The Muse of Indifference

ERIC C. WALKER

Nevertheless couples, held in contempt, have come together again. . . .
—Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love* (227)

If marriage is the name of our only present alternative to the desert-sea of skepticism, then for that very reason this intimacy cannot be celebrated, or sanctified; there is no outside to it. You may describe it as lacking its poetry. . . .
—Stanley Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary* (64–65)

IN HIS 1706 EDITION OF EDWARD PHILLIPS'S *THE NEW WORLD OF English Words* (1658), the early British lexicographer John Kersey supplied a dead-end definition for a stillborn cousin of a real word, *lapidary*: "*Lapidable*, marriageable, fit for a husband." The *OED* calls this a "strange mistake . . . copied in some later Dicts." Or we might think of it as a small poem, lost and found. As the preposition in the Pauline phrase "Since by Man came Death" keeps Anne Carson awake at night ("Perhaps it means / Man was standing at the curb / and Death came by" [*Glass* 41]), so "for" in Kersey's definition fidgets: who is "fit for a husband"? In 1706 women set to vanish under the sign of wife suffered this fit, but now the phrase corrals everyone—husbands, wives, spouses, partners, companions, significant others. According to the United States government, not to be marriageable is not to count, literally; on the Census 2000 long form, after questions to try to fix "sex" and "race," conjugality is queried this way: "7. What is this person's marital status? / A. Now Married / B. Widowed / C. Divorced / D. Separated / E. Never Married." The last verse of this bureaucratic stanza, "E. Never Married," manages to be both elegiac and hortatory as it stuffs its shadow, "Always Single," in the closet. The

ERIC C. WALKER is associate professor and University Distinguished Teaching Professor in the Department of English at Florida State University. His essays on writers from the Romantic century have appeared in *Studies in Romanticism*, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, *European Romantic Review*, *Studies in Philology*, *SEL*, *Keats-Shelley Journal*, *Philological Quarterly*, *Wordsworth Circle*, *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, and other journals and essay collections. This essay is part of a book on marriage, writing, and Romanticism.

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https://doi.org/10.1632/003081205X36949 Published online by Cambridge University Press

corner kids crowding onto the school bus sing "Chapel of Love" in chorus, cheek to cheek.

A back-formation from *epithalamium*, *epithalamic* has been in use in English since the mid–eighteenth century to name poetry that celebrates marriage, from Sappho to the Dixie Cups. But on the anticonjugal side, there is a telling gap in the lexical record: no term corresponding to *epithalamic* exists to label the many texts that have held couples in contempt. This absence testifies to the empire of modern marriage—it is the franchise, the only game in town.[1] My essay is about the pressure on the words *poetry* and *marriage* to pair off homologously, to behave isomorphically, and about the forms of resistance to that pressure, examples of which I locate under a term, *indifference*, that in Romanticism is coupled with conjugality to signify not apathy but recalcitrance. Two imperatives bear down on this pressure point: the burden on poetry to guarantee the meaning of words and the burden on marriage to guarantee the meaning of other people. In "Poetry and Psychoanalysis," Adam Phillips remarks the outrageous load that poetry shoulders: "The privileging of poetry and poets is a counter-force to the fear that language and meaning don't work" (*Promises* 6). At least as unfair a cargo, pairing off is, after G. W. F. Hegel, the only way to get what counts as a life: "our objectively appointed end and so our ethical duty is to enter the married state . . . the life involved in it is life in its totality" (*Philosophy* 111). This twinned pressure fences marriage writing in a forensic double bind that produces attitudes either epithalamic or anticonjugal—but it is a distinction, I argue, with no difference. In Stanley Cavell's terms, marriage triumphant for that reason lacks its poetry.

Which is to say that marriage also drowns in verse, overbrimmed. My topic here, however, is not the formidable history of the epithalamium but the effect on poetry of that formidability. Similarly, the rowdy traditions of antimarriage writing, although tempting, receive little notice here, whether they are celebrations of unmarried love or lamentations "of the wo that is in marriage" from every age.[2] Instead, I am interested in the cultural moment in the post-Christian West when the question whether marriage is a good idea or a bad idea begins to sound like a bad question. In the first section below, I locate in Romantic culture a newly urgent incommensurability of marriage and representation. Working with texts by Jane Austen, Hegel, Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich von Schlegel, and Anna Letitia Barbauld, I identify in Romanticism an emergent attitude to marriage culture denominated *indifference*. Indifference exhibits a remarkable shift in two places in Romantic culture, a radical displacement from the term's semantic roots of compromising mediation to an oppositional perch outside closed systems. At telling moments in women's poetry in late-eighteenth-century Britain, indifference is set over and against sensibility and the culture of marriage; a similar maneuver appears in F. W. J. von Schelling's philosophy at the turn of the century, where indifference leverages an outside to closed epistemologies and ontologies. Taking a cue from these separate Romantic instances, I adopt indifference to signify forms of writing that work in fugitive ways outside the forensic boundaries of marriage culture, which constrain marriage writing whether it is epithalamic or anticonjugal. These texts do not write narrowly for or against marriage as, outrageously, freedom's necessary form but, more widely, write against the foundational grain of a pervasive marriage culture that would preempt the subjects and forms of writing, as well as the question of freedom.

My goal is not to derive some impossible algorithm to winnow all marriage writing into epithalamic and anticonjugal subsets on the one hand and indifferent traces on the other. One threat posed by post-Hegelian conjugality is a nightmare of repetition, of example

https://doi.org/10.1632/003081205X36949 Published online by Cambridge University Press

without end: every story is necessarily, one way or another, a story about marriage. Instead of pursuing what could only be a madly iterated calibration, the examples that follow have a different goal: to foreground certain forms of marriage writing that deal not with the problem of marriage but with the problem of writing about the problem of marriage. This challenge is an especially steep one for poetry since it labors under the doubly impossible burden of signifying not only the meaning of marriage but also the meaning of meaning. In the second section, I turn to two poems, one modernist and one contemporary, that inflect exemplarily a poetics of indifference, Marianne Moore's "Marriage" (1923) and Anne Carson's *The Beauty of the Husband* (2001). In aphorism, epigram, quotation, apothegm, and other lapidary forms of a style of indifference fundamentally ironic, these texts tease out the unlimited boundaries of marriage culture.

Throughout these readings, I subordinate arguments about marriage as social praxis to an attendant quandary: the peculiar perplexity of producing poetry about marriage. In the wake of recent Canadian court decisions and landmark rulings of the United States Supreme Court and the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, gay and lesbian rights are now framed most urgently in the new century as the question of the freedom to marry.[3] This essay is also about marriage and freedom, but it focuses on a different tyranny, the tyranny that insists that marriage alone defines freedom and that threatens to bedevil the work to disrupt normative heterosexuality when that queer agenda risks being defined by marriage.[4] Constrained by the imperative to write about marriage and stymied by the injunction that to do so is impossible, these texts instead aim at an elusive liberty to think freedom in terms other than *married*, *unmarried*, or *never married*, outside the default categories of marriage culture. These forms of indifference ironically resist not marriage itself but marriage culture as a whole, the post-Hegelian imperative that conjugality, whether embraced or shunned, now defines human identity and human freedom.[5] In antimarriage contrast, in the anticonjugal tradition of William Godwin's *Political Justice* and Kierkegaard's "Diary of a Seducer," Laura Kipnis launches her recent polemic against the "marital panopticon" by proposing adultery as a "counterlogic to the prevailing system," as a "parodic transgression of the couple dyad" ("Adultery" 300, 298, 312). Although Kipnis performs an incisive critique of "normative intimacy" (298), I nevertheless locate her argument not outside the marriage "system" but ultimately within it as a countervailing, subtending pillar.[6] The elusive poetry of modern marriage emerges otherwise, taking root in what Cavell observes is its own manifest lack. A decade after Mary Wollstonecraft ended her first novel by hijacking a gospel vision of a postconjugal world "*where there is neither marrying*, nor giving in marriage" (68), she paired off with a companion who had just torched marriage as "a system of fraud . . . the worst of all laws . . . the most odious of all monopolies" (Godwin 849–50). The last infirmity of a radical mind, conjugality rules.

[I]

"Avoid poetry," advises Sydney Smith, among his several prescriptions for Lady Georgiana Morpeth's "low spirits" in 1820 (348). In Austen's *Persuasion* (1818), Anne Elliot advises Captain Benwick, widowed before marriage and wallowing in verse at Lyme Regis, to add more prose to his diet: "She ventured to hope he did not always read only poetry; and to say, that she thought it was the misfortune of poetry, to be seldom safely enjoyed by those who enjoyed it completely; and that the strong feelings which alone could estimate it truly, were the very feelings which ought to taste it but sparingly" (98). In this rare discussion of verse in Austen's fiction, poetry

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is clearly dangerous, but the nature of that danger is not so quickly evident. Pointing beyond mere indulgence in emotional excess, the danger of poetry is coupled, significantly, with the brokenness of Captain Benwick's marriage prospects. To understand marriage and writing as agonistic brings into focus the peculiar show poetry puts on in Austen's fiction, which is a telling Romantic sign of the limits of Romantic discourse.[7] As versified affect spills all over the culture during the decades of Austen's life, the running joke throughout her fiction is double-pronged and perfectly serious: poetry is a scarce commodity, and, worse, what of it exists is dead set against the conjugally affective. When early in *Pride and Prejudice* Mrs. Bennet recalls for the party at Netherfield a former lover of Jane who never proposed but "wrote some verses on her, and very pretty they were," Elizabeth scampers in: "And so ended his affection" (38). There endeth the lesson, although the passage skips along to other jokes about food and love. What little poetry there is in Austen lines up with the preconjugal, as with Jane Bennet's hapless suitor or, as in Captain Benwick's curious and unfortunate case, with the odd coincidence of preconjugality and postconjugality. The commensurability of marriage and poetry in Austen's fiction is a foundational absence. I understand this absence as an oppositional response to manifold perplexity: while high Romanticism labors to install poetry as the type to which writing aspires and while the culture installs marriage as the type to which identity aspires, Austen's novels set themselves against this pressure to marry poetry and marriage by writing about nothing but marriage in anything but poetry. The Romantic novel generally exhibits the necessarily forensic forms dictated by marriage culture—either Jacobin anticonjugality in novels by Godwin, Wollstonecraft, Mary Hays, Elizabeth Inchbald, Thomas Holcroft, and others or complacent epithalamia such as Hannah More's hugely popular *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*—but Austen's novels inhabit the marriage plot in elusively oppositional ways, one trace of which is the curious status of poetry therein.[8] By means of its heralded preoccupation with marriage, Austen's fiction paradoxically registers a divorce between marriage and writing, in Cavell's sense that marriage triumphant is "lacking its poetry."

Early in *Pride and Prejudice*, greasy Mr. Collins pitches his case to Elizabeth Bennet: "Almost as soon as I entered the house I singled you out as the companion of my future life" (94). As an explanation of the perdurability of conjugality, the companionate marriage has become as threadbare as Mr. Collins's pickup lines.[9] And as unavoidable. In the wake of the frosty evisceration of marriage in Godwin's *Political Justice* in 1793, marriage regularly takes a beating as a keystone human mystification. Anthony Giddens speaks of the "counterfactual thinking of the deprived" (45); Kipnis ransacks the "marital *gulags*" that emprison the "miserable classes" ("Adultery" 296); Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari read conjugality, "a regime for the pairing of people" (71), as a "repressive" rather than "revolutionary machine" (293).[10] Even evolutionary biologists have recently returned bad news for couples from the scutiny of, among other evidence, the male scorpion fly's salivary nuptial gift: "aspiring monogamists are going against some of the deepest-seated evolutionary inclinations with which biology has endowed most creatures" (Barash and Lipton 1). But in Julia Kristeva's words, an old question remains open: "what is it that leads love to dream of an eternal couple?" (225). Who are these pairs, ever coming to the sacrifice? With too many others to mention, the biologists fall in with Mr. Collins: "the successful monogamist assures himself and herself a companion for life" (Barash and Lipton 192). Before he caved in, Godwin was formed of sterner stuff: "the supposition that

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I must have a companion for life, is the result of a complication of vices. It is the dictate of cowardice, and not of fortitude. It flows from the desire of being loved and esteemed for something that is not desert" (849).

If companionship can be thought of as the weak epithalamic argument, Hegel in 1821 offers the strong version: marriage is the necessary door through which the individual passes into history. Before his argument marches onward to its monumental topics, the earlier pages of *Philosophy of Right* concisely map the modern empire of marriage. Hegel is unequivocal that the romance narrative, "the contingency of feeling and private inclination" (113), fails to explain marriage. What makes marriage "life in its totality" is not that it guarantees regular proximity to one other person in the vicinity of food or that it facilitates the accumulation of capital, shared or unshared, but that it changes identity, alters consciousness.[11]

> On the subjective side, marriage may have a more obvious source in the particular inclination of the two persons who are entering upon the marriage tie, or in the foresight and contrivance of the parents, and so forth. But its objective source lies in the free consent of the persons, especially in their consent to make themselves one person, to renounce their natural and individual personality to this unity of one with the other. From this point of view, their union is a self-restriction, but in fact it is their liberation, because in it they attain their substantive self-consciousness. (111)

This final sentence is a crucial moment in Hegel's argument, for in it he proposes how not one but three new identities are produced in marriage: not only the newly corporate form of "one person" but also new forms of identity ("their liberation") for the two individuals, what Hegel calls "substantive self-consciousness," a phrase with complex roots in the arguments about identity in his *Phenomenology*. The oppressive and conventional fiction of "one person" in Hegel's account is a critical soft target; what renders his take on marriage formidable and full of terror is the final step, the definition of a complex mode of identity, synonymous with human freedom, that is unavailable elsewhere. A generation earlier in Britain, Samuel Johnson, in speculative mood in *Rasselas*, had registered how single people "labor under a known sense of inferiority" and stand as "the outlaws of human nature" (94). Hegel codifies the territorial absolutism of conjugality.

How does the empire write back? A rallying place is the agon of conjugality that defines Kierkegaard's inaugural moment as a writer, with his 1841 thesis *The Concept of Irony* followed in a matter of days by his broken engagement and, little more than a year later, by the publication of *Either/Or*, the biggest book about marriage from Romanticism, early or late. Kierkegaard's stereoscopic preoccupation with irony and with marriage helps pose the question of what to call writing that digs in its heels against marriage culture as a whole, writing that is neither epithalamic nor narrowly anticonjugal. A number of these oppositional gambits resemble stock moves of Romantic irony, but Romantic irony is itself a species of stock anticonjugal discourse. The term *indifference* has nearly as slippery a history in Romantic writing as irony, but I settle on it to identify new forms of marriage writing prompted by two moments in Romantic discourse: the prominence of the term in women's poetry in the second half of the eighteenth century in Britain, where *indifference* aims beyond the horizon of modern coupledom, and Schelling's deployment of a cognate German form to gain a foothold outside closed philosophical systems. Although Marjorie Levinson a decade ago nominated indifference as a means to rethink Romantic critique, her exemplary texts return to a familiar gallery of Romantic solitaries—the old man traveling, the idiot boy, the leech gatherer, the discharged

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soldier—that continue to pose the problem of Romantic identity within the binary of the individual and the tribe, eliding the couple.[12] At the same time as Schelling in Germany uses "*die Indifferenz*" with Archimedean design, women writers in the period deploy indifference as a response to the specific problem of the pair, which Hegel soon declares to be the defining ground of human freedom.

In *Either/Or*, two long sections—"The Diary of a Seducer" and the first portion of Judge Wilhelm's response, "The Esthetic Validity of Marriage"—enact and parody late-Romantic forms of anticonjugal and epithalamic writing. "The Diary of a Seducer" transposes anticonjugality from its ethical register in Enlightenment discourse—marriage is unjust—to an aesthetic key: marriage is boring. Seduction, however, is interesting. Everywhere in the book, the problem of pairing off—through seduction or marriage—is inseparable from the problem of representation, from questions of poetry and of irony. Seduction, not marriage, supplies poetry. Kierkegaard encloses a first level of irony in the Seducer's anticonjugal method, as the Seducer relishes the moment when two lovers declare that they are all in all for each other: "It is no wonder that the poets always portray this intimate moment, this beautiful moment. . . . A little irony makes this moment's second moment one of the most interesting; it is a spiritual undressing. One must be poet enough not to disturb the ceremony yet the joker must always be sitting in ambush."[13] To the Seducer, poetry dwells only in such preconjugal moments, which at their best are doubled moments produced by irony ("this moment's second moment"), where (male) consciousness inhabits simultaneously two selves, both actor and witness, poet and joker. The poetry of seduction—which is to say, poetry itself—is a set piece of Romantic irony, a form of simultaneous making and unmaking.

Judge Wilhelm in counterattack zeroes in on this fetish for the moment. While he argues not the goodness but the "esthetic validity" of marriage, his case hangs on a different understanding of conjugality and temporality. The beauty of marriage, he claims, inheres in the durational, not in the moment. This line of argument leads him to a set of observations about the incommensurability of marriage and representation, what "can never be portrayed in poetry or art": "Romantic love can be portrayed very well in the moment; marital love cannot, for an ideal husband is not one who is ideal once in his life but one who is that every day" (2: 135). In *Either/Or*, the two opponents, the anticonjugal Seducer and Judge Wilhelm the epithalamic advocate, agree on just this: there is a new divorce between marriage and representation. The Seducer locates poetry outside marriage, in an elsewhere called seduction; the Judge in counterattack stipulates that marriage itself resists poetry, from the inside.

Judge Wilhelm then complicates his argument about temporality by stressing the distinction between "outer" and "inner" experience, the latter of which is the durational order that eludes representation: "But this history that proves to be incommensurable even for poetry is the inner history" (2: 137). Again, most absolutely: "This love cannot be portrayed. It always moves inward and spends itself (in the good sense) in time, but that which is to be portrayed by reproduction must be lured forth, and its time must be foreshortened. . . . *Marital love does not come with external signs*" (139–40; emphasis added). The head-on collision between Hegelian absolutism (marriage is "life in its totality") and the consensus of voices in *Either/Or* (marriage and writing are incommensurable) threatens to bring representational traffic to a dead halt: marriage is the only tale to tell; it is a tale that is untellable. This dilemma achieves sharpest definition in philosophic texts late in Romanticism; the earliest attempts to maneuver around the representational roadblock that is modern

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marriage also emerge, post-Romantically, in Romanticism, by means of a pervasively ironic rhetoric and a poetics of indifference.

Before turning to examples of indifference in Romantic discourse, however, I should distinguish between the ironic ways of indifference and Romantic irony. Far from sponsoring the oppositional moves of indifference, the foundational texts of Romantic irony depend on the anticonjugal postures that flourish inside the marriage system. When Kierkegaard launches his critique of Schlegel and Romantic irony in 1841, he takes aim at *Lucinde*, the novel—a tale of seduction—that Schlegel published at the same time as his *Fragments*: "If we examine more closely what Schlegel was combating with his irony, presumably no one will deny that there was and is much in the ingress, progress, and egress of the marriage relationship that deserves a correction such as this and that makes it natural for the subject to want to be liberated" (*Concept* 287). What is at stake, Kierkegaard recognizes, is freedom, but Romantic irony offers only the illusion of rebellion. Julius, the hero of *Lucinde*, is a card-carrying Romantic ironist: "I want to attempt to shape raw chance and mold it to the purpose. No purpose, however, is more purposeful for myself and for this work, for my love for it and for its own structure, than to destroy at the very outset all that part we call 'order'" (Schlegel, *Lucinde* 45). In a section titled "Allegory of Impudence," personified Wit addresses Julius and renders clear that Romantic irony achieves self-definition in terms dictated by conjugality: "Create, discover, transform, and retain the world and its eternal forms in the perpetual variation of new marriages and divorces" (58). Although conventional marriage everywhere lines up in the novel with the old "order," it is to be replaced not by extraconjugal or postconjugal forms but by what Julius elsewhere hails as the "sublime frivolity" (47) of the new Romantic conjugal pair dedicated to "perpetual variation," to the "daring chaos" that names the structure of both the novel and the relationship it narrates (63).

Romantic irony, in short, cannot live with marriage and cannot live without it. Critical preoccupation with the headline moments in Schlegel's *Fragments* about irony and Romantic poetry has caused "Athenaeum Fragment 34," a long piece on marriage, to be overlooked:[14]

> Almost all marriages are simply concubinages, liaisons, or rather provisional experiments and distant approximations of a true marriage whose real essence, judged not according to the paradoxes of any old system but according to all spiritual and worldly laws, consists of the fusion of a number of persons into one person. A nice idea, but one fraught with a great many serious difficulties. For this reason, if for no other, the will should be given as much free rein as possible, since after all the will has some say in any decision of whether an individual is to remain independent or become only an integral part of a common personality. It's hard to imagine what basic objection there could be to a marriage *à quatre*. But when the state tries to keep even unsuccessful trial-marriages together by force, then, in so doing, it impedes the possibility of marriage itself, which might be helped by means of new and possibly more successful experiments. (*Philosophical Fragments* 22)

The brave new world of experimental marriage will not be content with just two becoming one but sets its sights higher, on "a number of persons" becoming one, because it is, after all, "hard to imagine what basic objection there could be to a marriage *à quatre*," a line that scandalized the contemporary audience of the *Fragments* far more than chatter about poets and chaos. But the attack on the "old system" attacks just half of the system, the number of persons becoming one. The goal of becoming one, of becoming "an integral part of a common personality," stands unchallenged, apart from the deadpan

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aside "A nice idea, but one fraught with a great many serious difficulties." Although the text gestures toward the chance that "an individual" might "remain independent," it nevertheless invests its bedrock idea of freedom in "the possibility of marriage." In its brief compass, it even supplies an extensive taxonomy of marriage: trial marriage, true marriage, marriage *à quatre*, experimental marriage, approximate marriage, concubinage marriage, liaison marriage. Latter-day Romantic ironists at our millennial moment have stretched the list to include starter marriage (the new term of choice for trial marriage), encore marriage, green-card marriage, icebreaker marriage, drive-through marriage, and rebound marriage.[15] Conjugality rules.

Deeply complicit with compulsory conjugality, Romantic irony thus fails to supply discursive ground from which one could limn the unavailable beyond of modern marriage. I turn, then, to a different Romantic signifier, *indifference*, to name the work that skirts the boundaries of marriage culture. Departing from its common sense of mediating neutrality, *indifference* also marks crucial flanking maneuvers at two moments in Romantic discourse.[16] First, at the end of the eighteenth century, Schelling in Germany deploys "*die Indifferenz*" to signify an absolute beyond—an outside—that grounds difference; in Alberto Toscano's summary, Schelling aims at "the definitive abandonment of any project maintaining itself within the strictures of Kantian dualism, even in terms of thinking difference from an original *polarity* of subject-object, in favour of a thinking wholly concerned with thinking *from* indifference" (57).[17] As David Ferris argues, by means of indifference "Schelling has, in effect, opened the question of how the world and the place of the individual in it has been thought," a question that marriage culture would declare closed. Second, the term *indifference* in Britain in the last half of the eighteenth century undergoes a telling shift in the culture of sensibility, where it moves from its semantic roots of mediation to name the desire to escape entirely the closed circle of affect known as sensibility. In Jerome McGann's words, "nothing is more characteristic of the poetry of sensibility than its dialectical relation to 'Indifference'" (50). McGann's chief example in *The Poetics of Sensibility* is Frances Greville's poem "A Prayer for Indifference" (50–54), from the 1750s, in which the world of "treacherous sense" (line 29), the prison round of "pleasure" and "pain," is set against a plea for "sweet repose" (48) conveyed by "the nymph Indifference" (36). A more sustained example of how indifference signifies the beyond of sensibility is Ann Yearsley's poem "To Indifference" (1787), where the distressed speaker is "tost on extreme, / From bliss to pointed woe" (lines 7–8). Yearsley first argues that sensibility oppresses precisely because it demands nothing but polar extremes, with no place for mediate terms: "To SENSIBILITY, what is not bliss / Is woe. No placid medium's ever held / Beneath her torrid line" (30–32). But then Yearsley performs her key gambit, which is to abandon the fruitless search for a "placid medium." To escape the system, she plucks indifference from its middling ground and sets it outside, over and against sensibility:

> Then leave me, Sensibility! be gone,
> Thou chequer'd angel! Seek the soul refin'd:
> I hate thee! And thy long progressive brood
> Of joys and mis'ries. Soft indiff'rence, come!
> (44–47)

The poem closes with a vision of the unmoving place where the speaker will receive indifference:

> In this low cottage thou shalt be my guest,
> Till Death shuts out the hour: here down
> I'll sink
> With thee upon my couch of homely rush,
> Which fading forms of Friendship, Love,
> or Hope,
> Must ne'er approach. Ah!—quickly hide,
> thou pow'r,

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> Those dead intruding images! Oh, seal
> The lids of mental sight, lest I abjure
> My freezing supplication.—ALL is still.
> (48–55)

The problem in these last lines is that the marriage culture surrounding Yearsley codes the "low cottage" where "all is still" as a telos of the marriage plot, a fantasy of conjugal refuge. This widespread trope is in evidence, for example, in two early exercises by William Wordsworth from the same years, an imitation of Anacreon ("While Fancy paints beneath the Veil / The pathway winding through the dale / The cot the seat of Peace and love / Peeping through the tufted grove" [366]) and a Horatian performance, "*Septimi, Gades*": "Yes Mary to some lowly door / In that delicious spot obscure / Our happy feet shall tend" (766).[18] Yearsley's escape is cut short by a nuptial figure that returns the poem against its expressed wishes to a world of sensibility conditioned by conjugality; the fugitive from coupledom is at the last still a bride, now of quietness and slow time. *Indifference* in these poems marks not a lasting escape but a fugitive gesture beyond the horizons of sensibility and the culture of marriage.

Two years before her May 1774 marriage, Anna Letitia Barbauld published anonymously a print titled *A New Map of the Land of Matrimony*, the popularity of which is underscored by a reprint issued a decade or so later (fig. 1).[19] Drawn "from the latest survey," the cartography offers a sweeping western Ocean of Love that surrounds an eastern Land of Matrimony. The seascapes and landscapes are crowded with jokes about the pitfalls and pratfalls of pairing off: Rocks of Jealousy, Gulph of Reproach, Henpeck Bay, and the like. Among the map's many conventional tokens of the affective (Esteem, Jealousy, Pity, and so on), one feature of the landscape sounds an especially curious note: from the map's right edge, in the far east of the Land of Matrimony, stares the Dead Lake of Indifference. The map posits the polar opposite of the living waters of Love not as some desert place called Hate but as a dead sea going nowhere and named Indifference. This opposition of love and indifference is rendered explicit and structurally foundational in the map's compass in the upper left, in the legend of which "Love" at the south and "Indifference" at the north form the literal poles of this geography of conjugal affect. Barbauld's matrimonial map locates indifference in the binding logic of a terrifying ethical imperative: to love is to marry, which is to be alive; to be indifferent is not to marry, which is not to exist.

Of the dozens of terms for affect in Barbauld's print, *indifference* comes closest to naming a place off the map of marriage, just as Greville and Yearsley urge it as the rallying cry to flee sensibility. That Barbauld construes a Dead Lake of Indifference casts a cold spell over Yearsley's pastoral cot where "all is still," signifying that in Romantic culture the fixed spot of the marriage settlement comes packaged with a death threat. For Yearsley, to be still is to be indifferent, which is to escape the turmoil of sensibility. In the culture, to be still is to marry, to slip offstage at the end of the marriage plot to the domiciliary refuge that marks the end of representation. But to arrest motion is also the very life of representation. In Romantic culture, both marriage and writing live and die in still forms. The map of marriage in Romantic and post-Romantic culture is with marble men and maidens overwrought.

[II]

The year 1862 is an especially crowded point on the map of the marriageable, of those fit for life in its totality—or else. In London, George Meredith published *Modern Love*, a tale of the unfit. In Amherst, Emily Dickinson kept up a flood of lyrics, a remarkable number of which use marriage tropes in arrestingly new forms: "Title divine—is mine! / The Wife—without the Sign!" (poem 194); "The World—stands—

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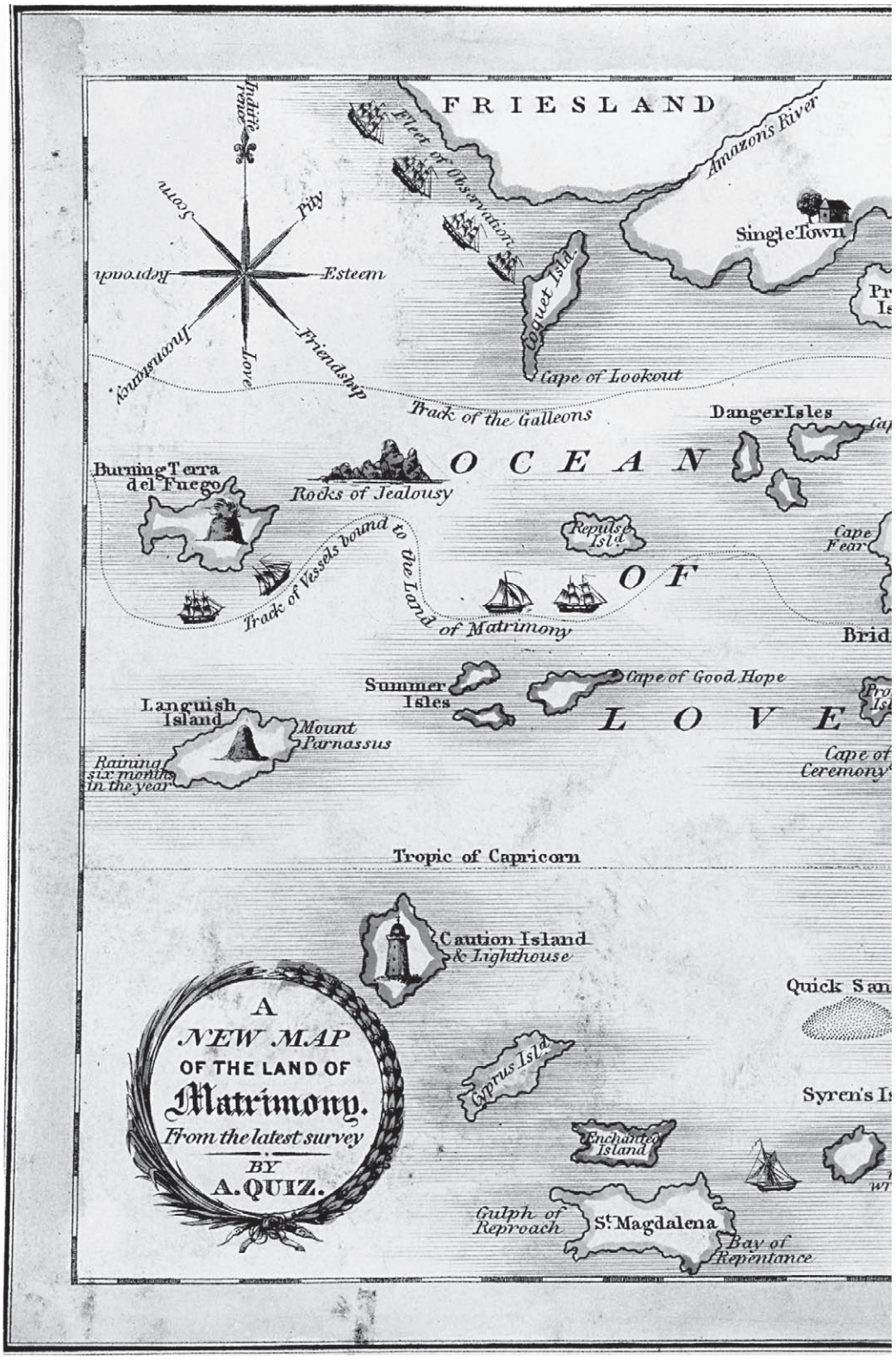
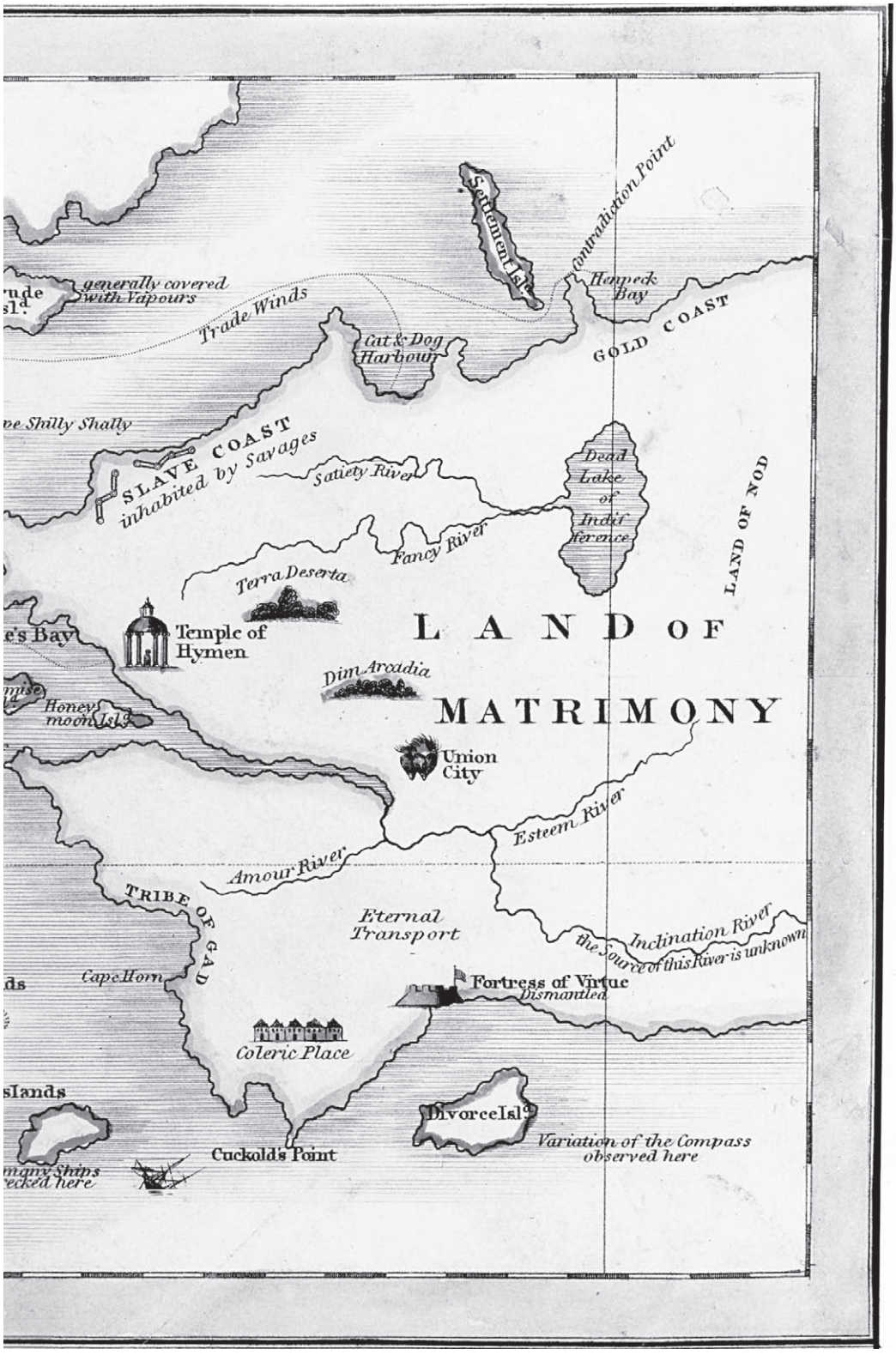


FIG. 1

A New Map of the Land of Matrimony, c. 1800. British Lib., London (Maps CC 5291). Reproduced by permission of the British Library.

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solemner—to me—/ Since I was wed—to Him—" (poem 280). But distinct from Walt Whitman's double-edged salute to "women fit for conception" in *Leaves of Grass* in 1855 (62), Dickinson's verse has a solo accommodation:

> I am alive—because
> I do not own a House—
> Entitled to myself—precise—
> And fitting no one else— (poem 605)

Just as Meredith, Whitman, and Dickinson, misfits of compulsory conjugality, all memorably misbehave, so marriage and representation continue post-Romantically to chafe against their necessary pairing. As Mona Van Duyn puts it in "Toward a Definition of Marriage" (1959), "It has a bulky knowledge, but what symbol comes anywhere near / suggesting it? No, the notion of art won't fit it" (32). But still the map of marriage is worked over and over, again and yet again, in borrowed forms, forms old, forms new. Once film arrives on the scene, a writer's best ticket to Hollywood is to buy a pair of seats: Tom and Viv, Virginia and Leonard, Will and Viola, Dorothy and Sam, John and Iris. When the two are poets—Sylvia and Ted, in notable instance—the gazing goes exponential.

As his book confesses his helplessness to do otherwise, Ted Hughes in *Birthday Letters* (1998) regularly courts the confusion attendant on—and resistant to—the effort to tell the story of his marriage to Sylvia Plath. In "Visit," for example, an early poem in the sequence (7–9), Hughes doubles up two moments, the memory of a drunken Cambridge midnight "lobbing soil-clods up at a dark window" he thought (wrongly) to be Plath's (line 22) and his encounter in the poem's present with Plath's journal account of that same Cambridge night. When at the end of the poem the dislocated speaker looks up, it is simultaneously a glance of the remembered self toward that mistaken dark window and a glance of the surviving self away from the "shock" of an encounter with the words of a dead spouse:

> I look up—as if to meet your voice
> With all its urgent future
> That has burst in on me. Then look back
> At the book of the printed words.
> You are ten years dead. It is only a story.
> Your story. My story. (64–69)

By design of the pronouns, the narrative that is begged, by both this poem and the entire book, is the plural impossible. Understanding fitfully that it does so, *Birthday Letters* assumes its necessarily stranded place in the representational feedback loop in which modern marriage is marooned: transfixing readers who are unable to turn away and long to do so, Plath speaks, Hughes speaks, Plath speaks, Hughes speaks—until deaths do them part. In a pairing rare in the volume for its explicitness, Hughes names a poem "The Rabbit Catcher" (144–46) to summon Plath's poem of the same title.[20] The male predator setting wires to snare rabbits becomes in Plath's final lines an image of the snare of marriage:

> And we, too, had a relationship—
> Tight wires between us,
> Pegs too deep to uproot, and a mind like
> a ring
> Sliding shut on some quick thing,
> The constriction killing me also.
> (lines 26–30)

Hughes writes back by troping rabbit trapping as verse making:

> In those snares
> You'd caught something.
> Had you caught something in me,
> Nocturnal and unknown to me? Or was it
> Your doomed self, your tortured, crying
> Suffocating self? Whichever,
> Those terrible, hypersensitive
> Fingers of your verse closed round it and
> Felt it alive. The poems, like smoking
> entrails,
> Came soft into your hands. (lines 66–75)

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Hughes ducks answering Plath's snare of marriage by foregrounding the snares—the misrecognitions—of their separate attempts to write about their marriage and its mad pursuits, their struggles to escape. Fixated on a dark window that is a mistaken target to begin with, dirt clods and poems both necessarily miss the mark that is a marriage: "Unknown to you and not knowing you. / Aiming to find you, and missing, and again missing" (33–34). The misrecognitions between two identity-forging human beings are themselves misrecognized by representation.

Like Wordsworth's coolly enigmatic brush-off of John Keats and his "Hymn to Pan" in London in December 1818, the politely failed encounter in 1958 between Marianne Moore and Plath and Hughes, newlyweds, now circulates as a fable of mid-century literary misinheritance. The irony of Hughes's account of this genteel but awkward meeting in *Birthday Letters*, "The Literary Life," is that Moore's 1923 poem "Marriage" magisterially redesigned for twentieth-century poetry the very paradigms of indifference *Birthday Letters* scrambles to navigate. Whereas the allusions of most high-modernist monuments have long been pinned to the mat in philological display cases, the crazy quilt of quotations in which Moore wraps conjugality remains largely unannotated, apart from her own sly notes. This elusiveness—"Marriage," Moore's longest poem, is one of the great understudied texts of modernism—stems not from the manifest eccentricity of the method, misread by priests of modernism from William Carlos Williams to Hugh Kenner as intriguingly unreadable, but from the poem's necessarily marauding maneuvers to scribble all over the impervious base of this most imperial of modern social forms.

The poem's title plunks down the monument in its formidable simplicity. The text talks back in a tone of confident declaration only as far as the noun phrase that is the opening line: "This institution." The second line immediately swerves off the high road of swift and certain definition: "perhaps one should say enterprise." The speaker's undecidedness in the first two lines plays out in the whole of the poem in a gendered division of attitude and speech between two prototypical characters, first named Eve and Adam and later simply She and He. The initial section dons and discards phrase after phrase as fit attire for the poem's title: "institution," "enterprise," "this fire-gilt steel / alive with goldenness" (lines 11–12), "this amalgamation which can never be more / than an interesting impossibility" (45–46)—and, from the mouth of a Romantic expert on conjugality, Godwin, "a very trivial object indeed" (125).[21] The first section ends in exasperated apostrophe to the god of marriage:

> Unhelpful Hymen!
> a kind of overgrown cupid
> reduced to insignificance
> by the mechanical advertising
> parading as involuntary comment,
> by that experiment of Adam's
> with ways out but no way in—
> the ritual of marriage. . . . (130–37)

Marriage, everywhere and always courted by representation, has thrown up a blockade: for the writer, the only way in is to work around and outside by means of indifference.

Moore's politics in the poem are forthrightly feminist. In the first half, Eve, "beautiful woman," who is "able to write simultaneously / in three languages— / English, German, and French— / and talk in the meantime" (21, 25–28), is a more sympathetic figure. Adam—philosopher, orator, statesman—"stumbles over marriage" even while he maintains his primary patriarchal power: "the O thou / to whom from whom, / without whom nothing—Adam" (124, 62–64). This most explicit anticonjugal component of the poem peaks at midpoint with a plain assertion

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of the special disadvantage of women: "experience attests / that men have power / and sometimes one is made to feel it" (191–93). But the speaker now distances herself from both female and male actors in marriage ("these savages" [246]) in a long third section of verbal dueling, framed across three dozen verses with the simple speech tags "He says," "She says," "He says," "She says." Eve and Adam sling mud with comic and densely allusive abandon: He hurls the quoted phrase "a wife is a coffin" (211), which Moore in the notes attributes to Ezra Pound; She strikes at him by quoting, so the note says, M. Carey Thomas's 1921 founder's address at Mount Holyoke:

> Men are monopolists
> of "stars, garters, buttons
> and other shining baubles"—
> unfit to be the guardians
> of another person's happiness.
> (200–04)

And so on, back and forth. The poem dismisses these antagonists into mirrored chambers of self-interest in the dwelling called marriage:

> he loves himself so much,
> he can permit himself
> no rival in that love.
> She loves herself so much,
> she cannot see herself enough. . . .
> (234–38)

In the poem's penultimate couplet, Moore quotes from the inscription on the base of the statue of Daniel Webster in Central Park: "Liberty and union / now and forever" (286–87). Readers veer one of two ways at this point. The epithalamically minded hear the language of that inscription endorsing at the end a compromise of quotidian life called marriage, the only form of social life that simultaneously accomplishes individuality and community—life in its totality. The anticonjugally minded hear that view of marriage dismissed as fantasy, as one last con job from the mouth of patriarchy, Webster a final instance of the orator-philosopher-statesman deflated throughout the poem.[22] But the division misses the point: to gesture toward both these ways of thinking about marriage, to quote a monument's inscription as the parting shot of a stampede of quotations that have throughout scribbled all over the monument called marriage, is to bring to the fore the poem itself as one long lapidary lark. Betraying neither a nod of epithalamic approval nor a final frown of anticonjugal displeasure, Moore's poem stares down marriage to see who will blink first. The contest commenced in line 1 to define "[t]his institution" arrives at a thick pass in the opening lines of the concluding section:

> One sees that it is rare—
> that striking grasp of opposites
> opposed each to the other, not to unity,
> which in cycloid inclusiveness
> has dwarfed the demonstration
> of Columbus with the egg—
> that charitive Euroclydon
> of frightening disinterestedness
> which the world hates. . . . (259–67)

The impenetrability of phrases such as "charitive Euroclydon" turns the imperviousness of marriage back against itself. Romantic indifference becomes the disinterested modernist artificer doing her nails, who responds to the "frightening disinterestedness" of marriage with a fugitive love letter of indifference that is the poem "Marriage," an Attic shape with attitude.

Moore's lapidary high jinks in "Marriage" spotlight the standoffs staged by indifference between marriage culture and manifestly closed forms of writing such as quotation and inscription. D. A. Miller argues that another closed and polished form, epigram, is the "elemental unit of Austen's prose" precisely in response to the outrage of marriage culture—in his phrase, an "attitude" set over and against compulsory conjugality ("Austen's Attitude" 2).[23] In his minibook *Monogamy*

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(1996), Adam Phillips rings changes on yet another closed form, aphorism, to leverage an outside to marriage culture. The short, small-format book is unpaginated and consists instead of 121 numbered passages, printed in a generous font, some as brief as a series of clauses ("Everybody, one might say, is left out of being someone else. But that is no comfort. Coupledom is as close as you can get" [116]), others running at most two short pages. Even reviewers predisposed to favor Phillips's writing found the style infuriating: it "ooz[ed]," in the words of one reviewer, "the arrogance of a man no one has contradicted for too long" (Fearn 18).[24] But that sense of outrage is the point. As Miller argues in his analysis of the "mortification" of Austen's epigrammatic style (3), the aggressively aphoristic manner of *Monogamy* is not the least bit interested in a reasoned debate about marriage, with Godwin or Hegel or anyone else. To enter the marriage debate is already to concede to conjugality the defining ground of identity. Against that outrage, some writing turns its back in epigram, quotation, inscription, and aphorism, in the forbiddingly labyrinthine ways of Kierkegaardian pseudonymity and publication, in the apothegmatic turns and counterturns of Moore's "Marriage."

In a review of Anne Carson's early work, while remarking her "appetite for formal constraints," Phillips observes that "in Carson, all the rituals of form are first and foremost an expression of their own limitations, the sign of what leaks out of them" ("Fickle Contracts" 115). A catalog of the forms in which Carson calls out couples, from her debut volume, *Eros the Bittersweet* (1986), through (at the time of this writing) seven more books of poems, essays, inventions, and translations, would look like another Carson book—reading through it all, it does begin to seem as though the motives, mysteries, and vicissitudes of pairing off constitute life in its totality, in Hegel's scary phrase. Which is a tale, as Judge Wilhelm reminds the Seducer, that resists telling. One of Carson's surrogate speakers says, "I found the kinship between a man and a woman can be a steep, whole, excellent thing and full of languages. Yet it may have no speech. Does that make sense?" (*Plainwater* 190). In *The Beauty of the Husband* (2001), in an episode featuring a nosebleed, the warring couple unexpectedly threaten to disappear together "as if they were one flesh. / Husband and wife may erase a boundary. / Creating a white page" (101). They fill a book-length poem, however, which in the front matter announces itself to be "the story of a marriage" but on its last page speculates that its method has been "to tell a story by not telling it" (145).

We might rephrase Phillips's take on Carson this way: rituals of form are, for Carson, frequently a way to leverage the unavailable beyond of marriage culture. The thirty sections of *The Beauty of the Husband* (the first twenty-nine of which readers are invited to think of as tangos) are separated (or strung together? interrupted or connected?) by quotations from Keats, but the quotations are all off-the-road Keats: small fragments of small revisions in the manuscripts of *Otho the Great* and *The Jealousies*, marginalia to Milton, a few lines from "Indolence" now and then. Quotation is here, as in Moore, a way around, a way of circling the elusive prey rather than an attack on it. The short Keats quotations are generously framed on otherwise blank pages (the "white page" of the inscrutable couple?), which graphic mode pumps epigraphic style with additional lapidary force even as the quotations pose only puzzles of meaning, near meaning, and unmeaning. Between sections 6 and 7, for example, the reader encounters just this opaque fragment from the obscurity of *Otho*: "114. She] {Ha?} She D,"—which is help of a slant kind at best.

But the entire book is grounded not in the most marginal of marginalia but in the most self-consciously lapidary moment in Keats:

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"Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty." In the course of *The Beauty of the Husband*, beauty, which is at first simple motive ("So why did I love him . . . ? / Beauty. No great secret" [9]), is revised toward an act of self-knowledge at the end:

> I overlooked one thing.
> That the beautiful when I encountered it
> would turn out to be
> prior—inside my own heart,
> already eaten. (140)

So much is clear about beauty; truth, however, is another thing. As a figure, it pops in and out of another conspicuous typographic convention that signals the text's lapidary twists and turns: the all-caps cranked-up volume of the openings of each section, which blur the line between title and text. Here is a typical opening:

> VII. BUT TO HONOR TRUTH WHICH IS
> SMOOTH DIVINE
> AND LIVES AMONG THE GODS WE MUST
> (WITH PLATO)
> DANCE LYING WHICH LIVES DOWN
> BELOW AMID THE
> MASS OF MEN BOTH TRAGIC AND ROUGH
> (33)

Of the multiple metaphors for marriage in the book—wound, war, game, madness, "mode of justice" (102)—dance, an Austen favorite, is most regularly and structurally deployed throughout. The phrase "DANCE LYING" in this section title doubles up the book's attitude toward poetry and marriage. The speaker in section 8 remarks, "Poets (be generous) prefer to conceal the truth beneath strata of irony / because this is the look of truth: layered and elusive" (37). *The Beauty of the Husband* is an ironic experiment in what "the true lies of poetry" (33) can do with marriage, this late in the game. Samuel Johnson long ago noted that in lapidary mode "a man is not upon oath" (Boswell 662), but that notion leaves the question whether Carson's speaker tells the truth. In addition to a series of tangos that "dance lying," I find it useful to think of the sections of this book as fits, in the old sense ("fyttes") of divisions of a poem. Another old meaning of *fit* was "[a]n adversary of equal power; one's 'match,'" which fits the human couple in these pages, animated always and everywhere by the Hegelian dynamics of the pair, what the poem calls the "hot bacon smell of pure contradiction" (134). Carson's poem tests, indifferently, the uneasy fit between two people and the uneasy fit between marriage and poetry. *The Beauty of the Husband* is a form fit for a husband.

What men or gods are these? What maidens loth? A stock genre of *New Yorker* cartoon features a couple alone in a room (fig. 2), with a book or books in the frame to signify the durational order of conjugality (if it is drinks instead of books, who knows?). In one example, from 2001, one partner looks up from reading and observes to the other, "I can't remember which one of us is me" (Weber). In another, from 1993, an enraged partner interrupts the other's reading with "Stop referring to you and me as 'we'!" (Kaplan). A silent panel from 1998 poses the couple back-to-back in reading chairs at opposite ends of a huge bookcase—the books separating or joining them (Schoenbaum)? A 1994 panel features a dapper spouse in his reading robe inquiring of his reading partner, "Is there any Robert Frost in the house?" (Roberts). The most telling of this ilk is a James Thurber cartoon from 1939. Turning in her overstuffed chair, a reading woman remarks to her spouse, "It's our *own* story *exactly*! He bold as a hawk, she soft as the dawn." The husband peers up from his paper and stares over his reading glasses at her and the tetrameter line that resembles poetry, arrested, inscrutable, silent.[25] The drawing heaps up the symmetries: two chairs, two lamps, two clouds in a picture centered on the wall, two human readers, the balanced periodicity—two phrases—of the lapidary fragment of (pseudo?) verse. The book on the writing table,

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a figure from the penultimate line of Moore's "Marriage," centers the image. The cartoon's superabundant symmetries are grounded in the modern homology, the outrageous fit, of marriage and poetry (*exactly*!), against the imperturbable grain of which Thurber nimbly performs a poetics of indifference.

Notes

[1] A few ghostly antimarriage terms (*misogamic*, *Encratistic*) haunt the pages of the *OED*, but conjugal imperialism has never allowed them traction. *Anticonjugal* is not a recorded usage. Forms of *epithalamium* are of course much older than English.

[2] The vast field of marriage poetry has been well served in early modern scholarship; see esp. the studies by Tufte and by Dubrow. One motive of this essay is a puzzle of the everyday, those not infrequent queries from former students that run like this: "I'm getting married in a couple of months. Got any good poems?"

[3] In June 2003, the Court of Appeal for Ontario cleared the way for same-sex marriage (Halpern), and similar rulings in several other provinces followed. In June 2003, in *Lawrence v. Texas*, the United States Supreme Court overruled a Texas sodomy law. In November 2003, in *Goodridge v. Department of Public Health*, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruled that the commonwealth may not "deny the protections, benefits, and obligations conferred by civil marriage to two individuals of the same sex who wish to marry."

[4] In the words of the Canadian sociologist and activist Rinaldo Walcott, "[I]t really does seem like marriage came to be constructed as the 'last' queer right. And if that is the case then queer politics is in a deep quandary. . . . I am ambivalent about whether queer marriage is an attempt at making queers so normal that issues of sexual freedom and rights will have almost no space in contemporary political contexts. . . . For some of us, the desire for marriage has worked to displace the much more difficult conversation about queer sexual liberation" (45). See also Warner on marriage and heteronormativity.

[5] Although I do not pursue an argument here about the politics of irony and indifference, I would begin to turn these materials to that end along the following lines. Moira Roth deployed *indifference* in the banner of an influential 1977 essay on cold war American art, "The Aesthetic of Indifference," to signify the apolitical. Jonathan Katz in response comes closer to my sense of how forms of indifference function agonistically in marriage culture: "what Roth refers to as an 'aesthetic of indifference' can be more accurately termed a 'politics of negation,' where negation functions as an active resistance to hegemonic constructions of meaning as natural or inherent in the work" (63). See also Eagleton 26; Žižek, *Sublime Object* 28–33; Hutcheon.

[6] Kipnis pitches her argument to a general audience in *Against Love* (2003), where the text confesses its complicity in the marriage system: "where would adultery be without marriage—it requires it!" (176).

[7] For the best recent work on Austen and Romanticism, see Galperin, "Byron" and *Historical Austen*; Tuite. My sense of Austen as an oppositional writer is especially indebted to Galperin; see also Chambers on oppositionality.

[8] For the intertwined histories of the novel and poetry in the construction of "Literature," see Siskin (*Historicity* and *Work*). In David Shumway's summary judgment, the novel long performed the heavy lifting of compulsory conjugality: "There is general agreement among historians of love and marriage that novels were the primary means by which a romantic conception of marriage came to be widely held" (20); for a compelling analysis of that history, see Armstrong. I argue here that poetry, unlike the novel, labors under a double burden in response to compulsory conjugality: to signify not only the meaning of marriage but also the meaning of writing. Where Siskin considers the georgic a generic key to what he calls "the work of writing" in this period, I would point to the epithalamium as peculiarly contested ground.

[9] In the huge archive devoted to the social history of Western marriage, the most influential form of the companionate-marriage analysis is Stone (*Family* and *Road*). For a typical recent endorsement of companionship as the Maginot Line of marriage, see Roiphe 276.

[10] To sample other arguments that chip away at marriage as a bourgeois mystification, see Davidoff and Hall; Fletcher; Habermas; Appiah; Smiley; Illouz; Shumway. To my mind, the richest body of writing on post-Cartesian, post-Christian marriage is the diverse work by Cavell (on Shakespeare, on Romanticism, on film); in addition to the chapters in his *In Quest of the Ordinary*, see also his *Contesting*, *Disowning*, and *Pursuits*.

[11] As Carole Pateman argues, Hegel's attention to what happens to consciousness in marriage renders Hegel "the most profound critic of contract" in the post-sacramental contract tradition (174). In Hegel's words, marriage "is precisely a contract to transcend the standpoint of contract, the standpoint from which persons are regarded in their individuality as self-subsistent units" (*Philosophy* 112).

[12] Levinson's essay does not engage the term *indifference* in Romantic texts, neither the poems of sensibility that I emphasize nor the works of Romantic-period philosophy; she instead brings to bear on her reading of Romantic texts contemporary theoretical biology and the antecedents of Romantic philosophy in Spinoza.

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"I can't remember which one of us is me."

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FIG. 2

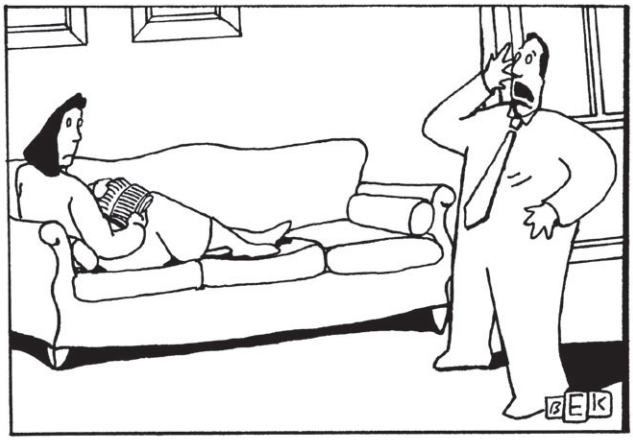
New Yorker couples with books.



"Is there any Robert Frost in the house?"

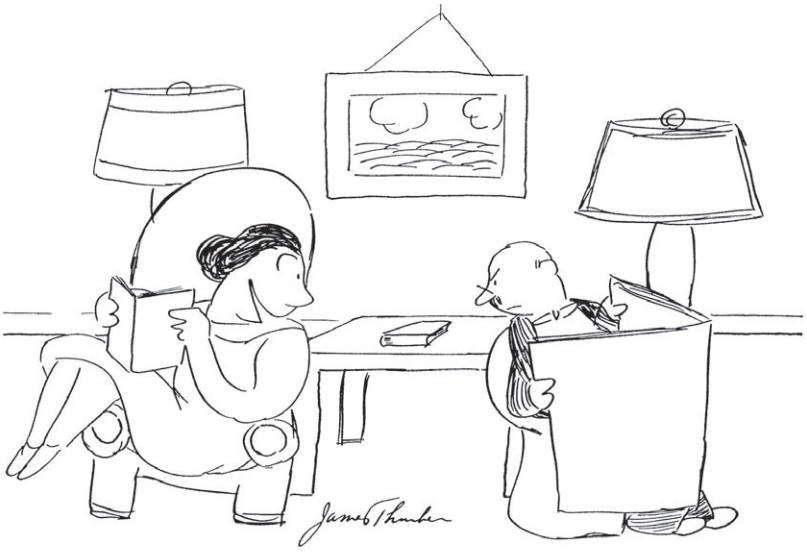
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"Stop referring to you and me as 'we'!"

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"It's our own story
exactly! He bold as a hawk, she soft as the dawn."

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[13] I use here Alastair Hannay's translation (283), which I prefer to the Hong and Hong rendering of this passage (1: 342).

[14] There is nothing on fragment 34 in, e.g., Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy.

[15] For these and other current conjugal terms of fashion, see Paul.

[16] Johnson defines *indifference* as "1. Neutrality; suspension; equipoise and freedom from motives on either side; 2. Impartiality," with illustrations from Locke, Bacon, Addison, Swift, and Hooker (*Dictionary*). In the prefatory paragraphs of his first *Critique*, Kant labels as "indifferentism" the standoff between skepticism and rationalism that he thinks has dead-ended philosophy. In British letters, Carlyle's "Centre of Indifference," the mediating way station between denial and affirmation, is the most familiar usage from the period (127–36; bk. 2, ch. 8). Kant and Carlyle depend on associated meanings of neutrality and apathy, which are replayed in a number of modern studies interested in the term as a mediating structure; see, e.g., Beddoes; Gray; Milnes.

[17] A full engagement with Schelling's many scattered texts that bear on indifference is beyond the bounds of this occasion. To sample some of the relevant Schelling material, see his *Idealism*; for more on Schelling, indifference, and freedom, see Žižek, *Abyss*.

[18] In *Northanger Abbey*, the fantasy of the rural marital retreat as fixed domiciliary refuge is on prominent display just on the edge of parody; see Catharine Morland's visit to her future matrimonial home, Henry Tilney's Woodston parsonage, in vol. 2, ch. 11.

[19] Barbauld subsequently yoked the print with a wedding-day poem to her husband, Rochemont Barbauld, "To Mr. Barbauld, with a Map of the Land of Matrimony," a verse text that remained private and unpublished until the posthumous *Works of Anna Letitia Barbauld* in 1825, seventeen years after the violent breakup of the marriage and Rochemont Barbauld's suicide in 1808. Perhaps pirated, the reprinted version of the original image reproduced here makes only a few small changes to the 1772 image; most notable are the attribution of the text to "A. Quiz" and the addition of "Union City." For the 1772 image, see Barbauld 89.

[20] For the circumstances of Plath's "Rabbit Catcher," see Stevenson 244–45. Only a few titles in *Birthday Letters* echo or repeat Plath's titles.

[21] My confident references to the "sections" of Moore's poem have no graphic warrant in the print text; I impose my own (questionable) sense of the poem's larger semantic and rhetorical divisions.

[22] For an anticonjugal take on the Webster quotation, see Bergman 252; for a more sympathetic teasing out of epithalamic possibilities, see C. Miller 118–19.

[23] My thinking in this essay generally is greatly indebted to Miller's occasional pieces on Austen over the past two decades. The latest form of that work is *Jane Austen; or, The Secret of Style* (2003), which arrived too late to be incorporated more fully in these remarks.

[24] In a review of his book *Equals* (2001), Elaine Showalter lodges a similar complaint, that Phillips "tends to be pithy rather than persuasive," even while she enumerates the stylistic habits that find their fitting subject in *Monogamy*: "his essays proceed through indirection, questions, repetitions, reversals, substitutions, and wordplay."

[25] The verse that Thurber quotes is the second line of a popular nineteenth-century Irish song, "Rory O'More," by Samuel Lover.

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