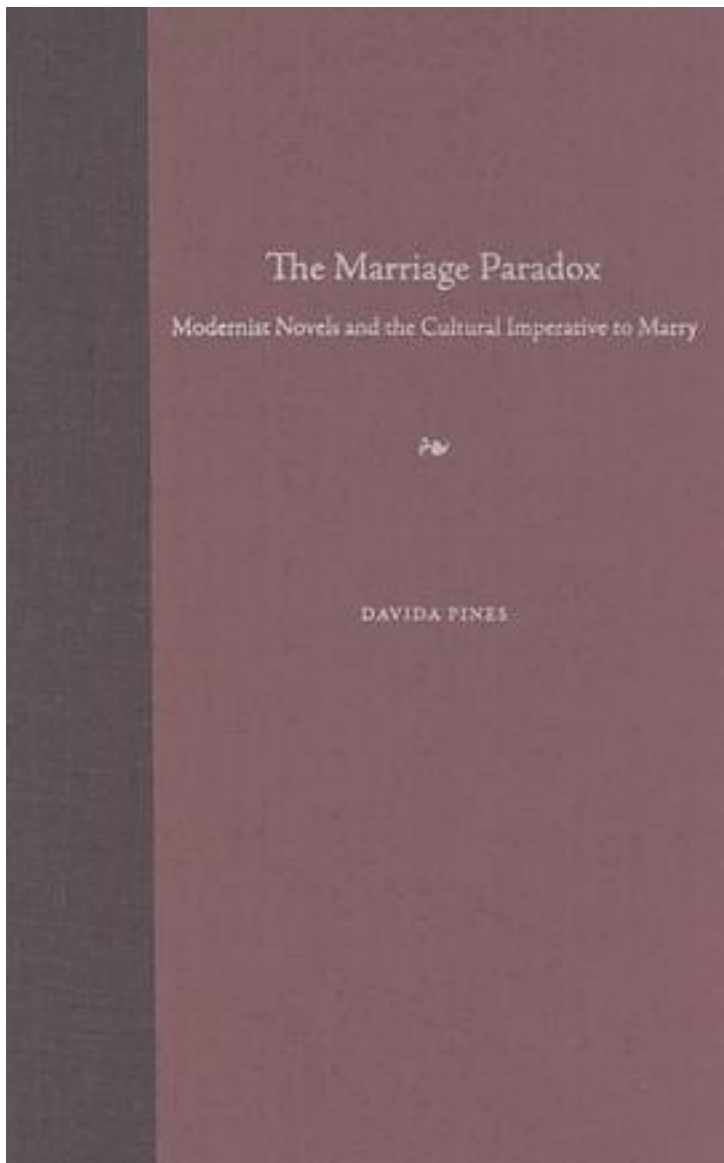


The Marriage Paradox



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Departing from the tradition of reading literary modernism in terms of formal innovation, Pines' study examines literary modernism through the lens of marriage. She considers the marriage plots of selected modernist novels by Henry James, Ford Madox Ford, D.H. Lawrence, Nella Larsen, and Virginia Woolf in relation to the social and legal restructuring of marriage occurring in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Britain and the U.S. In particular, she identifies and explores the strategies by which the modernist critique of marriage paradoxically reinforces the institution and the social imperative to marry. Despite a preoccupation with the changing nature of marriage, she argues, modern literature and culture do not imagine alternatives to marriage. By examining these novels in their social, legal, and historical contexts, Pines provides insights into how a critique of marriage can paradoxically contribute to a commitment to the institution. Ultimately, she argues, this critique undermines the definition of modernism as a radical disruption of social and cultural norms and raises questions about the persistence of marriage in Anglo-American culture. In treating marriage as a social and cultural institution, Pines departs from previous feminist examinations of modernism that focus on gender roles or consider the modern marriage plot in less historical and more formalist terms. And, finally, by setting texts of High Modernism alongside texts from the Harlem Renaissance, her study argues for a more expansive definition of literary modernism.

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