Leah Grisham, ***Heroic Disobedience: The Forced Marriage Plot and the British Novel, 1747-1880***. Wilmington: Vernon Press, 2023, 218 pp. Hb £70.00. ISBN: 9781648897344

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It is a renowned fact that, for centuries, women have been forced into arranged marriages, considered as mere pawns in the decisions of men. The condition of psycho-physical violence experienced by women in unwanted marriages has also been largely represented in literature and movies alike, in the past as well as in present times. What is perhaps less known, or at the very least probably less thought about, is the role played by capitalism in the coercion of women into the institution of marriage. Leah Grisham's *Heroic Disobedience* investigates the ways in which the rise of capitalism in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British society shifted family dynamics and marriage practices. Grisham particularly focuses on the commodification of young women, many of whom were treated as exchangeable objects in the British "marriage market", and on how certain novelists from this period have used what she calls the "forced marriage plot" to explore such dynamics.

Throughout the book, Grisham analyses an impressive number of novels by authors such as Samuel Richardson, Charlotte Lennox, Mary Robinson, Charlotte Smith, Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Stone, and Anthony Trollope. The novels considered in *Heroic Disobedience* share several key features, such as the presence of a tyrannical father figure who wants to force his daughter into marriage for his own financial gain, as well as heroines who refuse to submit to the *paterfamilias*' demands. In this sense, the "forced marriage plot novels show women reclaiming their subjective consciousness. The heroines of forced marriage plot novels, then, bring this reclamation to fruition through their heroic disobedience" (xv).

In the Introduction to the volume, Grisham underlines not only the importance of the plot for the development of those novels that explore the dynamics of forced marriages, but also the emphasis put on the individuality and subjectivity of the female protagonists, which helps "to ensure that readers feel empathy toward the disobedient heroines" (xvii). Particularly

interesting is Grisham's assessment of how Enlightenment ideology has influenced forced marriage plot novels in the representation of individual agency and community, further highlighting how the writers included in her study have shifted the attention from wealthy white men (who usually benefitted from Enlightenment-era understandings of autonomy) to women and the ways through which they resist patriarchal control.

The first chapter analyses Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa; or, the History of a Young Lady* (1747) and Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote; or, The Adventures of Arabella* (1752) as prototypes of the forced marriage plot novels. At the beginning of the chapter, Grisham also reflects on the relationship between the two authors since Lennox is usually seen as an acolyte of Richardson's. However, as Grisham notices, if "*Clarissa* is the prototype for forced marriage plotlines, […] it is Lennox who introduces radically pro-woman ideas into the plot that other authors will replicate for generations" (17). Grisham illustrates how these novels were able to portray the changes occurring in eighteenth-century British society, when the mercantilist economy of earlier centuries was gradually replaced by capitalist ideologies and a wider group of people started to benefit from upward mobility. During this period, women became tools in the hands of men who wanted to gain wealth and status. Focusing on the importance of the father-daughter relationship in both novels, Grisham convincingly reads Clarissa's and Arabella's stories as instances of female rebellion and resistance against patriarchal impositions.

The second chapter of the volume looks at two novels by late-eighteenth-century authors, Charlotte Smith's "The Story of Henrietta" (1800-02) and Mary Robinson's *Angelina; A Novel* (1796), both of which use the forced marriage plot as a tool for exploring the violent intersections between the slave trade, patriarchy and the rise of capitalism. In particular, Grisham focuses on how in these novels, "both enslaved people and women are oppressed because of the way the slave trade allowed wealth to accumulate" (34). The compelling analysis of Smith's and Robinson's literary works explores the role of slave owners as Gothic monsters, a stylistic move that overturns the traditional representation of evil as the racialised other. The chapter also offers a reconstruction of several historical uprisings in the Caribbean colonies, connecting the slaves' wars for freedom to women's heroic disobedience.

In the third chapter, Grisham investigates the forced marriage plot in Jane Austen's later novels *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814) and the unfinished *Sanditon* (1871), which was published posthumously. In these cases, arranged marriages become a way for Austen to reflect upon "the ways in which money, necessity, and morality interact" (69), while portraying the changing society of the time. Grisham pays attention not only to the father/daughter relationship in the novels, highlighting the various ways in which the female protagonists endure psychological coercion into unwanted marriages; the author also exposes the role played by mothers in Austen's novels and how wealth impacted British moral values in the choice of a husband or wife.

Chapter Four shifts the focus of Grisham's analysis to instances of patriarchal violence in post-industrial Britain through the close reading of two novels by Charles Dickens – *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-9) and *Dombey and Son* (1846-8) – and Elizabeth Stone's *William Langshawe, the Cotton Lord* (1842). Using a conceptual framework based on Marx's and Engels' theories to contextualise England's capital boom of the 1830s and 1840s, Grisham examines how Dickens and Stone deploy the forced marriage plot to depict the function of women and family dynamics in the dehumanisation of "fellow humans into objects of self-enrichment [which] was an important feature of post-industrial capitalism" (99). In these novels, mothers are often an integral part of such a dehumanising process, contributing to the physical commodification of their own daughters. Grisham also explores how in both Dickens' and

Stone's novels extra-familial friendships can help the female protagonists resist and escape the impositions of patriarchy.

Chapter Five primarily analyses Anthony Trollope's *The Way We Live Now* (1874-5), while also making observations on *The Three Clerks* (1857), *Sir Harry Hotspur of Humblethwaite* (1871), *The Prime Minister* (1876), and *The Duke's Children* (1880) by the same author. In this chapter, Grisham reflects on how economic speculation in the later decades of the nineteenth century influenced the dynamics of forced marriages in Britain. Particular attention is paid to Trollope's criticism of the progress myth perpetrated in the Victorian age: his novels portray the ways in which traditional ideas regarding class and gender affect the lives of late Victorian women, who "were hedged in on multiple fronts, trapped by archaic obsession with aristocratic endogamy on the one hand and, on the other hand, contemporary glorification of speculation" (141). In the novels by Trollope, the glorification of money and financial recklessness is directly connected to the psycho-physical abuse of women.

Lastly, Grisham also includes a coda in her volume that offers a perspective on the forced marriage plot after 1880. In fact, the use of such a narrative framework seems to be linked to the specific historical period of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Nevertheless, by looking at Mona Caird's *The Wing of Azrael* (1889), Grisham demonstrates how this novel uses the forced marriage plot as an exploration of New Women, a term that refers to women who, in the late nineteenth century, "consciously shirked society's expectation that they would live their adult lives as obedient, ministering wives and mothers" (172). In this sense, the heroines of the novels analysed by Grisham can be considered as prototypes of the New Women of the late nineteenth century.

Heroic Disobedience by Leah Grisham is a valuable contribution that explores the ways in which the rise of capitalism deeply influenced the lives of women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The trope of the marriage forced plot becomes, then, a valid mode of representation not only of the psycho-physical abuse the female protagonists of the selected novels in this volume endure, but also a way to portray their resistance against patriarchal impositions. Grisham not only offers a compelling analysis of the relevance of the forced marriage plot in British literature, but she also paves the way to future studies that look at the complex ways economy, gender and literature intersect.