



William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser., 82, no. 3 (July 2025): 441–76

Entangled Family Relations: Republican Marriage amid Revolution
By Janet Polasky

This transnational history of entangled marriages crossing the Atlantic contrasts the lived realities of women caught up in the American, French, and Caribbean revolutions with the sentimentalized ideals of republican marriage propagated by male diplomats traveling abroad. These diplomats' portrayals of freely chosen marriages in America sought to distinguish them from the arranged liaisons of Old Regime Europe. Many of these male observers married American women who had been educated to expect a shared life of friends. Instead, revolutionary politics, war, slavery, and exile disrupted their families, leaving the women alone, abandoned to what Mary Wollstonecraft warned would be a mundane existence. While their husbands claimed the individual rights of citizenship, these women found no role outside the limits of their isolated, companionless households in this transformed society. Drawing on letters, journals, treatises, and novels from both sides of the Atlantic, this article redefines the Atlantic revolutionary experience through women's perspectives, illustrating how shifting gender norms challenged the promise of familial companionship at the heart of emerging republics. Women in entangled marriages on both sides of the Atlantic struggled to make sense of this tumultuous revolutionary era embodied in individual men, their husbands.