), Schaffer historicizes squeamishness about endogamous marriages as the product of Victorian thinkers deeply invested in creating a history in which exogamous marriage appeared inevitable and enlightened. Henry Maine, in *Ancient Law: Its Connection with the Early History of Society, and Its Relation to Modern Ideas* (1861), and John

McLennan, in *Primitive Marriage: An Inquiry into the Origin of the Form of Capture in Marriage Ceremonies* (1865), each marshal historical arguments to rationalize women's subordination and dispossession disguised as enlightened exogamous marriage just at the time marriage law was beginning to change in women's favor and women were seeking other political reforms. McLennan, Schaffer shrewdly points out, acknowledged that endogamous marriage persisted through history but was unrepresentable since its very peaceableness and tranquility meant it produced no narrative. If we recognize the historical origins of our incest taboos, in Maine and McLennan as much as Darwin and the Bible, and why certain literary contemporary theories of sexuality are invested in policing them, then we can begin to acknowledge the appeal of cousin marriage plots. In *Mansfield Park* (1814), cousin marriage makes a happy substitution for (adoptive) sibling affections.

With respect to neighbor marriages, Schaffer points out that one reason the domestic novel is preoccupied with provincial settings is that they allow for marriage plots in which heroines discover the advantages neighboring men of property hold over rootless strangers. Colonel Brandon versus Willoughby in *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) is a clear instance. What *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) further demonstrate is that marrying the neighborhood squire gives a woman a social role in maintaining her own community. As Schaffer writes, "managerial prowess on a major estate is clearly one of the great attractions of these marriages," a claim most explicitly illustrated by Lizzy's role as the mistress of Pemberley (p. 100).

Disability marriage plots bring into representation the deeply intimate relationships of care-giving as uniquely powerful bases for marriages, which were not confined to legally defined marriages and could include same-sex pairings. Finally, none of these varieties of familiar marriage necessitated nor precluded erotic desire and could, as so famously in the case of *Jane Eyre* (1847), heighten it. Only vocational marriage, Schaffer's last subject, provides no example of success, apart from Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1856). Schaffer attributes this dearth to the logical conundrum in which the Langham Place feminists found themselves: having to advocate for women's work but only in lieu of marriage. Again, Pateman could clarify this analysis.

Finally, it is notable that George Eliot's novels so often provide Schaffer's examples of why familiar marriage plots eventually fail. Here it would be useful to ask whether Schaffer's argument implies that realist narratives gain momentum from the untenability of marriage plots in domestic fiction. Eliot's novels, like Trollope's, explode narratives that structure desires in fanciful ways. Marriage is an ending as well as a beginning, and all closures are artificial, including that of *Middlemarch* (1871).

But the realist's version of marital desire can survive outside of romance fictions. Schaffer reads Dorothea's declaration to Will, "I will learn what everything costs," as an anticlimactic deflation of marital desire.<sup>2</sup> I read it as the most realistically romantic thing one person can say to another. It is a statement about interdependency in everyday, familiar life. It beats "Reader, I married him."<sup>3</sup>

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Barrett Browning, "Sonnet 43," in *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: Selected Poems*, ed. Marjorie Stone and Beverly Taylor (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2009), 231.

<sup>2</sup> George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 789.

<sup>3</sup> Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 448.

ARCHIVES OF LABOR: WORKING-CLASS WOMEN AND LITERARY CULTURE IN THE ANTEBELLUM UNITED STATES, by Lori Merish. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017. 328 pp. \$99.95 cloth; \$26.95 paper; \$14.55 ebook.

Lori Merish's *Archives of Labor: Working-Class Women and Literary Culture in the Antebellum United States* supplements and joins two recent streams of scholarship on capitalism and women's place in it. Merish adds gender to the so-called new capitalist history that has recently re-narrated United States capitalism, mainly from the point of view of black and white producers and workers. Her recovery of literary narratives by and about female textile workers, factory girls, Mexicana mission workers, prostitutes, and domestic servants also buttresses recent scholarship by social reproduction theorists like Lise Vogel and Tithi Bhattacharya, who have shown the centrality of women's work, waged and unwaged, in producing society. Merish's book provides a rare literary portrait of women's labor, one that includes California in the age of the imperial conquest of Mexico. As such, it might also be thought of as part of the new western history movement ongoing in the academy.

Merish's thesis is that antebellum working-class women writers "address ways in which the female worker was positioned to *represent* the condition of class exploitation, subjection, and economic suffering" (p. 8). This argument is a historical materialist rendering of what has been called sentimentality in prevailing scholarship. Merish argues that the social position of women as the gentler sex both facilitated and masked their