



# Consensual Fictions: Women, Liberalism, and the English Novel

*Wendy S. Jones*

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## Consensual Fictions: Women, Liberalism, and the English Novel Wendy S. Jones

In eighteenth and nineteenth-century England, consensual marriages became increasingly popular, according to women a 'contractual subjectivity' in which the liberal ideal of individual choice was key. Representations of consensual marriage thus provide a firm grounding for the re-evaluation of women's place within society. Because this new progressive form of marriage was based on emotion rather than considerations of status or money, it challenged the hierarchical status quo of English society that the traditional patriarchal marriage had upheld. This phenomenon shows how necessary it is to historicize evaluations of political theory; while the relationship between liberalism and feminism is fiercely debated today, it was the foundation for radical feminism and social change from early modern times through much of the twentieth century.

In *Consensual Fictions*, Wendy S. Jones focuses on the English novel of the period to explore the relationship between married love, classic liberal thought, and novelistic form. Jones argues that these works of fiction use the mulitplot form to explore the specific set of cultural problems associated with the ways in which liberalism reconceived marriage, love, and gender by exploring alternative resolutions to cultural problems through different narrative lines.

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