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# DETERMINANTS OF DIVORCE IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY FLANDERS

Koen Matthijs  
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*In 1830, the year Belgium became independent, there were four divorces in Belgium. From about 1870 to 1910, there were about one hundred divorces per year, and since 1910, there have been about 1,000. The aim of this research is to investigate the factors that played a role in the increase in the number of divorces in Belgium in the course of the nineteenth century. The research relates to information from four Flemish municipalities for the period 1800-1913. Results indicate that an explanation of the rising divorce rate can be sought in the psychological and social consequences of the more pronounced shift in marriage, gender, and family expectations. Increasing numbers of women threw themselves more and more into their gender-specific expressive gender role, whereas the objective opportunities and attainability of this role did not increase commensurately. The result was role strain: high marriage and family expectations soon come up against intrinsic limitations. As a result of this, both individual and general frustration increased, and this was an ideal social substratum for facilitating divorce.*

**Keywords:** *divorce; nineteenth century; Flanders*

## 1. THE CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION

During the past three decades, nineteenth-century Western European birth and mortality trends have been well documented. The results of this research are usually presented under the overall heading of demographic transition, or the shift from

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“high” to “low” birth and death rates. Another mediating factor, the contraction of marriage, receives considerable attention in research as well: in the nineteenth century, the picture here amounts to an erosion of the Malthusian marriage pattern, with a transition from marrying “less” and “later” to marrying “more” and “earlier.” By contrast, the long-term development of divorce receives less attention, due in part to the lack of reliable data, but also to its limited impact on social, demographic, and cultural life at that time. However, although divorce was fairly rare during the nineteenth century, it was important in qualitative terms. In a ground-breaking study, Phillips<sup>1</sup> showed that the second half of the nineteenth century was a crucial transitional period in the modern history of divorce. The chance of divorce was rising sharply, divorce was also a subject of extensive public and political debate, and was a vexed personal and social theme.

Until the start of the nineteenth century, daily life resembled that of previous centuries in many respects: the pace, rhythm, and characteristics of agriculture determined the course of everyday existence. Separations and divorces did occur even then, but they lacked the importance that they would later assume.<sup>2</sup> This changed after the French and industrial revolutions. Landlords, tradesmen, craftsmen, and farmers gave way to industrialists, engineers, business leaders, and workers. Horses and carts were replaced by steamships, locomotives, and cranes. Near the coal mines, steel factories, and textile-working businesses, new cities arose, with factory walls, chimney pipes, and mine shafts as new architectural symbols of power and wealth. Light, noise, smells, motion, objects, and information were all increasing virtually boundless. Bodies, too. All of this occurred in an atmosphere of agitation and dazzling variety.<sup>3</sup> People at the time realized what was going on, as is shown by the many descriptions, pictures, and paintings of miners with stooped backs, pale women, ragged children, drunken workers, filthy towns, and grey urban districts.

From a modern sociological viewpoint, one is immediately inclined to regard these changes as a breeding ground for fast-rising divorce rates. This, incidentally, also forms the background to Durkheim’s analysis<sup>4</sup> of the late nineteenth-century increase in the frequency of suicide. He argued that the macrosocial insecurity and normlessness that prevailed at that time led to an increase in chronic *anomie* and subsequently to a rise in the number of divorces (and ultimately in the number of suicides). Although this reasoning is defensible in sociological terms, it also seems rather mechanical. Marriage and divorce are communicating vessels, so the (altered) social significance of marriage also needs to be taken into account—something that Durkheim more or less ignored. In early modern Western Europe, the marriage pattern was characterized by a high age at marriage and a relatively large proportion of non-marrying people.<sup>5</sup> This restrictive pattern is referred to as “Malthusian,” because it operated as a mechanism to keep economic production and population growth in balance. Marriage was a gate that opened or closed depending on the economic situation. Divorce was a rare phenomenon. The Malthusian marriage pattern became eroded during the second half of the nineteenth century: from about 1850, people married more and earlier. In Belgium, for example, between 1846 and 1910, the proportion of unmarried twenty-five- to twenty-nine-year-old women fell from 60 percent to 37 percent; for forty- to forty-five-year-old unmarried women, there was a fall from 22 percent to 17 percent. During the same period, the age at first marriage fell from thirty to twenty-six years for bridegrooms and from twenty-eight to twenty-four

years for brides. This erosion was quite generalized, but there were differences by region, socioeconomic status, and religious denomination.<sup>6</sup>

This evolution was linked to nineteenth century economic growth,<sup>7</sup> but the conditions created by the improved economic context were certainly not sufficient to account for the transition to a “flexible” system of marriage. According to Matthijs,<sup>8</sup> a romantic, even “mimetic” desire to marry and a pressure to marry driven by an urge for respectability, are possible additional explanations. This hypothesis is supported by the observation that the homogamy of age at marriage increased at the time: marriages increasingly took place between people of the same age.<sup>9</sup> There was also a significant fall in the intensity of remarriage.<sup>10</sup> Further on, there was a clear increase in the number and proportion of family members who acted as witnesses, whereas previously these had usually been anonymous third parties.<sup>11</sup> His results show that the increase in the number and proportion of witnessing family members was achieved chiefly through increased choice of the brother(s) of the bride and bridegroom. In a comparable study with Historical Sample of the Netherlands (HSN) data, van Poppel & Schoonheim<sup>12</sup> observed a similar trend: more than before, marrying was a significant event in the life of most individuals, an event that people wanted to share with family members.

The aim of this research is to investigate which factors had an effect on the chance of divorce, and hence played a role in the increase in the number of divorces in Belgium in the course of the nineteenth century. This is possible thanks to the maintenance of good historical population records. Marriage certificates in particular contain much relevant information, not just about marriage itself and the marriage partners, but about their parents and the witnesses. Some of these characteristics (age at marriage, difference in age at marriage, occupation, children present, etc.) also affect the likelihood of divorce. If a marriage ended in divorce, this was recorded on the marriage certificate. As a result, the effect on the chance of divorce can be examined of all the characteristics mentioned on or deducible from the certificate. In concrete terms, the research relates to information from four Flemish municipalities for the period 1800-1913, which approximately coincides with the start and flourishing of “modernization.”

## 2. DIVORCE IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY BELGIUM

In 1830, the year Belgium became independent, there were four divorces in Belgium, from around 1870 there were about a hundred a year, and from 1910 about a thousand. In Figure 1, the relative change in the number of marriages and the number of divorces is compared. The number of divorces rose rapidly, but still remained relatively limited. This was also the case in other European countries.<sup>13</sup> The increase does not mean that public opinion was becoming more tolerant: on the contrary, there are indications that opposition in fact grew stronger.<sup>14</sup> In some countries, this led to the divorce requirements being tightened up, among other things in terms of age, length of marriage and consent of ascendants. The procedure was lengthy and the financial cost was high.<sup>15</sup> As a result, some people were simply unable to afford a divorce.<sup>16</sup> The divorce process thus took place under stigmatizing and off-putting conditions, with a great deal of personal and social unpleasantness. This is empirically documented for Flanders in a study by Matthijs & Meulders.<sup>17</sup>

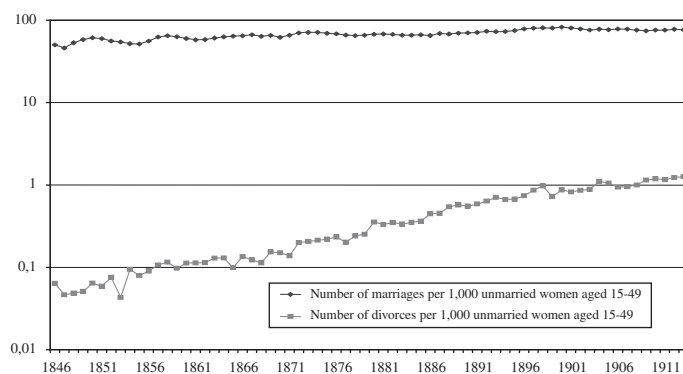


Figure 1. Change in the Number of Marriages (Per 1,000 Unmarried Women Aged 15-49) and in the Number of Divorces (Per 1,000 Unmarried Women Aged 15-49) in Belgium (1846-1913).

### 3. NINETEENTH-CENTURY DIVORCE LAW

In French revolutionary eyes, the government was supposed to ensure favorable conditions so that everyone could function optimally in their private sphere. Every good husband/father and wife/mother had the potential to develop into a good citizen, who would then be able to help promote revolutionary ideals. To make this possible, the individual needed to be liberated from patriarchal family structures and from church meddling.<sup>18</sup> The law of September 20, 1792 restricted the church's role in marriage: Henceforth, the sacrament was no longer a condition for marrying, but was optional.<sup>19</sup> Whereas parents had previously been able to register an objection to the marriage of their children, that right was now restricted. Changes were also made to women's status. Under the *ancien régime*, every woman lived more or less in the shadow of a man, who might be her father or husband, but might equally be her brother or son. The new law stipulated that from now on, women could marry and divorce under the same conditions as men, and had the same rights with regard to the upbringing of the children. This emancipatory discourse has to be qualified, because women continued to be left out in the cold as far as civil and political rights were concerned; the striving for equality stopped where public life started.<sup>20</sup>

On the same day as the new marriage law, a new divorce law was also passed. In preparation for this, there was much debate about the question of whether and on what grounds divorce could be permitted. The answer to the first question was in accordance with "revolutionary" logic: Marriage is a civil contract, and can be dissolved like any other contract. There were various motives for divorce: mutual consent, incompatibility of humors and characters, and specific reasons such as symptoms of mental illness, the manifestation of offensive or criminal actions, disorderly moral conduct, and absence for a period of five years.<sup>21</sup> This broad—some said lax—interpretation soon met with opposition, which led to the reversal of certain innovations and to more restrictive legislation. Later on, the Code Napoléon (1804) sought an acceptable compromise between the different tendencies. Thus the dependent position of women and children was reinforced again, and the possibility was reintroduced in

inheritance law of preferring one child. The extensive divorce possibilities were also pared back. “Incompatibility of character” was removed as a reason, and certain specific grounds for divorce were also repealed. Divorce by mutual consent was retained. The Code Napoléon was applied throughout the French Empire, which at that time covered no less than three-quarters of continental Europe. The end of the French Empire thus also marked the end of uniform European divorce legislation.<sup>22</sup> In 1816, part of the liberal divorce legislation in France was abolished, but in Belgium the liberal divorce law remained in force throughout the nineteenth century. This is important for our research, as it means that the effects of changes to the law do not need to be taken into account. Research shows that such changes have a significant effect on the divorce rate.<sup>23</sup>

#### 4. THE RESEARCH CONTEXT

Civil registration started in Belgium on June 17, 1796. The existing parish registers had to be handed in to the municipal administration, and lost their legal validity at that point. In some places, especially in the countryside and in regions where the clergy’s influence was strong, some people initially refused to apply the new procedures. As a result, some observations from the start of the research period may be unreliable. During the Dutch Period (1815-1830), the organization of the *burgerlijke stand*, or registry office, improved. Later, the new Civil Code of the independent Belgium (1830) adopted the existing registration practices. Apart from a limited number of adjustments, there were few changes to registration practices during the nineteenth century, and this obviously makes long-term comparison easier.

A marriage certificate is an administrative document that legally establishes the marriage. As well as information about the date and place of the marriage, there is also data about the marriage partners: their age, place and date of birth, address, occupation(s), literacy, previous marital status, and, if they were divorced or widowed, the place and date of each divorce and/or bereavement. There is also information about the parents of the marriage partners: whether they were alive or not, place of death, marital status, address, occupation, and literacy. Finally, there is information about the witnesses who attended the marriage: their age, occupation, relationship to the bride or bridegroom, and literacy. Literacy is deduced from whether or not they are able to sign their names. If someone was unable to do this, this was mentioned on the certificate, or an “x” was marked.

The research was conducted in four Flemish municipalities: Aalst, Bierbeek, Ghent, and Leuven. These municipalities have different socioeconomic structures and a different cultural climate. The choice of regions is thus used to include macrosocial and cultural factors in the research. In Leuven and Aalst, a random sample was taken of one in three certificates and in Ghent of one in twelve; in Bierbeek, the data from all certificates were input. This resulted in 9,330 certificates in Leuven, of which 7,510 (80 percent) related to a first marriage—i.e., one between a man who had never married before and a woman who had never married before. In Aalst, 5,496 certificates were input, of which 4,582 (83 percent) were for first marriages; in Bierbeek, there were 2,129, of which 1,810 (85 percent) were for first marriages; and in Ghent, there were 8,575, of which 6,885 (80 percent) were for first marriages. The datasets from each municipality included the following number of divorces: Leuven—116; Aalst—nineteen, Bierbeek—eight, and Ghent—143. Out of the total

of 25,352 marriages, 286 (i.e., 1.13 percent) ended in divorce. On the basis of the data (the basis for Figure 1), it can be calculated that 1.55 percent of the marriages contracted in Belgium between 1830 and 1940 ended in divorce.

Leuven is located in the present-day province of Vlaams-Brabant, in central Belgium, about 18.6 miles east of Brussels. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Leuven was economically in decline.<sup>24</sup> All social groups were suffering in one way or another under French occupation. During the Dutch period (1814-1830), recovery took place. Leuven was one of the first Belgian cities to have reliable rail connections. This simplified the supply of raw materials to the Leuven foodstuffs industry. In the second half of the nineteenth century, several trading activities pumped fresh life into Leuven's economy. However, Leuven never became an industrial city. Trade and services remained the driving forces behind the economy. By the mid-nineteenth century, 45 percent of the workforce was employed in (small) trading companies, the transport sector, and services. Growth in the services sector was supported by the expansion of the university, the city administration, the military barracks, schools, courts, prisons, and hospitals. Leuven had about 20,000 inhabitants in 1800; by 1900, this number had grown to over 42,000 people. This doubling over a 100-year period is insignificant when compared to other medium-sized Belgian cities. Only between 1875 and 1890 did the population of Leuven grow relatively rapidly—from 34,400 to 40,700 inhabitants.

The second study area is Aalst.<sup>25</sup> This small town is located in the southeast of the province of Oost-Flanders, at approximately the same distance (15.5 miles) from Brussels and from Ghent. At the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries, the textiles, foodstuffs, and cotton-processing industries, in particular, expanded. As elsewhere, the reconstruction was supported by the Dutch regime. In nineteenth-century Aalst, textiles played a major role. The population of Aalst grew more quickly than that of Leuven. Aalst had almost 11,000 inhabitants in 1800, rising to a little more than 35,000 by 1910. This growth was underpinned by the attraction of the textile industry. Its employees were often unskilled women. However, not only did Aalst have more immigrants than Leuven, but its natural growth was also higher, particularly after 1880.

The third study community, Bierbeek, was a small country community.<sup>26</sup> The community lies just less than 6.2 miles southeast of Leuven. Bierbeek had fewer than 1,000 inhabitants in 1750, 2,700 during 1850, and 3,700 by 1910. Geographically, Bierbeek is on the border between the loamy ground of Brabant, the Hageland, and western Haspengouw. This border roughly coincides with the soil boundary between sand/loam and loam. The agricultural land is generally suited to arable farming. In the nineteenth century, the vast majority of the population was employed in farming.

Ghent, the fourth study area, is a historical and big city. Ghent experienced a spectacular take-off in the early nineteenth century, based on its cotton industry. Its economy was mainly based on the cotton sector, but other branches of the textile sector and engineering were also important. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the combination of economic transformation, population growth (from 50,000 to 100,000 in the first half of the nineteenth century), intensive migration, and decreasing standards of living created living conditions that are best described as an urban crisis.<sup>27</sup> In the second half of the nineteenth century, the economic transformation and population growth slowed, while the standard of living rose gradually. The textile industry

*Table 1*  
Social Power Level of the Father of the Groom in Each Region (1800-1913)

	<i>Ghent</i>	<i>Aalst</i>	<i>Leuven</i>	<i>Bierbeek</i>
sp-level 5	6.6	4.3	9.4	1.3
sp-level 4	25.4	30.6	33.5	73.1
sp-level 3	31.2	21.8	24.0	7.0
sp-level 2	17.6	19.0	17.6	2.0
sp-level 1	19.3	24.4	15.6	12.3
N	3,729	2,457	3,829	1,114

*Source:* Marriage certificates of the four regions

*Note:* sp-level 5: elite (macro-scaled self-employed, high commanders, non-manual super-skilled, nobility); sp-level 4: middle class (medium-scaled self-employed, medium commanders, non-manual skilled, manual super-skilled); sp-level 3: skilled workers (low commanders, manual-skilled); sp-level 2: semi-skilled workers (micro-scaled self-employed, semi-skilled); sp-level 1: unskilled workers.

remained the dominant sector. Other important branches of the economy were metallurgy and engineering. Ghent was a stronghold of socialism. The cooperative “Vooruit” (dealing in bread and clothes) played a central role in this respect. The bakery was founded in 1880, and by 1913, about one quarter of all Ghent families were members.<sup>28</sup>

The economic situation of a region is partly reflected in the occupational structure. Table 1 presents the occupational structure of the fathers of the grooms. We applied the SOCPO scheme.<sup>29</sup> This classification distinguishes between five levels of social power, using skill, possession, position within a hierarchical organisational structure, and prestige characteristics as criteria (see note in Table 1 for additional information on the measurement of “social power”). The high score of Leuven on the high occupational level has to do with the presence of the university and numerous economic services. Bierbeek scores high on status level 4, but in this case, this reflects the high number of farmers. Proportionally, Ghent and Aalst score higher than Leuven and Bierbeek on the lowest status level (unskilled workers). In these regions, the process of industrialization and the increase of proletarianization were the highest.

## 5. THEORETICAL CONTEXT

In accounting for the divorce rate, the familiar distinction is often made between economically-oriented and culturally-oriented explanations. According to the exchange-oriented or rational choice model, in all their social behavior, including in their private lives, people make a more or less rational, economic calculation, in which the pros and cons of alternatives courses of behavior are systematically weighed up, and individuals strive to optimize and maximize their own interests.<sup>30</sup> They also do this when considering whether or not to marry, whether or not to stay married, and whether or not to divorce. In concrete terms, this implies a constant assessment of the value, benefits, and cost of the current marriage (in terms of factors such as income, status and prestige), but also of the expected or feared disadvantages of separating (including financial cost, loss of friends, and less contact with the children). This individual process is complicated by a variety of social factors. To give an example: during the second half of the nineteenth century, the average number of



children and the rate of employment of women outside the home both fell. Other factors remaining unchanged, fewer children means less pressure both within the family and from society to stay married (hence pushing up the chance of divorce), but also means more emphasis on high-quality children (hence pushing the divorce rate down). And because fewer women were employed outside the home, more "housewives" were dependent on their working partner, which made divorce more difficult economically for this group. More women started focusing (sometimes exclusively) on intra-familial, expressive roles that were associated, in turn, with a "new culture of romanticization, emotionalization, and domestication, which became widespread. This also made initiating a divorce "personally" difficult for these women, as it was disastrous socially. Looked at in this light, there are close links between economic and cultural developments.<sup>31</sup> Precisely this type of insight into processes of mutual cross-fertilization has led to ever more assertive criticisms of certain rational choice models, which are seen to be too mechanistic and to focus in on self-interest in a too one-sided manner.<sup>32</sup>

It was pointed out earlier that the mid-nineteenth century represents a turning point for several demographic trends. This timing is related to the fact that during this time, production and consumption drifted away from one another, and were assigned to separate institutions. From now on, economic production gradually took place outside the family, whereas consumption occurred within it. The family specialized in individual emotional attention, mutual care, and the cultivation of expressive values. Within the family, task distribution became even more gender-specific than had previously been the case.<sup>33</sup> The notion of "outside the home" became symbolically associated with man, work, money, prestige, public—and the future. The notion of "in the home" became associated with woman, leisure, privacy, children, emotion, warmth—and the past. From now on, therefore, as well as an economy of space, there was also an economy of time. People felt there was no time to lose to achieve happiness, which meant marrying as quickly as possible—not just for the oldest or the heir, but for everyone. There thus arose a driven, almost mimetic desire to marry: the intensity of marriage rose sharply, and the age at first marriage fell rapidly. In less than a generation, the "old" Malthusian pattern of marrying "little" and "late" imploded. More men and women, from all social groups, were marrying younger and younger, and increasingly at about the same age.<sup>34</sup>

From a different point of view, Gillis<sup>35</sup> points to the same conclusion: the decades near 1850 were a symbolic turning point. It was the time when highly-valued quality time became increasingly equated with intimate family time. To fulfil the new expectations, an entire range of marriage and family symbols were created, expanded, and imitated en masse from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. Bastard children, abandoned children, stepfamilies, cohabitation, and barbarian ways were thrown on to the dung heap of society. By contrast, their middle-class counterparts were actively working their way to the foreground: anyone wanting to celebrate religious rites, buy children's clothes, organize birthday parties, or spend Christmas in a family group, simply had to marry. Families were or became museums of family portraits and family albums, timeless places where the past was constantly commemorated. The family was no longer a place where people shared instrumental tasks and anonymous rooms; it was no longer a household, but an environment in which the shared past and joint future were realized. Physical proximity was not the only crucial aspect, but intense instinctive involvement was also important. The family became the ultimate supplier of quality time. All kinds of rituals were intended

to stimulate family stability, a sense of belonging, affection, and continuity. This was chiefly the woman's role and one reserved for Sundays. Sunday was not a day of rest for women, but a day for "labours of love."<sup>36</sup> Increasingly strict requirements were imposed on this invisible labor, and by 1900, housework had become a full-time job. It was a job involving increasingly more daily tasks taking longer to perform, precisely at a time when the public discussion was of reducing the hours worked outside the home (by men)!

As a result of all of this, family members meant a great deal of emotionally satisfying support for one another, and divorce in a sense became anathema, something to be avoided at all costs. On the other hand, this new set of social norms laid the foundations for a critical self-examination: If the actual situation failed to live up to the high expectations, and if the discrepancy between reality and desiderata became too great, divorce then did become a defensible and acceptable option.<sup>37</sup> Here, an interesting sociological paradox emerges: the genesis and diffusion of high subjective marriage hopes was simultaneously a brake on and a motive for divorce.

## 6. THE VARIABLES

The concrete measurement of economic and cultural factors is confined in the research to what is mentioned on the marriage certificates. On the one hand, this is quite a lot (given that this is an administrative document), but on the other hand, it is also limited from the academic viewpoint.

The dependent variable is binary: Marriage was either dissolved through divorce, or not. In the dataset, there are eighty-seven times more marriages that were not dissolved through divorce than ones that were. Analysis of this type of rare events data has many problems associated with it. After weighing up the various alternatives, we opted for logistical regression.<sup>38</sup> The first independent variable is the year of marriage (1800-1913). In this way, the "period effect" is measured: if this variable has a net effect after controlling for the effect of the other variables, this points to an underlying trend. Via the place of marriage variable (Ghent, Aalst, Bierbeek, Leuven), regional, social, and cultural differences are measured, and hence indirectly the uneven industrialization and urbanization, too. The regional origin (city versus countryside) of the marriage partners is also measured. Concretely, consideration is given to whether the bridegroom and the bride were born in the place where he/she married, or whether he/she had migrated to that place (either from the countryside or from the city). An important variable is the age at marriage and the age difference between the partners. A distinction is made between three types: marriages in which the man is older than the woman, those in which the woman is older than the man, and those in which the man and woman are the same age. The marriage partners are said to be older or younger where the difference is two years or more. The presence of premarital children is measured via the legitimization of children. A rudimentary measurement of education is taken on the basis of literacy or illiteracy, which is deduced from whether or not the person concerned is able to sign the marriage certificate. The marital status of the marriage partners is obvious: unmarried, widowed, or divorced. For the presence of the parents, there are three possibilities: alive, dead, or absent. For this variable, only the information about the father is used; there is lack of adequate data on the mothers.

A marriage certificate contains a considerable amount of information about occupations. As well as the occupations (up to three) of the bridegroom and the bride, it also states those of their fathers and mothers (if they are still alive, in any case). Although there were precise rules about what had to be recorded on the certificates, there are differences between the municipalities. Thus, for example, the occupation of the deceased fathers and mothers is always given on the marriage certificates in Bierbeek, never in Leuven, and only for the period 1805-1818 in Aalst. The inputting and classification of historical occupation data is often difficult, as the description is often very general. To give a few examples: in the case of occupations such as *tourneur*, *graveur*, and *polis-seur*, the material in question is often not mentioned; occupations such as *mechanicien*, *elektricien*, *machinist*, *monteur*, and *ajusteur* may belong to various industrial sectors; where *journalier* is indicated, there is usually no indication of whether the person in question worked in agriculture or industry; sometimes there is no clear distinction between self-employed and paid work, or between machine and manual work. One thing that is useful for the inputting task, however, is that the nineteenth-century sources do often distinguish between *mâitre*, *ouvrier*, and *garçon*.

In terms of registration of occupation, there is also a gender difference: the bridegroom's occupation is almost always shown, that of the bride far less often. In the first two decades of the nineteenth century, the bride's occupation was usually not stated; in Aalst, this information only began to be registered in 1814. Perhaps some officials did not regard women's work outside the home as sufficiently important to mention on official documents.<sup>39</sup> There will also have been cases where women deliberately withheld their occupation from the attention of the officials. There were also women who stopped working soon after their marriage, as a result of which their occupation was no longer relevant in their eyes, so that they did not mention it to the official. The indication "housekeeper" rarely appears; apparently this was not regarded as an occupation *sensu stricto*. One problem is the meaning of the indication "no occupation." This may refer to a high social level on the part of the people concerned (who were so wealthy that they did not need to, and did not even wish to work, and wished this to be explicitly registered as such), but it may equally apply to unemployed people looking for work, to housewives not looking for work, or to people who worked at home, but who did not state their work as an occupation (for example lace workers). This group received a separate code. If we confine ourselves to the period after 1830, the number of brides whose occupation is known falls substantially. In the first place, this has to do with the decreasing incidence of employment for women outside the home. The women's labor market participation (calculated as the percentage of women employed outside the home compared with the total female population) was 38 percent in 1846, and fell in the course of the nineteenth century to 25 percent in 1910.<sup>40</sup>

On the basis of occupation, the bridegrooms were assigned to different classes, measuring "social power." Education, possessions, and hierarchical position were also taken into account.<sup>41</sup> The classes are divided into the following categories: 1) unskilled lower class; 2) semi-skilled lower class; 3) skilled lower class; 4) middle class—with 4.1. middle class apart from farmers and 4.2. farmers; and 5) elite. For the brides, the social power variable is not available.

## 7. HYPOTHESES

In the sociological literature, the chance of divorce is often related to the woman's employment outside the home, and this is confirmed by research using nineteenth-century data.<sup>42</sup> The position of women was strongly dependent on their labor market participation, and this in turn affected their life course. Scholars have shown particular interest in how the context of the rise of the male breadwinner family and its parallel, the emergence of the new ideals of domesticity and privacy, developed women's labor force participation,<sup>43</sup> and subsequently the probability of divorce. Having a private income makes a woman who works outside the home more economically and socially independent. As well as raising her social status (she becomes an attractive partner), it also increases her power within the family (she can place higher demands on the existing relationship). Women working outside the home are also out and about more often, have more public contacts, and hence are more likely to meet another partner. This affects the likelihood that they will divorce. In the nineteenth century, much of women's employment was in cities, social spaces with a more tolerant attitude towards divorce: there is freedom in the city air. The trend at that time was twofold: for some women, economic independence increased, but the overall rate of employment fell. Within the new family climate (see earlier), there was considerable opposition to women working outside the home, especially when they married. As a result, many stopped working straight after they had married. Once they were married, it was a point of honor for many men to provide for the family themselves.<sup>44</sup> Conversely, the position of housewife was a full-time, guaranteed, highly valued occupation. Thus a paradox emerges: as a result of their employment outside the home, many women became more independent, which increased their chance of divorcing, but on the other hand, the proportion of women working outside the home fell considerably. The two developments are not mutually exclusive: it is possible that this dwindling group of economically independent women tended to divorce more. The hypothesis is that couples in which the wife was employed outside the home had a higher divorce rate.

Tying in closely with this, it can be expected that women's education is also relevant here. This too is an indicator of economic independence, and higher education opens up more opportunities on the employment market. But in the nineteenth century, it was in fact the low-skilled and unskilled women who had to find work outside the home to maintain their economic position. Research on actual trends shows that highly educated women have a higher chance of divorcing than those educated to a lower level,<sup>45</sup> but it is entirely conceivable that precisely the opposite was true in the nineteenth century. Educational level is not registered in the marriage records. The only (simple) proxy is literary, and this is measured as the ability to put one's signature on the record. If this is not the case, this is indicated by an "x." The hypothesis is that the chance of divorce is higher for the literated.

Modern studies show that those who marry young have a higher chance of divorcing than those who marry when they are older.<sup>46</sup> This has also been empirically documented with nineteenth-century data.<sup>47</sup> Booth & Edwards<sup>48</sup> give three possible explanations (from a twentieth-century perspective). The first has to do with role socialization: the younger one marries, the shorter the (learning) time one has to anticipate the married person's role. This leads to conflicting expectations and unfulfilled desires, and

hence to a higher chance of divorce. Two other reasons are connected with exchange theory. Younger people have more alternatives outside the marriage, thus they have more contacts with other partners, raising their chances of remarrying. This makes it easier for them to prepare for divorce. There is also less pressure on them to stay married, unless there are young children. Van Poppel<sup>49</sup> also adds that some young adults have unrealistic expectations about marriage and family life. The hypothesis is that the younger one marries, the higher the chance of divorcing. As well as age at marriage, the age difference also plays a role. The greater the difference, the greater the social and cultural gap between the partners, the more heterogeneous the expectations, the higher the chance of divorcing. Hence an additional hypothesis is: the greater the age differences between the partners, the higher the chance of divorcing.

Previous marital status is another factor. Research by van Poppel<sup>50</sup> shows that the chance of divorce is four times higher if at least one of the partners has already divorced once. Divorcing is like diving off a high board: the first time is the hardest. Apparently, people learn from earlier divorce experiences to allow an unsatisfactory life situation to drag on more easily, and to cope with social and cultural opposition to divorce. Another aspect is that remarriages are often “complicated”: the parties concerned bring their past with them, including children. They have their say in the relationship, both in favor and against, and this makes relations between the different family subsystems considerably harder. The hypothesis is that an earlier divorce on the part of at least one of the partners increases the chance of divorce.

According to van Poppel,<sup>51</sup> whether the parents are still alive or not also affects the chance of divorcing. If they are still alive, there is more traditional and conservative social control. Van Poppel relates this to the broader social and cultural environment: in the nineteenth century, many people were still living in the countryside or in a closed community. There, couples know each other and each others’ families better and longer, leading to stricter social control and supervision by the parents and the local community. However, this was not what emerged from van Poppel’s empirical research—the married partners with at least three living parents had a higher chance of divorcing than couples with fewer than three living parents. However, this difference was not statistically significant. The hypothesis is that couples whose parents are still alive have a lower chance of divorcing.

Various studies with nineteenth-century data show that people living in the city (or born there) are at greater risk of divorcing.<sup>52</sup> According to Fischer,<sup>53</sup> city dwellers take a more tolerant attitude to deviant behavior; they are confronted with it more often, and this erodes the “traditional” values and norms (see also earlier). In cities, he argues, there is also less restrictive social control over marriage.<sup>54</sup> The hypothesis is that those born in a rural area have a lower chance of divorcing than those born in the city.

The chance of divorce also varies with status. Depending on one’s status, one will have more or less material interests to defend, and these will play an important role in one’s appraisal of the advantages and disadvantages of staying married or divorcing. Various pieces of research show that lower social groups in the nineteenth century had a higher chance of divorcing than higher ones. Phillips<sup>55</sup> explains this through the high cost of divorce. Dessertine<sup>56</sup> also underlines the importance of the economic context. The hypothesis is that people from the higher social classes have a higher chance of divorcing.

If there are extramarital children, a special situation arises. For some people at least, there is a certain stigma attached to it, which prompted this group to marry quickly, even

if this was financially problematic and even if the people concerned were not properly prepared for marriage psychologically or socially.<sup>57</sup> The proportion of illegitimate children declined significantly in Flanders in the course of the second part of the nineteenth century, and where there was an illegitimate child, parents tended to marry with increasing rapidity.<sup>58</sup> Apparently they wanted to ensure in this way that their child grew up in a “normal” marriage relationship. Studies show that these “enforced” marriages were more likely to fail. In the research by van Poppel,<sup>59</sup> the extent to which children have to be legitimized is a good indicator of structural marriage problems. His research shows that there was such an effect, but that it was not significant. The hypothesis is that premarital children increase the chance of divorce.

## 8. RESULTS

The analysis occurs in steps: one starts with a model with the year of marriage as the first variable, and other variables are then added (see Table 2). Model 8 (last column) contains all the variables. For each model, the values of the odds ratios are given. These indicate the chance that an event will happen (in this case divorce) compared with the chance that this event will not happen (i.e., no divorce). The values reflect the chance of divorce in a given category of a variable compared with the reference category (which is given the value 1) for this variable. In Table 3, the model fit of the various models is shown. The Nagelkerke  $R^2$  is an adaptation of the Cox & Snell determination coefficient. The interpretation (in terms of explained variance) is the same as the  $R^2$  in multiple regression.<sup>60</sup> The Hosmer-Lemeshow goodness-of-fit test shows that the estimates of the models fit the data sufficiently closely. With the exception of the p-values in Model 1, all values lie above the norm of .05.<sup>61</sup>

A first important effect is the year of marriage: the later in the nineteenth century, the higher the chance of divorce, independently of the other measured factors. The place of marriage has a clear influence on the chance of divorce. Specifically, this points to the effect of the extent of urbanization: in cities (especially Ghent and Leuven), the chance of divorce was higher. Origin is also relevant. Local people (in the research these are primarily city dwellers) had a higher chance of divorce than migrants who came to the city from the countryside. This confirms the hypothesis that those born in rural areas had a lower chance of divorce than those born in the city. Rural socialization acts as a brake on divorce. For the brides, there are no differences in this regard. In terms of age at marriage, only the woman’s age is significant: the younger they marry, the higher the chance of divorce. This effect persists after controlling for the year of marriage, and is thus not attributable to the fall in the age at first marriage in the second half of the nineteenth century. The age difference between the marriage partners is also a factor. Thus the formulated hypothesis is confirmed: if the bride is at least two years older than the bridegroom, the chance of divorce is 50 percent higher than if the marriage partners are close to the same age. Departure from the social norm (namely that the man is somewhat older than the woman, or both partners are around the same age), increases the chance of divorce considerably. If the woman is older than the man, this has an effect on the balance of power, which tips more in favor of the woman and promotes her independence. The number of legitimized children also plays a role: couples with premarital children have a higher chance of divorce. The marriages concerned are often “enforced” ones to which a social stigma is attached and which may cause personal and social problems.

Table 2  
Multi-Step Logistical Regression of the Effects of Different Variables on the Chance  
of Divorce in Ghent, Leuven, Aalst, and Bierbeek (1800-1913)

Independent variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Marriage year	1.057*	1.051*	1.048*	1.048*	1.048*	1.047*	1.047*	1.057*
Marriage place	—	1.257	1.243	1.321*	1.341	1.371	1.386*	1.370*
	—	0.230*	0.223*	0.255*	0.256*	0.268*	0.280*	0.279*
	—	0.316*	0.330*	0.351*	0.303*	0.393*	0.408	0.418
Origin of man	—	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	—	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	—	0.437*	0.532*	0.550*	0.547*	0.492*	0.499*	0.468*
	—	1.116	1.216	1.236	1.184	1.091	1.091	1.096
Origin of woman	—	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	—	0.779	0.968	0.986	1.087	1.103	1.101	1.109
	—	0.877	1.008	1.013	1.050	1.044	1.016	1.027
Age at marriage of man	—	—	0.963	0.964	0.964	0.963	0.956	0.954
Age at marriage of woman	—	—	0.904*	0.903*	0.895*	0.892*	0.865*	0.864*
Age difference	—	—	1.048	1.062	1.038	1.018	0.983	0.972
	—	—	1	1	1	1	1	1
	—	—	1.536	1.542	1.560*	1.587*	1.606*	1.597*
Number of premarital children	—	—	—	1.214	1.256*	1.286*	1.369*	1.357*
Literacy of man	—	—	—	2.853*	2.760*	2.729*	2.788*	3.174*
	—	—	—	1	1	1	1	1
	—	—	—	0.886	0.846	0.829	0.878	0.854
Literacy of woman	—	—	—	1	1	1	1	1
	—	—	—	—	1.200	1.247	0.894	0.875
Occupation of woman	—	—	—	—	0.983	1.067	1.033	1.045
	—	—	—	—	1.503	2.179	2.239	2.267
	—	—	—	—	0.667*	0.740	0.759	0.769
	—	—	—	—	0.816	0.894	0.895	0.919
	—	—	—	—	0.768	0.853	0.839	0.854
None / housekeeper	—	—	—	—	1	1	1	1

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

Independent variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
<b>Social class man</b>								
Elite	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	1
Middle class non-farmer	—	—	—	—	—	0.713	0.673	0.672
Middle class farmer	—	—	—	—	—	0.281	0.254	0.249
Low class skilled	—	—	—	—	—	0.677	0.604	0.596
Low class semi-skilled	—	—	—	—	—	0.693	0.608	0.601
Low class unskilled	—	—	—	—	—	0.638	0.557*	0.539*
<b>Previous marital status of man</b>								
Unmarried	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1
Widowed	—	—	—	—	—	—	1.699	1.689
Divorced	—	—	—	—	—	—	1.856	1.854
<b>Previous marital status of woman</b>								
Unmarried	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1
Widowed	—	—	—	—	—	—	4.216*	4.211*
Divorced	—	—	—	—	—	—	13.593*	13.364*
<b>Father of man</b>								
Alive	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Dead	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1.001
<b>Father of woman</b>								
Not present	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.930
Alive	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Dead	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1.131
Not present	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.899

Note: \* Level of significance < 0.05.



*Table 3*  
Number of Observations and Model Fit For Each Model

	<i>N</i>	<i>Hosmer-Lemeshow chi<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>Nagelkerke R<sup>2</sup></i>
Model 1	25,278	15.77 (p = 0.0458)	0.1272
Model 2	24,428	8.67 (p = 0.3712)	0.1613
Model 3	24,373	9.08 (p = 0.3352)	0.1915
Model 4	24,332	4.01 (p = 0.3712)	0.1963
Model 5	22,987	7.77 (p = 0.4559)	0.1924
Model 6	22,444	11.40 (p = 0.1801)	0.1953
Model 7	22,396	5.98 (p = 0.6490)	0.2041
Model 8	22,340	4.75 (p = 0.7844)	0.2055

The bridegroom's literacy is also a (big) factor: in the nineteenth century, literate men were far more likely to divorce. Strangely enough, this does not apply to the brides; literate women are actually somewhat less likely to divorce than illiterate ones, but this effect is not significant. The bridegroom's social status also plays a role, as expected: all social classes have a lower chance of divorce than the elite, though this factor is only statistically significant in the case of the unskilled. This group has the lowest chance of divorce, and this is related to their difficult socio-economic situation. Not only was a divorce expensive, but pragmatic considerations also came up: by staying together the couple could pool their incomes and so meet their overheads. For the higher social groups, the reverse applies: thanks in part to their high income, they were attractive partners on the remarriage market, and this influenced their chance of divorce.

The most pronounced effect proceeds from the bride's previous marital status. This is in line with the hypothesis. Brides who had already divorced or been widowed once before their marriage are, respectively, thirteen and four times more likely to divorce than those marrying for the first time. For the bridegroom, the effects tend in the same direction, but are less pronounced and not significant. There are various factors involved here, the most important being the large age difference, the presence of children, more material interests (inheritance) and more potential conflicts.

Most of the formulated hypotheses are thus confirmed. Variables that had no statistically significant effect on the chance of divorce are origin of the bride, age at marriage of the bridegroom, literacy and occupation of the bride, previous marital status of the bridegroom, and whether or not the parents of the bride and the bridegroom are still alive. A summary sketch of a "typical" divorcing couple in the nineteenth century is as follows: the couples came from and lived in the city, the bride married young, there was often a premarital child, the bride was often older than the bridegroom, the man was literate and had a high social status, and the bride was widowed or divorced. Apart from all the mentioned factors, the chance of divorce gradually increased in the course of the nineteenth century.

## 9. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Many people today are fascinated by the virtually limitless torrent of postmodern challenges: the rise of the Internet, cultural globalization, regional nationalism, economic

globalization, the spread of computer literacy, individualization, and so on. Under the impact of these developments, the historical vision can become blinkered, causing the importance of contemporary developments to be overrated, while the impact of earlier changes is underestimated. The nineteenth century is an example of this. Our imaginary picture of this century is usually confined to a few aspects, the main attention-grabbers being the French revolution, the industrialization, and the social question. Yet these are “merely” three aspects, and perhaps not even the most important ones, of what was happening at that time. Equally fundamental were the democratic transition, the scientific breakthroughs, the technological innovation, the architectural *tours de force*, the emancipation of the new bourgeoisie, and the development of political, ideological, and economic organizations, the educational innovation, and finally, the pronounced emotionalization and romanticization of (marital) relations. All these trends also have less attractive counterparts: the developments mentioned were coupled with the pernicious destruction of traditions, naïve belief in new political ideologies of salvation, economic overheating, social deracination, colonial arrogance, and offensive exploitation.

Thinkers such as Durkheim were very good at spotting and pointing out these developments. His diagnosis was highly critical: all in all, the nineteenth-century changes led to chronic *anomie*, and this, in his view, is the key to explaining much nineteenth-century social behavior, including the increase in the number of divorces. Assessing this position empirically is no easy matter. It requires firstly the reconstruction of empirical indicators of a whole range of demographic and sociological long-term processes, and then the multivariate causal testing of these factors. Although our study has an incidental bearing on such testing, this is not its main purpose. What is considered, with data at an individual level, is whether characteristics of the marriage and the marriage partners (at the time of the marriage) have an effect on the chance of divorce. This analysis shows that “the man in the street” was not responsible for the first wave of divorces in the second half of the nineteenth century. It involved, firstly, economically prosperous people who had sufficient financial resources, and secondly, people (or couples) who, even before the divorce, were already out of step with the social norms of the time in one or more respects. For example, relatively frequently the woman had married very young, was much older than her partner, had an illegitimate child, or had already been divorced before. Wariness of ambitious interpretative generalization is fitting here: the research only concerns data relating to the moment of marriage. Later characteristics and developments remain out of the picture, and this is obviously a shortcoming. To deal with this, the intention is, at a later phase in the research, to combine the data from the marriage certificates with those from the population registers—which do contain information about the subsequent course of the people’s lives.

One point that has not yet been emphasized sufficiently is that multivariable analysis demonstrates that there is a statistically significant connection between the year of marriage and the chance of divorce. Independently of the other researched factors, the chance of divorce gradually rises in the course of the second half of the nineteenth century. The year of marriage is a type of summary measurement of “the changes” in all kinds of structural and cultural factors. Exactly which factors these are is hard to assess. Given that certain economic developments are quite well measured via occupation (which enables economic variables to be indirectly included in the model), additional explanations should probably be sought in cultural factors.

Research using the same data as those used in the present analysis shows that emotionalization and familiarization of human relations in all directions intensified in the course of the second half of the nineteenth century, and that women were the pioneers in this trend.<sup>62</sup> There are also indications that the middle of the nineteenth century was a symbolic turning point in this respect: from then on, quality time was increasingly equated with intimate family time.<sup>63</sup> To mention a few indicators, the intensity of first marriages increased, the age at first marriage fell, age homogamy rose sharply, the remarriage intensity lessened, the length of time between bereavement and remarriage increased, the number and proportion of family members acting as witnesses increased, the proportion of women working outside the home fell sharply, the proportion of illegitimate births decreased, and by the end of the nineteenth century, the majority of illegitimately born children were quite rapidly legitimized via a marriage (whereas this only happened to half such children in the first half of the nineteenth century).

Intriguingly, these developments occurred among all social groups—in other words both “new” groups such as the bourgeoisie and low-skilled industrial workers and “old” groups such as the elite and the farmers. Thus all the mentioned things were widely promoted and “mimicked,” which is why one may talk in terms of a mimetic desire for marriage. Marrying early and building up an identity around expressive family-centred and maternal roles was, for many women, a reaction to and remedy for their public exclusion and economic subordination. Because they were kept out of the public sector, they had to seek esteem and recognition where this was possible and where they were competent. They developed their own “female” status scale, which centered around a good marriage, a tidy, well-dusted house, and a warm family.<sup>64</sup> Was this a strategy that women really wanted, or was it a means of maintaining self-respect, in the absence of opportunities for self-development in the public sector? In either case, the divide between instrumental-male and expressive-female roles had the effect of widening the gap between men and women, but due to the specialization in separate social domains, this in fact procured social and individual pacification between the sexes—there was certainly no gender war. To put it another way, the esteem that women gained in marriage and via the family took the sting out of the gender problem, which had been exacerbated by industrialization.

For many women, the esteem they gained in their private experiential world will have been sufficient to make them feel contented. They functioned well in the closed family and did not grumble—not yet, in any case. It was agreeable for them to be acknowledged as the icon of the family:<sup>65</sup> a good marriage, a tidy household, and a cosseted family meant that they were doing their best. The new domesticity translated into a virtually blind concern on the part of the mother for her children (no more wet-nurses!), and especially for her daughters.<sup>66</sup> According to Roberts,<sup>67</sup> during the second half of the nineteenth century, a “mum culture” arose in all population groups—an intense mutual involvement between mothers and daughters. After their marriage, incidentally, many daughters settled down in the immediate vicinity of the parental home. For them, that home was the center and the network for mutual help, for the exchanging of food, intimate social intercourse, information about women’s ailments, and permanent emotional support. Others, however, probably found it highly irksome and unfair that the public sector was reserved for men. People realized that the distribution of gender roles was leading to women being disadvantaged, if not neglected, but it was precisely this that spurred women on to write

a new social history. It would soon turn out that the relegation of the female identity to the position of sister, daughter, wife, and mother was too narrow a foundation for a meaningful life. Moreover, that foundation became narrower and more constraining over time—not just literally (the corset was intended to constrict the female body), but also figuratively: the unpaid family work of “housewives” became increasingly exacting. The result was that housework had become a full-time job by 1900, not just during the week, but also on Sundays.<sup>68</sup> Women’s daily tasks thus became lengthier and more demanding, precisely at a time when there was public debate about reducing men’s working hours.

Thus, paradoxically, an explanation of the rising divorce rate in a family and marriage-friendly social context can be sought in the psychological and social consequences of the more pronounced shift in marriage, gender, and family expectations. Increasing numbers of women threw themselves more and more into their gender-specific expressive gender role, whereas the objective opportunities and attainability of this role did not increase commensurately. The result was role strain: the high marriage and family expectations soon come up against intrinsic limitations. As a result of this, both individual and general frustration increased, and this was an ideal social substratum for facilitating divorce. In essence, this is a reworking of Durkheim’s concept of *anomie*, demonstrating once again the surprising topicality of his thinking.

## NOTES

1. Roderick Phillips, *Putting asunder: A history of divorce in Western society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

2. See Phillips, *Putting asunder: A history of divorce in Western society*.

3. Manuel Stoffers, “Versnelling, nervositeit en geschiedenis. Over de betekenis van de eigen tijd voor de Duitse cultuurgeschiedenis tussen 1890-1930,” *Kennis en Methode* 21, no. 3 (1997), 192-203.

4. Emile Durkheim, *Le suicide. Étude de sociologie* (Paris: Les Presses Universitaires de France, 1897). Collection: Bibliothèque de philosophie contemporaine.

5. John Hajnal, “European marriage patterns in perspective,” in *Population in history: Essays in historical demography*, eds. David V. Glass and David E. C. Eversley (London: Arnold, 1965), 101-46.

6. For Belgian data, see Koen Matthijs, “Mimetic appetite for marriage in nineteenth-century Flanders: Gender disadvantage as an incentive for social change,” *Journal of Family History* 27, no. 2 (2002): 101-27; for other countries, see David I. Kertzer and Dennis P. Hogan, *Family, political economy, and demographic change. The transformation of life in Casalecchio, Italy, 1861-1921* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989); David Reher, “The history of the family in Spain: Past development, present realities, and future challenges,” *The History of the Family* 3, no. 2 (1999): 125-36; Evert W. Hofstee, *Korte demografische geschiedenis van Nederland van 1800 tot heden* (Haarlem: Fibula-Van Dishoeck, 1981); Kevin McQuillan, “Economic structure, religion, and age at marriage: Some evidence from Alsace,” *Journal of Family History* 14, no. 4 (1989): 331-46; James R. Lehning, “Nuptiality and rural industry: Families and labor in the French countryside,” *Journal of Family History* 8, no. 4 (1983): 333-45; Frans van Poppel, *Trouwen in Nederland: een historisch-demografische studie van de 19<sup>de</sup> en vroeg-20<sup>ste</sup> eeuw* (Wageningen: Landbouwhogeschool, 1992); Frans van Poppel, “Marriage as a farewell to youth: regional and social differentiation in the age of marriage in nineteenth-century Netherlands,” *Pedagogica Historia* 29, no. 1 (1993): 93-123.

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8. Koen Matthijs, *De mateloze negentiende eeuw. Bevolking, huwelijk, gezin en sociale verandering*, (Leuven: Universitaire Pers Leuven, 2001); See Matthijs, "Mimetic appetite for marriage in nineteenth-century Flanders: gender disadvantage as an incentive for social change," 101-27.

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10. Koen Matthijs, "Frequency, timing and intensity of remarriage in 19<sup>th</sup> century Flanders," *The History of the Family. An International Quarterly* 8, no. 1 (2003a): 135-62.

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13. See Phillips, *Putting asunder: A history of divorce in Western society*.

14. See Phillips, *Putting asunder: A history of divorce in Western society*, 403-05.

15. Moni Van Look, "Het burgerlijk recht inzake echtscheiding," in *Mislukt huwelijk en echtscheiding. Een multidisciplinaire verkenning*, ed. Victor Heylen (Leuven: Universitaire Pers, 1972), 75-91; Wilfried A. Dumon and Gerrit A. Kooy, *Echtscheiding in België en Nederland* (Deventer: Van Loghum, 1983); See Phillips, *Putting asunder: A history of divorce in Western society*; Frans van Poppel, "Family breakdown in nineteenth-century Netherlands: divorcing couples in The Hague," *The History of the Family* 2, no.1 (1997): 49-72.

16. Lawrence Stone, "The road to polygamy," *The New York Review of Books* 36, no. 3 (1989): 15.

17. Koen Matthijs and Carine Meulders, "On ne se jouera pas du divorce! Echtscheiding in de negentiende eeuw in het licht van de echtscheidingspraktijk te Brugge, 1865-1914," *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis* 26, no. 3-4 (1997): 64-103. Matthijs and Meulders describe (for divorces on the grounds of certain factual circumstances) the nineteenth-century divorce procedure, using documents from the court archives in Bruges. The procedure consisted of two phases, a preparatory and a litigation phase. The preparatory phase was about conciliation and concealment. The sessions took place behind closed doors, and the magistrate sought to bring about a reconciliation between the spouses. In response to the increasing number of divorces, the length of this conciliatory phase was lengthened in 1905, to allow more time to think things over. The litigation phase was one of conflict, discord, and disclosure. The sessions were public, domestic disputes were aired openly and lawyers waxed eloquent.

18. Peter Heyvaert, "Dagdagelijkse gevoelens in andere verbanden. Nieuwe houdingen tegenover huwelijk en gezin," in *De opstand van de intellectuelen. De Franse Revolutie als avant-première van de moderne cultuur*, ed. Mark Elchardus et al. (Kapellen/Amsterdam: De Nederlandse Boekhandel/Pelckmans—Wereldbibliotheek, Tor, 1989/2), 183-202.

19. Jan De Maeyer, "Relatie en huwelijk in de moderne tijd (ca 1800-ca 1950). Kerkelijke standpunten en strategieën," in *Levensrituelen. Het huwelijk*, eds. Roger Burggraave, Michel Cloet, Karel Dobbelaere, and Lambert Leijns (Leuven: Universitaire Pers, 2000), 33.

20. Joan B. Landes, *Women and the public sphere in the age of the French Revolution*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988); Heyvaert, *De opstand van de intellectuelen. De Franse Revolutie als avant-première van de moderne cultuur*, 183-202.

21. See Heyvaert, "Dagdagelijkse gevoelens in andere verbanden. Nieuwe houdingen tegenover huwelijk en gezin," 192-94.

22. For an international overview of developments at that time, see Phillips, *Putting asunder: A history of divorce in Western society*.

23. See Phillips, *Putting asunder: A history of divorce in Western society*, 255.

24. Historical aspects of nineteenth-century Leuven are discussed in J. A. Torfs, *Geschiedenis van Leuven. Van den vroegsten tijd tot op heden* (Leuven: Drukkerij Emiel Charpentier, 1899); Michel Magits, *Demografische en sociale structuren te Leuven (1846-1860). Bijdrage tot de stadsgeschiedenis in de 19<sup>de</sup> eeuw* (Brussel: vUB, Centrum sociale structuren en economische conjunctuur, 1974); Jaak Brepoels et al., *Stadsboek Leuven* (Leuven: Kritak, 1985); Marcel G. Peeters, *Leven in het oude Leuven* (Gent: Stichting Mens en Cultuur, 1992); *Van Petermannen en koeienschieters. Kroniek van Leuven*, ed. Eduard Van Ermen (Leuven: Uitgeverij P., 1997); Koen Matthijs, Jan Van Bavel, and Ilse Van de Velde, *Leuven in de negentiende eeuw. De bevolking: een spiegel van het dagelijkse leven* (Leuven: Acco, 1997).

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