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The Ménage-à-Trois and other Controversial Relationships, c. 1780 – 1840

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degree of
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Declaration

This thesis is submitted to the University of Warwick in support of my application for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. I declare that the research and writing of the thesis is my own work and that it has not been submitted to this or any other University for a degree.

Abstract

This thesis analyses controversial relationships between men and women in late Georgian England. It examines a range of different attachments, including adulterous affairs, affinal intimacies, cohabiting relationships, and *ménages-à-trois*. Historiography on heterosexual and marital deviance has tended to focus on the more extreme end of the spectrum, and thus emphasises the high-profile sex scandals and publicity surrounding adultery and divorce litigation that boomed over this period. This thesis addresses gaps in this scholarship by exploring a wider range of emotional and erotic intimacies that were transgressive according to contemporary marital and heterosexual norms. It also takes a more holistic approach compared to other studies by analysing the impact that being controversial had on an individual's domestic, familial, social, and public worlds. The chapters are structured according to these different spheres.

This thesis draws upon examples from aristocratic Whig society and several literary networks that existed on the margins of the middle classes between c. 1780-1840. By analysing these small and insular societies this thesis explores the multitude of factors that influenced how people conducted their social and personal relationships. It examines correspondence, diaries, novels, satirical prints, in addition to articles and paragraphs that were printed in contemporary newspapers and journals. Drawing on methodologies from anthropology, literary studies, and the history of emotions, it uses this broad source base to improve our understanding of the exchanges between the complex cultural macrocosm and social interactions.

The late Georgian period has been portrayed as an era of change, which included shifts in concepts of political power and social order, as well as in ideas about marriage, love, and intimacy. A number of the relationships I examine involve people who were prominent in public life, with the result that their private lives often developed political significance and were used to criticise and disparage them-both as individuals and as a community. Such pressure increased the strain on these people's social and familial relationships and did so at a time they were facing new challenges caused by a transforming social, political and cultural terrain.

Abbreviations

BL	British Library, London
BMS	British Museum Satire
CS5	5th Duke's Correspondence Group, c.1759-1811, Chatsworth Archives
Cth	Chatsworth House Archives
<i>G.L.G Private Correspondence</i>	Castalia, Countess Granville (ed.), <i>Lord Granville Leveson Gower: Private Correspondence, 1781-1821</i> (2 vols, London: Murray, 1916)
NMM	National Maritime Museum, London
NU	Nottingham University Special Collections
NYPL	New York Public Library
Plyth	Plymouth and West Devon Record Office
PRONI	Public Record Office for Northern Ireland
RA	Royal Academy, London
TNA	The National Archives, Kew, London

Introduction

In the summer of 1824, Leigh Hunt was embroiled in an intense correspondence with his sister-in-law, Elizabeth Kent. For over two years, Kent had been asking to join Hunt and his wife, her sister Marianne, in Italy, where they had moved to start a new life.¹ Occasionally Hunt promised to send for Kent imminently, but for the most part he was resolute that her request was impossible for him to fulfil. He thought it was possible that her appearance would spark a ‘calumny’ in the ‘small’ expatriate community where the Hunts lived in Florence: gossip circulated there with the ‘venomous concentration of a village’.² He admitted, however, that his refusal was mostly due to the fact that his wife felt that Kent’s presence would ‘disturb’ their peace. The sisters had a tense relationship, not least because Kent often tried to monopolise Hunt’s attention and affections.³ Although he could not grant her wish, Hunt continually reassured Kent that he felt her absence terribly, and sent ‘a hundred kisses’ to her ‘mouth’ and ‘heart’.⁴ His letters often read as though they were directed to a neglected mistress, rather than a sister-in-law. While the exact nature of their intimacy remains ambiguous, Hunt and Kent’s relationship caused controversy at various points in their lives: a journalist speculated that they had an illicit sexual relationship; a couple of their friends suggested that their behaviour was inappropriate; members of their family thought their relationship was strange; and

¹ Leigh Hunt moved his family to Italy to join Percy Bysshe Shelley and Lord Byron in hopes that together they would establish a new literary magazine. For the details of his relationship with Elizabeth Kent see Appendix, pp. 325-326.

² Leigh Hunt to Elizabeth Kent, July 1824: Thornton Leigh Hunt (ed.), *The Correspondence of Leigh Hunt* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1862), p. 223.

³ For example, see Bodleian Library (hereafter Bod.), MSS Shelley adds. d.5, fols. 42-43, Marianne Hunt to Mary Shelley, 4 October – 27 November 1823.

⁴ Leigh Hunt to Elizabeth Kent, 26 July 1825: Luther A. Brewer (ed.), *My Leigh Hunt Library: The Holograph Letters* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1938), pp. 142-143.

Marianne Hunt struggled when attempting to constrain it.⁵ Hunt's awareness that others thought their relationship was problematic influenced his interactions with Kent. He conveyed the limits of their relationship in his letters and reminded her that his wife was his priority.⁶ That said, Hunt appears to have been unwilling to compromise their closeness entirely, and throughout their separation he sustained their intimacy through epistolary expressions of affection and passion.

This thesis explores thirty-five controversial heterosexual relationships using letters, diaries, newspapers, literary journals, novels, pamphlets (the majority of which were published but also several that were printed for private circulation), and satirical prints. Specifically, it will focus on how controversial relationships were constructed and negotiated in an individual's domestic, familial, social and public worlds—spheres that overlapped considerably. A key challenge when this study was in its early stages was how to determine what sorts of relationships contemporaries would have classified as 'controversial'. Modern and contemporary definitions of the term are similar: an English dictionary that was published in London in 1803, defines 'controversial' as 'relating to disputes', and the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* describes the term as 'giving rise or likely to give rise to controversy or public disagreement; subject to (heated) discussion or debate; contentious; questionable; disputed'.⁷ Thus, I looked for evidence of disputes, or concealment that was motivated by the desire to avoid them, examining responses that show clear signs of

⁵ See pp. 171-172, pp. 192-194, p. 239.

⁶ Leigh Hunt to Elizabeth Kent, 20 February 1824: *My Leigh Hunt Library*, p.133

⁷ Oxford University Press, 'Controversial', *Oxford English Dictionary*, December 2015 (OED 3rd edition). <https://0-www-oed-com> (23 March 2020); Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English language, compiled from Dr Johnson; with the addition of words since familiarized to us* (6th edn, London: W. Peacock & Sons, 1803).

disapproval, which varied from gossip to ostracism, to demarcate relationships that the individuals involved, or their spouses, relatives, friends and enemies, construed as inappropriate, problematic and/or scandalous.

Originally, I intended to use the domestic structure of the ménage-à-trois to provide a more holistic picture of how people thought about and experienced extra-marital and marital relationships in the long eighteenth century. This was prompted by the paucity of scholarship on experiences of marital infidelity, and exactly what contemporaries defined as infidelity, compared to that on representations of adulterous relationships that had gained publicity. It quickly became apparent that restricting my research to such a specific and untypical relationship would be limiting, and thus I expanded my inquiries to include other relationships that caused controversy in a couple's social milieu. These include what we might today refer to as 'open marriages', those where spouses tolerated (to varying degrees) the other's indiscretions, cases of marital non-conformity, and more ambiguous intimacies, such as that which existed between Leigh Hunt and Elizabeth Kent.

I have excluded relationships that resulted in legal intervention, such as those that occasioned criminal conversation or divorce litigation, because they have received significant scholarly attention and represent the extreme end of the controversial spectrum. Instead, I focus on relationships that often caused conflict within marital relations, but not enough to cause one party to end the marriage; in doing so, this thesis reveals 'the more hidden regions of normative heterosexual erotic relations and behaviours'.⁸ This thesis studies long-term extra and non-marital

⁸ Leonore Davidoff, *Thicker than Water: Siblings and their Relations, 1780-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 24-25.

relationships, where the men and women involved expressed their love and commitment for one another whilst often simultaneously acknowledging that their liaisons were problematic. Many of these relationships were of a sexual nature; I also, however, examine relationships where consummation appears either unlikely, or remains ambiguous, following Leonore Davidoff's suggestion that sexual relationships should not be studied in isolation from 'other emotional attachments' that could equally 'embrace erotic fantasy and sexual desire'.⁹ The similar manner in which individuals privately and publicly conducted their controversial relationships, regardless of their exact form, and the ways in which their associates responded to them, make them comparable, and I argue that this was a direct result of their controversial status.

Controversial relationships existed across the class spectrum, but different social groups had different ideas about exactly what constituted sexual and marital deviance, and each group had their own methods of dealing with transgressors.¹⁰ The relationships that I examine are drawn from two social groups: the Whigs, a very distinctive elite society comprising the political opposition throughout most of the period covered by this thesis; and several smaller literary societies that existed on the peripheries of the developing middle class due to their association with political and religious radicalism. This decision was based on the fact that both groups were often perceived and portrayed as being sexually licentious and corrupt by their social and political rivals, creating collective reputations that, for a few of these societies,

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹⁰ For discussions on plebeian controversial relationships and conflict caused by changes to the sexual mores of the labouring classes over this period see Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (London: Rivers Oram, 1995).

like the Whigs and the Romantic coteries, have persisted to the present day. The majority of the individuals and couples discussed in this thesis had a public presence, either as published writers, like Mary Wollstonecraft, William Hazlitt, Lord Byron, and Eliza Sharples, or as members of the highly scrutinised 'fashionable society', which included an eclectic mix of aristocrats, politicians, courtesans, actresses and playwrights, including the Duchess of Devonshire, Lady Emma Hamilton, and Richard Brinsley Sheridan. For some individuals, these worlds overlapped: Lord Byron was closely associated with both the Whig Holland House set and the Romantic coterie that included Percy Bysshe Shelley and Leigh Hunt. Furthermore, several Whig elites, such as the 3rd Earl of Egremont and the Duchess of Devonshire, offered artists and novelists their patronage.

Given that their societies were already identified in cultural narratives as being unconventional or anti-establishment, participating in a relationship that could be perceived as sexually immoral or deviant made individuals more vulnerable to criticism and condemnation. The relationships studied include *ménages-à-trois*, ignored or tolerated extra-marital affairs, cohabiting partnerships, romantic friendships and intimacies between affinal siblings.¹¹ The particular domestic and sociability practices of each rank were often instrumental to the development of these relationships: for example, Leigh Hunt's intimacy with his sister-in-law, Elizabeth Kent, grew from her residency in his house, and John Parker, Lord Boringdon's, decade-long affair with Lady Elizabeth Monck started when they socialised as part of Countess Bessborough's entourage in Naples in 1794. The

¹¹ See Appendix for details of all the relationships consulted.

majority of the cases cluster in London and its surrounding areas; however, given the general geographical mobility of both of these groups some of these relationships were at least partly conducted in rural areas, like Devon and Derbyshire, or abroad, in France and Italy. Restricting the focus of the thesis to distinctive societies and social networks has enabled me to gain insight into specific sets of sexual mores and codes of conduct that influenced how individuals operated within them. Moreover, by avoiding accounts from the legal courts, which exhibit widespread or generalised ideas of 'disruptive' behaviour, this study sheds light on a range of emotional and physical conduct which might otherwise remain hidden; it examines the boundaries that guided heterosexual conduct, by asking what sorts of external intimacies married men and women thought of as betrayal, and what sorts of limits they put, or were expected to put, on their liaisons. In doing so, this thesis reconstructs a range of marital, social, familial and sexual conventions, and offers a cross-class analysis of the influence that expectations and codes of conduct could have on how controversial relationships were discussed, experienced, and represented.

The six decades covered by this thesis, circa 1780-1840, were characterised by gradual political, social, and cultural shifts, although certain decades, like the 1790s, witnessed more rapid changes. The French Revolution and subsequent wars that engulfed the main European powers for the following quarter of a century created a sense of political and social instability in Britain that influenced changes to, and conflicts between, the cultural discourses that individuals drew upon to understand their world and their place within it.¹² In addition to this, British society

¹² For example, see Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (2nd edn, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), introduction; Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

became more complex: increasing urbanisation meant that a high percentage of the population lived in close quarters with more opportunity for anonymity than those in rural communities. This combination of factors proliferated concerns about how morality could be policed. The Reformation of Manners movement, which had emerged in the late seventeenth century, experienced several, often short-lived, revivals in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. But in the majority of cases, the anxiety surrounding issues of sexual morality, and the threat that immorality was deemed to pose to prevailing ideas of British identity, was exhibited through print culture—a medium that exploded in the eighteenth century due to new technologies and increasing literacy rates.¹³ This had an impact on politics too: the aristocracy's position was challenged by an array of MPs, philosophers, pamphlet writers, novelists, and satirists, the majority of whom originated from the middling ranks of society. Aided by the growth of consumerism, the wealth and prosperity of this socially and professionally diverse group expanded, and influenced by some aspects of revolutionary ideology, they demanded a proportion of political power relevant to the contribution that they saw themselves making to the national interest; their demands would be steadily won in the nineteenth century.¹⁴

Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall's narrative of the emergence of the middle-class as a group who were identifiable by their religious values and unique domestic culture in the nineteenth century, has remained influential despite the

¹³ Faramerz Dabhoiwala, *The Origins of Sex: A History of the First Sexual Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), chapter 6.

¹⁴ For discussions see Margaret R. Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender, and the Family in England, 1680-1780* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Arthur Burns and Joanna Innes, 'Introduction', in Arthur Burns and Joanna Innes (eds), *Rethinking the Age of Reform: Britain 1780-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 1-70, (pp. 68-69).

criticisms it has received.¹⁵ In their account, domestic ideology was an extremely influential doctrine that shaped middle-class culture: based on Evangelical principles, it emphasised the exalted position of marriage and the family as the only foundation on which a strong and virtuous nation could be built. Thus, it prescribed very distinctive gendered roles for men and women and stressed the need for sexual continence. In restricting women's 'ideal' roles to those of wife and mother, domestic ideology set constraints on women's conduct, and, in theory, limited their access to the public sphere.¹⁶ Middle-class moralists expressed the opinion that women who did not conform to these principles, and who were publicly visible, like aristocratic wives and radical women, were deviant and corruptive. Yet, as Amanda Vickery and others have pointed out, forms of domestic ideology existed before the late eighteenth century, and the middle class did not hold a monopoly on it: other social groups shared many of its cultural values, and there was certainly no significant 'cultural chasm' between this emerging middle class and the landed gentry over this period.¹⁷ Davidoff and Hall's analysis is still useful-as Kathryn Gleadle points out, their thesis really emphasises not the novelty of domestic ideology, but its increasingly hegemonic position in nineteenth-century middle-class culture.¹⁸

¹⁵ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987); for reviews and criticisms see Kathryn Gleadle, 'Revisiting *Family Fortunes*: Reflections on the Twentieth Anniversary of the Publication of L. Davidoff & C. Hall (1987), *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (London: Hutchinson)', *Women's History Review*, 16:5 (2007), 773-782; Amanda Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History', *Historical Journal*, 36:2 (1993), 383-414.

¹⁶ Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, chapter three. Critics, including Gleadle, have pointed out that these ideals did not always reflect practice, and historians have since shown that middle-class women participated in the public sphere: Gleadle, 'Revisiting *Family Fortunes*', p. 777.

¹⁷ Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres?', p. 395.

¹⁸ Gleadle, 'Revisiting *Family Fortunes*', pp. 777-778.

As Gleadle cautions, the idea of ‘society’ as ‘a given monolithic entity’ is problematic: even those who could be categorised as belonging to the middling rank of society, due to socio-economic similarities, did not necessarily share the same beliefs and principles.¹⁹ Many of the literary societies examined in this thesis, such as the coteries surrounding Mary Wollstonecraft and the dissenting communities of the Unitarians and Freethinkers, argued for more drastic social and political reform, and to make marital and gender relationships more equal in order to ameliorate women’s lives.²⁰ Several of these societies experimented with different rules for heterosexual conduct, but, as we shall see, they were not untouched by the hegemonic norms of the class to which they belonged. Anna Clark describes the period covered by this thesis as a ‘twilight’ moment: one when the boundaries between regular and unconventional behaviour could be tested.²¹ This was certainly an era when older and newer notions of sexual mores coexisted, sometimes uncomfortably, but this coexistence provided individuals with a varied repertoire of conflicting discourses that they could draw upon in order to understand their own desires and relationships, as well as those of their associates.²² Perceptions of the sixty-year interval examined in this thesis vary depending on the scholar’s perspective: eighteenth-century historians often emphasise a decline in toleration during the

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 776.

²⁰ For examples, see Deidre Coleman, ‘Claire Clairmont and Mary Shelley: Identification and Rivalry within the “Tribe of the Otaheite Philosopher’s”’, *Women’s Writing*, 6:3 (1999), 309-328; Ginger Frost, *Living in Sin: Cohabiting as Husband and Wife in Nineteenth-Century England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), chapters 8 and 9; Kathryn Gleadle, *Early Feminists: Radical Unitarians and the Emergence of the Women’s Rights Movement, 1831-51* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995); Paul Stock, ‘The Shelleys and the idea of “Europe”’, *European Romantic Review*, 19:4 (2008), 335-349.

²¹ Anna Clark, *Desire: A History of European Sexuality* (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 140; Frost, *Living in Sin*, p. 5.

²² Anna Clark, *Alternative Histories of the Self: A Cultural History of Sexuality and Secrets, 1762-1917* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), p. 9.

1790s, whilst nineteenth-century historians suggest that although there was a change in discourse, in practice experiences did not undergo a great deal of dramatic changes.²³ Yet the circulation of these discourses undoubtedly led to more scrutiny and judgement on the private relationships and conduct of those in the public eye, which forms the rationale for the investigation of controversial relationships in this period.

This thesis contributes primarily to the historiography of marriage, however, it engages with a plurality of scholarships; it analyses political, social, and cultural transitions, thinks about issues of gender and class, and explores how people conducted their romantic, sexual, familial, and social relationships. Historians of sexual deviance have focused largely on what Davidoff terms ‘disruptive desires and behaviours’, such as prostitution, homosexuality and adultery, and as a result have neglected ‘the more hidden regions of normative heterosexual erotic relations and behaviours’.²⁴ That is not to say that this scholarship has not been useful; indeed, parallels can seemingly be drawn between behaviour and experiences in homosexual relationships and controversial heterosexual ones.²⁵ As Martin Bauml Duberman, Martha Vicinus and George Chauncey have argued, a homosexual’s experience of love was influenced by their ‘fear of exposure and experience of marginalisation’–

²³ For example, see Donna T. Andrew, ‘“Adultery à la mode”: Privilege, the law and attitudes to adultery 1770-1809’, *History*, 82:265 (1997), 5-23; Frost, *Living in Sin*; Jeanne M. Peterson, ‘No Angels in the House: The Victorian Myth and the Paget Women’, *American Historical Review*, 89:3 (1984), 677-708; Roy Porter, ‘Mixed Feelings: The Enlightenment and Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century Britain’, in Paul Boucé (ed.), *Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), pp. 1-27; Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self*.

²⁴ Davidoff, *Thicker than Water*, pp. 24-25.

²⁵ For discussions on the lives of homosexuals in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries see: Clark, *Alternative Histories of the Self*; Chris Mounsey and Caroline Gonda (eds), *Queer People: Negotiations and Expressions of Homosexuality, 1700-1800* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2007); Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus and George Chauncey, Jr (eds), *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past* (London: Penguin, 1991).

personal relationships were 'shaped by' and shaped 'the wider social and political milieux'.²⁶ Men and women whose relationships were deemed controversial also faced repression and hostility, and this similarly influenced how they conducted their intimacies.

Most of the scholarship on adultery draws heavily on print culture that portrayed cases that went to court.²⁷ The way that adultery was regulated underwent changes during the long eighteenth century: the use of the consistory courts for sexual transgressions, like fornication and adultery, declined and was replaced by new actions in the civil courts. This included 'criminal conversation', a suit that allowed a husband to sue his wife's lover for damages—although this was only available for those able to afford the expense. Focusing on representations of adultery, historians, including David Turner and Donna T. Andrew, have argued that social and cultural attitudes towards extra-marital relationships hardened over the course of the long eighteenth century.²⁸ By the end of the eighteenth century, the libertine culture of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, which had emphasised the naturalness and virtuous nature of sex (for the privileged few at least), had declined in popularity for the vast majority, and it was gradually replaced

²⁶ Duberman et al, 'Introduction', in *Hidden from History*, pp. 3-5, p. 13.

²⁷ For examples, see Andrew, "'Adultery à la Mode'"; John Brewer, *Sentimental Murder: Love and Madness in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Harper Perennial, 2005); Anna Clark, *Scandal: the Sexual Politics of the British Constitution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Elizabeth Fay, 'Mary Robinson: On Trial in the Public Court', *Studies in Romanticism*, 45:3 (2006), 397-423; Matthew Kinservik, *Sex, Scandal, and Celebrity in Late Eighteenth-Century England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Sarah Lloyd, 'Amour in the Shrubbery: Reading the Detail of English Adultery Trial Publications of the 1780s', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 39:4 (2006), 421-442; Cindy McCreery, 'Breaking all the Rules: The Worsley Affair in Late-Eighteenth-Century Britain', in Regina Hewitt and Pat Rogers (eds), *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Eighteenth-Century Society* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2002), pp. 69-88.

²⁸ Andrew, "'Adultery à la Mode'"; David Turner, *Fashioning Adultery: Gender, Sex, and Civility in England, 1660-1740* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

with a more constrained 'bourgeois Victorian sexuality' that firstly redefined the parameters of female sexuality, with changes to masculine ideals following later.²⁹ Katherine Binhammer argues that the 'panic' incited by the events of the French Revolution sped up this transition.³⁰

The roles that portrayals of illicit relationships played in agitating tensions between the middle and upper classes has received significant scholarly attention: Donna T. Andrew argues that the middling sorts identified adultery as one of four elite 'privileges' that should undermine aristocratic political power, and Clark suggests that in the early decades of the nineteenth century, elite sex scandals were used as a political weapon to challenge aristocratic rule.³¹ This was because ideas about sexual depravity were synonymous with images of social and national deterioration, with moralists often drawing comparisons between contemporary Britain and the fall of the Roman Empire to exemplify the dangers that a corrupt ruling class posed to its people.³² Whilst this had an effect on how the elite were perceived by those below them in the social order, it also influenced how the elite themselves responded to the sexual misconduct of their peers, as scholars including Hannah Greig, Judith S. Lewis, and Marilyn Morris have shown.³³ Aristocratic women's sexual behaviour was 'tightly policed', often by other women, who risked

²⁹ Katherine Binhammer, 'The Sex Panic of the 1790s', *History of Sexuality*, 6:3 (1996), 409-434, (p. 411).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 410.

³¹ For discussion see, Donna T. Andrew, *Aristocratic Vice: The Attacks on Duelling, Suicide, Adultery, and Gambling in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); Clark, *Scandal*, p. 3, p. 17.

³² Clark, *Scandal*, p. 10; Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800* (3rd edn, Harlow: Pearson Education, 2012), p. 27.

³³ Hannah Greig, *The Beau Monde: Fashionable Society in Georgian London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Judith S. Lewis, *Sacred to Female Patriotism: Gender, Class, and Politics in late Georgian Britain* (New York: Routledge, 2003), chapter 6; Marilyn Morris, *Sex, Money & Personal Character in Eighteenth-Century British Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

far more than aristocratic men from associating with disreputable ladies, as we will see in chapter two.³⁴ Lewis suggests that at the end of the eighteenth century there was a movement from elite women to reform their class from within, which led to their advocacy of evangelical principles and domesticity.³⁵ At times the existing scholarship, whilst making convincing arguments, oversimplifies the trajectory of changing attitudes to sexuality—a narrative that this thesis argues was neither very linear nor universal.

How adulterous relationships were experienced by the individuals who conducted them has received less attention, although this literature is increasing with the growth of the discipline of the history of emotions.³⁶ Joanne Begiato examines eighteenth-century court records to demystify some of the stereotypes of adultery. In doing so, she argues that the sexual double standard was more complex in practice than historians have acknowledged, because a husband's infidelity was not necessarily ignored nor tolerated by his wife, or by members of the couple's familial and social networks.³⁷ Begiato suggests that the court records imply that female adultery followed certain formulations: women were more likely to have affairs if there was a significant age difference between them and their husbands, and their paramours were more likely to be men of a lower social status.

³⁴ Greig, *Beau Monde*, p. 194.

³⁵ Lewis, *Sacred to Female Patriotism*, p. 189.

³⁶ Katie Barclay, 'Marginal Households and their Emotions: the 'Kept Mistress' in Enlightenment Edinburgh', in Susan Broomhall (ed.), *Spaces for Feeling: Emotions and Sociabilities in Britain, 1650–1850* (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 95–111; Katie Barclay, 'Illicit Intimacies: the Imagined 'Homes' of Gilbert Innes of Stow and his Mistresses (1751-1832)', *Gender & History*, 27:3 (2015), 576-590; Kate Gibson, "'I am not on the footing of Kept Women": Extra-Marital Love in Eighteenth-Century England', *Cultural and Social History* (2019), 1-19 <DOI: 10.1080/14780038.2019.1642064>; Sally Holloway, "'You know I am all on fire": writing the adulterous affair in England, c.1740-1830', *Historical Research*, 89:244 (2016), 317-339.

³⁷ Joanne Bailey [Begiato], *Unquiet Lives: Marriage and Marriage Breakdown in England, 1660-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 143-147.

Furthermore, she argues that the way that blame was assessed in these cases was 'remodelled and complicated by a variety of social and gender shifts': the treatment of cuckolded husbands became more sympathetic, male lovers were increasingly blamed for affairs, especially where they were believed to have seduced their friends' wives, and women went from being bold and unabashed when confronted about their indiscretions, to expressing shame and guilt.³⁸

Conversely, Kate Gibson argues that late eighteenth-century women were able to draw upon discourses of romantic love and enlightened ideas about individual happiness to construct positive images of their extra-marital relationships.³⁹ Using the correspondence of 'E.B', an unidentifiable mistress of Lord Tyrconnel, Gibson argues that women felt they were able to have naturally 'moral' relationships with men outside of marriage as long as they felt secure in the fact that their attachments were characterised by love and commitment; their experiences were not 'dominated by shame'.⁴⁰ Whilst her lover was a married man, 'E.B' was not a wife, and therefore she was not betraying religious vows, unlike Begiato's examples. In her analysis of adulterous love letters, Sally Holloway demonstrates that married mistresses often expressed shame and guilt for their affairs, and that they often had to deal with their lovers' jealousy of their husbands.⁴¹ Both men and women commonly used the framework of marriage to construct licit relationships in adulterous settings.⁴²

By examining exactly what people construed as infidelity and marital deviance, this thesis also explores contemporary expectations of marriage. Lawrence

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 162-166.

³⁹ Gibson, "I am not on the footing of Kept Women", pp. 2-3.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 5.

⁴¹ Holloway, "You know I am all on fire", p. 333.

⁴² Ibid., p. 318.

Stone's study of marriage and the family in eighteenth-century England sparked much debate between historians about what people expected from their marriages. Stone argued that marital relations were transformed in the eighteenth century, changing from emotionless mercenary matches into affectionate and loving attachments.⁴³ Ruth Perry suggests that Stone's narrative is 'misleading', while maintaining that it does hold some truth: in contemporary novels and certain social circles marriage was idealized as a romantic relationship.⁴⁴ Perry argues that this change was part of a fundamental shift in the character of the family as a whole, as the conjugal tie trumped the traditional bonds of consanguinity.⁴⁵ Holloway's recent study of romantic love suggests that the concept was revolutionised in the eighteenth century, when it was celebrated 'in philosophy, literature, and visual and material culture', which influenced people's aspirations and expectations of their marriages.⁴⁶

Helen Berry suggests that the cultural emphasis on romantic love stimulated a change to contemporary understandings of what constituted marriage, and led to

⁴³ Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (London: HarperCollins, 1977); For discussions debating Stone's narrative see David Lemmings, 'Marriage and the Law in the Eighteenth Century: Hardwicke's Marriage Act of 1753', *Historical Journal*, 39:2 (1996), 339-360; Eve Tavor Bannet, 'The Marriage Act of 1753: "A Most Cruel Law for the Fair Sex"', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 30:3 (1997), 233-254.

⁴⁴ Ruth Perry, *Novel Relations: the Transformations of Kinship in English Literature and Culture 1748-1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 192-193; G.J Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 336; Randolph Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution, Volume 1: Heterosexuality and the third Gender in Enlightenment London* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), p. 394; Ingrid Tague, 'Love, Honour, and Obedience: Fashionable Women and the Discourse of Marriage in the Early Eighteenth Century', *Journal of British Studies*, 40:1 (2001), 76-106, (pp. 80-81). Tague argues that although elite marriages were mercenary, some elite women still discussed their marriages using the affectionate terms employed by the writers of conduct literature, thus widening the potential audience influenced by this ideal.

⁴⁵ Perry, *Novel Relations*, pp. 195-196.

⁴⁶ Sally Holloway, *The Game of Love in Georgian England: Courtship, Emotions, and Material Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 168. For further discussions see, Perry, *Novel Relations*, pp. 192-193; Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility*; Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution*, p. 394; Tague, 'Love, Honour, and Obedience', pp. 80-81.

their interpretations being far broader than historians have hitherto considered.⁴⁷ Berry uses the marriage of the castrato Tenducci and Dorothea Maunsell, to demonstrate that marriage was not regulated exclusively by the State and Church. Instead, she shows that there was a willingness of the wider community to recognise different types of relationships as marital.⁴⁸ Ginger Frost also found discrepancies between legal conceptions of marriage and the types of relationship that communities were willing to accept as marital in her book on nineteenth-century cohabitation.⁴⁹ Chris Roulston argues that while these new ideas about love, marriage, and heterosexual relationships were being debated in contemporary culture, writers used fictional representations of *ménages-à-trois* to further test the boundaries of the married couple 'without duplicating the disruptive effects of adultery'.⁵⁰ The *ménage-à-trois* is an untypical marital and domestic structure that has been almost entirely ignored by historians of marriage and the family, despite the potential it has to elucidate the boundaries between spousal, erotic, and friendly relations.⁵¹ Roulston is the only scholar who has analysed it, and she restricts her investigation to literary representations of aristocratic and bourgeois married couples and female friends. Roulston argues that the intense affections that could exist between female friends had the potential to encroach on marital intimacy, but

⁴⁷ Helen Berry, 'Queering the History of Marriage: The Social Recognition of a Castrato Husband in Eighteenth-Century Britain', *History Workshop Journal*, 74:1 (2012), 27-50, (p. 31, p. 33, p. 45).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Frost, *Living in Sin*, p. 52.

⁵⁰ Chris Roulston, *Narrating Marriage in Eighteenth-Century England and France* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), p. 187.

⁵¹ The *OED* defines a *ménage-à-trois* as, 'A relationship or domestic arrangement in which three people (usually a husband and wife and the lover of one of these) live together or are romantically or sexually involved; (also) a sexual act involving three people'. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. 'Ménage à trois'.

were not often seen by husbands as a threat, and thus these *ménages* represented ‘both an act of transgression, and a domestication of that transgression’.⁵²

This thesis aims to bring together these different historiographical strands, and in doing so, to build a clearer picture of how contemporaries conceptualised and experienced marriage and infidelity, and all the other types of intimacies that existed on this spectrum. As Duberman, Vicinus and Chauncey have argued, a complex society, such as that which was developing in late eighteenth-century England, characteristically contains a ‘multiplicity of moral systems’; by delimiting its focus to the opinions and experiences of individuals from specific societies and social networks, rather than getting caught up in the plethora of sources and cases available, this thesis aims to understand how larger cultural narratives influenced microcosmic social and romantic relationships—and vice-versa.⁵³

This next section outlines the primary sources examined in this thesis and reflects on the methodologies used to interpret them. To comprehend the wider effects of controversial relationships on society—and the inverse—this thesis writes the history of controversial relationships from multiple perspectives. It uses a four-tiered model of investigation: the first examines the interactions of couples or trios who participated in controversial relationships; the second looks at the perspectives of members of the couple’s social networks and the many influences that shaped their standpoints; the third analyses how a couple’s family and kinship networks responded to their controversial relationship; and the fourth goes full circle and explores the effects of being controversial on individual women.

⁵² Chris Roulston, ‘The Eighteenth-Century *Ménage-à-Trois*: Having it both ways?’, *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 27:2 (2004), 257-277, (pp. 258-259).

⁵³ Duberman, Vicinus and Chauncey, *Hidden from History*, p. 11.

Letters dominate the wide range of primary sources that are consulted in this thesis. Writing and reading letters was an everyday task for many people over this period: amongst the middling sorts literacy rates were improving, and the postal system became more efficient-some of the correspondences examined in this thesis were international.⁵⁴ It is important to acknowledge that what an individual wrote in a letter was not necessarily representative of what they thought, and thus letters do not offer the historian access to fully authentic experiences. Henry French and Mark Rothery argue that individuals wrote letters to construct a specific image of themselves as they wished their correspondent to see them.⁵⁵ Clare Brant similarly suggests that letter writing enabled the writer to ‘imagine themselves into different personae’, and they could manipulate the facts to present their lives as they chose.⁵⁶ However, as individuals likely wrote what they thought they *should* say in response to controversial relationships, this enables me to ascertain what types of behaviour were deemed to be inappropriate according to the collective sexual and marital mores of each strata of society. Based on the types of topics they discussed, letters also offer historians an insight into the relationship between the correspondents, and how they expressed and mediated emotions.⁵⁷

This thesis analyses letters between an array of correspondents: including parents and their offspring, siblings, and friends, but mostly it looks at letters between lovers and/or spouses. As several scholars, including Brant, Holloway, and

⁵⁴ For discussions of eighteenth-century letter writing and postal services see, Susan Whyman, *The Pen and the People: English Letter Writers, 1660-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); and Clare Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

⁵⁵ Henry French and Mark Rothery (eds), *Making Men: The Formation of Elite Male Identities in England, c.1660-1900: A Sourcebook* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 13.

⁵⁶ Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters*, p. 26.

⁵⁷ Henry French and Mark Rothery, ‘Male anxiety among younger sons of the English Landed Gentry’, *Historical Journal*, 62:4 (2019), 967-995, (p. 977).

Martyn Lyons have argued, the love letter was a distinctive subcategory within the correspondence genre.⁵⁸ Holloway and Lyons have examined how love letters were used by courting couples to cultivate their new and often fragile relationships: Holloway argues that letters functioned as spaces where correspondents could create intimacy through expressions of love and affection, overcoming physical distances and long periods of time spent apart.⁵⁹ Whilst we might today assume that letters between couples were private, Holloway and Lyons both explain that courtship letters were anything but, and were often read aloud by the recipient to their family members, although as Lyons's case study demonstrates, private information could still be communicated by slotting secret scraps of paper into longer missives.⁶⁰ Due to their unique features, Holloway argues that adulterous epistles formed their own distinctive genre. Unlike other forms of love letter they were never intended for a wide audience; they were 'characterised by secrecy' and included practices such as the use of secret names, cryptic codes, carefully chosen messengers, disrupted correspondences and letter burning.⁶¹ Brant, Lyons, and Holloway all concur that the material culture of letters is important to understand the role they played in relationships between lovers: they represented 'a fetish object, reread, kissed, and/or carried on one's person', cultivating intimacy through their very materiality.⁶²

⁵⁸ Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters*, chapter 3; Sally Holloway, 'Romantic Love in Words and Objects during Courtship and Adultery c. 1730 to 1830' (PhD thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2013), p. 42; Martyn Lyons, 'Love Letters and Writing Practices: On *Écritures Intimes* in the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of Family History*, 24:2 (1999), 232-239.

⁵⁹ Holloway, 'Romantic Love in Words and Objects', p.90.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 27, pp. 99-101; Lyons, 'Love Letters and Writing Practices', p. 234, p. 236.

⁶¹ Holloway, "'You know I am all on fire'", p. 338.

⁶² Lyons, 'Love Letters and Writing Practices', p. 237; Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters*, p. 124; Holloway, *The Game of Love*, p. 65.

Katie Barclay and Sally Holloway have both drawn upon methodologies from the history of emotions to show that men and women used emotional expression in letters to ‘test, challenge and negotiate’ a range of intimate relationships.⁶³ Examining the correspondence between a Scottish elite married couple, the Grants, Barclay argues that both husband and wife used their missives to ‘influence the other and affect that balance of power within their relationship’; their letters were a medium through which domestic authority was constantly negotiated and experienced.⁶⁴ When it came to ‘illicit’ relationships, couples similarly used letters to identify and negotiate their roles and obligations to one another. In her article on kept mistresses, Barclay demonstrates that mistresses used domestic language and imagery in their letters to cultivate love and care from their partners, particularly at times when they felt their position was precarious.⁶⁵ Similarly, Holloway has recently argued that adulterous couples used love letters to strategically express certain emotions, like love and jealousy, giving the men and women involved the opportunity to challenge each other’s commitment and the limits of their liaisons.⁶⁶ Monique Scheer’s work on emotional practices has been extremely influential. Scheer argues that emotions are something we ‘do’ to engage with the world around us on several levels: the use of emotions stimulates both bodily and psychological activity in the individual practicing them and in the one with whom they are interacting.⁶⁷ Trying to

⁶³ Holloway, ‘Romantic Love in Words and Objects’, p. 44; Katie Barclay, ‘Negotiating Patriarchy: The Marriage of Anna Potts and Sir Archibald Grant of Monymusk, 1731-1744’, *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, 28:2 (2008), 83-101, (p. 84).

⁶⁴ Barclay, ‘Negotiating Patriarchy’, p. 86.

⁶⁵ Barclay, ‘Illicit Intimacies’, p. 586.

⁶⁶ Holloway, “‘You know I am all on fire’”, p. 338.

⁶⁷ Monique Scheer, ‘Are emotions a kind of practice (and is that what makes them have a history)? A Bourdieuan approach to understanding emotion’, *History and Theory*, 51:2 (2012), 193-220, (p. 194, pp. 212-215).

understand the complex dynamics of sexual or romantic relationships is difficult from a historical distance, but by analysing the emotions in a couple's dialogues, and the impact of these emotions, we can begin to assess how individuals communicated with one another and the sorts of tensions that existed in their relationship. This provides us with valuable insights with which we can try to construct a clearer picture of how controversial relationships were conducted.

I also look at correspondence between friends and relatives to analyse their gossip about a third party who was excluded from their epistolary exchange. Gossip is an underused source, but anthropologists, like Max Gluckman and Sally Engle Merry, have argued that it performs important social functions.⁶⁸ Gluckman suggests there is a distinction to be made between whether people were gossiping about celebrities or their mutual acquaintances. If the latter, gossip can perform a range of roles: it maintains unity by confirming the group's (otherwise) unwritten moral values and codes of conduct; it enables its members to deliberate the rules together when faced with an 'ambiguous' situation; and lastly, it can be used as an informal method of control, disciplining transgressors and deterring others from acting in similar ways.⁶⁹ In a chapter where she examines depictions of Lady Craven's conduct in society letters, newspapers and satirical prints, Katrina O'Loughlin demonstrates that gossip is also a useful source to investigate the 'shared emotional vocabularies' of a group: by examining the sentiments individuals attached to certain types of

⁶⁸ Max Gluckman, 'Gossip and Scandal', *Current Anthropology*, 4:3 (1963), 307-316, (p. 307); Sally Engle Merry, 'Rethinking Gossip and Scandal', in Donald Black (ed.), *Toward a General Theory of Social Control, Vol. 1 Fundamentals* (London: Academic Press INC. LTD, 1984), pp. 271-296.

⁶⁹ Gluckman, 'Gossip and Scandal', p. 308, p. 313; Engle Merry, 'Rethinking Gossip and Scandal', p. 271, p. 278.

behaviour we can assess their attitudes.⁷⁰ Moreover, Gluckman argues that the role and function of gossip varies according to a group's past and its position in 'larger society', an idea that I think is very applicable to the different groups I examine.⁷¹ As I will demonstrate in chapters two and three, the Whig world and literary societies were both under pressure from a larger conception of society, in different ways, and this fundamentally influenced levels of tolerance and sympathy for controversial couples in their networks.

There are practical limitations to using letters as sources: often only one side of the communication has survived, and in certain cases, letters containing material which the family saw as compromising are omitted from collections.⁷² I have examined collections of letters from the Bodleian and British libraries, alongside privately owned collections like those held at Castle Howard and Chatsworth House estates, and the John Soane Museum. Where possible, manuscripts have been prioritised over published materials, which were often subjected to censorship by their editors, who were often descendants of the authors. The British Library's very recent acquisition of the Granville papers, which includes a significant collection of letters written by Harriet Ponsonby, Countess Bessborough, to her lover, Granville Leveson Gower, over the course of their fifteen-year-long affair, has revealed quite how censorious that editing process could be. Two volumes of the correspondence were published in 1916, edited by Leveson Gower's daughter-in-law, Castalia, Countess Granville; in them, the nature of the relationship between Countess

⁷⁰ Katrina O'Loughlin, "'Strolling Roxanas": Sexual Transgressions and Social Satire in the Eighteenth Century', in Susan Broomhall (ed), *Spaces for Feeling: Emotions and Sociabilities in Britain, 1650-1850* (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 112-135, (p. 132).

⁷¹ Gluckman, 'Gossip and Scandal', p. 312.

⁷² French and Rothery, *Making Men*, p. 2.

Bessborough and Leveson Gower is quite ambiguous; in the manuscripts, however, their passionate love for one another is very clearly expressed, and, furthermore, the secret births of their three children, including one who was stillborn and buried in the garden by Bessborough's maid, and the practicalities of these children's upbringings are quite openly discussed.⁷³ In some cases, reliance on published correspondence was unavoidable due to issues of translation, such as Princess Lieven's letters to Prince Metternich, or for issues of access, such as Percy Bysshe Shelley's manuscripts.

This thesis also examines a variety of cultural ephemera that was mostly available to contemporaries in the public domain, including newspapers, pamphlets, literary journals, novels, and satirical images. Some of these are accessible in the British Library, but largely I have relied on online databases, such as *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online*, and *19th Century British Newspapers*. Many historians attempting to gauge changes in 'public' attitudes towards sexuality have used similar primary sources quite unproblematically. These same scholars, however, are often not discerning enough about the authors and intended audiences of the cultural tracts they use.⁷⁴ This is because they are not always evident, but I have tried to remedy this by being as specific as the evidence allows. As O'Loughlin has shown, printed forms of gossip often overlapped with oral and epistolary gossip networks,

⁷³ The couple's two living children, Harriet (1800-1852) and George (b.1802) are known of, but this first birth and loss I do not think has come to light before this collection of manuscripts was discovered. The collection at the British Library consists of 35 files containing several hundred letters written by the Countess to Leveson Gower between c.1796-1821. Included with the manuscripts are transcriptions made by Castalia Leveson-Gower, Countess Granville (1847-1938), who prepared the published editions of Countess Bessborough's correspondence. The vast majority are marked 'omit', as she deemed them unsuitable for publication.

⁷⁴ McCreery, 'Breaking all the Rules'.

somewhat muddying any simple categorisation of what was private and what was public according to genre or source type.⁷⁵

I have principally studied how controversial relationships were portrayed in the London press, including the daily and weekly newspapers, like the *Morning Post*, *Morning Chronicle*, and the *John Bull*. The London daily newspapers would benefit from further scholarly investigation. Wilfred Hindle's *The Morning Post* (1937), and Lucyle Werkmeister's, *The London Daily Press* (1963), have been useful and suggest that the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century was a time when the profession of journalism was transforming rapidly: whilst at the beginning of this period the 'journalists' of the London dailies were merely collating material sent in by contributors—many of whom remain unidentified or were at the time anonymous—by the end they were actively researching and writing their own essays and articles.⁷⁶ This thesis draws heavily on the *Morning Post's* gossip column, 'The Fashionable World', a feature that has hitherto not received significant historiographical attention, despite the insight it offers into the interaction between the fashionable elite and the press: having examined the portrayals of relationships in the column, fictional representations of contributors, and the reactions of those implicated by them, I argue that these paragraphs (at least in the first half of the period covered by this thesis) were *not* part of a moral attack on the aristocracy by a disenchanted middling sort, but were actually personal attacks, often motivated by enmity, and

⁷⁵ O'Loughlin, "Strolling Roxanas", p. 116, p. 132.

⁷⁶ Wilfred Hindle, *The Morning Post 1772-1937, Portrait of a Newspaper* (London: Routledge & Sons, 1937); Lucyle Werkmeister, *The London Daily Press, 1772-1792* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1963); For instance, Mary Robinson was a well-known contributor to the *Morning Post* in the 1790s, but the identities of most of their contributors remains murky. Bob Clarke, *From Grub Street to Fleet Street: An Illustrated History of the English Newspaper to 1899* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p. 255.

intended to humiliate the individuals they implicated in front of a delimited audience of their peers. In this way, they are similar to some of the satirical prints by artists like James Gillray and Isaac Cruikshank, which are also analysed in chapter two.

The thesis also examines commentary on controversial relationships in review periodicals, such as *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* and the *Analytical Review*. The audiences and contributors for these have been analysed more thoroughly by scholars, who have demonstrated how their attacks on the private lives of those in the public sphere epitomised their political allegiances and editorial rivalries.⁷⁷ I have also examined several contemporary novels, such as T. Surr's *A Winter in London* (1806) and Lady Caroline Lamb's *Glenarvon* (1816), and consider their plots and characters alongside real examples; although literary representations are 'symbolic' and often stereotypical, Ruth Perry argues that their use outweighs that of quantitative data, or legal records, when the scholar aims to get a sense of the sentiments and 'psychology of another period'.⁷⁸ The plotlines that authors chose to represent reflect the debates and 'obsessions' faced by contemporary society.⁷⁹ By combining such a wide range of contemporary sources this thesis emphasises the many lenses through which controversial relationships were constructed and portrayed for different audiences and purposes, and demonstrates the permeation between cultural scripts and more private discourses and experiences.

⁷⁷ Gregory Dart, *Metropolitan Art and Literature, 1810-1840: Cockney Adventures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), chapter two; Kim Wheatley, 'The Blackwood's Attacks on Leigh Hunt', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 47:1 (1992), 1-31.

⁷⁸ Perry, *Novel Relations*, p. 8.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

The chapters are structured following the multi-perspective lens: Chapter one focuses on the internal dynamics of the controversial relationships themselves. It uses correspondence to examine the kinds of obstacles and problems that couples perceived themselves to face, and how they negotiated them in order to create and sustain long-term intimacies against the odds. It draws cross-class comparisons between how such relationships usually began and the emotional practices and strategies that couples employed to protect and preserve themselves and their relationships when they identified them, or acknowledged that others would classify them, as controversial. It argues that the social reception of controversial relationships (or even anticipated receptions) fundamentally influenced how interactions between the couples were conducted and experienced.

Chapters two and three examine how Whig and literary societies reacted to the scandalous *ménages* of their members. They do this primarily by examining gossip, in oral, manuscript and printed forms, and considering the role that such discussions played in these societies. Both chapters explore the language and emotions used to discuss and represent the relationships, and how these depictions engaged with cultural discourses like sensibility, politeness, satire, and domesticity. They emphasise the differences between how both groups thought about marriage and the boundaries that each felt had to be crossed before a relationship could be considered controversial. At times it has been very difficult to determine whether social condemnation was driven by a concern for religious precepts of morality or a more secular ethical framework: the sense we get from what people wrote is that they did not clearly distinguish these two dimensions and tended to see them as mutually reinforcing and interconnected, rather than as clearly separate sets of

considerations. Both chapters also consider how the double standard worked in theory and in practice, and the problematic position that women held in these societies. I argue that the press was a tool that was used by members of both groups, albeit in slightly different ways, to expose the conduct of their personal and/or professional adversaries, often manipulating cultural narratives to exercise personal enmities. By interrogating representations of these sorts of relationships we can also view the development of a popular press.

I argue in both chapters that personal bonds of friendship and enmity influenced how individuals responded to the controversial relationships of their associates, and these bonds were further complicated by issues of status, hierarchy, gender, personal interest, and obligation. By examining the discourses and forms that social reactions took, both chapters illuminate the intricate and divergent sets of mores that influenced how social relationships were conducted in both groups. Moreover, they reveal that whilst these societies perhaps often appear to the historian to have been insular, they were in fact significantly shaped and affected by the larger societies to which they belonged.

Chapter four looks at how eight families, in which parents, siblings, and other kin are included, reacted to a relative's unconventional attachment. It demonstrates that the family had two main concerns that influenced its response: the damage it anticipated the relationship would have on its collective reputation, which was dependent on the conduct of all of its members, and the impact it felt that the relationship had on its complex internal dynamics. It examines the range of actions that different family members took to try to contain or put an end to controversial relationships, and argues that whilst specific meanings and concerns differed for

groups from different ranks of society, the Georgian family had certain innate characteristics which can be seen by the discourses they used to express themselves, and the practices they employed to try to manage a situation they felt needed rectifying.

Chapter five narrows the analytical focus to women and examines how (or whether) they tried to justify their relationships when they did not fit with contemporary expectations. By dividing the examples into three groups the chapter investigates how women portrayed their relationships to different audiences and how they internalised, or in some cases, rejected, the norms and codes of conduct of their different societies. It examines the roles and duties that women felt they owed to their husbands and families, the limits and expectations they set on their lovers, and the ethical frameworks they drew upon to create positive self-identities, which many managed despite acknowledging that others would disapprove, or even be repulsed by their behaviour.

This thesis concludes by emphasising the significant impact that being in a controversial relationship could have on an individual's life: for many men and women, it influenced their romantic, domestic, kin, and social relationships-to varying degrees. It considers the role that the individual and interpersonal relationships played in the creation of a macrocosmic cultural world, and argues that studying controversial relationships offers unique insights into how smaller societies functioned, and how their position within a larger society shaped their social and sexual conventions. This thesis shows that both marital and controversial relationships sit at a series of intersections between intellectual, social, cultural, and political history. Private lives mattered, both to those directly involved, and within

the social worlds of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. These lives were rooted in political and public realms, and in communities for which they posed a series of challenges. This was a period where these communities were experiencing new pressures and anxieties arising from urbanisation, the extension of the public sphere, and the challenge to the aristocratic dominance of the political order posed by the expanding middle classes. As such, this thesis offers a lens onto late Georgian society that explores its shifting networks of power and influence through the controversial relationships that developed.

Chapter 1: Maintaining Love and Intimacy Under Pressure: Emotions and Practices in Controversial Relationships

In May 1798, Countess Bessborough wrote a letter to her lover, Granville Leveson Gower, reflecting on events that had taken place earlier that day. Leveson Gower had arrived at Bessborough's London house in the morning, expecting to be received by her, but found the Countess about to leave on a social visit, accompanied by her friends, Lady Elizabeth Monck and Lady Anne Hatton. Unable to change her plans the Countess arranged to see him that evening, however, Leveson Gower felt snubbed and reacted 'harshly':

What are the mighty offences I have committed?... Do you think it was a bel regallo for me to... listen to long stories from Ld. Sudley and rhodomontades from Mr. Gore? Especially when I might have been with you... I return'd home as I told you I should, and waited for you till near five... when you came in – which I had almost despair'd of – I gave way to the pleasure of seeing you... You soon, it is true, damp'd my good humour, but still I endeavour'd to laugh you out of your grave looks, and especially to prevent John or my sister thinking them odd – mais en vain [sic].¹

Countess Bessborough's letter encapsulates some of the difficulties faced by couples who conducted controversial relationships, as well as hinting at some of the practices they employed to try to overcome them. Arranging to spend time alone together was

¹ British Library (hereafter BL), Add MS 89382/2/8, fols. 83-84, Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, [May 1798].

a logistical nightmare, but in the company of others they were conscious of the need to not raise suspicions by their conduct. Therefore, they often had to mask feelings that could not be made public. The fear of being discovered was ever-present. Those involved in 'illicit' relationships often reflected on how uncertain and fragile their connections were and stated how unsettled the unpredictability of their paramour's actions made them feel. The emotions that they expressed to each other shifted between extreme joy and extreme pain, and epitomised the emotional highs and lows experienced by those conducting relationships that were deemed inappropriate according to their rank's social and sexual mores. As was the case for Leveson Gower, individuals were often dissatisfied with the limits of their relationships and engaged in manipulative and disruptive behaviours to try to gain power over their love interest. Furthermore, as exemplified by the extract above, letters played a crucial role in such liaisons by functioning as spaces in which individuals could reflect upon and negotiate these relationships-as opportunities for private face-to-face interactions were often scarce.

This chapter examines correspondence and diaries to analyse the internal dynamics of eight controversial relationships, all of which involved long-term attachments between individuals who expressed romantic sentiments and ties of duty and obligation to each other. Significantly, many of the cases involved men and women who had a public persona that they had to manage, which must be taken into consideration given the intense scrutiny of the private lives of public figures across this period. The first section of this chapter assesses recent scholarship on unconventional relationships and then examines the circumstances under which the relationships explored in this thesis typically developed. It investigates what

motivated individuals to form them given the consequences they faced if their conduct was exposed. In the second section, I analyse the concerns and challenges that frequently arose in these relationships, and the practices that individuals employed to navigate them. I examine the roles that emotions, language and letters played in controversial relationships, and how individuals used them strategically to foster intimacy in less conventional circumstances. Throughout, this chapter explores themes of love and jealousy, truth and secrecy, conflict and anxiety, and expectation and obligation, whilst seeking to understand how individuals constructed their *ménages*; negotiated with one another when faced with obstacles; and how they tried to present their relationships to the outside world (and of *whom* that world comprised).

This chapter reveals that those in relationships that were perceived to involve a range of 'deviant' sexual and romantic behaviours faced very similar issues and adopted similar strategies to navigate them. This demonstrates the significant role that the act of identifying their relationship as being controversial had on shaping a couple's intimacy. I argue that the pressures that these relationships were put under created very unstable and emotionally intense unions. These pressures were generated both from external sources, which included bad publicity, social ostracism, or disapproving relatives, and from their internal dynamics, which were often fraught with vulnerabilities, both psychological and physical, and complex issues of gender and dependence. By examining their letters, I explore their romantic self-constructions and methods of manipulation. Societal conventions effectively constrained (to an extent) and problematised private behaviour; however, individuals still found methods to pursue their needs and desires.

Scholarship analysing adultery and other types of relationships that were deemed 'deviant' by contemporary society has focused largely on the print culture generated by cases that went to court.² Thus, much has been written about changing social and cultural attitudes to such relationships. How they were experienced by the individuals who conducted them has received less attention, although this literature has increased recently in response to the rise of the history of emotions.³ In her book about sibling relationships, Leonore Davidoff suggests that by moving away from the 'disruptive' accounts of criminal conversation and divorce trials, it is possible to begin to chart 'the more hidden regions of normative heterosexual erotic relations and behaviours'.⁴ It is these grey areas that this chapter seeks to address, and therefore it will examine sexual liaisons alongside others where consummation is not ascertainable, embracing Davidoff's argument that sexual relationships should not

² For examples see: Donna T Andrew, "'Adultery à la Mode': Privilege, the law and attitudes to adultery 1770-1809', *History*, 82:265 (1997), 5–23; John Brewer, *Sentimental Murder: Love and Madness in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Harper Perennial, 2005); Anna Clark, *Scandal: the Sexual Politics of the British Constitution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Elizabeth Fay, 'Mary Robinson: On Trial in the Public Court', *Studies in Romanticism*, 45:3 (2006), 397-423; Matthew Kinservik, *Sex, Scandal, and Celebrity in Late Eighteenth-Century England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Sarah Lloyd, 'Amour in the Shrubbery: Reading the Detail of English Adultery Trial Publications of the 1780s', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 39:4 (2006), 421-442; Cindy McCreery, 'Breaking all the Rules: The Worsley Affair in Late-Eighteenth-Century Britain', in Regina Hewitt and Pat Rogers (eds), *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Eighteenth-Century Society* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2002), pp. 69-88.

³ Katie Barclay, 'Marginal Households and their Emotions: the 'Kept Mistress' in Enlightenment Edinburgh', in Susan Broomhall (ed.), *Spaces for Feeling: Emotions and Sociabilities in Britain, 1650–1850* (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 95–111; Katie Barclay, 'Illicit Intimacies: the Imagined 'Homes' of Gilbert Innes of Stow and his Mistresses (1751-1832)', *Gender & History*, 27:3 (2015), 576-590; Sally Holloway, "'You know I am all on fire": writing the adulterous affair in England, c.1740-1830', *Historical Research*, 89:244 (2016), 317-339.

⁴ Leonore Davidoff, *Thicker than Water: Siblings and their Relations, 1780-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 24-25.

be studied in isolation from 'other emotional attachments' which could equally 'embrace erotic fantasy and sexual desire'.⁵

Historians who have examined emotions in 'illicit' relationships have focused on kept mistresses and sexual adultery. Sally Holloway has examined adulterous love letters and argues that they represented their own genre. Unlike courtship letters which were often read communally, adulterous missives were 'characterised by secrecy': practices included secret names, cryptic codes, and disrupted correspondences and letter burning.⁶ In her analysis of the relationships being performed through letters, Holloway draws similar conclusions to Katie Barclay's work on kept mistresses: that in many ways, power relations in adulterous relationships replicated those in marital ones.⁷ Mistresses were often economically dependent on their male lovers and used languages of love, duty and obligation to remind them of this, whilst men asserted their power over women and their bodies through declarations of jealousy and sexual desire, and by providing financially for their illegitimate families.⁸ Both men and women used the framework of marriage to construct licit relationships in adulterous settings.⁹ Mistresses were aware of their vulnerability as dependents on 'unregulated male power', and used emotional language to rejuvenate their lovers' affections for them when they felt they were waning.¹⁰ Both Holloway and Barclay emphasise the risks that women faced for conducting such relationships, and their vulnerability compared to their male

⁵ Ibid., p. 25.

⁶ Holloway, "You know I am all on fire", p. 338.

⁷ Ibid.; Barclay, 'Illicit Intimacies', p. 578.

⁸ Barclay, 'Illicit Intimacies', pp. 585-586; Holloway, "You know I am all on fire", p. 333.

⁹ Holloway, "You know I am all on fire", p. 318.

¹⁰ Barclay, 'Illicit Intimacies', pp. 583-586.

counterparts—a reality that cannot be overstated—however, by doing so, they do not fully consider the agency that women could potentially wield in these relationships. This chapter will demonstrate that mistresses—or women who were not wives—were not necessarily bound by the same rules as those in conventional marital relationships.

Both Holloway and Barclay take their methodological approach from the history of emotions. They examine the emotions that their subjects expressed and consider how these expressions were used to negotiate interpersonal relations. Barclay argues that the mistresses of Gilbert Innes of Stow tried to cultivate his affection both by using emotive language and by embracing duties that would have usually been the domain of a wife. These actions were often successful in reminding Gilbert of his obligations and affection, thus Barclay suggests that ‘emotions [were] generated through action’.¹¹ This chapter will take a similar methodological approach by considering how individuals expressed and employed emotions in order to elicit actions from others. Monique Scheer suggests that emotions should be understood not simply as feelings, but as practices that we ‘do’ to communicate and engage with those around us.¹² Scheer suggests that individuals knew which emotional practices to deploy in a variety of different situations ‘according to the patterns that their communities required’, and, furthermore, that the connection between conduct literature and behaviour has been over-emphasised.¹³ Linda Pollock takes a similar approach in her article on the role that anger played in early-

¹¹ Ibid., p. 586.

¹² Monique Scheer, ‘Are emotions a kind of practice (and is that what makes them have a history)? A Bourdieuan approach to understanding emotion’, *History and Theory*, 51:2 (2012), 193-220, (p. 194).

¹³ Ibid., p. 202.

modern relationships, as she argues that cultural scripts were malleable, and that emotions are 'embedded in a social and cultural world' stimulated by the specific social context of the situation. Pollock emphasises the 'social utility' of emotional performances, and argues that examining emotions (like anger) allows historians to 'explore... the dynamics of emotional engagement'.¹⁴ She describes a cycle whereby an individual's emotions were 'shaped', 'provoked', 'silenced' and 'moderated' by the actions of others, but also provoked others to engage in emotional strategies of their own.¹⁵ Pollock also convincingly argues that it is more useful to think of 'emotional systems'—how certain emotions worked together in specific situations—in order to be 'more conversant with the dynamic exercise of, interaction of, and communicative import of feelings'.¹⁶ I will adopt this approach in this chapter by establishing the emotional practices that individuals employed to construct their relationships and negotiate their roles and positions within them.

The relationships that are examined in this chapter developed under a variety of different circumstances and social settings. That said, certain stages in the formation of the liaisons are comparable and highlight the key roles that sociability and proximity played in engineering intimate relationships. While controversial romantic relationships in novels often developed after chance isolated meetings, as for example in Mary Hays's *Memoirs of Emma Courtenay* (1796), Lady Caroline Lamb's *Glenarvon* (1816), and Benjamin Disraeli's *Henrietta Temple* (1837), real couples mainly encountered one another at social gatherings. They met either

¹⁴ Linda Pollock, 'Anger and the negotiation of relationships in early modern England', *Historical Journal*, 47:3 (2004), 567-590, (p. 573, p. 590).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 590.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

because they were introduced by mutual friends or they were frequenting the same spaces or events. This was the case in Naples, where ‘gambling and gallantry filled up the evenings and mornings’ for a small group of expatriates in 1794.¹⁷ Over that summer John Parker, Lord Boringdon, began an affair with a married Irish woman, Lady Elizabeth Monck, that would endure for over a decade and produced three illegitimate sons.¹⁸ The couple’s mutual friends, Countess Bessborough and Granville Leveson Gower, also began a flirtation that would simmer before becoming a full-blown affair in 1796.¹⁹ In 1782, Lady Elizabeth Foster met and befriended the Duchess of Devonshire after being introduced to the latter’s social circle by a mutual friend in Bath, which ultimately led to her introduction to the Duke of Devonshire with whom she would have a relationship that ended in marriage after the first Duchess died in 1806.²⁰

The role of sociability in creating opportunity for ‘illicit’ connections to form can equally be found in relationships of individuals from lower status groups. In 1823, Thomas Jefferson Hogg was introduced to Jane Williams by a letter of recommendation from their mutual friend Mary Shelley.²¹ Hogg and Williams cohabited and had two children who were ignored by his family due to their illegitimate status. It appears that women often—perhaps unwittingly—performed

¹⁷ BL, Holland House Papers, Lady Holland’s Journals, Add MS 51927, June 1791 – 6th July 1797, fol. 131.

¹⁸ Details of this relationship have been recorded in a pamphlet published by descendants of the couple’s illegitimate children: Henry Stapleton, *Heirs without title: A History of the 1st Earl of Morley & his natural children* (York: Skelton Rectory, 1974).

¹⁹ These two were not the only affairs that began in this Neapolitan circle in 1794: Lady Elizabeth Webster started a relationship with Lord Holland, which would lead to her husband divorcing her and her marrying Holland in 1797, and Lady Elizabeth Monck’s sister, Lady Anne Hatton began a liaison with Viscount Morpeth.

²⁰ Amanda Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire* (London: HarperCollins, 1998), p.98.

²¹ Bod., Abinger MS, c.46, fols. 40-41, Jane Williams to Mary Shelley, 12 Feb [1823].

these introductions, as it was the painter Sir Thomas Lawrence's friend, Miss Croft, who introduced him to Mrs Isabella Wolff, wife of the Danish Consul, with whom he would maintain a three-decade long intimacy until both of their deaths within a year of each other in 1829 and 1830. As Lawrence Klein has argued, the Enlightenment Cult of Politeness idealised heterosocial interactions and permitted 'sophisticated flirtation', but these relations were regulated and policed according to each social rank's practices of sociability.²² Problems arose when too much intimacy or familiarity between a man and a woman raised their associates' suspicions that their relationship had transgressed the rules of propriety.²³ Most of these relationships began as friendships, and while a few may have remained essentially platonic, many were driven either by mutual attraction or other motives to consummate their liaisons.

A couple's proximity to each other also played a significant role in fostering 'illicit' intimacies. Contemporary social conventions in both elite and middling status groups meant that it was considered normal for women—both friends and family members—to live with a married couple for periods of varying length. In the first couple of months no one thought it was controversial for Lady Elizabeth Foster to join the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire at Chatsworth House.²⁴ Amongst those of a lower social status it was common for unmarried women to live with their married sisters, to assist them with their domestic work and childcare. Most historians who

²² Lawrence Klein, 'Kissing for Virtuosi: William Stukeley's Philosophy of Pleasure (1757)', *English Historical Review*, 131:549 (2016), 324-352, (p. 327); Soile Ylivuori, *Women and Politeness in Eighteenth-Century England: Bodies, Identities, and Power* (New York: Routledge, 2019), pp. 149-153.

²³ Joanne Bailey [Begiato], *Unquiet Lives: Marriage and Marriage Breakdown in England, 1660-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 142.

²⁴ When it became an issue for others, the Devonshires sent Foster to the continent briefly to act as a governess to Duke's illegitimate daughter, Charlotte Williams.

examine the household structure of the married couple and the unmarried sister consider it through the lens of the latter's experiences, and analyse how these women identified themselves and their roles in their sibling's household, highlighting their vulnerability as economic dependents of men over whom they had no formal claims.²⁵ Amy Froide surmises that single women's lives were female-centred, and whilst their relationships with their brothers were mostly characterised by material assistance, their ties with their sisters were characterised by companionship and emotional support.²⁶ In contrast, Davidoff suggests that a resident unmarried sibling had the potential to be 'demanding', 'an irritant, plying manipulative strategies among other family members', and 'divided loyalties'.²⁷ Davidoff also suggests that relations between a man and his resident sister-in-law had the potential to become erotic: his wife and the mother of his children, 'the hausfrau', was unfavourably compared to her 'exotic' younger sister, who was 'stimulating sexually and possibly also socially and intellectually'.²⁸ Intriguingly, Davidoff suggests that these themes were echoes of 'the situation of wife and mistress'.²⁹

Davidoff's analysis captures nicely the relationships that Percy Bysshe Shelley and Leigh Hunt had with their respective sisters-in-law, Claire Clairmont and Elizabeth Kent. Both sisters lived with their married siblings intermittently in the 1810s and 20s. Their residencies were often interrupted by conflict with their sisters, which the male head of the household was left to mediate. In her journal the year

²⁵ Alison Duncan, 'Old Maids': Family and Social Relationships of Never-Married Scottish Gentlewomen, c.1740-1840' (PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2012); Amy Froide, *Never Married: Single Women in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Karin Wulf, *Not all Wives: Women of Colonial Philadelphia* (London: Cornell University Press, 2000).

²⁶ Froide, *Never Married*, p. 85.

²⁷ Davidoff, *Thicker than Water*, p. 154.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 215.

²⁹ *Ibid*.

following her elopement with Percy Shelly and Claire Clairmont in the summer of 1814, Mary Godwin (later Shelley) charted the growing intimacy between her lover and her stepsister. When the trio returned to England in September, Mary was pregnant and often ill. Many evening entries recorded a similar pattern: 'go to bed early. Shelley & Clara sit up till 12 talking – S talks C. into good humour', 'Mary goes to bed at ½ past 8. S. sits up with Jane... At two they retire'.³⁰ Not only did they spend long nights alone together 'talk[ing] over the fire', but as Mary's pregnancy left her weak they also passed most of their days together: 'S & C go to several places then take a long walk', 'Very ill all day. S and J. out all day hopping about the time...'.³¹ On the 4 and 5, 7 December Mary remarked that 'Shelley and Clary...walk out as usual'—her commentary and constant note-keeping of their interactions hinted at her displeasure at the arrangement and her growing sense of isolation.³²

The intimacy between Percy and Claire developed during these months, as they spent a lot of time alone together, walking, conducting business in town, and having late-night chats by the fire—all of which were a consequence of their living in close proximity to each other. The intimacy between Hunt and his sister-in-law developed under similar circumstances: they spent several months alone together in 1814 in Surrey Gaol, where Hunt was incarcerated for printing defamatory passages about the Prince Regent.³³ During her time there, Kent performed roles that would usually have been the domain of a wife. Her intimacy with Hunt was largely founded

³⁰ Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley: 1814-1844*, ed. Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert (2 vols, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), vol. 1, p. 32, p. 37, p. 44. Claire Clairmont's original name was Jane, but she changed it to Clara and then Claire in the summer/autumn of 1814.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 45, p. 60, p. 61.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 49.

³³ Hunt's wife, Marianne, had gone to Brighton with the couple's young children for health reasons.

on their discussions about intellectual and philosophical topics. This continued after his release, when they walked alone on Hampstead Heath, making memories about which they would reminisce in their correspondence for the next decade.³⁴

The motives that drove individuals to cultivate relationships that they knew some would consider controversial were not always explicitly expressed, however reading between the lines it seems that in most cases they were drawn to something they felt the other individual offered them; usually this was love, companionship, happiness, and/or intellectual and emotional support. In 1802, Countess Bessborough wrote to Leveson Gower that his letters 'give me life and spirits, which both very often seem sinking from me when I am ill and away from you'.³⁵ Lady Elizabeth Monck also wrote to Leveson Gower to describe the 'state of bliss' she felt being at Saltram with her lover, Lord Boringdon; to justify Lady Elizabeth Foster's lingering presence in her home, the Duchess of Devonshire retorted to her mother that 'her society was delightful to us'.³⁶ In 1823, Elizabeth Kent wrote to Leigh Hunt that 'it is happiness inexpressible to feel that I am still dear to you, that you would wish to make me happy'.³⁷ As Holloway argues, individuals sought to derive happiness from these connections as this 'made their transgressions worthwhile'.³⁸

³⁴ New York Public Library (hereafter NYPL), Carl H. Pforzheimer Collection of Shelley and his Circle, Leigh Hunt manuscript material, LH0098, Leigh Hunt to Elizabeth Kent, 2 June 1824; Bod., MSS Shelley d.5, fols. 47-48, Elizabeth Kent to Leigh Hunt, 1 September 1823.

³⁵ Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, [January 1802]: Castalia, Countess Granville (ed.), *Lord Granville Leveson Gower: Private Correspondence, 1781-1821* (2 vols, London: Murray, 1916), vol. 2, p. 324.

³⁶ The National Archives (hereafter TNA), Leveson Gower Papers, PRO 30/29/6/2/16, Lady Elizabeth Monck to Granville Leveson Gower, 13 July 1796; Chatsworth House Archives (hereafter Cth), 5th Duke's Group (CS5), 1062, Duchess of Devonshire to Dowager Countess Spencer, 9 September 1790.

³⁷ Bod., MSS Shelley adds. d.5, fols. 47-48, Elizabeth Kent to Leigh Hunt, 1 September 1823.

³⁸ Holloway, "You know I am all on fire", pp. 331-332.

These relationships also offered an escape from the monotony of dull marriages, and in several cases, excitement and erotic pleasure. According to a letter from Leveson Gower to Lord Boringdon, Lady Elizabeth Monck actively pursued a sexual relationship with Boringdon from the off—her overt hints ‘surprised’ Leveson Gower.³⁹ It was perhaps unusual for a woman to be so forward, and Lord Boringdon would later condemn Lady Elizabeth Monck for her actions: in 1805, he tried (unsuccessfully) to convince Countess Bessborough that due to her conduct at the beginning of the affair, Monck had no cause to be angry with him about its end. The Countess criticised Boringdon’s hypocrisy, remarking to Leveson Gower that ‘at the time’ Boringdon had been ‘all gratitude’ when Monck had quickly allowed him to be ‘on the most intimate terms’ with her, but ‘now he makes it one cause for being less bound to her’.⁴⁰ The Countess told Leveson Gower that it ‘confirm’d’ to her that ‘there are no judges so severe on our [women’s] faults, as the very men who try to lead us into them’.⁴¹ Countess Bessborough’s replies to Leveson Gower’s early letters indicate that he pressured her to consummate their relationship. In the first three years of their correspondence, she was very clear that ‘*amitié*... is a very good word... I write it so often, because you always seem to forget it... it is *all* I have to offer’, and wrote that this was because she had learnt from experience that ‘real friendship is a thousand times to be preferr’d to the thorns and briars of love.’⁴² Holloway argues that romantic love was increasingly celebrated in various forms of literature over the

³⁹ BL, Morley Papers, Add MS 48222, fol. 60, Granville Leveson Gower to Lord Boringdon, 19 July 1794.

⁴⁰ BL, Granville Papers, Add MS 89382/2/23, fol. 88, Countess Bessborough to Granville Leveson Gower, 21 March 1805.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, [January 1795]: *G.L.G. Private Correspondence*, vol. 1, p. 110; Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, [July 1795]: *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 114.

course of the eighteenth century, and was tied to notions of happiness and self-fulfilment.⁴³ But the Countess suggested that 'love' (presumably outside of marriage) posed hidden dangers and could leave an individual injured. She protested for several years, but ultimately the Countess decided to risk love's 'briars' in the search for the emotional and erotic fulfilment that was lacking from her marriage.

It is possible that some women entered these relationships because they were hoping for the protection that an affluent man could offer. Jane Williams' letters to Mary Shelley suggest that she was struggling to be financially independent when she returned to England from Italy following her partner's death in the boating accident with Shelley in July 1822.⁴⁴ By 1824, she had 'bewitch'[ed] Thomas Jefferson Hogg, who assured her that he was 'not so unreasonable... to expect, that the greatest of all good is to be had for nothing'.⁴⁵ Although he could not offer her marriage (because she was already legally married), Hogg provided financially for Jane Williams and her children from her previous relationship. Similarly, Lady Elizabeth Foster's letters to both her mother and her husband following their separation emphasised her concerns about money and her uncertainty about what course of action she should take. When she joined the Duke and Duchess for the summer of 1782 her mother wrote how relieved she was that her daughter's summer was 'most happily allotted'.⁴⁶ Lady Elizabeth Foster's ménage-à-trois with the

⁴³ Sally Holloway, *The Game of Love in Georgian England: Courtship, Emotions, and Material Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 168.

⁴⁴ For example, see Mary Shelley to Jane Williams, 7 March [1823]: Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, ed. Betty T. Bennett (3 vols, Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1988), vol. 1, pp. 320-324.

⁴⁵ BL, Add MS 41686, fols. 7-8, Thomas Jefferson Hogg to Jane Williams, [1823/1824].

⁴⁶ For example, see Public Record Office Northern Ireland, Foster Papers, D3618/A/59, Lady Elizabeth Foster to Mr John Thomas Foster, 2 January 1782 and D3618/A/65, Lady Elizabeth Hervey, Countess of Bristol to Lady Elizabeth Foster, June 1782.

Devonshires gave her financial stability—the Duke assured her when she had money problems that, ‘whatever sum you may want will be paid by me with as much pleasure’, taking responsibility for her finances as a man would a wife, and, interestingly, without the bitterness that always ensued when his wife asked him for money to settle her debts.⁴⁷ The fact that she lived with the Duke *and* Duchess also allowed her to move without restrictions through elite society, protected from scandal—although not from gossip—she enjoyed a life of luxury in the Devonshire’s many opulent residences. It is also conceivable that Hunt and Shelley offered their unmarried sisters-in-law the opportunity for a better life in a more liberal home than the one that their parents offered.⁴⁸ Over this period people were motivated to form controversial relationships for a variety of reasons depending on their own gender and social standing. Their motives were complex and multi-layered but can be largely placed into two categories: want or necessity.

II

Individuals were aware that they could face a range of consequences for their relationships, which led them to resort to various means to conceal them. The end of the eighteenth century witnessed a rapid expansion of print media, which, due to the changing political climate, provided for a growing audience who were fascinated by the private lives of public figures.⁴⁹ That said, examples of elite individuals explicitly discussing fears that their ménages would be laid bare in pamphlets or

⁴⁷ Cth, CS5, 1723, Duke of Devonshire to Lady Elizabeth Foster, 26 February 1803 and 1052.1, Duchess of Devonshire to Duke of Devonshire, 1 March 1790.

⁴⁸ This is suggested in Elizabeth Kent to Marianne Hunt, 21 May 1813: Luther A. Brewer (ed.), *My Leigh Hunt Library: The Holograph Letters* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1938), p. 73.

⁴⁹ Faramerz Dabhoiwala, *The Origins of Sex: A History of the First Sexual Revolution* (London: Penguin, 2013), pp. 282-348.

newspapers are surprisingly rare. In February 1800, Lady Emma Hamilton complained about the unfairness of the 'private characters' of her lover, Admiral Lord Nelson, her husband, Sir William Hamilton, and herself being 'stabbed in the dark' by 'the infamous Jacobin papers'; in 1805, Countess Bessborough was distressed by a series of paragraphs appearing in the *Morning Post* that linked her to various men—including her real present and past lovers.⁵⁰ Given the permeation between elite society and newspaper paragraphs—which will be explored in the next chapter—it seems plausible that some of the concerns about letters being intercepted may have been related to the fear that their contents would be used to inspire paragraphs. As I will demonstrate in chapter three, the private lives of members of the radical literary world were also considered to be worthy of public analysis. These commentaries appeared mostly in the review journals, whose number increased in the first decade of the nineteenth century, rather than the London daily papers. In December 1818, Percy Shelley was particularly enraged that 'calumnies' concerning his domestic arrangements had been printed in the *Quarterly Review*, as he felt that whilst his 'public character, as a writer...as a speculator' was 'public property', his private life should be irrelevant: he suggested that the reviewer must have been motivated by 'personal hatred'.⁵¹ Significantly, what these cases often suggest is that people were most upset about their relationships being scrutinised in the press because they believed that their assailant was probably a member of the wider social

⁵⁰ Lady Hamilton to Sir Charles Greville, 25 February 1800: Horatio, 1st Viscount Nelson, *The Letters of Lord Nelson to Lady Hamilton; with a supplement of interesting letters, by distinguished characters* (2 vols, London: T Lovewell & Co, 1814), vol. 1, pp. 269-270; I will explore these paragraphs in detail in chapter 2.

⁵¹ Percy Shelley to Leigh Hunt, [20] December 1818: Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. by Frederick L. Jones (2 vols, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1964), vol. 2, p. 65.

network within which they moved—perhaps even a former trusted friend. Although scarce, these examples suggest that in the early nineteenth century, individuals who had a public presence did not necessarily focus on how their intimate lives would be construed by a wider reading public, but rather they worried about the channels of betrayal and lies by which news of their private affairs made it into the realm of print, and the ripples these would cause in their social networks. The cases reveal how members of these small societies employed forms of media in order to make personal attacks on their peers. They also suggest that the circles involved in mediating how and which ‘private’ information was exposed in the London gossip papers and the literary review journals were closely-knit, which will be examined in the next two chapters.

Above all, individuals expressed how concerned they were about how they were perceived within their specific social worlds. When trying to cope with accusations that he had been ‘living with Clare as my mistress’ and had fathered her child, Percy wrote to Mary that he did ‘not care a jot’ ‘what the Reviews & the world says’, but the fact that ‘persons who have known me are capable of conceiving me’ capable of ‘such unutterable crimes as destroying or abandoning a child’, was distressing.⁵² Countess Bessborough similarly delineated those whose opinions she cared for to Leveson Gower:

If I made use of the word *world*, it was as most people generally use it, I believe, as a short way of expressing that set of people they usually live with. My world, of course, is a very contracted one... It is the people I live with

⁵² Percy Shelley to Mary Shelley, 7 August 1821: *ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 316-319.

constantly whose opinions I mind, either from fearing to give pain to those I love amongst them, or from hating the being teaz'd and plagued.⁵³

Kent was also concerned about the 'consequences' that both she and Hunt faced 'from the talking world', and Hunt also referred to the 'scoundrelly tattlers'.⁵⁴ Their emphases on 'talking' implies that they were more concerned about gossip spread orally amongst people they knew rather than in print. This concern about how the people who knew them perceived their relationship, and furthermore, the obstacles that friends and family could present to such liaisons, suggests that men and women perceived their private conduct as being constrained by family, friends, and associates, whose judgements, opinions and reactions could hurt them. This suggests that that the world or society to which they identified themselves as belonging was delimited—a theme which will be explored in the following two chapters.

Over this period, men continued to have a greater degree of sexual license than women, however, with the decline of libertinism and the rise of a political culture that emphasised the need for the private lives of public figures to be virtuous, men were increasingly held accountable for their sexual misbehaviour—and evidence suggests that it influenced their conduct.⁵⁵ Men like Shelley, Hunt, and Lord Nelson worried that their domestic arrangements would meet with disapproval; Nelson would not visit Lady Hamilton at Merton when her husband was absent and they

⁵³ Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, 29 January 1796: *G.L.G.: Private Correspondence*, vol. 1, pp. 119-120.

⁵⁴ Leigh Hunt to Elizabeth Kent, 1 September 1824 and Leigh Hunt to Elizabeth Kent, 4 November 1824: *My Leigh Hunt Library*, p. 134.

⁵⁵ Marilyn Morris, *Sex, Money & Personal Character in Eighteenth-Century British Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), pp. 59-60.

would not be able to maintain the impression of respectability.⁵⁶ When Claire gave birth to Lord Byron's child, Percy Shelley repeatedly made it clear to Byron that mother and child could not stay with him and Mary, as gossipers would assume it was his, and feared being 'exposed to what remarks her existence is calculated to excite'.⁵⁷ He was correct in his assumptions, and his association with Claire left the trio vulnerable to gossip when their former servants attempted to blackmail them in 1821. They accused Percy of keeping Claire as his mistress—to which he nonchalantly responded that 'people may believe or not believe as they think good'—but they further alleged that he had fathered a child with Claire that he had tried to abort, and that the pair of them were violent towards Mary.⁵⁸ This episode caused tensions between the trio, and Mary was particularly keen to quell the rumours and so she addressed them directly, protesting her husband's innocence and proclaiming that their 'union' was 'undisturbed'.⁵⁹ Moreover, the rumours influenced their movements, as Mary suggested to Percy that it would be 'imprudent' for them to move to Florence near Claire at a time when suspicions had been cast against them.⁶⁰

For women, any association with sexual licentiousness was potentially damaging for their reputation—although tolerance varied according to status. Men from middling social statuses acknowledged that the women that they formed informal relationships with were more vulnerable to social exclusion than

⁵⁶ Lord Nelson to Lady Emma Hamilton, 28 September 1801: Alfred Morrison (ed.), *The Collection of Autograph Letters and Historical Documents formed by Alfred Morrison* (Second Series, 1882-1893) *The Hamilton & Nelson Papers* (2 vols, London, 1894), vol. 2, p. 168.

⁵⁷ Percy Shelley to Lord Byron, 9 July 1817: *Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, vol. 1, pp. 546-547.

⁵⁸ Percy Shelley to Mary Shelley, 7 August 1821: *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 316-319.

⁵⁹ Mary Shelley to Mrs Hoppner, 10 August 1821: *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, vol. 1, pp. 205-208.

⁶⁰ Mary Shelley to Percy Shelley, [10 August 1821], as quoted in Kenneth N. Cameron (ed.), *Shelley and his Circle, 1773-1822* (10 vols, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1961), vol. 3, p. 204.

themselves. How men responded to that fact varied: circa 1810-1811, when Mrs Wolff separated from her husband and was particularly vulnerable to gossip, Sir Thomas Lawrence was extremely cautious to communicate to her through Miss Croft, stating that he would not 'rain [Wolff] in postage' so as to avoid 'calamity'.⁶¹ In contrast, Thomas Jefferson Hogg acknowledged that Jane Williams inevitably risked 'the rocks beneath... the surface of the sea' if she became his mistress. Rather than try to protect her reputation, however, he assured her instead that he would compensate her for this with 'a great price' and his 'promise'.⁶² Men resorted to two modes to protect the women they cared for: they either kept the relationship a secret by keeping their distance and/or communicating through a third party, or they compensated their lovers for the risks they undertook. Their decisions fundamentally influenced their interactions.

Being involved in, or associated with, a controversial liaison stimulated concerns about reputation for both men and women, and their fears played an important role on determining interpersonal relationships. The fear of being ruined by scandal led individuals to adopt a variety of different practices in attempts to keep their liaisons secret. As Holloway argues, concern about letters being intercepted led couples to invent code names, to use trusted messengers rather than the post when they could, and to instruct their lovers to burn their letters after reading them in order to limit the chances of family members or servants discovering their liaisons.⁶³

⁶¹ Royal Academy (RA), Lawrence Papers, LAW/9/5, Thomas Lawrence to Miss Croft, [2 May 1811]; See also, LAW/9/61, Thomas Lawrence, 30 September 1810: a document in which Lawrence wrote angrily about the 'attack' on Wolff's character-it is unclear if this document was meant to be sent to someone.

⁶² BL, Add MS 41686, fols. 7-8, Thomas Jefferson Hogg to Jane Williams, [1823/1824].

⁶³ Holloway, "You know I am all on fire", p. 318.

Even in relationships that were probably not consummated, the fact that their expressions or behaviour might be construed as scandalous if read by an outsider led participants to adopt similar practices: whenever intensely expressing their affection for one another, Leigh Hunt and Elizabeth Kent referred to themselves using codes that only they would recognise, usually related to places that were identifiable from where they had spent time together, or by imaging themselves as literary characters.⁶⁴ They took these precautions because they themselves identified this behaviour as being controversial: 'Imagine the scandal that might be made of this: but you know whom I mean'.⁶⁵

Whilst such epistolary customs were widespread, discussions within the letters indicate that those conducting controversial relationships also adopted other strategies to conceal them. One of these was to avoid cavorting together in places where 'the world' was watching them. Hannah Greig argues that London, as 'the public stage', was best avoided by elite individuals behaving reprehensively.⁶⁶ Countess Bessborough admitted to Leveson Gower that she 'often thought over the difficulties of our meeting in London'.⁶⁷ London presented a plethora of public stages where a controversial couple might be spotted: with its pleasure gardens, theatres, and the Court, the elite were often on display to a multitude of audiences, including Londoners from the middling ranks of society. Even London aristocratic residences were problematic because family and friends were constantly calling and expected

⁶⁴ Bod., MSS Shelley adds. d.5, fols. 47-48, Elizabeth Kent to Leigh Hunt, 1 September 1823.

⁶⁵ Leigh Hunt to Elizabeth Kent, 6th November 1824: *My Leigh Hunt Library*, pp. 136-137.

⁶⁶ Hannah Greig, *The Beau Monde: Fashionable Society in Georgian London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 217.

⁶⁷ BL, Granville Papers, Add MS 89382/2/9, fols. 3-4, Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, 2 August 1798.

to be entertained—leaving little opportunity for private meetings. The country estate offered more opportunity for privacy even with the presence of guests, because they were larger and more spread out. Lady Elizabeth Monck refused to meet Lord Boringdon in London and he was frustrated by the failure of his attempts to cajole her, yet she would spend several weeks at a time living at Saltram with him and his guests.⁶⁸ That is not to say that they were immune to criticism at the country estate—guests at Chatsworth accused Lady Elizabeth Foster of inappropriate conduct with the Duke of Devonshire to her face.⁶⁹ In the 1830s, to avoid such interruptions, the Duchess of Bedford, wife of the 6th Duke, leased a remote house in the Scottish Highlands, away from ‘malicious tongues and prying eyes’, where she could spend her summers with her lover, painter Edwin Landseer, often leaving her husband in London.⁷⁰ Couples were conscious about being on public display, and tried to conduct their relationships in places where they were less likely to be scrutinised and where opportunities for privacy were more probable.

As their relationships often provoked hostile responses from others, many of the couples examined in this chapter were apart for long stretches of time: Claire Clairmont and Percy Shelley, and Leigh Hunt and Elizabeth Kent were separated because of tensions within their households; Lady Elizabeth Foster and the Devonshires, Sir Thomas Lawrence and Mrs Wolff, Lord Boringdon and Lady Elizabeth Monck, Countess Bessborough and Leveson Gower, all kept their distance from each other at times because they were concerned about being accused of impropriety.

⁶⁸ TNA, Leveson Gower Papers, PRO 30/29/9/1/10, Lord Boringdon to Leveson Gower, 1 October 1794.

⁶⁹ Cth, CS5, 684, Duke of Devonshire to Lady Elizabeth Foster, 29 August 1785.

⁷⁰ Rachel Trethewey, *Mistress of the Arts: The Passionate Life of Georgina, Duchess of Bedford* (London: Headline, 2002), p. 215.

Thus, letters played a crucial role in cultivating intimacy in controversial relationships, as objects that enabled correspondents to develop and communicate their affection, love, and passion for one another whilst overcoming physical distance. Parallels can be drawn between the conventions of illicit love letters and those that Holloway identifies as being customary to courtship letters; these comparisons are perhaps understandable as Holloway defines courtship as an 'emotionally fraught period' in the lifecycle, a description that could equally be applied to controversial relationships.⁷¹ Unlike their courting counterparts – these couples had very little chance their attachment would be legitimised. On a practical level, people used letters to communicate where they were, and what their plans were, so that their lovers could attempt to find a time and place when they could meet: while in her London residence, Countess Bessborough wrote to Leveson Gower to look for a 'flower pot in the furthest window' which signalled that she was able 'to go out'.⁷²

Letters record the difficulties of meeting and were often used to cancel plans: Lord Boringdon remarked how difficult it was to know Lady Elizabeth Monck's plans as they were contingent on her husband's family's plans, and Countess Bessborough often expressed her 'despair' when her husband suddenly changed their travel plans and she would miss her chance to see Leveson Gower.⁷³ As there were often obstacles preventing controversial couples from seeing each other, expressions of pain, frustration and longing are common in their correspondence. Lord Nelson asked Lady Hamilton, 'how can I bear our separation?' and assured her that she was

⁷¹ Holloway, *The Game of Love*, pp. 45-47.

⁷² BL, Granville Papers, Add MS 89382/2/10, fol. 61, Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, [c.1798].

⁷³ Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, [late 1797]: *G.L.G: Private Correspondence*, vol. 1, p. 175.

‘never out of my thoughts’; the Countess wrote to Leveson Gower confirming that ‘I shall not see you, and I cannot bear it’; Percy Shelley told Claire Clairmont that her ‘absence is too painful’.⁷⁴ As Henry French and Mark Rothery suggest, expressions of angst are to an extent to be expected in epistolary exchanges, due to the separation of the writer and reader.⁷⁵ In these cases, such expressions provoked responses that functioned to assure the writer that their feelings were reciprocated. They also tried to ascertain whether their loved ones were suffering too: Hunt sent Kent a ‘kiss, as long as I can make it’ and asked her, ‘does it do you good or harm? Tell me truly’, and Countess Bessborough questioned Leveson Gower whether he looked ‘back with pleasure on the time’ they spent ‘together’.⁷⁶ Asking direct questions manipulated the emotional dialogue by framing the recipient’s response. Long periods of separation exasperated insecurities: Lord Nelson, Lady Elizabeth Foster, Leveson Gower, and Elizabeth Kent all expressed fears of being forgotten or replaced by another, and Countess Bessborough, Elizabeth Kent and the Duke of Devonshire worried that their beloved was deceiving them. Being kept apart reminded individuals of the uncertain status of their relationships.

Deprived of the intimacies of everyday life, couples used epistolary conventions to foster a sense of closeness with each other. They imagined scenarios where they were together: Countess Bessborough wrote to Leveson Gower that

⁷⁴ Lord Nelson to Lady Hamilton, September 1801: *The Hamilton and Nelson Papers*, vol. 2, p. 165; National Maritime Museum (NMM), Phillipps-Croker Collection, CRK/19/11, Lord Nelson to Lady Hamilton, 31 July 1801; Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower [late 1801]: *G.L.G: Private Correspondence*, vol. 1, p. 305; Percy Shelley to Claire Clairmont, 29 October 1820: *Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, vol. 2, p. 241.

⁷⁵ Henry French and Mark Rothery, ‘Male anxiety among younger sons of the English Landed Gentry’, *Historical Journal*, 62:4 (2019), 967-995, (p. 969).

⁷⁶ NYPL, Pforzheimer Collection, LH0101, Leigh Hunt to Elizabeth Kent, 2 April 1825; Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, [August 1802]: *G.L.G: Private Correspondence*, vol. 1, p. 347.

thinking about being with him 'at Chatsworth is a situation as provokingly tantalizing as imagination can suggest'; Leigh Hunt evoked memories that he and Kent shared by asking her to imagine herself 'dancing for joy' upon her 'favourite spot... at Hampstead' and to 'recollect the affectionate things I have said to you there'; Sir Thomas Lawrence tried to arouse similar memories in Mrs Wolff writing to her that he 'thought instantly of you and the little pew at Charing, and long'd for your society'.⁷⁷ Often these fantasies incorporated discussions of the effects they had on their own bodies: Elizabeth Kent told Hunt that she had 'a painful pleasure in thinking of old times... I know how long and how sensibly grasps may be felt... that were given months and years since'; Countess Bessborough told Leveson Gower she thought she had heard him playing on the piano, and told him that the sound made 'mi palpita il cuore'.⁷⁸

At times, writers also imagined themselves causing physical sensations to their lovers, showing their desire to evoke traces of their presence on their bodies: Thomas Lawrence wrote to Mrs Wolff that his bedroom window in Rome was very small so 'only one person can conveniently look out of it' but the view was so spectacular that 'as sweet ev'ning closes I often squeeze you into it 'tho it does hurt you a little by holding your arm so closely within mine'; the Duke of Devonshire similarly evoked the intimacy of the bedroom to Lady Elizabeth Foster, proclaiming that he was 'terribly in want of' her, and reminded of the fact more so by seeing the

⁷⁷ Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, [1801]: *G.L.G: Private Correspondence*, vol. 1, p. 305; Leigh Hunt to Elizabeth Kent, 20 February 1824: *My Leigh Hunt Library*, pp. 132-133; RA, LAW/3/50, Sir Thomas Lawrence to Mrs Isabella Wolff, 25 June 1819.

⁷⁸ Bod., MSS Shelley adds. d.5, fols. 47-48, Elizabeth Kent to Leigh Hunt, 1 September 1823; Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, 24 February 1805: *G.L.G: Private Correspondence*, vol. 2, p. 25, 'my heart throbs'.

'blue bed you slept in'.⁷⁹ Some writers encouraged sensory interaction with the letters or other objects: Hunt drew Kent a 'kiss' at the bottom of one of the letters and told her he had kissed that space also.⁸⁰ Hunt and Kent, Leveson Gower and Bessborough, and Nelson and Lady Hamilton also all referred to wearing or holding locks of their beloved's hair.⁸¹ Holloway suggests practices like exchanging romantic gifts and fetishizing letters played 'an essential role' in 'strengthening feelings of love' in courtship, and it is conceivable that they performed similar roles in controversial relationships.⁸² Correspondents used fantasies, memories and objects to recreate the bonds of intimacy that existed between them and to give themselves a physical presence in the lives of those they loved.

The prominent cultural discourses of sensibility and romanticism influenced the language and imagery that the actors in these relationships used to construct them. The Devonshire ménage envisioned themselves as a non-binary version of the sentimental family that was idealised in contemporary culture and influenced ideas of marriage and parenthood.⁸³ When pregnant with her eldest daughter, the Duchess wrote to Foster and referred to the baby as 'your child', including her friend in a parental role.⁸⁴ Foster also asserted her integral position in their family ensuring she would not be excluded, and asked Georgiana to 'Kiss our child for me...I am to be

⁷⁹ RA, LAW/3/50, Sir Thomas Lawrence to Mrs Isabella Wolff, 25 June 1819; Cth, CS5, 683, Duke of Devonshire to Lady Elizabeth Foster, 11 August 1785.

⁸⁰ NYPL, Pforz. Collection, LH0101, Leigh Hunt to Elizabeth Kent, 2 April 1825.

⁸¹ See for example, Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, [November 1794]: *G.L.G: Private Correspondence*, vol. 1, p. 102; Bod., MSS Shelley adds. d.5, fols. 47-48, Elizabeth Kent to Leigh Hunt, 1 September 1823.

⁸² Holloway, *The Game of Love*, p. 68, pp. 76-83.

⁸³ Ingrid Tague, 'Love, Honour, and Obedience: Fashionable Women and the Discourse of Marriage in the Early Eighteenth Century', *Journal of British Studies*, 40:1 (2001), 76-106, (p. 84).

⁸⁴ Cth, CS5, 494, Duchess of Devonshire to Lady Elizabeth Foster, 7 May 1783.

its little mama: Canis said so', Canis was the Duke's nickname.⁸⁵ The Duke drew connections between his daughter and Foster, informing her flirtatiously that 'the Duchess thinks the child is much such a little thing as you, and I think so too, only she is not so naughty'.⁸⁶ Foster was deeply integral in the image of family that they all constructed; they simply adapted the ideas of comfort and domesticity and shaped them to suit their situation. Chris Roulston, who considers how female friendship was analysed in the *ménage-à-trois* as it was portrayed in eighteenth-century fiction, argues that the merging of maternal roles erased 'the potentially threatening quality of female inseparability', and was often romanticised by contemporary authors, such as Rousseau in *La Nouvelle Heloise* (1761).⁸⁷ By constructing this image the Devonshire trio framed their relations with those portrayed by literary representations of the two females, one male *ménage-à-trois* that Roulston discusses. Sir William Hamilton similarly referred to his wife's lover, Lord Nelson, as 'our best friend' and imagined the three of them as 'the famous "*Tria Juncta in Uno*". In contrast, Nelson preferred to think of his relationship with Lady Hamilton along more traditional and binary lines.⁸⁸

The Romantic writers of the 1810s and 20s were renowned for their reconfiguration of sexual and social conventions.⁸⁹ They were influenced by the wave of radical writings from the 1790s by novelists and philosophers such as William

⁸⁵ Cth, CS5, 508.1, Duchess of Devonshire to Lady Elizabeth Foster, July 1783.

⁸⁶ Cth, CS5, 513, Duke of Devonshire to Lady Elizabeth Foster, July 1783.

⁸⁷ Chris Roulston, 'The Eighteenth Century *Ménage-à-Trois*: Having it both ways?', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 27:2 (2004), 257-277, (p. 274).

⁸⁸ Sir William Hamilton to Lady Hamilton, 27 July 1801: *The Letters of Lord Nelson*, vol.2, p. 180 – 'three joined as one'; Sir William Hamilton to Lady Hamilton, [n.d. August 1802]: *The Hamilton & Nelson Papers*, vol. 2, p. 680.

⁸⁹ Deirdre Coleman, 'Claire Clairmont & Mary Shelley: Identification and Rivalry within the "tribe of the Otaheite philosopher's"', *Women's Writing*, 6:3 (1999), 309-328; Paul Stock, 'The Shelleys and the idea of "Europe"', *European Romantic Review*, 19:4 (2008), 335-349.

Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Hays, and Amelia Opie, among others. Their works challenged traditional heterosexual relationships by questioning the subordination of women, the utility and necessity of marriage, and by offering alternative frameworks for loving relationships—although not without caveats for their contemporary audiences.⁹⁰ Hunt and Shelley both believed in experimenting with the boundaries of love and sex, and their works implied that monogamous marital relationships were restricting for both men and women.⁹¹ Like the Devonshires, Percy Shelley was inspired by Rousseau’s experimentation with the romantic dynamics of the ‘third’ in *La Nouvelle Heloise*, and he was even more intrigued by James Lawrence’s book, *Empire of the Nairs* (1811).⁹² Lawrence described the Hindu caste of the Nairs, and advocated their rejection of marriage and ‘uninhibited sexual relations’; Percy encouraged both Claire and Mary to read the book.⁹³ Hunt and Shelley tried to construct their relationships with their sisters-in-law by imagining themselves experimenting with alternative communal domestic arrangements. Hunt proposed to Kent that they could spend time together and avoid scandal if they shared a home with Mr and Mrs Hunter and their two daughters: ‘with Marianne and all the rest of the females to nurse and comfort one another, and myself to sing and play Italian airs to you’.⁹⁴ Claire and Percy discussed their shared vision of utopian communities in which sexual relationships were not constrained.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ See for example, the ‘To the Reader’ in Amelia Opie, *The Father and Daughter* (1801); Mary Hays, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (reprint, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, orig. 1796), p. 4

⁹¹ Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Queen Mab; A Philosophical Poem: with notes* (London, 1813); Leigh Hunt, *The Story of Rimini, A poem* (London: Murray, 1816).

⁹² Coleman, ‘Claire Clairmont & Mary Shelley’, p. 317.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Leigh Hunt to Elizabeth Kent, 4 November 1824: *My Leigh Hunt Library*, pp. 134-136.

⁹⁵ For example, see Claire Clairmont, *The Journals of Claire Clairmont*, ed. Marion Kingston Stocking (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1968), pp. 48-49.

Both associated sexual freedom with radical politics, and believed that conducting unorthodox relationships was key to challenging society—which they felt needed revolutionising.⁹⁶ Daisy Hay suggests that the male Romantics cultivated their sisters-in-law to share their ideologies and opinions, which in the end proved detrimental to the women.⁹⁷ Conversely, Deirdre Coleman convincingly argues that Claire was very radical herself, and ‘liked to take the lead in acting out’ Percy’s philosophies (in contrast to the more conservative Mary) and therefore it is conceivable to think that she may have cultivated her intimacy with Percy to prove her commitment to the radical lifestyle.⁹⁸ The concepts and ideas that stemmed from the cults of sensibility and romanticism were instrumental in enabling the individuals discussed in this chapter to construct a positive image of their unconventional ménages for themselves: a picture that seldom acknowledged the conflict and disruptions that these relationships often caused, even in cases that operated under the pretence that a betrayed spouse accepted and tolerated the situation.

The language of friendship was a common feature in all the case studies. In letters, sign-offs such as ‘ever affectionate Friend’ were generic.⁹⁹ Naomi Tadmor suggests that in the early-modern period the concept of friendship was ambiguously applied to a variety of social relationships, including kin and marital relationships, but she does not examine how the language of friendship was used by those in extramarital relationships.¹⁰⁰ In the specific context of controversial relationships the

⁹⁶ Stock, ‘The Shelleys and the idea of “Europe”’, p. 347.

⁹⁷ Daisy Hay, *Young Romantics: The Shelleys, Byron and other tangled lives* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), pp. 48-50.

⁹⁸ Coleman, ‘Claire Clairmont & Mary Shelley’, p. 310, p. 316.

⁹⁹ Percy Shelley to Claire Clairmont, 29 October 1820: *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, vol. 2, p. 241.

¹⁰⁰ Naomi Tadmor, *Family & Friends in eighteenth-century England: Household, Kinship and Patronage* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 167, p. 192.

term 'friend' definitely denoted an emotional and affectionate bond between two people. In 1785, the Duke of Devonshire wrote to Foster that 'no absence...can ever lessen my friendship and affection for you', a point he reiterated twenty years later when he pleaded with her to return from the continent: 'the love and friendship that I have so long had for you, are firmly fix'd and unalterable'.¹⁰¹ Unlike many others involved in affairs, the Duke never tried to conceive of his relationship with Foster explicitly within the framework of marriage, however, by describing it as a loving 'unalterable' friendship he proclaimed his loyalty to Foster and assured her that his affection and their attachment was not temporary. As Holloway argues, the concept of friendship offered adulterers a means of constructing 'licit relationships in an adulterous context'.¹⁰² However, the language of friendship also enabled individuals to reassure their loved ones when they expressed concern about the fragility of their relationships, as it positioned their relationship into a conceptual framework that implied that their lover could expect their attachment to be based on the principles of friendship—including intimacy, affection, commitment, trust and loyalty.

The expectations that men and women had of their extra-marital relationships were heavily predicated by the individual's marital status. Men and women who were either unmarried or estranged from their former spouse expected their lovers to adopt the roles and responsibilities of a spouse. Lord Nelson referred to Lady Hamilton as his 'wife in the eye of God' and asked her to perform wifely tasks such as packing his clothes for him, choosing a place for him to live-which led to his

¹⁰¹ Cth, CS5, 680, Duke of Devonshire to Lady Elizabeth Foster, 12 July 1785 and 1735.1, Duke of Devonshire to Lady Elizabeth Foster, [n.d. 1803].

¹⁰² Holloway, "You know I am all on fire", p. 336.

purchase of Merton Place in Surrey and overseeing its decoration.¹⁰³ Barclay examines the demands made by kept mistresses, and argues that both Gilbert Innes of Stow and his numerous mistresses expected that even outside of marriage, 'a sexual relationship entailed a financial and emotional outlay from Gilbert', but that the 'nature and extent' of that outlay often caused conflict.¹⁰⁴ Unlike Barclay, I have not found any explicit requests from kept women to their lovers for money, however, there are examples of men assuring women that they would send money if it was needed.¹⁰⁵ Percy Shelley and Leigh Hunt offered their sisters-in-law money and a place to stay with seemingly little prompting, emphasising their affection and sense of duty.¹⁰⁶ Examining the expectations of both men and women in these relationships suggests that the picture is complex. A range of intimate relations between men and women automatically entailed certain domestic and financial obligations. The case for affinal siblings is particularly complicated, as sisters-in-law often acted as auxiliary wives for their brothers-in-law performing wifely tasks when their sisters were preoccupied with pregnancies and the demands of small children. Whilst in Surrey Gaol, Hunt wrote to his wife, who was in Brighton with their ill son, assuring her he was being well cared for by Kent, who organised his papers, prepared his meals, acted as his hostess, and on one occasion, when he was struggling with insomnia, she even read him to sleep.¹⁰⁷ Undertaking such everyday intimate

¹⁰³ Lord Nelson to Lady Hamilton, 26 August 1803: *Letters of Lord Nelson*, vol. 1, p. 175; NMM, CRK/19/16, Lord Nelson to Lady Hamilton, 26 Sept 1801.

¹⁰⁴ Barclay, 'Illicit Intimacies', p. 582.

¹⁰⁵ For example, see: Lord Nelson to Lady Hamilton, 28 September 1801: *The Hamilton & Nelson Papers*, vol. 1, p. 168.

¹⁰⁶ NYPL, Pforz Collection, LH0089, Leigh Hunt to Elizabeth Kent, 7 November 1822.

¹⁰⁷ Leigh Hunt to Marianne Hunt, 29 May 1813: Thornton Leigh Hunt (ed.), *The Correspondence of Leigh Hunt* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1862), pp. 88-89.

domestic tasks denoted affection and obligation, and these bonds were reciprocal. The domestic space was romanticised in this period, as a site where the 'intimacy of family life' was enacted, providing strong associations with the idea of 'belonging'.¹⁰⁸ Mistresses (and sisters-in-law) performed domestic duties to demonstrate their care for the men they shared their homes with, whilst men proved their love by providing money, and offering women a 'home'.¹⁰⁹ Through such acts individuals demonstrated their commitment to the relationship.

Married men and women expected different benefits from their extra-marital liaisons than those who were single. The Duke and Duchess of Devonshire both expected love, comfort and attention from Lady Elizabeth Foster.¹¹⁰ The Duchess wrote Foster a poem entitled 'To Bess', where she described the soothing effect of Foster's company: 'your presence can in sorrow bless/ in joy can more rejoice/ and sickness trouble & distress are banish'd by thy voice'.¹¹¹ Hunt wrote in a similar manner, urging Kent to join him and his wife in Italy, telling her that she had always been 'a great deal of comfort to me, a great deal of acceptable & sometimes necessary sympathy'.¹¹² As married women, Countess Bessborough and Lady Elizabeth Monck had no expectations (nor need) for their lovers to provide for them financially. Monck's descriptions of the time she spent at Saltram, Lord Boringdon's estate in Plymouth, were filled with imagery displaying their version of elite domestic ideology: 'perfect happiness surpasses all description... I never saw Boringdon look

¹⁰⁸ Katie Barclay, 'Illicit Intimacies', p. 578.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 585-586.

¹¹⁰ For example, see Cth, CS5, 679, Duchess of Devonshire to Lady Elizabeth Foster, [June 1785] and 680, Duke of Devonshire to Lady Elizabeth Foster, 12 July 1785.

¹¹¹ Cth, DF12/1/1/1, Georgiana Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire's Scrapbooks.

¹¹² NYPL, Pforz Collection, LH0096, Leigh Hunt to Elizabeth Kent, 22 November 1823.

so well the good hours we keep to do much...Boringdon forgets Operas etc and seems happier in the woods of Saltram than I ever saw him in my life.'¹¹³ Monck associated their happiness at being together with both her own and Boringdon's improved health. Their relationship was founded on psychological needs rather than economic vulnerability or necessity. Married individuals hoped that these long-term attachments would provide comfort and fill an emotional void caused by mercenary or unhappy marriages. Intriguingly, married women's lack of dependence on their lovers did change the power dynamics of the relationship, and they were not as straightforward as the usual narrative of male dominance and female submission.

Navigating hierarchies and power relations in both secret affairs and *ménages-à-trois* was inherently complex and frequently caused conflict. Factoring in the needs and desires of a third person caused complications, especially when that person felt vulnerable and became overbearing with their claims. Anxiety that another would overwhelm their partner with demands and try to take up all their energies—sexual or emotional—caused spouses to act. Although his maxim was to 'bear and forbear' his wife's affair with Lord Nelson, in 1802 Sir William Hamilton threatened her with 'a separation' from Nelson because he felt the latter was unfairly receiving 'the whole attention of my wife'.¹¹⁴ Marianne Hunt endeavoured to keep her sister in England despite her husband's repeated suggestions that they send for her to join them during the four years that they lived in Italy. Hunt told Kent that they feared she would bring 'a pressure upon feelings' and cause 'agitations [which] would have the worst possible effect both on myself and your sister'.¹¹⁵ Although he

¹¹³ TNA, PRO 30/29/6/2/16, Lady Elizabeth Monck to Granville Leveson Gower, 13 July 1796.

¹¹⁴ Sir William Hamilton to Lady Hamilton, [n.d 1802]: *The Hamilton & Nelson Papers*, vol. 2, p. 197.

¹¹⁵ Leigh Hunt to Elizabeth Kent, July 1824: *The Correspondence of Leigh Hunt*, pp. 223-226.

portrayed himself as being united with his wife, Mary Shelley told Jane Williams that Hunt ‘has had the humanity to permit... [Marianne] to decide concerning the coming of Miss K... she has placed her veto on it... He could not at so terrible a moment have acted against her wishes’—implying that Marianne only got her way because she was pregnant.¹¹⁶ Scholars have argued that Mary similarly saw Claire as a threat to her marriage with Percy, and it is true that she expressed her relief on the occasions where she managed to persuade him to set Claire up in a household separate from their own.¹¹⁷

Hunt tried to temper Kent’s expectations of what she could demand from their relationship by emphasising her subordinate position in their ménage, by reminding her that he ‘would rather please you than all other women put together, your sister excepted’, and in July of the same year: ‘my affection, as I have told you a thousand times, being greater for you than for any other human being, next to my wife and family’.¹¹⁸ Although he claimed Marianne was his priority, he undermined his claims with his declarations to Kent of his illicit longing, discussions of their previous physical interactions, and by imagining Marianne’s death so that Kent could come to Italy.¹¹⁹ Kent was not placid in these exchanges and made her annoyance very clear with ‘fits of temper’.¹²⁰ Spousal tolerance of a partner’s intimacy with another varied in these cases, but with their own relationships legitimised by marriage, husbands and wives generally expected to be prioritised by their spouse—

¹¹⁶ Bod., MS Abinger, c.46, fols. 65-66, Mary Shelley to Jane Williams, 10 April 1823.

¹¹⁷ *The Journals of Mary Shelley*, vol 1, p. 78; Hay, *Young Romantics*, p. 51.

¹¹⁸ Leigh Hunt to Elizabeth Kent, 20 February 1824: *My Leigh Hunt Library*, pp. 132-133; Leigh Hunt to Elizabeth Kent, July 1824: *The Correspondence of Leigh Hunt*, p. 224.

¹¹⁹ See for example, Leigh Hunt to Elizabeth Kent, 7 April 1823: *My Leigh Hunt Library*, pp. 125-128.

¹²⁰ NYPL, Pforz Collection, LH0096, Leigh Hunt to Elizabeth Kent, 22 November 1823.

regardless of any other romantic attachments they might make in their lifetime. When they felt that a third party had brought disruption into their domestic space, husbands and wives tried to re-establish the balance in the hierarchy by whatever means available to them, largely threats, appealing to their spouse to remember their obligations to them, and forms of emotional blackmail.

In his study on the Italian practice of *cicisbeism*, Robert Bizzocchi argues that adding a third person to a marriage was complex even when platonic, as the dynamics of a threesome lend themselves easily to possessiveness, jealousy and exasperated passions.¹²¹ The third person had the potential to disrupt the equilibrium of the romantic dyad—opening up the usual intimacy and intensity of its relations to influences from a rival bond. This included not only the marital relationship, but equally the couple who were conducting the affair. Married parties of adulterous relationships often upset their lovers when they confessed that they had to prioritise the demands of their spouse. Both Leveson Gower and Lord Nelson expressed their displeasure when the husbands of their mistresses invited men into their homes whom they perceived to threaten their own position. Nelson was enraged with possessive jealousy upon discovering that Sir William Hamilton had invited the Prince Regent to dinner: ‘I am gone almost mad...He wishes, I dare say, to have you alone. Don’t let him touch, nor sitt next to you’.¹²² Nelson’s frustration at his inability to assert any authority over who might have access to Lady Hamilton’s body is clear, and when he felt this vulnerability and the marginalisation of his

¹²¹ Robert Bizzocchi, *A Lady’s Man: The Cicisbei, Private Morals and National Identity in Italy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 182-183.

¹²² Lord Nelson to Lady Hamilton, [17] February 1801: *The Hamilton & Nelson Papers*, vol. 2, p. 116; Lord Nelson to Lady Hamilton, [18 February 1801]: *Ibid.*, p. 117.

masculine status in their relationship he reacted with anger and sullenness—as did Leveson Gower on similar occasions, including the example with which this chapter began.¹²³ Nelson hypocritically disregarded the nature of his own relations with Lady Hamilton, which he justified by his love for her, and he vehemently accused Sir William of selling his wife’s sexuality for his own political gain.¹²⁴ Whether Lady Hamilton blamed her husband in attempts to placate her lover and assure him of her devotion to him is difficult to know, as Nelson burnt her letters to him. Countess Bessborough, however, did resort to that defence in her response to Leveson Gower’s protests and wrote, ‘Am I so perfectly mistress in my own house that only just the persons I like, and no others, are invited to it?’¹²⁵ Issues of authority and power were more common in relationships involving a woman having a lover and a husband, as a man could assert his authority over two women, but a woman could not have two rulers. These issues within the gender hierarchy demonstrate one of the ways that male homosocial relations were influenced by women. Women had to placate and negotiate with the men who rivalled to control their bodies, but in most cases, it was to their husbands and not their lovers that they submitted.¹²⁶

Conversely, Percy Shelley, who disliked marriage and the conventions it heralded, displayed his intimacy with Claire through disrupting traditional hierarchies. In the tense early years of their union, when Mary demanded that Percy

¹²³ For example, see Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, [May 1798]: *G.L.G: Private Correspondence*, vol. 1, pp. 209-210; Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, 1 June 1794: *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 91.

¹²⁴ Lord Nelson to Lady Hamilton, 6 March 1801: *The Hamilton & Nelson Papers*, vol. 2, p. 126; NMM, CRK/19/13, Lord Nelson to Lady Hamilton, 18 August 1801.

¹²⁵ Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, [September 1798]: *G.L.G: Private Correspondence*, vol. 1, p. 222.

¹²⁶ For example, see Sir William’s letter to Nelson telling him that Emma had ‘acquiesced to my opinion’ about having the Prince of Wales to their house: Sir William Hamilton to Lord Nelson, 19 February 1801: *Letters of Lord Nelson*, vol. 2, pp. 200-202.

'give..[her] a garden & absentia Clariae', her wish was granted and when possible Claire was sent away.¹²⁷ A few years later however, Percy was encouraging Claire to confide in him. He wrote that he did not let Mary read Claire's letters, nor see the letters he wrote her; at times he told her to 'Address me at the Post Office... Joe James, and I will take care to procure the letter', so that Mary would have no reason to suspect they were communicating. He told Claire that she was his 'best friend'; when deciding on what course her plans should take when they all lived abroad he emphasised, 'we, that is you & I, ought to have a conversation together'—deliberately excluding Mary.¹²⁸ In contrast, Hunt told Kent that he made Marianne a partaker of any secrets she would confide in him, and he refused to allow Kent the impression that their relationship could exclude her sister.¹²⁹ Whether he was as candid to Marianne about Kent as he implied is debatable—it seems more likely that he was selective with his truths—but his suggestion that he would not keep secrets from her evoked the image that the bonds of marriage that tied him and Marianne were impermeable. Plenty of evidence suggests that the Shelleys' marriage was struggling by the time they moved to Italy, and, consequently, Mary's ability to influence Percy declined. His conduct towards Claire became gradually more intimate and their friendship increasingly took up Shelley's time and affection as he took responsibility

¹²⁷ Mary Shelley to Percy Shelley, 5 December 1816: *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, vol. 1, p. 22.

¹²⁸ Percy Shelley to Claire Clairmont, [31 March 1822]: *Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, vol. 2, pp. 402-403; Percy Shelley to Claire Clairmont, 3 December [1821]: *Ibid.*, p. 370; Percy Shelley to Claire Clairmont, [29 April 1821]: *Ibid.*, p. 287-288.

¹²⁹ NYPL, Pforz Collection, LH099, Leigh Hunt to Elizabeth Kent, 4 January 1825 and LH0096, Leigh Hunt to Elizabeth Kent, 22 November 1823.

for helping her with the fallout from her short-lived liaison with Lord Byron-to the detriment of his own marriage.¹³⁰

Hierarchies in controversial *ménages* were complex and shifting: they were influenced by various factors, including the gender of the betrayed spouse, the intimacy of the married couple, the personal moral codes of those involved, and the duration and the intensity of the extra-marital relationship. Whilst women like Lady Elizabeth Foster and Claire Clairmont were controlled by the married couple with whom they were entangled during the early periods of their *ménages*, after several years of intimacy their power increased due to growing emotional reliance on them. Different members of the *ménage* were prioritised or marginalised at different times, and this was determined by their position and ability to manipulate the individual in the middle. Unlike the kept mistress cases, where power relations mirrored marital relationships, in extra-marital relationships, male and female hierarchies were distorted. Wives as well as husbands could express their displeasure about the relationship to their spouse, and they used whatever authority they could exert to limit opportunities for behaviour that they did not like. Male and female lovers, and intimate friends, like Nelson, Leveson Gower, Lady Elizabeth Foster, and Elizabeth Kent, often felt marginalised and constrained, leading to outbursts of anger and conflict. The types of behaviour they adopted were used tactically in attempts to elicit the desired actions from the one they purported to love.

Anthropologist Helen Fisher argues that today experiences of jealousy are fundamentally tied to concepts of romantic love, but that jealousy is actually a

¹³⁰ Hay, *Young Romantics*, p. 203.

'biological system' that encourages sexual possessiveness in mating pairs.¹³¹ Whilst sensations of jealousy may have their origins in biology, the situations in which emotions were evoked, and how actors expressed and communicated them, are determined by their specific cultural and historical context.¹³² Expressions of jealousy were implicitly communicated by individuals in a range of 'deviant' relationships and were used strategically to manipulate the emotions and behaviour of the one to whom they were directed. Holloway argues that whilst jealousy was a 'guiding theme of men's letters', and structured their dialogue when they felt that another threatened their relationship with their lover, similar discussions were absent from women's replies.¹³³ Men strategically expressed their jealousy to their mistresses in attempts to 'exert their control over their lovers' and to 'prove the strength of their own attachment'.¹³⁴ Holloway focuses on adulterous lovers, but in the more complex ménages examined in this thesis, where husbands often tolerated their spouse's adultery, jealousy was also expressed by husbands in order to assert their authority when they felt it was needed. For example, Sir William Hamilton wrote to Lady Hamilton when he felt she had neglected him: 'the whole attention of my wife is given to Ld. N[elson]... if a separation shou'd take place... [it would be] *detrimental* to all parties, but... more sensibly felt by our dear friend than by us.'¹³⁵ His threat was explicit: the fact that Lady Hamilton devoted all her affection to Nelson meant that she had crossed the boundaries of his tolerance and he threatened to use his

¹³¹ Helen Fisher, 'The Tyranny of Love: Love Addiction—An Anthropologist's View', in Kenneth Paul Rosenberg and Laura Curtiss Feder (eds), *Behavioural Addictions: Criteria, Evidence, and Treatment* (London: Elsevier, 2014), pp. 237-265, (p. 239, p. 243, p. 245).

¹³² Pollock, 'Anger and the negotiation of relationships', p. 589.

¹³³ Holloway, "'You know I am all on fire'", p. 333.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 334, p. 338.

¹³⁵ Sir William Hamilton to Lady Hamilton, [n.d. 1802]: *The Hamilton & Nelson Papers*, vol. 2, p. 197.

authority to end the liaison if she did not rectify her conduct. His jealousy was implicit, but as Pollock suggests, each emotion has many 'related expressions' and communicants did not always express emotions using the specific 'emotion word', which means that we have to interpret the emotions that lurk behind the message that was conveyed.¹³⁶ In the 1794 edition of Samuel Johnson's dictionary, 'Jealousy' was defined by three behaviours: 'Suspicion in love', 'suspicious fear' and 'suspicious caution, vigilation or rivalry'.¹³⁷ Since Sir William identified himself as being displaced by a rival and demanded his share of his wife's 'attention' (and love) his jealousy was implied and employed as an emotional tactic to assert his authority whilst denoting his need for his wife's affection.

Jealousy was an emotional strategy utilised by men from different social classes to manipulate their intimate relationships with women: Lord Nelson's jealous tirades to Lady Hamilton about the Prince of Wales have already been discussed; Leveson Gower was similarly jealous of Countess Bessborough's male friends; and Leigh Hunt expressed concern that he had been 'substitute[d]' in Kent's affections, hinting at his jealousy. As Holloway argues, expressing their jealousy gave men a means to both assert their power over the women that they wished to possess, and to demonstrate their own love and devotion. It also gave voice to their frustration with the constraints they felt were imposed on their actions by their situation, and often their subordinate position within a male hierarchy. Equally significant is the response that their tirades received from the women at whom they were directed, which demonstrate their attempts to pacify and soothe the men's irritation.

¹³⁶ Pollock, 'Anger and the negotiation of relationships', p. 573.

¹³⁷ Samuel Johnson, *Dictionary of the English Language*, 10th edn. (London, 1794). The entry for 'Jealous' also included 'full of competition' and 'cautious against dishonour'.

Responding to his questions about the nature of her relationship with an 'Edward Bartley' in 1823, Elizabeth Kent reassured Leigh Hunt that she:

had no reason to give up on his account, the pleasure I have of dwelling on one single intensity, as the one thing to be thought of, loved, and cherished... Tell the dear fugitive friend with whom I parted at Ramsgate [Hunt] that I think, and delight to think of him, night and day; tell him I never loved...better.¹³⁸

Similarly, Countess Bessborough attempted to soothe Leveson Gower by assuring him that the young men that he 'allude[d]' to in his letter 'never did, and never will *engross my attention*'. She suggested that his 'attack' on her about 'Beauclerc' did not bother her as this relationship was innocent, unlike their own, which, when her 'sister' accused her of impropriety, left the Countess feeling 'unhappy and ashamed from knowing there is more truth than I like to own in what they say'.¹³⁹ Women's responses demonstrate that in 'illicit' relationships expressions of jealousy functioned as part of a dialogue between two people; when men articulated their jealous frustrations they expected a response: their fear and anxiety that another could supplant them in their beloved's affections highlighted their vulnerability, and prompted women to reassure them that their love was reciprocated with promises of fidelity.

¹³⁸ Bod., MSS Shelley adds. d.5, fols. 47-48, Elizabeth Kent to Leigh Hunt, 1 September 1823.

¹³⁹ Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, 1 June 1794: *G.L.G.: Private Correspondence*, vol. 1, p. 91; Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, 29 January 1796: *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 120; BL, Add MS 51927, fols. 132-133.

Intriguingly, whilst on one hand women tried to placate jealous lovers, at times they also appear to have tried to strategically arouse jealousy in them when they felt that their attentions were wandering. Upon hearing rumours about Leveson Gower's romantic exploits whilst he was abroad on a diplomatic posting, Countess Bessborough played on his insecurities writing: 'I have had three *violent* declarations of love... Pray come back... old women are much more easily flatter'd and gain'd than young ones'.¹⁴⁰ Within the complexities of the ménage-à-trois, Lady Elizabeth Foster tried to evoke feelings of jealousy in both the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire. She wrote to tell the Duchess how 'surrounded' she was in Parisian society-these sorts of letters caused quarrels in which the Duke had to intervene.¹⁴¹ On one occasion he assured her that the Duchess had been provoked by anxiety: 'her love for you being as great as ever, and from an apprehension that yours for her might be diminished by your new acquaintances'.¹⁴² In the early years of their ménage, Foster also pitted the Duke and Duchess against one another, trying to make them jealous of the attention and amount of letters that they both received from her.¹⁴³ Trying to make their lovers jealous was a means for women to generate attention from them, by reminding them that they were desirable and could attract replacements if their liaison ended.

Women also had their own jealousies. Holloway suggests that jealousy was perceived as an emotion exclusive to men, however this does not seem to have been

¹⁴⁰ For example, see Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, 26 July 1798: *G.L.G: Private Correspondence*, vol. 1, p. 211.

¹⁴¹ Cth, CS5, 530, Lady Elizabeth Foster to Duchess of Devonshire, 8 September 1783.

¹⁴² Cth, CS5, 665.1, Duke of Devonshire to Lady Elizabeth Foster, [1785].

¹⁴³ Cth, CS5, 682, Duke of Devonshire to Lady Elizabeth Foster, 4 August 1785; CS5, 679, Duchess of Devonshire to Lady Elizabeth Foster, June 1785; CS5, 861.1, Duchess of Devonshire to Lady Elizabeth Foster, 25 February 1788.

true in elite circles by the end of the eighteenth century.¹⁴⁴ When alone on the continent secretly pregnant with the Duke of Devonshire's child, Lady Elizabeth Foster jealously accused him of having 'flirtations'. His reply reassured her that he 'had none at all, and dont desire to have any [sic]'.¹⁴⁵ Countess Bessborough often hinted at her jealousy of Leveson Gower's other lovers, but rather than anger she stated: 'whenever you attach yourself to any one, I shall feel pain'.¹⁴⁶ She tried to deny her jealousy, and implied that what she actually felt was 'regret at not being the person so much with you & so pleasant to you, than real jealousy'.¹⁴⁷ Even once the relationship was well-established Bessborough still justified her feelings by attributing them to concern that his 'tête à tête... must end in being probably dangerous to you'.¹⁴⁸ Georgiana Russell, wife of the 6th Duke of Bedford, also expressed jealous sentiments about her husband's 'little habits'-his intimacy with the Countess of Sandwich. In 1833, upon her return to London from Scotland where she had been sojourning with her own lover, she told her friend, Lord Holland, that the Duke was preoccupied by Sandwich, and so had sent her away to their Woburn estate, 'out of the way, with the other useless brood mares'.¹⁴⁹

Jealousy was clearly a difficult emotion for women to express explicitly. In contemporary novels that depict a heroine being supplanted in a man's affections by another, the women never react jealously: in the Duchess of Devonshire's *The Sylph*

¹⁴⁴ Holloway, "You know I am all on fire", p. 333.

¹⁴⁵ Cth, CS5, 682, Duke of Devonshire to Lady Elizabeth Foster, 4 August 1785.

¹⁴⁶ Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, 29 January 1796: *G.L.G: Private Correspondence*, vol. 1, p. 120.

¹⁴⁷ BL, Add MS 89382/2/9, fols. 5-6, Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, 3 August 1798.

¹⁴⁸ Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, [April/May 1805]: *G.L.G: Private Correspondence*, vol. 2, p. 71.

¹⁴⁹ BL, Holland House Papers, Add MS 51674, Georgiana Russell, Duchess of Bedford to Lord Holland, 25 December 1833.

(1778), Julia states she is ‘melancholy’ but ‘not jealous’ when she sees her husband with another woman at the opera; in Amelia Opie’s *The Father and Daughter* (1800), when Agnes Fitzhenry finds her lover is engaged to another it ‘was more than..[she] could bear’, but her anger when she confronted him was concerned with the shame she had brought on her family rather than his betrayal of her; in Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* (1814), when Fanny Price observes the growing intimacy between her love interest Edmund Bertram and Miss Crawford she feels ‘sorrowful’ and makes her excuses to leave them swiftly; in 1837, when Disraeli’s, *Henrietta Temple* discovers that Ferdinand Armine, the man she thought she was betrothed to, is due to wed another she was ‘choked with emotion...incapable of thought’, but she made no mention of jealousy.¹⁵⁰ Later in the book, Henrietta ‘was even desirous of becoming acquainted with’ her replacement and tries to get Armine to fall in love with his fiancée, even though she secretly still loves him herself.¹⁵¹ Jealous behaviour was negative, and not in-keeping with the ideals that guided female conduct. In novels only villains or minor characters expressed jealousy, like Madame de Merteuil in *Dangerous Liaisons* (1782), the Bertram sisters in *Mansfield Park*, and Lady Anne Parker in *the Sylph*.¹⁵² Heroines did not get jealous—with the notable exception of Calantha in Caroline Lamb’s *Glenarvon* (1816), however, as Clara Tuite has discussed, Lamb’s public displays of rage and jealousy against Lord Byron and his new lovers were taken as a sign of her madness and saw her excluded from high society.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ Georgiana Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire, *The Sylph* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2007, orig. 1778), p. 74; Opie, *The Father and Daughter*, p. 25, p. 30; Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions LTD, 2000, orig. 1814) p. 170; Benjamin Disraeli, *Henrietta Temple: A Love Story* (London: Colburn, 1837), book 4, chapter 7.

¹⁵¹ Disraeli, *Henrietta Temple*, book 6, chapter 6.

¹⁵² Austen, *Mansfield Park*, p. 93.

¹⁵³ Clara Tuite, ‘Tainted Love and Romantic “Literary Celebrity”’, *English Literary History*, 74:1 (2007), 59-88.

The treatment of female jealousy in contemporary literature suggests a conflict between the constructions of women in fiction and reality. While jealousy was not a polite and feminine attribute, in a culture where the romantic dyad was idealised, to feel as though one had a rival for a lover's affections aroused it. Women in elite circles could (and did) covertly convey their jealous sentiments, thus female jealousy did have a place in their cultural scripts. Leveson Gower responded to Countess Bessborough's 'jealous' words and sensing her anxiety he pacified her in his response: 'I see and acknowledge the truth and Justice of your Lecture... I know not whether I have repeated to you before that to you I owe the happiest moments of my life...if it had been my Lot to have been married to you, I should have passed a life of happiness'.¹⁵⁴ Jealousy was a fundamental emotional practice used in this period by men and women who conducted adulterous and complex intimacies to test the commitment and depth of their paramour's love and devotion. Jealousy could be intentionally aroused in a lover, and the expression of jealous sentiments were intended to elicit denials of infidelity (for women, but not always men who did not have to be sexually faithful) and much desired reassurances of love and commitment: both strategies conveyed messages of vulnerability. If we consider jealousy as part of a logic of emotions then it is clear that it had gendered characteristics: male jealousy worked in unison with anger and anxiety, whilst women's jealousy operated within a nexus of pain and sadness, but both essentially tried to provoke passionate responses from the individual that they were directed towards.

¹⁵⁴ Leveson Gower to Countess Bessborough, 20-24 April 1805: *G.L.G: Private Correspondence*, vol. 2, pp. 71-72.

Illegitimate pregnancies—both real and rumoured—exacerbated the tensions and vulnerabilities that couples experienced. As Greig has shown, in elite circles an illegitimate pregnancy often marked the end of social tolerance of a discreetly managed affair, and women were exiled—often to the continent—to give birth in secret and leave their child in the care of strangers. If their husbands were tolerant and the birth was properly handled, then this exile was temporary, and women could return to high society once the dust had settled, although they had to leave their illegitimate children behind.¹⁵⁵ Lady Elizabeth Foster undertook two such journeys in 1785 and 1788 to give birth to the Duke of Devonshire's children. Although her letters from the period do not survive, the Duke's replies suggest that she found the process extremely upsetting and isolating; relations between them were tense and she accused him of flirting with others in her absence. To show her anger and regain some sense of power Foster also threatened to not return, which prompted the Duke to reply that 'next summer... I intend to take you ...[to Bolton] let the consequence be what it will, so don't talk any more nonsense about not returning'.¹⁵⁶ Her threat manipulated the Duke into proclaiming that his attachment to her was more important than what other people would say.

The practice of concealing pregnancies by going abroad under the pretences of bad health was interrupted by hostilities between France and Britain in the 1790s, and elite women had to find a way to conceal their pregnancies for longer periods of time. Between 1797 and 1804, seven illegitimate children were born in London or its

¹⁵⁵ Greig, *The Beau Monde*, pp. 142-144.

¹⁵⁶ Cth, CS5, 683, Duke of Devonshire to Lady Elizabeth Foster, 11 August 1785 and 737, Duke of Devonshire to Lady Elizabeth Foster, 16 May 1786.

surrounding area as a result of the relationships examined in this chapter.¹⁵⁷ Both Countess Bessborough and Lady Elizabeth Monck reported having to make excuses so as not to receive family or visitors who might discover their conditions.¹⁵⁸ Boringdon lamented the fact that Monck could not travel to Naples.¹⁵⁹ The fact that these circumstances made it more complicated to conceal pregnancies heightened the anxiety around them and forced lovers to make difficult decisions balancing their public reputation with private concerns about the safe-keeping of their offspring. Due to the conflict in France, the Duke of Devonshire brought his and Lady Foster's children back to England and installed them in the nursery alongside his legitimate children. As far as Boringdon was concerned, the restrictions on social mobility opened possibilities that might not have been considered had the option for going abroad been there. He wrote to Leveson Gower that because it was going to be almost impossible to conceal her pregnancy, he was trying to convince Monck that they should be open about their relationship and aim to get her husband to divorce her.¹⁶⁰ Her sister, Lady Anne Hatton, feared that now they had 'an excuse' they would throw caution to the wind and risk losing Monck's two daughters from her marriage.¹⁶¹ These children were a point of tension between the couple: he appears to have resented the fact that she prioritised them over the infants they had together.¹⁶² Although they schemed to use the Countess's influence over Mr Monck

¹⁵⁷ Lady Elizabeth Monck and Lord Boringdon had three sons in 1797, 1799, and 1800; Countess Bessborough and Leveson Gower had a daughter in 1800 and a son in 1804; Lady Hamilton and Lord Nelson had a daughter in 1801 and a child that died shortly after its birth in 1804.

¹⁵⁸ For example, see TNA, PRO 30/29/6/2/18, Lady Elizabeth Monck to Leveson Gower, 30 May 1797.

¹⁵⁹ TNA, PRO 30/29/9/1/44, Lord Boringdon to Leveson Gower, 23 October 1798.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ TNA, PRO 30/29/6/2/28, Lady Anne Hatton to Leveson Gower, [1796]. The given date has been pencilled on the letter later, but given the conversation corresponds with Boringdon and Leveson Gower's dated letters from Oct/Nov 1798, I think a date of end 1798/beginning 1799 is more likely.

¹⁶² See for example, TNA, PRO 30/29/9/1/43, Lord Boringdon to Leveson Gower, 20 October 1798.

to ensure the girls were not taken from their mother, in the end Leveson Gower managed to persuade Boringdon that it was not an ideal course of action due to the risk that Mr Monck might not file for divorce, which would leave Lady Elizabeth a social pariah.

Many affairs did not operate in complete isolation but impacted on wider friendship networks. Individuals were candid about their relationships with a few trusted friends, often soliciting their opinion about whether their behaviour was immoral or far beyond society's standards of appropriateness and asking them to help with deceptions. Men advised their friends about whether or not their conduct was inappropriate: over the course of their long friendship, which began when they were teenagers in the 1780s and continued until Boringdon's death in 1840, Leveson Gower and Lord Boringdon remonstrated with each other on several occasions when they thought the other had behaved badly regarding a woman.¹⁶³ In 1798, Leveson Gower cautioned Boringdon that he lived in too 'little restraint' with Monck, to which Boringdon replied that he did not think it a problem as he was 'certainly restrained from every thing else'.¹⁶⁴ Sometimes opinions about 'deviant' conduct caused tensions and tested friendships, but equally advice was often solicited: Boringdon frequently asked Leveson Gower for advice about how to proceed with Monck, especially on the occasions when he impregnated her. In a different social group, Hunt requested that Kent ask their mutual friends 'the Novellos...whether they think your coming here would be injurious'.¹⁶⁵ Individuals accepted judgement and criticism from their friends fairly willingly, and used it to measure their conduct in

¹⁶³ BL, Add MS 48222, fol. 61, Leveson Gower to Lord Boringdon, 20 May 1793.

¹⁶⁴ TNA, PRO 30/29/9/1/44, Lord Boringdon to Leveson Gower, 23 October 1798.

¹⁶⁵ Leigh Hunt to Elizabeth Kent, 1 September 1824: *The Correspondence of Leigh Hunt*, pp. 227-233.

comparison to the accepted standards of the broader social group to which they belonged. This suggests that the spheres of influence that determined private conduct were more hierarchical than we might anticipate, and although individuals demonstrated an awareness of the 'public sphere', it was their personal relationships that had more of an impact on how they conducted their illicit intimacies.

Elite men and women who conducted controversial relationships relied on their friends for both emotional support and for practical assistance with the logistical difficulties of seeing one another discreetly. In the small social circle that surrounded the affairs of Boringdon and Leveson Gower, the men interceded with each other's mistresses when requested to, attempting to placate them or convince them to take a course of action favoured by their friend. For example, Boringdon wrote to Leveson Gower 'I am working heaven & earth... to get Ldy E.[Elizabeth] to Saltram in ye autumn – talk to her abt. it & see if you can be of any use [sic.]', and on another occasion he reported to Leveson Gower that 'our two letters had so good an effect on Ldy. Anne [Hatton], that the Viscount [Morpeth] was never in better graces'.¹⁶⁶ In October 1794, the three men also colluded to bring about 'The Devonshire Plan', a scheme which would enable them to all see their mistresses at the same time without raising suspicions as they would appear to be a part of a larger party.¹⁶⁷ The friendship between Leveson Gower and Lord Boringdon was particularly intimate, and they looked to each other for consolation when their liaisons were not going well: in despair at '2 o'clock in the morning' on the 20 August

¹⁶⁶ TNA, PRO 30/29/9/1/52, Lord Boringdon to Leveson Gower, 12 August 1801; TNA, PRO 30/29/9/1/10, Lord Boringdon to Leveson Gower, 1 October 1794. The relationship between Anne Hatton and Morpeth will be examined in more detail in the next chapter.

¹⁶⁷ TNA, PRO 30/29/9/1/14, Lord Boringdon to Leveson Gower, 28 October 1794.

1794, Leveson Gower wrote to Lord Boringdon that felt 'very melancholy' about Countess Bessborough's reluctance to 'have any liaison' with him.¹⁶⁸ The way that they shared their problems suggests that by causing anxiety and uncertainty, controversial relationships could foster homosocial bonds between friends, by establishing intimacies based on trust and empathy as they showed their vulnerabilities to one another.¹⁶⁹

Women also sometimes felt the need to involve individuals outside of their relationships. Lady Anne Hatton asked Leveson Gower to ask Viscount Morpeth to come back to town to see her, and implored him to 'not represent me in an unfavourable way'; Lady Elizabeth Monck thanked him for intervening when Boringdon made demands that she publicly separate from her husband.¹⁷⁰ These heterosocial exchanges were far from egalitarian: the women who made such requests acknowledged the position of power that the male friend held, and emphasised their own vulnerable and subordinate position to intreat the men to utilise their influence when they felt they had none themselves. Logistically, women took the lead in exchanging notes and communications between their friends and their lovers, enabling relationships to progress and be sustained; men were left asking each other whether their respective mistresses had exchanged letters.¹⁷¹ Heterosocial relationships have received little scholarly attention, but it is clear that

¹⁶⁸ BL, Add MS 48222, fols. 73-74, Leveson Gower to Lord Boringdon, 20 August 1794.

¹⁶⁹ Friendships between elite women could be similarly cultivated when sharing the obstacles that came with illicit relationships, but these will be further examined in the next chapter.

¹⁷⁰ TNA, PRO 30/29/6/2/29, Lady Anne Hatton to Leveson Gower, [1796]; TNA, PRO 30/29/6/2/18, Lady Elizabeth Monck to Leveson Gower, 30 May 1797.

¹⁷¹ For example, see TNA, PRO 30/29/9/1/48, Lord Boringdon to Leveson Gower, 28 July 1800; TNA PRO 30/29/6/2/22, Lady Elizabeth Monck to Leveson Gower, 31 March 1806.

in situations where an 'illicit' couple needed assistance from their support networks, homosocial and heterosocial bonds intersected.

Men and women disclosed the same feelings and information to their male and female friends but relied on them for different types of assistance. When preparing for the birth of their second child, Lord Boringdon and Lady Elizabeth Monck relied heavily on their network to conceal the pregnancy from Monck's husband. Leveson Gower was charged with procuring lodgings for the couple, and Countess Bessborough and Lady Anne Hatton were asked to distract and deceive her husband, who had interrupted the couple's plans by leaving Bath early and bringing forward his trip to Ireland: He would have returned when Monck would have been very visibly pregnant and preparing to lie in.¹⁷² This was somehow resolved, only for further complications to ensue when Mr Monck became ill at Bath just weeks before the baby was due: Lady Anne had to go and take care of him, much to her annoyance, and Countess Bessborough also deceived Lady Elizabeth's brother, William Gore, by telling him that Lady Elizabeth was also ill, ensuring the pregnancy remained concealed from Monck's family.¹⁷³ Lady Elizabeth Foster and the Duchess of Devonshire similarly orchestrated deceptions to keep their family group at Chiswick, so that Foster could stay alone with Countess Bessborough to deliver her baby in 1804.¹⁷⁴ Once a child was born, close female friends visited each other's children and also reported back to the men about how their children were developing, and when

¹⁷² TNA, PRO 30/29/6/2/19, Lady Elizabeth Monck to Leveson Gower, 19 September 1798.

¹⁷³ Trinity College Dublin, Arran Papers, 7581, fol. 10, Countess Bessborough to William Gore, 21 March 1799.

¹⁷⁴ Cth, CS5, 1786, Lady Elizabeth Foster to Duchess of Devonshire, 28 October 1804.

asked to, male friends stood as legal trustees.¹⁷⁵ Both Monck and Boringdon were apologetic for the ‘trouble’ they had brought to their friends’ doors, but ultimately they expected that their friends would be anxious about them and feel duty-bound to help. How Boringdon and Monck negotiated between them about who to involve in their crisis, and how these involvements influenced the dynamics of their relationship is unfortunately lost information, however, they demonstrate that friendships in elite heterosocial networks offered practical and emotional support to individuals. These networks were built on bonds of trust and similar experiences, and men and women alike drew on them when they felt vulnerable to ameliorate their experiences of ‘illicit’ relationships.

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Individuals whose relationships did not conform to societal expectations acknowledged that the judgements of others, such as their spouse, relatives, or acquaintances, put pressure on their attachments. Fear of the reactions of those close to them, and anxiety about damaging these bonds, fundamentally influenced an individual’s decisions about what they concealed from whom, and how they behaved towards their lovers in different contexts. Interactions within controversial liaisons were heavily influenced by the individual’s attempts to adhere to shifting cultural and social expectations of love, marriage, and sexual behaviour. These external influences had an impact on the intimate relationship, with individuals establishing boundaries on what their lover could expect from them so as to keep

¹⁷⁵ See for example, TNA, PRO 30/29/6/2/22, Lady Elizabeth Monck to Leveson Gower, 31 March 1806; Castle Howard, 6th Earl of Carlisle’s Papers, J17/11, Lord Boringdon to Viscount Morpeth, 12 May 1804.

their attachment concealed; they also determined the spaces and locations in which they conducted their relationships. Conventional binary power relations were often disrupted, and men were often left feeling frustrated and powerless by the constraints imposed on their authority. Women remained subordinate in gender relations, but they did not always have (and were not always able to) submit to their lovers where they had another male authority figure to prioritise and on whom they depended.

The boundaries that were necessary to ensure discretion and concealment frequently left individuals feeling vulnerable and uncertain about how committed their beloved was, which influenced how they behaved and conducted their relationships. Individuals employed a variety of emotional strategies to navigate complex relationship dynamics that involved conflicting loyalties. These cases illustrate that manipulative behaviours were a common feature in relationships that were conducted under pressure. Although there were slight variations according to the individual's social standing and gender, the sense of exposure and vulnerability led people to employ manipulative strategies to test their loved one's commitment, such as expressing and arousing jealous sentiments. They also made demands which upset established hierarchies of affection and obligation; these emotional practices and behaviours were remarkably similar regardless of the status group of the individuals involved. Couples desperately tried to maintain their intimacies, despite the instability, heartbreak, and sense of isolation they often caused them. They adopted unconventional and secretive practices to protect their liaisons, whilst at the same time trying to protect their reputations by keeping up the facade of conformity to societal expectations. Although they were often stressful to manage,

the relationships were often driven by powerful needs and impulses (to fill different voids—some practical, some emotional) and were therefore considered to be worth the risks. Despite the many obstacles they faced, all of the people examined in this chapter managed to create and sustain relationships for long periods of time that were meaningful to them, and that were based on intimacy, passion and commitment—the main three components that Robert Sternberg argues make up the ‘triangle’ of love.¹⁷⁶

Letters are important relics of controversial relationships: they were cherished by the addressees who preserved them—even if the writer had requested that they be destroyed after reading. Correspondents absorbed and deployed popular cultural tropes, like romantic love and the sentimental family, to construct letters that placed their relationship into frameworks that emphasised their affection and commitment to the recipient. As couples in controversial relationships were frequently separated and uncertain of when they would next meet, their letters embodied their relationship. Letters provided secret spaces for intimacy to be sustained; writers embraced erotic language, stimulated memories of places that held special meanings for them and tried to provoke bodily sensations in their readers. By doing so, they gave themselves a physical presence in the imaginations of their loved ones and kept feelings of desire alive when opportunities for physical intimacy were sporadic. It is important to consider correspondence as a form of dialogue: writers carefully structured the contents of their letters, not only to perform a certain version of themselves to the receiver, but also in attempts to

¹⁷⁶ Robert Sternberg, ‘Triangulating Love’, in Robert Sternberg & Tom Barnes (eds.), *The Psychology of Love* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), pp. 119-138, (p. 120).

influence and frame responses to them. Epistolary expressions or attempts to arouse emotions, like jealousy, sadness and anxiety, were often strategic—they created a space for reassuring declarations of love and commitment from the recipient that helped to reduce the writer’s own feelings of insecurity and uncertainty. As Scheer argues, the mind and body are embedded in social relations: in these cases, individuals employed emotional practices to manipulate the minds and bodies of their loved ones anticipating a particular outcome, however, as Scheer points out, such practices are not always effective.¹⁷⁷

Many of the anxieties and difficulties experienced by the individuals participating in these relationships were compounded by events that were outside of their control. As scholarship has shown, this period was one characterised by international war and internal political and social tensions. The sense of instability created by these factors frequently occasioned moral panics and facilitated the development of more fixed gender and sexual ideals.¹⁷⁸ These discourses were fronted by the press, whose role in the development of a ‘public sphere’ has been well documented.¹⁷⁹ The following two chapters will examine the connection between the press, print culture, sexual gossip and scandal, and the concept of ‘society’ within both Whig and literary circles. As we have seen in this chapter, the decisions made by individuals in private life were not impervious to this ‘public’ realm. Moreover, an awareness of the threat of exposure posed by the developing

¹⁷⁷ Scheer, ‘Are emotions a kind of practice’, pp. 209-211.

¹⁷⁸ For example, see Katherine Binhammer, ‘The Sex Panic of the 1790s’, *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 6:3 (1996), 409-434; Morris, *Sex, Money & Personal Character*; Kathleen Wilson, ‘Nelson’s Women: Female Masculinity and Body Politics in the French and Napoleonic Wars’, *European History Quarterly*, 37:4 (2007), 562-581.

¹⁷⁹ Hannah Barker and Simon Burrows, ‘Introduction’, in Hannah Barker and Simon Burrows (eds.), *Press, Politics and the Public Sphere in Europe and North America, 1760-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 1-22, (p. 1).

press appears to have increased across both social groups as the nineteenth century progressed. Intriguingly, anxieties about exposure were intertwined with fears of betrayal and rivalry within social networks rather than concern for the reactions of a broader 'public' that we might identify as the audience for sex scandals today. For the Whig world and literary societies, the 'public' sphere was relatively delimited, yet it played a significant role in the interpersonal operations of their private circles.

Chapter 2: Braving ‘the opinion of the World’: Controversial Liaisons, Gossip and Scandal in Whig Society¹

In April 1810, Lady Melbourne warned her daughter-in-law, Lady Caroline Lamb, that ‘When one braves the opinion of the World, sooner or later they will feel the consequences of it’.² At the time, Lady Caroline was conducting a very indiscreet romance with Sir Godfrey Webster; Lady Melbourne reprimanded her daughter-in-law’s imprudent behaviour and for inviting ‘the World’ to judge and condemn her, and the Lamb family more generally. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, elite society, or ‘the World’ as it was often called by its members, was relatively small compared to what it would become during the Victorian period.³ The World was frequently referred to in the letters of society men and women, where it was held up as a figurative, powerful, all-encompassing entity, that watched and judged its members for their behaviour, and turned on those who failed to adhere to its complex codes. The term was also appropriated by newspaper editors to title elite gossip reports, such as the *Morning Post*’s daily column, ‘the Fashionable World’, which often included paragraphs contributed by members of elite society themselves, that were most likely intended for a knowing and delimited audience. A wide range of heterosexual relationships, marital, non-marital, adulterous, intimate, and platonic, were deemed worthy of ‘the World’s’ interest, and were dissected and analysed at length in letters, newspaper paragraphs, and satirical prints.

¹ BL, Lamb Papers, Add MS 45546, fol. 16, Lady Melbourne to Lady Caroline Lamb, [April 1810].

² *Ibid.*

³ Leonore Davidoff, *The Best Circles: Society Etiquette and the Season* (London: Cresset Library, 1986), p. 16, p. 20; Hannah Greig, *The Beau Monde: Fashionable Society in Georgian London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 18-19. Greig suggests that despite some tolerance of social mobility, eighteenth-century fashionable society was made up predominantly of titled individuals, and probably only numbered ‘a few hundred individuals in any one year’.

The concept of 'the World' was used variably; it often symbolised elite and fashionable society as a whole, but it could also denote the smaller, complex and overlapping social networks that were built on familial alliances and party loyalties: over the period covered by this thesis, these were the Whigs or the Tories. This chapter will focus primarily on the Whigs, who were the main opposition party throughout this period. As Leslie Mitchell has shown, the Whigs were deeply conflicted on almost all political issues of their time, which shaped their social relationships as they were known to 'bicker' and 'subdivide' frequently.⁴ High-profile members of the party were renowned for their lax attitudes to sexual morality and images of them were often used to tarnish the whole group as immoral and debauched. These included: Charles James Fox, leader of the Whigs for the final two decades of the eighteenth century, who had many mistresses, and scandalised elite society in 1795 by marrying former courtesan and royal mistress, Elizabeth Armistead; and the 5th Duke and Duchess of Devonshire, who were both suspected of having various extra-marital relationships. The Duchess was believed to be Fox's mistress during the 1784 Westminster election and the couple's long-term ménage-à-trois with Lady Elizabeth Foster met with disapproval, particularly from the Duchess's mother; and during the Duchess of Devonshire's lifetime the party was also closely associated with the Prince of Wales (future George IV), who was notorious for his numerous affairs, with both married Whig women like Lady Melbourne and Lady Jersey, and actresses and courtesans from lower social origins, like Mary Robinson and Maria Fitzherbert, as well as for his disastrous marriage to

⁴ Leslie Mitchell, *The Whig World, 1760-1837* (London: Hambledon, 2005), p. 1.

Princess Caroline of Brunswick. The Whigs gradually lost the support of the Prince in the early 1800s, and relations were hostile by the time he became Regent in 1811. The Whigs were also largely, but not universally, supportive of Queen Caroline's claims to the status of Queen Consort after his accession to the throne as George IV in 1820.

Party allegiances did not preclude other relationships. The individuals examined in this chapter mixed socially and romantically with members of the Tory party, and sometimes these relationships were thought to threaten men's allegiances to their party. This chapter will examine letters, diaries, and publications, such as roman-à-clefs and exposés that were reputedly written by members of elite society, alongside newspaper paragraphs and satirical prints, to analyse the relationships that 'the World' deemed controversial. The focus will be on two generations of Whigs who provide us with an opportunity to assess continuity and change across the half-century. The first period, circa 1780-1806, will examine the controversial relationships of the networks of men and women who surrounded Georgiana Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire, up to her death, including her sister, Harriet Ponsonby, Countess Bessborough; Elizabeth Lamb, Lady Melbourne; Frances Villiers, Countess Jersey (wife of the 4th Earl); Francis Russell, 5th Duke of Bedford; George O'Brien Wyndham, 3rd Earl of Egremont; and the Prince of Wales. The second period, 1806-1840, considers the conduct of the remaining older generation of Whigs, including the marriage of Lady Elizabeth Foster to the widowed 5th Duke of Devonshire; the mounting tensions and climax of the Prince Regent's marital problems; and the rise of the next generation, including Lady Caroline Lamb, the daughter of Countess Bessborough and wife of Lady Melbourne's son William; and

the Lady Patronesses of Almack's club, which included Lady Melbourne's daughter, Lady Emily Cowper (after 1839 Viscountess Palmerston), Sarah Child Villiers, wife of the 5th Earl of Jersey, and Princess Lieven, wife of the Russian ambassador, who were the official leaders of high society during the Regency and the 1820s. It also considers the 'reign' of George IV's mistress, Marchioness Conyngham, and examines the romantic lives of several roués, like Lords Byron, Clanwilliam and Petersham, and the Duke of Wellington.

This chapter examines the sorts of relationships 'the World' considered controversial, and the concerns that these controversies suggest elite society was preoccupied with in this period. What did they gossip about, and when did a relationship become a society scandal? How did elite individuals respond to controversial relationships, what forms did their reactions take, what functions did these reactions serve, and what factors influenced them? Was recovery ever possible after sexual disgrace? This chapter is intended to develop our understanding of how the elite understood and enacted their unwritten sexual and social codes, and the factors that influenced when and how they practiced them. Analysing elite society gossip about relationships that they deemed controversial reveals much about how their society functioned, whilst helping us to understand their (often contradictory) attitudes towards what constituted sexual deviance.

Several scholars have tackled the question of how and why elite society's mores gradually transformed from the racy libertine culture of the early eighteenth century, to the championing of domestic ideology during the Victorian period. Most have concluded that the transformation was primarily due to shifts in political culture. Judith Lewis and Hannah Greig argue that some of the drive for moral reform

came from within the elite themselves as they faced widespread criticism by the press at the end of the eighteenth century, where their 'private vices' were used in politically motivated attacks on aristocratic privilege.⁵ Lewis argues that in order to maintain their prestigious position, the elite reformed a 'theater of greatness', that had enabled them to laud their authority over the people, into a 'theater of virtue'- one that was influenced by evangelical principles.⁶ In this transformation aristocratic men and women continued their ostentatious public appearances, but they sustained their prestige through performances of militaristic or altruistic roles instead.⁷ Lewis suggests that the elite's adoption of evangelical principles was not purely superficial, and it encouraged many to value restraint and self-control.⁸ Lewis's arguments are slightly problematic, since those leading society in the 1810s and 1820s, whilst not necessarily courting publicity for their liaisons, were hardly putting concerted effort into appearing virtuous.

Over the period in question elite sexual mores fluctuated in a non-linear manner. Marilyn Morris relays a more complex and convincing argument of the change in elite mores in her book that explores the development of our obsession with the private characters of public figures. In her account, she sees the move influenced by several factors, including the increasing presence of a popular press in political and social spaces that had been formerly exclusively controlled by the elite, and moreover, the way that George III's marriage was widely publicised as the

⁵ Greig, *Beau Monde*, p. 26; Judith S. Lewis, *Sacred to Female Patriotism: Gender, Class, and Politics in late Georgian Britain* (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 174-176, p. 189.

⁶ Lewis, *Sacred to Female Patriotism*, p. 183.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 188-189.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 160, p. 171.

perfect example of the domestic ideal that all Britons should aspire to.⁹ Rather than see a simple narrative of progression, Morris emphasises the paradoxes, and argues that elite men had the difficult job of conforming to conflicting ideals: they needed to have a ‘clubbable’ masculine social life whilst also appearing to be good husbands and fathers.¹⁰ Although the book covers the long eighteenth century, the focus is really on the period before 1800 and Morris does not offer much analysis of the Regency. She does, however, concur with other scholars, that elite women’s visibility in political culture became increasingly problematic, and that these concerns tended to be represented by anxieties over female chastity.¹¹

Hannah Greig argues that female sexual behaviour was ‘tightly policed’ in aristocratic circles, and that ‘even the most vivacious leaders of fashion’ could face a variety of sanctions for breaching society’s ‘unwritten’ code of sexual conduct.¹² Greig examines cases of women being exiled from elite society, both on temporary and permanent bases, and argues that ostracism was meted out to female transgressors by a united *beau monde*, in order to preserve the hegemonic position of their group and the status quo within it. Greig’s book offers important insights into the way that sexual codes functioned within elite society. Her focus, however, on transgressions that ‘triggered expulsion’-like illegitimate pregnancy and elopement-means that the more subtle nuances of how society reacted to less obvious extra-marital relationships remain underexplored.

⁹ Marilyn Morris, *Sex, Money & Personal Character in Eighteenth-Century British Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), pp. 59-60, p. 68.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, chapter 3.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 133; Elaine Chalus, *Elite Women in English Political Life, c.1754-1790* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), p. 229; Kathleen Wilson, ‘Nelson’s Women: Female Masculinity and Body Politics in the French and Napoleonic Wars’, *European History Quarterly*, 37:4 (2007), 562-581.

¹² Greig, *Beau Monde*, p. 194, p. 215.

Katrina O’Loughlin’s work on the satires depicting Lady Craven takes on a similar subject matter to Greig: Lady Craven had several affairs before she separated from her husband in the 1780s and embarked on a very high-profile exile in Europe, where her activities were well-documented by the contemporary newspapers and caricaturists in London.¹³ O’Loughlin demonstrates that the gossip that appeared in the ‘public’ sphere of newspapers, periodicals and visual satires overlapped with the gossip that was discussed within the more ‘private’ sphere of epistolary networks. She suggests that the two were ‘mutually constituted spaces’ intended for the same esoteric audiences, and were used to both critique behaviour and attack specific individuals.¹⁴ Furthermore, O’Loughlin argues that gossip is a useful source to examine the ‘shared emotional vocabularies’ of a group. In her examples, the ability of satire to provoke both disgust and laughter in its audience enabled its dual function as a device to censure behaviour *and* to cement the bonds of elite sociability.¹⁵ As she looks exclusively at satires and Horace Walpole’s sarcasm, O’Loughlin’s focus is rather narrow; on the other hand, her use of the history of emotions’ methods to analyse gossip is effective. While it appears that most of the discussions in printed sources were satirical, discussions in correspondence about these relationships involved the expression of a whole range of complex and contradictory emotions from the spectators, which ultimately still functioned to strengthen familial and social bonds.

¹³ Katrina O’Loughlin, ‘“Strolling Roxanas”’: Sexual Transgressions and Social Satire in the Eighteenth Century’, in Susan Broomhall (ed), *Spaces for Feeling: Emotions and Sociabilities in Britain, 1650-1850* (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 112-135.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

1780-1806

The use of scandals to discredit the aristocracy has been thoroughly analysed by historians, including Anna Clark.¹⁶ However, the works of anthropologists have been more useful in thinking about how scandal develops and functions within smaller communities, like the Whig World.¹⁷ Rather than being opportunistically 'seized' upon by an instigator and brought to the attention of a broader public in order to expand political debate, scandals kept within elite circles tended to progress from gossip about unsubstantiated rumours concerning an agent(s)' seemingly immoral behaviour, to an escalation of the circulation of these rumours (on many occasions appearing in different mediums like newspaper paragraphs and prints), until it would eventually peak in an open scandal as 'a public' reacted with outrage or shock when said rumours appeared to have been confirmed. Some scandals progressed very quickly through these stages, others more slowly, and in some cases the scandal was the result of the cumulative effects of an individual's long-term scandalous lifestyle.

The 'amorous career' of Lady Anne Hatton, close friend to Countess Bessborough, exemplifies how gossip escalated in elite networks, and how people reacted to controversial relationships.¹⁸ In 1794, in Naples, Elizabeth Vassal-Fox, Lady

¹⁶ Anna Clark, *Scandal: the Sexual Politics of the British Constitution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Donna T. Andrew, "'Adultery à la mode": Privilege, the law and attitudes to adultery 1770-1809', *History*, 82:265 (1997), 5-23; Cindy McCreery, 'Breaking all the Rules: The Worsley Affair in Late-Eighteenth-Century Britain', in Regina Hewitt and Pat Rogers (eds), *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Eighteenth-Century Society* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2002), pp. 69-88.

¹⁷ Max Gluckman, 'Gossip and Scandal', *Current Anthropology*, 4:3 (1963), 307-316, (p. 307); Sally Engle Merry, 'Rethinking Gossip and Scandal', in Donald Black (ed), *Toward a General Theory of Social Control, Vol. 1 Fundamentals* (London: Academic Press, 1984), pp. 271-296. For full discussion see introduction, pp. 27-28.

¹⁸ BL, Holland House Papers, Lady Holland's Journals, Add MS 51929, 26 July 1799 – 28 April 1801, fols. 75-76.

Holland, commented on Lady Anne Hatton's liaison with George Howard, Lord Morpeth, the twenty-one-year-old heir to the Earldom of Carlisle, a man whom Lady Holland admired:

Ld. Morpeth... has taken the flippant gallant Ly. Anne Hatton under his protection. She is too volatile to be his exclusively... to my surprise [I] found her in company with Ly. Plymouth, who is the great retailer of the anecdotes against this slippery Hibernian, & whom she declared against receiving.¹⁹

According to Lady Holland, Lady Anne was 'rejected' by English society in Naples, unlike her sister, Lady Elizabeth Monck, who, although 'as bad in point of chastity almost as her sister', was 'discreet & full of retinue, by which she has preserved herself in reputation'.²⁰ Lady Anne was transgressive because she was imprudently promiscuous, and others reacted as Lady Holland had done. Lady Plymouth 'declared against receiving' Lady Anne socially and a later source confirms that she was not alone in doing so.²¹ Yet, whilst Lady Anne's behaviour in Naples was gossip-worthy and saw her excluded from certain societies, she was certainly not a social pariah, and continued to socialise with Countess Bessborough and her mother, the very pious and respectable Dowager Countess Spencer.²²

¹⁹ BL, Holland House Papers, Lady Holland's Journals, Add MS 51927, June 1791 – 6th July 1797, fol. 132.

²⁰ Ibid, fol. 133.

²¹ Plymouth record Office (Plyth), Parker family of Saltram and Robinson Letters, 1259/2/502, Theresa Villiers to Lady Anne Robinson, 8 April 1800.

²² For example, see Cth, CS5, 1166, Dowager Countess Spencer to Georgiana Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire, 15 August 1793. The Dowager Countess Spencer records sending Lady Hatton 'a note from me to beg if there was any thing I might go to her'.

In 1800, interest in Lady Anne's relationships escalated when rumours began circulating that she was to become the third wife of the Marquess of Abercorn. Many thought the idea incredible, that a woman with such a reputation for promiscuity and without money could be considered marriageable by a powerful peer. Lady Holland recorded gossiping about the rumours with some of her male friends: 'General Fitzpatrick with his usual sarcasm declares she has only changed her keeper', whilst 'Beauclerk thinks Ly. Ann dreams'.²³ The men scorned Lady Anne and discredited the rumours. Lady Holland was also dubious, and suggested Lady Anne's attempts on the Marquess were calculated and, if she succeeded, worrying:

If she closes her amorous career with one of the greatest matches in the kingdom, I don't know how young women will credit wise precepts of Virtue alone is rewarded etc. Ly B[essborough] protests that she has only lived openly with four gallants, but though that number is sufficient to establish her character, yet I know she has had more.²⁴

Gossip and rumour gave Lady Holland the opportunity to reflect on the values of sexual chastity in the elite marriage market. She was concerned that if a woman whose reputation for promiscuity was well-known managed to marry a peer, then the next generation of young women might believe that chastity was unimportant, and that vice would be rewarded. This elite clearly held conflicting notions of what constituted sexual morality, and the looming scandal of Lady Anne's marriage and re-

²³ BL, Add MS 51929, fols. 75-76.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

admission into society as a peeress gave the individuals in this elite social network the chance to debate the ambiguities of sexual conduct with each other.

Lady Anne's position in female society was precarious whilst the details of the marriage were being arranged. The Devonshires were instrumental in negotiating with the Marquess, but from Lady Anne's account of the 'interview' to the Devonshires' seventeen-year-old daughter, Lady Georgiana, one gets the sense that there were limits to the Duchess's support. While she noted that the Duchess 'has been very kind to me upon this occasion', Lady Anne remarked to her friend, 'I had once a hope you w[oul]d. be present at the ceremony but I fear I must give it up'.²⁵ As her two daughters came of a marriageable age, the Duchess grew cautious about the reputations of those she allowed them to socialise with.

The wedding took place on 2 April 1800. Notice of the marriage appeared in the West End papers, with the *Morning Post* being the first to announce it in 'The Fashionable World' column: 'This evening will be married the Marquis of ABERCORN to the lovely Lady ANNE HATTON... Her Ladyship is a widow, and one of the most accomplished and handsome women in the country, and the match is the consequence of a pure and ardent affection on both sides'.²⁶ The paragraph bolstered Lady Anne's credentials even further by stating that the 'Dukes of Gloucester [George III's younger brother] and Devonshire' acted as her 'guardians on this occasion', and added that after their honeymoon the Abercorns would be back in London to pay 'their respects to their MAJESTIES'. This very flattering account was presumably inserted to the newspaper by the couple themselves, or by somebody

²⁵ Castle Howard, 6th Earl of Carlisle's Papers, J/18/60/5, Lady Anne Hatton to Lady Georgiana Cavendish [married name, Howard], [1800].

²⁶ *Morning Post*, 2 April 1800.

who was close to them, which Lucyle Werkmeister suggests was a standard practice amongst members of fashionable society.²⁷

Whilst its self-puffing qualities are evident, the paragraph appears to have been intended to interact with, and depending on how it is read, potentially to quash new rumours that were circulating about the pair: namely that they had chosen to marry simply because they would countenance each other's indiscretions. The paragraph tacitly acknowledged and challenged the gossip using a medium that would reach a broader elite public more quickly. The Marquess of Abercorn also had a chequered reputation; in 1792 he had married his second wife, who was his cousin, very shortly after the death of his first wife, which led many to speculate that she had been his mistress. This marriage was short lived, and in 1798 elite society was scandalised when the second wife eloped with the Marquess's first wife's brother, and they were divorced in April 1799. He was also known to keep a lower-class mistress 'at the bottom of his garden'.²⁸

The marriage granted Lady Anne rank and status as the Marchioness of Abercorn, yet several aristocratic women remained reluctant to socialise with her because of her reputation, which, if anything, her marriage had made worse. 'Lady Essex is in a quandary', remarked Lady Theresa Villiers to her aunt, Lady Anne Robinson.²⁹ She was unsure about 'inviting this said Marchioness having like many other people refus'd to do so at Naples on account of the notoriety of her character'. Now that she was the wife of a peer, many women of fashionable society were

²⁷ Lucyle Werkmeister, *The London Daily Press, 1772-1792* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1963), p. 7; John Brewer, *Sentimental Murder: Love and Madness in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Harper Perennial, 2005), p. 44.

²⁸ Plyth, 1259/2/502, Lady Theresa Villiers to Lady Anne Robinson, 8 April 1800.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

uncertain of how to treat a woman they had formerly cut for her indiscretions, and gossip allowed them to both express their views and to deliberate collectively how they ought to proceed. Lady Theresa made her position clear to her aunt, explaining that she would not write a 'congratulatory letter' to Lady Anne's sister, (Lady Elizabeth Monck, Lady Theresa's brother's mistress), in case it was 'construed (at least wilfully so) into advances towards the Priory [the Abercorns' Harrow-based estate], of w[hi]ch my great object will be to keep aloof'.³⁰ The reason she was so reluctant to approach Lady Anne was in part due to her former reputation, but was also due to the scandalous rumours that surrounded her marriage:

Tis said to have been settled between this amicable pair, that they are not to investigate each other's conduct... if one is dispos'd to moralize upon the subject to be sure nothing can be more shocking than the mockery wch is made of the Marriage ceremony on this occasion, & I cd not help being amus'd with thinking of the different ideas that must have been annex'd to the same words, in the course of a few days, the same words being read to, & the same vow being made by Lord & Lady Francis Osborne, & Lord & Lady Abercorn [sic].³¹

Excessive promiscuity was deviant, but the idea that a seemingly respectable marriage could mask such behaviour was worse, for if both husband and wife condoned each other's blatant infidelity, then society would have to tolerate it too,

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

having no cause to cut them (a problem they had also faced during the Jersey scandal of 1796). Opinions about the morality of extra-marital relationships certainly varied according to the individual, but the idea that two people would enter marriage, with neither intending to be faithful, was 'shocking' and offended most people's conceptions of propriety. The pair's pre-existing reputations made the rumours worse. Only four months after the wedding Lady Theresa would tell her aunt that the assumptions proved true, as Abercorn's 'lady' had been brought back to the Priory, under Lady Anne's 'immediate patronage'.³² Lady Theresa was convinced this connivance was mutual and that 'the Marchioness says the same revers'd about Ld. Morpeth who is always at the Priory'.³³

Whilst several women demonstrated their indignation by choosing to avoid Lady Anne, she *was* presented to Queen Charlotte at court, 'for the first time since her marriage... attired in white and silver' at the Queen's weekly Drawing Room reception on 8 May 1800.³⁴ Unfortunately, there are no witness descriptions of her reception. However, on 6 May 1800, in the same week that both Abercorns returned to court, a print by Isaac Cruikshank was published satirising their marriage (figure 1). *Modern Marriage a la Mode sweet fruits of the third honey moon!!* depicted the Marquess, with long horns on his head, placing a wedding ring on Lady Anne's finger, whilst she looks up at the altar, which is a platform for two goats and a smiling satyr. The Marquess's three daughters stand behind their father crying, and a shrouded woman stands behind the bride, who represents the disapproving figure of the Marquess's first wife. Satyrs are mythical woodland creatures that are traditionally

³² Plyth, 1259/2/517, Lady Theresa Villiers to Lady Anne Robinson, 28 July 1800.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Morning Chronicle*, 9 May 1800.

depicted as half man and half goat—the libidinous companions of the God of fertility, Pan; they were used to symbolise ribaldry and indecent and immoderate appetites. The Marquess's horns more closely resemble those of the satyr than those often used to depict cuckoldry, and this, combined with the behaviour of the two goats, implies that his motives for entering the marriage had more to do with satisfying his base sexual urges than 'pure and ardent affection'. Lady Anne is a more ambiguous figure. She looks up at the satyr and goats, while pointing at the Marquess's horns. Has it just dawned on her that her groom is a satyr, or were her motives similar to his? Unfortunately, her face is turned away from the audience so we cannot see her expression. The fact that her face is not depicted is interesting: artists like Cruikshank and Gillray usually put a lot of emphasis on their subjects' facial features to ensure that their audiences would recognise them even when they were not named. This suggests that Lady Anne was not notorious enough for the artist to have an idea of how to draw her—which implies that whoever alerted Cruikshank to the controversial marriage thought that it was the Marquess's behaviour that was primarily worth satirising.

For members of elite society, the most controversial relationships were those that seemed to threaten the formation of advantageous and appropriately conducted marriages. Relationships were perceived to do this in a variety of different ways. Sir William Hamilton and Charles James Fox were both ridiculed



Figure 1 - Isaac Cruikshank, *Modern Marriage a la Mode Sweet Fruits of the third Honeymoon!!* (London: S.W. Fores, 6 May 1800), BMS 9576.

when they made morganatic marriages to their long-term mistresses in the 1790s— although, for fear of the repercussions, Fox kept his marriage secret until 1802, seven years after it had taken place. The conception that such liaisons could lead to marriage was particularly concerning, as it appeared to give women of a dubious reputation and/or a lower social status the opportunity to infiltrate high society by using their sexual wiles to manipulate elite men. Men’s inability to resist their married mistresses was also occasionally held responsible for their choosing to not marry, which was particularly problematic when they were a titled peer who needed a legitimate heir. Lady Melbourne’s influence over her lover, George Wyndham, 3rd Earl of Egremont, was thought to be the cause of his breaking his engagement to Lady Maria Waldegrave, one of Horace Walpole’s nieces, in 1780. Lady Maria was

humiliated by the match being called off, and a Mr Edward Vernon, 'Ly Harcourt's youngest brother', asked Lady Melbourne's friend, the Duchess of Devonshire, 'a thousand impertinent and ridiculous questions' about the situation and announced 'quite loud' at a dinner party that 'Egremont deserv'd to be hang'd' and that 'It proves that Lady Mel is very handsome'.³⁵

Another concern was the belief that having an older married mistress might prevent an eligible bachelor from feeling the need to bother with marriage. Reports of the ménage-à-trois of Lord and Lady Maynard with Francis Russell, the 5th Duke of Bedford, also highlighted these concerns. The 5th Duke of Bedford succeeded to the dukedom as a child, but by the mid-1780s, he was in his twenties and considered to be the Whigs' most eligible young bachelor (and bankroller). Lady Maynard, formerly Anne Parsons, had spent her life being a serial mistress to powerful men, most famously the Duke of Grafton whilst he was Prime Minister in the 1760s. In 1776, she had married Viscount Maynard, a minor peer twenty years her junior, and they spent most of their time living on the continent, which is where they met Bedford on his Grand Tour. The West End newspapers printed paragraphs discussing their relationship in quite crude terms while they were abroad, seeking to inform and amuse their readers in London.³⁶ When the Duke was due to return to Britain, the *Morning Post* reported that 'all the unmarried Belles of Britain are preparing for the return of the young Duke of Bedford; but those better acquainted with the world of intrigue, know that the affections of his Grace are already fixed. Lady Maynard, in the

³⁵ BL, Lamb Papers, Add MS 45911, fols. 1-2, Duchess of Devonshire to Lady Melbourne, [1780].

³⁶ See for example, *Parker's General Advertiser and Morning Intelligencer*, 15 May 1784; *World and Fashionable Advertiser*, 7 May 1787; *Morning Herald*, 21 January 1788.

Autumn of her charms, has him entirely to herself'.³⁷ As Kimberly Schutte argues, the elite marriage market was a tightly controlled mechanism that was supposed to ensure the exclusive and cohesive nature of elite society.³⁸ Lady Maynard had already infiltrated their circles by marrying Lord Maynard, and now she had captivated a far more eligible young bachelor. The *Morning Post* not only informed the 'unmarried Belles'-and more importantly their mothers-of the Duke's attachment, but it also implied that whilst Lady Maynard monopolized his affections, the Duke would not be motivated to marry and fulfil his duty.

One of the biggest scandals for elite society over this period was the Prince of Wales's affair with Frances Villiers, Countess of Jersey, wife of the 4th Earl. Their affair was believed to have played a significant role in destroying his marriage to his cousin, Princess Caroline of Brunswick. Lady Jersey was instrumental in persuading the Prince to marry in 1795, which he had agreed to do so that parliament would pay off his debts. She was then made a Lady-in-waiting to the new Princess and the Prince regularly demonstrated his preference for her in front of his wife, which caused tension in their household. The couple separated their households a month after the birth of their only child, Princess Charlotte, in 1796, and a long and very publicised dispute ensued. Lady Jersey's role in the breakdown of the marriage was judged to be substantial and the broader public were scandalised when she and the Prince continued their connection quite openly and demonstrated their hostility to her by assembling outside of the house she was staying at in Berkeley Square.³⁹

³⁷ *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, 3 August 1786.

³⁸ Kimberly Schutte, *Women, Rank, and Marriage in the British Aristocracy, 1485-2000: An Open Elite?* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 133.

³⁹ Tim Clarke, *The Countess: The Scandalous Life of Frances Villiers, Countess of Jersey, 1753-1821* (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2016), pp. 174-175.

The elite often remarked on the dangerous response the pair's conduct had provoked from the public, but they were also outraged for other reasons. Firstly, the affair incited such a scandal because it involved members of the Royal Family, who were the leaders of the aristocracy (regardless of party allegiance), and had created and maintained a certain image of themselves since the beginning of George III's reign in 1760. As Morris notes, the Court of George III and his consort, Queen Charlotte, was quite conservative and marked a turning point in conceptions of acceptable behaviour within this space. The King's marriage was held up as a model of moral and domestic ideals; George III did not have an acknowledged mistress, unlike his grandfather and great-grandfather before him, and the Queen was reputed to refuse to receive ladies at Court whose reputations had been compromised by sexual scandal.⁴⁰ A good reception at Court marked one's elevated status as a high-ranking and 'respectable' member of 'the world': as Lady Harcourt told the Dowager Countess Spencer, 'the line was upon the present King's accession drawn between such persons as were and were not to be received at Court'.⁴¹ The Prince of Wales was renowned for his indiscretions and his behaviour had always been a point of conflict with his parents, but this affair was different: Queen Charlotte liked Lady Jersey, and showed her preferential treatment at Court despite her acknowledged position as the Prince's mistress, her notorious tormenting of the Princess (whom the Queen was less fond of), and the public outrage levelled against her.

As Lady Harcourt's letter suggested, by 1796, reception at Court had long been a means to distinguish between those of the elite who were accepted, on the

⁴⁰ Morris, *Sex, Money & Personal Character*, p. 59.

⁴¹ Lady Harcourt to Dowager Countess Spencer, 30 October 1796, as quoted in Clarke, *The Countess*, p. 199.

basis that their conduct appeared virtuous, and those who were reputedly immoral, and therefore, worthy of exclusion. In October 1796, Lady Jersey's reception at the Queen's Drawing Room to present one of her daughters was much remarked upon, and contemporary descriptions of it show that an individual's appearance at Court was not sufficient to determine whether they were included or excluded from elite society. The Countess of Sutherland told Lady Stafford that the Queen had spoken to Lady Jersey 'in a very gracious manner... many of the observers for they were numerous... thought her Majesty do more than was necessary... In short people did not seem to think it alright'.⁴² As Lucy Worsley and Sally Holloway have demonstrated, the royal court, where a group of people who were distinguishable by a 'shared identity' gathered regularly, formed a distinctive emotional community: social interactions and emotional expressions were 'closely observed by the gathered crowd' and 'expected and actual behaviour was commented on at length' by courtiers.⁴³ Queen Charlotte's acceptance of Lady Jersey mid-scandal, 'after the fuss she made formerly about distinctions of character', was seen as a blatant hypocrisy, and the Queen's betrayal of her principles made her very unpopular with some women.⁴⁴ For the first time, the majority of women chose not to follow the Queen's lead:

⁴² Countess of Sutherland to Lady Stafford, [n.d Oct 1796], quoted in Clarke, *The Countess*, p. 198.

⁴³ Sally Holloway and Lucy Worsley, "Every body took notice of the scene of the drawing room": Performing Emotions at the Early Georgian Court, 1714-60', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 40:3 (2017), 443-464, (p. 443-445). Their study ends in 1760 but there were some continuities for Court life under the reign of George III. The concept of 'emotional communities' was devised by Barbara Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

⁴⁴ Countess of Sutherland to Lady Stafford, [n.d Oct 1796], quoted in Clarke, *The Countess*, p. 198.

I hear the Royal family are determined to support [Lady Jersey] ... She certainly was *cut* by everybody else at the drawing room, I think of course one ought to avoid her *there* in order *not* to toad eat the Queen – It is a great triumph to all the ladies formerly neglected by her Majesty for they say it cannot now be a mark of *purity* to be spoken to by her, all this diverts me very much.⁴⁵

The scandal caused disruption at the Drawing Room and made the event tense for those present: the Countess of Sutherland told Lady Stafford that ‘nobody followed her [the Queen’s] example for everyone kept out of Ly Jersey’s way & ran off at her approach’.⁴⁶ There was a sense of spiteful glee in the women who contravened the Queen, who must have felt uncomfortable, having set the moral standard for thirty-five years. But the women were merely upholding the requirement for the veneer of ‘purity’ that had been previously demanded at Court: their own conformity to these values was key to their sense of their collective identity. By gossiping, an activity that anthropologists suggest has an important function in social groups, the women confirmed the group’s (otherwise) unwritten moral values and codes of conduct, while simultaneously validating their own sense of belonging to the group and marking the exclusion of those who had failed to conform.⁴⁷ On this occasion the Queen’s association with Lady Jersey lowered her in the other aristocrats’ esteem and made her opinions temporarily less valuable.

⁴⁵ Countess of Sutherland to Lady Stafford, [n.d. Oct 1796], quoted in Clarke, *The Countess*, p.199.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Gluckman, ‘Gossip and Scandal’, p. 308, p. 313.

The fear of being tainted by association influenced women's reactions to controversial liaisons. Even the Whig women, several of whom were also reputed to have had affairs with the Prince, turned their backs on Lady Jersey. The Duchess of Devonshire wrote to Lady Melbourne, 'Peste [Lady Jersey's nickname] ... thinks we were all in a league against her'. She considered trying to reconcile, but she quickly decided 'on Gs account [her daughter, Lady Georgiana]... to be very cautious for once in my life... she would be a bad person for my girls in every way'.⁴⁸ This perhaps brought to mind an earlier disagreement with her mother over her friendship with Lady Derby after her elopement with the Duke of Dorset in 1778. Back then the Duchess had been newly married and childless, and she argued that although she had 'the greatest horror of her crime...[she could not] join the world in abusing a person I have liv'd with'.⁴⁹ Around twenty years later, with two teenage daughters whose reputations needed to be protected, the Duchess was far more cautious about whom she allowed into her society.

Several men also commented disparagingly on the Prince's affair with Lady Jersey, but the concerns they expressed were different from those of the women. Members of the Prince's inner circle worried about the strength of Lady Jersey's influence over him, which had allowed her to meddle in Court politics.⁵⁰ Lord Hugh Seymour, who was one of the Prince's closest friends, wrote to Commodore J. W. Payne that he suspected Lady Jersey was trying to get them both removed from the

⁴⁸ BL, Lamb Papers, Add MS 45548, fol. 33, Duchess of Devonshire to Lady Melbourne, [n.d].

⁴⁹ Cth, CS5, 236, Duchess of Devonshire to Dowager Countess Spencer, 4 December 1778.

⁵⁰ It was not that none of the Prince's former mistresses had been thought to meddle, but rather that they did not cause the same degree of disruption in the Prince's social circles as Lady Jersey did.

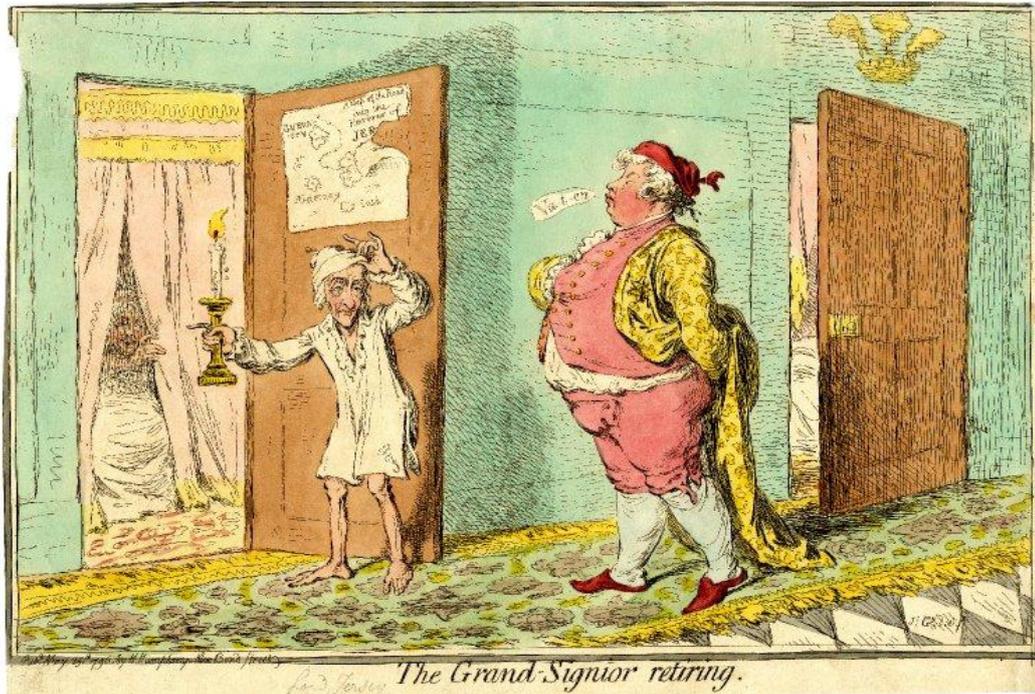


Figure 2 - James Gillray, *The Grand Signior Retiring* (London: H. Humphrey, 25 May 1796), BMS 8807.

Prince's favour, and requested that Payne ask the Prince 'whether he is really anxious to turn me out of his family or whether it is only the object of that bitch under whose influence he is at present'.⁵¹ As Elaine Chalus argues, due to the dynastical nature of eighteenth-century politics, elite women were regularly involved in orchestrating the social networks of political men.⁵² But by the 1790s, their involvement was problematic and was depicted by many as emblematic of corruption. The British elite had just witnessed the fall of the French aristocracy, for which noble women with loose morals and immoderate appetites, and men who allowed themselves to be ruled by them, were held in part accountable. In 1795, Lord Auckland reported to Sir Gilbert Elliot: 'The World talks very freely of the Prince of Wales and Lady Jersey, who

⁵¹ Lord Hugh Seymour to Commodore J. W. Payne, 16 January 1795: A. Aspinall (ed), *The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales, 1770-1812* (8 vols, London: Cassell, 1965), vol. 3, p. 16.

⁵² Chalus, *Elite Women in English Political Life*, p. 92-3, p. 229.

has not taken warning by the histories of the French Court. She has her bed in the Prince's dressing room at Brighton'.⁵³

In the 1790s, many satirical prints were published depicting the affair that focused on similar themes to those concerning the men.⁵⁴ Images like James Gillray's, *The Grand Signior retiring* (figure 2) and Isaac Cruikshank's *Sketches from nature* (figure 3)-both published in May 1796-portrayed a very corpulent Prince being led to Lady Jersey's bed by her elderly husband. Cruikshank's image illustrated the story that Lady Jersey had been intercepting the Princess's post from her family in Brunswick. Her role in the breakdown of the Prince's marriage was clear from the third scene, 'The Discovery' where the Princess draws back the Prince's bed curtains to discover the couple together, but the final scene depicts Lady Jersey holding the letters and discussing 'German princes'. The letter scandal caused tensions between the Brunswicks and the Hanoverians, and Cruikshank's image clearly showed the Prince's mistress actively meddling in international politics. Lady Jersey was demonised in these images, and her relationship with the Prince was portrayed as being entirely based on sex and power, and void of any romantic or more complex emotions. This representation, particularly of aristocratic female sexual excess, involves ideas that scholars have attributed to middle-class moral reformers, but also featured in elite assumptions about adulterous relationships.⁵⁵ In the satires, neither

⁵³ Lord Auckland to Sir Gilbert Elliot, 4 September 1795: *The Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales*, vol. 2, p. 482.

⁵⁴ Vic Gatrell, *City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in Eighteenth-Century London* (London: Atlantic Books, 2006), p. 12. Gatrell suggests that a similar comparison can be made between depictions in graphic satires and 'what was spoken among men rather than written in text or confessed in the salon', in prints depicting the Prince's relationship with Maria Fitzherbert.

⁵⁵ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), p. 176; Matthew Kinservik, *Sex, Scandal, and Celebrity in Late Eighteenth-Century England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 10-11.

the Earl of Jersey nor the Prince were portrayed as achieving contemporary conceptions of masculine ideals: the Earl of Jersey was a weak and pathetic cuckold, implicit in his own humiliation, whilst the Prince was duped and weakened by his reliance upon his “elderly” lover.

Exactly whose attitudes and values were being represented in satires can be difficult to ascertain. The end of the eighteenth century was the ‘golden age’ of graphic satire, a genre that used humour and symbolism to critique social groups and individuals alike. Audiences for the satirical prints have been the subject of much debate; Eirwen Nicholson argues that whilst the lower orders may have seen prints in the print shop window, they were spectators, not consumers. She stresses the difficulties involved in reading and decoding hidden symbols in the images, which would have required a level of prior knowledge about the subjects.⁵⁶ Not only were they intended for elite audiences, but Vic Gatrell suggests that it is likely that prints depicting specific elite sex scandals would not have been on display and were instead kept in private collections: unlike more general satires they were not necessarily produced to influence a broader public.⁵⁷ The elite engaged with this art form; they tried their own amateur drawings; they commissioned prints from professional artists; they regularly bought images, displayed them, and borrowed volumes from the publisher.⁵⁸ The elite used satirical prints as instruments of sociability, to laugh and discuss the behaviour of others communally at society dinners and parties.

⁵⁶ Eirwen Nicholson, ‘Consumers and Spectators: The Public of the Satirical Print in Eighteenth-Century England’, *History*, 81:261 (1996), 5-21, (p. 17).

⁵⁷ Gatrell, *City of Laughter*, p. 136

⁵⁸ Nicholson, ‘Consumers and Spectators’, p. 16.

What remains less clear is the extent to which the elite were involved in the design of certain prints. There is little evidence explaining how prints that depicted discreet illicit relationships were commissioned, but it is possible that evidence was destroyed to protect identities and elite clients often contacted artists through intermediaries—as they did newspaper editors. Even if they did not commission them specifically, members of the elite often provided the inspiration for such prints: some sent anonymous letters informing the satirists about indecorous relationships, whilst others sent in amateur drawings to be ‘worked up’, for which they usually expected some compensation.⁵⁹ Satirists also used information from the paragraphs in the London papers. James Gillray had a procedure to demonstrate when a print was a collaborative effort: he added “‘del.” (delineavit) or “des.” (designavit) when the plate was etched from a verbal suggestion, (see figure 2 for an example), “fec[i]t” when he worked up an amateur’s drawing, whilst if the whole conception was his own, he would sign it “inv[enit] et fec[it]”.”⁶⁰ Satirical prints were not merely a weapon used against the elite, but were instead a genre which they actively patronised and engaged with. Artists like Gillray and George Cruikshank had collaborative relationships with elite clients that enabled them to use insider knowledge to create prints that appealed to their elite audience.⁶¹

Satirical representations of controversial relationships also appeared daily in the paragraphs printed by the West End newspapers, such as the *Morning Post*, the

⁵⁹ Examples of all can be found in BL, Correspondence and Papers of James Gillray, Add MS 27337, 1751-1830.

⁶⁰ Robert L. Patten, *George Cruikshank’s Life, Times, and Art* (2 vols, London: Lutterworth, 1996), vol 1, p. 78.

⁶¹ Patten suggests that Cruikshank’s life-long friendship with William Henry Merle, the son of a wealthy banker who existed on the peripheries of fashionable society, provided him with much gossip about the latter’s acquaintances. *Cruikshank’s Life, Times, and Art*, vol. 1, pp. 118-119.

Morning Chronicle, and the *World and Fashionable Advertiser*. The paragraph was a relatively new feature in newspapers, first appearing in the second half of the eighteenth century.⁶² The mechanisms behind how the newspapers were made aware of high-society gossip over this period are murky. Werkmeister argues that it was common practice for members of fashionable society to send paragraphs to



Figure 3 - Isaac Cruikshank, *Sketches from Nature!!!* (London: S.W. Fores, 28 May 1796), BMS 8809.

⁶² Werkmeister, *The London Daily Press*, p. 7.

newspaper offices to be inserted by the editors; they relayed a range of fashionable news and gossip, from the self-puffing announcement of the Abercorn marriage, to rumours about Lady Maynard's sexual conquests. The *Morning Post*, whose audience Hindle suggests was thought to be primarily the landed classes, featured a column on page three, 'the Fashionable World', which regularly reported who had attended the King's Levée and the Queen's Drawing Room, and also listed the various balls, dinners and routs and their attendees in London.⁶³ Frequently inserted alongside these reports were paragraphs alerting the Fashionable World to rumoured liaisons amongst its members. Some of these were recounted subtly, others were more explicit – like the *Morning Post's* report on the 5th Duke of Bedford's attachment to Lady Maynard.⁶⁴ Paragraphs proved popular with audiences, and furthermore, they were lucrative for the paper's proprietors, as members of fashionable society paid both to have paragraphs about their enemies printed, and to have paragraphs about themselves suppressed.⁶⁵ The Prince of Wales, intent on stopping paragraphs that appeared in the *Morning Post* implying that he had married his mistress, Mrs Fitzherbert in 1788-coinciding with the debates on the Regency Bill-reputedly bought the shares in the paper from the proprietor, and 'vested' Mr John Taylor with the editorship, thereby linking the paper for many years with the Prince's patronage.⁶⁶

⁶³ Wilfred Hindle, *The Morning Post 1772-1937, Portrait of a Newspaper* (London: Routledge & Sons, 1937), p. 2.

⁶⁴ *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, 3 August 1786.

⁶⁵ Werkmeister, *The London Daily Press*, pp. 7-8, p. 90.

⁶⁶ Hindle, *The Morning Post 1772-1937*, p. 55. The Prince's household also tried (not very successfully) to control the press during the Jersey scandal: 'The Oracle, Sir, tho' not in the immediate pay, is still under the auspices of Administration; & the Morning Post avowedly a partisan for Opposition. Those two papers of opposite qualities are however decidedly devoted to your Royal Highness's interest... I wish to God, Sir, that this foul conspiracy could be brought home & fastened on somebody; & for which purpose I have desired Stuart to leave no possible effort untried... as nothing would more

Due to the anonymity of the process, individuals could use paragraphs as a vehicle for personal enmity. Editors seem to have guarded the privacy of contributors, even if they gave the subjects of paragraphs the opportunity to pay them not to print stories: Henry Bate, owner of the *Morning Post* in the 1770s famously ‘fought a duel with a Captain Stoney rather than reveal the name of the contributor of some offensive paragraphs.... about a lady with whom the Captain was friendly’.⁶⁷ Both literary examples and one real case that reveal the process behind paragraphs suggest that they were assumed to be a medium mostly used by marginal figures of fashionable society, who were driven by feelings of malice or jealousy to injure those whom they felt had wronged them. In the opening scene of Richard Brinsley Sheridan’s 1777 play, *The School for Scandal*, Lady Sneerwell, who is kept at a distance by the other elite women due to her dubious reputation, checks with her attendant, Mr Snake, that her slanderous notes have been inserted into the papers – furthermore, they have been copied in Snake’s hand so ‘there can be no suspicion whence they came’.⁶⁸ We are assured that society gossips-like ‘Mrs Clackit’-will use the knowledge that these paragraphs contain to create havoc for those they implicate.⁶⁹ In Thomas Surr’s *A Winter in London* (1806), Captain Neville is renowned for living off the proceeds he makes selling paragraphs to the papers about the members of high-society with whom he socialises. A handwritten key to the

effectually shew to the world the vile & atrocious means which have been used to deceive & mislead the multitude... Some fresh paragraphs to Lady ---- on the subject of Coventry, have been sent to evening papers, & which Stuart has had the address to prevent being inserted; at the same time I have charged him, Sir, to use every precaution towards hindering any insinuations from appearing against her Ladyship’, Colonel John McMahon to the Prince of Wales, 16 Aug 1796: *Correspondence of George, Prince of Wales*, vol. 3, pp. 261-262.

⁶⁷ Hindle, *The Morning Post 1772-1937*, p. 17.

⁶⁸ Richard Brinsley Sheridan, *The School for Scandal* (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1991, orig. 1777), p. 1.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

characters in a copy of the novel in the British Library suggests that Neville was modelled on 'Captain Greville', a younger son of the 1st Earl of Warwick, whilst the Duchess Belgrave was said to represent the Duchess of Devonshire.⁷⁰ 'The World' was comprised of people of various statuses, and the peers of the realm perhaps inadvertently shared private information with those below them: for example, the diaries of Joseph Farington, landscape painter and member of the Royal Academy, record an enormous amount of elite society gossip that he is made aware of over dinners with his friends who painted the portraits of the rich and famous.⁷¹

Those privy to the scandalous secrets of those on the highest rungs of society, whose positions often seemed impervious, could use this information to attack them. In the early months of 1805, Countess Bessborough and the other women in her family, including her sister the Duchess of Devonshire and both women's teenage daughters, were victims of an anonymous writer, who tormented them with obscene letters and drawings, and also inserted several suggestive paragraphs to the *Morning Post*.⁷² The writer 'was very abusive' about past and present affairs of 'our whole society'-the men and women from the exclusive Devonshire House Circle.⁷³ On 4 January 1805, Countess Bessborough wrote to Leveson Gower that she was:

⁷⁰ Thomas Skinner Surr, *A Winter in London; or, Sketches of Fashion: A Novel, in Three Volumes* (2nd edn, London: Richard Phillips, 1806). The third volume of this edition in the BL has a handwritten key to the characters inside the cover. Shelf mark 1607/5998.

⁷¹ See for example, Joseph Farington, *The Diary of Joseph Farington*, ed. Kenneth Garlick and Angus Macintyre (17 vols, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), vol. 6, April 1803 – Dec 1804, p. 2137. Entry for '2 October 1803' Farington recorded having dinner at John Hoppner's and Hoppner telling him about Lord Boringdon and Lady Elizabeth Monck.

⁷² BL, Granville Papers, Add MS 89382/2/23, fol. 3, Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, 2-3 January 1805.

⁷³ BL, Add MS 89382/2/23, fols. 48-50, Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, 14 February 1805.

very angry at the foolish Paragraph in the news papers, not that I imagine you will suspect me of flirting with La Montagna, or any one else, but that it must appear unlikely to you, that I should be named in the news papers, with any person, without having been seen a good deal with them.⁷⁴

The following day, she managed to get someone from the *Morning Post* to bring her 'the manuscript of the Paragraph'. Although a 'great deal was taken out by the Editor', the proprietors had clearly tried to placate their contributor by printing a censored version.⁷⁵ The paragraph was published in the *Morning Post* on 4 January and was titled, 'Devonshire House Fete'.⁷⁶ It informed readers that the Duchess was 'assembling all the fashionables' to perform a play she had written, and she had accorded roles in the play to 'the Marchioness of Abercorn, Countess of Bessborough, and the Honourable Mr. Hill'. After the play 'a grand ball' was to take place, and the 'assigned' partners paired the Countess with Mr. Hill. On the surface this does not seem to be particularly scandalous; Countess Bessborough, however, provides the details of what was originally meant to be published in her letter to Leveson Gower:

After the chief parts are allotted to La Priora [Marchioness of Abercorn], Mrs Arundel [Bessborough] & La Montagna [Mr. Hill] was added: "for which they are daily preparing themselves by rehearsals, the angry scenes perform'd by the former, the tender ones by the two latter persons." Then comes the

⁷⁴ BL, Add MS 89382/2/23, fol. 5, Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, 4-6 January 1805.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, fol. 7.

⁷⁶ *Morning Post*, 4 January 1805.

account of the ball, with “The amiable Hostess, who is always eager to contribute to the convenience of her friends, to save confusion, has allotted the Partners.”⁷⁷

The original was far more suggestive: the alleged connection between Countess Bessborough and Mr. Hill was far more obvious, and it also gave the impression that the Duchess was a debauched matchmaker, who encouraged dissipation in her house. What was most alarming for the Countess was the ‘hand it was written in’, which she recognised.⁷⁸ The letters mentioned the Countess’s lovers from the 1780s and 90s, made sly acknowledgments of her on-going relationship with Leveson Gower, and also alluded to ‘conversations and jokes’ that had recently taken place at Devonshire House.⁷⁹ Countess Bessborough believed that the letters and paragraphs were a malicious campaign by her ex-lover, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, who was infatuated with her and whom she had rejected in recent years as she was faithful to Leveson Gower.⁸⁰ This belief seems plausible, given the writer’s intimate knowledge of her life and the repeated insinuations that she and Leveson Gower were being unfaithful to each other, which one could read as an attempt to foster tensions between them.⁸¹ The Countess had to fend off awkward questions from Leveson Gower’s mother, who sent her a letter on 6 January ‘enquiring what the Paragraph could mean... what great acquaintance with La Montagna could have occasion’d my

⁷⁷ BL, Add MS 89382/2/23, fol. 7, Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, 4-6 January 1805.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ BL, Add MS 89382/2/23, fol. 3, Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, 2-3 January 1805.

⁸⁰ Countess Bessborough to Granville Leveson Gower, 5 January 1805: *G.L.G: Private Correspondence*, vol. 2, pp. 4-5.

⁸¹ The writer sent the Countess letters telling her that Leveson Gower was ‘laughing at her in the arms of a fairer mistress’ and telling everyone that she had given birth to his child. See BL, Add MS 89382/2/23, fols. 48-50, Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, 14 February 1805.

being nam'd with him thus. This was just what I apprehended & probably the purpose of the thing'.⁸²

The Duchess and Countess must have come to some sort of financial arrangement with the *Morning Post*, because by 22 January, the paragraphs were 'not now put in, as a Dr. Fleming, who manages the Mornng. Post, stops them'.⁸³ Although the fact that the paragraphs were paired with the poison-pen letters, which were sent to several members of the group, potentially heightened the anxiety about them, generally, the women in the Duchess's network identified appearing in such paragraphs as anxiety-provoking: in 1783, the Duchess wrote to her mother to warn her 'that there is something ill-natured about Ly. Jersey in the *Morning Herald*... whilst Ld. Jersey is with you do read the newspapers of a morning and conceal it if you see it'; and in 1786, Lady Melbourne wrote to the Duchess: 'I had better venture to make you a little uneasy, than run the chance of your not knowing it.... There have been some paragraphs in the news papers', informing the Duchess that rumours were circulating about her sister's relationship with her then-lover, Charles Wyndham.⁸⁴

Personal vengeance may have been the main objective in this particular case, but such paragraphs also had the potential to perform several other functions in elite society. As John Brewer suggests, we are better to understand the late eighteenth-century press not as 'an authoritative organ, written by professionals to offer

⁸² BL, Add MS 89382/2/23, fol. 6, Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, 4-6 January 1805. Leveson Gower's mother, Lady Stafford, initially disapproved of the relationship but she gradually accepted Countess Bessborough's presence in Leveson Gower's life.

⁸³ Countess Bessborough to Granville Leveson Gower, 22 January 1805: *G.L.G.: Private Correspondence*, vol. 2, pp. 7-8.

⁸⁴ Cth, CS5, 483, Duchess of Devonshire to Dowager Countess Spencer, 10 January 1783, and 753, Lady Melbourne to Duchess of Devonshire, 24 July 1786.

objective information to the public, but [as] a place where public rumour, news, and intelligence could circulate as if it were printed conversation'.⁸⁵ It is clear that these paragraphs functioned as an extension to elite oral gossip networks, informing larger groups of people whom was reputedly sleeping with whom. Lady Melbourne's letter to the Duchess, alerting her to the paragraphs about Countess Bessborough's affair with Charles Wyndham, reveals the tangled network of print and oral gossip networks:

[with] no name or initials I was in hopes it would not be known who was meant, which indeed I did not know myself till Marsh told me there was such a report... Mr Greville came to me to ask me if I had mentioned it to you, as he met Ly Beauchamp coming to town who asked him the news in a very curious manner⁸⁶

The fact that several people had guessed who the paragraph referred to even though the information given was ambiguous, suggests that they were meant to be seen by those already (or likely) to be aware of the situation, with contributors intentionally addressing a select audience. The Duchess and Countess's plan to submit a poem to the *Morning Post* as a response to the attack in 1805, which would 'only be understood by the writers and receivers of the letters', also confirms this to be a normal practice.⁸⁷ Like the satirical prints, the intended audiences for paragraphs

⁸⁵ Brewer, *Sentimental Murder*, p. 40.

⁸⁶ Cth, CS5, 753, Lady Melbourne to Duchess of Devonshire, 24 July 1786.

⁸⁷ Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, 14 February 1805: *G.L.G.: Private Correspondence*, vol. 2, p. 17.

were esoteric; however, unlike prints, their appearance in a rapidly expanding medium meant that their *actual* audience was more difficult to control. There is no evidence that the paragraphs provoked a significant reaction from readers from lower ranks, but as Hindle argues, because the *Morning Post* cost between 'two and a halfpence and three and a halfpence', only the 'well-to-do' could afford to buy it daily.⁸⁸ The information that was shared in the newspapers could be reshaped by others for different ends: for example, Jon Mee suggests that Charles Piggott sourced anecdotes from newspaper paragraphs to inform his attacks on the aristocracy in *The Jockey Club* (1792) and its sequels, *The Female Jockey Club* and *The Whig Club* (both 1794).⁸⁹

Paragraphs amused their elite audiences, but despite their lack of emphasis on morality, they were also somewhat corrective; by ridiculing their subjects, they provoked laughter, which both Gatrell and O'Loughlin have argued was extolled for its 'disciplinary effects'.⁹⁰ They caused some of the individuals who featured in them to reflect on their own behaviour, and that they were humiliating may have acted as a deterrent for others. Charles Abbott debated the tensions between moralists and satirists in his 1786, *Essay on the Use and Abuse of Satire*, for which he won an award at Corpus Christi College.⁹¹ In Abbott's view, the two effects were not incompatible, as he argued that satire was a form of 'art' that had the power to 'reform' its audience through its 'reproof' of wrongdoers.⁹² He cautioned, however, that 'if malice and

⁸⁸ Hindle, *The Morning Post 1772-1937*, p. 44.

⁸⁹ Jon Mee, *Print, Publicity and Radicalism in the 1790s: The Laurel of Liberty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 137.

⁹⁰ Gatrell, *City of Laughter*, p. 5; O'Loughlin, "'Strolling Roxanas'", p. 132.

⁹¹ Charles Abbott, *An Essay on the Use and Abuse of Satire* (Oxford, 1786).

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

immorality point the arrows' then satire could actually corrupt the innocent.⁹³ The nature and the motives behind the 'ridicule' determined its influence: when loaded with 'invective' the power of satire was 'confined within a narrow compass, it may deter or punish but will seldom correct or improve'.⁹⁴ Abbott used the works of 'skill' by men like Swift and Addison to exemplify good practice; it seems probable that he did not approve of the amateur attempts of members of the elite, whose words were corrupted by 'private animosity', which was the 'worst abuse' of satire.⁹⁵

Those conducting affairs were sometimes confronted for their behaviour, and furthermore, so were their associates.⁹⁶ The Duchess of Devonshire was horrified when Edward Vernon questioned her about the Earl of Egremont's liaison with Lady Melbourne.⁹⁷ In 1783, Countess Bessborough was subjected to a similarly uncomfortable confrontation when she was 'teaz'd... cruelly' by Lady George Cavendish whilst she was visiting Compton Place. Rather than being so ludicrous that the Countess could easily dismiss them, Lady George's accusations were 'so blended with some truth that... [Bessborough] was quite hurt'.⁹⁸ In both cases, it is implied that the perpetrators were pleased with the shock and discomfort they caused. In 1805, the Countess was even more humiliated when 'Mrs Mortimer' accosted her at a ball she was chaperoning, and started 'asking her quite aloud when she heard from... [Leveson Gower] how her [illegitimate] children were & on her representing the impropriety she answer'd "Oh I thought you did not mind for every body

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 1.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 3.

⁹⁶ Cth, CS5, 684, Duke of Devonshire to Lady Elizabeth Foster, 29 August 1785: discusses Lady Elizabeth Foster being confronted by unnamed guests at Chatsworth.

⁹⁷ BL, Add MS 45911, fols. 1-2, Duchess of Devonshire to Lady Melbourne, [1780].

⁹⁸ Cth, CS5, 547, Duchess of Devonshire to Lady Elizabeth Foster, 18 October 1783.

knows””.⁹⁹ The women considered this confrontational behaviour to be very ill-natured. Motives for such attacks are difficult to ascertain; the assailants were seen as spiteful and unkind for humiliating and shaming transgressors and their associates. In the above cases the attacks originated from individuals who were of a slightly lower social status than those whom they challenged, illuminating the hierarchical tensions that existed within the Whig world. Like the paragraphs, confronting an individual about their sexual misbehaviour was one method that less affluent members of the group could employ to chasten those above them—perhaps giving them a sense of superiority. Even those at the very top of Whig society were not impervious to gossip. That is not to suggest that they anticipated the criticism: all records of these altercations report the astonishment felt by the target at encountering such disrespectful behaviour at society events, like balls and dinner parties, where behaviour was supposed to be polite.

Friendship and enmity shaped reactions to controversial liaisons. Friends within these networks often provided emotional and practical support for couples who were conducting affairs. In chapter one I examined the circle surrounding Countess Bessborough and Leveson Gower, and how they strategized with one another to pass secret letters, arrange secret meetings, and conceal illegitimate births: by their behaviour they acknowledged the codes as they came together to subvert them. It is also clear that the women, and the men, depended on each other emotionally for advice and consolation. The Duchess of Devonshire, Lady Melbourne, and Lady Elizabeth Foster formed a similar network, and defended each other to

⁹⁹ BL, Add MS 89382/2/23, fol. 60, Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, 24 February 1805.

those who criticised their behaviour.¹⁰⁰ When discussing their friend's liaisons with others they did not gossip, but instead tried to appeal to them to display compassion and empathy for female transgressors.¹⁰¹ While the empathiser's own experiences with romantic intrigue cannot be entirely discounted, it seems plausible that these performances of empathy were also connected to the ideologies surrounding politeness and sensibility, both of which influenced the expectations that elite women were supposed to adhere to, ranging from how they should conduct themselves in public, to how they should write their letters. Discussing a topic as impolite as adultery did not conform easily to these expectations—although in a moralising context it was acceptable—and performing empathy allowed women, like the Duchess of Devonshire, to portray their sensitivity even whilst articulating their concern.

With each other then, the three women emphasised that the bonds of their friendship meant that they felt obligated to provide advice: Lady Melbourne provided very practical advice to the Duchess when her sister's alleged elopement was provoking gossip, telling her to 'come & show herself there will be a good many people in town this week'.¹⁰² They were also understanding about one another's affairs, never debasing them by suggesting that they were based on sex rather than love.

This behaviour can similarly be seen through Lady Holland's differential treatment of Lady Anne Hatton and her friend, Sarah Windsor, Countess of Plymouth.

¹⁰⁰ For examples see BL, Add MS, 45548, fols. 1-97.

¹⁰¹ For example, see Cth, CS5, 236, Duchess of Devonshire to Dowager Countess Spencer, 4 December 1778.

¹⁰² Cth, CS5, 753, Lady Melbourne to Duchess of Devonshire, 24 July 1786.

Several comments made by Lady Holland in her journal suggest that she harboured a personal dislike for Lady Anne because she envied her; firstly, because all the men Lady Holland admired found her attractive, including Lord Morpeth and also the Baron D'Armfeldt; secondly, because she was not constrained by a mercenary marriage in the same way that Lady Holland saw herself to be, having been married aged fifteen to a man twenty-five years her senior.¹⁰³ In June 1794, Lady Holland recorded that 'Ly. Anne might have married Ld. Grandison, but she preferred a handsome young lover, to the worse prostitution of marrying a disgusting old man'.¹⁰⁴ In contrast, Lady Holland was supportive of her friend Lady Plymouth's multiple extra-marital relationships; and although she records her having at least three lovers between 1793-1795, she never implied that this was excessive or depraved. When Lady Plymouth ran the risk of getting pregnant whilst her husband was absent, Lady Holland wrote regretfully in her journal that it was unfortunate that she was also leaving town as: 'tho' I am not very prudent myself yet I think she is less so, & I might have kept her out of the scrape she is on the brink of falling into'.¹⁰⁵ Rather than attack Lady Plymouth's character, as she frequently did with Lady Anne, Lady Holland was sympathetic, and instead wished that she could be there to guide and advise her friend to assure her behaviour met with the expectations of their wider social network.¹⁰⁶ Countess Bessborough wrote similarly of her friends Lady Anne and Lady Elizabeth Monck, even going so far as to imply that women should be

¹⁰³ This marriage will be discussed further in chapter five.

¹⁰⁴ BL, Add MS 51927, fol. 133.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, fols. 31-32.

¹⁰⁶ Lady Holland was also very supportive of Lady Plymouth's relationship with Lord Amherst, whom she would marry after her estranged husband died in June 1799. Holland often provided the couple with the appearance of propriety by accompanying them on trips. See for example, BL, Lady Holland's Journals, Add MS 51928, November 1797 – July 1799, fol. 103.

more sympathetic to one another as ‘there are no judges so severe on our faults, as the very men who try to lead us into them’.¹⁰⁷

Over this period, opinions about what constituted transgressive sexual behaviour, and how to respond to it, varied considerably in Whig society. They may have drawn their framework of sexual mores from that which was represented at Court by the King and Queen. Whether sexual immorality was to be treated as a serious concern or a levity differed, however, according to the individual and the subordinate communities within which they moved. Everyone knew what behaviour was broadly unacceptable, and crucially what must be concealed, but how aristocratic sexual mores were put into practice were influenced by personal bonds, which were shaped by unequal power relations, each individual’s own priorities and responsibilities, and friendship and enmity.

II

1806-1840

Over the following thirty years, the way that members of the Whig world discussed and reacted to controversial liaisons gradually changed. This coincided with alterations to the Whig party’s inner networks. 1806 saw the deaths of two of Whig society’s leaders: Charles James Fox and the Duchess of Devonshire. Both were very charismatic individuals who had often managed to unite individuals of opposing opinions socially, even if not politically. With these two deaths the party also lost its intimacy with the Prince of Wales, whose friendship with both Fox and the Duchess

¹⁰⁷ BL, Add MS 89382/2/23, fol. 88, Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, 21 March 1805.

had influenced his support of the party.¹⁰⁸ Tory leader, William Pitt the Younger, also died in 1806, leaving the Whigs without a prominent opponent against whom they could rally. The social relationships of the next generation of Whigs were different from those of their predecessors: whilst family name continued to mean something, and we see continued social alliances between members of the Cavendish, Fox, Lamb, Russell, and Villiers dynasties, the personal bonds that this network was built on were less empathetic, and attitudes towards controversial relationships became paradoxically both more critical and more tolerant. This section will explore what drove these shifts, starting with an analysis of the royal marriage and the mores of both the Regency and George IV's courts; it will consider the effects of changes to the Whigs' inner networks, and their changing relationship with the public and growing electorate.

In this period, the types of relationships and behaviours that were judged to be scandalous were largely the same, although there were some developments. Long-term extra-marital relationships culminating in marriage remained controversial: much ado was made by members of Whig society when Lady Elizabeth Foster married her long-standing lover, the 5th Duke of Devonshire in October 1809, and when Lady Emily Cowper married the 3rd Viscount Palmerston in December 1839, two years after her husband's death. The 5th Duke of Devonshire tried to keep his second marriage quiet, no doubt aware of the upset it would cause within his extended family. The first Duchess's niece, Sarah, Lady Lytton, wrote to her brother, Lord Robert Spencer, that their grandmother (the Dowager Countess

¹⁰⁸ The Prince's mistress from circa 1807-1819, Isabella Ingra-Seymour-Conway, Marchioness of Hertford, was loyal to the Tory party, and her influence undoubtedly played a part in his change of allegiance.

Spencer) 'is not quite well... A marriage is said to have taken place which shocks her very much'.¹⁰⁹ Lady Sarah continued that even beyond the immediate family the marriage would be viewed as 'the crowning of a perseverance in vice and artfulness'. For this reason, the plan was that Lady Elizabeth would not immediately claim her title:

the lovely bride is not to have "in soft sound 'your grace' salute her ear."
How long her humility will dispense with the honour is difficult to calculate;
but I dare say before you can answer this letter the Duchess of Devonshire's parties, and the Duchess of Devonshire's perfections, will be talked of in London.¹¹⁰

Lady Holland wrote in her journal a month after the marriage that 'Ly Eliz: came, the first time I have seen her since her marriage with Duke of Devonshire, I could not utter a congratulations upon the occasion'.¹¹¹ The legitimisation of illicit relationships that had been an open secret made members of their society uncomfortable because it seemed to allow these women to emerge victorious after vice.

Female adultery remained a prominent topic for elite gossipers throughout the period, although attitudes and reactions towards it were changing. Lady Jane Harley, Countess of Oxford, Lady Caroline Lamb, Lady Frances Wedderburn-Webster, Lady Sarah Villiers, Countess of Jersey, Lady Emily Cowper, and Georgiana Russell, Duchess of Bedford (wife of the 6th Duke), were all criticised for their affairs.

¹⁰⁹ Lady Lyttleton to Lord Robert Spencer, 12 October 1809: Sarah Spencer, *The Correspondence of Sarah Spencer, Lady Lyttelton, 1787-1870*, ed. the Hon. Mrs H. Wyndham (London: Murray, 1912), p. 83.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

¹¹¹ BL, Lady Holland's Journals, Add MS 51937, 5 June 1809 – 16 January 1810, fol. 73.

Increasingly, men also came under attack for their extra-marital relationships. In the previous period, men were rarely explicitly criticised for their liaisons in society gossip, and if they were, the focus was on their unnatural submission to women: they were portrayed as ignorant cuckolds or manipulated lovers. From the early nineteenth century, a wider range of male behaviour gradually faced scrutiny from 'the World'—they too were criticised for excessive venality and imprudence, as well as cruelty and irresponsibility. Men, like Lords Byron, Petersham, Clanwilliam, Palmerston, and the Duke of Wellington, were classed as 'roués', and managed to both attract and repulse the women of their class simultaneously.

The biggest scandal of this period also involved the Prince Regent/George IV's marriage to Princess Caroline of Brunswick. After their separation in 1796, the Princess was moved to a house in Blackheath where she entertained many influential politicians. Rumours that the Princess's conduct was inappropriate and that she had given birth to an illegitimate child led the Prince to have her investigated for adultery in 1806. When Parliament ruled that the allegations were false, but that the Princess needed to be more cautious about her conduct, George III supported his daughter-in-law, and would not allow his son to banish her formally from court, nor to forbid her from seeing her daughter, Princess Charlotte. When the Prince was officially declared Regent after the King relapsed permanently into insanity in 1811, the Princess's position became more precarious.

In 1807, the Dowager Countess Spencer extolled the virtues of George III's Court to her daughter, Countess Bessborough:

when one considers that the too frequent admission of the Dowr. Ly. Jersey, Ly. Holland, Ly. Hamilton, Mrs Fox, your poor cousin, Mrs Bouvery, Mr. Fawkner & others into all companys, we must acknowledge there is great merit in the uniform steadiness that has been able to enclude [exclude] them all, & to set an example much wanted, & which if it was followed might perhaps produce a greater change in the manners of the times than any other single circumstance could do...Who knows, if I had had more firmness, how much it might have operated upon your dear sister's conduct & your own.¹¹²

For Dowager Countess Spencer, the Court's function was to 'set an example' for others to follow, allowing it to lead the way in reforming aristocratic manners and morals; this was much more difficult during the Regency (c.1811-1820), when the Court was fragmented. Queen Charlotte continued to hold her Drawing Room reception, although not as regularly as before, and acted as hostess for her son at Royal receptions until her death in 1818. The Prince Regent also presided over an increasingly influential court at Brighton. In addition to this, Princess Caroline had her own alternative court, which was popular with members of the Whig party, at her residences in Blackheath and Kensington Palace. Thus, high society had more options than previously, and could court favour from various royals according to the company and mores that they found preferential.

¹¹² Dowager Countess Spencer to Countess Bessborough, 8 July 1807: Earl of Bessborough in collaboration with A. Aspinall (eds), *Lady Bessborough and her Family Circle* (London: J. Murray, 1940), pp. 160-1.

Princess Caroline's court was renowned for being less fastidious about its attendees' morals than the Queen's. In her scandalous exposé, *Diary illustrative of the Times of George IV* (1838), Lady Charlotte Bury, who was lady-in-waiting to the Princess between 1809-1813, frequently disapproved of the Princess's friendship with Jane Harley, Lady Oxford, a woman whose affairs were so numerous that her children were dubbed 'the Harleian Miscellany'.¹¹³ In 1811, when the Prince of Wales became Regent and several of the Princess's former allies dropped her, Bury was 'terrified' when the Princess suggested 'driving to Lady Oxford's at a moment when I knew that all eyes would be turned upon her'.¹¹⁴ Bury recorded an uncomfortable conversation where she managed to convince the Princess not to visit Lady Oxford, cautioning her of 'what may be said'. For Lady Bury, and the Princess (whose purported letters Bury reproduces in the *Diary*), Lady Oxford was a controversial character due to her multiple casual affairs and her lack of discretion. For Bury, 'Long attachments, even when not sanctioned by morality, excite compassion: but the ephemeral fires of passion, intrigue, interest, and pleasure, are loathsome.'¹¹⁵ Like Lady Anne Hatton before her, Lady Oxford's relationships with multiple men did not encourage many women to sympathise with her. In 1811, she had a quarrel with her brother that made it into the newspapers. The Princess wrote to Lady Bury to inform her that this 'quarrel' had led to events that would threaten Lady Oxford's social position:

¹¹³ Lady Charlotte Bury, *The Diary of a Lady-in-Waiting: being the Diary Illustrative of the Times of George the Fourth interspersed with Original Letters from the late Queen Caroline and from other Distinguished Persons*, ed with an introduction by A. Francis Steuart (2 vols, London: John Lane, 1908, orig. 1838), vol. 1, p. 83. 'the Harleian Miscellany' was an allusion to a well-known collection of pamphlets and other printed material from the extensive library of the Oxfords' ancestors, published between 1744-1753.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

Mr. S[cott] is about to publish a pamphlet, as an addition to the Harelian Tracts [sic], setting forth the amatory adventures of his sister. We shall break our necks in haste to buy it, of course crying "shameful" all the while; and it is said that Lady O[xford] is to be cut, which I cannot entirely believe.... some well-timed parties, and she may still keep the society which she hath been used to. The times are not so hard as they once were, when a woman could not construe Magna Charta with anything like impunity. ¹¹⁶

The Princess suggested that published accounts of Lady Oxford's scandalous relationships would be very popular in elite circles, and one gets a sense that although readers would act suitably appalled by the sordid details, they would find them entertaining. She also implies that sexual mores were laxer than they had been previously, although her association with Lady Oxford still helped her enemies to discredit her. English writer Matthew Lewis, who was a good friend of Bury's, wrote to her that 'The newspapers say... she has been dining twice with Lady Oxford. Now she ought in prudence to choose more decent company'.¹¹⁷ The idea that female immoral conduct was somehow contagious was still typical in the 1810s, and the Princess needed her moral virtue to be irreproachable in order to gain support from others against the Regent. Bury agreed with Lewis and wrote that the Princess had 'cut her own throat' by associating with Lady Oxford.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ "The Princess of Wales to Lady Bury", [Sunday 1811]: *The Diary of a Lady-in-Waiting*, vol. 1, p. 69.

¹¹⁷ Bury, *The Diary of a Lady-in-Waiting*, vol. 2, p. 325.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 274.

Both the Prince and Princess's aides used newspapers to exacerbate the tensions between them. The Prince continued to use his friend, MacMahon, in an attempt to control the newspapers, as he had done during the scandal caused by his affair with Lady Jersey.¹¹⁹ At the same time, some of the Ladies in the Princess's circles attempted to use the press to promote her cause. In February 1814, a trial was held in the King's Bench at which Lady Bridget Perceval accused John Mitford of perjury: letters and paragraphs promising Princess Caroline support, allegedly written by leading politicians, including the Prime Minister, Lord Liverpool, had been inserted into newspapers, like the *Star*, between 1811-1813. They were eventually traced back to Mitford, who alleged at his trial that he had been employed by Lady Perceval to copy letters written by her and others, including Lady Anne Hamilton, and to insert them in the newspapers. He claimed that he had been unaware they were forgeries. Lady Perceval further incriminated herself by confining Mitford in an asylum so that he could not be examined by the courts. When the allegations came to light, she attempted to have him convicted for perjury; the courts, however, determined that the letters had originated with Lady Perceval, and Mitford was acquitted.

The trial was marked by the publication of several satirical prints, one of which was Charles Williams's, *Lady P aragraph Championizing* (figure 4). 'Lady P' is the focal point of the image: she sits at a desk that is covered with newspapers and scrolls, musing over what to write and says, 'Now then for something strong but not libellous, I hate half measures.... John Bull have at you! I'll open your eyes'. A snake

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 118-9. See note 66 for details.

coils around her arm, spiking her pen with its venom – perhaps an allusion to ‘Mr Snake’, Lady Sneerwell’s attendant who acted intermediary between her and the newspapers in Sheridan’s *School for Scandal* (1777). Mitford is on the left-hand side of the image hanging a picture of a country inn over one of an asylum. There are also portraits of Lady Anne Hamilton, and the Princess’s former friend, Lady Douglas, who had acted witness against her in the ‘delicate investigation’ of 1806, hanging on the walls of ‘Lady P’s’ office. The image clearly depicted elite women’s involvement in the process of paragraph production: it implied that they made use of them as vehicles for malice and, potentially, for political meddling. What is interesting about this case is that it tacitly acknowledged that paragraphs had a larger audience than the elite would perhaps have assumed a decade earlier. The reading public, ‘John Bull’, were an audience whose opinion mattered to Lady Perceval: securing their support for the Princess was thought to be worthwhile. Although this particular case involved the royals, whose private lives had long interested the broader public, there was an increasing awareness that stories printed about less prominent members of ‘the World’ might appeal to a wider audience in this period. The revelation of the deceptive conduct of the Princess’s ladies, which was assumed to have been orchestrated by her, contributed to the Princess’s unpopularity. In May 1814, she left Britain for the continent, having negotiated an annuity from Parliament. The whole affair was, as Bury’s diary suggests, ‘a very badly managed piece of business’.¹²⁰

Paragraphs that exposed the sexual behaviour of members of ‘the World’ continued to be popular in the West End newspapers. Presumably, many still

¹²⁰ Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 220-1.

originated from members of fashionable society. In February 1816, the *Morning Post* printed a poem criticising Lord Byron for his cruelty to women in its 'The Fashionable World' column, just weeks before the news of his separation with his wife broke. The poem could easily have been written by a scorned lover—perhaps Lady Caroline Lamb who was known for her poetic dabbling. It was attributed to 'DROL NORBY', and began 'Love on his lips, and hatred in his heart/His motto, constancy—his creed, to



Figure 4 - Charles Williams, *Lady P paragraph Championizing.* – *Vide Letters* (London: S.W. Fores, 4 March 1814), BMS 12194.

part'.¹²¹ How individuals reacted to being discussed in paragraphs began to change in this later period, and there was more of an effort from those implicated to respond to them. Byron's friend, Sir James Wedderburn-Webster, sued the *St. James's Chronicle* for the libel of his wife in February 1816. The newspaper published a series of paragraphs in August 1815 that linked the Duke of Wellington to Lady Frances Wedderburn-Webster. They alleged that the Duke had returned to Brussels after Waterloo, not to visit the wounded, but to 'indulge in an adulterous intercourse' with Lady Frances, whose husband was absent tending to his estates in England, and, furthermore, that a criminal conversation trial would be brought against the Duke.¹²² Although their names were only mentioned together once, there was enough information for readers to guess the identity of the 'Venus' who had been 'netted... with such a Mars'.¹²³ One of the paragraphs was 'headed – "Brussels, 1815." Thus purporting to have been written there', and Wedderburn-Webster demanded proof from the paper's editor, Mr Baldwin, that it had been, which the latter could not, or would not, provide.¹²⁴

Wedderburn-Webster tried to claim £50,000 for the damage to his wife's reputation, suggesting that the accusations had provoked a serious reaction from society, and that he needed to have the rumours officially proven to be false. The jury found in favour of the couple, and the editor was made to pay £2000 in damages.

¹²¹ *Morning Post*, 22 February 1816. The poem's description of Byron trying to 'hide a soul of black envenom'd gall' is reminiscent of Lamb's characterisation of him as Lord Glenarvon in her gothic novel. She also famously reconfigured the Byron family's motto, 'Crede Byron', to 'Ne Crede Byron', which she then had engraved on the livery of her own servants.

¹²² James Wedderburn-Webster, *The Important Trial in the Common Pleas, Friday, February 16, 1816. Webster v. Baldwin, for a Libel charging Adultery between the Most Noble Arthur, Duke of Wellington and Lady Frances C. W. Webster, at Brussels, after the Battle of Waterloo* (London, 1816), p. 6.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

Much of the trial report centred on the issue of where the rumours had originated. The defendant was adamant that the rumours were not ‘the offspring of his invention’ but he was reticent about where they had been sourced.¹²⁵ When pushed, the defence lawyer claimed that the defendant did not think it was appropriate to call a witness to discuss the Lady’s reputation further, and claimed ambiguously that ‘in his situation, he was obliged to echo back that which took its existence and its form, not from him, but from others’.¹²⁶ Mr Baldwin had published the paragraphs, but he claimed he was not the author, although he left unclear whether he had received them in manuscript form or had copied them from foreign papers.

Individuals also responded to paragraphs by sending in open letters to be published in the newspapers where they had appeared. Wedderburn-Webster did this when his marriage was scrutinised for a second time in 1821. A paragraph, entitled ‘Extraordinary Fracas in High Life’ appeared in the *Morning Post* on 5 April, alleging that Wedderburn-Webster had come to blows in St. James’ with Lord Petersham, the son of the 3rd Earl of Harrington, who was an intimate of the King.¹²⁷ Princess Lieven, wife of the Russian ambassador, told her lover Prince Metternich that Lord Petersham and Lady Frances had arranged a secret meeting, but her husband intercepted the couple’s note and surprised them. He ‘threw’ Petersham ‘on the ground and pommelled him’ and Lady Frances was ‘packed... off to a country house’.¹²⁸ The Princess also drew upon a repertoire of historical rumours, recalling

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 13.

¹²⁷ *Morning Post*, 5 April 1821.

¹²⁸ Princess Lieven to Prince Metternich, 18 April 1823: Princess Dorothea Lieven, *The Private Letters of Princess Lieven to Prince Metternich, 1820-1826*, ed. Peter Quennell, assisted in translation by Dilys Powell (London: Murray, 1937), p. 132.

Lady Frances's unproven scandalous relations with the Duke of Wellington in her narrative, suggesting he was so enamoured that he 'nearly forgot in her company that he had the battle of Waterloo to win'. Lieven's account of how Wedderburn-Webster had become aware of the intrigue differed from that which was implied by Isaac Cruikshank's satire, *Peter Sham – Peter Shampood; or the Consequence of Kissing and Telling* (figure 5), where a character traced the gossip back to Lieven's domain, 'Almack's' club, where Petersham had 'whispered' about his intimacy with the Lady.

A series of letters purportedly written by both men's representatives were published in the *Morning Post*, the first of which, on 10 April, announced its intention to 'trouble the Public with a statement'.¹²⁹ The author wanted the public to know that Lord Petersham had tried to deny the events that had prompted the paragraph, but that Wedderburn-Webster had refused to support this claim—apparently now indifferent about his wife's reputation. The exchange of public letters ended with the pair having a duel, in which neither party was injured but became the subject of several satirical prints.¹³⁰ The Wedderburn-Websters separated not long after. Letters addressed to the concerned individuals, but addressing a 'public' audience, became more common, as people tried to determine where the rumours that inspired paragraphs had originated, or emphasise where they had *not* originated. In the breakdown of Lord Byron's marriage in April 1816, letters were published in the London newspapers almost daily, reputedly written by the friends and family of both

¹²⁹ *Morning Post*, 10 April 1821.

¹³⁰ For example see: Isaac Robert Cruikshank, *Peter's Sham duel: or a dunghill cock endeavouring to shew game* (London: G. Humphrey, April 1821), BMS 14283; Isaac Robert Cruikshank, *The Duel between Web and Sham-Peter; or most horribly frightened!!* (London: J. Fairburn, May 1821), BMS 14285.

parties.¹³¹ Lady Byron's father, Sir Ralph Noel, wrote a letter to the *Morning Chronicle* to proclaim that 'no paragraphs hostile to LORD BYRON had originated with Lady BYRON or her immediate friends'. He addressed the elite but tacitly acknowledged that there would be a larger audience:

I should lament very much the necessity of making this subject the theme of further discussion in the public Papers, which I have always disapproved of in questions that concern the relations of private life.¹³²

Sir Ralph Noel was reluctant to create broader awareness of the family scandal, but he, like Wedderburn-Webster and others, realised that he inevitably would be resorting to a public medium to refute allegations. 'The World's' relationship with the London press was transforming as its readership expanded; it was no longer considered to be an unproblematic tool for elite communication. It was now known to reveal elite sexual misconduct to a discerning middle-class public, and it exposed the quarrelling and spiteful nature of elite society.

Novels written by members of 'the World' also had the potential to expose its vulnerability. Lady Caroline Lamb's roman-à-clef, *Glenarvon*, was published in the summer of 1816. Set in the backdrop of the Irish Revolution, the novel narrates Lamb's affair with Lord Byron from her perspective and includes several letters that the poet had written to her. The release of the novel in May capitalised on the Byron scandal: Byron had left England for the continent to escape mounting hostilities at

¹³¹ For examples see: *Champion*, 14 April 1816; *Morning Post*, 19 April 1816; *Morning Chronicle*, 20 April 1816; *The Examiner*, 21 April 1816; *Morning Post*, 23 April 1816. The breakdown of Lord Byron's marriage caused a widespread media scandal, and reports featured in the national newspapers and literary journals reaching a range of different audiences.

¹³² *Morning Chronicle*, 20 April 1816.

the end of April. Its publication marked the climax of years of gossip about Lamb's scandalous conduct. Her erratic behaviour during her affair with Byron in 1812 drew many negative comments, as did her nervous breakdown when he ended the relationship and moved on with Lady Oxford in 1813. After recovering, Lamb continued to embark on affairs indiscreetly. In Paris in 1815, her cousin, Lady Harriet Granville, the second daughter of the 5th Duke and Duchess of Devonshire, wrote to her sister that Lamb was 'primed for an attack upon the Duke of Wellington, and I have no doubt but that she will to a certain extent succeed, as no dose of flattery is too strong for him to swallow'.¹³³ Lady Granville was much less sympathetic or

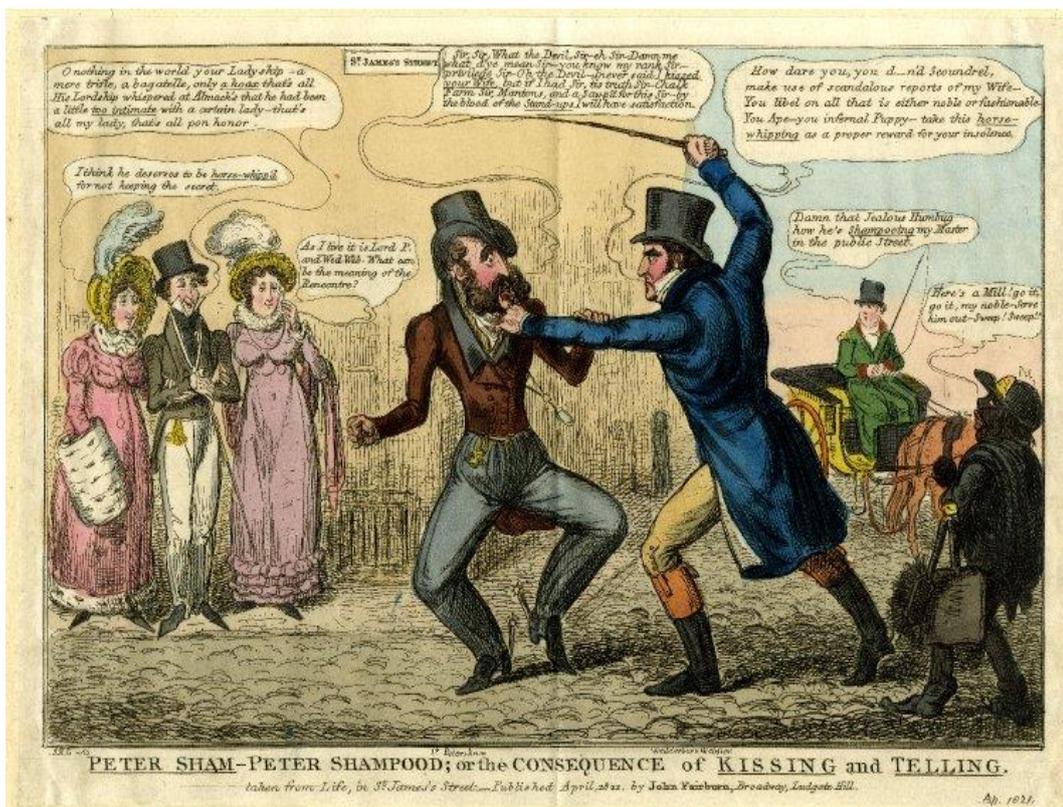


Figure 5 - Isaac Robert Cruikshank, *Peter Sham – Peter Shampoood; or the Consequence of Kissing and Telling* (London: John Fairburn, April 1821), BMS 14279.

¹³³ Countess Granville to Lady Georgiana Morpeth, [1815]: Harriet Leveson Gower, Countess Granville, *Letters of Harriet, Countess Granville, 1810-1845*, ed. The Hon. F. Leveson Gower (2 vols, London: Longmans & Co, 1894), vol. 1, p. 74. Lady Harriet married her aunt's lover, Granville Leveson Gower, in December 1809.

supportive than her mother had been, and their family bond did not protect Lamb from her disdain.

Glenarvon caused such a scandal because Lady Caroline Lamb used it to portray several members of Whig society very unfavourably; Sarah Villiers, Lady Jersey, wife of the 5th Earl and daughter-in-law to the previously discussed Countess Jersey, was enraged by her portrayal as 'Lady Augusta', and retaliated by excluding Lamb from Almack's club. Lamb did not seem to understand her crime, and wrote to Lady Holland (who had also been satirised in the novel as the Princess of Madagascar) that she would 'never...forgive' Lady Jersey, 'I have often stood by her - & her leaving me so shabbily now is not right'.¹³⁴ Whilst Lamb had been readmitted into society after the affair with Byron, she never recovered her position after the publication of *Glenarvon*. She had humiliated her friends and her family by exposing elite society 'to all the chamber maids and footmen'.¹³⁵ After the scandal broke, Lamb's husband moved her to the countryside. Lady Granville visited her in December 1816 and was stunned by her exuberant reception:

she only displayed a total want of shame and consummate impudence... And this is the guilty, broken-hearted Calanthe who could only expiate her crimes with her death.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ BL, Holland House Papers, Add MS 51560, fol. 206, Lady Caroline Lamb to Lady Holland, [1816].

¹³⁵ BL, Add MS 45548, fol. 143, Lady Cowper [later Viscountess Palmerston] to Lady Caroline Lamb, [1816].

¹³⁶ Countess Granville to the 6th Duke of Devonshire, 15 December 1816: *Letters of Harriet, Countess Granville*, vol. 1, p. 90.

Unlike Ladies Holland and Jersey, Lady Granville's comments hinted at her concern about the immorality of Lamb's behaviour; Lamb's lack of 'shame' was despicable, and Lady Granville ridiculed Lamb's choice to portray herself as 'the guilty, broken-hearted Calanthe', when she was clearly not at all remorseful for her conduct. The language that Lady Granville used not only implicitly drew upon religious notions of immorality but also interpreted Lamb's behaviour in accordance with a more secular framework of ideas: she refers to Lamb's 'crimes' rather than her sins. The way that Lady Granville discussed conduct that she viewed as illicit was very different to how her predecessors had. She expressed no empathy for Lamb, nor did she for other women whose conduct she criticised during the Regency; instead, she mocked the women (and some men). While mockery had been a reaction to illicit relationships in Whig society earlier, it marked a change to see it in the context of a close female familial relationship.

When George III died and the Regent became King in January 1820, Princess Caroline returned to Britain to claim her place as Queen consort. George IV opposed her which sparked a series of events known as 'the Queen Caroline Affair'.¹³⁷ The King demanded that Caroline's name be struck out of the liturgy, and he had her put on trial for adultery—with her Italian servant, Bartolomeo Pergami—which he hoped would allow him to obtain a divorce. The trial dragged on for months and held the attention of the public. It also caused a significant amount of tension between

¹³⁷ Historians have written about this Affair from different perspectives: Anna Clark, 'Queen Caroline and the Sexual Politics of Popular Culture in London, 1820', *Representations*, 31 (Summer 1990), 47-68; Thomas Laqueur, 'The Queen Caroline Affair: Politics as Art in the Reign of George IV', *Journal of Modern History*, 54:3 (1982), 417-466; Dror Wahrman, "'Middle-Class" Domesticity goes Public: Gender, Class, and Politics from Queen Caroline to Queen Victoria', *Journal of British Studies*, 32:4 (1993), 396-432.

members of the Whig aristocracy. Lady Granville recorded the anxious atmosphere at Woburn, the 6th Duke of Bedford's country estate, as the Whigs assembled there in December 1820: 'Lady Jersey is too absorbed to think who is for or who against. She sits netting and raving... her countenance is become so stern and political that it affects her beauty'.¹³⁸ Whilst the Whigs generally supported the Queen, some were far more committed to her cause than others.

In response to the Affair, a new loyalist newspaper, the *John Bull*, was established by Theodore Hook in December 1820. Lady Granville informed her sister, Lady Morpeth, that 'there is a new paper, which causes great sensation. Its object seems to be to frighten women from visiting the Queen... The first victim is the Duchess of Bedford... Lady Jersey next, very abusive...it is an odious publication'.¹³⁹ In a recurring feature, 'The Queen's Female Visitors', the Duchess of Bedford was vilified for her mercenary marriage; supposedly, she had originally been engaged to the 5th Duke of Bedford, but after his death in 1802, she had switched her affections to his brother, the 6th Duke, whom she had married in June 1803. On 24 December 1820, the *John Bull* mockingly reported:

In this, however, let the world think as they may, there was no inconsistency; the young Lady had vowed unto herself and mother that she would be married to a Duke of Bedford; and if the mortality had spread in the family,

¹³⁸ Countess Granville to Lady Georgiana Morpeth, 19 December 1820: *Letters of Harriet, Countess Granville*, vol. 1, pp. 196-7.

¹³⁹ Countess Granville to Lady Georgiana Morpeth, 22 December 1820: *Letters of Harriet, Countess Granville*, vol. 1, p. 201.

her Ladyship would probably have transferred her affections to all the branches of the illustrious House of Russel, till she had found one.¹⁴⁰

The Duchess's more recent conduct was also satirised. On 7 January 1821, Princess Lieven wrote to her lover, Prince Metternich, that the *John Bull's* editor 'gives all the tittle tattle about the women who called [to see the Queen]. Yesterday the paper contained a poem entitled "Trip to Vienna," dedicated to Lord Clanwilliam making remarks about the Duchess of Bedford's journey there'.¹⁴¹ Lord Clanwilliam and the Duchess had a brief intrigue in Austria in the autumn of 1820. After his return to England in February 1821, the Duchess embarrassed herself at a party at Princess Lieven's when Clanwilliam ignored her: 'she planted herself in front of the door... so that he could not avoid her'.¹⁴² Lord Clanwilliam 'overturned a table which was blocking a door, wrenched it open and thus got to the stairs'. Princess Lieven suggested that the others in the room observed the encounter closely, and the Duchess was humiliated and 'left a minute later'. Unfortunately, I have been unable to locate the *John Bull* poem that Lieven referred to, but it seems that the newspaper's popularity led to 'dozens of editions of each issue', which Lieven suggested 'the presses' could not 'cope' with.¹⁴³

The *John Bull* dredged up old and new rumours of female sexual improprieties in order to incriminate a host of Whig women who supported the Queen, including Lady Jersey and Mrs Brougham, wife of Henry Brougham, the Whig politician and

¹⁴⁰ *John Bull*, 24 December 1820.

¹⁴¹ Princess Lieven to Prince Metternich, 7 January 1821: *Private Letters of Princess Lieven to Prince Metternich* p. 102.

¹⁴² Princess Lieven to Prince Metternich, 28 February 1821: *Ibid.*, pp. 123-124.

¹⁴³ Princess Lieven to Prince Metternich, 7 January 1821: *Ibid.*, p. 102.

lawyer who represented the Queen in the trial. The Jerseys' brought a libel suit against the newspaper in 1821, which James McCord suggests was an attempt to restore Lady Jersey's honour and 'implicitly', the legitimacy of 'her right to participate in politics' as an aristocrat.¹⁴⁴ Although Lady Jersey did not get justice for her case, the *John Bull* was fined for 'five libels on the late queen' the following year.¹⁴⁵ In response to the Jersey trial, *The Times* reported 'that a newspaper "must never be the medium of private or political calumny"'.¹⁴⁶ Yet, this was exactly what newspapers had been doing for decades, and they did not stop with the *John Bull*.

The *John Bull* caused a furore in high society because the editor was unknown and seemed to know too much. Discussing the poem about the Duchess of Bedford and Lord Clanwilliam, whose brief affair, conducted abroad, was known only by a small group, Princess Lieven mused, 'in view of the exactitude of the details and of the facts, he must belong to good society'.¹⁴⁷ Lieven later suspected that William Knighton, the King's private physician, was the editor.¹⁴⁸ According to his biographer, Christopher Hibbert, George IV became increasingly dependent on Knighton, who was very unpopular with the other courtiers who felt he had been raised too far above his station.¹⁴⁹ Knighton was not responsible for the *John Bull* but there was a strong sense that whoever it was belonged to a lower social class than those he satirised, and was acting inappropriately according to high-society's mores. Princess

¹⁴⁴ James N. McCord, 'Taming the Female Politician in Early-Nineteenth-Century England: John Bull versus Lady Jersey', *Journal of Women's History*, 13:4 (2002), 31-53, (p. 44).

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

¹⁴⁶ *The Times*, 21 May 1822, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 45.

¹⁴⁷ Princess Lieven to Prince Metternich, 7 January 1821: *Private Letters of Princess Lieven to Prince Metternich*, p. 102.

¹⁴⁸ Princess Lieven to Prince Metternich, 8 August 1822: *Ibid.*, p. 188

¹⁴⁹ For more information see, Christopher Hibbert, *George IV: Regent and King, 1811-1830* (London: Allen Lane, 1973).

Lieven remarked that 'he is doing the ministers a bad turn' and that 'if the author were known, he would be knocked on the head. He plans very soon to rule the rulers'.¹⁵⁰ The aristocrats did not like their secrets being exposed to those below: Lady Cowper recorded that she would 'read it and burn it,... [so as not] to let the servants at Whitehall keep it'.¹⁵¹ All of the individuals who were ridiculed by the paper were offended; Brougham left town 'wretched at *John Bull's* attacks' on him and his wife, which accused them of having pre-marital sex.¹⁵² The attack on Brougham even brought him sympathy from a former enemy, the husband of his former lover, Lady Caroline George Lamb: '*c'est comique*' wrote Lady Cowper, 'George is frantic and furious at his [Brougham's] getting a little well deserved abuse in a public paper for his public conduct'.¹⁵³ Her emphasis on the 'public' aspect of the attack on Brougham was not random: the elite were gradually becoming more and more aware of how avidly their secret affairs were being consumed by a newspaper-reading public.

The Queen Caroline Affair came to a somewhat abrupt end when she died in August 1821, just weeks after her humiliating and public refusal of entry to the King's coronation. The open hostilities within aristocratic society eventually ceased. The King did not remarry, and instead treated his mistress, the Marchioness of Conyngham, as his consort. Initially, he was very cautious about keeping this relationship discreet, particularly because the Marchioness had been 'much abused'

¹⁵⁰ Princess Lieven to Prince Metternich, 8 August 1822: *Private Letters of Princess Lieven to Prince Metternich*, p. 188.

¹⁵¹ Lady Emily Cowper [later Palmerston] to Frederick Lamb [23 Feb 1821]: Emily Temple, Viscountess Palmerston, *The Letters of Lady Palmerston selected and edited from the originals at Broadlands and elsewhere*, ed. Tresham Lever (London: John Murray, 1957), p. 71.

¹⁵² Lady Emily Cowper to Frederick Lamb, 28 Feb [1821]: *Ibid.*, p. 73.

¹⁵³ Lady Emily Cowper [later Palmerston] to Frederick Lamb [23 Feb 1821]: *Ibid.*, p. 71. The affair between Lord Brougham and Lady Caro George is discussed in chapter 4.

'by the mob' during the Queen Caroline Affair.¹⁵⁴ In May 1821, Charles Greville remarked that, 'Lady Conyngham... rides out with her daughter, but never with the King, who always rides with one of his gentlemen. They never appear in public together'.¹⁵⁵ After the Queen's death they became less cautious, and in September 1821, Lady Granville told her sister that:

Lady Conyngham appears but little, but that little is high. She was in a box opposite to him [the King] at the play, and not content with making her *des demonstrations* all the time, he wrote to her in pencil and sent it round by Lord Mount-Charles. Mr. Luttrell, who detests the Irish, is quite beyond his patience on the subject. "Royalty has generally some restraint, some shackle upon it; but here is a new case, a thing unheard of, a King broke loose. There will be no catching him again."¹⁵⁶

The King had 'broke loose', and for the rest of his reign the Marchioness would be treated like a French King's *maîtresse-en-titre* of the Ancien Régime; whilst she was not immune to criticism, aristocrats and politicians alike courted her favour and patronage because of the influence that she held over the King. The Whigs in particular flocked around the Marchioness, trying to get leverage with George IV.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ Countess Granville to Lady Georgiana Morpeth, 1 September 1820: *Letters of Harriet, Countess Granville*, vol. 1, p. 172.

¹⁵⁵ Charles Cavendish Fulke Greville, *The Greville Memoirs: A Journal of the Reigns of King George IV, King William IV and Queen Victoria*, ed. Henry Reeve (Cambridge University Press, 2011, orig. 8 vols, 1888), vol. 1, p. 47.

¹⁵⁶ Countess Granville to Lady Georgiana Morpeth, 3 September 1821: *Letters of Harriet, Countess Granville*, vol. 1, p. 211.

¹⁵⁷ See for discussion of a dinner held by Lady Cowper purposely to engineer a meeting between the Marchioness and Earl Grey: Princess Lieven to Prince Metternich, 24 June 1822: *Private Letters of Princess Lieven to Prince Metternich*, p. 182.

She was a central figure in female aristocratic social circles, and women seemingly accepted her leadership without dwelling significantly on the morality of her relationship with the King. Even Lady Granville, who had previously been quite a stickler for moral conduct, was on intimate terms with the Marchioness. After the service on Christmas Day 1823, she went 'to Lady Conyngham, and saw her Christmas gifts, which made my mouth water, and made me almost wish for a situation'.¹⁵⁸ She often recorded her discussions with the Marchioness and the King, noting her sister's and her own intimacy with the couple, whose 'society' in Brighton she found 'very agreeable'.¹⁵⁹ Lady Cowper also submitted to Marchioness Conyngham's power and was 'afraid to encourage' the Marchioness's son's attentions, for fear of 'upset[ting]' his marriage to 'an heiress with an income of £40,000'.¹⁶⁰ Disrupting the Marchioness's plans would undoubtedly 'put her out of favour at Court'. The Marchioness's power was seen to originate from the King's emotional dependence on her, which several of the ladies ridiculed, but the position it gave her was unequivocal: Princess Lieven wrote to Earl Grey, 'She is treated as Queen. The King gives her the right-hand place over the Duchess of Cumberland'.¹⁶¹ The Duchess was the King's sister-in-law, and, according to Court hierarchy, should have been the more senior female.

¹⁵⁸ Countess Granville to 6th Duke of Devonshire, 1 January 1824: *Letters of Harriet, Countess Granville*, vol. 1, p. 243.

¹⁵⁹ For examples, see Countess Granville to Lady Georgiana Morpeth, 10 March 1822: *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 223; and Countess Granville to Lady Georgiana Morpeth, 29 July 1828: *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 29.

¹⁶⁰ Princess Lieven to Prince Metternich, 26 January 1828: *Private Letters of Princess Lieven to Prince Metternich*, p. 149.

¹⁶¹ Princess Lieven to Earl Grey, 9 September 1829: G. Le Strange (ed. and trans), *Correspondence of Princess Lieven and Earl Grey* (3 vols, London: Bentley & Son, 1890), vol. 1, p. 289.

Although kings were undoubtedly given greater freedoms than others, the visibility of this relationship at Court influenced how aristocrats responded to unconventional relationships. Lady Granville's judgements about adultery and promiscuity in the 1820s are somewhat different from those she pronounced on similar relationships in the 1810s. She wrote letters filled with society gossip to her sister, Lady Morpeth, still her in her satirical tone, but her typical reflections on morality are strikingly absent.¹⁶² She was no longer as discerning about who she allowed into her society either, and recounted Lord Hertford's visit with his mistress, Lady Strachan, whom Charles Greville described as 'a very infamous and shameless woman'.¹⁶³ While she clearly disapproved of Lady Strachan's 'unbounded influence over Lord Hertford', the worst criticism Lady Granville made about her was that she had 'a vulgar housemaid common look in her features'.¹⁶⁴ Lady Granville was also very indulgent when it came to the philandering of her friend, Lord Clanwilliam, making light of his vanity, and sarcastically describing his happiness 'with popularity and five pretty women'.¹⁶⁵ While remaining critical of these liaisons, Lady Granville did not attach shame and disgrace to them in the same way that she had previously, suggesting that she did not expect her sister (her principal correspondent) to react with revulsion, but with amusement. The sisters' increasing age may have also played a role in this, but there are hints that suggest that aristocratic sexual mores relaxed in the 1820s.

¹⁶² For example, see Countess Granville to Lady Georgiana Morpeth, 17 February 1824: *Letters of Harriet, Countess Granville*, vol. 1, pp. 255-256.

¹⁶³ *The Greville Memoirs*, vol. 5, p. 93.

¹⁶⁴ Countess Granville to Lady Georgiana Morpeth, 27 August 1833: *Letters of Harriet, Countess Granville*, vol. 2, p. 144.

¹⁶⁵ Countess Granville to Lady Georgiana Morpeth, 10 February 1825: *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 343.

The notion that women automatically had to avoid other women whose sexual reputations were damaged was thus (temporarily) suspended by most members of aristocratic society. The Lady Patronesses of Almack's Club led high society in the 1820s. Many of these women, including Princess Lieven, Lady Jersey, and Lady Cowper, had notorious reputations, and yet they were bombarded by individuals who were desperate to cultivate a social relationship with them in order to get an invite to the exclusive weekly Wednesday night ball held at Almack's assembly rooms in St. James's. As Jennifer Davey has argued, with its complex procedures and rules, Almack's should not just be reduced to a mechanism in the elite marriage market, but was a site of aristocratic exclusivity and 'female influence'.¹⁶⁶ The patronesses, who throughout the 1820s remained quite static, performed the role of marking inclusion and exclusion: they were entirely in charge of the guest list, and met weekly during the season to sift through applications, sending invites to those who were successful. They printed the names of those who were not on a separate list, which was left at the club for applicants to inquire about.¹⁶⁷ In 1824, Lady Granville wrote to her sister that Madame Flack was pleased that 'she was going to the play with Ladies Jersey and Cowper, which sounds well for her fashionable career. "It is a great thing for a Lady in Town" to be well with those Countesses'.¹⁶⁸ To receive an invite to Almack's was a marker of the recipient's status as a member of an exclusive society, in a manner not dissimilar to how George III's court had functioned in the earlier period. However, inclusivity at Almack's was not

¹⁶⁶ Jennifer Davey, "'Wearing the Breeches?' Almack's, the Female Patroness, and Public Femininity c.1764-1848', *Women's History Review*, 26:6 (2017), 822-839, (p. 823).

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 829.

¹⁶⁸ Countess Granville to Lady Georgiana Morpeth, 11 October 1824: *Letters of Harriet, Countess Granville*, vol. 1, p. 308.

based on sexual purity, as observers noted, and many carried on their extra-marital relationships there—including the patronesses themselves.¹⁶⁹

The Almack's' Patronesses were often referred to as a collective by contemporaries, as Davy demonstrates. Their relationships with each other, however, were complex and often hostile. Even Princess Lieven and Lady Cowper, who, on the surface, appeared to be social allies, were often critical of one another's behaviour. In March 1821, Lady Cowper sought Princess Lieven's approval of her pursuit of Lord Clanwilliam. The Princess tried to subtly suggest that the attachment was not a good idea, but she was ignored. She described the exchange to Prince Metternich and pronounced that Lady Cowper was 'a woman full of wit and insight, letting her head be turned by a pair of black eyes'.¹⁷⁰ The collections of Princess Lieven's published correspondence suggests that she gossiped more candidly about sex scandals with her lovers than her female friends – there was perhaps an element of distrust shaping her homosocial relationships. In 1830, she wrote to Lady Cowper that her lover, Earl Grey, had advised her to end their relationship, so that she could retain her influence with the King, concluding 'all this is very difficult to write to you'.¹⁷¹ Their correspondence lacks the frequent emotional confidentiality of that of Lady Cowper's mother, Lady Melbourne, and her close friends, such as the Duchess of Devonshire. Their exchanges were restrained, and they rarely discussed their emotions with each other without tangible awkwardness.

¹⁶⁹ For example, Lady Caroline Lamb continued to be admitted even after her notorious affair with Lord Byron, she was only excluded after the publication of *Glenarvon* (1816), which humiliated two of the patronesses—Lamb's sister-in-law, Lady Cowper, and the Countess of Jersey.

¹⁷⁰ Princess Lieven to Prince Metternich, 7 March 1821: *Private Letters of Princess Lieven to Prince Metternich*, p. 126.

¹⁷¹ Princess Lieven to Lady Cowper, 5 January 1830: Princess Dorothea Lieven, *The Lieven-Palmerston Correspondence, 1828-1856*, ed. and trans. Lord Sudley (London: Murray, 1943), p. 14.

At George IV's Court, aristocratic women were constantly competing with one another for relationships (social or sexual) with powerful men, and this rivalry shaped their own relationships. As Patricia Meyer Spacks suggests, gossip could support 'comradeship' by assisting the gossipers to 'deny, their own competitive impulses' by focusing their dislike on a third party.¹⁷² Lady Cowper and Princess Lieven bonded this way over their mutual dislike of a third Almack's Patroness, Lady Jersey. In the late 1820s, Lady Jersey defected from the Whigs and befriended the Duke of Wellington. Their intimacy was much discussed, with some suggesting that she had replaced his closest confidante, Mrs Arbuthnot, in his affections. Some suspected the relationship was based on Lady Jersey's attempts to meddle in politics.¹⁷³ Princess Lieven and Lady Cowper discussed this relationship in their correspondence-usually gleefully describing occasions when the Duke had appeared to snub Lady Jersey at social events.¹⁷⁴ Princess Lieven hated Lady Jersey, and told Lady Cowper that she had accepted that the feeling was mutual, but that they would remain civil to each other in society.¹⁷⁵ Keeping up this politeness was demanding, and it is possible that her cruel comments about Lady Jersey's sexual conduct allowed Princess Lieven the chance to exorcise those tensions.

In October 1833, the Princess wrote to her lover, Earl Grey, that Lady Jersey was comically 'running after Lord Palmerston'.¹⁷⁶ Viscount Palmerston had been having an extra-marital relationship with Lady Cowper for many years, and although

¹⁷² Patricia Meyer Spacks, 'In praise of gossip', *The Hudson Review*, 35:1 (1982), 19-38, (p. 28).

¹⁷³ See for example, William Heath, *Morning Nigh* [sic] (London: T. McLean, 1828-1830), BMS 15717.

¹⁷⁴ For example, see Princess Lieven to Lady Cowper, 27 February [1832]: *Lieven-Palmerston Correspondence*, pp. 34-35.

¹⁷⁵ Princess Lieven to Lady Cowper, 5 January 1830: *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁷⁶ Princess Lieven to Earl Grey, 23 October 1833: *Correspondence of Princess Lieven and Earl Grey*, vol. 2, p. 484.

the two were not exclusive, Princess Lieven ended her gossip: 'So much for the fidelity of men!', a barbed remark on Palmerston's disloyalty to his mistress, who was travelling in Europe at the time.¹⁷⁷ This was the only occasion on which she referenced Lady Cowper; unlike their predecessors, women in the later period did not routinely perform empathy, or show much compassion towards one another over their treatment by men. Grey was 'amused' by the gossip, and the affair took on the character of a political statement when Lady Jersey made an 'exhibition' of it at a society event held by the Princess in November.¹⁷⁸ She was overheard claiming that 'P[almerston] never was really in love with anybody but her', acknowledging the competition she felt between herself and Lady Cowper, and perhaps even the Princess who had also had an affair with Palmerston in the 1820s.¹⁷⁹ Furthermore, 'all society...[was] taken aback' by the way that Lady Jersey was 'flushed with victory at having been able to pass...[Grey] by, while in possession of the arm of the Foreign Secretary'.¹⁸⁰ By parading with her lover and snubbing the Whig Prime Minister, Lady Jersey drew attention to her conduct. However, even this blatant behaviour did not get her cut from society. Cutting appears to have been less frequently resorted to in the 1820s and early 1830s than it had been in the 1780s through to the 1810s. That is not to say that no women were ostracised, but rather that these tended to be women, like Marguerite Gardiner, Countess of Blessington, who were of dubious social origins *and* had a reputation for promiscuity.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Earl Grey to Princess Lieven, 27 October 1833: *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 486; and Earl Grey to Princess Lieven, [16 November 1833]: *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 491.

¹⁷⁹ Earl Grey to Princess Lieven, [16 November 1833]: *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 491.

¹⁸⁰ Princess Lieven to Earl Grey, 16 [November 1833]: *ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 491-2.

In the Whig world social relations were tense, and individuals were often driven by personal motives to humiliate others for sexual misconduct. Joseph Skillet (pseudonym for Lord John Russell, the third son of the 6th Duke of Bedford) noted in his exposé, *Essays, and sketches of Life and Character. By a Gentleman who has left his lodgings* (1821), that the young gentleman enters 'the World' apprehensively, due to its reputation as 'a wilderness where every vice and every bad passion grows without restraint'.¹⁸¹ He relaxed when he found 'the World' lively and joyful, and went on 'careless and confident, till his progress awakens jealousy, and his imprudence gives room for slander'.¹⁸² Therefore, it was not necessarily the conceived immorality of the conduct that drove reactions, but rather that the conduct enabled individuals to justify their contempt and cruel criticism, and, in consequence, they exorcised feelings of contempt and jealousy. One way they could exorcise these feelings was to commission or drop hints to satirists or their publishers. There are a couple of examples in the James Gillray manuscript collection in the British Library of anonymous individuals sending in ideas for satires depicting alleged affairs. The best example for this period is concerned with the Marquis of Hertford, a Tory and son of one of George IV's mistresses, which, as it such an understudied source type, I quote in full:

Hints for a caricature Aug 1830

Which if executed it is requested one may be sent to the Marquis of Hertford

Park Lane

¹⁸¹ J. Skillet [pseud. Lord John Russell], *Essays and Sketches of Life and Character. By a Gentleman who has left his Lodgings* (2 edn, London, 1821), p. 33.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 34.

Lady Strachan, the well known mistress of several people, but nominally the Marquis of Hertfords... He is in the habit of lavishing large sums upon her whilst she gives him as many horns as there are days and nights in the year – the following conversation was overheard at his Lordships villa in the Regents park between Lord Stradbroke one of her first favourites and herself a few days since, and it is thought high time to open Lord H’s Eyes upon the subject by representing Lord Stradbroke and Lady Strachan in an amorous position - in the back ground Lord H’s villa – and a servant seen listening and saying “I wish my Lord could hear you madam. He might then be brought to his senses and your high hands brought low”. – Lady Stracham’s speech, “how sweet to go astray by the side of my favourite Broke – whilst my Gouty Guardian sleeps – but soft! Should he awake! What then! Have I not a hundred thousand pounds and his promise of marriage safely locked up and this I told to all the world! Then he is in my power and welcome pleasure from any side but most welcome from my sweet Stra--- broke!!”

Lord Stradbroke speech “and so you have made the Marquis believe you treat me as a fool: this is Extraordinarily Clever: thanks to you my Gentle Lambkin! I as well as severall others can make a fool of him any day. May he laugh who loses, he who wins. Ha! Ha! Ha!!!”

The caricature to be called the Double Intrigue – or Gallantry Extraordinary.¹⁸³

¹⁸³ BL, Add MS 27337, fol. 199, Anon to George Humphrey, August 1830: I have looked on the British Museum’s online collection but have been unable to find a print that looks as though it might have been inspired by this letter.

The letter writer hoped to be able to use this print to ‘open Lord H[ertford]’s Eyes’ about the duplicity of his mistress and requested a copy should be sent to Hertford directly. Presumably, they hoped to shock Hertford and incite a confrontation between him and Lady Strachan—and perhaps even Lord Stradbroke. There are malicious undertones in this letter: Hertford is portrayed as an ignorant ‘gouty’ old fool, and the servant’s desire to bring Lady Strachan ‘low’, and to see her disgraced and left vulnerable without the protection of Hertford, gives expression to the letter writer’s motives. The author clearly felt her behaviour and influence was excessive—suggesting she had several lovers simultaneously but felt secure in her position of power over Lord Hertford, who doted on her—and they hoped that she would be punished when Hertford realised that she was unfaithful. I have not been able to find a print that demonstrates that this hint was developed, but by sending the letter, the writer suggests that this practice was not out of the ordinary and they felt they could harness the medium to their own ends—ends that were driven by personal animosity and a desire to humiliate and disrupt those involved.

Social tensions were perpetuated by the regular appearance of exposés and roman-à-clefs written over this period and published for a broader audience; as for example, Lady Anne Hamilton’s *Epics of the Ton* (1807); Lady Caroline Lamb’s *Glenarvon* (1816); Lord John Russell’s *Sketches of life and Character* (1821); *Almack’s: A Novel* (1826) by ‘Marianne Spencer Hudson’; *Secret History of the Court of England from the Accession of George* (1832), which was also attributed to Lady Anne Hamilton, who refuted the allegations but was forced to leave the country to escape the furore about it; *Victims of Society* (1837) by the Countess of Blessington; and Lady Charlotte Bury’s *Diary Illustrative of the Times of George IV* (1838). In many cases,

these books were written by individuals who had experienced the censorial side of society, and therefore the society that they portrayed was cruel and hypocritical, led by those who did not practice the morality that they expected others to adhere to, and filled with calculating individuals who spent their days trying to lure others into scandal to improve their own position.

Members of elite society often reacted angrily to the exposés and claimed that the stories they told were fabrications or exaggerations. Bury's *Diary* caused a lot of anxiety when it was published in 1838: Greville described it as a 'wretched catchpenny trash', and Earl Grey thought it showed 'excessive stupidity'.¹⁸⁴ In particular, it was felt that such publications gave unfair portrayals of female society: after the publication of *Victims of Society*, the *World of Fashion and Continental Feuilletons* described the book as 'Lady Blessington's War against women', and questioned, 'Has she been sent to Coventry?... We are astonished by the gross falsehoods, the wretched caricatures of female society'.¹⁸⁵

Furthermore, there was a concern that the publications held this allegedly false portrayal up for a broader public to judge: Lady Cowper was concerned about Lamb's *Glenarvon* being read by the 'chamber maids', and reviews of *Almack's: A Novel*, which satirised the Lady Patronesses, including Princess Lieven, Lady Jersey, and Lady Sefton, remarked that 'our leading fashionistas... are made to run the gauntlet of public opinion'.¹⁸⁶ Earl Grey thought Lady Bury deserved to be 'excluded

¹⁸⁴ Greville, *The Greville Memoirs*, vol. 4, p. 49; Earl Grey to Princess Lieven, 6 February 1838: *Correspondence of Princess Lieven and Earl Grey*, vol. 3, pp. 256-7.

¹⁸⁵ 'Lady Blessington's War against women', *World of Fashion and Continental Feuilletons*, vol. 14, 1 June 1837, p. 136; see also *idem*, p. 185.

¹⁸⁶ BL, Add MS 45548, fol. 143, Lady Cowper to Lady Caroline Lamb, [1816]; 'Review of 'Almack's, a Novel', *World of Fashion and Continental Feuilletons*, vol. 4, 1 January 1827, p. 17.

from society' for her disloyalty; she had sold out her peers for '£1,000', and fuelled 'the appetite for scandal which so generally prevails'.¹⁸⁷ With these publications came a mounting sense that elite society was being attacked from within, which spread distrust in some circles. This coincided with the changes to elite society's relationships with the newspaper press, but also with the electorate, which began its gradual expansion after the Reform Act was passed under Earl Grey's government in 1832. The elite sensed their vulnerability as they lost control over how they were portrayed to a large reading 'public' whose opinion of them increasingly mattered. The opinion of 'the World', whilst still important, was somewhat eclipsed by that of the 'Public'.

*

This chapter has shown that the way that members of elite society reacted to relationships that they perceived to be controversial was complex. The types of relationships that they thought were controversial (excluding those that involved litigation) primarily involved those where women seemed to wield too much influence over men, and thus compromised the stability of elite society. This was because they encouraged men to make inappropriate marriages, to not to marry at all, to fight with each other, or made them neglect former loyalties. The position that aristocratic women held in elite society, and the access they had to political influence, was increasingly problematic as the period progressed—particularly because women

¹⁸⁷ Earl Grey to Princess Lieven, 6 February 1838: *Correspondence of Princess Lieven and Earl Grey*, vol. 3, pp. 256-7.

who were known for being sexually unchaste were thought to be open to other corruptions—and any marriages that gave them the power to manipulate elite men were alarming. Conceptions of controversial male behaviour gradually transformed over the period: in the late eighteenth century, concerns remained fixed on men's submission to women, but into the nineteenth century they could also be transgressive by being cruel to their wives and mistresses, or excessively venal. Elite masculine ideals became more complex with the growth of domestic ideology; by the 1830s, having a promiscuous reputation could make a man less attractive as a potential husband: Princess Lieven thought it was 'folly' that Lady Pembroke was 'so terribly innocent about world matters...[that she was] quite prepared to give her daughter' to the notorious roué, Lord Clanwilliam.¹⁸⁸ Lady Granville similarly expressed her dismay that the disreputable Lord Yarmouth might try to marry Lady Grantham's daughter, though she thought that with 'their ideas about religion and morality' Lady Grantham would be unlikely to accept 'a man who I, less strict, would not even introduce to my girls'.¹⁸⁹

Sexual mores fluctuated across this fifty-year period: whilst the difference at the beginning and the end of the period are evident, the development was certainly not linear. This was because the royal court shaped elite codes of conduct: when George III and Queen Charlotte were in power propriety was expected and any individual conducting an indiscreet affair was criticised and excluded (to varying degrees), but when George IV was on the throne, individuals were far more relaxed about their peers' indiscretions, and were less likely to cut someone for their sexual

¹⁸⁸ Princess Lieven to Lady Cowper, 14 April [1830]: *Lieven-Palmerston Correspondence*, p. 17.

¹⁸⁹ Countess Granville to Lady Georgiana Morpeth, 8 September 1832: *Letters of Harriet, Countess Granville*, vol. 2, p. 132.

transgressions. Various sub-societies, like the Whigs, took their lead from the Court and monarch, whose influence extended into how they viewed the World and actors within it. The way that controversial relationships were discussed, and the sorts of emotions that were attached to them, underwent subtle changes. The religious tenets of sexual immorality were very clear in criticisms during the earlier period in a way that they were not by the 1820s; the religious language and concepts continued to be used implicitly, but were generally to reinforce the idea that these relationships were socially transgressive. By the 1820s, the dominant manner in which these relationships were discussed in epistolary networks was sarcasm. Sarcasm was present in letters of the earlier period, but it was surpassed by expressions of empathy and anxiety, particularly in the context of close and intimate personal networks, like the ones analysed in this chapter.

How the elite put these codes into practice was subject to more variables and reveals that whilst the World was a distinctly universal image of elite society, its operations depended significantly on small interpersonal networks, as Hannah Greig has similarly argued of the *beau monde*.¹⁹⁰ Whether an individual was shown empathy or apathy was largely dependent on their social relationship to the individual(s) who reacted. Friends tried to show each other support, though their actions were sometimes restrained by their own responsibilities and interests. By engaging in a controversial relationship, an individual gave their enemies ammunition; criticisms and attempts to humiliate individuals for their conduct seem frequently to have been driven by motives of enmity and envy, rather than a desire

¹⁹⁰ Greig, *Beau Monde*, p. 217.

to restore moral order. The World was very hierarchical and competitive, and individuals could use sexual misconduct to their advantage in their social relationships with their 'superiors' or those they had clashed with-whether this was by verbally confronting them, intimidating them with exposure in the press, or by commissioning a satirical print that could be circulated in order to ridicule them. There does seem to have been a slight change of emphasis as the nineteenth century progressed, and admittance into the highest social circles closed-off, and the tensions reflected internal hierarchies less and were more concerned with exposure to an anonymous public.

Reactions took many different forms and performed various functions. Anthropologists have suggested that gossip plays an important role in smaller societies, and this was definitely the case in Whig society. Gossip simultaneously entertained individuals whilst enabling them to deliberate the ambiguities of sexual and social conventions (which were very divisive for the elite over this period); it united them with those they gossiped with, assuring them of their shared values, and it also allowed them to diffuse the tensions that came with feelings of rivalry that were inherent to the World's social milieu. Examining oral and written discussions, some gossipy, others less so, suggests that social relationships within elite society experienced changes over this period. As the Whig party fractured in the nineteenth century, the women associated with the party lost their cohesion as a social unit. The second generation of Whig women continued to interact with each other, but their compassion and sense of camaraderie was not the same. In a way this also reflects changes in the dominant cultural discourse: the first generation were very influenced by the principles of sensibility (they shared hyperbolic emotional outbursts with each

other frequently), whereas the second generation were far more emotionally restrained and were more witty and sardonic-resisting being emotionally drawn in to the melodramas of others. The political undertones of their affairs were also discussed more, and homosocial rivalries were more prominent than they had been in the earlier period.

The most obvious change over this period was the World's relationship with the London press. In the beginning its members used columns like the *Morning Post's* 'The Fashionable World' quite unproblematically, under the impression that they could use it to communicate in code to a delimited audience of their peers with the aims of humiliating their enemies. Raymond Geuss's argument about the complexity of the connections between the terms 'public' and 'private' is useful here: he argues that both terms have various connotations that are culturally, historically, and even socially specific.¹⁹¹ The late eighteenth-century elite did not necessarily conceptualise the West End newspapers as a public space in the same way as their descendants would—for them, their 'public' was predominantly members of their wider social network, and they felt secure that their codes and ambiguities could exclude other audiences. Their relationship with the press became more complex as their society grew alongside the expanding readership of the London daily newspapers. Laqueur argues that the concept of a general public was 'created and represented by the press', and he views the Queen Caroline Affair in 1820 as a significant moment when the 'public's' opinion had a bearing in British politics.¹⁹² It may have slightly predated the Affair, but during the early decades of the nineteenth

¹⁹¹ Raymond Geuss, *Public Goods, Private Goods* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 3, p. 8.

¹⁹² Laqueur, 'The Queen Caroline Affair', p. 431.

century, 'public opinion' definitely emerged as a category that the elite were concerned about, in relation to various aspects of their lives. Thus, they started to change their interaction with the press, bringing them to court for libel more frequently, and responding to cryptic paragraphs with lengthy letters to explain situations more meticulously. Individuals feared being betrayed to the press by their acquaintances—a tension that is still prevalent in modern elite networks. Furthermore, these tensions were exacerbated by the various romans-à-clefs and exposés that were published by members of the World across this period. There was an increasing awareness that their authority was no longer unquestionable, and that they were vulnerable to criticism—publications that exposed what the emerging middle-class would view as immoral behaviour were concerning. The affairs of the World were, for a short while, attached to an increasingly visible political public sphere, which perhaps influenced Society's separation from politics; as Davidoff has demonstrated, in the Victorian period, Society withdrew into private spaces, was far more exclusive about who it would admit, and was more rigorous in its demands over the sexual and social etiquette that its members had to adhere to.¹⁹³ The next chapter examines how the social and public worlds of the much smaller literary societies responded to the controversial relationships of their members.

¹⁹³ Davidoff, *Best Circles*, p. 16.

Chapter 3: Her 'defection from the right Path hurts all her Friends exceedingly': Reactions to controversial liaisons in (radical) literary societies¹

In August 1827, Frances Wright, writer, feminist, and social reformer, introduced herself to Mary Shelley to gain the author's friendship and interest in her cause:

I shall preface this letter with no apology... as the daughter of your father & mother (known to me only by their works & opinions) as the friend and companion of a man distinguished during life & preserved in the remembrance of the public as one distinguished not by genius merely but, as I imagine, by the strength of his opinions & his fearlessness in their expression – viewed only in these relations you wd be to me an object of interest... I have heard or read or both, that wch has fostered the belief that you share at once the sentiments & talents of those from whom you draw your being...[sic] pledged as I am to the cause of, what appears to me, moral truth & moral liberty, I neglect my means for discovering a real friend of that cause I were almost failing to a duty... I wish to convey to Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin Shelley my respect & admiration of those from whom she holds those names my fond desire to connect her with them in my esteem & in the knowledge of mutual sympathy to sign myself her friend,
Frances Wright.²

¹ Hester Lynch Piozzi to Penelope Sophia Pennington, 4 August 1794: Hester Lynch Piozzi, *The Piozzi Letters: the Correspondence of Hester Lynch Piozzi*, ed. Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom (6 vols, Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1989-2002), vol. 2 (1792-1798), p. 189.

² Bod., MS Abinger, c.47, fols. 98-99, Frances Wright to Mary Shelley, 21 August 1827.

In her letter, Wright drew connections between individuals with literary credentials from three different groups, who had all made radical attempts to reconfigure marital and sexual relationships: Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, whose writings and ideologies caused much controversy in the revolutionary decade of the 1790s; Percy Bysshe Shelley from the Romantic generation of the 1810s and 20s; and the Dissenters, including the Unitarians, Freethinkers (like Wright herself), and the early socialists, like the Owenites, who preached about marital nonconformity in the late 1820s and 30s. Across all three groups, the individuals advocating domestic reform formed small politicised literary coterie, many of which also had religious concerns at their core. However, these coterie did not exist in isolation, but were often closely associated with larger literary societies: thus, their members socialised and collaborated with other literati, individuals who came from a diverse range of backgrounds and did not necessarily share the same views on all topics. Frances Wright's assumptions, that because she and Mary Shelley shared 'sentiments' and 'mutual sympathy' they could be friends, was not generally representative of friendship ties within these societies.³

This chapter examines several couples who belonged to these coterie and will focus on how friends and acquaintances from their broader social networks reacted to their controversial relationships. The cases include non-marital cohabitation, extra-marital relationships, and other intimacies that although not strictly 'platonic' likely remained unconsummated, yet still were considered by others to be controversial because they seemed to denote the presence of

³ Evidence suggests that the two women probably never met as Wright left England to go to America shortly after sending the letter-although they corresponded several more times.

adulterous sentiments, or even incestuous ones. The first part of the chapter will establish the broader context by examining the different literary societies and the relationship that each had with the London newspaper and periodical press. I argue that the ways in which the relationships of prominent radicals were exposed and portrayed by the press underwent changes *and* continuities, reflecting both the political and cultural tensions for each period as well as shifts in the profession of journalism. The next section of the chapter argues that the publicity that the relationships attained influenced how a couple's associates responded to them. Using diaries and correspondence, I examine the different discourses that friends and acquaintances of the couples drew upon to think about and form opinions on unconventional romantic and sexual behaviour. I argue that gossip in these networks took on a very different character than it did in Whig society, even if the functions it performed were similar, which highlights the difference between the two ranks' values and expectations of marriage. The final section of the chapter examines the forms that reactions took, from confrontations to cutting, and the various factors that influenced and determined them. Overall, the chapter argues that the manner in which writers responded to the new ideas that their friends' relationships encompassed was extremely complex, and that their reactions tell us much about how literary coterie were encompassed within broader, and very influential, literary networks. Each group's marginal position within the middle-class influenced how they conducted their interpersonal relationships. This chapter also illuminates the ties that bound friendships—which were far more complex than a simple sharing of principles—and the vulnerabilities that strained them.

Ginger Frost devotes a chapter to several of the radical couples who belonged to the three groups in her book about cohabitation in the nineteenth century. She examines their theories to determine why they preached about marital nonconformity and how far their practices matched their beliefs.⁴ Frost uses Wollstonecraft's relationship with Godwin as a starting point, making a similar trajectory to Frances Wright. The pair married in March 1797, shortly after Wollstonecraft had discovered she was pregnant in December 1796/January 1797. Both had been extremely critical of the institution of marriage in their writings, arguing for marital reform and suggesting that the inflexibility of the current system was the cause of many social issues. The ideas and opinions that they espoused provided a template for many of the radicals who followed them to think about relationships outside of marriage. Frost considers the effect these works had on Shelley and his experiments with marriage and sexual freedom, and how his practices, and those of his peers, were connected to a broader Romantic agenda to rebel against society's conventions. Finally, she considers the relationships of members of certain dissenting groups, many of whom were inspired by Shelley, like Richard Carlile, the radical publisher. Frost points out that the practices and domestic arrangements of these people were not necessarily exclusive to them and their position in society—it was the public and politicised nature of their relationships that made them unique.⁵ The pressure to conform to broader societal mores was very strong across this period; as Frost demonstrates, many who advocated marital

⁴ Ginger Frost, *Living in Sin: Cohabiting as husband and wife in nineteenth-century England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), chapter 8.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

reform, like Godwin and Shelley, married anyway, as they realised that their ideologies severely socially compromised the women with whom they were involved. Frost argues that most couples who never married only did not because they could not—usually because one of them was already married.⁶

According to Frost, the issues that radicals had with the status quo remained constant across the entire fifty-year period: they fought for social recognition of relationships that were not legally legitimised but where couples demonstrated their commitment to each other, arguing that true marriage was about the compatibility of hearts and minds. In addition to this, they saw the need for more accessible divorces to free people from unhappy unions.⁷ Radicals did not promote promiscuity, bar a few exceptions, but rather argued that the ultimate control held by the church and state over such personal and private matters should be rethought. As Frost suggests, the 1790s' radicals, Romantics, and Dissenters, all believed that reform of marital relations and sexual mores could remedy a range of social issues; however, whilst they shared this common feature, the alternatives and solutions they proposed were more nuanced. For example, several of the figures associated with Romanticism advocated 'free love' between men and women without really considering the consequences. In contrast, the 1790s' radicals and the dissenting communities recognised that women were more vulnerable than men if they engaged in relationships outside of marriage and proposed various solutions: Wollstonecraft suggested that women should be better educated to allow them to be economically independent; the Owenites experimented with communal living,

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

where the costs and efforts of raising members' children, regardless of their legitimacy, was shared by all of the adults in the community; and others, like Robert Carlile, thought that greater awareness of birth control was the answer, and so he controversially published *Every Woman's Book* (1826).⁸

Through their published works and domestic arrangements, many of the individuals in political-literary coteries were rebelling against domestic ideology. As scholars like Joanne Begiato and Karen Harvey have demonstrated, domestic ideology can be found in various forms and across different social groups in the eighteenth century, however, the very evangelical 'Cult of Domesticity' really rose to prominence amongst the middle-class in the nineteenth century.⁹ This influential doctrine defined middle-class culture, emphasising the importance of marriage as the foundation of the family and an orderly, strong and moral society; it prescribed separate roles for men and women and stressed the need for female chastity and male sexual responsibility.¹⁰ Sexual relations outside of marriage were perceived as sinful and shameful and were consistently linked to images of social degradation. The discourse surrounding domestic ideology dominated how most people from the middling sorts thought and judged women's conduct and their relationships with men. Yet, as Kathryn Gleadle has argued, the very 'activity of writing' encouraged individuals in literary societies to think more freely about social conventions and gave

⁸ For a detailed analysis of Owenism see Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Virago, 1983). See chapter 5 on marriage.

⁹ Joanne Bailey [Begiato], *Parenting in England, 1760-1830: Emotion, Identity, and Generation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 8-9; Karen Harvey, 'Men Making Home: Masculinity and Domesticity in Eighteenth-Century Britain', *Gender & History*, 21:3 (2009), 520-540, (p. 527).

¹⁰ For discussion see Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987).

them the opportunity to shape and express their ideas.¹¹ Gleadle examines the literary coterie connected to Unitarianism, which she argues cultivated 'the intellectual origins' of the women's suffrage movement.¹² Moreover, Gleadle suggests that a 'radical offshoot' group of Unitarians was responsible for the revival of a particular branch of feminist thought that had originated in the 1790s with women like Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Hays, who argued that women's roles and aspirations should not be limited to wifely domestic tasks.¹³ The connection between religious dissent and demands for marital and domestic reform had a long tradition: William Godwin, Leigh Hunt and William Hazlitt all came from dissenting families; Hays was a Unitarian, and Wollstonecraft moved within their social and professional networks. That said, calls for domestic reform and gender equality were marginal in dissenting communities until the 1830s and, even then, it remained the concern only of a fringe group.¹⁴ Extreme polemics concerning sexual or marital behaviour frequently lacked wider support within these societies.

This was a turbulent period in British politics: The Government was frequently faced with the threat of radical and revolutionary ideologies, often inspired by events in France. Throughout the period covered by this thesis a large section of the periodical and newspaper press declared itself loyal to the Establishment, and suggested its purpose was to maintain the social and moral status quo. The quarterly journals, monthly magazines, and weekly papers, which were where most of the commentary on radical relationships was printed, were often affiliated to the leading

¹¹ Kathryn Gleadle, *Early Feminists: Radical Unitarians and the Emergence of the Women's Rights Movement, 1831-51* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995), p. 2.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

political parties, the Tories and the Whigs.¹⁵ Through the stories they printed, and the tone in which they reported them, the loyalist press explicitly and implicitly advocated conservative domestic and social ideals. One way in which they did this was by lambasting individuals associated with radical movements, generally tarring all members of these groups with the same brush by suggesting that they reviled the institution of marriage and practised the principles of Libertinism.

Political divisions were obvious in the reviews of Godwin's candid *Memoirs of Wollstonecraft*, which was published early in 1798 just months after her death from puerperal fever. Whilst the *Analytical Review*, the publication to which Wollstonecraft herself had contributed, argued that there had been nothing corrupt about her conduct and ideas, its conservative opponent, the *Anti-Jacobin Review*, passionately challenged their assertion 'that Mrs. Wollstonecraft's amours were not opposite to morality', and claimed that the journal's 'influence' made such assertions 'dangerous'.¹⁶ As it was their first issue, the *Anti-Jacobin* stated to its readers that it believed it was their 'business' to 'attack' the immoral opinions published in the *Analytical Review*, and to stop radicals from being able to employ 'the press as a vehicle of Jacobinism'.¹⁷ They expressed concern for the platform that radical publications gave controversial relationships, fearing this would encourage others to imitate them. In the same year, *the British Critic's* review of Helen Maria Williams's *A Tour in Switzerland* (1798), used similar language to associate her political leanings

¹⁵ David Higgins, *Romantic Genius and the Literary Magazine: Biography, Celebrity and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 13-15.

¹⁶ 'Book Review of *Memoirs of the Author of the Vindication of the Rights of Women*. By Wm. Godwin', *Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine, or, Monthly Political, and Literary Censor*, vol. 1, July 1798, pp. 94-102, (p. 101).

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 102.

with images of religious and moral heterodoxy: 'Female modesty, the lovely ornament of our countrywomen, opposes in France but a feeble barrier to Jacobinical principles, which laugh at morality, and despise religion. Miss or Mrs. Williams consequently felt no compunction at attending Mr. S. [John Hurford Stone] on his excursion, who is, we are told, a married man, and has a wife living in this country'.¹⁸ Williams moved to Switzerland with Stone, a political radical and publisher, after being freed from the French prison where she had been incarcerated during the Terror. Stone separated from his wife and lived with Williams, and at times with her mother and sister also, on the continent until his death in 1818. The exact nature of the couple's relationship is unknown, but their association with religious dissent and radicalism helped to fuel the rumours that it was illicit. William Gibson and Joanne Begiato argue that politics, theology, and sex were 'intimately connected' in the long eighteenth century, so in its attempts to undermine the radicals' politics by aligning them with religious and sexual unorthodoxy the loyalist press were building on themes already deeply entrenched in contemporary culture.¹⁹

Gregory Dart argues that the early decades of the nineteenth century witnessed a 'periodical revolution'—commentary on radical writers' controversial relationships increased in line with this expansion.²⁰ Discussions of private life continued to be prompted by controversial publications, but there were some changes to the methods journalists used to report them. When Leigh Hunt's poem

¹⁸ 'Book Review of *A Tour in Switzerland: or, a View of the present State of the Governments and Manners of those Cantons: with Comparative Sketches of the present State of Paris*. By H. Williams', *British Critic*, vol. 12, July 1798, pp. 24-29, (p. 24).

¹⁹ William Gibson & Joanne Begiato, *Sex and the Church in the Long-Eighteenth Century* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), pp. 5-6.

²⁰ Gregory Dart, *Metropolitan Art and Literature, 1810-1840: Cockney Adventures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 25.

The Story of Rimini was published in 1816, he was the subject of a sustained attack by John Lockhart, one of the journalists of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. The plot of *Rimini* was a retelling of the story of Paolo and Francesca, the 'incestuous' brother and sister-in-law lovers from Canto V of Dante's *Inferno*. This choice of subject was controversial: the threat of affinal incest was a topical concern given that households regularly included a resident unmarried sister-in-law. There was much debate in the Victorian period about whether marriage to a deceased wife's sister ought to be allowed as it was listed within the Church's prohibited degrees, but contemporaries feared changes to the law might allow illicit sexual impulses to threaten the domestic sphere.²¹ Rather than simply review the poem, Lockhart began a politically motivated series of articles entitled 'On the Cockney School of Poetry', that targeted Hunt, alongside other poets, and attempted to discredit their influence by implying that they were vulgar and low-born with aristocratic pretensions.²²

Reviews of the poem suggested that its topic was distasteful: the *Dublin Examiner* wrote that 'it paints one of the blackest crimes under which human nature can sink'.²³ Only Lockhart, however, related the poem's subject to Hunt's domestic situation: as discussed in chapter one, his household often included his sister-in-law, Elizabeth Kent, with whom he had a very intimate relationship. In the first instance Lockhart accused Hunt of believing that women who did not read were merely 'breeding machine[s]' a snide but intimately knowledgeable reference to Hunt's

²¹ See Nancy F. Anderson, 'The "Marriage with a Deceased Wife's Sister Bill" Controversy: Incest, Anxiety and the Defense of Family Purity in Victorian England', *Journal of British Studies*, 21:2 (1982), 67-86, (p. 77-78).

²² Jeffrey N. Cox, 'Cockney Cosmopolitanism', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 32:3 (2010), 245-259, (p. 246).

²³ *The Dublin Examiner*, June 1816, reprinted in *The Romantics Reviewed: Part C: Shelley, Keats and London Radical Writers*, ed. Donald Reiman (2 vols, New York: Garland Publishing, 1972), p. 308.

wife, Marianne, who was well-known within their social circle for not being as intellectual as her sister, and who bore Hunt ten children over the first twenty years of their marriage.²⁴ Lockhart then moved on to the unconventional relationship in question, describing Hunt as being suspiciously sympathetic of the brother and sister-in-law lovers by taking 'mighty pains to render *Rimini* a story not of incest, but of love.'²⁵ By his third essay Lockhart revelled in reports of gossip, suggesting that 'many people... speculate, and talk... and pry into secrets... [identifying] Leigh Hunt himself with Paolo... What to them was the foulness of pollution, seemed to him the beauty of innocence.'²⁶ Lockhart implied that his information came from sources close to Hunt, at least close enough to access his 'secrets'. Journalism as a profession was advancing over this period; while most eighteenth-century journalists merely collected and organised material, by the nineteenth century they were regularly researching to produce original essays and specialising in certain areas of news, such as parliamentary reporters, etc.²⁷

William Hazlitt was also a victim of some underhanded journalism after the anonymous publication of his autobiographical novel, *Liber Amoris; or, the New Pygmalion* in 1823. *Liber Amoris* is a candid account of Hazlitt's all-consuming infatuation with Sally Walker, the daughter of the man who ran the lodging house where he rented a room in the early 1820s. Hazlitt was by this time estranged from his wife, whom he eventually divorced in the hope of marrying Walker. Once he returned from Scotland following the divorce, he discovered that she was reluctant

²⁴ *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, October 1817, reprinted in *ibid.*, p. 51.

²⁵ *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, November 1817, reprinted in *ibid.*, p. 60.

²⁶ *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, July 1818, reprinted in *ibid.*, pp. 87-88.

²⁷ Bob Clarke, *From Grub Street to Fleet Street: An Illustrated History of the English Newspaper to 1899* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p. 255; Dart, *Metropolitan Art and Literature*, p. 66.

to accept his proposal because she was enamoured of another lodger. He then spent several months flitting between rage and devastation before writing the book that encapsulated all those emotions and publishing it—much to the horror of many of his acquaintances. The *John Bull*, the loyalist newspaper whose attack on the Whig ladies I examined in the previous chapter, condemned the novel as a ‘nasty book’ and encouraged its readers to ‘shrink with disgust’ from the conduct exemplified within it.²⁸ The paper clearly made a habit out of exposing ‘immoral’ sexual practices to attack a wide range of people who were seen to oppose the Establishment. In their first mention of the book they promised to print an unpublished letter from the correspondence that the book was based on in the next issue, that would ‘*prove* that the hero and the author are one and the same person’.²⁹ One of Hazlitt’s biographers has suggested that this letter was probably stolen from his lodging house, and that it was likely that Theodore Hook, the *John Bull*’s editor, would have been offered it by one of Hazlitt’s associates in exchange for money.³⁰ In the next issue they printed the letter and publicly outed Hazlitt as the author, concluding that ‘we have now quite done with Mr. Hazlitt, and if he feel offended or sore that his private letters are thus made public, he must reconcile himself by recollecting that it is he himself who have given publicity to the affair altogether’.³¹

The *John Bull* used well-known stereotypes from literature in their criticisms and disdained Hazlitt’s attempts to ‘ruin the character of a modest, virtuous girl by his calumny’.³² The figure of the male libertine, who recklessly seduced and ruined

²⁸ *John Bull*, 16 June 1823.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Duncan Wu, *William Hazlitt: The First Modern Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 337.

³¹ *John Bull*, 23 June 1823.

³² *John Bull*, 16 June 1823.

virtuous young women, and neglected or abandoned his wife, although traditionally associated with aristocratic sexual depravity was often present in attacks that the loyalist press made against other radicals from this period. In reviews of *Rimini*, Lockhart accused Hunt of having 'kept company with kept-mistresses' and suggested that he was attempting to 'versify vice into virtue'.³³ In 1818, when Hunt published *Foliage*, a volume of poetry, a review in the Tory mouthpiece, the *Quarterly Review*, criticised him largely for his association with Shelley: 'it is not proof of a very affectionate heart to break that of a wife by cruelty and infidelity... we should think it imbecility indeed to court that man's friendship, or to celebrate his intellect or his heart as the wisest or warmest of the age'.³⁴ Shelleyan ideas about male (and female) sexual conduct were the antithesis to those prescribed by domestic ideology, whose centrality to defining and distinguishing middle-class culture in the nineteenth century has been noted by several historians.³⁵ Broader society's notions of what constituted appropriate masculine sexual behaviour were transforming over the course of this period, becoming less permissive and emphasising the need for men to be responsible. The loyalist presses portrayed Hunt and Hazlitt's behaviour as an imitation of the conduct of their aristocratic friends, including Shelley and Lord Byron—and saw the same issues of vulnerable women, rakish seducers, and familial and social degradation.

The external identification of a group like the 'Cockney School', as a literary coterie that needed to be demonised for their opinions and 'depraved' practices, was

³³ *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, May 1818, reprinted in *The Romantics Reviewed*, pp. 80-85, (p. 83).

³⁴ 'Review of *Foliage; or Poems Original and Translated... by Leigh Hunt*', *Quarterly Review*, vol. 18, January 1818, pp. 324-335, (p. 328-9).

³⁵ See Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*.

not entirely novel—there was some attempt by the *Anti-Jacobin Review* to group radicals who supported the French Revolution. However, efforts to demonise the ‘Cockney School’ were more widespread. Whilst she acknowledges that competitive rivalries existed between certain editors and journals in the periodical marketplace, Kim Wheatley argues that class tensions were at the core of the *Blackwood’s* attack on the ‘Cockney School’. Wheatley states that Lockhart, being at the upper end of the bourgeoisie, deemed Hunt and his peers, at the lower end, as a threat to the stability of the middle class—which, as a political unit, was in its infancy.³⁶ Furthermore, Lockhart was irritated by Hunt dedicating *Rimini* to Lord Byron, and his attempts to imitate an aristocratic social life.³⁷ Dart concurs with this analysis, and points to the fact that the Tory press continued to make attacks on Cockneyism as a means to criticise ‘dramatic changes in contemporary society’.³⁸ Keats, Hunt, and Hazlitt were drawn under the banner, and the connotations must have been well-known as the *John Bull* referred to Hazlitt as a ‘cockney’ in its review of *Liber Amoris*, five years after Lockhart’s attack, relating its criticisms back to the group as a whole, writing that ‘the cocknies are mighty particular about scandalizing ladies’.³⁹

Dart views the exchanges between the loyalist and radical presses as an in-class fight for ‘cultural legitimacy’.⁴⁰ This battle went beyond the literary marketplace and stemmed from the middle-class’s struggle to establish itself as a political entity. Dror Wahrman argues that after the French Revolution the concept of the ‘middle

³⁶ Kim Wheatley, ‘The Blackwood’s Attacks on Leigh Hunt’, *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 47:1 (1992), 1-31, (pp. 4-5, p. 24)

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11; Cox, ‘Cockney Cosmopolitanism’, p. 246.

³⁸ Dart, *Metropolitan Art and Literature*, pp. 18-20.

³⁹ *John Bull*, 16 June 1823.

⁴⁰ Dart, *Metropolitan Art and Literature*, p. 23.

class' had been tarnished by images of 'political innovation and agitation'.⁴¹ Wahrman implies that as a 'middle-class consciousness' developed across the first three decades of the nineteenth century, any association with radicalism was humiliating for the many 'political moderates' from their ranks.⁴² They fought to create a cultural identity that was characterised by domestic ideology and notions of respectability, that differentiated the middle class from both the corrupt and depraved aristocracy and the 'uneasy' class below.⁴³ While the aristocracy were easily defined, exactly where the line was drawn between the middle-class and the labouring classes was less clear; Dart suggests that this boundary was 'as much cultural as economic', and thus social and sexual mores were key to distinguish between those who belonged to the middle class and those who were not respectable enough.⁴⁴

The political disorder caused by the Revolutionary wars with France and the austerity that many faced in the years that followed, prompted a conservative cultural backlash: ideas that could be read as being radical and revolutionary and challenging the status quo, were quickly disparaged. Moreover, the threat posed by the opinions and alternative set of sexual and social mores that the Romantics offered their readers was probably compounded by their status as celebrities.⁴⁵ Several of these individuals had a significant share of the press at their command, and therefore the power to be influential: Hunt edited *The Examiner* and frequently

⁴¹ Dror Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class: The Political Representation of Class in Britain, c.1780-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 152.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 151.

⁴³ Dart, *Metropolitan Art and Literature*, p. 23.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Tom Mole, 'Introduction', in Tom Mole (ed), *Romanticism and Celebrity Culture, 1750-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 1-19, (p. 2).

used this position to defend his own conduct and that of his associates by responding to rumours and allegations made in the loyalist journals; and Hazlitt was a prolific essayist and political reporter, who wrote regularly for popular publications like the *Edinburgh Review* and the *Morning Chronicle*, as well as *The Examiner* and *The London Magazine*.⁴⁶ Dart suggests that *Blackwood's* was concerned about Hunt's audience, a mix of 'lawyers clerks' and 'shopkeepers', 'a class of limited education but high aspirations that had come to a new and worrying prominence in contemporary urban society'.⁴⁷ The attacks made on the coterie coincided with the Tories' attempts to constrain the radical press legally, by the Six Acts of 1819. Their appearance as a cohesive group with a collective set of unconventional ideologies and their ability to reach large audiences, who appeared susceptible to change, opened them up to attack by an opposition who sought to suppress them through slander and demonisation.⁴⁸

In contrast, unconventional couples from the religious minority groups of the late 1820s and 1830s largely escaped being scandalised in the national newspapers or the review periodicals. Scandals within religious dissenting communities were contained: discussions about any controversial relationships between members appeared predominantly in newspapers and journals that were edited and written by members of the societies, and which addressed a delimited audience of other

⁴⁶ For examples see Hunt's defence against the allegations made against him of affinal incest in *The Examiner*, 28 June 1818; his defence of Lord Byron in *The Examiner*, 21 April 1816. Furthermore, Maria Gisborne noted Hunt's plans to defend Shelley by preparing 'medicine' for the *Quarterly Review's* editor, Gifford, which appeared in *The Examiner*, 16 June 1822: Frederick L. Jones (ed.), *Maria Gisborne and Edward E Williams—Shelley's Friends: Their Journals and Letters* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951), p. 45.

⁴⁷ Dart, *Metropolitan Art and Literature*, p. 15.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 70. Dart suggests that these attacks had some success as the stigma left by the Blackwood's attacks lessened the value of Hazlitt and Hunt's work and made publishers reluctant to take them on.

members. Sometimes, instances of unconventional 'marriages' were disclosed and discussed in articles written by the people who were actually experimenting with them. Often these pieces took a defensive position. Eliza Sharples and Richard Carlile announced their 'moral marriage' in their respective publications: in 1834 Sharples prefaced her journal, *The Isis*, with a justification that her relationship with Carlile, who was separated from his wife, was 'what marriage should be; though not perhaps altogether what marriage is in the majority of cases... where marriage is merely of the law or for money, and not of the soul, there I look for abuse'.⁴⁹ Carlile's name appeared relatively frequently in the national papers in the second half of the 1830s, due to court proceedings against him for causing a public nuisance, however, his liaison with Sharples was only referenced in one paper, *The poor man's guardian*, which was a rival publication to his own.⁵⁰

The editor of the Unitarian periodical, *the Monthly Repository*, William Johnson Fox, was not as candid about his domestic situation as Sharples, but from late 1833 into 1834 he wrote and published a series of articles addressing 'the Dissenting Marriage Question'—a topic that affected him personally.⁵¹ In these pieces he deplored the 'present system' that 'inexorably bound [couples] together for life by the law', and suggested that those who lived together 'without affection' were 'living viciously' and should be allowed to divorce. Recognising that women were particularly vulnerable if unions could be easily broken, he advocated 'a temporary

⁴⁹ Eliza Sharples, 'Preface', *The Isis*, 29 May 1834, p. v; Richard Carlile, 'A Statement of my own family affairs', *A Scourge of the littleness of 'Great Men'*, 18 October 1834, pp. 17-21.

⁵⁰ See for example, 'To Mr. Richard Carlile', *Poor Man's Guardian*, 15 November 1834; *Champion* 20 February 1837.

⁵¹ William Johnson Fox, 'The Dissenting Marriage Question', *Monthly Repository*, vol. 7, January 1833, pp. 136-142.

toleration of polygamy' to manage their risk.⁵² While Fox was largely unchallenged by the loyalist press, his controversial ideas caused tensions within his congregation which led to his resignation.⁵³ Many of his followers felt his views were prompted by his own complicated domestic setup: he separated from his wife in 1832, but they lived in the same house with Fox's ward and literary assistant, Eliza Flower. When Mrs Fox complained about her husband to members of the congregation, he separated more formally from her, and left the marital home to set up a household with his children and Flower. This move sparked many rumours. Fox's resignation letter, 'To the members of the congregation assembling in South-Place, Finsbury', was published in the *Morning Chronicle*, but verbatim, without any additional opinions or judgment.⁵⁴

Although the Unitarians generally advocated liberalism and sought to remedy female oppression, Gleadle argues that ideas about women's roles and the need for marital reform were so divisive they occasioned a split within the sect.⁵⁵ 'Mainstream' Unitarians treated women conservatively, and while they saw the value of female education, they educated women primarily to enable them to assist men with their scholarly pursuits.⁵⁶ Gleadle argues that in practice, the Unitarians were not much different from the Evangelicals, and confined women to domestic roles.⁵⁷

⁵² Ibid, pp. 141-142.

⁵³ On one occasion *The Sunday Times* satirised Fox in a short paragraph entitled 'The Fox and the Flower'. The journalist alluded to Fox's issues with his congregation, suggesting that he had been 'awkwardly chased on a late occasion. We shall be glad to see him in his old fields as brisk and confident as heretofore; but if *Sly Renard* has demolished a fair *Flower*, under the circumstances some of his followers give out, the opinion will be, the sooner he goes to earth the better.' *The Sunday Times*, 7 September 1834, Issue 620, p. 2. This mention in a mainstream newspaper seems to have been exceptional.

⁵⁴ *Morning Chronicle*, 6 September 1834.

⁵⁵ Gleadle, *Early Feminists*, p. 4, p. 20.

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 22-25.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 26.

Gleadle suggests that their strict adherence to 'conventional etiquette' was the result of the criticism they faced from wider society for their religious beliefs.⁵⁸ Some Unitarians were dissatisfied with these mores, as they felt they went against their liberal principles, and Fox himself led an offshoot from the sect, which Gleadle terms the 'Radical Unitarians'. The Radical Unitarians saw the need for marital reform as they felt that contemporary system 'legally enabled male domination' over women and facilitated cruelty. They also argued that divorce needed to be more accessible, but as it was not, they accepted the non-marital heterosexual relationships of their friends-emphasising that couples should unite because they loved and appreciated each other, not simply because they were legally bound.⁵⁹ Gleadle nominates Fox's coterie as the 'early feminists' because they argued for domestic reform so that women would be liberated and have access to the public sphere.⁶⁰

The radical branch caused tensions within the wider Unitarian sect, who were under pressure to conform to the mores of the broader middle-class; association with any behaviour which could be read as 'immoral' or 'libertine' was felt to undermine their efforts to ameliorate their political position, exhibiting parallels with the loyalist movements of the Romantic era. This was particularly felt in the 1830s and 40s, as toleration for different religious groups increased, which was reflected in legal changes, such as the Marriage Act of 1836, and more and more Unitarians entered public careers; the sect were well-represented in Parliament, so

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 112-113.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-35.

respectability was crucial.⁶¹ As Unitarian MP William Smith's biographer remarks, the Unitarians feared social and religious 'prejudice', which was rife and 'emanated from an acute struggle for power in English Society'.⁶² Thus, this tendency to keep scandals contained was probably strategic, and appears to have been largely successful: in spite of all the furore, Harriet Martineau assured Fox in 1838 that those who knew that she considered herself 'indebted' to Fox, 'know nothing... of your domestic concerns'.⁶³ Furthermore, Flower occasionally appeared in local and national papers that reviewed her musical publications without being explicitly vilified in print for her ambiguous position in Fox's household.⁶⁴

Frost suggests that, although they were ridiculed by the loyalist press, many of the radical couples had the support of their 'alternative' societies.⁶⁵ Although this is in part true, it glosses over the fact that the majority of the radical couples that she examines did face negative reactions and hostility from some of their friends and associates. They may have had the backing of their fellow coterie members, who shared their radical outlook, but these coteries did not live in a vacuum. In her recent study on female friendship within Quaker communities, Naomi Pullin has demonstrated that between the mid-seventeenth and mid-eighteenth centuries, Quakers, although members of a very distinctive religious sect, interacted and lived closely with members of their broader local community—irrespective of religious

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 112-114. After the Marriage Act of 1753 only marriages performed by the Church of England, Quakers and Jews were legally recognised. The Marriage Act of 1836 enabled other religious groups to legally conduct and register marriages in their own buildings with a license.

⁶² Richard W. Davis, *Dissent in Politics, 1780-1830: The Political Life of William Smith, MP* (London: Epworth Press, 1971), p. 215.

⁶³ Bancroft Library, *The Harriet Martineau Papers*, Series 1, Box 2, Folder 68, Harriet Martineau to William Johnson Fox, 1 March [1838].

⁶⁴ For example, see 'Substance of several courses of lectures on music, read in the University of Oxford, and in the Metropolis', *Westminster Review*, vol. 15, October 1831, pp. 320-334.

⁶⁵ Frost, *Living in Sin*, p. 187.

identity.⁶⁶ Using examples from Britain and North America, Pullin suggests this exemplifies the ‘fluidity and continual reconfiguration of the borders’ that define social groups.⁶⁷ The social worlds of the groups examined in this chapter were shaped by ‘family and professional connections and interests’.⁶⁸ Individuals did not belong exclusively to delimited and local intellectual/literary milieus: they connected with others across cultural divides and geographical distances, forming a series of overlapping social networks.⁶⁹ As members of the developing middle class their associates often had conventional opinions about what constituted appropriate sexual and marital behaviour—which left them at odds with their more radical friends. The next section of this chapter will examine how these people assessed the controversial relationships of their radical friends and associates.

II

Rumours reported in the press functioned similarly in literary societies as they did in Whig society, as they stimulated gossip between people who either knew, or knew of, those implicated. Penelope Sophia Pennington wrote to Hester Lynch Piozzi, the diarist and author, to ask her whether ‘what all the Papers have announced [was] true, that Helen Williams *is married* to that *Stone*?’. Piozzi replied that Williams had ‘turned to *Stone*’ and added that ‘she is now second to his wife... a living Spectatress of these Political and *Impolitic* Revolutions’.⁷⁰ Individuals gossiped for a variety of

⁶⁶ Naomi Pullin, *Female Friends and the Making of Transatlantic Quakerism, 1650-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), chapter 4.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

⁶⁸ See Mark Philp, *Radical Conduct: Politics, Sociability, and Equality in London, 1789-1815* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), forthcoming, chapter three.

⁶⁹ Sarah Richardson, *The Political Worlds of Women: Gender and Politics in Nineteenth Century Britain* (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 12-13.

⁷⁰ Hester Lynch Piozzi to Penelope Sophia Pennington, 17 February 1795: *The Piozzi Letters*, vol. 2, pp. 239-240. See note 5 on p.240 for Pennington’s letter.

reasons: on one level it was a basic exchange of news and opinions about a mutual associate, but it could also be malicious and aim to influence others to reevaluate their relationships with those in question. In 1797 William Godwin alleged that Elizabeth Inchbald had used her 'influence' with their mutual friends, the Twisses, to get them to cut Wollstonecraft.⁷¹ Gossip was usually delivered in such a way as to entertain, amuse, and sometimes shock the recipient. In her letters to Pennington, Piozzi did all three: she made sarcastic allusions about the connections between tragedy, Helen, and Paris, but she also alleged that Williams was 'a wicked little Democate who lives publicly' with a married man.⁷² Whilst her letters were filled with satire, in her diary Piozzi developed her pity for Mrs Stone, a woman she did not know, as a 'poor little soul' left behind to 'be guillotined by the Terrorists'. In her private narrative Williams was a cruel mistress, who 'stormed and cried, and obliged' Stone to 'drive Mrs Stone from his Door' and into danger.⁷³

In 1818, David Booth, husband of Mary Shelley's childhood friend, Isabella Baxter, made assumptions about the Shelley and Claire Clairmont ménage that reflected accusations levelled at Percy's behaviour that had been published not long before. Booth never approved of Percy due to his elopement with Mary whilst he was still married to Harriet, but Isabella's father encouraged him to visit the couple after their marriage, and to consider allowing Isabella and Mary to reform their

⁷¹ Bod., MS Abinger, c.3, fols. 77-78, Elizabeth Inchbald to William Godwin, 11 September 1797.

⁷² For examples see Hester Lynch Piozzi to Penelope Sophia Pennington, 11 July [1794]: *The Piozzi Letters*, vol. 2, p. 184; and Hester Lynch Piozzi to Penelope Sophia Pennington, [29] April 1798: *ibid.*, p. 492.

⁷³ Hester Lynch Thrale, *Thraliana: The Diary of Mrs Hester Lynch Thrale (later Mrs. Piozzi) 1776-1809*, ed. Katherine C. Balderston (2 vols, 2nd edn, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), vol. 2, '20 April 1795', p. 922.

friendship.⁷⁴ Booth was not impressed by the couple and alleged to Isabella that Percy took it in turns living with Mary and Claire. Percy's friendship with Claire made many suspicious, including William Godwin and Lord Byron. Emma Donoghue suggests that friendships between men and women in literary circles could be contentious because such relationships existed 'between the overlapping discourses of friendship and love'.⁷⁵ Eighteenth-century culture marginalised heterosocial friendship: in novels, men and women's friendships frequently resulted in marriage, and ideal friendships were most commonly portrayed between members of the same sex. Thus, models of ideal heterosocial friendships were lacking and so such relationships were regulated by a mix of 'group supervision, marriages to other people, [and] taboos to do with age, race or class'.⁷⁶ Given these markers, it is perhaps not surprising that the friendships of Percy Shelley and Claire Clairmont, Leigh Hunt and Elizabeth Kent, and William J. Fox and Eliza Flower were controversial—they all had a negative impact on the married individual's relationship with their spouse.

Booth was also shocked by Shelley's new poem, *Laon and Cythna*, which was 'wilder than "Queen Mab"', and, aptly, dealt with themes of incest and atheism. Booth found that, despite marrying, Percy had no regard for the sanctity of marriage and he characterised him as an 'insane' profligate, who 'publicly...trample[s] on the morality of his country', and 'does everything he can do to become notorious'; he

⁷⁴ Mary Shelley to Percy Bysshe Shelley, [24 September 1817]: Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, ed. Betty T. Bennett (3 vols, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), vol. 1, pp. 41-42. See note 4.

⁷⁵ Emma Donoghue, 'Male-Female Friendship and English Fiction in the Mid-Eighteenth Century', (PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1996), p. 233.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

caused his wife 'pain', and Booth implied that Percy had fathered 'little Miss Auburn'—Claire's daughter with Lord Byron.⁷⁷ Booth was partly motivated to write thus to Isabella because he feared that the Shelleys were planning to enlist her to join their 'hareem' in Italy.

Over this period discourse about relationships that did not conform to gender or marital norms drew upon cultural scripts that were produced in newspapers, periodicals, and novels, and their prominent themes of politics and morality often appeared in judgements and opinions that members of the couple's social networks made about them. Their influence was strongest for distant associates or estranged friends, like Booth, Baxter, and Piozzi. These narratives produced certain archetypes that were influential in shaping the assumptions associates made about unconventional couples, and in how they formed judgements and opinions about them. In the minds of their associates there was a conflation between an individual's public identity and the radical ideologies (sexual or political) that they had asserted and their private behaviour; for Booth, Percy Shelley personified the aristocratic libertine, and Helen Maria Williams and Claire Clairmont could be characterised as unsentimental radicalised women, who revelled in displacing poor vulnerable wives like Mrs Stone and Mary Shelley.

Piozzi's satirical commentary exemplifies a genre that was very popular across the eighteenth century, however, the later cases that are examined in this chapter suggest that private commentaries about controversial relationships became more explicitly concerned with serious reflections on immorality. Although her husband

⁷⁷ David Booth to Isabella Booth, 9 January 1818, as quoted in Donald H. Reiman (ed.), *Shelley and his Circle, 1773-1822* (10 vols, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1961), vol. 5, pp. 390-392.

had been married when they eloped together in 1814, Mary Shelley was very disparaging about her friend, Edward John Trelawny's affair with a married woman, Mrs Gabriella Wright, and used the situation to reflect on 'vice' and 'moral discourse' with Jane Williams.⁷⁸ Mary Shelley never portrayed any hint of humour when discussing the liaison and judged Mrs Wright for her shamelessness and scheming, which suggests that her views on the morality of extra-marital affairs were determined by their specific contexts. In 1834, Sarah Austin told Thomas and Jane Carlyle 'a tragical story' about their mutual friend John Stuart Mill, who was 'lost to all his friends and to himself', all because he was '*desperately in love*' with the married Harriet Taylor—a solemn tone that Carlyle would himself adopt when he shared his concerns with his brother and his friends.⁷⁹ Gossip performed a similar function in this group as it did for the Whigs, discussed in the previous chapter, giving individuals a space to think about and reflect on what distinguished immoral from moral behaviour, and how social and sexual mores operated in practice. Many, like Piozzi, Benjamin Haydon, John Stuart Mill, and Thomas Carlyle reflected on the uncertainty of the period, some more extensively than others.⁸⁰ That said, the way gossip was delivered was different from Whig society, the tone was much more sober, and reflected more on private character and morality than outward behaviour.

Whatever lens was used to interpret sexual 'misconduct', revolutionary radicalism or aristocratic privilege, the underlying issues were the same, and

⁷⁸ Bod., MS Abinger, c.46, fols. 1-2, Mary Shelley to Jane Williams, 18 September 1822.

⁷⁹ Thomas Carlyle to Dr John Carlyle, May 1834, as quoted in F. A Hayek, *John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor: Their Correspondence and Subsequent Marriage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951), p. 80.

⁸⁰ For example, see the series of articles by John Stuart Mill entitled, 'The Spirit of the Age', that were printed in *The Examiner*, on 9 January, 23 January, 6 February, 13 March, 3 April, 15 May, and 29 May 1831.

demonstrate how central discourses of morality were to conceptions about marriage and appropriate gender roles within marital relationships in middling-class culture. The strong connection between these ideas reflects two different cultural movements that occurred during this period. Firstly, the idea that marriages should be entered into for love, which had its origins in the Enlightenment emphasis on the importance of individual happiness to societal well-being-if emotional and sexual fulfilment was now to be aimed for and attained in marriage, then why should individuals seek it in other relationships; and secondly, the development of domestic ideology which was grounded in evangelical principles. The bond between marital conformity, familial stability, and religious devotion was strong. Thomas Carlyle wrote to his brother about his friend John Stuart Mill's new circle of Unitarian friends, who were all 'very indignant at marriage... obliged to divorce their own wives... these people's own houses (I always find) are little Hells of improvidence, discord, unreason'.⁸¹ The presence of these two strands in middle-class culture made it very difficult for contemporaries to interpret a reconfiguring of marriage to include separation or sexual relationships outside marriage as moral or virtuous – even if they recognised that that was what their friends were trying to do. As Harriet Martineau stated to William Johnson Fox when she learned that he had left his wife to live with Eliza Flower (on a platonic basis) while she agreed there was a need for a 'greater freedom of Divorce', she believed that his 'mode of life, however honourable in your eyes, is injurious to the morals of domestic life'.⁸²

⁸¹ Thomas Carlyle to Dr John Carlyle, 28 October 1834, as quoted in Hayek, *John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor*, p. 82.

⁸² Bancroft Library, *The Harriet Martineau Papers*, Box 2, Folder 67, Harriet Martineau to William Johnson Fox, 16 February [1838], and Box 2, Folder 68, Harriet Martineau to William Johnson Fox, 1 March [1838].

Those who sympathised with the ideologies that underwrote their friends' unconventional relationships often acknowledged that wider society could only interpret their behaviour in a negative light. Martineau explained to Fox that although his relationship with Flower was not sexual, by 'giving up a wife when her brightest years are closing, & beginning life again with another' that was how his 'conduct appears to society'.⁸³ As far as Martineau was concerned, the fact that Fox's actions had left his wife vulnerable to shame and 'profligacy' meant that he had 'no right to complain'. It was impossible for wider society to comprehend that virtuous intentions lurked behind actions that had, for such a long time, been judged as profligate and libertine. The fact that experimenting with marital and sexual relationships made women especially vulnerable was often a concern that friends noted; in fact, many argued that women could not practice such ideologies without great risk because of their economic dependence on men.⁸⁴ After Wollstonecraft's death her friend, Mary Hays, wrote her obituary in which, whilst she did not condone her actions, she defended them. Hays portrayed Wollstonecraft as a brave and virtuous woman, who had truly believed that her connection with Gilbert Imlay had 'all the sanctity and devotedness of a matrimonial engagement' but was unfortunately 'victim' to a 'libertine'.⁸⁵ Explaining that Wollstonecraft had been genuinely committed to Imlay, and had thought that their motives and affections were mutual, and that her heart had been broken following her abandonment, was

⁸³ Bancroft Library, *Martineau Papers*, Box 2, Folder 68, Harriet Martineau to William Johnson Fox, 1 March [1838].

⁸⁴ Roxanne Eberle, *Chastity and Transgression in Women's Writing, 1792-1897: Interrupting the Harlot's Progress* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 111, p. 121.

⁸⁵ [Mary Hays], 'Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft', *The Annual Necrology for 1797-8; Including, Also, Various Articles of Neglected Biography* (London, 1800), p. 425, p. 447.

clearly very important to Hays; she devoted most of her obituary to this time in Wollstonecraft's life and incorporated many letters written by the latter to Imlay to depict her vulnerability as their relationship broke down. Hays' empathy is not surprising: her own personal relationships also caused ripples in the dissenting circles in which she moved, such as her unrequited love for William Frend which inspired her to write the *Memoirs of Emma Courtenay* (1796). Her outspoken support for Wollstonecraft contributed to her own dubious reputation.⁸⁶

Not many of the couples had friends who would attempt to defend the virtue of their seemingly licentious behaviour. However, some of their friends and associates were inspired to write novels in which alternative beliefs and relationships were, often critically, examined. Amelia Opie's *Adeline Mowbray* (1804), is considered to be a roman-à-clef of Wollstonecraft and Godwin's relationship; Thomas Love Peacock's *Nightmare Abbey* (1818) is a satire of the Romantic movement, and its main plot focuses on Scythrop, a satirical portrait of Shelley, who is torn between his love for two women: Marionetta, who is generally taken to represent Harriet Shelley, and Stella/Celinda, who is believed to have been inspired by Mary Shelley and Claire Clairmont; and Harriet Martineau's first novel, *Deerbrook* (1839), is about Edward Hope, a doctor in a small village who falls in love with one of two sisters but is compelled by the community to marry the other. Although not such an unmistakable interpretation of Fox's relationship with Eliza Flower, the two Ibbotson sisters were apparently based on Eliza and her sister Sarah, and the theme of forbidden desire and love forming between people who live intimately under the

⁸⁶ Henry Crabb Robinson, *Diary, Reminiscences and Correspondence*, ed. Thomas Sadler (3 vols, London: Macmillan, 1869), vol. 1, pp. 57-58.

same roof make it impossible not to draw connections between the plot and Fox's reality. These novels not only explored controversial conduct and relationships, but also acted as social commentaries by remarking on the prevalence of affectation in contemporary society, the vulnerable position of women, and issues with the marriage system. The judgements made by both Opie and Martineau are ambiguous. Reviewers praised Opie's novel as a 'critique of English Jacobin Politics'; however, as Roxanne Eberle has argued, whilst Opie 'condemns the consequences of radical theory, she satirizes the hypocritical society that shuns the lovers'.⁸⁷ Significantly, Opie portrays the 'marriage' of Adeline and Glenmurray as the only one which is virtuous and moral compared to *all* of the others that she depicts in the novel, strongly condemning the state of marriage at the beginning of the nineteenth century.⁸⁸

Martineau did not follow stereotypes either and portrayed the emotional anguish of Dr Edward Hope as he tried to forget about his love for his sister-in-law. Hope is not a seducer and expresses guilt and shame for the feelings that he has for Margaret—furthermore he feels trapped by her ongoing presence in his household and the resulting intimacy that their proximity draws them both into, which he describes as 'his sorest trial'.⁸⁹ Although her novel tackles the social issue of unmarried women in Victorian society, Martineau also explores the microcosm by considering the complexities of human relationships, the development of love, and how both could be exasperated by existing societal structures and expectations.

⁸⁷ Eberle, *Chastity and Transgression*, p. 121.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

⁸⁹ Harriet Martineau, *Deerbrook* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1878, orig. 1839), p. 170, pp. 176-177, pp. 212-213.

Peacock's portrayal of Scythrop and his love interests was satirical, however, like Opie, he gives plenty of space in his novella to muse over the philosophies which motivate Scythrop, and his internal torment as he tries to decide which woman would be more compatible with him and thus make the better wife. Shelley/Scythrop is depicted as being melodramatic—but unlike in the articles by the press, he is no libertine motivated by sex, just a young foolish man trying to find his perfect soul mate. If anything, he meets his match in the two young women, who both abandon him to marry others by the novella's end. His indecisiveness leaves him with neither—a justice that Peacock knew Shelley did not receive in real life. Opie, Peacock, and Martineau did not unambiguously condemn the behaviour of their characters, but all reflected on how difficult it was for people to rethink relationships and try to put them into practice in a society that did not allow space for change. By exploring their intentions, emotional angst, and social isolation, the authors offered the reading public an alternative interpretation of controversial relationships from that presented by the press—one which had the potential to create sympathy.

Within literary societies individuals formed assessments that were shaped by a plurality of factors, including prevailing stereotypes and cultural narratives, but they were not necessarily bound by them: whilst many remained dubious and critical of unconventional *ménages*, they often saw relationships with degrees of relativism that are often absent from commentaries that appeared in the periodical press. Those who were candidly engaging in adulterous sex were judged more harshly than those whose actions were more ambiguous: Haydon was horrified by Hazlitt's admission that he had slept with a prostitute to orchestrate his divorce and wrote in

his diary that Hazlitt's 'wilful moral degradation' made his 'cheek redden'.⁹⁰ In Italy in 1822, Mary Shelley determined to see as little as possible of Trelawny's mistress, Mrs Gabriella Wright. She wrote to her friend, Jane Williams, that she 'hate[d] & despise[d] the intrigues of married women', and that not even 'the chains which custom throws upon them justify them'.⁹¹ It was interesting that she should make this reflection about the immorality of adulterous wives to Williams, considering that she knew that Williams herself was married but estranged from her husband, and had cohabited with Shelley's friend, Edward Ellerker Williams, borne him two children, and informally took his name. Moreover, she was willing to support Williams when she cohabited with Thomas Jefferson Hogg, addressing her 'Mrs Hogg' in her letters, and telling Lord Byron's mistress, Teresa Guiccioli in 1827 that Jane 'became... [Hogg's] wife this past spring'.⁹² This acceptance of one relationship and the condemnation of the other had much to do with the conduct of the individuals and the nature of the relationships in question: Hogg and Williams were stably cohabiting, appeared married to outsiders, and had no third person appearing as a victim—incidentally the ideal framework for non-marital relationships that Frost's communities were also willing to tolerate—the same could not be said for Trelawny's intrigue with Mrs Wright.⁹³

In contrast to their judgements on the clear-cut cases of adultery, both Mary Shelley and Benjamin Haydon were more reserved in their opinions about Leigh

⁹⁰ Benjamin Robert Haydon, *The Diary of Benjamin Robert Haydon*, ed. Willard Bissell Pope (5 vols, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960-63), vol. 2, '5 August 1822', p. 374.

⁹¹ Bod., MS Abinger, c.46, fols. 1-2, Mary Shelley to Jane Williams, 18 September 1822.

⁹² Mary Shelley to Teresa Guiccioli, [August] 1827: *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, vol. 1, p. 565.

⁹³ Frost, *Living in Sin*, pp. 225-226.

Hunt's relationship with his sister-in-law. At different times both remarked that the relationship was inappropriate but neither ever confronted Hunt nor ceased their friendship with him for that reason. Haydon was a frequent visitor to Surrey Gaol in 1813, where Hunt lived with Elizabeth Kent for a few months whilst his wife was in Brighton with their two sons. Observing the interactions between brother and sister-in-law, Haydon suggested in his diary that there was an erotic element to their relationship, and while he did not believe it had gone 'to the full extent of a manly passion... He [Hunt]... is satisfied to corrupt the girl's mind without seducing her person, to dawdle over her bosom, to inhale her breath, to lean against her thigh & play with her petticoats... his feelings may be kept tingling by imagining the rest'.⁹⁴ Although the relationship was not consummated (as far as Haydon was aware) he argued that Hunt's desire and 'fondness' for Kent, based on her 'qualities which his wife has not, and which he knew she had not when he married her', was cruel, and that such comparisons resulted in his affections for his wife 'waning'.⁹⁵ Mary Shelley lived with the Hunts in Italy for almost a year after Shelley's death in 1822. Over the period that Hunt was in Italy he and Kent corresponded frequently, as discussed in chapter one, and her demands to join him caused tensions between Hunt and Marianne. Although Mary Shelley's discussions about their relationship did not imply any physical relationship, presumably because she had not witnessed the pair together, she still suggested that there was something about the attachment that was destructive: she wrote to Jane Williams that she hoped for Marianne's sake 'Hunt

⁹⁴ *The Diary of Benjamin Robert Haydon*, vol. 2, p. 83.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

continues well & kind. You may guess to whom I allude... her arrival would be a death blow to poor Marianne... some time or other I fear it will occur'.⁹⁶

Two months later Mary Shelley wrote that Hunt 'has had the humanity to permit her [Marianne] to decide concerning the coming of Miss K... she has placed her veto on it'.⁹⁷ Although she made no suggestions of sexual misconduct, Mary Shelley implied that Hunt's relationship with Kent was a source of tension in his marriage, and that her presence had the potential to disrupt the household hierarchy. This notion of the domestic space being disrupted suggests that whether a heterosexual relationship was deemed to be problematic and immoral was not exclusively based on the premise of sexual consummation. Similarly to Mary Shelley, Harriet Martineau suggested that William Johnson Fox's 'passion' for Eliza Flower had been instrumental in unravelling his marriage.⁹⁸ Fox himself, hypocritically, appears to have disapproved of John Stuart Mill's platonic relationship with Harriet Taylor on the basis that it was causing upset to Mr Taylor, whose wellbeing concerned him.⁹⁹ These cases reveal that there was a scale of divergence from heterosexual normative behaviour that has largely been ignored by historians in favour of the more extreme allegations of sexual misconduct that appeared in the press over this period. In this status group, heterosexual intimacies (which were often assumed to encompass sexual desire) were believed to pose a threat to the marital bond and the family; the concern about illicit desires and intimacies were bound up with the expectations that

⁹⁶ Bod., MS Abinger, c.46, fols. 44-45, Mary Shelley to Jane Williams, 19-20 February 1823.

⁹⁷ Bod., MS Abinger, c.46, fols. 65-66, Mary Shelley to Jane Williams, 10 April 1823.

⁹⁸ Bancroft library, *Martineau Papers*, Box 2, Folder 68, Harriet Martineau to William Johnson Fox, 1 March [1838].

⁹⁹ For example, see John Stuart Mill to William Johnson Fox, [5 or 6 November 1833]: John Stuart Mill, *The Earlier Letters of John Stuart Mill, 1812-1848*, ed. Francis Mineka (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963), vols. 12-13, p. 187.

this class was beginning to have of marriage, and how emotionally fulfilling the marital relationship was supposed to be, which broadened the spectrum of what types of behaviour constituted infidelity.

III

The final section of this chapter considers the forms that reactions took and the factors that determined them. In general, once they were aware that their friends were engaging in unconventional romantic relationships (or had done in the past), individuals reflected on the morality of the behaviour, both privately in journals and by gossiping with friends and relatives. If they chose to act this usually incited a chain of events: a confrontation, either verbally or in a letter—which then either led to some degree of acceptance, a gradual estrangement, or cutting ties. How an individual chose to react to the controversial relationship of a close friend was complicated by the levels of intimacy that existed between them. Their intimacy meant that they were usually confided in about the relationship in question—often before rumours abounded more widely: Wollstonecraft appears to have confided in Mary Hays and Amelia Opie; Edward Trelawny was very open in his letters to Claire Clairmont about his relationship with Mrs Wright; John Stuart Mill confessed the state of his relationship with Mrs Taylor in letters to William Johnson Fox; and Martineau wrote to Fox to tell him that Eliza Flower ‘has done what was due to my friendship for her, & told me all’.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ For examples see, Mary Wollstonecraft to Amelia Alderson [Opie], [11 April 1797]: Mary Wollstonecraft, *The Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Janet Todd (London: Allen Lane, 2003), pp. 408-409; Edward Trelawny to Claire Clairmont, 19 September 1822: Edward John Trelawny, *Letters of Edward John Trelawny*, ed. H. Buxton Forman (London: Henry Frowde, 1910), pp. 15-19;

Such confidences often aroused feelings of concern and pity, and some expressed that they had a sense of responsibility towards their friends, either to advise them in how best to proceed or to make them see the error of their ways. Fox discussed his situation with his friends but Mill wrote to tell him the conversation had continued after he left, and that they had universally agreed that as the ‘crisis in the congregation’ was due to the belief that he and Flower were lovers, ‘it would be very foolish that you should not have the full advantage of its not being true’.¹⁰¹ Mill advised Fox not to disclose the fact that this was only the case because of ‘expediency... not principle’.¹⁰² When Fox refused to refute the allegation because he felt his congregation were encroaching on a private matter, Mill tried to make him see the consequences this would have—‘your future prospects will entirely depend upon that fact being denied or not’—and that whilst it was ‘denied and deniable’, his friends would ‘stand by’ him and ‘defend’ him but that they all felt it was ‘of great importance that every public mention of the charge should be accompanied by mention of your denying it’.¹⁰³ This was also because they knew the relationship would reflect badly on the rest of the group. Proximity to the situation often provoked a more diverse range of emotional responses in individuals than the more standard revulsion expressed by those who were further removed from those involved. Friends described ‘fear’ and ‘pain’, being ‘hurt’, ‘surprised’ and ‘grieved’,

Bancroft Library, *Martineau Papers*, Box 2, Folder 62, Harriet Martineau to William Johnson Fox, [early summer 1835].

¹⁰¹ John Stuart Mill to William Johnson Fox, [14 July 1834]: *The Earlier Letters of John Stuart Mill*, pp. 228-229.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

and these emotions guided their reactions, at times prompting sympathy and support, whilst at others triggering disbelief and anger.

Friends were often shocked by what they perceived to be the irrational behaviour of those pursuing controversial liaisons and were unable to justify their lack of rationale and self-control. In October 1836, Carlyle wrote to John Sterling to tell him that 'Mills is in a bad way', and remarked how 'strange' it was that his love for Mrs Taylor had him 'pining away into dessication and nonentity' and 'dying broken-hearted'.¹⁰⁴ Haydon was more explicit about Hazlitt's behaviour, often inferring in both his diary and his letters to Miss Mitford that his love for Sally Walker had put Hazlitt 'in a state of absolute insanity'. There was a prominent link between love and madness in contemporary culture.¹⁰⁵ Haydon connected this insanity with Hazlitt's emasculation, writing that the latter was in 'a perfect state of bewildered feebleness', and told Miss Mitford that 'his metaphysical habits of thinking have rendered him insensible to moral duty'.¹⁰⁶ Masculine norms were changing over this period: counterparts to female sensibility, men were ideally supposed to be rational, stoic and stable—at least in public.¹⁰⁷ Male friends of both Hazlitt and Mill felt that their unorthodox romantic conduct had deviated from masculine ideals and exhibited mental weaknesses, highlighting the dangerous consequences that could

¹⁰⁴ Thomas Carlyle to John Sterling, 3 October 1836, as quoted in Hayek, *John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor*, p. 85.

¹⁰⁵ Sally Holloway, *The Game of Love in Georgian England: Courtship, Emotions, and Material Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 137.

¹⁰⁶ Benjamin Haydon to Miss Mary Mitford, 8 September 1822: Benjamin Robert Haydon, *Correspondence and Table-Talk, with a Memoir by his son*, ed. Frederick Wordsworth Haydon (2 vols, London: Chatto and Windus, 1876), vol. 2, p. 75.

¹⁰⁷ John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class home in Victorian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p. 179.

arise if an individual could not control their illicit desires—even if they refrained or were prevented from acting on them.¹⁰⁸

Women's behaviour was also subject to scrutiny if it appeared mad. In January 1823, Mary Shelley remarked to Jane Williams that Mrs Wright was behaving 'very ill' as she 'shews herself ready to sacrifice all—even her lover's safety, to her wilful desires'.¹⁰⁹ The situation had escalated by March, and Mrs Wright, having been locked up by her husband and only allowed out 'to Mass &... to Mrs Thomas', became 'disperata' and sent Mary Shelley a 'dirty epistle brought by a blacksmith, probably thrown to him out of a window... asking for intelligence' about Trelawny. Mary was bewildered by the risks Mrs Wright was taking with no thought of her lover's safety: 'suppose her letters... fall into W's [Mr Wright's] hands—they are couched in such terms that a duel must ensue—so figurative her real care for Ty's life'.¹¹⁰ The other issues that friends raised about a couple's (or an individual's) conduct demonstrate that there were more factors involved when judging whether a relationship was corrupt than just illicit sex.

This perplexity, that people embroiled in passionate affairs or illicit intimacies seemed not to care about who they might hurt or endanger by their conduct, appears to have been widespread throughout the period. Piozzi was shocked about Helen Maria Williams's alleged conduct towards Mrs Stone; Mary Shelley condemned Mrs Wright's lack of care for Trelawny and Elizabeth Kent's selfishness; David Booth highlighted to his wife the pain and destruction the Shelleys had caused their

¹⁰⁸ Mill also had a history of depression, and suffered a mental breakdown in the 1820s, but in the mid-1830s his friends clearly associated his despondency with his attachment to Taylor.

¹⁰⁹ Bod., MS Abinger, c.46, fols. 34-35, Mary Shelley to Jane Williams, 12 January [1823].

¹¹⁰ Bod., MS Abinger, c.46, fols. 56-57, Mary Shelley to Jane Williams, 7 March [1823].

families, remarking how they had been connected to two suicides; and Martineau explained to Fox that his 'selfishness of giving up a wife when her brightest years are closing, & beginning life again with another' was what had caused her 'disapprobation' to become 'so strong'.¹¹¹ The negative characteristics that they stressed, like selfishness, thoughtlessness, and cruelty, were the opposite to the qualities that were valued in a good friend, or even a decent person. In the middle class, ideal conduct was enmeshed with concepts of moral virtue, honesty, and kindness. To appear to have a lack of regard for other people's wellbeing was concerning, and for those associated with individuals perceived to behave in such manners it was a painful embarrassment. In her diary, Piozzi reflected that Williams's 'defection from the right Path hurts all her friends exceedingly'; Haydon similarly stated to Miss Mitford that 'Hazlitt at present gives me great pain by the folly with which he is conducting himself'.¹¹² Pain and embarrassment often led friends to distance themselves from the couple: Martineau told Fox candidly in February 1838, she would 'avoid seeking...[him] at home' to avoid what was 'painful to me to witness'.¹¹³

The alarm about the lack of concern that their friends showed about the impact that their relationship choices would have on others extended to how this controversial conduct could impinge on the associates themselves. The actress and novelist, Elizabeth Inchbald, was a close friend of William Godwin's and was on polite

¹¹¹ Bancroft Library, *Martineau Papers*, Box 2, Folder 68, Harriet Martineau to William Johnson Fox, 1 March [1838].

¹¹² Benjamin Robert Haydon to Miss Mary Mitford, 8 September 1822: *Correspondence and Table Talk*, vol. 2, p. 75

¹¹³ Bancroft Library, *Martineau Papers*, Box 2, Folder 67, Harriet Martineau to William Johnson Fox, 16 February [1838].

terms with Mary Wollstonecraft, to whom she had been introduced by Godwin. However, she became openly hostile towards them shortly after their marriage in March 1797, as this marriage revealed to her, and many others, that Wollstonecraft could not have been married to Gilbert Imlay, father to her three-year-old daughter. She conveyed her anger in a sharply written note to Godwin, where she acidly wished him ‘and Mrs Godwin joy’, and suggested that his ‘joyfulness’ would have made him forget to arrange a box for a theatre trip that they had planned so she had ‘entreated another person to supply’ one. She sardonically concluded, ‘if I have done wrong—when you next marry I will act differently’.¹¹⁴ Inchbald was angry that her reputation had been compromised by being associated with a woman who had an illegitimate child, but Judith Barbour suggests her anger may also have been directed at Godwin; they had quite a flirtatious friendship and he had been accompanying her in public spaces around the time of the marriage.¹¹⁵ Wollstonecraft asked Amelia Alderson (Opie) to intercede with Inchbald on her behalf, and the trip to Drury Lane theatre went ahead on 19 April—but the two women quarrelled in the box in front of their associates and Inchbald subsequently cut Wollstonecraft from her social network.¹¹⁶ On the day that Wollstonecraft died in September 1797, Godwin resumed his correspondence with Inchbald, announcing his wife’s death and angrily remonstrating Inchbald for her ‘shuffling behaviour’ that night at the theatre, and for

¹¹⁴ Bod., MS Abinger, c.3, fol. 59, Elizabeth Inchbald to William Godwin, 11 April 1797.

¹¹⁵ Judith Barbour, ‘“Obliged to make this sort of deposit of our minds”: William Godwin and the Sociable Contract of Writing’, in Gillian Russell and Clara Tuite (eds), *Romantic Sociability: Social Networks and Literary Culture in Britain, 1770-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 166-185, (p. 180).

¹¹⁶ Mary Wollstonecraft to Amelia Alderson, [11 April 1797]: *The Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft*, pp. 408-409.

her 'base, cruel & insolent' 'conversation' which others 'in the box' overheard.¹¹⁷ Inchbald's replies over the course of the weeks that followed show that she argued that she was justified in her actions towards Wollstonecraft because of their 'slight acquaintance', she vehemently refuted that any real friendship had existed between them, and that her brief association with Wollstonecraft had 'been productive of petty suspicious detractions and reviling's (from which my character has been till now preserved)'.¹¹⁸ Her persistent charge to Godwin was that he had done her an ill turn-as his lack of consideration about who he introduced her to had compromised her reputation, provoking her into reacting in a punitive manner.

Other women similarly felt indignant and angry when they felt that their reputations had been compromised by a friend who had drawn them into association with a disreputable individual. Their responses appear to have been compounded when that individual happened to have a very public profile. Piozzi was annoyed when Helena Williams brought Stone to her house (just prior to the allegations of impropriety being made against them) upon discovering that he lived in a 'common lodging' and was married with a family.¹¹⁹ Mary Shelley told Jane Williams that she was trying to 'get out of the dilemma into which Trelawny's thoughtlessness brought' her, by presuming to try to use her to act as a go between for him and Mrs Wright.¹²⁰ Women were more likely than men to act as though being inconsiderately pulled into these associations was a personal affront, and they frequently distanced themselves

¹¹⁷ William Godwin to Elizabeth Inchbald, 13 September 1797: William Godwin, *The Letters of William Godwin*, ed. Pamela Clemit (2 vols, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), vol. 1, pp. 241-242.

¹¹⁸ Bod., MS Abinger, c.3, fol. 89, Elizabeth Inchbald to William Godwin, 14 September 1797.

¹¹⁹ Hester Lynch Piozzi to Penelope Sophia Weston, 15 September [1792]: *The Piozzi Letters*, vol. 2, p. 68.

¹²⁰ Bod., MS Abinger, c.46, fols. 1-2, Mary Shelley to Jane Williams, 18 September 1822.

from the individuals involved, either abruptly or more gradually. The recurrence of these sorts of responses from women indicates that it was those who were most vulnerable to gossip themselves who were often the most vocal and severe about their acquaintances whose behaviour could be deemed as immoral. This reflects the fact that contemporaries perceived sexual immorality to be contagious, and furthermore that women relied on the good moral conduct of those with whom they were associated to maintain their own reputations. Piozzi's and Shelley's reputations were vulnerable, as both had previously been involved in scandals of their own (after the death of her first husband, Piozzi had a relationship, which eventually resulted in marriage, with a music teacher whose social status was inferior to her own); and for single women, like Inchbald and Sarah Siddons, who also cut ties with Wollstonecraft after her marriage, keeping their own reputation irreproachable was crucial to enabling them to move within respectable circles. This was particularly pertinent for women trying to operate with propriety in the theatrical world, where actresses were often likened to prostitutes.

Being admitted to and maintaining one's position in a respectable social network was very important. Firstly, because such networks gave their members access to resources of social and cultural power but secondly, behaviour in such networks was regulated by mores and conventions that could (in theory) protect women from unwanted advances.¹²¹ Godwin disdained the 'silly...proper etiquette' of the Twisses, who 'could not (they pretended) receive' Wollstonecraft 'into their precious circles' once the fact that she had an illegitimate child became wider

¹²¹ Philp, *Radical Conduct*, chapter 3.

knowledge, but oddly, he did not perceive how important Inchbald's reputation was to her as he argued that she 'kept no circles to debase & enslave', therefore, he could not understand her hostility.¹²² Married women also had to consider the behaviour of those they befriended; Jane Carlyle wrote to her brother-in-law that she 'could really love [Harriet Taylor] if it were safe... but she is a dangerous looking woman and engrossed with a dangerous passion... no useful relation can spring up between us'.¹²³ As their reputations were not as quickly damaged by sexual misconduct as women's, men could afford to be more permissive with their friends' behaviour, however, by the 1830s they too were increasingly unwilling to be associated with people who were believed to hold radical ideas about marriage and sexuality. Thomas Carlyle told John Sterling that Mill's 'set of people... is one I have to keep out of. No class of mortals ever profited me less. There is a vociferous platitude in them... Mill was infinitely too good for them'.¹²⁴ Although he condemned the social circle that Mill was part of, he was very 'attached' to him, and at first he counted Mill apart from it, even though he thought his behaviour was contemptible. They remained friends until Carlyle eventually distanced himself and stopped writing to Mill in 1838.¹²⁵

Controversial relationships often caused friendships to breakdown. Due to the complexities of human relationships there was no hard and fast set of rules that determined how this happened, or whether such separations were permanent.

¹²² William Godwin to Elizabeth Inchbald, 13 September 1797: *The Letters of William Godwin*, vol. 1, pp. 241-242.

¹²³ Jane Welsh Carlyle to John Carlyle, 12 January 1835, as quoted in Hayek, *John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor*, p. 82.

¹²⁴ Thomas Carlyle to John Sterling, 17 January 1837, as quoted in *ibid.*, p. 86.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

Whilst some like Piozzi and Carlyle managed to estrange themselves gently by simply ceasing to reply to letters, others, like Thomas Baxter (Isabella Booth's father) and Harriet Martineau found themselves confronted for their hostility. The Shelleys demanded to know why Baxter had not visited, as he had said he would, and accused him of being swayed by his son-in-law's 'prejudices' against them;¹²⁶ and Martineau found herself fending off Fox's accusations of her 'incongruity' for condemning his relationship with Flower.¹²⁷ While Baxter argued that his differences in principles and standing should lead to a clean break with the Shelleys, Martineau's friendship with Fox was complicated by professional ties. She felt 'indebted' to him as he had once provided her with a regular income from her writings when she was vulnerable, therefore she assured Fox of her 'regard' for him, and told him that she was no 'enemy' but that 'remaining apart' was best for both of them due to the 'anxieties' his domestic arrangements caused her.¹²⁸ Confrontations also sometimes led to the more abrupt practice of cutting, where an association was quite suddenly ended. Mill's friendship with John Arthur Roebuck was ended after the latter confronted him about his indiscretion with Mrs Taylor, which had been the cause of 'a suppressed titter' at Mrs Buller's party. Roebuck felt he had to speak to Mill, because they were 'like brothers', so he confronted him at India house about the 'ridicule' he was inviting—he recorded that Mill was silent during the confrontation but ended their friendship after.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ This was not the only time the Shelleys would behave in this manner: they also confronted the Gisbornes for not visiting them when they returned to Italy in 1820, correctly suspecting that a third party (this time the Godwins) had influenced their friends' opinions of them.

¹²⁷ Bancroft Library, *Martineau Papers*, Box 2, Folder 67, Harriet Martineau to William Johnson Fox, 16 February [1838].

¹²⁸ Bancroft Library, *Martineau Papers*, Box 2, Folder 68, Harriet Martineau to William Johnson Fox, 1 March [1838].

¹²⁹ R E Leader, *Life and Letters of J. A. Roebuck* (London, 1897), p. 38.

Like Roebuck, most people saved their altercations for private spaces. Many used letters to communicate what was perhaps difficult to say face-to-face. The confrontation between Inchbald and Wollstonecraft in the box at the theatre seems to have been exceptional, and possibly occurred due to Inchbald's frustration and raised temper after being cajoled into a situation she had evidently tried to avoid. Examining quarrels about controversial relationships also suggests that gender politics within this group were complex: certain women felt able to challenge men for their behaviour. Inchbald confronted Godwin; Claire Clairmont was 'cruel' to Trelawny after he confessed to his affair with Mrs Wright; and Martineau was outspoken about the morality of Fox's behaviour with Flower, feeling authorised to condemn his 'living with another after separating from your wife'—and further anticipating his replies by insolently admonishing that he would 'object to these words—but how else can the fact be put?'.¹³⁰ Women's deference to men could be lowered by transgressive behaviour—male authority was weakened, opening up a space for women to address their issues quite boldly and candidly, and at times to be quite impolite. This is quite a striking difference from how gender politics and sexual misconduct operated in Whig society, where gender hierarchy was strictly adhered to and women rarely challenged men explicitly for their conduct with other women.

Even when friendships broke down due to disagreements about romantic or sexual misconduct, these estrangements were often not permanent: although they were never as intimate as they had been, Inchbald and Godwin did socialise in certain crowds together after Wollstonecraft's death; Isabella Baxter and Mary Shelley

¹³⁰ Edward Trelawny to Claire Clairmont, 4 December 1822: *Letters of Edward Trelawny*, p. 28; Bancroft Library, *Martineau Papers*, Box 2, Folder 69, Harriet Martineau to William Johnson Fox, 9 March [1838].

rekindled their friendship after the latter returned to England following her husband's death; and Martineau started up her correspondence with Flower in the early 1840s, and re-joined Fox's society after Flower's death and his reconciliation with his wife. The quarrels and disputes about controversial relationships reflect a period of pressure: the relationships had caused a scandal, and were the leading topic for gossip, either in the press, or local community. There was usually uncertainty about what would happen next: associates were concerned about how the public would react, and how this would impact on friends and family; agitations and anxieties ran high. After time, when the furore had died down, and in some cases the liaisons had come to an end, heated exchanges could be forgiven, and friends could and often did reconcile. These reactions often mark one moment within long friendships—a moment which underlines the strengths and weakness that were easier to see when a friendship was under pressure.

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To conclude, how people in literary societies thought about and reacted to controversial relationships had much to do with their society's status as a marginal section of the emerging middle class. As Wahrman, Dart, and others have inferred, the concept of an emerging cohesive and united middle class is problematic; the social ideologies of many of the middling groups who were committed to driving political reform were varied and often conflicted. Issues surrounding sexual and marital relationships were at the forefront of these divisions. What this chapter has shown is that literary radicals were not confined in little circles of like-minded individuals, but forged friendships with other literati even if they held contrary opinions on many significant topics. Hegemonic ideas about sexual and marital

relationships, that were integral to a broader 'middle-class' culture, influenced how social relationships were conducted in literary societies. These societies were often subjected to similar external pressures—hence their deployment of similar mechanisms of defence. Therefore, social relationships in marginal groups could be strained when the group succumbed to pressure from wider society to maintain a respectable appearance. The portrayal of each society's sexual mores was heavily influenced by their own relationship with the London press. A large section of the press proclaimed its loyalty to the establishment and suggested that it was duty-bound to scrutinise and expose the 'immoral' conduct of its radical rivals. In doing so they hoped to discredit their opponents to the reading public for their unorthodox political and religious beliefs, which they suggested, guided these individuals to live dissolute lives. The personal relationships of revolutionary radicals, like Helen Maria Williams and Mary Wollstonecraft, and the 'Romantics', like Leigh Hunt and William Hazlitt, were especially targeted by the loyalist press, but gradual shifts in journalistic methods are noticeable in their representations. Commentary on their controversial relationships was frequently prompted by their published works, but by the 1810s and 20s, there was more of a concerted effort to draw connections between individuals and discredit them as a recognisable group, and furthermore, professional journalists pried into their private lives for secrets. This reflects the conservative backlash against the radical press and suggests that the Romantics, who had the publishing power to reach far greater audiences than the 'Jacobins' of the 1790s, were more of a threat to the Establishment.

The loyalist press used prominent cultural narratives to depict controversial relationships, and often drew from archetypal figures represented in novels and

plays, such as the aristocratic libertine and his naïve young victim, or the atheistic promiscuous radical who hated his nation and reviled family-life. Their use of such imagery perpetuated these ideals and offered contemporaries a powerful and persuasive lens through which to read and assess alternative relationships. Even within 'radical' networks, many individuals struggled to interpret certain behaviours and relationships that had always been portrayed as immoral and sinful as anything other. For certain individuals, like Wollstonecraft and Shelley, to be 'radical' meant to advocate political, domestic, and sexual reform simultaneously, but for many others, like David Booth, these issues were not necessarily connected. Therefore, the representations of controversial relationships that appeared in the newspapers and literary journals influenced the assessments of many of the couple's acquaintances, and even some of their friends; their success was perhaps in part due to the stability of hegemonic ideas surrounding what constituted appropriate sexual behaviour and ideal marriage for people from the middling ranks. Traditional (with religious origins) concepts of what constituted immorality remained deeply influential in the attitudes and judgments of many. That said, levels of religious devotion varied significantly amongst members of literary societies, and many of the individuals who discussed the relationships did not articulate their concerns about the morality of sexual desires and relations in conventionally religious terms. Rather than explicitly equating such conduct with eternal damnation or sin, they emphasised how 'immoral' behaviour transgressed their social ethos by causing harm to others and society; there was a significant merger between the two sets of ideas. Individuals gossiped with their friends about the controversial relationships of mutual acquaintances. Their gossip was generally of a more sober tone than that which

circulated in Whig society, as rumours of sexual misconduct were more anxiety-provoking amongst members of the middling ranks. Nonetheless, gossip performed a similar function within literary societies, acting as a form of entertainment that provided a space for individuals to reflect on social and sexual mores and to bond with their friends over matters of morality.

The reactions of friends to a couple's unconventional ménage exposes the micro conflicts caused by a social and cultural landscape that was transitioning very gradually; new ideas and attempts to rethink personal relationships often met with hostility because mainstream culture and society remained very inflexible on these issues, and continued to advocate the dangers of sexual 'immorality' in order to maintain the status quo. Although marginal groups were often portrayed as disparaging the institution of marriage, many of the individuals embroiled in these networks appear to have thought that marital relationships should be respected and protected. Many individuals, like Harriet Martineau and Benjamin Haydon seem to have been concerned that as alternative relationships could in no way be regulated, they might allow the masses too much freedom, leading to a sexual chaos. A wide range of behaviour that was perceived to threaten a marriage was criticised. As Begiato points out, it was not just women's conduct that was condemned, male adultery was also viewed capable of damaging the 'emotional ties between spouses'.¹³¹ But in addition to this, the examples in this chapter suggest that there was a growing tendency to view desires and feelings as being illicit and dangerous—even if they were not acted upon. These dangers stemmed from the perceived

¹³¹ Joanne Bailey [Begiato], *Unquiet Lives: Marriage and Marriage Breakdown in England, 1660-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 144.

powers that sentiments had to arouse jealousy and encourage selfishness which could disrupt spousal relationships and threaten familial stability—these groups saw a broader spectrum of behaviour constituting marital infidelity compared to the members of Whig Society.

There was also an anxiety about what people could get up to in the privacy of their homes: Piozzi, Booth, and Martineau, all reflected on the domestic situations of their associates, and simply considering who lived under the same roof influenced their opinions about the potential these *ménages* posed for ‘deviant’ conduct. It is over this period that historians have suggested that the home was increasingly conceptualised as a private, safe and comforting domain, however it is clear that this emphasis on privacy, and how difficult this made the home to regulate, suggested to many that the domestic was a potential space for subversion. With such concerns members of literary societies differed from those of Whig society who were more concerned by actions and illicit sex than by passions that were kept in check. This reflects the two groups’ contrasting anxieties about sexual immorality: in Whig circles an individual’s outward behaviour was more important than what they might do in secret, but in literary societies the charade of social performance was often thought to be distasteful, and they were more concerned about sincerity and integrity in both private and public behaviour.

Controversial intimacies were often a point of tension between friends even though they tended to view relationships with relativism. Some tried to understand their friends’ way of thinking and the motivations that guided their behaviour but very few would openly defend controversial relationships, and almost none would completely condone them. Even when they understood and accepted the

justifications and reasonings given for unorthodox *ménages*, many warned their friends that such practices could not endure in a prejudiced society where women were so dependent and vulnerable. An array of variable factors affected how people reacted to controversial relationships, which highlights the complexities of friendship in literary societies. The intimacy between the person judging and the person whose conduct was being judged was significant: the reactions of those who were on more intimate terms with the couples were far more complex than those who kept them at a distance. Their proximity could direct their reactions in different ways: if they had not been confided in, individuals often confronted their friend and challenged their actions. Many were moved to anger, sometimes because they felt any scandalous behaviour would compromise the political or social aspirations of the group, but most commonly because they feared how their being associated with an illicit liaison might damage their own reputation and compromise those that they felt responsible for. Such reactions were most common where the relationship in question had received a lot of publicity—which provoked tensions further. Female friends, whose reputations were automatically vulnerable due to their sex, often took such carelessness with their own reputations very personally. Respectable social circles were not at all accommodating of transgressive women, which led many women to disassociate themselves from others whose morality seemed questionable quite rapidly. For others, intimacy created sympathy and concern, with several individuals expressing that they felt it was their duty to advise and help their friends. Even when they did not condone their friends' alternative *ménages*, individuals like Harriet Martineau and John Stuart Mill were often unwilling to make a swift judgement and cut ties, which reflects the inner conflict that individuals experienced

as they tried to balance their need for the emotional fulfilment provided by close friendships with an adherence to the expectations and constraints wider society placed on conduct.

The concerns that friends expressed demonstrate that in these networks such relationships transgressed social mores in complex ways: people were often perplexed by what they saw as selfish, irrational, cruel and unkind behaviours, which they often found difficult to reconcile with the principles they had believed they shared with their friends. Due to this, they often suggested they felt betrayed and repulsed by their friend's actions. In some cases, friendships in literary societies were further complicated by professional interest: some felt too indebted to be too censorious or to cut ties completely. Even when reactions did conclude with friendships breaking down, these ruptures often were not permanent; many reconciled years later, either once the controversial relationship in question had ended or become legitimate, showing that the scandals caused by such controversies did not last forever in these networks, although they often left traces on people's personal relationships. The next chapter turns to the family, another realm in which an individual's controversial conduct could occasion angry responses, estrangements, and accusations of betrayal.

Chapter 4: Painful Betrayals, Conflict and Estrangement: Familial Responses to Controversial Relationships

In September 1798, the Burney family were shaken by an extraordinary affair: James Burney, elder brother of the celebrated novelist, Frances, abandoned his wife and children to set up home with his much younger half-sister, Sarah Harriet (referred to by the family as 'Sally'). A week before this took place, James had spoken to his father, Dr Charles Burney, about his matrimonial problems, and requested to be allowed to move back into his father's house, where Sally and his stepsister, Mrs Maria Rishton, also resided. Dr Burney refused 'to let the self-divorced husband board with him', allegedly because he felt that 'J[ames] had left his wife & children unmercifully, indecently to pass all his time with S[ally]'.¹ Unable to live together under their father's roof, James and Sally set up their own house. He came to collect Sally and her belongings from Dr Burney's household when the latter was out, so as to avoid a confrontation, and they left the maid, Molly, with a packet of letters, one of which was for Mrs Rishton, requesting that *she* tell their father that they had left.² The end of 1798 and the early months of 1799 were filled with confusion and conflict, and in letters to several of her sisters, Frances deliberated the etiquette protocols of how the pair could 'be restored to any intercourse with their family—a family they have deserted & disgraced!'³

¹ Frances D'Arbly to Mrs Phillips, 13-15 December 1798: Frances, Madame D'Arbly, *The Journals and Letters of Frances Burney (Madame D'Arbly)*, ed. Joyce Hemlow (12 vols, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), vol. 4, pp. 212-220.

² BL, Barreit Collection, Egerton MS 3697, fol. 275, Mrs Rishton to Frances D'Arbly, 2 September 1798. James Burney's original note to his stepsister heads this letter that Mrs Rishton sent Frances.

³ Frances D'Arbly to Mrs Phillips, 12 March 1799: *Letters of Frances Burney*, vol. 4, pp.240-250.

The family's correspondence network was vast: Frances had five full siblings, and her father's second marriage had increased the family with stepsiblings and eventually half siblings. In their letters, the Burney sisters tried to make sense of James and Sally's relationship—Mrs Rishton had intimated it was of an incestuous nature—whilst also trying to come to terms with their own feelings of betrayal and rejection, and eventually, attempting to reconcile the 'poor fugitives' with their father.⁴ This peculiar relationship, that, whilst they felt it pushed at the boundaries of propriety, most of the family did not really believe involved incestuous activities, still caused alarm; in particular, family members expressed concern that their flight would create a 'terrible ado' if it was more widely known, and would 'disgrace' the family's good name.⁵ Despite the threat perceived to their collective reputation, the Burneys were not all united in their opinions about the relationship, and this case demonstrates that one family member's controversial domestic, romantic, or sexual choices, could bring to the fore a wide range of issues that provoked conflict within the family.

This chapter establishes two things: how family groups reacted to a member's controversial relationship, and the dangers they thought it posed. As such, it is a chapter of two parts: Firstly, I consider the issues that family members raised about their relatives' unconventional relationships and explore how these concerns were related to their conceptions of collective identity and reputation. I analyse what their concerns reveal about expectations and norms within the family, covering topics such as morality, shared values, loyalties and allegiances, hierarchy, and authority.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Frances D'Arblay to Mrs Phillips, 13-15 December 1798: *ibid.*, pp. 212-220; BL, Egerton MS 3697, fols. 276-278, Maria Rishton to Frances D'Arblay, 3 September 1798.

Secondly, I examine how families attempted to manage these relationships; who felt that they were expected to take action; what actions they took; and whether they attempted to regain influence and control, or to sever ties with those they felt had betrayed the family. Furthermore, I will reflect on how the actions of certain family members varied in accordance with the individual's class, gender, and position within the family.

Using letters and diaries, alongside one narrowly circulated pamphlet, this chapter draws upon examples from eight different families: four from the aristocracy, and four from literary and artistic societies. How we should determine what, or who, constituted 'family' for contemporaries has been the subject of much historical debate; I refer to those related by blood or by marriage, which, in this chapter, comprises an array of parents, siblings, in-laws, and aunts; those who felt that they were on intimate terms with the errant family member and expressed expectations that they were due explanations and consideration.⁶ Alongside these I also consider the involvement of other members of the household, such as servants, in this case those who were intimately integrated with the family. Some servants, like Burney's maid, Molly, or Dowager Countess Spencer's favourite, Miss Trimmer, were highly valued individuals who contributed to the family's emotional domestic life; others, often nameless threats referred to in correspondence, were not. The controversies faced by the eight families examined in this chapter varied, but included adultery, illegitimacy, incest, and marital nonconformity—with many crossovers. Each family and its crisis had its idiosyncrasies; however, we can find

⁶ Naomi Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England: Household, Kinship, and Patronage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), introduction.

commonalities across both status groups and throughout the period, which cut across the exact nature or specific circumstances of the controversial relationship in question. Using controversial relationships as a lens through which to analyse familial bonds reveals that families were composed of a complex web of different, sometimes conflicting, bonds of affection, duty, and loyalty—bonds that were stretched and damaged by unorthodox behaviour. The conflict caused by these relationships reveals the significant influence that shared moral codes and values—intrinsic to family identity—had on notions of belonging and betrayal.

This chapter argues that the family's concern for their public reputation was rooted in feelings of private failure and personal betrayal: their public and private faces were inseparable. There were differences across social statuses regarding exactly what types of behaviour the family was willing to tolerate, and the severity of disciplinary action that family members would resort to. However, the concerns and emotions they articulated and the way that conflicts evolved are more remarkable for their similarities than their differences. Regardless of status, families worried about the humiliation they would face from their peers for being associated with scandalous conduct and they sought to hide the evidence to avoid it. Carlo Ginzburg has recently suggested that historically shame was an emotion that was often shared by a group, rather than an entirely individualistic phenomenon.⁷ In these cases, the family shared a collective sense of shame from their association with an individual whose conduct was dishonourable.

⁷ Carlo Ginzburg, 'The Bond of Shame', *New Left Review*, 120 (2019), 35-44.

By behaving disgracefully, the individual drew attention to themselves, but they also exposed their family to scrutiny and speculation. Betrayal of the family was felt deeply, and they were often keen to point the finger of blame at the outsider for encouraging misplaced loyalties in their relative. Parental authority was resented and challenged, and the family's sense of order and hierarchy was disrupted. Domestic space was revered as a symbol of acceptance or exclusion. Parents, siblings, and a host of other family members relied on correspondence networks to vent, interpret and scheme. Although these shared characteristics are remarkable, as Joanne Begiato cautions 'words and images can mask different meanings' and require careful contextualisation.⁸ The family, as a category for historical analysis, is in part a creature of its social, cultural and political contexts, however, the fact that families often perceived and reacted to the threat of sexual misconduct in apparently very similar ways, suggests that certain aspects of family life (at least in the British context) were universal over this period.

The family has been the subject of much historiographical analysis. The powerful ideological role that images of the family played in British culture has received the most attention.⁹ The family was a metaphor for the nation; if British families were virtuous and well-ordered, headed by a benevolent father who protected and took responsibility for his obedient dependents (women, children and

⁸ Joanne Bailey [Begiato], *Parenting in England, 1760-1830: Emotion, Identity, and Generation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 2.

⁹ Rosemary Sweet, 'The Ordering of Family and Gender in the Age of the Enlightenment', in Frank O'Gorman and Diana Donald (eds), *Ordering the World in the Eighteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 112-140; Sylvana Tomaselli, 'The Most Public Sphere of All: the Family', in Elizabeth Eger et al (eds), *Women and the Public Sphere: Writing and Representation, 1700-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 239-256.

servants), only then could a respectable and stable society ensue.¹⁰ As Sylvana Tomaselli has argued, the fact that the ideals surrounding the family were intrinsic to the social organisations that shaped public life, meant that as an institution the family could not be wholly confined within the 'private sphere', despite Victorian representations of domestic ideology.¹¹ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall's book on the development of the middle-class places a significant emphasis on the role of a distinctly evangelical cult of domesticity in the creation of a distinctive class identity; amongst the middling sorts, they argue, family roles and expectations were shaped by staunch Christian domestic moral values.¹² Historians have concurred on the powerful influence that notions of domesticity had on familial expectations and experiences, however, Davidoff and Hall's argument that it was entirely of middle-class evangelical origins has been challenged. As both Begiato and Karen Harvey have convincingly argued, domestic ideology and culture can be found across different social groups throughout the eighteenth century, and its religious tenets were combined with 'aspects of sensibility and romanticism'.¹³

Experiences of family life were influenced by cultural ideals; however, these narratives were often difficult to put into practice. In a book that surveys the development of the modern family, from the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries, Davidoff et al, analyse familial relationships and suggest that they were complex and shaped by emotions and ideas including, 'love, hate, pity, care, duty,

¹⁰ Sweet, 'The Ordering of Family and Gender', p. 112; Tomaselli, 'The Most Public Sphere of All', p. 247.

¹¹ Tomaselli, 'The Most Public Sphere of All', p. 239.

¹² Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987).

¹³ Bailey, *Parenting in England*, pp. 8-9; Karen Harvey, 'Men Making Home: Masculinity and Domesticity in Eighteenth-Century Britain', *Gender & History*, 21:3 (2009), 520-540, (p. 527).

loyalty, calculation, self-interest, patronage, power, [and] dependency'.¹⁴ Family relationships were interdependent and the actions of individuals affected the reputation of the collective. As Begiato has argued, the family was a 'crucial location for identity formation', a delicate mechanism where the individual created their own identity—and consequently contributed to that belonging to their family—but were also shaped by the family's existing identity.¹⁵ Scholars have tended to focus on specific relationships within the family, such as interactions between parent and child, or between siblings. Both Begiato and Elizabeth Foyster have examined parenthood and have shown that the parental role remained central to people's lives and identities long after their children reached adulthood.¹⁶ Parents were expected to instil in their children the family's values and moral codes (largely those matching the social mores adhered to by their rank more widely). If they saw their adult and married children failing to conform to these values they could still intervene in their lives, as parents could, and often did, demand respect and deference. That said, the relationship between parent and child was not static, and as both Begiato and Foyster demonstrate, power dynamics and expectations for emotional support shifted between them as children became adults.¹⁷

Bernard Capp and Davidoff have surveyed sibling relationships during the early modern period and the long nineteenth century, respectively.¹⁸ Both suggest

¹⁴ Leonore Davidoff et al, *The Family Story: Blood, Contract and Intimacy, 1830-1960* (London: Longman, 1999), p. 7.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 55; Bailey, *Parenting in England*, p. 97.

¹⁶ Bailey, *Parenting in England*, passim; Elizabeth Foyster, 'Parenting was for life, not just for childhood: the role of parents in the married lives of their children in early modern England', *History*, 86:283 (2001), 313-327.

¹⁷ Bailey, *Parenting in England*, p. 222; Foyster, 'Parenting was for life', p. 317.

¹⁸ Bernard Capp, *The Ties that Bind: Siblings, Family, and Society in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Leonore Davidoff, *Thicker than Water: Siblings and their Relations, 1780-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), chapter 6.

that sibling bonds were important and continued into adulthood, where brothers and sisters continually provided emotional and practical support for one another. Sibling relationships were based on reciprocal moral obligations, which involved different duties respective of gender and seniority, and whilst rivalries and tensions were common, for the majority these relationships were underlined by feelings of love and affection.¹⁹ Davidoff describes the relationships between adult siblings as the 'dance of intimacy', and in her bourgeois cases the strength of siblings' emotional attachments were particularly acute; at times, a sibling's marriage could be seen as an unwelcome interference.²⁰ Thus, across this period, a range of different relationships within the family were rooted in strongly entrenched ideals and expectations; and an individual's unwillingness, or inability to conform to the ideals and expectations that these relationships entailed caused tensions and conflict.

Begiato points out that the evidence offered by court records often obscures the involvement of other family members in marital conflicts.²¹ Begiato argues that this is misleading, as familial correspondence demonstrates that everyday marital disputes, about economic issues, personality clashes, and religious differences, often involved other family members, including the couple's parents and adult children.²² Sometimes family members acted as intermediaries between spouses, at other times they exacerbated the problem. Married couples did not live in isolation, and members of their wider family and kinship networks could be heavily involved in their

¹⁹ Capp, *The Ties that Bind*, pp. 197-198.

²⁰ Davidoff, *Thicker than Water*, pp. 137-140, p. 146.

²¹ Joanne Begiato, 'Bearing Grudges: Marital Conflict and the Intergenerational Family', in J. DiPlacidi and K. Leydecker (eds), *After Marriage in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 41-63, (p. 42).

²² *Ibid.*, p. 44, pp. 52-53, pp. 58-59.

relationships—often pointing out or trying to redress wrongdoings. Commentary about how the family handled issues of sexual transgression appears often incidentally in discussions about family structure or sexual deviancy. In her article on the numerous mistresses of the Scottish banker, Gilbert Innes of Stow, Katie Barclay refers to the fact that women's illicit attachments often lost them their family's emotional and financial support.²³

How the family as a unit tried to manage the threat of sexual scandal is rarely the subject of sustained analysis, and where it is, scholars have focused on individual cases. Margot Finn and Sarah Pearsall both examine how the family dealt with threats to their reputation in colonial contexts. In her study about the Earl of Minto's family, Finn examines the role that familial correspondence played in persuading family members to change their minds about two of his sons' wives, of whom they initially disapproved: the exchange of letters, emotions and opinions within the family network broke down prejudices and forged new relationships.²⁴ Pearsall examines how the Anglo-Jamaican, John Tharp dealt with his wife's affair with his son-in-law. She argues that the contemporary cult of sensibility could undermine traditional power networks within the family and is key to understanding Tharp's reaction. His daughter's pleas for clemency for her husband, as well as Tharp's desire to avoid the family name being embroiled in scandal (as a wealthy Nabob he had dynastic ambitions that could not be easily fulfilled) determined his leniency; he

²³ Katie Barclay, 'Illicit Intimacies: The Imagined 'Homes' of Gilbert Innes of Stow and his Mistresses', *Gender & History*, 27:3 (2015), 576-590, (pp. 583-584).

²⁴ Margot Finn, 'Family Formations: Anglo India and the Familial Proto-State', in David Feldman and Jon Lawrence (eds), *Structures and Formations in Modern British History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 100-117.

arranged a private and very generous separation settlement with his wife and did not take legal action against his son-in-law.²⁵

Nicola Phillips' book, *The Profligate Son*, analyses the breakdown of relations between William Jackson, an East India Company merchant, and his son, another William.²⁶ Her research is based on an extraordinary document: Jackson's own three volume account, *Filial Ingratitude; Or, The Profligate Son*, that meticulously chronicled his son's descent into profligacy amongst prostitutes and gamblers in Regency London. Phillips reconstructs the family scandal and uses it as a lens through which to look at various contemporary social issues, including schooling, consumer culture, and the judicial system. She explains that Jackson eventually cut his son off, leaving him to face many years in debtors' prison and eventual transportation to Australia. None of the families examined in this chapter were as severe—however controversial conduct did disrupt familial relationships.

It is evident from the small existing scholarship that many underlying issues influenced how individual families reacted to controversial behaviour from one of their own, but the recurrent themes of shame, reputation, morality, betrayal, disobedience, manipulation, resentment and abandonment suggest that we should be able to draw some broadly applicable conclusions about the impact that sexual transgressions had on the family over this period.

²⁵ Sarah Pearsall, "The Late Flagrant Instance of Depravity in my Family": The Story of an Anglo-Jamaican Cuckold', *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 60:3 (2003), 549-582, (p. 554, p. 581).

²⁶ Nicola Phillips, *The Profligate Son: Or a True Story of Family Conflict, Fashionable Vice, and Financial Ruin in Regency England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

All families, regardless of status, worried about being publicly associated with scandal because of the shame it would bring upon them. They feared that it would lead others to judge them in a negative light. In August 1831, Mrs Catherine Marlay wrote to her mother, Countess Charleville, 'it is grievous to hear of such depravity & to reflect on such scenes of folly as are going on in "good society" in London. It is deplorable too that we are connected with so much of both'.²⁷ Mrs Marlay's brother, Lord Tullamore, was rumoured to have been involved in the breakup of the Count and Countess D'Orsay's marriage, and his connection to their disreputable circles was an embarrassment to his mother and sister. Although they did not think he was responsible for the breakup, Countess Charleville remarked that it was what 'the Town will believe', which was what really mattered.²⁸ In 1816, Lady Cowper expressed similar concerns about her family being humiliated by her sister-in-law, Lady Caroline Lamb's, roman à clef, *Glenarvon*; which was a thinly veiled account of the latter's affair with Lord Byron.²⁹ The novel featured scathing portrayals of Lamb's husband's family and friends, including an unflattering depiction of the family's matriarch, Lady Melbourne, as the adulterous and baby murdering, Lady Margaret Buchanan. Lady Cowper was horrified by the publication and wrote to Lamb accusing her of using the novel to 'offend and to hold us to ridicule... [and to] disclose to the world' the family's secrets.³⁰ Family reputation was also a prominent concern with

²⁷ Nottingham University Special Collections (hereafter NU), Marlay Collection, MY 1970, Mrs Catherine Marlay to Countess Charleville, [August 1831].

²⁸ NU, MY 1969, Countess Charleville to Mrs Marlay, 17 August 1831.

²⁹ For a longer discussion about Lamb's *Glenarvon* and responses to it from members of Whig Society see chapter 2, pp. 137-139.

³⁰ BL, Lamb Papers, Add. MS 45548, fol. 143, Lady Cowper to Lady Caroline Lamb, [1816].

those lower down the social scale, with both William Godwin and Charles Burney expressing fears that their children's behaviour would bring disgrace on the whole family.³¹ The idea that the actions of one individual could bring humiliation on all was a common perception, and family members feared being associated with the stigma of illicit liaisons. Ginzburg suggests that shame is a feeling that can bind individuals who belong to a community.³² It is clear that this captures something of the experiences of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century family: shame was a 'collective response' that enabled family members to discuss their feelings and experiences, and many, when faced with the controversial sexual conduct of one of their members, felt ashamed of their identification with that individual rather than of any actions of their own.

The family's reputation was most important as a point of reference amongst their peers with whom they frequently jostled for prestige and power, or in other cases, whom they relied upon for financial or social support. Consequently, individuals were very conscious of the need to keep any scandalous behaviour of relatives concealed from their wider social networks, and they employed a range of practices to maintain secrecy. They largely refrained from discussing affairs with people who were not trusted family members. Dowager Countess Spencer assured the Duchess of Devonshire, that she never mentioned her daughter's ménage-à-trois 'to any living soul except ... your sister' - it was 'a subject too humiliating... to converse

³¹ BL, Egerton MS 3697, fols. 276-278, Maria Rishton to Frances Burney, 3 September 1798; William Godwin to John Taylor, 27 August 1814, as quoted in William Godwin, *The Elopement of Percy Bysshe Shelley and Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, as narrated by William Godwin; with commentary by H. Buxton Forman* (Boston, 1911), pp. 14-16.

³² Ginzburg, 'The Bond of Shame'.

about'.³³ Although William Godwin informed his friend, John Taylor, of his daughters' elopement with Percy Bysshe Shelley, because he felt obliged having been 'assisted' by him, he requested that Taylor confine the tale 'to the deepest secrecy'.³⁴ Correspondents also cautioned each other about keeping their letters safe; Frances Burney frequently reminded her sisters to keep their letters carefully tied up, cryptic, and hidden from the serving staff.³⁵ In their letters, relatives often used codes to discuss relationships that they felt compromised the family, or they were deliberately ambiguous. Maria Rishton implied that there was something 'uncommon' about the 'intimacy' between James and Sally Burney, which she had been encouraged to believe from her mother and stepfather. The topic of incest was such a taboo, however, that she refused to say it explicitly, and told Frances that she 'always turned with horror from the Tale and never suffered it to escape my lips'.³⁶ Dowager Countess Spencer rarely named her son-in-law's mistress, Lady Elizabeth Foster, in her letters, referring to her instead as 'the obstacle'; and although they referred to the situation obscurely from time to time, the family of Benjamin Smith, a Unitarian MP, never mentioned his partner, Anne Longden, by name, as they refused to have any contact with her or the couple's children because the pair were not married.³⁷ This avoidance of openly referring to problematic domestic situations often hinted

³³ Cth, CS5, 1061, Dowager Countess Spencer to Duchess of Devonshire, 9 September 1790 and 1063, Dowager Countess Spencer to Duchess of Devonshire, 10 September 1790.

³⁴ William Godwin to John Taylor, 27 August 1814, as quoted in *The Elopement of Percy Bysshe Shelley and Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin*, p. 10.

³⁵ For example, see Frances D'Arblay to Mrs Phillips, 13-15 December 1798: *Letters of Frances Burney*, vol.4, pp. 212-220.

³⁶ BL, Egerton 3697, fols. 276-278, Maria Rishton to Frances D'Arblay, 3 September 1798.

³⁷ BL, Althorp Papers, Add. MS 75914, Dowager Countess Spencer to 2nd Earl Spencer, 12 February 1787.

at the pain they caused—but most importantly by being vague they were less likely to be compromised if a letter was intercepted.

Sometimes, they were cautious so as not to compromise another family member's reputation: Countess Charleville and Mrs Marlay discussed how often Lord Uxbridge was dining at Lord Tullamore's house, whilst he was away, and subtly inferred to the 'enigma' of his 'connexion' with Tullamore's wife.³⁸ Cohen suggests that keeping secrets was a 'familial strategy' that functioned to confine the family's shame within their own networks—a practice that she suggests twentieth-century families have disbanded with in accordance with changing social mores.³⁹ But over the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, families from both the upper ranks and the middling sorts, almost without exception, attempted to protect their image by keeping their relative's transgressions from becoming wider knowledge. Being inescapably associated with an individual whose behaviour disregarded sexual and social mores was embarrassing and jeopardised their social standing.⁴⁰

Exactly why the family was embarrassed by the misconduct of one of its members varied according to rank and values. For some aristocratic families, like the Melbournes, it was the notion that their family would appear divided and as though certain members were incapable of conforming to the societal expectations of their rank. In the 1810s, Lady Melbourne, was humiliated by the conduct of two of her daughters-in-law, both called Caroline. Her son William's wife, Lady Caroline Lamb, first embarrassed the family by her very indiscreet affair with Sir Godfrey Webster in

³⁸ NU, MY 1983.1, Countess Charleville to Lady Marlay, [n.d circa September 1831].

³⁹ Deborah Cohen, *Family Secrets: shame and privacy in modern Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 2.

⁴⁰ Sir John Soane is the only exception to this. His reaction to his son's relationship with his sister-in-law will be discussed shortly.

1810: 'Your behavior last night was so disgraceful in its appearances and so disgusting in its motives', wrote Lady Melbourne, 'you... left every one of yr connections for ye purpose of forming an intimate acquaintance with Ly & Miss Wellesley because they are friends of Sir Godfrey Websters [sic]'.⁴¹ By publicly affiliating herself with her lover's acquaintances at the theatre and leaving the circles who were associated to the family, Lady Caroline exhibited her disloyalty to the family, as well as giving credence to rumours. As discussed in chapter two, for many, how discreetly they conducted their affairs determined whether Whig society would tolerate them or not. Lady Melbourne had long followed that mantra herself and had retained her own prominent position in Whig society, in spite of her numerous affairs, because of her ability to adhere to and manipulate the complex sexual conventions that governed elite society; helped of course by her compliant husband who conducted many affairs of his own.

Much to Lady Melbourne's dismay, Lady Caroline was not as astute, and so she chastised her for 'overlook[ing] all decencys imposed by society', and reminded her that, as a married woman, her 'levity...not only compromises her own honour & character but also that of her husband'—who, after the premature death of his elder brother in 1805, was the heir to the Melbourne title and estates.⁴² Lady Melbourne was less severe with her son George's wife, 'Caro G', who absconded to Italy with Lord Henry Brougham in 1816, in the midst of the *Glenarvon* debacle.⁴³ Perhaps in part this was because there was not the same clash of personalities as between Lady

⁴¹ BL, Melbourne Papers, Add. MS 45546, fol.16, Lady Melbourne to Lady Caroline Lamb, 13 April 1810.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Lady Caroline George Lamb (née St Jules) was the illegitimate daughter of the 5th Duke of Devonshire and Lady Elizabeth Foster.

Melbourne and Lady Caroline, but Caro G was also somewhat absolved by the fact that her affair did not take place amidst the scrutiny of *the Ton* in London, and furthermore, she was not the heir's wife. That said, Lady Melbourne still attempted to make Caro G's conduct adhere to societal norms, and after the pair ended their liaison and returned to England, Lady Melbourne instructed Caro G that it would be of a 'great advantage if' she 'delay'd your appearance here for a month or two longer', so that it did not look as though she were chasing Brougham back across the continent.⁴⁴ Correspondence between Lady Melbourne and several of her children suggests that the two Carolines were an embarrassment to the family because their behaviour subverted aristocratic norms and exposed the Melbournes' lack of control over certain family members. The fact that the two in question were young women was especially humiliating. Furthermore, the pair managed to drive a wedge between other family members. William refused to follow his mother's advice and separate from Lady Caroline; in January 1817, his brother, Frederick Lamb wrote to their mother deploring the divisions caused by his sisters-in-law, regretting that 'two such causes [were] ever inflicted upon a family which was so perfectly happy and united before they came into it'.⁴⁵

Sexual and social mores varied considerably in elite society, depending on the specific circles in which the family moved. The Melbournes adhered to an old-fashioned set of rules about sexual behaviour and morality: adultery was acceptable to them if it conformed to certain codes. However, as discussed in chapter two, sexual mores were the source of much division in aristocratic society over this period,

⁴⁴ BL, Add. MS 45547, fols. 31-32, Lady Melbourne to Lady Caroline G. Lamb, [April 1817].

⁴⁵ BL, Add. MS 45546, fol. 177, Frederick Lamb to Lady Melbourne, 28 January 1817.

as they were frequently shifting. In many circles, particularly those which surrounded the monarch, George III and his consort Queen Charlotte, a form of elite domestic ideology flourished, that stressed the importance of Christian morality and virtue. New standards were raised by which both male and female behaviour would be judged.⁴⁶ Lady Theresa Villiers was particularly sensitive about her brother, Lord Boringdon's, long-term relationship with his married mistress, Lady Elizabeth Monck, because both she and her husband were prominent members of the Court, and intimates of the King and Queen themselves.⁴⁷ In October 1802, when Boringdon went to France with Monck, Lady Villiers wrote to her aunt, Lady Anne Robinson, recounting an embarrassing conversation that had taken place between her husband, 'Mr V.' and the King:

The Royal Family had not heard of his [Boringdon's] journey... the remainder of the intelligence [that Monck travelled with him] has not yet reach'd their ears, as the King told Mr. V. he was glad he was gone as he thought it indicated that a certain liaison was at an end.⁴⁸

The fact that the King was aware of Boringdon's adulterous relationship with Lady Monck and found it distasteful was shameful for Lady Villiers and her husband, who

⁴⁶ Judith S. Lewis, *Sacred to Female Patriotism: Gender, Class, and Politics in late Georgian Britain* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 175, p. 189; Marilyn Morris, *Sex, Money & Personal Character in Eighteenth-Century British Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), chapters 3 and 4.

⁴⁷ This affair was discussed in detail in chapter one.

⁴⁸ Plyth, Parker family of Saltram and Robinson letters, 1259/2/661, Lady Theresa Villiers to Lady Anne Robinson, 28 October 1802. Emphasis original.

took the opportunity to avoid admitting the truth by not correcting him—‘Mr V. cd not bring himself to undeceive him but I daresay he will find it out’.⁴⁹

Whether the aristocratic family belonged to Tory circles, who were generally loyal to George III, or the Whig party who formed an alternative court around the scandalous Prince of Wales, did not necessarily determine their moral code. Dowager Countess Spencer’s husband and son were Whig MPs, for whom she canvassed during election periods, and her daughters were both married to prominent Whig lords; she had a very stringent and religiously grounded moral code. As mentioned in chapter one, she was horrified that her daughter, the Duchess of Devonshire, allowed her husband’s mistress, Lady Elizabeth Foster, to live with them. The Duchess regularly attempted to assure her mother of the ‘innocency’ of the relationship between the Duke and Lady Foster, and described as ‘an attachment; which except the attachment of friendship & esteem is otherways false’.⁵⁰ These attempts suggest that it was the belief that the pair had a sexual relationship—which her daughter appeared to condone—that rattled Spencer’s sense of propriety, but illicit sex was clearly a difficult topic for mother and daughter to discuss candidly. The Dowager Countess was notoriously pious and adopted evangelical principles into her everyday life, such as sobriety, early rising, and philanthropic activities.⁵¹ As Begiato has argued, parents both aspired and were expected to cultivate certain values in their children by setting a good example and being strict with their expectations.⁵² The

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Cth, CS5, 891, Duchess of Devonshire to Dowager Countess Spencer, 10 September 1790.

⁵¹ Lady Stafford was pleased about the Dowager Countess’s presence at Chatsworth as she ‘has the Art of leading, drawing or seducing people into right ways’, and Lady Stafford hoped her son, Granville Leveson Gower, would think of Spencer as a ‘Guide and Counsellor’. Lady Stafford to Granville Leveson Gower, 30 November [1801]: *G.L.G. Private Correspondence*, vol. 1, p. 312.

⁵² Bailey, *Parenting in England*, chapter 7.

ideal qualities for Christians across the social spectrum centred on notions of ‘virtue’, ‘piety’, ‘industriousness’, ‘filial duty’, and ‘domesticity’, and by transmitting these values ‘parents were conduits for numerous national, familial, and personal expectations’.⁵³ For their family’s reputation, parents aspired to ensure their offspring could replicate their manners and morality, and thus maintain the family’s identity for subsequent generations.⁵⁴ This parental duty, to provide a good example and be strict on moral conduct, was critical in childhood but continued after children reached maturity, hence Spencer’s frequent attempts to chastise both her daughters for the lax moral codes to which they and their close friends adhered.⁵⁵

In 1790, the Duchess suspected that her children’s governess, Selina Trimmer, had been sent by her mother to spy on her and the household. Trimmer was the daughter of the pious educational reformer Sarah Trimmer, and had come highly recommended by Spencer and retained a close relationship with her. The Duchess was distressed that Trimmer seemed to know so much about her mother’s movements, opinions and intentions: she had ‘been so positive in her assurances’ that Dowager Countess Spencer would not be meeting the Duchess, Foster, and the children at Compton, and ‘asked me so sneeringly this morning whether you went or not’.⁵⁶ Worst of all, Trimmer had openly acted disrespectfully to Foster in front of the children: ‘if it is from ignorance, it is a want of good breeding... If it is meant as a dislike to any body in my house, you must feel it is what I could not put up with in the

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

⁵⁵ For example, see Cth, CS5, 237, Dowager Countess Spencer to Duchess of Devonshire, 5 December 1778. The Countess complained to the Duchess about her friendship with Lady Melbourne and Lady Derby.

⁵⁶ Cth, CS5, 1062, Duchess of Devonshire to Dowager Countess Spencer, 9 September 1790.

governess of my children'.⁵⁷ Spencer flatly denied that any conversations had passed between her and Miss Trimmer that her daughter would have objected to, but she was less clear about whether her opinions may have influenced the governess's insubordination—they certainly shared more similar values when it came to matters of sexual morality.

Spencer clearly felt that she had failed to instil her values in her daughters, but consoled herself that she had been successful with her son: she wrote to him in the midst of expressing her anxiety about the conflicts that both her daughters were experiencing with their husbands, 'You are as I have too often had occasion to say my only real satisfaction in this world'.⁵⁸ Although their specific standards were quite different, in many respects Dowager Countess Spencer's frustrations were similar to Lady Melbourne's, who also lamented her failure to get the next generation to conform to the family's values and codes of conduct. Her concerns were not limited to the family's public face, she was also concerned about the vulnerable position both of her daughters put themselves in through their conduct: she wrote to Countess Bessborough during the elopement rumours in 1786, 'the more I scold, the more I love you... anxious tenderness for you... makes me dread every thing that may injure you'.⁵⁹

Being associated with immorality and scandal was also disconcerting for families from the middling sorts, whose embarrassment was similarly underpinned by a myriad of reasons specific to their family's mores and situation. William Godwin

⁵⁷ Cth, CS5, 1064, Duchess of Devonshire to Dowager Countess Spencer, 10 September 1790.

⁵⁸ BL, Add MS 75914, Dowager Countess Spencer to 2nd Earl Spencer, 7 February 1787.

⁵⁹ BL, Althorp Papers, Add MS 75608, fol. 506, Dowager Countess Spencer to Countess Bessborough, 13 June 1786.

famously disapproved of how marriage constrained the individual's freedom, however, in 1814, he was horrified when his daughter Mary eloped with Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'he, a married man', whom he accused of 'seducing' Mary, and 'deserting his wife'.⁶⁰ Although he was deeply critical of the institution of marriage, Godwin did not approve of the couple's actions at all: he was concerned for his daughter, who was young and vulnerable, especially given Percy's seemingly casual desertion of his pregnant wife. In addition to disliking being associated with the couples' immorality, Godwin was further disquieted by rumours that he was 'selling his daughter' to Percy Shelley.⁶¹ Godwin's finances were in dire straits, he was in a considerable amount of debt and had been relying on friends, including Shelley, to help. The assumption that Godwin had orchestrated his daughter's relationship with Shelley to recompense the latter for his financial assistance exacerbated Godwin's existing reputation as an immoral radical. Godwin explained to John Taylor that the situation had left him torn between wanting to keep the affair a secret, and feeling the need to explain 'how I conducted myself' as he foresaw that he would need a 'vindication' to distance himself from the situation.⁶²

Over fifteen years later, the architect, Sir John Soane, would allow his humiliation to take a back seat, as he was so horrified by his son George's 'diabolical passions' for his sister-in-law, Maria Boaden.⁶³ Like Godwin in his letter to Taylor, Soane chronicled his son's relationship with Maria, however, his was a more formal

⁶⁰ William Godwin to John Taylor, 27 August 1814, as quoted in *The Elopement of Percy Bysshe Shelley and Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin*, pp. 10-11.

⁶¹ Mary Godwin to Percy Bysshe Shelley, 3 November 1814: Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, ed. Betty T. Bennett (3 vols, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), vol. 1, p. 4.

⁶² William Godwin to John Taylor, 27 August 1814, as quoted in *The Elopement of Percy Bysshe Shelley and Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin*, p. 15.

⁶³ Soane Museum Archives, 4/C/12/3, Sir John Soane to John Boaden, 9 April 1832.

document that was based on meticulously gathered evidence from doctors who had attended Maria in her pregnancies, servants who lived in George's house, and the woman in the countryside to whom George had charged the upbringing of his and Maria's child.⁶⁴ This unusual document is held in the John Soane archive, and forms part of a collection that includes the original letters from Soane's witnesses and transcriptions of various other letters, that are all reproduced in the document. The document also refers to an earlier pamphlet that Soane had published and circulated amongst his and George's acquaintances. Soane's documentation of the family's scandal, and his decision to publicise it to certain people, was also motivated by his need to protect his family and its reputation. He would not remain silent because he had discovered the affair after the sudden appearance of a child for whom he was asked to fund a school place.⁶⁵ George and his wife, Agnes, alleged that this was their second son, however, Soane's suspicions were raised and after careful investigation he discovered that this was an illegitimate child that George had fathered with Agnes's sister, and whom the trio were trying to pass off as legitimate. Angered that they were trying to get him to financially support their incestuous and illegitimate offspring, Soane made certain that people around them knew of the child's status, and its mother's, and even got the baptism record changed to reflect the boy's real parentage.⁶⁶

Like many of the families studied in this chapter, the Soanes were not strangers to family conflict. Soane was disappointed by the lack of ambition and

⁶⁴ Soane Museum Archives, 4/B/5/6, S699, Sir John Soane, *Details Respecting the Conduct and Connexions of George Soane* (privately printed).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

wayward behaviour of his two sons, who had both married in 1811 without seeking their parents blessing. In 1815 George had been responsible for an article that was published in one of the London papers attacking his father's architectural work. This caused a sizeable rift in the family, and Soane believed the stress of it all caused his wife's death, as she passed away a couple of months after the article had appeared. Thus, many factors contributed to Soane's reaction to George's ménage-à-trois: he clearly found their relationship repellent and saw George as having gone too far, but it is also possible that he was justifiably exorcising some long-held demons. In his narrative Soane ensured that his disapproval for George and Maria's 'depravity' was unambiguous. Rather than portraying himself as being embarrassed, or reflecting on his failings as a parent, Soane depicted himself as an injured man, constantly abused and deceived by all members of that family unit.⁶⁷ The fact that he felt that he had to be open about the situation perhaps encouraged him to adopt this stance: whilst humiliation was awkward to deal with socially, pain and betrayal most often elicited sympathy.⁶⁸

In the 1820s and 1830s, the Smiths of Norwich were similarly embarrassed and ashamed of their son Benjamin's unconventional relationship with Anne Longden. Benjamin was the eldest of ten children—his father was William Smith, also a politician, abolitionist, and dissenter. The family were Unitarians, a sect which, as Kathryn Gleadle has shown, held largely traditional views about marriage and emphasised the virtues of domesticity: Whilst they educated their daughters they

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 21, p. 25, p. 27.

⁶⁸ Soane Museum Archives, 4/C/12/13, Prescott Grotes to Sir John Soane, [n.d.].

still envisioned them having conventional lives as wives and mothers.⁶⁹ Benjamin's mother, Frances Smith, and his five sisters, Martha Frances—'Patty', Anne, Frances (mother of Florence Nightingale), Joanna, and Julia, all strongly disapproved of his cohabitation with Anne on the grounds that it was 'like moral murder', and as far as his mother was concerned, 'perfectly heart breaking'.⁷⁰ Their disdain was due to Benjamin's refusal to marry Anne and the couple's illegitimate offspring; the fact that the relationship was monogamous and committed offered them no comfort. Like the Dowager Countess Spencer, the Smith women found their moral principles at odds with a close family member's.

Benjamin was a member of the group that Gleadle calls the 'radical unitarians', a proto-feminist offshoot from the main sect.⁷¹ The radicals were largely led by the controversial unitarian minister, William J. Fox, whose controversial relationship with Eliza Flower was examined in the previous chapter. They advocated the need for egalitarian relations between the sexes and saw the family as the first 'centre of despotism' that desperately needed to be reformed.⁷² For radical unitarians like Benjamin, ideological opposition to marriage was strong, and he would have felt that he was being kinder and fairer to Anne by not marrying her, as, in his eyes, 'marriage legally enabled male domination over... wives and took women's legal rights away'.⁷³ His family though, could not reconcile themselves with his views and his consequent actions. As Gleadle has argued, the controversial

⁶⁹ Kathryn Gleadle, *Early Feminists: Radical Unitarians and the Emergence of the Women's Rights Movement, 1831-51* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995), pp. 20-22. The links between Unitarianism and marital non-conformity are discussed in detail in chapter 3.

⁷⁰ Cambridge University Library, *William Smith (1756-1835) and family correspondence, journals and other papers*, Add. MS 7621/268, Frances Smith to Anne Smith, 17 November 1831.

⁷¹ Gleadle, *Early Feminists*, pp. 4-5.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 106.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 112-114.

attitudes towards marriage and sexuality that were held by the fringe movement caused tensions within the sect of Unitarianism, leading to a disassociation in the 1830s; and these divisions clearly also affected families.⁷⁴ For the Smiths, Benjamin and Anne's domestic situation did not conform to their expectations, and their inescapable connection to an illegitimate family compromised the pious identity that the rest of the family aspired to—a collective identity that established and maintained the family's sense of belonging and standing in their unitarian circles. Because of the interdependent nature of the family's public reputation, all families linked to sexual misconduct were concerned. This was not a straightforward fear that family members would be assumed to be guilty of the same immorality or that their own propriety would be questionable but was also connected to shame for private failures made public. Parents and siblings had various obligations to each other, which included responsibilities to instil or maintain moral values, protect each other from debauchery, and to uphold loyalty and respect for the family.

The relative who pursued a controversial relationship at the expense of their family betrayed more than just the family's values. There was a strong sense amongst the families examined in this chapter that their relative was prioritising their illicit connections over pre-existing loyalties. Lady Villiers complained to her aunt that her brother was not writing to her regularly anymore and treated her with 'coolness' that was growing 'worse and worse'.⁷⁵ The siblings had been close in youth and Boringdon's estrangement was 'a most painful affliction' for Lady Villiers, 'the more so from being perfectly unexpected'.⁷⁶ Many expressed their pain and bewilderment

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 15-16.

⁷⁵ Plyth, 1259/2/493, Lady Theresa Villiers to Lady Anne Robinson, 1 January 1800.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

at being rejected by their family members. Frances Burney suggested that James and Sally had 'alienated' the rest of the family, and she was bewildered by James's hostility when he replied to her letter without making 'one little wish of hearing from me... though the whole tenor of my letter was inviting it'.⁷⁷ Jealous undertones can be perceived in her complaints about them: she wrote to her sister, Susanna, 'I earnestly hope contrition will open their infatuated Eyes... they are *perverse*,-& will soon cease to care so much for each other's society when they can have it so completely'.⁷⁸ Thirty years later, Julia Smith felt similarly rejected by her brother Benjamin, whom it seems estranged himself from the family because of their disapproval of his domestic life. Benjamin's relationship with Anne began in 1826, and by June 1827, Julia complained to their sister, Frances Nightingale, that 'Ben I scarcely ever see'. In 1829, she was disappointed when he said he would visit 'but... [had] not come to town'.⁷⁹ The fact that Julia regretted their estrangement is clear, she wrote to Nightingale again in 1829 to tell her that 'Ben came on Wednesday & has been living here he is looking very well, & is the most agreeable society I know, but I am sorry to say he does not promise us much of it... Last night we had a tête à tête the first I have had with him these 2 years'.⁸⁰

Siblings, especially sisters, felt that they were entitled to be prioritised when it came to love, emotional support, intimacy, and other mutual obligations. The idea that a sibling might prefer the company of someone else and would also rather seek

⁷⁷ Fanny D'Arblay with M. D'Arblay to Esther Burney, 22 November 1798: *Letters of Frances Burney*, vol. 4, pp. 208-211.

⁷⁸ Frances D'Arblay to Mrs Phillips, 13-15 December 1798: *ibid.*, pp. 212-220.

⁷⁹ Claydon House Archives, Nightingale Papers, bundle 24, Julia Smith to Frances Nightingale, 30 June 1827, and Julia Smith to Frances Nightingale, [1829].

⁸⁰ Claydon, bundle 24, Julia Smith to Frances Nightingale, [1829].

comfort and solace from them, was upsetting and confusing. In the 1830s, Nancy Hunter, the half-sister of Elizabeth Kent and Marianne Hunt, wrote to the latter for advice when Kent had threatened to commit suicide (her first attempt was in 1817). Nancy explained to Marianne that Kent's extreme low mood was because her 'breaking with Mr. Hunt has produced no great sensation', and Nancy believed that Kent's threats were a strategy to get Hunt's attention:⁸¹

It would be a certain means of gaining a kind of power over him, which she has at present lost. She would be sure of exercising a strong influence... she would know that she would frequently be in his thoughts, and in a very intense manner, and as to the pain it would give him and every one else, I think she would be glad of that with respect to him, and indifferent as to us. She is a very strange person.⁸²

The idea that they had been unjustly demoted in their sibling's affections was shared by many across the period and the social spectrum. It was a common feature in familial reactions to a wide range of controversial relationships and is representative of how these liaisons disrupted the family's sense of order and hierarchy. Whether the indifference was intentional or not, many felt sad and rejected by their siblings, who, as far as they could see, now prioritised a new intimacy. The fact that siblings described this behaviour as 'perverse' or 'strange' suggests that it went against familial emotional norms. Siblings perceived they had a mutual claim to emotional

⁸¹ Nancy Hunter to Marianne Hunt, [n.d.]: Luther A. Brewer (ed.), *My Leigh Hunt Library: The Holograph Letters* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1938), pp. 100-101.

⁸² *Ibid.*

intimacy and confidences, and ought to be prioritised over outsiders. This was a part of their bond that they valued highly and guarded jealously. They were willing to concede their precedence for a spouse, as that was a legitimate and significant relationship—but not attachments that they perceived to be illicit or controversial. Having now established how controversial relationships threatened the family's image and its internal dynamics, the next part of the chapter moves on to consider the forms that their reactions took.

II

A strategy that many adopted to overcome the emotional pain of this rejection was to point the finger of blame squarely at the individual whom they saw as intruding in the family's life. Dowager Countess Spencer named Foster as 'the obstacle' that disrupted the harmonious relationship she had once shared with her daughter and son-in-law, and moreover, she tried to make the Duchess see that Foster's presence was a threat to her position, especially when her debts made relations with the Duke tense; Lady Melbourne wrote to Lady Caroline how disappointed she was that 'every action every impulse of your mind [is] directed by Sir Godfrey Webster', and she similarly alleged that Brougham was controlling Caro G's thoughts and actions, remarking how 'odd' it was that he thought 'himself exempt from all blame... [and] should have ye power to persuade' Caro G of this too.⁸³ In response Caro G retorted that Brougham 'never did this to alienate me from you & your family... excepting the fault of liking me he has not had one in his conduct towards me'; she defended the

⁸³ BL, Add MS 75914, Dowager Countess Spencer to 2nd Earl Spencer, 12 February 1787; BL, Add. MS 45546, fol. 16, Lady Melbourne to Lady Caroline Lamb, 13 April 1810; BL, Add. MS 45547, fols. 31-32, Lady Melbourne to Lady Caro G. Lamb, [After 3 April 1817].

allegation and assured her mother-in-law that she was not being manipulated.⁸⁴ Conveniently forgetting the pre-existing tensions in his household between Mary and her step-mother, Godwin entirely blamed Percy Shelley for Mary and Claire absconding: he was the ‘impious... traitor’ who had elicited Godwin’s daughters’ betrayal, and furthermore he expressed his concern that Shelley was so unprincipled that he would probably abandon the girls and leave them ruined and vulnerable.⁸⁵

Demonising the individual as a manipulative and immoral figure who had disrupted their family’s usual closeness was a common theme. The young Countess D’Orsay was too pitiful a figure to be blamed, so Countess Charleville held the Countess’s stepmother responsible for the chaos instead. She told Mrs Marlay that Lady Blessington had ‘encouraged’ and manipulated Tullamore’s affections for the Countess, because she had her own debauched motives for wanting the D’Orsays to separate.⁸⁶ Frances Smith thought Anne Longden no better than a prostitute, and told her daughter Anne that she was ‘sorry to say that Ben has left us, when I think of the society for which he quitted your house and Joannas my heart sinks under me it seems like moral murder [sic]’.⁸⁷ In some cases, there was a strong sense that the intruder had deliberately sown the seeds of discord to weaken the bond between relatives—Lady Villiers was certain that Monck was ‘the cause of coolness’ in her brother’s attitude towards her, which at times influenced her to be friendly in hopes that Monck would be more benevolent about the influence she held over

⁸⁴ BL, Add. MS 45547, fols. 23-24, Lady Caro G. Lamb to Lady Melbourne, 1 August 1816.

⁸⁵ William Godwin to John Taylor, 27 August 1814, as quoted in *The Elopement of Percy Bysshe Shelley and Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin*, p. 11, p. 13.

⁸⁶ NU, MY 1968, Countess Charleville to Lady Marlay, 16 August 1831. Before his marriage, the Count D’Orsay had lived for several years in a ménage-à-trois with the Count and Countess of Blessington. His affair with the Countess was rumoured to have continued after her husband’s death in 1829. For full details see Appendix, p. 330.

⁸⁷ Cambridge University Library, Add. MS 7621/268, Frances Smith to Anne Smith, 17 November 1831.

Boringdon's actions.⁸⁸ The idea that a once loyal and loving relative had been hoodwinked by a disruptive figure, who had the power to manipulate their affection and actions, was common. This image of an imposing outsider disturbing the family's comfort and order was perhaps easier for individuals to reconcile with than the alternative, which was that their relative had chosen to reject them of their own accord. Begiato argues that the family is an important site for the development of individual and collective identities, and with this in mind it seems probable that family members chose to blame an individual who they could clearly identify as 'the other', rather than one whom contributed to their own sense of self and family.⁸⁹

It was common for family members to express feelings of contempt towards this intruding individual. Many could, and did, avoid interacting with them. For some, however, this was not a possibility. As the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire showed no sign of making Foster leave, the Dowager Countess Spencer was forced to live alongside her whenever she visited them at Chatsworth or Devonshire House in London. This sometimes led to tense confrontations, for which Spencer later found herself having to apologise; in August 1788 she tried to justify her 'behaviour', which she explained was 'not premeditated' but 'arose at Chatsworth from my own feelings at scenes I was unfortunate enough to be witness to'.⁹⁰ Having to witness Foster and the Duke's affection for each other made it impossible for Spencer to ignore. Lady Villiers was also occasionally compelled by her husband, who tried to keep in his brother-in-law's favour, to entertain Monck. Her description of one of these visits to

⁸⁸ Plyth, 1259/2/493, Lady Villiers to Lady Anne Robinson, 1 January 1800.

⁸⁹ Bailey, *Parenting in England*, p. 97; Davidoff et al, *The Family Story*, p. 55.

⁹⁰ Cth, CS5, 891, Dowager Countess Spencer to Duchess of Devonshire, 8 August 1788.

her aunt is illustrative of Lady Villiers's anxiety about the meeting and hints at how former encounters between the two women had passed:

I have not been made so nervous for a great while, as I was the other day by a visit from Ly Eliz. Monck, Mr Villiers made me let her in... I was so afraid of her being larmoyante... however I was mistaken, & she was very gracious, I talk'd as fast as I could to prevent feeling awkward... neither did she once name my brother a thing I never knew happen before.⁹¹

On this occasion Monck had acted with decorum but previously she had behaved in a manner that Lady Villiers deemed inappropriate, suffering emotional outbursts and trying to discuss Boringdon, which Lady Villiers found awkward and distressing.

Although they made their disapproval of these liaisons clear, both Lady Villiers and the Dowager Countess Spencer had to tolerate them to a degree, because they were limited in their authority to challenge the behaviour of their male relatives. Whilst she railed at the Duchess for the impropriety of their domestic arrangement, Spencer responded with horror to her daughter's suggestion that she should discuss the matter with the Duke himself, and responded 'I most earnestly intreat that no hint upon this subject may ever arise between us'.⁹² As Henry French and Mark Rothery have argued in their study about the formation of elite masculine identities, while as mothers, elite women could claim some authority in the family, their

⁹¹ Plyth, 1259/2/493, Lady Theresa Villiers to Lady Anne Robinson, 1 January 1800.

⁹² Cth, CS5, 1063, Dowager Countess Spencer to Duchess of Devonshire, 10 September 1790.

authority over male relatives was limited.⁹³ As a younger sister, Lady Villiers was even more constrained. She was obliged to socialise with Monck when commanded to do so by her husband and resented her lack of power in these situations. On the other hand, she felt that her paternal aunt, Lady Anne Robinson, an unmarried independent woman, who was also a quasi-mother figure to Boringdon and herself (she raised them after the death of their mother) had more chance of exerting influence over her brother than she herself had. In April 1800, Lady Villiers suggested that Boringdon was 'struck with the difference' of Robinson's manner towards him and advised her on a delicate situation.⁹⁴ Robinson was holding a ball in London and she was not enthused at the prospect of inviting her nephew, given his behaviour, but Lady Villiers felt that the opportunity could be used to restore their former closeness and to soften the tensions between them all. While she thought Lady Robinson should not invite 'him & her too without any further comment', as that would 'be a sort of tacit acknowledgment that you thought you had been deficient before', she still advised her aunt to invite Boringdon to remind him of 'the affection that us'd to exist between' them, and added that 'if you was to do this & get quite a satisfactory answer, then perhaps you might ask her (Lady Elizth.) too, as a reward, tho' I wd. not do it as a bribe [sic]'.⁹⁵ Whilst elite women were expected to police morality and sexual mores in upper-class society, this was clearly a very complex task when the family was involved. Women challenged their female relatives, and with more prudence, male relatives, for their misconduct, but their agency was

⁹³ Henry French and Mark Rothery, *Man's Estate: Landed Gentry Masculinities, 1660-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 221.

⁹⁴ Plyth, 1259/2/501, Lady Villiers to Lady Anne Robinson, 2 April 1800.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

constrained by their own position in the family, as well the position of the one whose behaviour they reproached.

Their ability to force their relatives to put an end to their illicit liaisons may have been limited, but mothers and sisters across the social spectrum did not simply sit back and allow them to continue peacefully. They used correspondence to air their concerns to each other, and as Lady Villiers and Robinson have shown, they considered how they might manipulate the situation. One strategy that several resorted to was emotional blackmail. Dowager Countess Spencer often wrote to the Duchess of Devonshire about the emotional anguish the ménage-à-trois was causing her; she told her that it was a 'subject so very distressing to me', a 'torture... to endure all I have so long done', and that she knew it was 'as painful for you to read these things as it is to me to write them'.⁹⁶ In 1790, she also refused to join her daughter and grandchildren on a trip to the seaside because Foster would be accompanying them—withdrawing her presence physically as well as emotionally.⁹⁷ In 1810, Lady Melbourne similarly expressed her distress and tried to distance herself from Lady Caroline, telling her 'I lament it, but as I can do no good I shall withdraw myself & suffer no more... let me alone I will have no more conversations with you upon this hurtful subject'.⁹⁸

This tactic was also employed by women from the middling ranks of society. Benjamin Smith's sisters' refusal to discuss Anne Longden and the children of their relationship left him without their support after her death from tuberculosis in 1834.

⁹⁶ Cth, CS5, 1061, Dowager Countess Spencer to Duchess of Devonshire, 9 September 1790 and 1063, Dowager Countess Spencer to Duchess of Devonshire, 10 September 1790.

⁹⁷ See conversation in Ibid.

⁹⁸ BL, Add. MS 45546, fol. 16, Lady Melbourne to Lady Caroline Lamb, 13 April 1810.

The Smith women's emotional (and physical) distance from his household meant that Benjamin did not receive the support from his family that a widower could usually expect, and they initially suggested he should place his five illegitimate children with a different family. Just a couple of weeks after Anne's death, his sister Patty unsympathetically remarked to Frances Nightingale that Benjamin 'must marry & well'—sentiments she might not have shared so callously if it had been a wife who had died.⁹⁹ Emotional support whilst Benjamin was grieving was not forthcoming either, and only his brother-in-law, William Nightingale wrote 'kind' letters to him in the weeks after Anne's death. Benjamin's responses to these letters reveal how difficult he was finding life as a single parent with five young children and no familial support, whilst also highlighting his sense of isolation from his family in the wake of Anne's death and his overwhelming grief:

Your kind letter did me good, when I was most in want of it—no one who has not felt the dreary void that follows in such a case, can tell or conceive how much—I wish I could come to you but the governess who was with the children having left... there is no body in whose care I feel easy to leave them for a longer time than I can help.¹⁰⁰

He could not seek solace from his family as he was unable to bring his children with him when he visited; they and their mother were taboo. Benjamin felt fortunate to

⁹⁹ Claydon, Nightingale Papers, bundle 28, Martha Frances Smith to Frances Nightingale, 20 September 1834.

¹⁰⁰ Claydon, Nightingale Papers, bundle 29, Benjamin Smith to William Edward Nightingale, 16 September 1834.

be able to express his emotions to his brother-in-law, but acknowledged that even he had a limit: 'the first return to a house which had been left in disorder by one who can never come again is a severe trial-But there is no now occasion to tax your good nature'.¹⁰¹ Withholding emotional support, or calculatedly manipulating another's emotions, was an effective punishment that women utilised frequently, and often refused to relinquish even during very traumatic periods of their relative's life. The Duchess of Devonshire told her mother that her criticisms 'wound a heart yt is full of the tenderest & most dutiful love to you'; Mary Shelley's short diary entry recording that Claire had sent for their sister Fanny Imlay after the death of Mary's baby, 'but she does not come' hinted at the void left by her absence; and Benjamin Smith clearly felt his mother and sisters' absence keenly.¹⁰² The fact that this strategy could be employed by women from the aristocracy and middling sorts alike suggests that all women recognised the value of their emotional support and used this to great effect. The knowledge of how detrimental being excluded from this comfort and intimacy could be to their errant relatives cannot have been easy to endure, but many did as it was a method for women to make their disapproval felt, and also ensured that it was clear to outsiders that they did not condone misconduct.

Fathers were expected to be more naturally authoritative than mothers. Imagery abounded over this period, analogising fathers to kings who were responsible for disciplining their families and maintaining order.¹⁰³ As Begiato has

¹⁰¹ Claydon, Nightingale Papers, bundle 29, Benjamin Smith to William Edward Nightingale, 19 September 1834.

¹⁰² Cth, CS5, 1062, Duchess of Devonshire to Dowager Countess Spencer, 9 September 1790; Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814-1844*, ed. Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert (2 vols, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), vol. 1, p. 68.

¹⁰³ Davidoff et al, *The Family Story*, p. 136.

shown, in the eighteenth century this ideal was not necessarily representative of reality, and mothers could be disciplinarians just as fathers could be tender and affectionate to their children.¹⁰⁴ Patriarchal authority was frequently challenged by adult children, regardless of its symbolic power.¹⁰⁵ Both Charles Burney and William Godwin's initial attempts to quash their offspring's controversial relationships were unsuccessful. Both men expressed their disapproval when their children confided in them: Charles Burney forbade James from moving in with himself and Sally, and Godwin 'expostulated' with Percy and Mary, but both fathers were ultimately 'deceived'.¹⁰⁶ Rather than continuing their attempts to bring their children under their control, both fathers renounced them. Charles Burney told Frances that he 'was determined to *leave them to themselves*. He most positively commanded me not to interfere'.¹⁰⁷ This reluctance to act was 'truly unexpected', as was the fact that Burney did not want to discuss it with his family.¹⁰⁸ Fathers were clearly expected to remonstrate with their adult children for misconduct—but repeated failures convinced some that abandoning them would be a better solution. Burney and Godwin both refused to allow their errant children back into the family home and would not communicate with them directly—often using their other children as intermediaries. It was difficult to control the actions of adult children who could

¹⁰⁴ Bailey, *Parenting in England*, p. 158.

¹⁰⁵ It has been difficult to judge elite fathers based on these case studies: they were either dead, like the Duchess of Devonshire's and Lord Boringdon's fathers, or they do not seem to have written about the situation—like Lord Melbourne.

¹⁰⁶ William Godwin to John Taylor, 27 August 1814, as quoted in *The Elopement of Percy Bysshe Shelley and Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin*, p. 11.

¹⁰⁷ Frances D'Arbly to Mrs Phillips, 13-15 December 1798: *Letters of Frances Burney*, vol. 4, pp. 212-220.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

ultimately live independently, however, even in cases where children were still dependent on their fathers, paternal authority could still be resented and subverted.

Soane provided substantial financial assistance to his son George and his family, allowing them to maintain their genteel lifestyle. When George refused to remove Maria Boaden from his household, Soane used his position to try and influence the situation. Firstly, he withheld their allowance, 'in the hope that its temporary suspension would have immediately produced...reformation in their conduct'; he then tried to create disunity by asking to see Agnes Soane alone so that he could question her and get the facts.¹⁰⁹ He promised Agnes protection and financial support, for her and her children, if she could either dismiss Maria, or 'retire with her children to a place of quiet and safety, leaving her wretched sister and criminal husband to indulge without interruption their bad propensities'.¹¹⁰

In his document narrating the scandal's progression, Soane was keen to present himself as a caring father-in-law (and grandfather) and expressed his concern for his legitimate relatives. In contrast he was severe about his son, and his illegitimate grandchild and its mother were treated with contempt. Frustrated by his lack of success with either George or Agnes, Soane escalated his attempts to force them to end the arrangement. He circulated a pamphlet chronicling the situation so that people in their social networks would be scandalised and ostracise the family. This enraged George and led him to threaten the printers with libel action.¹¹¹ Furthermore, Soane told George's landlord, 'Mr. England', about the incestuous family he was harbouring under his roof—and that he had withdrawn George's

¹⁰⁹ Soane, *The Conduct and Connexions of George Soane*, p. 18.

¹¹⁰ Soane Museum Archives, 4/C/12/3, Sir John Soane to John Boaden, 9 April 1832.

¹¹¹ Soane, *The Conduct and Connexions of George Soane*, p. 21.

allowance for as long as it continued.¹¹² This had the desired effect, and Mr England went immediately to 'insist' that Maria and her son left the house 'within one hour', and angrily reproached George for making his 'house as bad as the worst brothel in England'.¹¹³ This was a small victory for Soane, however, as George told his wife and Mr England 'no power on earth' would keep him from Maria.¹¹⁴ Indeed, the conclusion of Soane's narrative describes how they tricked him into paying the family's allowance to Agnes whilst George moved the family close to Maria Boaden's residence and the ménage continued across two houses. This case, and the others, suggest that the image of the authoritative father was a very difficult masculine role for men to fulfil; even though his son was financially dependent on him, Soane simply did not have the power to put a stop to his illicit liaison.

Most of the parents in this chapter were less exhaustive than Soane in their attempts to right the wrongs they perceived in their children's conduct. However, amongst the middling sorts especially, their control over who was permitted to enter their own domestic space was one that they would not yield. The middle-class domestic ideal of the home as a private sanctum, a comfortable refuge from the public world, has been considered a Victorian phenomenon, but as Harvey suggests, the concept of 'home' as a 'multi-faceted state of being, encompassing the emotional, physical, moral and spatial' was already popular by the end of the eighteenth century.¹¹⁵ In 1798, Charles Burney refused to allow James or Sally to come back to the house: he wanted 'never more to see or hear of them', and

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹¹⁵ Harvey, 'Men Making Home', p. 536.

furthermore, 'he expected' that his other children 'could not visit those who fled him while under his roof'; in the 1810s, the Godwins would not allow Mary into their house, although Claire was encouraged to return. And, to extend their authority over those in their home, they also forbade Mary's sister, Fanny, and Claire's brother, Charles, from visiting the Shelley household; in the 1820s and 30s, Soane refused to admit Maria Boaden into his house when she called with her son to ask for help; and the Smiths would not allow Anne Longden or her children into any of their homes, however, Benjamin was still welcome on his own.¹¹⁶ The home emerges as an important site through which reactions could be manifested—control over the domestic space marked the family's rejection of the individuals who had betrayed them, but it also was a means to perform their disapproval to observers from the outside world.

As Davidoff et al point out, the residences of the aristocracy were not viewed as private havens but were public facing spaces that emphasised their social position.¹¹⁷ There is some evidence, however, that suggests that the elite similarly used domestic spaces to demonstrate their acceptance or rejection of controversial liaisons. Lady Villiers was reluctant both to let Monck into her home, or to call upon her, only doing so when directed by her husband; and in 1787, Dowager Countess Spencer wrote to her son to tell him that she had declined the Duchess's invitation to Devonshire House because she had 'an unsurmountable objection to being in the house with the obstacle [Foster] which is I think giving my sanction in some degree

¹¹⁶ Frances D'Arblay to Mrs Phillips, 12 March 1799: *Letters of Frances Burney*, vol. 4, pp. 240-250; Soane, *The Conduct and Connexions of George Soane*, p. 19.

¹¹⁷ Davidoff et al, *The Family Story*, p. 116.

to that incomprehensible connexion'.¹¹⁸ Two years later the Duchess would thank her mother profusely for saying that she would allow Foster to visit her house in Chiswick, as it implied a tacit acceptance of Foster in the family.¹¹⁹ Although the home undoubtedly had different meanings to families from different ranks, no one happily invited those they did not approve of into them. For members of both status groups, the home was symbolic, and admittance into the home, or visiting the homes of others, was a marker of acceptance—one that could be recognised externally as well as between the individuals in question. In contrast, refusing entry to the home and snubbing the home of another indicated disapproval and rejection.

Families from the middling sorts snubbed relatives whose behaviour they viewed as transgressive, to both express their disapproval and to punish them. This was a practice that was distinctive to the middling-sorts and was directed almost exclusively towards women. Godwin cut Mary when he saw her in the street, and told her sister Fanny that she could not see her; Soane refused to even respond to a letter from Maria Boaden; and the Smiths shunned Anne Longden but would see their son and brother.¹²⁰ Burney was alone in shunning his son as well as his daughter, but as he felt James was to blame for depriving him of Sally (and her housekeeping), and trying to steal his maid, Molly, theirs was an unusual situation—the male hierarchies in the family had been badly disturbed. The elite did not shun their relatives for misconduct: Lady Melbourne expressed her wish to cut ties with Lady Caroline, but she was unable to while her son refused to separate from her. As

¹¹⁸ BL, Add. MS 75914, Dowager Countess Spencer to 2nd Earl Spencer, 12 February 1787.

¹¹⁹ Cth, CS5, 950, Duchess of Devonshire to Dowager Countess Spencer, 12 May 1789.

¹²⁰ *The Journals of Mary Shelley*, vol. 1, p. 41, pp. 44-5; Soane, *The Conduct and Connexions of George Soane*, p. 20.

Hannah Greig has shown, adulterous women often returned to the protection of their birth families if their husbands removed them from their marital homes, and families could hide their shameful relatives from public view in cottages on their estate.¹²¹ As we have seen in this chapter, elite women (and families) often had to tolerate the mistresses of their brothers, fathers, sons, sons-in-law, and even husbands; men from the middling sorts did not have the same powers to force their families to accept their mistresses.

On the surface, it appears that the reactions of families from the middling sorts were more severe towards their errant relatives, however, it was not that straightforward. Controversial relationships rarely elicited a united response from the family, and often provoked pre-existing tensions into conflict. This was most apparent in the Burney and Godwin families, where their respective siblings' conduct caused intergenerational disagreements. Unlike her father, Frances was unwilling to allow the estrangement to continue and devised a way that she and her husband could visit the pair at eldest sister's Hetty's house without being too offensive to her father.¹²² She also made many attempts to reconcile him with her siblings, and tried to coerce him by appealing to his softer side: in July 1799 she wrote that she 'grieve[d]... at the impression made on your mind by poor J & S' and assured him that whilst she would 'take no measures against your consent' she hoped that he would not 'forbid my occasionally naming them, & letting you know how they go on'.¹²³ Frances claimed that her 'love of peace making' directed her actions, and, although

¹²¹ Hannah Greig *The Beau Monde: Fashionable Society in Georgian London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 199.

¹²² Frances D'Arblay to Mrs Phillips, 12 March 1799: *Letters of Frances Burney*, vol. 4, pp. 240-250.

¹²³ Frances D'Arblay to Dr Burney, 25 July 1799: *ibid.*, pp. 311-315.

she in no way challenged her father's authority, she did use notions of her own emotional vulnerability and sensibility-attributes of her feminine status-to try and manipulate his resolve. William Godwin's stepchildren, although deferent and obedient to his face, also subverted his authority by visiting Mary, Percy and Claire. Fanny Imlay was in an awkward position as her loyalties were divided: Mary was her only blood relative, but her dutiful role to the family as the eldest daughter was deeply ingrained in her. In November 1814, 'Mrs G did not allow Fanny to come down to dinner', because she had received a lock of Mary's hair, yet on other occasions Fanny defended Mrs Godwin, informing Mary that 'Mamma...is anxious to make you appear in the very best manner'.¹²⁴ Although in the beginning Godwin's authority over Fanny had held, when Mary had her baby in February 1815, Fanny visited late at night on a number of occasions.¹²⁵

Men could perhaps afford to be more permissible with the conduct of those they socialised with. Charles Clairmont was also discouraged from visiting the trio; however, he had more freedom than Fanny and visited frequently, often staying late.¹²⁶ Charles admired Percy Shelley and his principles. He wrote to a friend in 1816 that he thought 'Godwin's treatment of Shelley unjust', he was 'a young man of the greatest refinement', and his relationship with Mary was legitimate as 'he who leaves such a woman for another in every respect more suited to his intellectual nature, acts neither selfishly or sensually'.¹²⁷ He clearly favoured his step-father's earlier views on

¹²⁴ Fanny Imlay to Mary Godwin, 3 October 1816: Marion Kingston Stocking (ed.), *The Clairmont Correspondence: Letters of Claire Clairmont, Charles Clairmont, and Fanny Imlay Godwin* (2 vols, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), vol. 1, pp. 80-83.

¹²⁵ *The Journals of Mary Shelley*, vol. 1, pp. 65-66.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 26, p. 47, p. 53.

¹²⁷ Charles Clairmont to Francis Place, 12 January 1816: *The Clairmont Correspondence*, vol. 1, pp. 17-23.

heterosexual conduct, but Charles noted that he was not 'forgetful of the many obligations I am under to Godwin, or the claims which he and all my family have upon me'. As an adult male, Charles refused to be constrained by Godwin and his mother's demands. The two generations of the Godwin/Clairmont household were divided in their reactions to the affair, as the younger family members differed in their opinions and sympathies. Discord in the family caused individuals a significant amount of anxiety; Frances Burney frequently wrote about how distressed she was, and Fanny Imlay struggled with her conflicted loyalties, and the strain is thought to have influenced her suicide in October 1817. Her tragic death reopened communications between Godwin and Mary, who began a stilted correspondence, but relations only improved significantly when Percy and Mary married, after his first wife's suicide in December 1817. Unlike in contemporary novels, where there was rarely ever redemption for transgressive children, particularly daughters, most of the families in this chapter reconciled to an extent: the Soanes were the only exception.¹²⁸ Amongst the middling sorts reconciliations only occurred after a relationship had been legitimised (like Mary Shelley's), or had been ended, but amongst the elite degrees of acceptance always varied, and over a prolonged period of time family members, like Dowager Countess Spencer or Lady Villiers, eventually learnt to tolerate their relative's illicit partners.

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¹²⁸ For example, in two of Amelia Opie's novels, *The Father and Daughter* (1801) and *Adeline Mowbray* (1804) the female protagonists are disowned by their parents on account of sexual transgressions, and only reconcile on their death beds; in Lamb's *Glenarvon* (1816), one of the titular character's young female lovers, Alice Mac Allain, is exiled from her family home and shunned by her father, a doctor. She dies impoverished and alone without being reconciled with her father, much to his regret.

Glimpses of the family in crisis reveal that there was a significant amount of overlap between norms and expectations within the family, across both the period and social spectrum. They articulated similar concerns and reacted in comparable ways when threatened by transgression. These similarities and continuities were scarcely affected by cultural changes around them, which suggests that certain features were intrinsic to the Georgian family as a category, independent of rank and time. Whether they were worried about the image and endurance of their dynasty and access to power, or they relied on a business or trade and had to maintain the image of respectability, families feared being associated with scandal because it could damage their reputation and thereby reduce their social capital: the sexual transgressions of one member threatened the family as a collective. Hence, they employed a variety of practices in attempts to keep scandalous behaviour a secret. It is impossible to separate the family's public face from what was going on in its private network; fears about the family's shared identity were grounded in the fact that its members would be judged for their private failures to instil morality and respect for duty and obligation in their relatives—parents were the most burdened by this, but it also affected other family members. Even with the expansion of the media, which given that many of these families contained public figures we might expect to be significant, families were predominantly concerned about how their own reference group would perceive them. Scandal operated in many spheres—not exclusively the media—and for many it was their specific societies by whom they set their standards—moral or otherwise.

Specific expectations and norms varied per family. Rank was not necessarily an important factor, as some members of the aristocracy were much more

concerned about Christian morality than others. That said, across the spectrum, an individual who fell in love with someone that they were not supposed to, or who would not or could not legitimise their relationship, was betraying their family in a variety of ways. Firstly, their betrayal of the family's values was disappointing and upsetting—family members found it difficult to understand those whose actions they perceived to be immoral or abnormal, and often responded angrily or dejectedly. Thus, controversial relationships caused a lot of conflict within the family, which was problematic as harmonious familial relationships were very important because they offered individuals a sense of stability and security. The cases considered here suggest that family members, and particularly siblings, felt they had a strong claim for precedence over others regarding an individual's emotional support, confidence, and intimacy; this was part of the mutual obligations upon which their relationships were founded. The natal (and marital) family was central to the emotional worlds of the individual—even in adulthood. Only marital relationships could supersede them, and family members could be particularly resentful if they felt they had been demoted by someone who did not have a legitimate claim. Parents expected to derive comfort and deference from their adult children and were frustrated when these expectations were not met. The idea of the authoritarian father figure was impossible to maintain in practice. Filial obedience was difficult to enforce, both in the transgressive child and in some cases in their other offspring; over a period where mores and values were transitioning, intergenerational conflict was not uncommon. Controversial relationships often led to a renegotiation of sibling and parental relationships. Most individuals struggled to manage the conflict and disunity in their families. The lack of loyalty, defiance, indifference, and distancing of a once close

relative was difficult for individuals to reconcile themselves with, therefore the majority chose to blame the outsider-demonising the other as a deceptive and cunning individual, who had enchanted their relative and led them to forget their former loyalties and duties was easier than imagining this rejection was of their own will—an image which left them with a fractured sense of familial identity.

Thus, emotional cultures within aristocratic and middling class families had considerable commonalities: their obligations and expectations of duty, affection, intimacy, deference, loyalty, were very similar, even if their exact meanings varied. Their outside worlds though were less comparable and the social consequences for transgressive behaviour were more variable. This perhaps accounts for why the forms familial reactions took varied more than the emotions and tensions that they provoked within the family. While Soane was unique in going to such lengths in his attempts to regain order in his family, most did try several different measures to get their family member to end their liaison. These measures varied according to the individual's status, gender, and position in the family, and that of the family member whose behaviour they were criticising. Men tried to impose their authority, first upon the transgressor and subsequently on other members of their family—though this was rarely successful. In contrast, women were brought together by familial crises, drawing upon their epistolary networks to express their anger and hostility, and often trying to make family members negotiate and reconcile. Most of the women in this chapter were rarely acting on the orders of men and had considerable agency of their own in managing familial relationships. Family members distanced themselves emotionally and physically from errant relatives for two possible reasons: firstly, as a defensive mechanism—a means by which to exhibit their disapproval to the outside

world, because being seen to condone such behaviour would compromise their social position; and secondly, it was an emotional response—a means to punish those whom they felt had betrayed them. The domestic space was used by many families as a symbol of acceptance and rejection, but the middling sorts alone resorted to cutting.

The double standard manifested itself differently for the different status groups: in elite families men could force their family members to tolerate their mistresses—albeit reluctantly; elite women’s lovers could not be accepted into the family fold, however, adulterous women were not exiled from their families even if they were from society. Amongst the middling groups men did not have the power of their elite counterparts to make their relatives accept a relationship they believed was inappropriate, but they themselves were rarely ostracised for it. Women from the middling sorts who engaged in these relationships fared the worst: they faced the social sanctions imposed by wider societal expectations as their families took a clear standpoint and shunned and isolated them, and they were also barred from entering their lover’s domestic situations. Even individuals who were not physically shunned still expressed feelings of rejection and isolation and bemoaned the lack of support offered by their families, such attitudes can be found amongst Lord Boringdon, Benjamin Smith, Lady Caroline Lamb, the Duchess of Devonshire, and Elizabeth Kent. Given the centrality of the family in the creation of individual identity, what effect did this have? The last chapter of this thesis will now turn to the individual to analyse the impact that their sense of exclusion and isolation from the different spheres hitherto examined had on their sense of self.

Chapter 5: Self-Assessment, Justification, and the Limits of Defiance

It is unkind & cruel in you to... drive me ... into reflections that kill me... when you force me thus to look back with despair into myself – can I conceal from myself or from you, of how little value my vows my promises must be – can I deny that I am already perjurd that I have broke thro' every sacred tie.¹

Countess Bessborough to Granville Leveson Gower, 1798.

I am proud in the conviction of having set a good example; somewhat proud of the success of my effort; but prouder still of the honourable and useful position which I still fill in the community, in aid and assistance of the true spirit of reform for whatever is corrupt and wrong. There are those who reproach my marriage... nothing could have been more pure in moral, more free from venality.²

Eliza Sharples, *The Isis*, 1834.

Engaging in a relationship that was deemed to be sexually transgressive did not entirely determine an individual's sense of identity, however, it often prompted them to reflect on their character and behaviour. The reflections they expressed focused on religious and secular precepts of morality, both their own and those of the social group to which they belonged. The last four chapters have demonstrated that over this period it was undoubtedly women, from all ranks, who risked the most from engaging in controversial relationships: they were more likely than their male lovers to be confronted and criticised by friends, family, and even mere acquaintances for

¹ BL, Granville Papers, Add MS 89382/2/9, fols. 44-45, Countess Bessborough to Granville Leveson Gower, 28 August 1798.

² Eliza Sharples, 'Preface', *The Isis*, 29 May 1834, p.v.

their actions; more likely to be ostracised and isolated, left without emotional or financial support; they were also the most vulnerable to the consequences of illicit sex–illegitimate pregnancy; and their reputations, once damaged, were more difficult to redeem. Consequently, this chapter will focus exclusively on women, and will examine how they reflected on their conduct and how they evaluated themselves. It will consider how these reflections shaped the ‘self’ and the ménages that they portrayed for various audiences—including themselves. As the two examples above demonstrate, women’s ruminations on their sexual and romantic conduct were extremely diverse. Their contemporaries labelled both Countess Bessborough and Eliza Sharples as mistresses of their respective lovers, and the children born of the liaisons were all considered by society to be bastards, but the women construed their positions and reflected on their behaviour with marked variance. How and why did some women justify their controversial ménages on the grounds of morality, sustain a positive opinion of themselves in the face of mass condemnation, and critique their exclusion from conventional society, whilst others engaging in similar relationships were absorbed by feelings of shame and guilt, and were terrified of the prospect that their conduct could be laid bare for their associates to judge and condemn?

Kate Gibson has recently addressed the question of how some women who engaged in extra-marital relationships managed to ‘construct a self-identity that was not inevitably characterised by shame’.³ Gibson argues that women could, and did, strategically use discourses associated with romantic love and sensibility to ‘bolster

³ Kate Gibson, “‘I am not on the footing of Kept Women’: Extra-Marital Love in Eighteenth-Century England”, *Cultural and Social History* (2019), 1-19, <doi: 10.1080/14780038.2019.1642064>, (p. 3).

their sense of identity and self-worth'.⁴ She examines the letters of 'E.B', a mistress of Lord Tyrconnel known only by her initials, to demonstrate how she sought to portray their liaison as a loving, monogamous relationship, that was based on natural affection and the pursuit of happiness—and which contrasted unfavourably with his mercenary marriage, where both parties were unfaithful. 'E.B' saw her conduct in terms of Enlightenment values, like sincerity and individualism, and, she portrayed her affair with Tyrconnel as being virtuous and 'respectable' despite the fact that popular opinion labelled it 'sinful'.⁵ She only lost her confidence in her principles when she was visibly pregnant with Tyrconnel's child and she became uncertain of his commitment as he began to distance himself physically, emotionally and financially.⁶ As her status as a mistress became more 'public' with her advancing pregnancy, 'E.B.' found herself excluded from aristocratic circles, and suddenly she began to express the shame attached to her situation. This leads Gibson to argue that 'shame' was not 'an emotion inherently attached to the action of committing adultery', but was more often the result of 'material circumstances'—like pregnancy or precarity.⁷ While Gibson makes a convincing case, I am not sure how broadly applicable this argument is to women engaging in extra-marital relationships over this period: some women expressed their shame when engaging in secret or extremely discreet affairs because of the immorality attached to adulterous sex, whilst others knew the precarity of their situation but went public with their relationships and rejected the shame that they knew society would cast on them.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

Furthermore, because Gibson's sole source of information is the letters that 'E.B' wrote to her lover, the assessment of her character is necessarily one-dimensional; perhaps her missives were constructed to engineer reassurances from her lover of his affection and the virtuous nature of their relationship, and also to convince him that she was a self-assured woman, who was deserving of his love. We do not know what 'self' she portrayed to her parents, siblings, or friends, or indeed what she really thought of herself.

This chapter examines the journals, letters, and publications of several women, each of whom has been discussed at various points in the previous chapters. Historians have shown that none of these sources can offer a direct window into an individual's thoughts and emotions. Anna Clark examines how queer individuals, like the Yorkshire gentlewomen, Anne Lister, used their journals as spaces in which they could experiment with different discourses to 'create' an alternative self, enabling them to develop their own 'persona'.⁸ Adopting a persona allowed these individuals to hide certain feelings from others.⁹ Others, including Clare Brant, have suggested that letters enable us to see how an author constructed (sometimes multiple) versions of themselves as they would like to be seen by their correspondent(s), or in the case of public letters, audiences.¹⁰ Moreover, as we have seen throughout this thesis, letters were instruments that individuals used to conduct and negotiate a

⁸ Anna Clark, *Alternative Histories of the Self: A Cultural History of Sexuality and Secrets, 1762-1917* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), pp. 8-10.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁰ Henry French and Mark Rothery (eds), *Making Men: The Formation of Elite Male Identities in England, c.1660-1900: A Sourcebook* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 13; Clare Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 26.

variety of interpersonal relationships, therefore, their self-representations were shaped to serve particular purposes in accordance with their specific audience.

This chapter attempts to disentangle how women internalised the sexual norms of their social group and how this affected their self-assessments and representations. How did they interpret their own feelings and actions, especially when they were contrary to those they felt were expected of them? What sorts of moral issues did they perceive their liaisons to highlight? Were they concerned about behaving morally for the sake of ethics and virtue, or were they fearful of social rejection? What rationale did they see for obeying the codes of conduct for their social group? And how did they justify breaking these codes? I also examine the factors that determined how these norms were internalised. To analyse their diverse opinions and self-assessments, I have divided these women into three categories: Firstly, Whig women who suggested that their relationships were socially and sexually transgressive, and immoral; secondly, Whig women who did not express the belief that their behaviour was unethical or inappropriate, as long as it conformed to certain discretionary codes; and thirdly, those from the marginal literary societies from the middle classes, who were bolstered by a sense that their relationships *were* moral and rejected society's norms and judgements because they believed that reform was needed.

I

I lov'd this man to distraction, & gave him every proof of love woman could give-& dreading the misery my disgrace would bring on my family, or my poor mother, & my children, I conceal'd my guilt-I dared by deceit retain

the affection of my friends & usurp a place in society I had no right to...
believe me you cannot see me in blacker colours than I do myself.¹¹

In December 1809, shortly before Lady Harriet Cavendish's wedding to Granville Leveson Gower, her aunt, Countess Bessborough, wrote her a letter, confessing to and reflecting on her affair with her niece's bridegroom. The Countess described the anxiety that the relationship had caused her because of the 'deceit' in which she was constantly engaged to keep her guilty secret from being uncovered—an event she wanted to avoid as this would lead to the whole family being engulfed by shame and scandal. The claims the Countess made to her niece were not just guilty reflections on past behaviour; as we saw in chapter one, over the course of their fifteen-year long affair, Countess Bessborough consistently berated herself for her conduct in her letters to Leveson Gower, and the couple appear to have had many tense exchanges debating the morality of their connection. Whilst Leveson Gower rejected her accusations of 'gallantry', a code of elite masculine conduct which had connotations with libertinism, Countess Bessborough often described herself as 'depraved', 'wicked', and 'wretched'.¹² She emphasised her culpability, often telling Leveson Gower that he was not to blame because she had 'encourag'd' him (despite evidence to the contrary), and issued long tirades of self-loathing.¹³ This tendency to be melodramatically self-critical and deprecating was a practice that the Countess

¹¹ BL, Granville Papers, Add MS 89382/3/2, fols. 28-30, Countess Bessborough to Lady Harriet Cavendish, [December 1809].

¹² For examples, see BL, Add MS 89382/2/8, fols. 58-59, Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, [1798]; BL, Add MS 89382/2/9, fols. 17-18, Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, 9 August 1798; BL, Add MS 89382/2/5, fol. 300, Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, [1796].

¹³ BL, Add MS 89382/2/5, fols. 57-58, Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, [5 July 1795].

handed down to her daughter, Lady Caroline Lamb, who similarly described herself as a 'wretch' who was 'a disgrace to... all' her family on account of her affair with Lord Byron.¹⁴

As we saw in chapter two, attitudes towards controversial relationships fluctuated in Whig society over this period: for women, the declining popularity of sensibility meant that their peers began to treat them less compassionately, and, in addition to this, the fracturing of the social and political cohesion of the party meant that individuals had less of a trusted support network to turn to in times of difficulty. Paradoxically, sexual mores relaxed gradually over the course of the Regency and into George IV's reign, which meant that although they might have been criticised more harshly, women generally evaded the more punitive social sanctions for their (moderate) indiscretions. That said, both Countess Bessborough and Lady Caroline reflected on the risks they undertook for their affairs, and they expressed similar concerns about how their personal choices impacted negatively on their sense of self, their religious identity, and their families. Their self-assessments and portrayals suggest that upbringing had a significant influence on how elite women thought about morality, love and duty, as well as how they internalised the social and sexual mores of their rank.

Clark suggests that religion remained 'one of the most important discourses' that individuals drew upon to understand themselves.¹⁵ This was true for the Countess, which was problematic, as she found her desires and actions difficult to

¹⁴ BL, Holland House Papers, Add MS 51560, fols. 201-203, Lady Caroline Lamb to Lady Holland, [post 5 July 1813]; BL, Lamb Papers, Add MS 45546, fol. 71, Lady Caroline Lamb to Lady Melbourne, [1812-1814].

¹⁵ Clark, *Alternative Histories of the Self*, p. 8.

reconcile with her Christian identity. Her experience is unlikely to have been unusual: Joanne Begiato and William Gibson argue that religion continued to shape attitudes towards sexual morality over this period.¹⁶ As children, both mother and daughter received an extensive religious education: Countess Bessborough's mother, Dowager Countess Spencer, was renowned for demanding strict adherence to evangelical principles in her visitors—let alone her children, and Lady Caroline was taught by the governess her grandmother had recommended, Selina Trimmer, daughter of the pious educational reformer, Sarah Trimmer. Countess Bessborough felt her affair was incompatible with her religious practices: on one occasion she fretted about communicating with the Bishop of London, and on another she told Leveson Gower that she had 'been crying all morning' after receiving her 'usual summons to attend the sacrament—but I shall certainly not prophane it by my presence it would be almost sacrilege'.¹⁷ She further explained that it was 'torture' for her 'believing & respecting...our religion whilst I am acting in open defiance of them all'. Maintaining her relationship with Leveson Gower obliged Bessborough to commit a multitude of 'sinful' behaviours.

Before the affair began, Countess Bessborough tried to cut ties with Leveson Gower after an incident where she allowed him 'to press me against your bosom without resistance'.¹⁸ This physical intimacy marked the crossing of a boundary, and she stated that their flirtation had become a 'criminal attachment'. Extra-marital sex similarly signified transgression to Lady Caroline: she retained some sense of

¹⁶ William Gibson & Joanne Begiato, *Sex and the Church in the Long-Eighteenth Century* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), pp. 1-3.

¹⁷ BL, Add MS 89382/2/8, fols. 56-57, Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, [spring 1798].

¹⁸ BL, Add MS. 89382/2/5, fols. 142-143, Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, [1796].

respectability after ending her flirtation with Sir Godfrey Webster, feeling she had proved she was 'not wicked enough to live with one Man & like another'; but after her affair with Lord Byron she described herself as 'wholly ruined... completely fallen'.¹⁹ Lady Calantha Avondale, the heroine from Lady Caroline's roman-à-clef *Glenarvon* (1816), is similarly discomposed the morning after consummating her relationship with the Byronic Glenarvon: 'To wake is terrible when the heaviness of sin is upon us!'.²⁰ There is an obvious change in Bessborough's tone after the couple consummated their relationship towards the end of 1796, and after this she began to portray herself very negatively. Not least because she was then compelled to engage in deceitful and manipulative practices to continue their affair. Lying to her sister about her feelings, and to her husband about her whereabouts, made her particularly uncomfortable. Her relationship with Leveson Gower also brought her into contact with Lord Boringdon's mistress, Lady Elizabeth Monck. When Bessborough became embroiled in schemes to hide Monck's pregnancy from her husband in October 1798, she noted that she was 'quite shock'd at myself for the fertility of my invention in schemes to save her; it seems to me a proof of natural depravity & falsehood'.²¹ The constant deception of those she was close to, and her ability to do it successfully, was problematic for Bessborough, and left her fearful that she might be fundamentally immoral.

Lady Caroline was less explicit about how religious precepts of morality influenced her interpretation of her own sexual conduct. She did suggest to her

¹⁹ BL, Add MS. 51560, fol. 164, Lady Caroline Lamb to Lady Holland [May 1811]; and fols. 201-203, Lady Caroline Lamb to Lady Holland, [post July 1813].

²⁰ Lady Caroline Lamb, *Glenarvon* (Kansas: Valancourt Books, 2007, orig. 1816), p. 218.

²¹ BL, Add. MS 89382/2/10, fols. 22-23, Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, [October 1798]. For longer discussion of this episode see chapter 1.

mother-in-law, Lady Melbourne, that when she had married William Lamb she had a 'horror of vice of deceit or any thing that was the least improper', but that he had teased her about her 'superstitious enthusiasm' and instructed her in 'the worlds' wickedness'.²² She feared divine 'punishment' and told Lady Melbourne that she was fearful her baby would be taken for her 'sins'.²³ Furthermore, in *Glenarvon*, Calantha 'renounced' God's 'favour and protection' which led to much misfortune.²⁴ Although she suggested that she had lost her connection to Christianity as a result of her sexual conduct, Lady Caroline told Lady Holland that she respected those who shunned her on the basis of the 'strict undeviating principles' of 'Religion'; in contrast, those who shunned her on the basis of 'mere Worldly prudence' she felt were hypocritical and unjust.²⁵ Lady Caroline continued to use religion as a marker for sincere virtue compared to false performances of morality. During her affair with Byron she was not particularly loquacious about the morality of her conduct, but this was something she reflected on when writing *Glenarvon*. The narrator explains that 'Calantha felt no horror at her conduct. She deceived herself: conscience itself had ceased to reprove a heart so absorbed, so lost in the labyrinth of guilt'.²⁶

Christian principles were intrinsic to social mores over this period. Despite criticisms that they were falsely performed in elite society, Christian virtues of sincerity, modesty, loyalty, and chastity were standard expectations for female conduct. Countess Bessborough's frequent portrayals of herself as deceitful, immoral, unfaithful, and unchaste, often dwelt on the emotional and social

²² BL, Add MS 45546, fols. 13-15, Lady Caroline Lamb to Lady Melbourne, 24 March 1810.

²³ BL, Add MS 45546, fols. 21-22, Lady Caroline Lamb to Lady Melbourne, [April/June 1810].

²⁴ Lamb, *Glenarvon*, p. 299.

²⁵ BL, Add MS 51560, fol. 187, Lady Caroline Lamb to Lady Holland, [July 1811].

²⁶ Lamb, *Glenarvon*, p. 263.

ramifications that her failure to practice Christian virtues would have on her family. In 1798, she wrote to Leveson Gower, 'God if my poor mother knew what I am... I should be her murderer how deeply tenfold wicked & depraved I must be more than any other woman who with the kindest husband, children whom I adore & such a mother & sister'.²⁷ Lady Caroline expressed similar concerns about how her conduct was affecting her mother, but she was most concerned about the impact of her 'ruin' on her husband, 'the most noble the most generous of human beings', who, in standing by her despite the humiliation and disdain from his family and friends alike, had 'sacrificed himself'.²⁸ Although Bessborough's husband had been quite volatile to her over the years, she was determined to present him to Leveson Gower as a victim, undeserving of their disgrace.²⁹ As discussed in the previous chapter, due to the interdependent nature of reputation, the transgressions of one's relatives could tarnish the family name. Unable, or unwilling, to justify their affairs for any reason other than what they perceived as a selfish pursuit of pleasure and happiness, both women expressed regret and remorse for the shame and humiliation they would cause their families.

Women were aware that not conforming to the rules could have consequences for those they loved. Young women especially needed to be protected from the vulnerabilities that any exposure to sexual misconduct could cause. The danger of putting others at risk of social condemnation by association was a key part of the rationale for conforming to society's rules. In January 1805, Countess

²⁷ BL, Add MS 89382/2/8, fols. 58-59, Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, [1798].

²⁸ BL, Add MS 45546, fol. 20, Lady Caroline Lamb to Lady Melbourne, [n.d]; BL, Add MS 51560, fols. 201-203, Lady Caroline Lamb to Lady Holland, [post 5 July 1813].

²⁹ BL, Add MS 89382/2/9, fol. 61, Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, 8 September 1798.

Bessborough and Lady Caroline, then unmarried and aged only nineteen, received anonymous letters 'filled with every gross disgusting indecency'. The Countess reflected guiltily that no one could have been provoked by Lady Caroline, so she must have been targeted because she had 'a mother unworthy of her'.³⁰ The fear of association was compounded with the fear that young women would naturally look to older women as examples and could potentially emulate their behaviour; more senior members of society were expected to lead by example. As discussed in chapter two, the Duchess of Devonshire expressed her wish to keep her daughters away from Lady Jersey after the latter's scandalous affair with the Prince Regent in the 1790s, and she also kept Lady Anne Hatton at a distance from her eldest, Lady Georgiana, whilst Hatton was trying to negotiate marriage to the Marquess of Abercorn in 1800. Lady Holland also worried about the implications of Hatton's marriage, remarking that it seemed unlikely that the next generation of 'young women will credit wise precepts of Virtue alone is rewarded'.³¹ The fact that on account of her promiscuity Hatton had been in a 'humiliating state', vulnerable to 'neglect, poverty, & discredit' would be dangers forgotten. By judging their own and each other's behaviour, women were subconsciously setting expectations and standards for their group.

Both women reflected on the double standard. Perhaps trying to elicit sympathy from Lady Holland after her affair with Sir Godfrey Webster had ended, Lady Caroline remarked that affairs 'raise the man in the opinion of some but they

³⁰ BL, Add MS 89382/2/23, fol. 3, Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, 2 January 1805. The poison pen letters and the paragraphs that were used to attack members of the Devonshire House Set were discussed at length in chapter 2, see pp. 114-117.

³¹ BL, Holland House Papers, Lady Holland's Journals, Add MS 51929, 26 July 1799 - 28 April 1801, fols. 75-76.

lower the woman to the very dirt of the earth'.³² Bessborough related it explicitly to her own situation, attempting to get Leveson Gower to admit that he was not under the same constraints as she was. She urged him to recognise the risks she undertook for him and the cost to her mental and spiritual wellbeing. She portrayed her position using religious imagery: 'I have for you my G. sacrificis'd, peace here & happiness hereafter'—'I have sacrificis'd to you duty, peace, hope, modesty [sic]'.³³ Following a couple of these assertions she warned him that he had to accept some of the culpability: 'you too my love must share the evil which you have in part occasion'd'.³⁴ Unable to claim there was any virtue in their relationship, Bessborough found the immorality she attached to it a difficult burden to bear alone. She suggested to Leveson Gower that she saw them sharing an identity—'you are to me another self'.³⁵ It is possible that the Countess's persistent portrayals of her 'immoral' conduct to Leveson Gower were an attempt to seek absolution—by communicating her distress to him she framed his reassuring and soothing responses.

Countess Bessborough and Lady Caroline both blamed their breaking of the rules on emotions and passion that they felt were uncontrollable. The Countess wrote to Leveson Gower: 'I gave way to my love for you, to the wish of proving it, & the impossibility of refusing you'.³⁶ However, unlike Gibson's 'E.B', Bessborough did not think that love vindicated her: 'I am inexcusable' she lamented, a self-evaluation that Lady Caroline would echo, stating to Lady Holland that she did not 'seek to

³² BL, Add MS 51560, fols. 184-186, Lady Caroline Lamb to Lady Holland, [4 June 1811].

³³ BL, Add MS 89382/2/9, fols. 17-18, Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, 9 August 1798; and fol. 61, Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, 8 September 1798.

³⁴ BL, Add MS 89382/2/9, fol. 61, Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, 8 September 1798.

³⁵ BL, Add MS 89382/2/9, fols. 7-9, Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, 3 August 1798.

³⁶ BL, Add MS 89382/2/9, fols. 17-18, Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, 9 August 1798.

excuse' herself as it was impossible, and in Lady Calantha in *Glenarvon*, who, when confessing her sins to her aunt admonished that she had 'no excuse' for her behaviour.³⁷ This was partly due to the fact that they were unwilling to admit that there were problems in their marriages, and that made their betrayals and love for another difficult to justify. On the other hand, neither woman felt herself to be irredeemable. Lady Caroline felt that withdrawing herself from society would help, and Bessborough hoped that her attempts at penance could not be entirely in vain. Nonetheless, consumed by emotions they felt were uncontrollable, both Bessborough and Lady Calantha/Caroline submitted to their lovers: 'I have no will on earth but your's [sic]'.³⁸

Examining how Countess Bessborough and Lady Caroline internalised norms of conduct demonstrates that for some there was a subconscious process where religious principles were conflated with the social censure faced by individuals for 'immoral' behaviour. Unwilling to challenge the norms that regulated elite marriage and sexual conduct, which she clearly felt served some purpose, Bessborough was incapable of viewing her love for Leveson Gower as natural or moral in any way. She was baffled by Lady Elizabeth Monck's blasé attitude towards her affair with Lord Boringdon, recounting to Leveson Gower that 'she is happy enough to forget that acting as we do is not perfectly right & justifiable, I alas see & feel myself the worst of human beings'.³⁹ Her standards remained society's standards, (and her mother's standards) and so she perpetuated the norms and expectations of elite society even as she flouted them. Fearing the risks, on earth or in heaven, was not enough to check

³⁷ Lamb, *Glenarvon*, p. 297.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 210

³⁹ BL, Add MS 89382/2/13, fol. 134, Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, [late 1799].

her behaviour, and her failure to achieve what she felt was the moral ideal was very detrimental to her sense of self. She existed for many years in a sense of perpetual anxiety, which she communicated to her lover in letters by her performances of self-loathing and self-abandonment.⁴⁰ These self-portrayals were perhaps meant to emphasise her dependence on Leveson Gower, and to suggest how exceptional this relationship was for her: by suggesting that her conduct was out of character and very distressing for her, the Countess conveyed the depth of her love for Leveson Gower and reassured him of his position—which as we saw in chapter one, he often felt was vulnerable.

As Gibson argues, some women struggled with their sense of shame whilst visibly pregnant with an illegitimate child, because it made their ‘transgressions’ undeniably evident. Surprisingly, Bessborough told Leveson Gower that her pregnancy ‘rather reconciles me’ and even though the ‘dreadful risk’ was worrying, she was ‘pleas’d nay almost proud... it is a closer tie to you, & makes me feel more belonging to you’.⁴¹ At the start Bessborough found some redemption in motherhood, although she also later described the children as ‘two wretched little beings who will bear thro’ life the disgrace my crime has brought upon them’.⁴² Her letters in the days that followed the secret birth of their daughter Harriet in August 1800 expressed her love and care for the infant—which included nursing her daughter for two days until she was removed to the wet nurse’s home. Leveson Gower

⁴⁰ This anxiety seems to have been quite characteristic for Bessborough—both Lady Elizabeth Monck and Lady Anne Hatton discuss her anxiety in their letters to Leveson Gower. For example, see TNA, Leveson Gower Papers, PRO 30/29/6/2/19, Lady Elizabeth Monck to Leveson Gower, 19 September 1798.

⁴¹ BL, Add MS 89382/2/13, fols. 112-113, Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, [August 1799].

⁴² BL, Add MS 89382/3/2, fols. 28-30, Countess Bessborough to Lady Harriet Cavendish, [December 1809].

expressed his surprise that she chose to do this herself, to which she retorted was she not 'the most natural & properest [nurse] that could be found?' and told him that she was grateful that she had 'the delight of pressing it to my bosom & seeing it draw life from there'.⁴³ The love she felt as a mother for her child was natural and wholly justifiable, a love that she expected herself to feel, and although it was a consequence of the couple's 'sinful' conduct, it was a love that she could never conceive of as immoral.

II

You estimate the force & truth of a person's liking by the imprudences they commit... now I think it a false way of judging - & that a persons conduct in such situations depends upon their character – a woman who respects *les biensances* & is driven from them, by a strong passion, gives you the greatest proof of attachment – but she still adheres to propriety & decorum in trifles, when she has given *it up* in reality; & is much more to be relied upon & believed than one of those light whimsical ladies who defy the World & run headlong into every sort of imprudence - & then call it a Violent Love which cannot be controul'd [sic].⁴⁴

Lady Melbourne's correspondence with Lord Byron began after he ended his affair with Lady Caroline Lamb. She was in her sixties, he in his twenties, and she assumed the role of confidante and instructed him on how to manage his liaisons with married

⁴³ BL, Add MS 89382/2/15, fols. 14-15, Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, [30 August 1800].

⁴⁴ Lady Melbourne to Lord Byron, 19 January 1814, as quoted in Jonathan David Gross, *Byron's 'Corbeau Blanc': The Life and Letters of Lady Melbourne, 1751-1818* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1998), p. 163.

women, like Lady Oxford, correctly. She occasionally commented on how women ought to behave in such situations, such as the above example from a letter written in January 1814. In her view there were distinctions to be made between the types of women who would embark on an affair. She explained to Byron that women who respected society's etiquette, who maintained the appearance of 'propriety & decorum', even after they had 'given *it up* in reality', were just as devoted to their lovers as those 'light whimsical ladies', who seemed willing to take more risks. Lord Byron could have been in no doubt as to which of the two types of ladies represented Melbourne's own conduct, and which exemplified his ex-lover, Lady Caroline. Lady Melbourne assumed a confident and worldly persona when she addressed Byron, who, although much younger than she was, had already made a reputation for himself as a philanderer in Whig circles. She had perhaps expressed more insecurities when she addressed her female friends in the 1790s, however her blasé attitude towards sexual morality remained constant.

The next cases demonstrate that even within one social group, in this case, Whig society, women conceived of their conduct in a multiplicity of ways, however, certain patterns of how one could measure one's own behaviour emerge. Lady Melbourne, Lady Holland, Lady Elizabeth Foster, Lady Elizabeth Monck, and the Duchess of Bedford, all had similar manners of internalising society's codes when it came to portrayals of their own behaviour. I also include the courtesan, Harriette Wilson, who existed on the peripheries of fashionable society and engaged in relationships with similar men, as there is an interesting overlap suggesting that she shared—or at least she wanted to be seen to share—the same principles as the aristocrats. The majority of these cases cluster around the 1790s-1810s, a time when

historians have suggested that the scrutiny and condemnation of aristocratic marital and sexual practices was heightened due to a moral panic that was incited by the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars.⁴⁵ Print culture exploded with visual and satirical representations of elite marriages, affairs, and divorces, ridiculing and censuring 'immoral' conduct. Over these two decades the Whigs were most concerned about how their conduct was judged by their peers, as we saw in chapter two, so perhaps unsurprisingly, the women in this section refused to see their behaviour through this lens. Rejecting religious notions of immorality, the women construed their relationships according to different ethical frameworks and drew on popular cultural narratives concerning romantic love and domesticity to construct relationships that were virtuous and innocuous. These women reveal their ideas of marriage in their self-assessments and portrayals, as well as the roles and responsibilities they perceived themselves to have-both to their relatives and their rank more widely.

Religion was largely absent from these women's discussions about their conduct. In 1797, months after her divorce from Sir Godfrey Webster and marriage to Lord Holland, Lady Holland wrote in her journal that she had received 'so strange an education that if I speak freely upon sacred subjects it is not from an affectation of being an esprit fort, but positively because I have no prejudices to combat.... I never was instructed in abstract or practical religion'.⁴⁶ Reflecting on her upbringing, Lady Holland claimed that she had been left to shape her own education, reading and

⁴⁵ Donna T. Andrew, "'Adultery à la mode": Privilege, the law and attitudes to adultery 1770-1809', *History*, 82:265 (1997), 5-23, p. 17; Kathleen Wilson, 'Nelson's Women: Female Masculinity and Body Politics in the French and Napoleonic Wars', *European History Quarterly*, 37:4 (2007), 562-581, (pp. 564-567).

⁴⁶ BL, Lady Holland's Journals, Add MS 51928, November 1797 – July 1799, fols. 8-9.

gathering information that interested her—quite the contrast from Countess Bessborough’s religious instruction, which was devised and overseen by her pious mother. Harriette Wilson similarly exclaimed, when considering the wife of one of her lovers, ‘All my religion is from my heart, and not from books’.⁴⁷ In her letters to Leveson Gower, Monck (whose pregnancy was a distressing topic for Bessborough) never reflected on the morality of her affair with Boringdon—even during the more stressful periods when she was trying to conceal her pregnancy from her husband.⁴⁸ Monck considered Leveson Gower to be her friend: she asked him for favours and shared her concerns with him during all three of her illegitimate pregnancies. As she planned for each baby’s arrival her only concern was the practical one of concealment so as not to provoke a scandal; in her letters to Leveson Gower she never tried to justify her relationship with Lord Boringdon, and she never mentioned feeling guilty or ashamed.⁴⁹ This was likely because she felt confident that Leveson Gower accepted her behaviour and supported her. Unfortunately, any letters that she wrote for different recipients have not survived, so it is difficult to know how she presented herself to others who she might have perceived as less tolerant. A couple of letters that Bessborough wrote Leveson Gower over this period suggest that Monck did not always speak so candidly to her friend about her pregnancies: ‘Ly E. has been with me & I am quite sure my suspicions about her are right—she looks very big but alas I dare not question her’.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Harriette Wilson, *Harriette Wilson’s Memoirs of Herself and Others* (reprint, with preface by James Laver, London: Peter Davies, 1929, of orig. 1825), p. 97.

⁴⁸ For full discussion of this episode see chapter 1 pp. 79-80.

⁴⁹ For example, see TNA, PRO 30/29/6/2/18, Lady Elizabeth Monck to Leveson Gower, 30 May 1797.

⁵⁰ BL, Add MS 89382/2/13, fol. 134, Countess Bessborough to Leveson Gower, [1799].

They may not have been particularly concerned about religious morality, but instead these women evaluated the ethics of their conduct using a different set of criteria. Like 'E.B', they extolled certain enlightenment values, specifically happiness and improvement, but they believed that such pursuits should only be undertaken if it was not at the expense of harming the innocent. In her correspondence with Leveson Gower, Monck barely mentioned her husband, but wrote that staying with Lord Boringdon at his Saltram estate was 'perfect happiness' and that they were both 'much improved in health' for it.⁵¹ Lady Holland felt no guilt towards her first husband, whom she condemned as a 'allured villain' who made her 'hate mankind'.⁵² Even though it caused a massive public scandal, she did not see her union with Lord Holland as shameful, but instead suggested it had made her 'the happiest of women' and that 'the example of his excellence has drawn out the fullest good I had, as certainly I am a better person & a more useful member of society than I was in my years of misery'.⁵³ Through their careful actions and words many of these women implied that their pursuit of happiness should not come at the expense of harming innocent people. Lady Holland adopted a narrative of self-improvement, which she suggested also benefited others. Discussing her liaison with a Lord Ponsonby which had taken place almost two decades previously, Harriette Wilson expressed her 'bitter anguish' at not thinking about the fact she would be inflicting 'the deepest wound in the breast of an innocent wife!'.⁵⁴ Wilson recorded telling her lover that they must be discreet and, if discovered, 'separate for ever... we are not monsters!...

⁵¹ TNA, PRO 30/29/6/2/16, Lady Elizabeth Monck to Leveson Gower, 13 July 1796.

⁵² BL, Add MS 51928, fols. 8-9.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Wilson, *Harriette Wilson's Memoirs of Herself*, p. 81.

we will never indulge in selfish enjoyment at the expense of misery to any one of our fellow creatures'.⁵⁵ Wilson's portrayals of herself were surely not sincere, given their appearance in a scandalous memoir that many had succumbed to blackmail efforts not to appear in. She did not censor her account for fear of harming Ponsonby's wife, whatever she might have suggested—but the way Wilson portrayed her character highlighted her knowledge of the inner-workings of society etiquette.

Women tended to use discourses of domesticity when presenting their controversial ménages. They seamlessly assimilated adulterous relationships into discussions about family life, often emphasising the comfort and happiness of all involved. In 1834, the Duchess of Bedford described her holiday in Scotland with her husband, family, and lover, the painter Edwin Landseer, to her friend, Lord Holland: 'we have all enjoyed our delicious summer, & I hope you think I sent the Duke to England in good health & spirits'.⁵⁶ Lady Elizabeth Foster's portrayals of her position in the Devonshire ménage-à-trois depict her as an integral part of their family. In 1783, she described herself as the Duke and Duchess's first-born child's 'little mama' and expressed her love for the whole family.⁵⁷ As we saw in chapter one, this was a position that both the Duke and Duchess encouraged. Years later, when Britain was under the threat of French invasion, Foster described a scene of domestic comfort in her journal as the family removed itself to a 'melancholy' house in Bedford for safety: 'I am here with D.[uke] D.[evonshire] & the Dss. The children are with us, we read, draw, D.D. hunts, & being together we must still be comfortable'.⁵⁸ The Duchess of

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁵⁶ BL, Holland House Papers, Add MS 51674, fol. 53, Duchess of Bedford to Lord Holland, 8 December 1834. The Duchess's brief liaison with Lord Clanwilliam was discussed in chapter two, see pp. 141-142.

⁵⁷ Cth, CS5, 511, Lady Foster to Duchess of Devonshire, 20 July 1783.

⁵⁸ Cth, Elizabeth Foster's Journals, DF11/2/3, '29 October 1793', pp. 38-39.

Devonshire's and the 6th Duke of Bedford's tolerance of their spouses' adultery made it easier for the women involved in the affairs to suggest that they were content and not victims. This may have alleviated their consciences, as the lack of conflict and their powerful use of the pronoun 'we' enabled them to suggest to themselves, and to the recipients of their letters, that their actions were not damaging others.

Early forms of domestic ideology also influenced the traits that women deemed appropriate in their extra-marital relationships. As Gibson argues, contemporary novels and the press distinguished between "moral' extra-marital relationships' and "immoral' ones' using 'levels of sentiment'.⁵⁹ Love and affection were definitely preferable to relationships based on sexual attraction alone, but stability, longevity, and to a degree, exclusivity, were also important factors that women considered when assessing their own and other's conduct. In 1818, Lady Melbourne advised her daughter, Lady Cowper, to remain loyal to her lover, Lord Palmerston.⁶⁰ Wilson, who set out to ape aristocratic female behaviour, said that she had to 'distinguish' herself 'from those in the like unfortunate situations, by strict probity... I will never become vile... when I am ill used, I will leave my lover rather than deceive him'.⁶¹ Cocks suggests that the history of heterosexuality would benefit from a rewrite under a 'queer gaze' to illuminate the many aspects that contributed to sexual identity.⁶² Cocks argues that the popular approach of seeing sexuality as 'an opposition of hetero to homo' is very modern, and in the past people may well have evaluated their sexual identity according to different scales. On this view, if marriage,

⁵⁹ Gibson, "I am not on the footing of Kept Women", p. 9.

⁶⁰ Gross, *Byron's 'Corbeau Blanc'*, p. 3.

⁶¹ Wilson, *Harriette Wilson's Memoirs of Herself*, p. 9.

⁶² H.G. Cocks, 'Modernity and the Self in the History of Sexuality', *Historical Journal*, 49:4 (2006), 1211-1227, (p. 1224).

and by effect, marital sex, was seen as the foundation of social order, then its antithesis would not be homosexuality but actually promiscuity, 'of all kinds'.⁶³ Analysing women's portrayals of their own conduct highlights the fact that their interpretations of sexual behaviour was extremely nuanced and often related to their individual 'patterns of sociability'.⁶⁴ Despite her career as a courtesan who essentially negotiated financial arrangements with her various lovers before she entered a relationship with them, Wilson often described being 'in love', and was keen to distinguish herself from prostitutes.⁶⁵ The idea that promiscuity, especially female, was immoral and irresponsible was a widespread social attitude, which is perhaps why these women often stressed the comparability (and sometimes compatibility) of their relationships with domestic ideals of marriage.

Other concerns that these particular women thought about were more specific to their rank and status. As discussed in chapter two, one of elite society's key rules for those conducting extra-marital affairs was prudence and discretion. Monck was extremely concerned about keeping her illegitimate pregnancy concealed from family and her wider social networks; Foster worried about maintaining the appearance of respectability, and disliked being accused of the impropriety of her connection with the Duke of Devonshire.⁶⁶ Lady Melbourne was very critical of the 'whimsical ladies' who defied 'the world' with their 'violent love', and for her part, she admitted to Byron that on the rare occasion that she had gotten 'into a disagreeable embarrassment' she 'extricated' herself 'as Speedily as it was

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Wilson, *Harriette Wilson's Memoirs of Herself*, p. 74.

⁶⁶ Cth, CS5, 684, Duke of Devonshire to Lady Foster, 29 August 1785.

possible' and 'always allow'd every body to make their own comments, without ever trying to set them right'.⁶⁷ Lady Holland would similarly advise Lamb that 'the less you talk or write about' your own scandal, the better.⁶⁸ Women feared being outed, or inadvertently outing themselves, for their controversial liaisons because they knew they could be confronted with criticisms and social rejection. Being aware of how to maintain decorum and composure in public (and in many instances, in private) was often prioritised over moral integrity.

For this group of women, their internalisation of the codes of conduct was heavily guided by their conceptions of their social roles and familial duties. Becoming a mistress did not necessarily supersede or alter their wifely identities. Being seen to prioritise husband and legitimate family over lover was important: Monck argued with Boringdon that she could not leave her husband for him and risk damaging the prospects of her two legitimate daughters; and during a serious illness that left her bedbound, the Duchess of Bedford told Lord Holland that she could not 'describe the agony I have suffered... when I was aware I was dying, at the idea of never again seeing the Duke'; the *Satirist* falsely reported that same month that she had sent for Landseer to nurse her.⁶⁹ It is also noteworthy that many of these women did not have affairs until after they had secured their husband an heir. The conventions of elite marriage are well-known: marriages were arranged to secure and promote dynasties. Love matches, or marriages that became loving unions were possible, but for the majority, companionship was what was guaranteed—some on a more amicable

⁶⁷ Lady Melbourne to Lord Byron, 19 January 1814, as quoted in Gross, *Byron's 'Corbeau Blanc'*, p. 163.

⁶⁸ BL, Add MS 51560, fol. 206, Lady Caroline Lamb to Lady Holland, [April 1816]. On the back of this letter is a draft of Lady Holland's reply.

⁶⁹ BL, Add MS 51674, fols. 34-35, Duchess of Bedford to Lord Holland, 22 January 1833; *The Satirist; or the Censor of the Times*, 20 January 1833.

footing than others. Although they were not explicit about it in the same way as Countess Bessborough, the women in this group never suggested that they owed their husbands sexual fidelity. Rather they were obliged to be respectful of them and to not humiliate them, or their families, which is why prudence and moderation were their maxims. They did not condemn the ‘artificial and unwarranted prejudices of society’, like Gibson’s ‘E.B.’, but adhered to them, shaped them, and learnt to exploit them.⁷⁰

The rationale for conforming to these codes of behaviour was largely about self-protection—they knew the consequence could be social exile—but in preserving the self they were also protecting the aristocratic lifestyle. If they played by the rules and their affairs had the domesticated appearance of affection and stability, and were conducted discreetly with no displays of excessive or hysterical emotion, they could find individual pleasure and happiness, whilst simultaneously performing their roles as mothers and wives who maintained the status of the men and families who led the country. Although Lady Holland’s first marriage had been a disaster, rather than criticise arranged marriage she always depicted this as her own ‘calamity’, not a problem endemic to her rank.⁷¹ Content in her second marriage she happily criticised others: in 1801 she recorded in her journal that Lady Oxford was ‘exclaim[ing] against institutions, especially that of marriage, to which she says she has been a helpless victim’.⁷² Rather than offer sympathy, Lady Holland felt she should intervene to put Lady Oxford back on the right track with ‘a little mild reproof

⁷⁰ Gibson, “‘I am not on the footing of Kept Women’”, p. 8.

⁷¹ BL, Holland House Papers, Lady Holland’s Journals, Add MS 51927, June 1791–July 1797, fol. 5.

⁷² Elizabeth Vassall Fox, Lady Holland, *The Journal of Elizabeth Lady Holland*, ed. Giles Fox-Strangeways, Earl of Ilchester (2 vols, London: Longmans & Co, 1908), vol. 2, pp. 136–137.

and disapprobation' which would 'rescue her from the gulf'. Prior to Lady Caroline Norton in the mid-nineteenth century, elite women did not publicly voice a need for marital reform—or if they did, they did not find much support.

Although there was always something personal in an individual's interpretation and portrayal of their own behaviour, the women from groups one and two have demonstrated that patterns of behaviour that were based on societal norms are distinguishable. None of the women in the second group portrayed themselves as bad people, not in diaries for their own reflection, nor in letters to their friends or lovers, nor even in publications like Wilson's memoirs. Their take on morality was more social than religious, and if they did not conceive their behaviour to be harming others, and they felt they were fulfilling their duties to the men on whom they depended, then they could construct a self-identity that was honourable. Women internalised behavioural norms to protect themselves from social exclusion, as their status was important to preserving their sense of self. They interpreted these norms to prioritise the appearance of propriety, even if it was only surface deep; a facade that was increasingly important for their rank in an era where political reform was much debated. By maintaining the rubric of power and prestige through their sexual behaviour, women ensured stability for their sons and daughters—in individual families as much as for the elite more generally. That is not to say that these women did not see flaws in this system, but by adhering to their conceptions of custom and decorum they did not see themselves sacrificing too much. In a system that emphasised duty above individual pleasure they protected the loopholes that enabled them certain freedoms.

We remembered that we were human, and have not fallen into the error of pledging love for life... my life's career, I submit to the judgement of all charitable beings. I court not the judgement of those who have no charity: but I can boldly say, I brave and defy it. I live to please myself, and to serve the cause of virtue and honesty... I am satisfied, conscientiously satisfied, that, whatever I have publicly done, has been well and usefully done, and will not license complaint until some Englishwoman does better.⁷³

In May 1834, Eliza Sharples used her position as editor to publicly announce her union with Richard Carlile in the preface of the first volume of *the Isis*.⁷⁴ Carlile was legally married, although he was estranged from his wife before he met Sharples in 1829, but as far as Sharples was concerned their union was 'what marriage should be; though not perhaps altogether what marriage is in the majority of cases'.⁷⁵ In this opinion she was not alone; although their friends and families saw them as kept mistresses or indulging in extra-marital liaisons, Mary Shelley and Harriet Taylor similarly emphasized the morality and legitimacy of their controversial relationships. As Sarah Richardson has argued, some middle-class women were so committed to political issues that politics infiltrated 'all aspects' of their lives.⁷⁶ The women in this

⁷³ Sharples, 'Preface', *The Isis*, p.vi.

⁷⁴ The social and political context of the couple's decision to publicise their relationship is discussed in chapter three.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.v.

⁷⁶ Sarah Richardson, *The Political Worlds of Women: Gender and Politics in Nineteenth Century Britain* (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 17.

section advocated a revolutionary overhaul of marital and sexual relations: to them, their private relationships took on a political significance. They were often members of dissenting sects, which allowed them more opportunity to evaluate their social and domestic roles, and their relationships with men, without the same restraints imposed by the Anglican Church. As we saw in chapter three, however, support from friends and associates was often lacking. Existing on the margins of the emerging middle class, members of literary societies were often pressured to censure or disassociate themselves from conduct that a broader public would view as sinful and depraved. Each of the women in this section portrayed their relationship slightly differently but all stressed the importance of love and sincere affection over legal ties; they attacked societal customs and mores as corrupt and artificial, and they argued for marital reform. Moreover, there was often a strong sense of self-righteousness and confidence in their own principles, which led them to boldly defy conventions; however, this self-assurance was occasionally challenged when they were confronted with how others viewed and judged their behaviour.

These women emphasised their sincere love and affection for their male partners. Like Gibson's 'E.B', they felt assured their attachments were based on love and therefore, they did not see how they could not be moral and virtuous. In 1833, Harriet Taylor assured John Stuart Mill that he 'need never regret... what has already brought such increase of happiness and can in no possible way increase evil'.⁷⁷ She similarly exalted their connection to her friend, Eliza Flower: 'to be with him wholly

⁷⁷ Harriet Taylor to John Stuart Mill, [summer 1833], as quoted in F.A Hayek, *John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor: Their Correspondence and Subsequent Marriage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951), p. 45.

is my ideal of the noblest fate... he is the companion spirit and heart desire'.⁷⁸ Sharples did not feel that her union with Carlile challenged her identity as a Christian—although she too deviated from more conventional teachings of Christianity. She proclaimed her commitment to a 'religion of love and good morals, of science and satisfaction', and, in a series of public letters to her younger sister, she announced that the relationship had improved her: 'I have found a true knowledge of myself. I was dead and have risen from the grave of sin and ignorance. I have ascended into heaven'.⁷⁹ Discourses of love enabled the women to justify their unions and see them as virtuous and morally improving. They also emphasised the monogamous nature of their relationships—often construing them as marriages. Adeline Mowbray, Amelia Opie's fictional representation of Mary Wollstonecraft, epitomised their rhetoric in her portrayal of her relationship with Mr Glenmurray (William Godwin's character): she insisted that 'kept ladies in general... would live with any man... I never loved, nor shall love, any man but Mr Glenmurray. I look on myself as his wife in the sight of God'.⁸⁰

In October 1814, when they were forced to live apart due to Shelley's attempts to evade his debtors, Mary Godwin assured him in their shared journal that they were 'those that love cannot separate'.⁸¹ In contrast, she felt that those *without* love could separate—even if they were legally bound in marriage, as were Shelley and his estranged wife, Harriet. Overall, these women shared a controversial (for their

⁷⁸ Note from Harriet Taylor to Eliza Flower in a letter from John Stuart Mill to William Johnson Fox, [5 or 6 November 1833], as quoted in *ibid.*, p. 54. Eliza Flower's relationship with William Johnson Fox is discussed in chapter three.

⁷⁹ Eliza Sharples, 'The Editress to her sister Maria', *The Isis*, 15 December 1832, No. 39.

⁸⁰ Amelia Alderson Opie, *Adeline Mowbray, or, the Mother and Daughter* (Memphis: General Books LLC, 2012, orig. 1804), p. 42.

⁸¹ Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814-1844*, ed. Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert (2 vols, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), vol. 1, p. 40.

contemporaries) conception of the importance of love within marriage: it was not merely preferable, or ideal, but essential, transformative, and legitimately transgressive. If the affection had gone from a marriage to continue to live together and raise a family in conflict was wrong: 'where marriage is merely of the law or for money, and not of the soul, there I look for abuse'.⁸² They were not against marriage itself-they all either expressed that they would, or they did marry legally when they could. Rather they saw the need for reform to provide those who were no longer in love with a way out of marriage, that would also allow them to eventually remarry and find happiness: as Sharples suggested, 'pledging love for life' was not always rational.⁸³ Reflecting on her former friend, Isabella Booth's, allegedly unhappy marriage, Mary Shelley lamented that she was 'another victim of that ceremony', although her opinion of David Booth was probably prejudiced by his refusal to allow Isabella to continue their friendship.⁸⁴

In the 1830s, Harriet Taylor and Eliza Sharples would both argue that the inequality between the sexes was facilitated by the institution of marriage because it forced women into being dependents. In an early draft of her later publications on marriage and divorce, Taylor remarked that 'girls' entered into the marriage contract whilst they were young and 'perfectly ignorant' of what it meant, and when their husbands turned out not to be who they thought they were, they were stuck.⁸⁵ They felt this was a problem relevant to all women, who, even when they regretted their

⁸² Sharples, 'Preface', *The Isis*, p.v.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.vi; Hayek, *John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor*, p. 77.

⁸⁴ Mary Godwin to Percy Bysshe Shelley, [24 September 1817]: Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, ed. Betty T. Bennett (3 vols, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), vol. 1, p. 41. For discussion about Booth's opinion of Mary and Percy Bysshe Shelley see chapter three, pp. 183-185.

⁸⁵ Hayek, *John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor*, p. 77.

decisions, spent their lives feigning happiness because of the stigma society attached to separation and divorce. This was emblematic of the wider corruption and artificiality of society and the state's abuse of power over its people: as Taylor remarked, 'legislative restraints as to matters of feeling' were absurd.⁸⁶ On the surface, they ridiculed and rejected the norms and expectations of their society—although in practice when confronted with the judgements of others it was a bit more complex.

None of these women ever advocated promiscuity and all were very expressive about their commitment and devotion to their partners. Sharples was the most outspoken, using the radical journal that she edited to increase awareness of her ménage to 'set a good example' for the reading public, trying to provide a role model that would enable people to imagine a committed and virtuous union between the sexes outside of marriage.⁸⁷ As Helen Rogers argues, Sharples and Carlile both used their relationship for political ends in the hopes to inspire others.⁸⁸ In *The Isis* Sharples repeatedly remarked on her pride—she would not endorse the shame that others tried to attach to her. She saw herself serving 'the cause of virtue and honesty... whatever I have publicly done, has been well and usefully done'.⁸⁹ Her public letters to her sister enabled her to portray herself as the concerned elder sister, eager to 'teach' her sibling to be 'something more than the slave of ill-judged custom'—although she admitted she was motivated by the idea that these lessons

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 76.

⁸⁷ Sharples, 'Preface', *The Isis*, p.v.

⁸⁸ Helen Rogers, *Women and the People: Authority, Authorship and the Radical Tradition in Nineteenth Century England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), see chapter 2.

⁸⁹ Sharples, 'Preface', *The Isis*, p.vi.

would also be 'as suitable to every other young person so situated'.⁹⁰ In these public letters Sharples always portrayed herself as a confident, self-assured, and morally correct woman: she left no room for doubt about the precarity of her situation, although many scholars have suggested that the relationship was often far from harmonious.⁹¹

Although the other women were not as eager as Sharples to draw attention to their relationships, they did not go to the same lengths to conceal them as some of the women in groups one and two. They were spared from the pressures of secrecy, but, as we saw in chapters three and four, they had to deal with unpleasant reactions from many of their relatives, friends, and acquaintances. Harriet Taylor, whose relationship with John Stuart Mill remained platonic and relatively scandal free (although it provoked much gossip), did debate putting an end to the ambiguity and setting up home with Mill in the 1830s. Mill was apparently reluctant to subject them both to the scandal this would inevitably cause, and informed her that 'such a life never succeeds', to which Taylor retorted that 'it would succeed in our case'.⁹² They all knew to anticipate almost universal condemnation and rejection. Facing criticism and rejection from family and friends was painful and sometimes led women's confidence in their convictions to falter. On her death bed, the fictional Adeline Mowbray lamented the fact that she had been seen 'in the eyes of the world an example of vice, when I believed myself the champion of virtue'.⁹³

⁹⁰ Sharples, 'The Editress to her sister Maria', *The Isis*, 20 October 1832, No 34.

⁹¹ Rogers, *Women and the People*, chapter two.

⁹² Harriet Taylor to John Stuart Mill, [1835], as quoted in Hayek, *John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor*, p. 98.

⁹³ Opie, *Adeline Mowbray*, p. 87.

When her friend Isabella refused to correspond with her on her return from the elopement to Europe, Mary Godwin wrote to Shelley that she was ‘disappointed—I did think Isabel perfectly unprejudiced’.⁹⁴ Discovering that she did not share the same values as her friend was crushing, however Isabella’s rejection made her reflect on how others saw her situation. Reluctant to identify Shelley as a ‘married man’, she lamented that others refused to see ‘that Harriet [Shelley] is selfish & unfeeling’. Mary did not like to think of herself as Shelley’s mistress, or that their relationship was detrimental or unfair to his wife, thus being perceived this way by a close friend was distressing. Heather Bozant Witcher suggests that the elopement journal, to which Mary and Shelley both contributed, provided the couple with a space where they could ‘assert their identity in the form of written collaboration’, legitimising their union as a ‘we’, and excluding Claire Clairmont, Mary’s stepsister who had accompanied them, to create ‘a private memory of a pseudo-honeymoon experience’.⁹⁵ I would go further, and argue that Mary’s ‘intersubjectivity’ with Shelley extended into other spaces and served other functions. After describing Isabella’s rejection, Mary proudly asserted to Shelley, ‘We will defy our enemies & our friends (for aught I see they are all as bad as one another) and we will not part again’.⁹⁶ The collaborative self bolstered Mary’s self-assurance when she felt challenged about her actions, and reassured her of a stable intimate connection when faced with the loss of others. It also demonstrates that, having been cut off

⁹⁴ Mary Godwin to Percy Bysshe Shelley, 3 November 1814: *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, vol. 1, p. 5.

⁹⁵ Heather Bozant Witcher, “‘With me’”: The sympathetic collaboration of Mary Godwin and Percy Bysshe Shelley’, *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 52:2 (2016), 144-159, (p. 150, p. 156).

⁹⁶ Mary Godwin to Percy Bysshe Shelley, 3 November 1814: *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, vol. 1, p. 5.

from their conventional support networks, these women were heavily reliant, emotionally as well as physically, on the men they were with—increasing their vulnerability.

Existing children and illegitimate pregnancies were another area of tension for women, and occasionally made them question how they could sustain their principles in contemporary society. They feared the stigma their conduct would cast on their offspring—legitimate and illegitimate. Taylor told Mill that the idea that she ‘should spoil four lives & injure others... is the only hesitation’ that prevented her from leaving her house for his.⁹⁷ While she is pregnant with Glenmurray’s child, Adeline Mowbray is so affected by witnessing a group of boys taunt a gentleman’s ‘bastard’ that she abruptly decides to accept Glenmurray’s offer of marriage, so as to not subject her child to similar disgrace.⁹⁸ She is so agitated by this fear that she miscarries the next day. The lives of illegitimate children varied, but they lacked the resources and status of their legitimate counterparts. Mary recorded the birth of Shelley’s first son to Harriet in her journal, when she was also pregnant with her first child: ‘a letter from Hookham to say that Harriet has been brought to bed of a son and heir – S.[helley] writes a number of circular letters on this event which ought to be ushered in with ringing of bells &c. for it is the son of his wife’.⁹⁹ Her underlining of the word ‘wife’ and mocking tone about the celebration of the birth of an heir hinted at her resentment and jealousy of Harriet’s status, and of her son’s—which she knew her own child would not be blessed with.

⁹⁷ Harriet Taylor to John Stuart Mill, [1835], as quoted in Hayek, *John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor*, p. 99.

⁹⁸ Opie, *Adeline Mowbray*, p. 47.

⁹⁹ *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814-1844*, vol. 1, p.50.

By challenging conventional mores, these women were part of a process of rethinking and remapping heterosexual romantic and sexual codes of behaviour. They pursued happiness, but also hoped that by breaking with conventions they would inspire changes that would eventually benefit all women. With this to bolster them they proclaimed the virtue of their relationships and managed to construct an identity that was confident and positive. However, being controversial in an unforgiving society was difficult. Women found seeing their actions through the eyes of others uncomfortable, except for Sharples' public persona which seems to have thrived on anticipated criticisms. In particular, women began to doubt their veracity when facing ostracism from friends and family, or when they had concerns about the effects their behaviour would have on their children, *or*, when they feared their lover's commitment had waned—each of which might be differently motivated.

*

Women's self-assessments and portrayals in the face of accusations of impropriety demonstrate that while there will always be elements of individual personality that determine how a person interprets their own behaviour, certain social and cultural patterns emerge. Most of the women examined in this chapter felt able to portray their conduct in a positive light, which suggests that by this period people from these particular ranks of society were not unanimously constrained by harsh religious conceptions of morality. Philosophies emerged over the course of the Enlightenment that both created new conceptions of the self and provided a greater range of criteria by which individuals could measure their ethics. Some of the women examined in this chapter drew upon newer ideologies to justify or validate their behaviour.

However, women to a far greater extent than men, were generally caught between the new and older pre-existing notions of the self: notions of sensibility encouraged them to be guided by their emotions and passions, however, at the same time they were consistently expected to conform to stringent gender and marital ideals.

The pursuit of love, a quest which was exalted in contemporary novels aimed at women, like Burney's *Evelina* (1778), emerges as an important measure of an individual's choices and actions: it was perceived to encourage self-improvement and by extension to enrich society. By maintaining that they were in love, many women were able to use discourses that included love in their rubrics, including domestic ideology and sensibility, to construct sympathetic images of their ménages for themselves, their lovers, and their friends. Groups two and three differed in how they made use of these discourses: the individuals in group two adapted images of domestic bliss and romance to construct relationships that exhibited elements of the desired cultural ideals; the women in the third group used the language of marriage and domesticity to validate their unions and represented them as being on par (and sometimes superior) with marital relationships. Individuals from groups two and three also shared the belief that their behaviour did not harm anybody whose own conduct was innocent. The idea that individuals should be free to act as they wished as long as they did not harm or infringe the liberties of others was a philosophical/political theory much debated over this period, and was fully developed by John Stuart Mill in his book, *On Liberty* (1859).¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ The question about how the individual's personal liberties were compromised in civil society was much debated throughout the eighteenth century by Enlightenment philosophers, including John Locke.

These self-representations are problematic due to the performative nature of the sources: as we saw in chapter one, letters played a vital role in constructing and sustaining controversial intimacies. Therefore, the expressions of self-assessment that letters contained were not necessarily authentic, but were representations that were directed to lovers, family members, friends, and sometimes the wider society, and so were often driven by complex motives. As I have demonstrated in chapters one, two, three and five, women, like men, wrote to their friends and lovers seeking reassurance of their acceptance and support, and for consolation and comfort when they found themselves facing difficulties. In these exchanges they could either strengthen their position by emphasising the moral integrity of their relationships, as Harriet Taylor did in her note to Eliza Flower and Mary did in her letters to Shelley, or they could accentuate their vulnerability and seek reassurance, as Countess Bessborough did in her letters to Leveson Gower.

Women seem to have internalised codes of conduct according to how they understood their main roles and obligations and their connections to a broader identity of rank. Idiosyncrasies occurred because of different characters, upbringings, and susceptibility to the influence of others. This explains why the women in groups one and two, who all belonged to Whig society, expressed that they had a responsibility to maintain the status quo through their marital and sexual conduct, but the types of behaviour they perceived as being acceptable varied considerably. The rationale women most articulated for conforming to societal expectations of female conduct was an awareness that by engaging in controversial relationships they would risk harming others, either by causing them emotional distress, or by damaging their reputations by association. How far these codes were followed

because of external pressures or internal anxieties is therefore difficult to assess. Women from all three groups negotiated their conduct in anticipation of how others would perceive it; opinions, both imagined and pronounced, shaped the self and the relationship that women portrayed. But, while they considered how other people would view their conduct, women also judged their behaviour based on their own expectations of how others should behave; as Simon Gunn suggests, identity, of a group or an individual, is a 'paradox' and is 'shaped both from within and without'.¹⁰¹ Women were thus responsible for subconsciously shaping and reproducing norms through judgements, but also through the performance of their own identities and behaviours, as they both evaluated, and responded to evaluations of others. The elite women from groups one and two routinely tried to conform to their conceptions of the rules of extra-marital sex, because they could see their rationale and how they benefitted their rank. Those who, like Countess Bessborough, felt they were transgressing those codes, struggled to construct a positive self-identity.

Unsurprisingly, the women from group three, who advocated marital reform, rejected the sexual norms they had been expected to abide by, and instead tried to create new ones. They faced many obstacles including social and familial rejection. The status quo was so deeply entrenched that the majority could not envision the reforms the women suggested were possible, and so many experienced a marginal existence at least for a time. All the women sensed their vulnerability and were aware that their involvement in unconventional unions could cost them more dearly than their male counterparts. Self-preservation in the face of possible social rejection was

¹⁰¹ Simon Gunn, *History and Cultural Theory* (Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd., 2006), p. 133.

a factor that influenced women's portrayals of themselves across both ranks, although it was practiced differently: some women, mostly the elite, limited or concealed their behaviour so as to not face sanctions from society; whilst those seeking reform frequently adopted a confident and defiant register to bolster themselves from the negativity directed towards them. At times they found this very challenging, which sometimes prompted them to lose some of that self-assurance and try to find ways to reaffirm their identities. The common vulnerability for all the women considered in this chapter was their concern about the consequences their behaviour could have on the future prospects of their children: women suggested that maternal love frequently eclipsed romantic and induced them to compromise on their happiness or their principles.

Conclusion

This thesis has shown that several relationships that have been thought of as anomalies, too unrepresentative to be worthy of historical study, like the 5th Duke and Duchess of Devonshire's *ménage-à-trois* with Lady Elizabeth Foster, were far from exceptional. Between 1780 and 1840 (although undoubtedly before and after this period also) many people engaged in intimate, romantic, and/or erotic relationships that were deemed controversial, either by themselves, their spouses, families, friends, or acquaintances. Significantly, the cases I have examined demonstrate that numerous relationships between men and women had the potential to be controversial, regardless of whether or not they had caused a marriage to breakdown; or whether their actions had achieved the notoriety of sex scandals like Lady Jersey's affair with the Prince of Wales. Moreover, certain relationships were controversial even though the nature of the relationship was ambiguous, and observers could not be certain if it involved adulterous or illicit sex.

That is not to say that all of the relationships in this study provoked equal levels of controversy: Leigh Hunt's intimacy with his sister-in-law Elizabeth Kent was nowhere near as scandalous nor as notorious as Lady Caroline Lamb's affair with Lord Byron, just as the 6th Duchess of Bedford's brief intrigue with Lord Clanwilliam did not cause as much disruption to the lives of those around them as George Soane's incestuous relationship with his sister-in-law, Maria Boaden. Observers assessed controversial relationships with an eye to relativism: whilst Mary Shelley was horrified by Edward Trelawny's affair with Mrs Gabrielle Wright, she accepted Jane Williams's non-marital cohabitation with Thomas Jefferson Hogg. This was because individuals drew upon variable frameworks of morality and ethics to make their

judgements. A crucial element that shaped these frameworks were the sets of values that originated from religious (evangelical) principles, but these were connected to, and undoubtedly reinforced by, other sets of concerns that emphasised how illicit unions transgressed each community's broader social ethos. That said, many of the relationships that achieved notoriety did so due to the status of the individuals involved rather than their behaviour per se: for example, Lady Jersey's affair with the Prince of Wales was far more scandalous and vilified than her multiple earlier affairs with other married men, including the 5th Duke of Devonshire and the 5th Duke of Carlisle, due to the Prince's royal credentials. Additionally, both Whig society and the radical literary coteries were the focus of much press comment: the Whigs, as members of the social and political elite, led extravagant and exotic lives that were considered to be of general interest to the reading public, whether this interest was driven by disgust or awe; and several literati publicised and politicised their own unconventional intimate relationships, often incorporating demands for domestic reform into their broader radical political identities.

Choosing to engage in a controversial relationship shaped the way an individual behaved, interacted with others, and how they saw themselves. It affected their romantic, marital, domestic, familial, and social relationships. When individuals acknowledged that their attachments could be considered contentious, for whatever reason, they resorted to comparable emotional strategies and practices to manage them internally. As chapters one and five have established, the methods that couples employed to construct and maintain their intimacies were often connected to concerns about self-preservation. Self-preservation entailed constructing a positive self-identity, which could be done either by proclaiming the legitimacy of one's

actions and defiantly rejecting established norms, or by justifying them on some basis. Maintaining a good reputation that allowed one to preserve one's social position was also crucial. The former was very difficult if one could assess one's behaviour only according to a more traditional religious moral framework, which was restrictive and punitive when it came to sexual or erotic behaviour. As Anna Clark and Kate Gibson have suggested, by the late eighteenth century individuals were aware of a wide range of different discourses they could draw upon to interpret and construct their sense of self and their relationships.¹ Chapter five supports this scholarship, as the majority of the women it examines circumvented traditional constraints and reflected on the happiness that their relationships brought them, which some suggested would be beneficial to society. Several suggested that if their conduct was not directly harmful to others then it could not be immoral. We must bear in mind the specific audiences they addressed, as women were more likely to construct positive images of their conduct to those they felt would accept it, and they reserved expressions of shame and guilt for those from whom they sought sympathy, compassion, and forgiveness. Even though they could justify the relationships using relatively new ideologies, like romantic love and domestic equality, positivity was not unanimous, and older conceptions of sin and immorality continued to influence how women thought about their relations with men.

Men and women drew on discourses of marriage and family that were integral to domestic ideology in order to construct positive images of their ménages,

¹ Anna Clark, *Alternative Histories of the Self: a Cultural History of Sexuality and Secrets, 1762-1917* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), p. 9, p. 28; Kate Gibson, "'I am not on the footing of Kept Women': Extra-Marital Love in Eighteenth-Century England', *Cultural and Social History* (2019), 1-19 doi: 10.1080/14780038.2019.1642064.

to each other and to those whose criticisms they feared, like parents and friends. Eliza Sharples publicly defied claims that her relationship with Richard Carlisle was sinful, and contended that it was ‘what a marriage should be’; William Johnson Fox justified his ‘intimacy’ with Eliza Flower to Harriet Martineau, John Stuart Mill, and his mother, on the basis that it was chaste and improved the comfort of his and his children’s domestic life vastly compared to when he had shared a home with his wife; Lady Elizabeth Foster frequently drew on imagery of shared motherhood and domestic comfort to describe her life with the Devonshires; and Lord Nelson described Lady Hamilton as his ‘wife in the eyes of God’.² As Gibson argues, romantic love emerges as an important factor that drove individuals to form attachments that they knew they could be punished for, and it also acted as a source of positive self-affirmation.³ By claiming that they were in love, the majority of individuals bolstered their own sense of morality and suggested they could not be as corrupt as others made them out to be.

Chapter one demonstrated that even if an individual resisted social judgement when they assessed their own conduct and the integrity of their relationship, being controversial still often shaped their behaviour and how they managed their interactions with their beloved. Firstly, to protect themselves and others (like their children) from the unpleasant consequences that often followed being exposed for ‘immoral’ conduct, most couples engaged in secretive practices. They wrote letters to each other in codes or using aliases, they entrusted servants or

² Lord Nelson to Lady Hamilton, 26 August 1803: Horatio, 1st Viscount Nelson, *The Letters of Lord Nelson to Lady Hamilton; with a supplement of interesting letters, by distinguished characters* (2 vols, London: T Lovewell & Co, 1814), vol. 1, p. 177.

³ Gibson, “‘I am not on the footing of Kept Women’”, p. 3.

friends with these missives rather than using the postal system, and they frequently burnt them after reading. We have seen examples of this in the correspondences between Sir Thomas Lawrence and Mrs Wolff, Percy Bysshe Shelley and Claire Clairmont, Leigh Hunt and Elizabeth Kent, Lady Hamilton and Lord Nelson, and Lady Elizabeth Monck and Lord Boringdon. They also engineered elaborate schemes in order to be able to spend time alone together and had secret ways of communicating, like Countess Bessborough's moving flowerpot.

Many couples had to appear indifferent to each other in company for fear of redress. The secretive and deceptive practices that Sally Holloway suggests characterised adulterous affairs were clearly also typical in other controversial relationships, as for example the liaisons between non-married couples, like Lady Anne Hatton and Lord Morpeth, and Lord Byron and Claire Clairmont.⁴ This was a feature they also shared with queer or homosexual unions.⁵ Across both status groups, too much open familiarity between a man and a woman frequently prompted suspicion and speculation. In cases where opportunities to be alone together were rare, passionate expressions of love and devotion were frequently limited to letters, as can be seen in the cases of Leigh Hunt and Elizabeth Kent, and Leveson Gower and Countess Bessborough. Illegitimate pregnancies were a source of much anxiety because they could lead to a liaison being revealed irrefutably, and so they frequently involved an escalation of secretive and deceptive practices: several people were involved in the effort to keep Lady Elizabeth Monck's three

⁴ Sally Holloway, "'You know I am all on fire'": Writing the Adulterous Affair in England, c.1740-1830', *Historical Research*, 89:244 (2016), 317-339, (p. 338).

⁵ Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus and George Chauncey Jr, 'introduction', in Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus and George Chauncey, Jr (eds), *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past* (London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 3-5.

illegitimate pregnancies a secret from her husband, and Lord Boringdon also chose to deceive his wife (after he married in 1804), by claiming the children's mother was dead; and for many years George Soane deceived the nursemaid he employed to care for his illegitimate child to keep its mother's identity hidden, and he also attempted to dupe his father.⁶ The anticipation of external judgements and sanctions influenced self-expression and private practices.

Whilst concerns about how their intrigues would compromise their social standing were prevalent, individuals struggled when the need for secrecy and/or the lack of legitimacy in their relationships constrained their actions. As couples were often unable to spend time alone together and were frequently aware that either one or both had others whom they had to prioritise, controversial relationships were characterised by expressions of vulnerability and the regular practice of manipulative behaviours. As chapter one revealed, the men and women who engaged in these relationships were frequently explicitly and implicitly renegotiating the terms of their liaisons, and the expectations and needs that they had of each other. In this way they were not dissimilar to more conventional heterosexual couples: as Katie Barclay has shown, married couples were continuously involved in tacitly negotiating their relationships.⁷ That said, the individuals examined in this thesis perhaps felt more vulnerable and were inescapably aware of the precarity of their intimacies, thus they frequently resorted to manipulation.

⁶ For Boringdon's lies to his wife and his attitude towards her see, TNA, PRO 30/29/9/1/65, Lord Boringdon to Leveson Gower, 28 July 1804.

⁷ Katie Barclay, 'Negotiating Patriarchy: The Marriage of Anna Potts and Sir Archibald Grant of Monymusk, 1731-1744', *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, 28:2 (2008), 83-101, (p. 86).

Despite the restrictions placed on their relationships, many built and sustained affections by using their letters to craft intimacy, a practice that Holloway suggests was similarly used in courtship letters.⁸ Controversial couples reminisced about times they had spent together, or imagined meetings, often evoking the sensation of touch to give themselves a physical dimension in the minds of their beloved when they were apart. Like courting couples, they also engaged with material culture, kissing and holding letters close and exchanging gifts of hair which they wore on their bodies.⁹ In controversial relationships, this intimacy was further constructed by expressions of love, sadness, jealousy, and vulnerability, with which individuals sought to frame the responses of their correspondents to ensure they received the reassurances of love and devotion that they needed. The majority also employed the language of friendship in their exchanges to position their relationships into a conceptual framework that denoted their affection, commitment, and loyalty. Many of the relationships mirrored conventional marital power relations, which supports Barclay's findings on kept mistresses, however, this study has found that in some cases controversial relationships could unbalance gendered hierarchies.¹⁰ Married elite women, like Countess Bessborough, Lady Hamilton, and Lady Elizabeth Monck, were not economically dependent on their male lovers, and so the men were often frustrated by their inability to wield authority over them. Moreover, in some of the long-term relationships men's long-term dependence on their mistresses for emotional support also periodically shifted the power relations between them.

⁸ Sally Holloway, *The Game of Love in Georgian England: Courtship, Emotions, and Material Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 45.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 76-83.

¹⁰ Katie Barclay, 'Illicit Intimacies: The Imagined 'Homes' of Gilbert Innes of Stow and his Mistresses (1751-1832), *Gender & History*, 27:3 (2015), 576-590, (p. 578).

People conducted their controversial relationships based on assumptions or experiences of how their families and society would react to them. As chapters two, three and four have shown, engaging 'imprudently' in any conduct that might be perceived as scandalous could prompt malicious gossip and awkward confrontations. These could result in the individual being exposed and ridiculed in front of larger audiences. For women more often than men, it could result in estrangement from friends and family. In both Whig society and the various societies that made up the literary world, engaging in illicit relationships made individuals vulnerable to verbal and written attacks on their character.

Both societies had close and complex links with the London press: certain individuals, like George IV and Leigh Hunt, owned and controlled particular newspapers and journals, and were able to utilise them to defend their own conduct and cast suspicion on the morality of their opponents. The secrets of many of the couples examined in this thesis were exposed in print by members of their wider social group. While the exact practices of both groups differed, the motives that drove disclosures about private behaviour, and the functions such disclosures performed, were similar: rather than a straightforward attempt to capitalise on publicity to correct immoral conduct, uses of the press to expose and ridicule private behaviour were frequently motivated by personal or political enmities, revealing that these smaller societies were fraught with rivalries and tensions. Religious conceptions of sexual immorality were ubiquitous and so they provided a motif that was used universally to critique sexual behaviour and to justify attacks on individuals (even of those whose high and powerful status gave them the appearance of being untouchable). In a way these findings complicate the connection between late

eighteenth-century sex scandals and politics that historians have mapped so far: By examining different types of sources and their authors, it is clear that there was another dimension to discussions of controversial relationships over this period.¹¹

Chapters two and three have shown that gossip and scandal performed important functions in these smaller social groups. Gossip and scandal are triggered when a person's behaviour appears to 'violate collective values and morals'.¹² However, within the societies that have been examined by this thesis, moral values were fluctuating, complex and often conflicting over this period. This was because this period witnessed significant change: the press and print culture expanded rapidly and communicated the highly ideological politics of the French Wars to a large audience. There was a strong sense that the order of British society was shifting, and, in addition to this, the rise of a conception of romantic love put pressures on traditional values and generated both new possibilities and controversies. Many were reluctant to accept change and retained traditional conceptions of what constituted ideal marital and sexual conventions, while others challenged these long-enduring norms, often embarrassing those who were identified as being associated with them. As Gregory Dart, Kathryn Gleadle, Judith S. Lewis, and Dror Wahrman have all shown, albeit in diverse ways, different societies believed that a shift in the social and political order was possible: the middle classes jostled to obtain some power, while the elite tried to reform to maintain their authority.¹³

¹¹ For examples see: Donna T. Andrew, "'Adultery à la mode': Privilege, the law and attitudes to adultery 1770-1809', *History*, 82:265 (1997), 5-23; Anna Clark, *Scandal: The Sexual Politics of the British Constitution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Matthew Kinservik, *Sex, Scandal, and Celebrity in Late Eighteenth-Century England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

¹² Scott Brenton, 'Scandal and Social Theory', in Howard Tumber & Silvio Waisbord (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Media and Scandal* (London: Routledge, 2019), pp. 25-33, (p. 25).

¹³ Gregory Dart, *Metropolitan Art and Literature, 1810-1840: Cockney Adventures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 23; Kathryn Gleadle, *Early Feminists: Radical Unitarians and the*

On a macro level, as scandal highlights ‘the parameters’ of ‘acceptable standards of behaviour’ and morality, implicitly it functioned by suggesting to its audience that there should be some consensus in matters of sexual mores.¹⁴ By emphasising the unquestionable ‘immorality’ of liaisons, such as Lady Jersey’s blatant affair with the Prince of Wales, or William Hazlitt’s treatment of his wife and Sarah Walker, gossip and scandal both constructed and reflected the moral codes for social groups. In both of these cases, the scandal that erupted was not necessarily morally inspired—for instance the hostility shown to Lady Jersey by her peers was quite possibly due to jealousy and Court rivalry; criticisms took on a moral tone because these concerns were so ubiquitous. Whilst gossip was inspired by each group’s broader anxieties, scandal was emblematic of them, and centred on cases that seemed to threaten social stability. This was particularly prevalent at times when Britain was at war and during the periods of austerity that followed. Over this period Whig society and literary coteries shared similar concerns about the position of women within their groups, and the deterioration of marriage—which was held up as the foundation of a stable society.¹⁵ In parallels, both groups feared that alternative romantic or domestic ménages, exemplified by political radicals or outdated libertines, might allow women more freedoms and power than conventional relationships where their position as subordinates was stable. Evidence from gossip

Emergence of the Women’s Rights Movement, 1831-51 (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995), pp.112-114; Judith S. Lewis, *Sacred to Female Patriotism: Gender, Class, and Politics in late Georgian Britain* (New York: Routledge, 2003), chapter 6; Dror Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class: The Political Representation of Class in Britain, c.1780-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 151-152.

¹⁴ Julian Petley, ‘Shame and Scandal: Making the Personal Political’, in Tumber and Waisbord (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Media and Scandal*, pp. 421-432, (p. 423).

¹⁵ Rosemary Sweet, ‘The Ordering of Family and Gender in the Age of the Enlightenment’, in Frank O’Gorman & Diana Donald (eds), *Ordering the World in the Eighteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 112-140; Gleadle, *Early Feminists*, p. 4, p. 20, p. 30.

within both groups has also concurred with historians' arguments that masculine ideals were gradually changing, and men were increasingly held accountable and condemned for a wider range of behaviour than they had been in the early-modern period.¹⁶

Discourse and imagery that appeared in print (and in satirical images) both reflected and shaped discussions that occurred in oral gossip networks, confirming O'Loughlin's argument that the two were 'mutually constituted spaces'.¹⁷ Printed rumours about Helen Maria Williams prompted Hester Piozzi into epistolary discussions about the former's relationship with Hurford Stone: she adopted the press's satirical tone, stereotypes, and political allusions into her own narrative—portraying Williams as a 'wicked little democrat' and a harsh mistress, whom she alleged encouraged Hurford Stone to leave his wife to the mercy of the French Revolutionaries; and there are hints of Gillray's pathetic characterisation of the 4th Earl of Jersey in Lady Theresa Villiers description of him as a 'little fawning... Beast' who was unable to stand up to his wife.¹⁸ The overlap between discourses appearing in print and those in letters and reports of conversations is not surprising: as several scholars have argued, individuals regularly drew on cultural narratives to assess and describe their own relationships and those of the people around them.¹⁹ This

¹⁶ For relevant discussions see John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class home in Victorian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); David Turner, *Fashioning Adultery: Gender, Sex, and Civility in England, 1660-1740* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 197-199.

¹⁷ Katrina O'Loughlin, "'Strolling Roxanas": Sexual Transgressions and Social Satire in the Eighteenth Century', in Susan Broomhall (ed), *Spaces for Feeling: Emotions and Sociabilities in Britain, 1650-1850* (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 112-135, (p. 132).

¹⁸ Plyth, Parker family of Saltram and Robinson Letters, 1259/2/412, Lady Theresa Villiers to Lady Anne Robinson, 28 October 1798.

¹⁹ Ruth Perry, *Novel Relations: the Transformations of Kinship in English Literature and Culture 1748-1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) p. 5; Ingrid Tague, 'Love, Honour, and Obedience:

exchange was mutual though, as attitudes towards the relationships that were printed in the papers and represented by the caricaturists were often either produced by people from these groups themselves, or they were involved in collaborations with professionals.

Reactions to having one's conduct exposed in print varied, but for many the experience was anxiety-provoking. Some reflected on their behaviour and most were provoked into action to limit the damage caused to their reputations. They did this by publicly denying the claim, either implicitly, as Lady Melbourne suggested Countess Bessborough should do by appearing in town to be seen after the paragraphs alleging she had eloped with her lover in 1786; or explicitly, which Leigh Hunt did in his journal, *The Examiner*, when his relationship with Elizabeth Kent was being investigated in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in 1816. As the nineteenth century progressed responding to printed slurs—no matter how ambiguous—became more routine, either via letters sent in to the papers, journal articles, or by resorting to the legal system, as Sir Wedderburn-Webster did by suing the *St James's Chronicle* in 1816. Printed comments speculating on private behaviour humiliated the individuals they incriminated, which was undoubtedly their primary purpose. They triggered awkward questions from friends, family members, and acquaintances, often leading to uncomfortable discussions. Furthermore, by reaching a larger (but still relative) 'public' audience, they intensified the gossip that circulated within the individuals' social networks and damaged their social capital.

Fashionable Women and the Discourse of Marriage in the Early Eighteenth Century', *Journal of British Studies*, 40:1 (2001), 76-106.

On a micro level, gossip united friends in both Whig and literary societies. Their discussions of relationships that seemed to either illuminate or cover up immoral conduct, such as Wollstonecraft and Godwin's marriage, or Lady Anne Hatton's marriage to the Marquess of Abercorn, enabled them to reflect on the ambiguous grey areas of sexual and social mores. Moreover, as anthropologists have suggested, gossip reassured friends that they shared similar values and conceptions of morality.²⁰ It also allowed individuals to exorcise often stifled negative feelings that were proliferated by the tensions that were inherent in such tight-knit and competitive groups, where individuals were often rivals for power and prestige: a significant amount of published critical commentary on people's private relationships stemmed from in-class tensions. By creating broader awareness of an individual's (particularly women's) shameful conduct, gossip and scandal also encouraged others in their wider social networks to mobilise against them for 'justifiable' reasons: Lady Hatton was 'rejected' by women in Naples and London for her 'notoriety'; Lady Caroline Lamb was excluded from Almack's by Lady Jersey after *Glenarvon* was published; and Mary Wollstonecraft and Eliza Flower were both dropped by members of their social circles on account of their suspect relationships with men. Consequently, gossip and scandal acted as a deterrent, by making individuals aware that if they engaged in similarly scandalous conduct, they too would likely face ridicule and contempt. Gossip took on a different character according to social rank. There was more of an attempt by those in literary societies to use gossip to moralise

²⁰ Max Gluckman, 'Gossip and Scandal', *Current Anthropology*, 4:3 (1963), 307-316, (p. 308); Sally Engle Merry, 'Rethinking Gossip and Scandal', in Donald Black (ed), *Toward a General Theory of Social Control, Vol. 1 Fundamentals* (London: Academic Press, 1984), pp. 271-296, (p. 271, p. 278).

explicitly in sober reflections. In contrast, those in Whig society were empathetic at the beginning of the period and sardonic towards the end.

Contravening expectations put many social relationships under pressure, and by analysing these relationships this thesis has frequently revealed the boundaries and limits of interpersonal conduct within marriages, families, and friendships. These boundaries emphasise that reactions varied in accordance with the individual's class, gender, and relationship to the 'transgressor'. Having an affair with a married woman, or keeping a mistress, did not affect the reception of elite men with their peers; they may have been gossiped about but they were rarely challenged for it, and friends were lenient with each other's indiscretions, usually willing to offer advice and support. Both elite men and women were willing to recognise the long-term affairs of their friends as valid and significant relationships. This supports both Helen Berry and Ginger Frost's arguments about the willingness of communities to accept non-marital or quasi-marital relationships.²¹ In Whig society individuals did not necessarily conceive of these liaisons as being equivalent to marriage, but they were willing to acknowledge unions such as that between George IV and Marchioness Conyngham, and Lady Elizabeth Monck and Lord Boringdon, validating them as couples and understanding that these relationships were important to those who experienced them.

That said, knowing how to respond to these relationships was more complex for elite women, who risked being tainted by associating with any woman whose

²¹ Helen Berry, 'Queering the History of Marriage: the Social Recognition of a Castrato Husband in Eighteenth-Century Britain', *History Workshop Journal*, 74:1 (2012), 27-50; Ginger Frost, *Living in Sin: Cohabiting as Husband and Wife in Nineteenth-Century England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008).

conduct was perceived to be indecent. In the late eighteenth century, Whig ladies tried to support their friends in their controversial liaisons and were often unwilling to abandon them to society's condemnation. They expressed that their friendship made them duty-bound to advise and help their friends, but these duties constantly had to be weighed against the risks their association could bring upon themselves and others: for example, the Duchess of Devonshire was far more concerned about limiting her involvement with scandalous women, like Lady Anne Hatton and Countess Jersey, when her daughters were of a marriageable age. Whilst at the beginning of the period women in Whig networks empathised and fretted about how their friends would suffer for transgressions, by the 1820s and 1830s, they were far more sardonic and emotionally distant. This change reflected shifts in their 'emotional community' and sexual mores, which were led by the royal Court, who played a key role in setting the standards and expectations for elite society as a whole, as well as the fracturing of the Whigs as a social unit.²² Overall, Whig society was relatively tolerant of those who engaged in controversial relationships. They were certainly more likely to readmit these individuals into their circles post-scandal than those from the middling ranks of society.

Although there were certain literary individuals who were highly tolerant, the wider literary world and its audience were very censorious. Middle-class societies were largely intolerant of transgressive women, regardless of how powerful or influential their lover might be. Thus, the women in literary societies were less permissive regarding matters of sexual conduct. Controversial relationships

²² The concept of 'emotional communities' was devised by Barbara Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

antagonised bonds between female friends, and often prompted expressions of anger and revulsion. The notion that female sexual immorality was contagious strongly influenced how women from literary networks reacted to the transgressions of their friends and acquaintances. Most women were eager to disassociate themselves from 'deviant' women quickly, to display their disapproval of the conduct to others within their social networks and to protect themselves. They were far more likely to cut former friends for their indiscretions than their aristocratic counterparts: Hester Piozzi and Elizabeth Inchbald were particularly irritated when they felt their own reputations had been compromised because a friend's deception had left them unwittingly socialising with a 'deviant' woman. That said, their opinions and reactions depended on their sense of what constituted sexual morality. Whilst the majority ascribed to conventional moral frameworks, as we saw in chapter five, some women within literary societies had a less constraining conception of sexual 'deviance', and were therefore willing to accept the cohabitation of unmarried couples like that of Jane Williams and Thomas Jefferson Hogg. For these women, their radical identity was not restricted to the public world of politics: first and foremost, they demanded reform in private and domestic relationships where they felt the status quo was damaging and unreasonable.

Men's responses to controversial relationships also varied according to their specific social milieu. Men who identified themselves as being involved in what we now call the Romantic movement, like Shelley, Hunt and Hazlitt, were very open to alternative and more liberal sexual mores, and only condemned their peers when they felt they were being cruel. Other men with whom they were brought into contact were far less tolerant and were often inclined to view their behaviour

through the lens of libertinism; they were consequently reluctant to interact with them. Many men within dissenting circles also had progressive ideas about love and marriage and felt that two people cohabiting peacefully was far more ideal than a married couple who hated each other but were forced to remain together by law. That said, each case was complex and unique: while John Stuart Mill felt that divorce laws were in need of reform, he thought that William Johnson Fox's abandonment of his wife and new ménage with his former ward, Eliza Flower was problematic due to the scandal it provoked. Both men and women in literary circles criticised the controversial relationships of their friends when they felt they violated other values that they considered to be virtuous. They often made links between controversial attachments and selfishness, deceit, cruelty, and irrationality. Also, in contrast to their Whig counterparts, they were more apt to criticise their married peers for having illicit desires even if they did not act on them. This difference emphasises the two ranks' contrasting expectations of marriage: for the elite it was the act of adulterous sex that did the damage and threatened dynasties, for those in literary circles, who genuinely exalted the importance of love in marital relationships, any feelings or thoughts that could damage marital affection were dangerous. Due to their different expectations of what constituted an ideal marital relationship, individuals from the middling ranks of society referred to a broader spectrum of behaviour that they considered as marital infidelity.

Social networks were often built on families, and so both units frequently reflected and reproduced the other's attitudes, opinions, and sanctions. People's responses to the scandalous conduct of a family member were complex and suggest that certain features were intrinsic to the Georgian family. Reactions within the

family reflected three key concerns: firstly, how the liaison would affect the family's reputation—which was interdependent on the individual reputations of several family members; secondly, (and closely related) a sense that their family had been betrayed, their shared values had been rejected and their relationships had been demoted and replaced by an illicit attachment; and thirdly, anxiety about the vulnerable position the family member was now in, having conducted themselves in such a way that they potentially faced being ostracised. Families from both ranks used similar emotional logics to express these concerns, stressing the pain, distress and suffering that the individual's relationship caused them—which was frequently amplified by their relative's apparent indifference to this pain. Many, like the Godwins, Burneys, Smiths, Melbournes, and Dowager Countess Spencer, also distanced themselves physically and emotionally from their errant relatives, both to show their peers that they did not condone such conduct and also to try to manipulate the relative in question into ending their relationship. Parents and siblings commonly conveyed feelings of anger, shame, and humiliation because they were involuntarily implicated by their relative's scandalous conduct. They were often united by a collective sense of shame, as their private failures to instil values and morality was exposed for the judgement of their peers.

Despite the similarity of their concerns and the discourses they used to convey them, families from Whig society and those of literary societies imposed different sanctions on their relatives—in line with the expectations of their society's specific codes. The two groups' different use of the double standard is also prevalent: women invariably fared worse than men, however, mistresses of elite men, like Countess Bessborough or Lady Elizabeth Monck, were often tolerated (although not

always happily) by their families, and Whig women who had affairs, like Countess Jersey or the Duchess of Bedford, were never ostracised by their close relatives. Furthermore, the children born to the elite couples examined in this thesis were mostly cared for by their fathers or by their father's relatives; in this way they were absorbed into their natal families, marginalised but not entirely rejected. In contrast, the mistresses, or cohabiting companions of men from the middling classes, like Jane Williams or Anne Longden, *and* their children, were typically ostracised by both their lover's family, and sometimes even by their own. Men from these classes did not have the authority to force their families to be tolerant of their partners nor of their illegitimate children. The domestic space was viewed by both groups as be a site through which tacit acceptance or obvious rejection of an individual could be performed. Estrangements were common and caused a lot of emotional pain, but most of the families examined did reconcile eventually. Several of the cases analysed in chapter four demonstrate that the family, like society, did not always act as one unified entity, and, the relationships could provoke inter-generational disputes, especially in families from the literary circles where alternative conventions were gaining ground.

In taking a holistic research approach to the relationships and examining how they were discussed and responded to across various mediums and social units, this thesis has demonstrated that the familial, social, and political converged considerably. As chapter five demonstrated, women carefully portrayed themselves and their relationships in accordance to their specific audiences: while an individual might focus on how love had improved their physical and mental wellbeing to a friend, that same individual might express shame and remorse for their affair to their

mother. Individuals assessed and conducted their relationships according to how they knew, or assumed, they would be perceived in different spheres. The connection between print culture and sexual and social mores formed a macrocosm that illustrated the expectations people felt they *should* have of one another's behaviour, and this affected a microcosm of interpersonal conduct, where people managed their relationships according to more complex and variable factors. Using controversial relationships as a lens through which to look at how small societies operated has revealed the complexities of human interactions, the ties that held them together and the tensions that fractured their relationships. It has also problematised how we should approach certain primary sources, like newspapers and satirical prints. While they helped to establish these larger cultural narratives, in many cases commentaries on controversial relationships were driven by very personal reasons, highlighting the individual's ongoing and active participation in creating, sustaining, and challenging social and sexual mores. Public and private were not straightforward dichotomies.

This thesis has contributed to various fields, including histories of the family, gender relations, friendship, social networks, the London press, as well as histories of specific emotions, including love and jealousy, and how these were expressed and practiced in different contexts. But its focus on cases of marital non-conformity and the spectrum of marital infidelity renders this study primarily a history of marriage. It has demonstrated the importance of looking at a wide range of sources to understand the complex nuances that shaped how individuals thought about and practiced their marital and romantic relationships. This study improves our understanding of this era: The late Georgian period has been portrayed as an era of

change, which included shifts in ideas about marriage, sex, women's roles, love, and intimacy. Using controversial relationships as a lens to examine these shifts has demonstrated the limitations of sweeping narratives of change, and has shown the importance of acknowledging specific contexts; many members of the Whig world and the literary societies clearly had their own alternative conceptions of what constituted appropriate romantic and sexual conduct, however, they were unable to avoid being assessed by the norms that the majority ascribed to. Given the visibility of both groups' in British society, the private lives of their members took on political significance and were often used to criticise and disparage them as a community. This added pressure strained social and familial relationships in these groups that were already facing new challenges as they negotiated the anxieties caused by a transforming social, political and cultural terrain.

Appendix

Burney, James (1750-1821) and Burney, Sarah Harriet (1772-1844)

Captain James Burney was the son of musician Charles Burney (1726-1814) and his first wife, and Sarah Harriet was his half-sister, youngest daughter from Charles's second marriage. In 1785, James married Sarah Payne and they had two children. He left his wife in 1798 to set up home with Sarah Harriet. He was 48 and she 26. Their relationship caused disruption within the family, but its precise nature is unclear. In 1803, James returned to his wife and children and Sarah Harriet became a governess for a family in Cheshire.

Carlile, Richard (1790-1843) and Sharples, Eliza (1803-1852)

Richard Carlile, radical publisher and writer, was married in 1803 and had at least five children. He met Eliza Sharples, who came from a very pious family in Lancashire, when she visited him in Giltspur Street Compter, where he was serving two years for sedition. Carlile officially separated from his wife the following year-1830. Sharples was Carlile's disciple and he prepared her to deliver lectures on women's rights at the Rotunda lecture theatre in Blackfriars. They consummated their relationship whilst he was still in prison, and their first child was born in 1833. After he left prison, he acknowledged their relationship and they cohabited. Both announced their relationship was a 'moral union' to friends and family, and publicly via newspapers. As their family grew, Sharples withdrew from the public aspect of their work. Carlile died intestate in 1843, leaving Eliza and their children living in poverty.

Cavendish, William, 5th Duke of Devonshire (1748-1811), Cavendish [née Spencer], Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire (1757-1806), and Foster [née Hervey], Lady Elizabeth (1759-1824)

Lady Elizabeth Foster moved in with the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire shortly after meeting them in Bath in 1782. The relationship between the two women was very intense and affectionate. At some point Foster began an affair with the Duke, and their first child, Caroline St Jules, was born in August 1785. A son was born in May 1788, but the Duke was not as certain of his parentage. The two children were raised in secret in France until the Revolution, after which they were brought to live with their legitimate half siblings. The ménage-à-trois lasted until the Duchess's death in 1806. In October 1809, Foster married the Duke, much to the dismay of the first Duchess's family, but the marriage was short-lived as he died in 1811.

Fox [née Vassall], Elizabeth Vassall, Lady Holland (1771-1845) and Fox, Henry Richard, 3rd Baron Holland (1773-1840)

In 1794, Lord Holland embarked on an affair with Lady Elizabeth Webster when he was on his Grand Tour in Naples. She was married to Sir Godfrey Webster, twenty-five years her senior. Lady Elizabeth eloped with Holland in 1796, after discovering she was pregnant with his child. She was divorced in July 1797 and married Lord Holland two days later. They had six more children. Lady Holland was never received at Court, but her extensive correspondence shows that she held a high position within Whig society, and she retained friendships with women of her rank as well as men.

Fox, William Johnson (1786-1864) and Flower, Eliza (1803-1846)

William Johnson Fox was a Unitarian preacher and the Minister of the unconventional South Place Chapel. His marriage to Eliza Florance was strained. He met Eliza Flower, daughter of the radical printer, Benjamin Flower, whilst touring Scotland. Benjamin Flower died in 1829 and Fox became trustee for Eliza and her sister, Sarah. She became Fox's assistant, helping him with his editorship of the Unitarian magazine, the *Monthly Repository*. The Foxes separated informally in 1832: keeping the household together for financial reasons, and Mrs Fox moved upstairs. Two years later she made allegations about her husband's relationship with Flower, sparking a scandal that would see him resign from his congregation and become estranged from many of his friends—including his former mentee, the author and social reformer, Harriet Martineau. He set up a separate household with Flower and his children at Craven Hill. In 1836, the Unitarian organisation in London expelled him, and after this, he led a radical offshoot of the sect. Flower died of consumption in 1846—and Fox reconciled with his wife sometime after.

George IV (1762-1830)

George IV had multiple mistresses when he was the Prince of Wales, including actresses Mary Robinson and Elizabeth Armistead, and married women such as **Elizabeth Lamb, Viscountess Melbourne**. In 1785, he secretly married the twice-widowed Catholic, Maria Fitzherbert, which was legally invalid. He began an affair with **Frances Villiers [née Twysden], Countess of Jersey (1753-1821)** in 1793. Although she was only ten years his senior, she was a grandmother, a fact that the press exploited; her husband, whom George made his Master of Horse, was seen to

be too accepting of the affair; and Lady Jersey's attempts to exert control over other members of the Court was controversial. She also orchestrated his marriage to his cousin, **Princess Caroline of Brunswick (1768-1821)**, in 1795. The marriage was a disaster, and the Prince and Princess separated shortly after the birth of their daughter in 1796. The affair with Lady Jersey ended acrimoniously in 1807, when she was replaced by a rival, another married peeress, the Marchioness of Hertford. She was in turn replaced by **Elizabeth Conyngham [née Denison], Marchioness Conyngham (1769-1861)** in 1819. This was George's last significant relationship, which lasted until his death in 1830.

Hamilton [née Gore, other married name Hatton], Anne, Marchioness of Abercorn (1763-1827) and Howard, George, Lord Morpeth (1773-1848)

Lady Anne engaged in multiple non-marital relationships after her husband died in 1793. Her longest standing affair was with George Howard, Lord Morpeth, who she met in Naples in 1794. Their five-year relationship ended when Morpeth admitted that he could not marry Lady Anne, as she was not considered suitable by his family. He later married Lady Georgiana Cavendish, the eldest daughter of the 5th Duke of Devonshire. Much to everyone's surprise, Lady Anne married John Hamilton, the 1st Marquess of Abercorn in April 1800: the couple were believed to be mutually tolerant of each other's extra-marital relationships.

Hamilton [née Lyon], Emma, Lady Hamilton (1765-1815), Hamilton, Sir William (1731-1803) and Nelson, Horatio, Viscount Nelson (1758-1805)

In 1791, Sir William Hamilton, British Ambassador to Naples, caused a scandal by marrying Emma Lyon, a blacksmith's daughter who had been a courtesan since she

was a teenager. She had been Sir William's mistress for five years—and his nephew's before that. They met Lord Nelson in 1798 after the Battle of the Nile. Nelson and Emma began an affair that Sir William appeared to accept. Sir William was recalled by the British government in 1800, so the trio returned to London with Emma heavily pregnant with Nelson's child—a daughter, Horatia, (b. Jan 1801). Nelson abandoned his wife, Frances (m.1787) and lived in a ménage-à-trois with the Hamiltons, often at his Surrey estate. After Sir William's death in 1803, Emma moved to a separate residence from Nelson, but was encumbered by debts. She conceived a second child around this time who died shortly after its birth. Nelson died at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805 leaving Emma devastated and in dire financial straits. She spent her final years in and out of debtors' prison and eventually moved to Calais to escape her creditors. She died there in 1815.

Hazlitt, William (1778-1830), and Walker, Sarah (b.1800 – c.1878)

William Hazlitt was a painter and essayist from a dissenting family. He married Sarah [née Stoddart] in 1808 and they had one surviving son but lost several other children in early infancy. They began to live apart circa 1816. Hazlitt took lodgings off Chancery Lane and fell in love with his landlady's daughter, Sarah—who was over twenty years his junior. Hazlitt thought his feelings were reciprocated and went to Scotland to divorce his wife in the hope that he would then marry Sarah. After the divorce Hazlitt discovered she was in love with another. His *Liber Amoris* included edited versions of the pair's letters and conversations. It was published anonymously in 1823, but he was quickly identified as the author and his enemies in the right-wing press seized upon it to denigrate his character. Hazlitt married Isabella Shaw in 1824.

Hogg, Thomas Jefferson (1792-1862) and Williams [née Cleveland], Jane (1798-1884)

Thomas Jefferson Hogg, lawyer, is best-known today for writing an unflattering biography of his friend, Percy Bysshe Shelley. In 1823, Hogg met Jane Williams (Shelley's last infatuation) when she returned to England from Italy following the death of her partner, Edward Williams, in the same boating accident as Shelley. Hogg made his affections for Jane clear shortly after they met. She was unsure but eventually agreed to cohabit and took his name informally. They could not marry because Jane was legally married to a Captain John Edward Johnson, whom she had been estranged from prior to her relationship with Williams. They had two daughters—whom Hogg's family refused to see due to their illegitimate status—but to many they appeared respectably married and remained together until his death in 1862.

Hunt, (James Henry) Leigh (1784-1859) and Kent, Elizabeth (1791-1861)

Leigh Hunt met Elizabeth Kent in 1802. Kent was already a fan of Hunt's poetry, but it was her elder sister, Marianne, whom he chose to court, and they married in 1809. The Hunts had ten children. Kent periodically lived with them, providing Marianne with domestic support, but also assisting Hunt with his literary endeavours. This included his editorship of *The Examiner*, a radical weekly paper founded by Hunt's brother, John. Kent resided with Hunt in Surrey Gaol, when he was imprisoned for Libel of the Prince Regent, whilst Marianne convalesced with her young children. The nature of Hunt and Kent's relationship is unclear: their correspondence suggests it

was emotionally intense and erotic, and perhaps occasionally physically affectionate. They were bound by a shared love of literature. Kent was driven to attempt suicide on at least two occasions, allegedly because of conflict between them. The attachment strained Hunt's marriage, and when the family moved to Italy in 1822 to be with the Shelleys, Marianne refused to allow her sister to accompany them. In his later years Hunt was beset with poor health and Kent was his amanuensis. Marianne spent her final years a housebound alcoholic, dying in 1857. Hunt followed in 1859, and Kent died impoverished in 1861.

Lamb [née Ponsonby], Lady Caroline (1785-1828) Byron, George Gordon Noel, 6th Baron Byron (1788-1824)

Lady Caroline married the Hon. William Lamb (1779-1848), heir to the Melbourne title, in 1805. Their marriage was tempestuous, and they lost two babies who were born prematurely. Their sole surviving child was intellectually disabled. Lady Caroline was unfaithful and had several short-term affairs, including with **Sir Godfrey Webster (1789-1836)**. She had an intense three-month long affair with Lord Byron in 1812 that scandalised elite society because of her lack of discretion. Byron tired of her dramatic tendencies and swiftly moved on with **Jane Harley [née Scott], Countess of Oxford (1774-1824)**. He ended the affair with Lady Caroline via a letter (which she reprinted in her roman-a-clef of their affair, *Glenarvon* (1816)). She had a nervous breakdown: she tried to sneak into Byron's house dressed as a page boy, she sent angry letters to Byron and his new mistress, and she also tried to slit her wrists publicly at a society ball. Her behaviour was so erratic that her husband's family tried to persuade him to separate from her, but he refused even after she was ostracised by Whig society for the humiliating portrayals of various individuals in *Glenarvon*. Lamb lived in rural

retirement for much of the rest of her life, and although William was persuaded to start a legal separation in 1825, he was with her when she died in 1828 at Melbourne House.

Lamb [née St Jules], Lady Caroline George (1785-1862), Brougham, Henry Peter, 1st Baron Brougham and Vaux (1778-1868)

Lady Caroline George was the illegitimate daughter of the 5th Duke of Devonshire and Lady Elizabeth Foster. She married the Melbournes' youngest son, George Lamb (1784-1834) in 1809. They had no children. In 1816, Lady Caroline George absconded to Italy with Henry Brougham, lawyer and politician. She justified the affair by claiming that George was a drunk who neglected her. After family intervention she returned to England and the couple were reconciled in 1817.

Lamb [née Milbanke], Elizabeth, Viscountess Melbourne (1751-1818) and Wyndham, George O'Brien, 3rd Earl of Egremont (1751-1837)

Lady Melbourne married Sir Peniston Lamb in 1769. Both tolerated one another's multiple affairs throughout the marriage. Sir Peniston was only certain of his paternity of their eldest child, also named Peniston (1770-1805). He largely accepted the five children that followed as his own (although Peniston's premature death in 1805 devastated him). The other children are rumoured to have been the result of Lady Melbourne's affairs with **George O'Brien, 3rd Earl of Egremont**—with whom she had a life-long relationship from circa 1773, and **George, Prince of Wales**—with whom she had an affair in the mid-1780s—who took a life-long interest in her son George (1784-1834). She was a Whig hostess and used her sexuality for both the Whig party

interest and to advance her husband's political career. Her affair with **Francis Russell, 5th Duke of Bedford (1765-1802)**, from 1791 until his death in 1802, influenced his bankrolling of several of the party's activities. She had an epistolary intimacy with Lord Byron after he ended his affair with her daughter-in-law until her death. Lady Melbourne was never ostracised due to her ability to play by the rules, but sometimes her actions incited others to gossip, as for example when she appeared to intervene and stop both Egremont's and Bedford's proposed marriages in 1780 and 1802 respectively.

Lawrence, Sir Thomas (1769-1830) and Wolff [née Hutchinson], Isabella (d.1829)

Lawrence was a very successful portrait painter and a fellow of the Royal Society. He met Mrs Isabella Wolff, wife of the Danish consul in London, when he was commissioned to paint her portrait around 1803—although it was not completed and exhibited until 1815. They had an emotionally intense but ambiguous relationship, and when she separated from her husband in 1810, they were wary of keeping an appropriate distance from one another so as not to arouse suspicions. Lawrence was devastated when Wolff died in 1829. He died a few months later in January 1830.

Maynard [née Parsons], Anne [Nancy], Viscountess Maynard (c.1735-1814/15), Maynard, Charles 2nd Viscount Maynard (1752-1824), and Russell, Francis, 5th Duke of Bedford (1765-1802)

Originally Nancy Parsons, Lady Maynard made a career as a political courtesan. She was the mistress of the Duke of Grafton in the 1760s, over the period when he was

Prime Minister: they scandalised society by appearing at the theatre openly together when the Queen was present. Grafton ended their relationship when Parsons began a liaison with the 3rd Duke of Dorset (1745-1799) in 1770. In 1776 she met and married Viscount Maynard and the couple toured the continent. They had no children. They met the young Francis Russell, 5th Duke of Bedford, who was on his Grand Tour, in France in 1784, and lived in a ménage-à-trois for around three years until the Duke returned to England. The relationship was conducted abroad but the London newspapers took a lot of interest in it. The Maynards remained together after the affair ended but were estranged circa 1800. Lady Maynard remained in France/Italy until her death. Lord Maynard did not remarry even though he outlived his wife by a decade.

Mill, John Stuart (1806-1873) and Mill [née Hardy; other married name Taylor], Harriet (1807-1858)

John Stuart Mill was introduced to Harriet Taylor through their mutual friend, Unitarian Minister, **William Johnson Fox**, circa 1830. She was married to John Taylor (1796-1849) and the couple had three children. Mill and Harriet were drawn together by intellectual interests: both were passionate about the need for social and political reforms and advocated equality between the sexes. Their friendship was emotionally intense but whether it was consummated or not is moot. Harriet was reluctant to break formally from her husband, fearful of causing him pain and disgracing the family. In 1833 the Taylors agreed to a trial separation, and Mill went to visit Harriet in Paris. After she returned to England, all three lived in separate households, though

Harriet saw Mill often. Harriet nursed her husband in his final months as he died from cancer in 1849, and she married Mill in 1851. Throughout their marriage she suffered with ill health, and she died in Avignon in 1858. After her death, her daughter Helen Taylor lived with Mill and acted as his amanuensis.

D'Orsay, Gédéon Gaspard Alfred de Grimaud, Count D'Orsay (1801-1852), D'Orsay [née Gardiner], Harriet Anne Jane Frances, Countess D'Orsay (1812-1869) and Gardiner [née Power; other married name Farmer], Marguerite, Countess of Blessington (1789-1849)

The Count D'Orsay met the Count and Countess of Blessington in 1822 and lived with them in a ménage-à-trois as they toured Europe in the 1820s. In 1827, the Count of Blessington married Lady Harriet, his fifteen-year old daughter (from his first marriage), to D'Orsay, to cement him in their family and to financially provide for his future. After Blessington died in 1829, his wife, daughter and son-in-law returned to London and set up a household together. The Countess D'Orsay asked her relatives for help escaping her marriage, alleging that her stepmother and husband were sexually involved. She left in 1831. Her husband and stepmother accused her of having an affair with **Charles Bury, 2nd Earl of Charleville (1801-1851)**.

Parker, John, 2nd Baron Boringdon (1772-1840) and Monck [née Gore], Lady Elizabeth (c.1764 - ?)

Lady Elizabeth Monck had been married to Henry Monck for over a decade when she met John Parker, Lord Boringdon in Naples in 1794. Their affair was passionate, loving, and endured for a decade. They had three sons born in 1797, 1799, and 1800, who were brought up on Boringdon's estate in Plymouth. With each pregnancy Boringdon made efforts to get Lady Elizabeth to leave her husband, assured that the

latter would divorce her which would enable Boringdon to marry her. She was unsure and feared becoming a social pariah and disgracing her two legitimate daughters. This caused a lot of conflict between them. Lady Elizabeth temporarily ended the affair when Boringdon married heiress Lady Augusta Fane (b.1786), in 1804. They reconciled the following year. When Lady Augusta eloped with Sir Arthur Paget in 1808, her husband's relationship with Monck was cited as being partly to blame. The Moncks appear to have been living separately by this point. Lady Elizabeth's reputation was compromised by the mention of her name in Boringdon's criminal conversation and divorce litigation proceedings. She lived a more retired life after. Boringdon married, Frances Talbot (d.1857) in 1809; he continued to support Monck's sons, but there is no further mention of their relationship after this.

Ponsonby [née Spencer], Henrietta Frances, Countess of Bessborough (1761-1821), and Gower, Granville Leveson, 1st Earl Granville (1773-1846)

Countess Bessborough married Frederick Ponsonby, 3rd Earl of Bessborough in 1780. They had four children, but the marriage was reportedly not a happy one. She had affairs in the 1780s, with Charles Wyndham—which almost resulted in an elopement until her family intervened, and with Richard Brinsley Sheridan. When her husband discovered the latter in 1789, he began divorce proceedings, but the 5th Duke of Devonshire, who was Ponsonby's cousin and the Countess's brother-in-law, managed to persuade him to reconcile with her. In 1794, she met Granville Leveson Gower in Naples. She initially refused his advances, but they had consummated their relationship by the end of 1796. She fell pregnant three times: the first baby was stillborn in 1799, a daughter was born in 1800, and a son in 1804. They tried to keep the relationship a secret but many in Whig society knew about it. The affair ended

when Leveson Gower married the Countess's niece, Lady Harriet Cavendish, in 1809— with the Countess's blessing. Lady Harriet accepted her husband's two illegitimate children into her household, and the Countess and Leveson Gower kept up an affectionate correspondence until her death in 1821.

Russell [née Gordon], Georgiana, Duchess of Bedford (1781–1853) and John Russell, 6th Duke of Bedford (1766-1839)

Lady Georgiana married the 6th Duke of Bedford in 1803. She was previously engaged to his elder brother, the 5th Duke, until his premature death in 1802. They had ten children together. They both tolerated each other's affairs. Lady Georgiana's brief liaison with Richard Charles Francis Christian Meade, 3rd Earl of Clanwilliam, in Vienna, 1820, is discussed in chapter two, but she also had a long affair with the painter, Sir Edwin Landseer, circa 1826 until shortly after the Duke's death in 1839. He reputedly fathered her youngest child (b.1826) and the trio lived on and off in a ménage-à-trois in Bedford's residences in Scotland and England.

Seymour-Conway, Francis, 3rd Marquess of Hertford (1777-1842) and Strachan [née Dillon], Lady Louisa (d.1868)

The 3rd Marquess of Hertford was estranged from his wife, Maria Emily Faganani (m.1798) when he met Lady Strachan in the 1820s. She was married to Sir Richard John Strachan, but it is unclear whether she became Hertford's mistress before or after her husband's death in 1828. Hertford financially supported her and her daughters during her widowhood, and he was upset and humiliated when she absconded and married an Italian. She left her daughters with him, but Charles

Greville suggests that Hertford became so debauched they had to leave. Hertford reputedly lived with an entourage of prostitutes until his death in 1842.

Shelley, Percy Bysshe (1792-1822), Shelley [née Godwin] Mary Wollstonecraft (1797-1851), and Clairmont, Clara Mary Jane (1798-1879)

Percy Bysshe Shelley met Mary Godwin in consequence of his financial and intellectual rapport with her father, William Godwin. When the couple fell in love in 1814, Shelley was already married to Harriet and had one child and another on the way. Godwin forbade their relationship, so they eloped to the continent together in the July, taking Mary's stepsister, Claire Clairmont with them. They returned after six weeks, Mary pregnant, because they had run out of money. They took lodgings in London, where Mary's baby died shortly after its birth. They went on to have three more children, only the last, Percy Florence (1819-1889), survived infancy. The Shelleys married in 1816, after Shelley's first wife's suicide. Mary, Shelley, and Claire lived for several years in a tense ménage-à-trois: Claire and Shelley were flirtatious and affectionate, and their friendship grew more intimate as the years went on, although many biographers agree it was unconsummated. Shelley helped Claire in her dealings with Lord Byron, who fathered her only child, Allegra (1817-1822). Shelley died in a boating accident in Italy in July 1822. Mary returned to England the following year to raise their son; she never remarried. Claire went on to be a governess in Russia and never married.

Smith, Benjamin (1783-1860) and Longden, Anne (d. 1834)

Benjamin Smith met Anne Longden, a milliner's apprentice, in 1826, when he was visiting his sister, Frances Nightingale, in Derbyshire. She soon became pregnant

(with Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon). He leased a house for her, and she briefly assumed the name 'Mrs Leigh' to prevent gossip. Benjamin would not marry her because of his principles, which included the idea that marriage legalised and facilitated female oppression. A second child was born in 1828 and the family went to America for two years. After their return to England they lived openly together and had three more children. Benjamin's female relatives refused to see Anne or the couple's children; it is less clear what his father, politician William Smith, thought about this unconventional ménage. After Anne's death from consumption, Benjamin ignored his family's suggestion that he send his children to be raised in a rural location, and instead raised them himself in Hastings.

Soane, George (1790-1860), Soane, Agnes (d.1851), and Boaden, Maria (unknown)

George Soane married Agnes Boaden against his parents' wishes in 1811, they had three children. Her sister, Maria, lived with them. At some point George and Maria began an affair and she miscarried a child in 1821. A son was born in 1824 and brought up in the country until 1828. The Soanes then tried to pass him off as their legitimate child—even getting him baptised—but his sudden appearance aroused Sir John Soane's suspicions. Agnes accepted her husband's relationship with her sister, potentially under duress. Soane offered to support her and her children if she left her husband, but she did not. In the mid-1830s they separated their household, but Maria and her son lived in the same neighbourhood as the Soanes and they continued their relationship.

Temple, Henry John, 3rd Viscount Palmerston (1784-1865) and Temple [née Lamb, first married name Cowper], Emily, Viscountess Palmerston (1787-1869)

Lady Emily married the 5th Earl Cowper (1778-1837) in 1805 and they had five children - only the eldest was undisputedly Cowper's. Lady Emily had many affairs, but her only consistent liaison was with the 3rd Viscount Palmerston, who reputedly fathered three of her children. Palmerston was nicknamed Cupid because of his womanising and had many affairs with married Society women, including with Lady Emily's fellow Almack's patronesses, **Sarah Sophia Child Villiers, the Countess of Jersey**, and **Dorothea, Princess Lieven (1785-1857)**, wife of the Russian ambassador to England. Lady Emily married Palmerston in 1839, two years after her husband's death.

Trelawny, Edward John (1792-1881) and Wright, Gabrielle (unknown)

Edward John Trelawny, writer and adventurer, befriended Percy Bysshe Shelley and Lord Byron in Pisa in 1822. It was through them that he met Gabrielle Wright, wife of the man who designed Byron's schooner, the *Bolivar*. For Trelawny his affair with Gabrielle was casual: he wrote to Claire Clairmont, whom he loved and proposed marriage to on several occasions (she declined his offer), that he pitied Gabrielle, whose feelings for him were far more intense. Gabrielle's husband restricted her movements and Trelawny left Italy in July 1823 to accompany Byron to Greece.

Villiers, Sarah Sophia Child, Countess of Jersey (1785-1867) and Wellesley, Arthur, first Duke of Wellington (1769-1852)

Heiress, Sarah Sophia Child married George Child-Villiers, 5th Earl of Jersey in 1804. She had multiple affairs that her husband tolerated—including with her associate's, Lady Emily Cowper's, long-term lover, the 3rd Viscount Palmerston, in 1833. Whether or not her friendship with the **Arthur Wellesley, 1st Duke of Wellington** was sexual is unknown. Some of their contemporaries suggested it was an affair, whilst others saw it purely as political manoeuvring on her part. Wellington was a notorious womaniser, and had several affairs before and after his marriage, including with notorious courtesan, Harriette Wilson (1786-1845). Her attempts to blackmail him with her exposé, *Memoirs of Harriette Wilson, Written by Herself* (1825) were unsuccessful.

Wedderburn-Webster [née Annesley], Lady Frances Caroline (1793-1837) and Stanhope, Charles, Viscount Petersham (1780-1851)

In 1810, Lady Frances married James Wedderburn-Webster (1788-1840), who was a friend of Lord Byron's. She had a brief flirtation with Byron in 1813, and was apparently the muse for his poem, *When We Two Parted*, written in 1815 after he heard the rumours of her affair with the Duke of Wellington in Brussels. Her husband denied that there was any truth in the rumour, and successfully sued the newspaper that first ran the story. How far her flirtation with Viscount Petersham went in 1821 is similarly ambiguous. But her husband's interruption of the couple's arranged

meeting, and the two men's subsequent duel, fuelled the gossip mill and inspired many satirical prints. The Webster's marriage broke down in 1823.

Williams, Helen Maria (1759-1827) and Stone, John Hurford (1763-1818)

Helen Maria Williams, writer, met John Hurford Stone, a radical and printer, in France, where she was following the activities of the French Revolution. In 1793, the English living in France were arrested. Stone was imprisoned with his wife, and Williams separately with her family. Stone's wife divorced him in 1794, and he went to Switzerland with Williams. Rumours circulated about them, but Williams always maintained their friendship was platonic. After Napoleon's abdication, they lived together with other members of Williams's family in Paris until Stone's death in 1818.

Wollstonecraft [married name Godwin], Mary (1759-1797), Godwin, William (1756-1836)

Mary Wollstonecraft, author, and advocate for women's rights, had an unconventional relationship with Captain Gilbert Imlay (1754-1828), an American Revolutionary she met in France in 1793. Imlay registered Wollstonecraft as his wife to protect her from the French authorities. Their daughter, Fanny, was born in 1794. Imlay abandoned Wollstonecraft, leading her to attempt suicide. Wollstonecraft was introduced to William Godwin, philosopher, and writer, by their mutual publisher, Joseph Johnson. Their relationship began in 1796, and Wollstonecraft discovered she was pregnant in the winter. They married in March 1797, much to the surprise of their associates who thought Wollstonecraft was already married because she had continued to use the name Imlay in London. After Wollstonecraft's death in childbirth

in September 1797, Godwin raised her two daughters with his second wife, Mary Jane Clairmont (1768-1841).

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Add MS 75914: Letters from Lady Spencer to her son, George Spencer, 2nd Earl Spencer, 1786-1787.

Add MS 75608: Correspondence of Lady Spencer with her daughter, Henrietta (Harriet), wife of Frederick Ponsonby, Viscount Duncannon, 3rd Earl of Bessborough, [1768?]-1814.

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Add MS 45547: Correspondence of Lady Melbourne with her fourth son, George Lamb, his wife, Caroline (née St. Jules), 1808-1817; and with Lord and Lady Byron, 1812-1817.

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