Injunction--Suit by Wife to Enjoin Mexican Divorce Action Disallowed (Rosenbaum v. Rosenbaum, 309 N.Y. 371 (1955))

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flexibility of earlier holdings in protecting the rights of the pledgor. That justice was served by the holding is not doubted. However, the general problem of what constitutes adequate public notice still remains. It is submitted that a workable solution would be to amend the Lien Law so that its provisions would unmistakably apply to pledge agreements, and could not be waived by the pledgor.

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INJUNCTION—SUIT BY WIFE TO ENJOIN MEXICAN DIVORCE ACTION DISALLOWED.—Defendant-husband instituted a divorce action in Mexico while on a one-day visit there. Plaintiff-wife sought an injunction restraining her husband from maintaining the action, alleging that the defendant had not established bona fide domicile in Mexico. The Court of Appeals held, on motion to dismiss, that as the Mexican divorce would be invalid, there would be an adequate remedy in declaratory judgment. *Rosenbaum v. Rosenbaum*, 309 N.Y. 371, 130 N.E.2d 902 (1955).

The Constitution reserves to the states control over marriage and divorce. This, coupled with the jurisdictional problems peculiar to divorce actions, led to confusion as to the recognition of sister-state decrees. Eventually most states recognized divorces of other states where jurisdiction was founded on the domicile of one party and service by publication of the defendant. A line of Supreme Court decisions clarified the law in this area by stating that a wife may establish separate domicile whenever necessary; that where neither party is domiciled a divorce decree is invalid; that every state must give full faith and credit to divorce decrees of sister states based on

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2 U.S. Const. amend. X (by implication); *In re Burrus*, 136 U.S. 586, 593-94 (1890) (dictum); see 40 Iowa L. Rev. 667, 669 (1955).

3 2 Kent, *Commentaries* *108*.

4 See, *e.g.*, *Thompson v. State*, 28 Ala. 12 (1856); *In re James' Estate*, 99 Cal. 374, 33 Pac. 1122 (1893); *Dunham v. Dunham*, 162 Ill. 589, 44 N.E. 841 (1896); *Gould v. Crow*, 57 Mo. 200 (1874); *Shafer v. Bushnell*, 24 Wis. 372 (1869).

5 Some states excepted to this rule. See, *e.g.*, *People v. Baker*, 76 N.Y. 78 (1879); *Irby v. Wilson*, 21 N.C. 568 (1837); *McCreery v. Davis*, 44 S.C. 195, 22 S.E. 178 (1895).


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domicile and service by publication; 8 and that jurisdictional power of
a sister state may be questioned by the non-appearing spouse in the
court of his domicile.9

In the area of equitable relief, other jurisdictions have granted
injunctions under circumstances similar to, or even less compelling
than, those of the instant case. In one case, a British court restrained a
party bringing suit in a foreign country where neither party was dom-
iciled.10 Some states have granted injunctions against citizens who
have instituted foreign-nation divorce actions, including a so-called
"mail-order" divorce.11

The New York law was shaped by the leading case of Goldstein
v. Goldstein 12 and the first Williams v. North Carolina case.13 The
Appellate Division early approved the issuance of injunctions to re-
strain sister-state and foreign divorce actions 14 and the trial courts
followed this lead.15 One court restrained a husband merely threaten-
ing an action.16 The Court of Appeals reversed this trend in the
Goldstein case. There the court held, on motion to dismiss, that as
Florida was not the matrimonial domicile and neither party was dom-
iciled there, any decree of divorce issued on these facts would be in-
valid and could not harm the plaintiff's rights. In 1942, the first
Williams case held that a decree of a sister state based on domicile and
service by publication is entitled to full faith and credit in every other
state. This resulted in a partial reversal of New York's position.
The courts granted injunctions against persons maintaining divorce
actions in sister states or territories 17. In the leading case of Garvin

8 Williams v. North Carolina, 317 U.S. 287 (1942). This case expressly
overruled the famous case of Haddock v. Haddock, 201 U.S. 562 (1906), which
held that a New York court did not violate the full faith and credit clause of
the Constitution when it refused to recognize a Connecticut divorce issued on
domicile of the husband and service by publication of the wife.
10 Moore v. Moore, 12 T.L.R. 221 (C.A. 1896). This result was reached
though "English Courts do not recognise as possessing extra-territorial validity
any decree of divorce pronounced by the Courts of a foreign country . . .
unless at the date of the suit the parties were domiciled within the jurisdiction
of the Court pronouncing it." 6 HALSBURY, LAWS OF ENGLAND 304-05 (2d ed.
1932).
11 See, e.g., Wells v. Wells, 230 Ala. 430, 161 So. 794 (1935); Knapp v.
Knapp, 12 N.J. Misc. 599, 173 Atl. 343 (Ch. 1934) (mail-order divorce).
12 283 N.Y. 146, 27 N.E.2d 969 (1940).
14 In Gwathmey v. Gwathmey, 116 Misc. 85, 190 N.Y. Supp. 199 (Sup. Ct.),
aff'd mem., 201 App. Div. 843, 193 N.Y. Supp. 935 (1st Dep't 1921), the court
issued an injunction after finding that the defendant had no bona fide domicile in
(1st Dep't 1926), the court granted an injunction after finding defendant had
no bona fide domicile in Mexico.
Dublin, 150 Misc. 694, 270 N.Y. Supp. 22 (Sup. Ct. 1934); Richman v. Richman,
17 Hammer v. Hammer, 303 N.Y. 481, 104 N.E.2d 864 (1952); Garvin v.
v. Garvin, 18 the Court of Appeals held that since any divorce the husband might obtain in the Virgin Islands would be accorded full faith and credit, the wife should be saved the burden of striking down the prima facie effect of the district court’s finding of residence. Nevertheless, the courts still refused to enjoin citizens prosecuting actions in other countries. 19

In the instant case, the Court follows New York precedent in holding that where a plaintiff institutes a divorce action in a foreign country, but acquires no bona fide domicile there, no valid decree can be issued and he need not be enjoined. The decision reaffirms the policy of the Goldstein case and distinguishes the Garvin case. In the latter case, the court granted a temporary injunction because of the presumptive validity that full faith and credit would give the decree. Such a judgment would be valid until collaterally attacked and could be used to the wife’s detriment. Thus, the court in that case considered the wife’s burden of disproving the decree’s validity to be the irreparable injury necessary to support an injunction. 20

But the Court here points out that the Garvin case turns upon full faith and credit while the instant case does not. It denies that Mexican decrees should be accorded the prima facie effect given decrees of sister states. The Court states, “... we have never held that any such presumptive legality and validity must be accorded Mexican divorces....” 21 It calls such decrees evidence only, relying on Section 397 of the Civil Practice Act. 22 Thus, the Court refuses to extend comity to Mexican divorces and considers them ineffective until proven in domestic courts. Since the Mexican decree would be a nullity, the Court reasons that it can do the plaintiff no harm.

The dissent disagrees and asserts that judgments of foreign countries reciting domicile and service by publication should be accorded the same presumptive validity given sister-state decrees. While

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22 “Nothing in the last two sections is to be construed as declaring the effect of a record or other judicial proceeding of a foreign country, authenticated, so as to be evidence.” N.Y. Civ. Prac. Act § 397. Section 395 provides that “A copy of a record... of a foreign country, is evidence when authenticated....”
these decrees are beyond full faith and credit considerations, the dis-
sent points out that New York policy has been to recognize judgments of
foreign countries except where they contravene public policy. The
Mexican decree to be procured, then, would be valid on its face and
have effect until declared void. In that situation, as in the Garvin
case, an injunction would be justified to save the plaintiff the burden
of striking down the prima facie effect of the decree.

In denying presumptive validity to Mexican decrees, the Court
leaves plaintiff’s marital rights in danger. If the defendant obtains the
decree he seeks in Mexico, the plaintiff must have the decree declared
a nullity to protect her rights. In the meantime, the decree will be
accorded prima facie validity in other states and the husband may
use the decree to the plaintiff’s injury. Defendant supports the plain-
tiff. If he remarries, he would have to provide for two “wives” and
his support of the plaintiff might thus be impaired. Even if sepa-
rated from the second “wife,” he could be obliged to support her and
he would not be allowed to plead the invalidity of his decree.

The decision aids no one. The defendant is left free to entangle
himself further in marital difficulties; the plaintiff must stand by help-
lessly while her cause of action becomes overripe; the state will find
itself burdened by more litigation. Clearly, it would have been wiser
to adopt the view of the dissent that: “It is traditional for equity to
restrain persons from doing acts which will work an injury to others,
and are for that reason contrary to equity and good conscience.”

MUNICIPAL CORPORATIONS—NOTICE OF CLAIM—FAILURE OF
ANOTHER TO ACT FOR INCAPACITATED CLAIMANT WILL NOT BAR
APPLICATION FOR LATE FILING.—Six months after sustaining injury,

23 Rosenbaum v. Rosenbaum, supra note 21 at 381-82, 130 N.E.2d at 907
(dissenting opinion). See also Goldstein v. Goldstein, 283 N.Y. 146, 153-54,
27 N.E.2d 969, 972 (1940) (dissenting opinion).

24 Chief Judge Conway notes in his dissent that “If we deny plaintiff the
right to injunctive relief we will be placing her in a position where she cannot
prevent a so-called ‘legal nullity’ from coming into existence, yet in order to
have this ‘legal nullity’ so adjudged she will have to prove, in an action for a
declaratory judgment, the self-same allegations presently before us.” Rosenbaum
v. Rosenbaum, supra note 21 at 381, 130 N.E.2d at 907 (dissenting opinion).

25 See Reik v. Reik, 109 N.J. Eq. 615, 158 Atl. 519 (Ch. 1932), aff’d per
curiam, 112 N.J. Eq. 234, 163 Atl. 907 (Cl. Err. & App. 1933); Commonwealth

26 See Goldstein v. Goldstein, supra note 23 at 156, 27 N.E.2d at 973 (dis-
senting opinion).


(dissenting opinion).