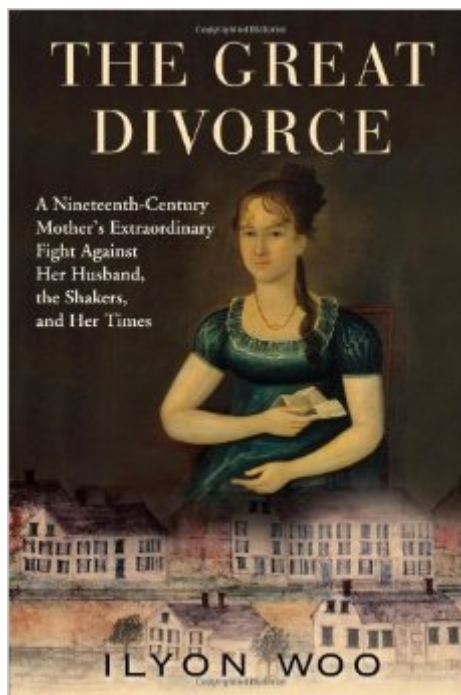


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# The Great Divorce: A Nineteenth-Century Mother's Extraordinary Fight Against Her Husband, The Shakers, And Her Times



## Synopsis

Ilyon Woo's *The Great Divorce* is the dramatic, richly textured story of one of nineteenth-century America's most infamous divorce cases, in which a young mother single-handedly challenged her country's notions of women's rights, family, and marriage itself. In 1814, Eunice Chapman came home to discover that her three children had been carried off by her estranged husband. He had taken them, she learned, to live among a celibate, religious people known as the Shakers. Defying all expectations, this famously petite and lovely woman mounted an epic campaign against her husband, the Shakers, and the law. In its confrontation of some of the nation's most fundamental debates—religious freedom, feminine virtue, the sanctity of marriage—her case struck a nerve with an uncertain new republic. And its culmination—in a stunning legislative decision and a terrifying mob attack—sent shockwaves through the Shaker community and the nation beyond. With a novelist's eye and a historian's perspective, Woo delivers the first full account of Eunice Chapman's remarkable struggle. A moving story about the power of a mother's love, *The Great Divorce* is also a memorable portrait of a rousing challenge to the values of a young nation.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Once in awhile, a book comes along and changes your perspective of what one person can accomplish despite the rules. This is a testament to Eunice Chapman's extraordinary commitment, endurance, and faith. I applaud Ilyon Woo's extensive research and meticulous detail to capture the story from multiple points of view. She managed to capture each main character in their true light as

both aggressor and victim. It is a brilliant story and one that every book club group should read.

I am a history junkie. I especially enjoy works that give a rich, full flavor of a time as well as presenting different views of the same event. This book delivers nicely on both counts, relating the atmosphere in New York State and the country in the early 1800's, especially in regards to religion, the condition of women, and women's rights. The centerpiece is one woman's battle to regain her children, who had been spirited away by her husband. At a time when a woman had little recourse against those that harmed or mistreated her, Eunice Chapman's battle was an amazing one. What could have been a small family drama escalated into a war that caught up politicians, lawyers, the Shaker religion and such luminaries as Martin Van Buren and Thomas Jefferson. All that aside, the author makes the book highly accessible to the reader, writing in an engaging style that makes this a page-turning historical mystery. It is just plain great storytelling!

I love a well written book and the language here is like a fine meal, something to savor. Ilyon Woo has woven ample research into the fabric of this story, so we can see our country in the early 19th century and see the people. This is a tale for parents to read and marvel at the commitment of one mother to her children, and for young women to read and marvel at how true feminism is about so much more than current rhetoric minimalizes. I do not doubt that *THE GREAT DIVORCE* will soon be a part of women studies curriculums at our finest colleges. Every woman should read this remarkable tale to remind ourselves how far we've come, and that real women make waves and then ride them ashore, they don't drown in them.

I thoroughly enjoyed *The Great Divorce*. It is the well written, and clearly well-researched and even handed, story of a very determined and intelligent young woman who had the misfortune to make a poor choice in marriage at a time when women had few rights before marriage, and even fewer after. Her dysfunctional and alcoholic husband eventually became a Shaker, and forcibly took their children to a Shaker community, which compounded her difficulties. The story of her getting the first legislative divorce in New York state, and recovering her children, and the aftermath of it all, is quite amazing, with numerous twists and turns. Much historical background on the Shakers is set forth, which I also found of considerable interest. I would highly recommend this fine book.

I am not a frequenter of non-fiction, but after reading this this book, I am willing to change. Ilyon Woo's well-crafted writing reads like a novel, totally engaging and beautifully detailed, and the fact

that this is a true story makes it all the sweeter. I learned so much about history, politics, and women's rights (or lack thereof) in reading this amazing story. There is a great depth of humanity in the portrayal of the main protagonists, their motivations, hopes and weaknesses. I would highly recommend this book to anyone who loves a good book down to the rich details that make the story come alive.

Woo does a wonderful job combining story telling with history. I read this book in three days, and stayed up later than I should have each night in order to find out what happened next. In addition to the gripping story of a woman's fight to win back her children from her estranged husband and the Shakers, the book skillfully provides a fascinating portrait of life in the 1800s and the options (or lack there of) open to women at this time.

A deceptively easy read, but thought provoking. One almost immediately sympathizes with both Eunice and her husband James, if for different reasons. Opens a window on early 19th century life in America. Unlike similar works that strive to be scholarly and pretentious, this is a good old fashioned story that happens to be true.

I would recommend this to people who like reading historical books. In this day and age - we tend to forget how things were "in the day" - I am a child of the 1950's and can remember how scandalous divorce and pregnancy out of wedlock were - not that long ago! I feel that our female population doesn't really understand the progress that has been made in our rights. In this day and age it is a given that the mother will get custody of children...this wasn't always the case.... I really enjoyed the book - hope others will also.

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