

Romantic and Socio-Sexual Scripts in
Eighteenth-Century Britain

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Abstract

My thesis re-examines scholarly understandings of love, courtship, and socio-sexual practice during the long eighteenth century through the double lens of scripting theory and feminism. My research contributes to understandings of sexual consent, female agency, and the emotional and romantic development of young men and women throughout the period.

In Chapter One, I will demonstrate how young men and women developed distinctly different ideas and expectations of, and scripts for, love and marriage during the decade-long developmental stage between the onset of puberty and the point at which many were practically able to seriously consider courtship and matrimony. I will explore the disparate lived experiences of young men and women in the long eighteenth-century, as well as the contrary cultural influences they were exposed to during this time, and demonstrate the effects of these divergent developmental experiences by analysing men's and women's behaviours and attitudes once they reached an age at which they began seeking, entering, or being sought out for serious romantic relationships with or by the opposite sex.

In Chapter Two, I will analyse literary and artistic representations of socio-sexual practice to demonstrate how sexual consent was requested, performed, and interpreted in received eighteenth-century socio-sexual scripts. Particularly, I will show that erotic literature specifically advised men to request consent when their partner was sexually inexperienced, and to wait for their partner to give that consent before proceeding with sexual contact. I will further explore how people, particularly women, were expected to express consent nonverbally, by making their faces and bodies sites of communication. Finally, I will show how men in erotic literature were portrayed as being deliberately attentive to nonverbal communication, demonstrating that men were expected to be actively engaging with women's nonverbal communication.

This research complicates existing understandings of eighteenth-century courtship dynamics and socio-sexual practice, and identifies elements of the received socio-sexual script regarding the requesting, communicating, and interpreting of sexual consent throughout the long eighteenth century.

Thesis Declaration

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

I give permission for the digital version of my thesis to be made available on the web, via the University's digital research repository, the Library Search and also through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the University to restrict access for a period of time.

I acknowledge the support I have received for my research through the provision of an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship.

Signature:

Introduction

I was upon the Bed... making as if I had been at work, when he came into the Chamber he saluted and asked me, what I did, I made him a civil answer, and desired him to sit down, which he soon did close by me, staring me full in the face, and all quivering and shaking, asked me if my Mother were at home, and told me he had met you at the bottom of the stairs, and that you had spoken to him about me, desiring to know if it were with my consent. I returning no answer, but Smiling, he grew bolder, and immediately Kissed me, which I permitted him...¹

So relates the newly non-virginal Katherine of her first sexual experience with a young man by the name of Roger in *The School of Venus* (1680). Later, once the couple have begun to have penetrative sex, Katherine recalls how Roger: ‘asked me if I were pleased, I answered, yes... so am I, said he, hugging me close unto him’.² Roger’s comportment throughout the encounter—his nervousness, his emotional vulnerability, his respect for Katherine’s agency and consent, and his verbal requests for confirmation that Katherine is enjoying herself—as well as Katherine’s emphasised agency and decision-making throughout their encounter both serve to complicate the accepted narrative of socio-sexual relations in eighteenth-century Britain. This narrative posits that romantic and sexual dynamics between men and women during the long eighteenth century in Britain were predominantly characterised by of male aggression and female submission. However, *The School of Venus* (1680) is not an isolated case. The socio-sexual scripts represented in numerous varieties of well-circulated and widely read texts—erotic literature, general fiction, advice and conduct literature, and men’s and women’s life writings—invite a new examination of the sexual and romantic dynamics between men and women in eighteenth-century Britain.

The aim of this research is to enrich the existing academic debate around romantic and sexual gender relations between men and women during the long eighteenth century. As stated above, most recent scholarship in this field argues that women’s sexuality and sexual agency were dominated by

¹ “The School of Venus (1680),” in *When Flesh Becomes Word: An Anthology of Early Eighteenth-Century Libertine Literature*, ed. Bradford K. Mudge (Oxford University Press, 2004), 27.

² *Ibid.*, 30.

male aggression and repression.³ While I acknowledge that both male aggression towards and repression of women and their sexuality were present during the period, I argue that historical evidence speaks to a much more complex and egalitarian set of romantic and socio-sexual scripts and practices. To this end I will explore the way that distinct cultural influences and lived experiences disparately shaped the emotional development of young adults throughout the long eighteenth century, specifically in relation to their receipt and negotiation of romantic and socio-sexual scripts. Following this, I will demonstrate how this developmental phase impacted men's and women's romantic and socio-sexual experiences if and when they began to seriously consider courtship and marriage. With regards to the more specifically sexual element of socio-sexual scripts and practices, I will establish that consent, both in sexual and non-sexual contexts, was conceptualised as an act of willing submission. I further outline some elements of the socio-sexual script for heterosexual sexual experiences, including requesting, performing, and interpreting sexual consent. This thesis argues that socio-sexual and romantic scripts for heterosexual couples in eighteenth-century Britain reflected a greater degree of respect for and exercise of female agency than has previously been believed, and that men and women were both active participants within the negotiation and performance of these scripts.

i. Primary source materials

This thesis is a work of cultural history, within which I have brought a range of different kinds of sources into conversation in order to provide evidence of cultural representations and understandings of socio-sexual and romantic scripts, as well as their related practice; specifically, I am using conduct and advice literature, erotic literature, fiction and poetry, and visual art. In doing so, I was limited by several factors: in looking for personal life writings, including diaries and letters, I was hampered by my inability to access relevant archives; and, in the case of the erotic literature I studied, by the relatively small number of surviving materials, as compared to the number of surviving novels from the period, for example. As such, much of my research is reliant on a small group of key sources. Peter Burke has

³ See, for example: Katie Barclay, "From Rape to Marriage: Questions of Consent in Eighteenth-Century Britain," in *Interpreting Sexual Violence, 1660-1800*, ed. Anne Greenfield (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2013); Garthine Walker, "Rereading Rape and Sexual Violence in Early Modern England," *Gender & History* 10, no. 1 (April 1998); Rebecca Frances King, "Rape in England 1600-1800: Trials, Narratives and the Question of Consent" (MA thesis, University of Durham, 1998).

identified the problematics of using a few, select sources repeatedly to attain a broad cultural picture of society in that age; particularly, he warns against reading ‘texts and images of a certain period as... unproblematic reflections of their times’ and advises cultural historians to be critical of their historical sources.⁴ To combat the difficulties identified by Burke, I have deliberately selected public sources, such as novels, erotic literature, and poetry, which enjoyed significant popularity during their contemporary period; my conclusions, therefore, specifically reflect popular ideas about love, sex, and romance during the long eighteenth-century.

In chronological order, the examples of conduct literature I used for my analysis of received scripts for courtship, friendship, and romance throughout the period are as follows: François de Salignac de la Mothe-Fénelon *Instructions for the Education of a Daughter* ([French, 1688; English 1707] 1708); W. Vaughan’s *Advice to Young Gentleman, Concerning the Conduct of Life* (1710); the Marquise de Lambert’s *Advice of a Mother to Her Son and Daughter* (1737); Pierre-Joseph Boudier de Villemert’s *The Friend of Women* (1802; 1758); Sarah Pennington’s *An Unfortunate Mother’s Advice to her Absent Daughters* (1761); *Letters Written by the Earl of Chesterfield to his Son* (1774); John Gregory’s *A Father’s Legacy to His Daughters* (1788); *Rudiments of Taste, in a Series of Letters from a Mother to her Daughters* (1790); John Bennet’s *Letters to a Young Lady, on a Variety of Useful and Interesting Subjects* (1793); Thomas Gisborne’s *An Enquiry into the Duties of Men in the Higher and Middle Classes of Society in Great Britain* (1794); Thomas Gisborne’s *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (1797); and Hester Chapone’s *Letters on the Improvement on the Mind, Addressed to a Young Lady* (1820; 1773). These texts were widely read throughout the long eighteenth century and most were reprinted multiple times. As such, they do represent a broad cross-section of popular opinions about love, courtship, and friendship within the middling and upper classes throughout the long eighteenth century.

I followed the same principle in selecting erotic literature, general fiction, and poetry to reference, and restricted myself primarily to those examples that achieved widespread popularity during the period. Where possible, I have chosen examples that are also reasonably well known today, for ease

⁴ Peter Burke, *What Is Cultural History*, 2nd ed. (Malden: Polity, 2008), 20.

of reading. With regards to erotic literature, I used Michel Millot's *L'escole Des Filles* (1668); *The School of Venus* (1680); the Abbé du Prat's *Venus in the Cloister, or the Nun in her Smock* (1683); *A Dialogue Between a Married Lady and a Maid* (1740); Claude Prosper Jolyot de Crébillon's *The Sopha: A Moral Tale* (1787; 1742); John Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1749); and Harris's *List of Covent-Garden Ladies* (1788). As to novels and poetry, I have used *The Pleasures of a Single Life* (1701); Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa; or, the History of a Young Lady* (1748); *The Temple Rakes, or Innocence Preserved* (1750); Pierre Choderlos De Laclous' *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (1782); and Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1818). I do refer to other works throughout my thesis; however, these are the texts that I have used as a foundation for my arguments.

As regards artwork, I have made a case study of paintings of Jean-François de Troy, specifically, for several reasons. In the first instance, he was immensely popular for many years during the middle of the eighteenth century, and he specialised in paintings that depicted various types of socio-sexual encounters. In the second, his composition, specifically with regards to the ways in which subjects are physically positioned in relation to one another, is noticeably consistent across his oeuvre, which included both biblical or mythological paintings and numerous *tableaux de mode* and *scènes galantes*. Jean-Luc Bordeaux observes, 'de Troy was drawing from a repertoire of favorite [sic] poses and gestures which he used interchangeably' and his biographer, Comte de Caylus, explains that as de Troy's fame grew, the influx of orders 'prompted him to prefer the repetition of the same subject to correction and changes'.⁵ The advantage of this is that while de Troy's *tableaux de mode* and *scènes galantes* offer no explicit descriptions of the relationships between the subjects, his biblical and mythological paintings are representations of specific parts of existing literature, and the attitudes of the participants are wholly discoverable. Given that de Troy utilised markedly similar posing and composition across both his contextualised biblical and mythological and his noncontextualized *tableaux de mode* and *scènes galantes*, logic dictates that he deployed these favourite poses and gestures

⁵ Jean-Luc Bordeaux, "Jean-François De Troy. Still an Artistic Enigma: Some Observations on His Early Works," *Artibus et Historiae* 10, no. 20 (1989): 153; Comte de Caylus, *Vies D'artistes Du Xviii Siècle: Discours Sur La Peinture Et La Sculpture: Salons De 1751 Et De 1753*. (Paris: Librairie Renouard, 1910), 33. I translated the latter from French using DeepL Translator. The original quote reads: '...est qu'elle l'engageait a preferer la repetition du meme sujet a la correction et aux changements'.

to communicate consistently similar meanings. For this reason, de Troy's work serves as an effective source from which to study visual representations of nonverbal communication between people in romantic and socio-sexual situations. There are, naturally, many other artists whose work speaks to similar subject material and offers similar evidence; however, due to the constraints of this thesis, I have restricted myself to the case study of de Troy's work exclusively.

Despite the measures I took to mitigate the problematics of writing a broad cultural history, this thesis, like any other work in this field, remains vulnerable to charges of anecdotalism, impressionism, and subjectivism. However, by studying a broad range of types of cultural artefacts; by explicitly narrowing my field of study to just those in British society who had access to the social and cultural spaces in which those artefacts were produced; and by actively engaging in the practice of source criticism, as prescribed by Burke, I have attempted to mitigate some of the problems inherent in the writing of a cultural history.⁶

ii. Sex, Love, and Rococo Gender Roles

The existing scholarly literature on consent is firmly entrenched in the literature on rape and sexual violence. In fact, there are scarcely a handful of scholarly works that focus specifically on historical understandings of consent, not merely in the eighteenth century, but also in the adjacent periods. Of what exists, the most relevant is Juliana Adelman and Ciaran O'Neill's recently-published microstudy of the illicit and undoubtedly scandalous four-year pre-marital relationship between Mary McMahon, a domestic companion and the daughter of a dancing master, and James Kenney, a member of the minor gentry.⁷ However, the article primarily uses scripting theory to analyse the ways that Mary's and James' actions reflected the general roles men and women were expected to play in the Victorian socio-sexual script, observing that 'James understood that his role was to pursue, while Mary's role, regardless of how she felt about James, was to resist'.⁸ Additionally, its application of the term socio-sexual script is broader than my own; Adelman and O'Neill apply it to not merely sexual encounters, but also to non-

⁶ For a discussion of source criticism and methodology in the writing of cultural history, see Chapter Two of: Burke, *What Is Cultural History*.

⁷ Juliana Adelman and Ciaran O'Neill, "Love, Consent, and the Sexual Script of a Victorian Affair in Dublin," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 29, no. 3 (September 2020).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 400.

sexual romantic moments in their relationship and the negotiation of roles in their pseudo courtship. Comparatively, while I engage with scripts concerning courtship more generally, I do so in the context of studying the construction, negotiation, and performance of scripts in a specifically sexual context.

On the other side of the chronological spectrum, and in the unlikely field of legal and political history, Julia Rudolph analyses the mechanics of consent within the context of seventeenth-century English legal and political thought. She demonstrates that seventeenth-century writers perceived the relationships between monarchs and subjects to be analogous to the relationships between husbands and wives; that in both, authority should be bequeathed to the former by the willing submission of the latter; and that this willing submission was termed ‘consent’.⁹ While Rudolph establishes these ideas in the context of a political and legal history, her work provides an active and temporally-relevant model for my interpretation of the term ‘consent’ in the eighteenth century.

As mentioned above, consent is primarily discussed in scholarly work on rape and sexual violence in the eighteenth century. Given the interconnectedness of the two, this is unsurprising. However, the problems inherent in seeking evidence of consent practices largely or exclusively from accounts of rape and sexual violence are obvious: while these sources provide valuable insight into situations where consent was lacking, and do sometimes offer glimpses of common understandings of consent through the testimonies of the male defendants if they attempted to convince the jury that consent had been given, they are all accounts of disputes regarding sexual malpractice; they cannot elucidate ordinary sexual scripts, attitudes, or practices.

For example, Katie Barclay has written about the normalisation of rape within courtship in eighteenth-century Scotland and the resulting difficulties associated with delineating rape from sex. She argues that, though the level of respect for women’s rights to consent to or refuse sex and marriage increased throughout the period, society ‘limited the nature of that consent to a form of resistance to male desire, where the female will was something to be overcome to allow the female self to be fully submerged into that of her husband.’¹⁰ She further writes that, for women, consent was ‘not an active

⁹ Julia Rudolph, “Rape and Resistance: Women and Consent in Seventeenth-Century English Legal and Political Thought,” *Journal of British Studies* 39, no. 2 (April 2000).

¹⁰ Barclay, “From Rape to Marriage: Questions of Consent in Eighteenth-Century Britain,” 44.

expression of female desire but a lack of “no”, and so found even in silence.’¹¹ I refute Barclay’s arguments by asserting that sexual and marital gender power dynamics were markedly different throughout the eighteenth century; that shows of submissiveness or passivity are and should be acknowledged as an active expression of desire; and that the socio-sexual scripts concerning consent included distinct physical/nonverbal elements that demonstrate that silence—*id est*, an absence of verbal communication—does not imply a lack of active communication.

Garthine Walker has also written about eighteenth-century conceptions of rape, and argues that ‘the language which signified sexual intercourse was itself one of female complicity’, that the ‘assertion of rape - that penile penetration had occurred without the woman’s consent - implied that she had been forced to submit to [sic] the rapist... [which] indicated consent.’¹² While my work is not focused on analysing historical rapes or assaults—specifically as identified by the victims and, in some cases, by contemporary witnesses and the courts, rather than by modern interpreters—my understanding of consent in the eighteenth century indirectly contradicts Walker’s. I argue that the language of sexual intercourse suggested the practice of female agency and active participation, rather than complicity; I acknowledge that the verbs most commonly deployed to describe female participation in sexual activity usually implied either passivity or submissiveness, but I disagree that sexual passivity or submissiveness negates either agency, participation, or the possibility of sexual pleasure.

Anna Clark has also written about the significance of consent but, like Barclay and Walker, her efforts are undermined by the nature of her source material, the aim of her research, and the imposition of certain modern ideas onto her analysis of historical women. She asserts that ‘to understand women as historical actors as well as victims, we must focus on consent’; she is interested in understanding women as the victims of sexual violence first and foremost, rather than as active sexual agents themselves.¹³ In light of this aim, she predominantly draws on accounts and representations of rape and sexual violence and, as stated above, the use of this source material immediately problematizes any attempt to locate or define consent in sexual conduct. This field of scholarship is enormously valuable,

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Walker, “Rereading Rape and Sexual Violence in Early Modern England,” 6; *ibid.*

¹³ Anna Clark, *Women's Silence, Men's Violence: Sexual Assault in England 1770-1845* (New York: Pandora, 1987), 9.

but cannot contribute much to our understanding of consent as it was commonly conceived of and practiced, which is what my work aims to do.

There is some discussion of consent in studies of historical literature, both erotic and otherwise. For example, Katherine Binhammer does consider consent in her book, *The Seduction Narrative in Britain, 1747-1800* (2009); however, though she does cite some non-fiction accounts, her research primarily concerns the representation of consent within that specific literary context, and how women in these pieces of literature are portrayed as feeling when they consent, whereas I intend to demonstrate how women conceptualised and communicated consent.

Melissa Sanchez summarised the general scholarly opinion on the problematics of analysing consent in historical literature when she said that ‘feminist studies of early modern representations of rape have argued that in a culture that eroticizes male force and female submission, it becomes hard to tell the difference between rape and consensual sex.’¹⁴ However, while I agree that there are some depictions of historical sex wherein consent is either dubious or illegible, I argue that, in many cases, the difficulties arise due to the influence of modern ideas about affirmative consent, not due to illegibility within the texts themselves.

Aaron Hanlon discussed consent specifically within the context of Cleland’s *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, but his work is primarily concerned with the whether or not Fanny’s consent is possible or legitimate within the utilitarian social structures he believes govern both the text, and eighteenth-century British society more generally.¹⁵ He concludes, more or less, that it is not. However, he does not have a functional script for the mechanics of consent within the context of the *Memoirs*, which contributes to the difficulties he encounters trying to delineate depictions of sex from those of rape. I will identify the foundational features of this script in Chapter 2.

Karen Harvey has also discussed consent in her studies of eighteenth-century erotic literature, particularly in her monograph *Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century: Bodies and Gender in English*

¹⁴ Melissa Sanchez, *Erotic Subjects: The Sexuality of Politics in Early Modern English Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 88.

¹⁵ Aaron Hanlon, “*Fanny Hill* and the Legibility of Consent,” *ELH* 86, no. 4 (Winter 2019).

Erotic Culture.¹⁶ In this work, Harvey reiterates popular understandings of eighteenth-century gendered power dynamics through her analysis of eighteenth-century erotic literature, arguing that ‘gendered patterns of movement which endorsed male movement and female immobility mutate into male force and female submission’, and asserting the presence of ‘a continuum of male violence... in much eighteenth-century erotica’.¹⁷ She deploys close reading methods to assert that ‘the erotic imaginary championed male sexual aggression against defenceless women’, drawing the reader’s attention to depictions of sex that fixate on violence perpetrated upon, and pain experienced by, women, and identifying erotic depictions of women’s sexual submission and men’s sexual aggression as being reflective of a culture of sexual violence.¹⁸ She also notes that, throughout eighteenth-century erotic literature, ‘female submission, either freely given or coerced, was ultimately always present’.¹⁹ I do not disagree that the eighteenth-century had a definite problem with sexual violence; however, I dispute her readings of eighteenth-century erotic literature, and argue that much popular literature in this genre in fact emphasised the importance of respecting the sexual agency and physical wellbeing of one’s partner, and instructed men on the proper ways of performing this respect and care.

There is an existing body of scholarly work on the publishing history and literary development of erotic literature during the long eighteenth century. Patrick Kearney, Julie Peakman, and Roger Thompson have all written about the development of erotic literature and pornography; Kearney’s work is a comparatively broad history, Peakman’s has a specific focus on eighteenth-century England, and Thompson’s is concerned with English works produced in the latter half of the seventeenth century.²⁰ David Foxon has undertaken a similar study of specifically libertine literature, which addresses erotic texts within the context of libertinage more broadly.²¹ Likewise, Lisa O’Connell and Peter Cryle have

¹⁶ Karen Harvey, *Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century: Bodies and Gender in English Erotic Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 196; *ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 195.

²⁰ See: Patrick Kearney, *A History of Erotic Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1982); Julie Peakman, *Mighty Lewd Books: The Development of Pornography in Eighteenth-Century England* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Roger Thompson, *Unfit for Modest Ears: A Study of Pornographic, Obscene and Bawdy Works Written or Published in England in the Second Half of the Seventeenth Century* (London: Macmillan, 1979).

²¹ See: David Foxon, *Libertine Literature in England, 1660-1745* (New York: University Books, 1965).

produced a book on eighteenth-century libertinage in a socio-cultural and political context.²² There is also a wealth of scholarly work concerning erotic literature and pornography in the nineteenth century, but the majority of that is beyond the scope of the current research.²³

This history can, however, be broadly summarised. During the seventeenth century, British erotic literature was generally characterised by its use of functional language or ‘plain speak’. In fact, *The School of Venus* (1680) makes a page-long detour away from an otherwise consistently pornographic section of the narrative in order to dismiss any attempts ‘to describe a Monysyllable [sic] by new words and longer ways than is necessary’.²⁴ There were some exceptions to this rule in texts that were considered more literary, such as Nicholas Chorier’s *Satyra Sodatica* (1660), but this was published in Latin. It did not receive an English translation for another two decades, and when it did, it appears that some of its literary quality was lost in translation, either deliberately or accidentally. Regardless, plain speak was not to last.

The early eighteenth century saw both the rise of amatory fiction and a dearth of original erotic literature.²⁵ Naturally, there were some exceptions—erotic poetry appears quite regularly and, of course, cheap print continued to produce erotic material, though much is clearly intended to be satirical—but by and large, reprints and slightly-edited versions of seventeenth-century texts were far more common than original material. The literary dry spell was briefly broken in 1748 when John Cleland published the first instalment of his now-infamous *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, more commonly known as *Fanny Hill*, but long-form erotic literature did not become a popular genre until much later. In *Memoirs*, John Cleland shamelessly borrowed the somewhat florid stylistic features of that genre to create the first piece of erotic literature to use absolutely no plain speak whatsoever. Despite legal efforts to suppress the text, *Memoirs* remained a popular text throughout the century. Later erotic fiction shows the

²² See: Lisa O’Connell and Peter Cryle, eds., *Libertine Enlightenment: Sex, Liberty and License in the Eighteenth Century* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

²³ See, for example: Peter Fryer, *Private Case—Public Scandal* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1966); Gordon Grimley, *Wicked Victorians: An Anthology of Clandestine Literature of the Nineteenth Century* (London: Odyssey Press, 1970); Simon Joyce, “Past, Present, and Pornography,” *Victorian Studies* 59, no. 3 (Spring 2017); Steven Marcus, *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth Century England* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966).

²⁴ “The School of Venus,” 108.

²⁵ Kearney, *A History of Erotic Literature*, 51.

influence of such work, though little is as overtly florid as *Memoirs*. Following the publication of *Memoirs*, and Cleland's subsequent prosecution for publishing it, there was very little long-form or narrative erotic literature produced over the remainder of the long eighteenth century. Peter Fryer may have been exaggerating when he said that 'the castration of English imaginative literature made the English clandestine literature of sex [in the latter half of the eighteenth century] the most poverty-stricken and boring in Europe', but not significantly.²⁶

However, while I make significant use of erotic literature in my primary source analyses, I do not engage further with most of the secondary literature on the history of the genre as it is not concerned with consent or female agency as represented by these texts.²⁷ *Mighty Lewd Books*, for example, explores the development of pornography throughout the eighteenth century and, though it does reference the inequality of power dynamics between men and women as represented in erotic literature, it does not analyse these relationships more deeply.²⁸ Similarly, *Unfit for Modest Ears*, which analyses obscene works from the latter half of the seventeenth century, is equally disinterested in the representation of consent; it identifies instances of rape within the texts, but does not seriously engage with them or consider the depiction of consent analytically.²⁹ Therefore, while this literature has been helpful in establishing my understandings of the wider scholarly discussion of this material, it has largely been excluded from further discussion.

Despite the extensive scholarly literature on the publishing history of erotic literature and the analysis of the genre in general, most eighteenth-century erotic texts have not been analysed individually in significant depth. The exception to this, however, is Cleland's *Memoirs*.³⁰ Within much

²⁶ Fryer, *Private Case–Public Scandal*, 84.

²⁷ See, for example: Peakman, *Mighty Lewd Books*; Thompson, *Unfit for Modest Ears*; Kearney, *A History of Erotic Literature*.

²⁸ Peakman, *Mighty Lewd Books*.

²⁹ Thompson, *Unfit for Modest Ears*.

³⁰ For example, see: Hanlon, "Fanny Hill and the Legibility of Consent."; Jad Smith, "How Fanny Comes to Know: Sensation, Sexuality, and the Epistemology of the Closet in Cleland's 'Memoirs'," *The Eighteenth Century* 44, no. 2/3 (Summer-Fall 2003); Emily M. West, "Technologies of Episolarity and Embodiment in John Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*," *ibid.* 60, no. 4 (Winter 2019); Laura J. Rosenthal, "Fanny's Feelings: Social Mobility and Emotions in *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 43, no. 2 (April 2019); Leo Braudy, "Fanny Hill and Materialism," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 4, no. 1 (Autumn 1970); Peter Sabor, "From Sexual Liberation to Gender Trouble: Reading *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* from the 1960s to the 1990s," *ibid.* 33, no. 4 (Summer 2000); Simon Stern, "Fanny Hill and the 'Laws of Decency': Investigating Obscenity in the Mid-Eighteenth Century," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 43, no. 2 (April 2019); Andrea Haslanger,

of this scholarship, there is a near-perfect uniformity of opinion regarding the way in which the text represents sex, and which features of the text that were intended to be erotic, to whom, and in what way.

Regarding the former, Laura Rosenthal observes that ‘few critics have failed to notice the violence of so many of these scenes: the descriptions of terror, blood, pain, rapture, and rupture.’³¹ As to the latter, broadly speaking, most scholars argue that Cleland intends to appeal to a male audience by allowing them to imagine performing sexual aggression against defenceless, nonconsenting women. Aaron Hanlon argues that Cleland ‘eroticizes the ambivalence or ambiguity of ostensibly consenting, yet violent and painful sex acts’ in his ‘portrayal of coercive utilitarian social structures that undermine simple notions of affirmative consent’, and Anne Robinson Taylor asserts that *Memoirs* is written to appeal specifically to heterosexual men and contains ‘a strong undercurrent of dislike for women’.³²

While I agree that *Memoirs* is written for a male audience, I dispute Taylor’s assertion that the text is written specifically for heterosexual men. This is in part because heterosexuality is an inappropriate classification to apply to eighteenth-century men, given the comparative acceptance of sexual fluidity present throughout the period, but largely due to Cleland’s deliberate use of first person, which places the presumably male reader in *Fanny’s* mind and body as she describes the physical pleasures of submission, not in the minds and bodies of the men and women she has sex with; this strongly suggests that the appeal of reading the text was in accessing the experience of sexual submissiveness second-hand through the acceptable smokescreen of a female character.

Hal Gladfelder’s is the only reading I have found that directly contradicts the key elements of the majority of scholarly opinions. Gladfelder not only argues that the violent language in the text is not meant to be taken literally, and declines to participate in the popular close readings of those terms, but also theorises that the text, rather than eroticizing male violence against women and reifying its normalcy, is actually sodomitical in nature, in that it ‘question[s] settled notions of what “nature” is...

“What Happens When Pornography Ends in Marriage: The Uniformity of Pleasure in ‘Fanny Hill’,” *ELH* 78, no. 1 (Spring 2011).

³¹ Rosenthal, “Fanny’s Feelings,” 101.

³² Hanlon, “*Fanny Hill* and the Legibility of Consent,” 941; *ibid.*, 943; Anne Robinson Taylor, *Male Novelists and Their Female Voices: Literary Masquerades* (New York: Whitson Publishing Company, 1981), 26.

challenge[s] fixed categories of identity... elicit[s] and embod[ies] “impossible,” absurd desires’ and reflects Cleland’s own complicated relationship with sexuality.³³

I do not dispute the validity of any of these readings; however, I will be reading *Memoirs* against the grain, focusing primarily on the implications of its authorship, perspective, and intended audience. I will explain and justify this approach in more detail in the methodology section below. I agree with Robinson Taylor that the text implies a strong dislike for women, but disagree with her identification of heterosexual men as its sole target demographic; it seems clear to me that the first half of the book at least was initially written for Cleland’s own enjoyment, and perhaps that of some of his friends, and that the queer narratives in this section speak for themselves.³⁴

Within the existing literature on love and marriage, there is significant debate as to the period during which romantic love began to take precedence in ideas about marriage in England and its neighbouring countries.³⁵ Stephanie Coontz observes that until comparatively recently, ‘it was inconceivable that people would choose their mates on the basis of something as fragile and irrational as love and then focus all their sexual, intimate, and altruistic desires on the resulting marriage.’³⁶ Narrowing the focus of her discussion to examine attitudes in early modern Europe, she states that sixteenth- and seventeenth-century moralists believed that if a married couple were both of good character, they would likely come to love each other *after* their marriage, but maintained ‘that youths [must] be guided by their families in choosing spouses who were worth learning to love’.³⁷ However, the views of moralists do not reflect universal, or even necessarily popular, social practice or cultural beliefs.

³³ Hal Gladfelder, *Fanny Hill in Bombay: The Making and Unmaking of John Cleland* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2012), 56.

³⁴ See: Taylor, *Male Novelists and Their Female Voices*. There is compelling evidence to suggest that John Cleland participated in homosexual relationships, both within his work and in the details of his biography. See Chapters 3 and 6, in particular, of *Fanny Hill in Bombay*.

³⁵ For work on love and marriage, see: Maureen Waller, *The English Marriage: Tales of Love, Money and Adultery* (London: John Murray, 2009); Alan Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England: Modes of Reproduction 1300-1840* (New York: Basil Blackwell Inc., 1986); Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, a History: From Obedience to Intimacy or How Love Conquered Marriage* (New York: Viking, 2005); Katie Barclay, *Love, Intimacy and Power: Marriage and Patriarchy in Scotland, 1650-1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011); Joanne Bailey, *Unquiet Lives: Marriage and Marriage Breakdown in England, 1600-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977).

³⁶ Coontz, *Marriage, a History: From Obedience to Intimacy or How Love Conquered Marriage*, 15.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

Maureen Waller locates a movement towards change in the mid-seventeenth century, noting that ‘the 1640s and 1650s witnessed a ferment of debate in which the traditional relationships between... husbands and wives were questioned, and radical notions about marrying for love or divorcing for incompatibility were aired.’³⁸

Patricia Crawford and Laura Gowing acknowledge the popular two-step model previously favoured by historians, but argue that this model is reductive. According to the two-step model, marriage was characterised by ‘emotional distance, patriarchal authority, [and a] lack of intimacy’ in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century, and then ‘companionate, more egalitarian marriages’ began to emerge in the eighteenth century.³⁹ Crawford and Gowing, however, assert that ‘the romantic ideal of the eighteenth century did not replace patriarchal marriages with more equal relationships; nor was the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century model of patriarchal order incompatible with ideals of companionship and intimate, loving marriages’.⁴⁰

Sally Holloway’s research on courtship emphasises a similar model, discarding the notion of ‘oppositional categories of marrying for love *or* status, individual choice *or* the interests of kin’ and argues that eighteenth-century men and women ‘were well aware that a balance was to be struck between the two.’⁴¹ As these sources suggest, the relative importance of romantic love and material considerations has been in a state of flux throughout the centuries and across different classes, and the eighteenth century was simply one of multiple historical periods that saw the pendulum swing in the direction of the love match, with the caveat that this did not signify an end to financial and social pragmatism.

The work of these scholars demonstrates that, while significant research has been done into adjacent fields of study, there is a definite elision in the literature surrounding the receipt and performance of

³⁸ Waller, *The English Marriage: Tales of Love, Money and Adultery*.

³⁹ Patricia Crawford and Laura Gowing, eds., *Women's Worlds in Seventeenth-Century England: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 2000), 163; *ibid.*, 164.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Sally Holloway, *The Game of Love in Georgian England: Courtship, Emotions, and Material Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 14.

socio-sexual and romantic scripts in eighteenth-century Britain, particularly as regards the socialisation of young men and women and understandings of sexual and romantic consent throughout the period.

iii. Methodological Approaches to the Study of Sex and Romance

Methodologically speaking, my research is primarily guided by scripting theory. Within this framework, I have also incorporated elements of a performative model of gender. With regards to my reading of the historical evidence, particularly of eighteenth-century erotic literature, I have rejected popular ways of reading such as close reading and content analysis in order to centralise the representation, performance, and repetition of socio-sexual scripts.

As stated above, my thesis is heavily informed by and structured around scripting theory, developed by William Simon and John H. Gagnon and primarily used within sociology. Scripting theory interrogates the intersection of cultural practice and representation through the construction and analysis of the ‘scripts’ that govern behaviour in any given time or place. Generally speaking, there are three levels at which scripting is analysed: in ‘cultural scenarios (instruction in collective meanings), interpersonal scripts (the application of specific cultural scenarios by a specific individual in a specific social context), and intrapsychic scripts (the management of desires as experienced by the individual).’⁴² As the aim of this research is to understand how individuals related to one another in a romantic and sexual sense, I have primarily focused on the construction of interpersonal scripts.

Naturally, this theory can be used in the analysis of any number of cultural practices but the work that Simon and Gagnon have undertaken on the development of sexual scripts, wherein the conceptual framework of scripting theory is used to analyse sexual behaviour, is of particular relevance to this thesis. Their work has been employed several times by other researchers working in a similar field. In 2004, Vera Paiva used scripting theory to guide her research into Brazilian young people’s attitudes to sex practices and AIDS while developing AIDS intervention and prevention programmes for the same groups.⁴³ While this is a contemporary example, there is also a precedent for its use within

⁴² William Simon and John H. Gagnon, “Sexual Scripts: Permanence and Change,” *Archives of Sexual Behaviour* 15, no. 2 (April 1986): 97. Brackets in original.

⁴³ Vera Paiva, “Gendered Scripts and the Sexual Scene: Promoting Sexual Subjects among Brazilian Teenagers [2004],” in *Culture, Society and Sexuality: A Reader*, ed. Richard Parker and Peter Aggleton (New York: Routledge, 2007 (1999)).

historical studies of socio-sexual attitudes and behaviours, albeit not one undertaken at such a great temporal distance from its subjects as this thesis.

In 2003, David Wyatt Seal and Anke A. Ehrhardt used it to inform a study on men's understandings and interpretations of heterosexual scripts in inner-city New York in the 1990s, and more recently, in September 2020, Juliana Adelman and Ciaran O'Neill used it in their study of an extra-marital relationship that took place in Dublin in the nineteenth-century.⁴⁴ This is the only instance I have found of scholars using the theory of sexual scripting in a way similar to my work. Wyatt Seal and Ehrhardt were able to survey members of the social group they were studying. As I am studying historical actors and scripts, my analysis will depend upon the examination of existing primary source material, like that of Adelman and O'Neill.

In developing my approach to the historical application of scripting theory, I was influenced by Katie Barclay's performative model of gender.⁴⁵ Barclay's model focuses primarily on social practice and experience, rather than representation, so as to account for 'the intersectionality and hybridity of identity'.⁴⁶ This emphasis on social practice and performativity has been instrumental in shaping my own methodological approach. However, key to Barclay's model is a composite approach to analysis, through which she synthesises the construction of both the internal self and the external or embodied self; essentially, she decentralises representation, in order to focus on the engagement between identity and performance. As my thesis does not focus on the construction of identity, however, but on the development of interpersonal scripts, my own approach decentralises identity within this representation-practice-identity triumvirate in order to prioritise the interaction between representation and practice.

My methodological approach to analysing eighteenth-century erotic literature also comprises a break with traditional ways of reading similar texts. Unlike much of the existing work on eighteenth-century erotic literature, my analysis does not rely on traditional close reading or content analysis,

⁴⁴ Seal, David Wyatt, and Anke A. Ehrhardt. "Masculinity and Urban Men: Perceived Scripts for Courtship, Romantic, and Sexual Interactions with Women [2003]." In *Culture, Society and Sexuality: A Reader*, edited by Richard Parker and Peter Aggleton, 375-96. New York: Routledge, 2007 (1999); Adelman and O'Neill, "Love, Consent, and the Sexual Script of a Victorian Affair in Dublin."

⁴⁵ For Barclay's discussion and use of this model, see: Katie Barclay, *Men on Trial: Performing Emotion, Embodiment and Identity in Ireland, 1800-1845*, ed. Lynn Abrams, et al., Gender in History (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

meaning ‘to choose a text or corpus of texts, count the frequency of references to a given theme or themes, and analyse “covariance”’.⁴⁷ Specifically, I am deliberately disengaging from the practice of analysing erotic literature and speech using dictionary or standard definitions, on the basis that this methodology lacks sensitivity to contextual modifications in meaning and connotation.⁴⁸ The lexicon of eighteenth-century sexuality includes a great deal of seemingly violent language. However, as Hal Gladfelder asserts in his analysis of *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, depictions of sex that use this lexicon ‘may be disturbing or comically exaggerated or both, but the one thing [they’re] not is literal’.⁴⁹ To be clear, I am not suggesting that there is no problematic violence in these texts. Rather, I assert that we cannot *infer* the presence of problematic violence based exclusively on the use of popular sexual rhetoric and colloquialisms. I am aware that there is ongoing debate about the role of language in reflecting subconscious frameworks, but, as I am interested primarily in how people negotiated their opinions and behaviour within those frameworks, rather than the meanings of the framework itself, I will not be engaging with that debate. Therefore, I have decentralised close reading in my analyses of erotic texts, specifically as regards words and phrases from the lexicon of eighteenth-century erotic practice.

While I will not be using a traditional close reading of erotic literature, I will be using close reading terminology that was used in relation to sex but did not have its standard meaning altered, embellished, or made euphemistic for that purpose, and was not eroticised; most importantly, the word ‘consent’, and its related eighteenth-century terminology, including ‘yielding’ and ‘submitting’. The definitions of these words did not have to be altered for use in erotic or sexual contexts, so they remained stable except when the common language definition shifted, as was the case for ‘consent’. Therefore, traditional close reading is effective for these terms.

I will also be reading most of the pieces of erotic literature referenced hereafter as deliberately educational, rather than exclusively pornographic. While erotic literature is not the only basis of eighteenth-century men’s sexual understanding, it is clearly a foundational source. As mentioned above,

⁴⁷ Burke, *What Is Cultural History*, 22.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Gladfelder, *Fanny Hill in Bombay*, 75.

sections of popular pornographic texts are evidently intended to be informative, and even instructional. In addition to instructions about proper conduct during sexual encounters, these texts often include an explanation of the sexual body, and how sexual activity works, before any penetrative sex takes place in the narrative, and these sections are often written in such a way as to make them accessible to a person with no sexual knowledge whatsoever. This is particularly true in pornography that is written in dialogue form. One party is generally the source of wisdom, and the other is simultaneously a stand-in for the inexperienced reader—asking questions of everything and giving the other an opportunity to be helpfully specific—and a source of comic relief for the experienced one.

In *The School of Venus* (1680), for example, Frances describes first men's and women's sexual organs and their functions, then men's and women's orgasms, and then various sexual positions to her younger friend Katherine.⁵⁰ Finally, Katherine announces that she is 'almost mad to be at it' and the narrative moves on.⁵¹ *A Dialogue between a Married Lady and a Maid* (1740) begins with a similar educational preamble, wherein Tullia performs Frances' office for her young friend Octavia on the eve of her marriage. The presence of these explanatory passages strongly suggests that they were written for educational purposes and, given the relative paucity of opportunities to properly learn about sex, it is highly likely that men, either consciously or unconsciously, absorbed the information they read. Therefore, I will be reading the whole of these texts as being sources of men's received sexual scripts.

iv. Housekeeping: Notes on Terminology and Scope

Throughout this thesis, I have used the term 'heterosexual' to refer to socio-sexual scripts, practices, and couples that include a male and a female partner. I am aware that the concept of heterosexuality does not reflect the comparative fluidity of eighteenth-century understandings of sexual attraction and pleasure, given that English society during this period was 'just learning how it could codify gender difference and... construct sexuality as a rigid binary'.⁵² As such, my use of the term here is not intended to indicate that the participants in a couple are heterosexual in the modern sense of the word.

⁵⁰ See: "The School of Venus."

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁵² George E. Haggerty, *Men in Love: Masculinity and Sexuality in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 172.

I will also be using the term ‘homosexual’ in a similar way to describe the different scripts governing socio-sexual practice between male-male or female-female couples. My use of the terms ‘homosexual’ and ‘heterosexual’ exclusively relates to the gender combination of the people involved in a sexual pairing, rather than their identities.

My focus of my thesis has been narrowed by socio-economic factors and class. This is, in part, because the overwhelming majority of the primary source materials I reference in this thesis—the pieces of visual art, novels, poems, letters, diaries, life writings, and conduct or advice books—were produced by members of the middling and upper classes. On the other side of the equation, financial means were necessary to then access these kinds of publications and media. That said, I have been more flexible with regards to class than to wealth; while the lived experiences of aristocratic men and women, for example, were different to those in the minor gentry or the professional classes, the media to which they were exposed would have been much the same. The ways in which they accessed culture would likely have been different, but whether a young woman purchased a book herself, or borrowed it from a circulating library, the vital point is that she read it.

Of course, people in lower socio-economic positions did engage with popular culture and media; however, there is compelling evidence to suggest that this culture was often markedly dissimilar to that of the middle and upper classes. Rather than slowly inheriting media from higher up the social ladder, as a top-down cultural model would imply, evidence suggests that poor and labouring men and women participated and contributed to their own indigenous popular culture, including print and literary cultures, which engaged with ideas from the middle- and upper-class cultures, but did not generally seek to emulate it.⁵³

As a result of these distinctions, my contribution to understandings of eighteenth-century ideas about sex, love, and consent is, therefore, specifically limited to the ideas held by those who had sufficient pecuniary means to engage with the written and media culture I have had access to. While it is likely that members of other social groups negotiated similar ideas and were exposed to similar scripts, this is beyond the scope of the current research.

⁵³ See: Steven Cowan, “The Growth of Public Literacy in Eighteenth Century England” (Institute of Education, University of London, 2012).

Furthermore, this research only analyses ideas of love, courtship, and consent in relation to people in heterosexual couples. There is historical evidence of queer socio-sexual scripts and romantic practice, which is comparable in subject matter if not in quantity to the evidence relating to heterosexual socio-sexual scripts and romantic practice. However, while scripts for heterosexual and homosexual socio-sexual practice do develop in conversation with and parallel to one another, they are not interchangeable and, despite the fluidity of eighteenth-century understandings of desire, the former is still the dominant of the two; sex between men and women was still the most common sort. It is, therefore, necessary to begin by establishing the dominant script, before attempting to unravel its related scripts. Though I will reference queerness where relevant, discussion of specifically queer socio-sexual scripts and romantic practice is beyond the scope of this thesis.

v. Structure of the work

In Chapter One, I will demonstrate how young men and women developed distinctly different ideas and expectations of, and scripts for, love and marriage during the decade-long developmental stage between the onset of puberty and the point at which many were practically able to seriously consider courtship and matrimony. I will explore the disparate lived experiences of young men and women in the long eighteenth-century, as well as the contrary cultural influences they were exposed to during this time. I will further demonstrate the effects of these divergent developmental experiences by analysing men's and women's behaviours and attitudes once they reached an age at which they began seeking, entering, or being sought out for serious romantic relationships with or by the opposite sex. I found that women were routinely socialised to associated romantic love with trust, respect, and emotional intimacy in their relationships and, therefore, to privilege longer courtships that allowed them time to develop significant connections with their prospective spouses. Contrarily, I found that many men were socialised to associate love with feelings of sexual desire towards an appropriate, marriageable woman and, therefore, that they often did not see the necessity of establishing an emotional connection prior to proposing marriage or courtship.

In Chapter Two, I will analyse literary and artistic representations of socio-sexual practice to demonstrate how sexual consent was requested, performed, and interpreted in received eighteenth-

century socio-sexual scripts. Particularly, I will show that erotic literature specifically advised men to request consent when their partner was sexually inexperienced, and to wait for their partner to give that consent before proceeding with sexual contact. I will further explore how people, particularly women, were expected to express consent nonverbally, by making their faces and bodies sites of communication. Finally, I will demonstrate how men in erotic literature were portrayed as being deliberately attentive to nonverbal communication, indicating that men were expected to be actively engaging with women's nonverbal communication. I argue that women were able to effectively communicate their sexual consent through the use of specific, culturally established signals, including smiling and physically facilitating sexual contact, and that men were socialised to expect, understand, and respect nonverbal communication within the performance of socio-sexual scripts.

vi. Final Thoughts

Thus, I intend to enrich the field of eighteenth-century socio-cultural history, particularly with regards to the development and negotiations of romantic and socio-sexual ideas by men and women during the period. Working primarily in conversation with scholars of eighteenth-century courtship, gender power dynamics, sexuality, and erotic literature, I will demonstrate that romantic and socio-sexual scripts between men and women during the long eighteenth century were characterised by a greater degree of awareness of and respect for women's agency, consent, and desire than has previously been believed.

Chapter 1

Learning Romantic and Socio-Sexual Scripts in Early Adulthood

‘Is this all the objection you have against me, my dear *Arabella*?’ said [Belmour]... ‘That shall soon be disannulled, whenever you have a Mind to give me your hand... I shall not hesitate a Moment of acquainting [my father] with our Nuptials, whenever you will consent to have them solemnized.’

‘I am afraid,’ replied *Arabella*, ‘that you flatter me infinitely, and would think me too forward, if I should give you my Consent after such a short Courtship. Therefore I must beg a little more Time, that I may sufficiently reflect on what I am about, lest, by acting too heedless, I should plunge both you and myself into irretrievable Misfortunes.’⁵⁴

This exchange, though fictional, is representative of men’s and women’s disparate attitudes towards love, courtship, and marriage throughout the long eighteenth century. Young men were generally socialised to associate romantic love with sexual desire and admiration and were, therefore, often happy to fling themselves headlong into matrimony as soon as they had both secured the financial means to marry and located a suitable candidate. By contrast, young women were socialised to approach their courtships and prospective suitors with caution, and to associate romantic love with the presence of a mutual emotional and intellectual connection, developed over time.

The existing body of literature on courtship rarely places particular significance on the relative lateness of serious courtships in the eighteenth century, generally not taking place until roughly the participants’ mid-twenties.⁵⁵ Though there are a small number of studies that do discuss this, the broader

⁵⁴ *The Temple Rakes, or Innocence Preserved: Being the Adventures of Miss Arabella R—Y*, (Dublin: G. Faulkner and J. Exshaw, 1750), 34-35. Grammar has been standardised for ease of reading.

⁵⁵ Historians do reference courting couples’ ages, and this period between puberty and serious courtship is mentioned in scholarship on eighteenth-century courtship. However, I have found no scholarly work within which the social and cultural development, specifically with regards to self-identity and ideas about love, which occurred within this period is the primary, or even secondary, focus of the piece. The economic and cultural necessity of delaying marriage being generally understood, there is little to no analysis of how people developed their ideas of love and selfhood within socio-sexual frameworks during the years between the ages of roughly fifteen to twenty-seven.

scholarly picture gives the impression that eighteenth-century men and women leapt directly from the schoolroom to the altar within a very short space of time.⁵⁶ This is particularly the case for women during the long eighteenth century, as their early lives are generally more obscure than those of their male contemporaries, primarily due to scholarly neglect in the intervening centuries. While men's early misadventures, their Grand Tours and school years and apprenticeships, are acknowledged and discussed quite often in scholarship, elite women seem to simply appear in drawing-rooms, peacefully embroidering and awaiting proposals of marriage, at some point in their latter teens.⁵⁷ However, while people did occasionally marry very young, it certainly was not the norm; rather, men and women generally enjoyed roughly a decade of emotional and interpersonal development after the onset of adolescence before marriage became a serious, or even relevant, concern.⁵⁸

There is existing research on adolescence and early adulthood, as well as literature on courtship, however these elements of people's lives tend to be studied independently of one another; that is to say that studies consider *either* adolescence/early adulthood *or* courtship, rather than considering the two in concert.⁵⁹ I argue that this period between puberty and marriage is a key developmental stage in the

⁵⁶ There were, of course, also people who did not marry at all, and there is an existing literature on singleness in the eighteenth century; see, for example: Amy M. Froide, *Never Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford UP, 2005); Olwen Hufton, "Women without Men: Widows and Spinsters in Britain and France in the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of Family History* 9, no. 4 (December 1984); Bridget Hill, *Women Alone: Spinsters in England 1660-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); David Hussey and Margaret Ponsonby, *The Single Homemaker and Material Culture in the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. Gareth Shaw, *The History of Retailing and Consumption* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).

⁵⁷ For examples of scholarly work discussing men's early lives, see, for example: Richard Butterwick-Pawlikowski, "'In the Greatest Wildness of My Youth': Sir Charles Hanbury Williams and Mid-Eighteenth-Century Libertinism," *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 41, no. 4 (2018); Morris Marples, *Romantics at School* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967); Michèle Cohen, "The Grand Tour: Constructing the English Gentleman in Eighteenth-Century France," *History of Education* 21, no. 3 (1992); Roland Pietsch, "Ships' Boys and Youth Culture in Eighteenth-Century Britain: The Navy Recruits of the London Marine Society," *The Northern Mariner* 14, no. 4 (October 2004). While there is a comparative lack of work on girlhood and female adolescence during this period, there are several notable studies of girlhood. See, for example: Mary O'Dowd, "Adolescent Girlhood in Eighteenth-Century Ireland," in *A History of the Girl: Formation, Education and Identity*, ed. Mary O'Dowd and June Purvis (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

⁵⁸ Different numbers have been proposed as the averages ages at which men and women married, respectively, during the long eighteenth century. See, for example, Holloway, *The Game of Love*, 12; Hussey and Ponsonby, *The Single Homemaker and Material Culture in the Long Eighteenth Century*, 12.

As regards the age ranges of those who married: even within families, wherein the social and cultural experiences and expectations would largely be common to all daughters, the ages at which daughters married could vary greatly, which suggests that women were likely to marry when they wished to, rather than feeling obliged to find a husband as soon as possible. Jane Austen's favourite niece, Fanny Knight, married at 27; her younger sister, Lizzie Knight, married at 18; and their cousin, Anna Austen, married at 21. See: Joan Austen-Leigh, "Fanny Knight," *Persuasions Occasional Papers*, no. 2 (1986): 2.

⁵⁹ For literature on youth and adolescence, see: Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth in Early Modern England* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1994); Leanne Calvert, "'What a Wonderful Change Have I Undergone...'

eighteenth-century life cycle that deserves attention in its own right and that has significant implications for our understandings of courtship and gendered power dynamics in the eighteenth century. In particular, acquiring a more developed perspective on the cultural ideas and social experiences that shaped young people even before they approached matrimony themselves will provide us with a better understanding of how the participants in eighteenth-century relationships understood both their own and each other's roles in romantic and socio-sexual scripts, as well as how men and women disparately constructed their ideas about romantic and conjugal love, courtship, and marriage.

The aim of this chapter, broadly speaking, is to address the existing lacuna between adolescence and marriage in our understanding of the eighteenth-century life cycle. I argue that, far from being emotionally inexperienced as adults, most young women in the eighteenth century already had years of experience building significant, emotionally satisfying relationships with other women by the time they reached an age where they could safely enter serious courtships. Furthermore, I demonstrate that they were encouraged to approach their courtships with men in the same way that they approached their homosocial friendships.

Additionally, I argue that young men in the eighteenth century were socialised differently to their female peers during this developmental phase. To varying extents, men did have access to emotionally significant relationships with other men, and were encouraged to develop such friendships; however, they faced limitations elsewhere.⁶⁰ Many young men lacked access to significant relationships with female peers during their late teens and early twenties; they often compensated for this absence through engagement with sex workers or erotic literature, neither of which encouraged them to consider

So Altered in Stature, Knowledge & Ideas!': Apprenticeship, Adolescence and Growing up in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Ulster," *Irish Economic and Social History* 45, no. 1 (July 2018); Elizabeth S. Cohen and Margaret Reeves, eds., *The Youth of Early Modern Women* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018). It is worth noting, however, that eighteenth-century-specific literature on adolescence and youth is quite limited. The largest study of adolescence and youth in England, cited above, extends to the end of the seventeenth century but no further, and the majority of other sources found on the topic are Victorian in focus. For example, see: Carol Dyhouse, *Girls Growing up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England*, vol. 14, Routledge Library Editions: Women's History (Oxford: Routledge, 2013); Elizabeth Fox, "Victorian Girls' Periodicals and the Challenge of Adolescent Autonomy," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 51, no. 1 (Spring 2018); Michael James Childs, *Labour's Apprentices: Working-Class Lads in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992). For literature on courtship, see: Holloway, *The Game of Love*.

⁶⁰ For work on male homosocial friendships during the period, see: Richard Godbeer, *The Overflowing of Friendship: Love between Men and the Creation of the American Republic* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2009).

emotional intimacy a prerequisite to marriage; and, unlike young women, they were not advised to apply the lessons that they learned from their homosocial friendships to their heterosexual courtships. This resulted in the delayed development of romantic and socio-sexual socialised behaviours in many young men. These disparate experiences contributed to a discrepancy between men's and women's expectations of love and marriage by the time they were able to seriously consider matrimony.

The terms 'young men' and 'young women' will be used throughout this thesis to indicate a man or woman who has reached puberty, but has not yet been married, irrespective of their actual age. This is because age is not a precise category of historical analysis, nor is it one whose eighteenth-century lexicon has a mutually intelligible relationship with our contemporary one. It is not even a particularly clear-cut category when considered exclusively within its own time and place. As Steven Mintz observes, 'multiple definitions of age coexist in particular historical eras, even within a single society.'⁶¹ Furthermore, in the eighteenth century, the nominal, legal, and cultural markers by which one might gauge the transition between childhood and adulthood were scattered across people's lives in ways that make little sense to a modern audience, and which complicate even contemporary eighteenth-century notions of age categories. For example, during the eighteenth century, one might legally be considered an 'infant' or a 'minor' even as social norms ascribed one the titles, privileges, and responsibilities of adulthood upon reaching various social milestones, such as marriage.⁶² As such, in an effort to erase the distinction between adolescence and adulthood, I will be categorising people entirely without reference to either age or the terminology that would have historically been used to describe them, and dubbing all unmarried people who have reached puberty 'young adults'.

This chapter will begin by introducing the ideals and restrictions that governed young people in this stage of life, so as to contextualise their actions both during and after it. It will explore the cultural ideas about love and marriage that men and women were exposed to as they approached and progressed through adolescence, particularly focusing on the increasing romanticisation of love during the long eighteenth century. Following this, it will demonstrate that, though young people were increasingly

⁶¹ Steven Mintz, "Reflections on Age as a Category of Historical Analysis," *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 1, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 92.

⁶² See, for reference: *The Infants Lawyer: Or, the Law (Both Ancient and Modern) Relating to Infants*, (London: R. and E. Atkyns, 1697).

taught to value romantic love, they were generally incapable of realising it in its most 'complete' form for much of their early adulthoods.

Building on this context, this chapter will seek to understand how men and women thought, felt, and acted during this period of their lives. It will explore how they were differently socialised, as well as how they negotiated their relationships (both homosocial and heterosocial) and identities, and reconciled contrasting cultural values and social expectations with regards to love and romance, during the years between adolescence and their mid to late twenties. Finally, it will demonstrate how these years of personal development and divergent socialisation guided men's and women's actions and attitudes if and when they began to seriously consider the business of courtship and marriage in their own lives.

Overall, this chapter will demonstrate the ways in which young men and women learned, developed, and negotiated their ideas about love, romance, courtship, and marriage during their early adulthoods. While there is research on eighteenth-century ideas about romance, love, courtship, and marriage, this literature does not adequately engage with the influences that men and women were exposed to during the prolonged developmental period that preceded young adults' serious heterosexual relationships, particularly in light of the fact that this period generally lasted for close to or more than ten years. There is some relevant work in adjacent fields, such as the scholarship on youth and adolescence, but it generally limits itself by primarily using age as an indicator of youth, despite the fact that this is an inappropriate way to categorise eighteenth-century men and women, for the reasons discussed above. In this chapter, I will demonstrate how men's and women's separate and distinct socialisations throughout their early adulthoods resulted in marked disparities between their ideas about love and marriage when they came to consider their own courtships.

i. The Rehearsal Period

a) Setting the Stage and Receiving Scripts

Eighteenth-century young men and women developed their understandings of romantic and socio-sexual scripts against a backdrop of cultural conflict. On the one hand, romantic love within courtship and marriage was increasingly being represented to the young people of the middle classes as not only an immensely desirable thing, but also an achievable goal, which encouraged young men and women to value and aspire towards its attainment in their lives; on the other hand, however, the practical and financial requirements of realising romantic love in this complete, marital form had not changed materially enough to make it accessible to everyone, or even to most people, until their mid to late twenties. The result of this conflict between the immense cultural value of romantic love and its inaccessibility to young people for many years of their early adulthoods was that most young men and women spent roughly a decade absorbing ideas about love, sex, romance, courtship, and marriage from largely external sources: these included cultural representations of love or marriage, second-hand accounts or personal observation of other people's marriages or relationships, or social interactions that imitated the experience of romantic love, such as homoromantic friendships or experiences with sex workers. This section will explore the set pieces, so to speak, amongst which young people learned, negotiated, and rehearsed the scripts for socio-sexual and romantic interactions.

As discussed above, it is clear that romantic love in the context of marriage was more important in the eighteenth century than it had ever been before, despite the continued influence of financial and material realities. While practical considerations were no means eclipsed by love or other emotional motives, and while transactional arrangements certainly still occurred, it was no longer considered generally acceptable to *publicly* treat marriage as a purely commercial or diplomatic transaction. Rather, both men and women appear to view this transactional approach to marriage as archaic and repressive, and to consider the language and ideals of love and romance an obligatory feature of their courtships. One aphorism of the period summarised this new attitude rather bluntly: 'that man that is against his sons and daughters to marry, has sons and daughters that wish their father dead'.⁶³ In light of this, it is

⁶³ Quoted in: Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England: Modes of Reproduction 1300-1840*, 133.

perhaps unsurprising that, while the families of the courting couples remained highly involved in the courtship process, and especially in the creation of the marriage contract, their role was at least nominally supportive, rather than openly decisive.⁶⁴

Behind closed doors, however, this was not always the reality of things. Mary Granville describes the occasion of her first courtship, when she was just seventeen years old. Mr Pendarves, a man ‘then near sixty... ugly and disagreeable... fat, much afflicted with gout’, applied to Mary’s uncle, Lord Lansdowne, for her hand.⁶⁵ Her uncle ‘rejoiced at an opportunity of securing his interest by such an alliance, one of some consequence in his country, whose services he at that time wanted, readily embraced the offer and engaged for my compliance’.⁶⁶ She remarks that ‘he might have said *obedience*, for I was not entreated but commanded.’⁶⁷ Despite her clear anguish and repugnance at this prospect, her uncle and other relations succeeded: she was forced to the altar in the same year.

While such instances of parental abuse of power certainly happened, the belief that women ought not to be forced to marry against their will, that they ought to retain the right of choice in their marriages, is demonstrated by the widespread condemnation of totalitarian parenting such as that endured by Mary Granville. In popular commentaries and fiction, it is routinely depicted as a cause of grief and conflict. In *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (1782), Madame Volanges insistence that her teenage daughter, Cécile, marry the wealthy but much older Comte de Gercourt against her will drives her into undertaking a secret romance with her music tutor and eventually leaves her sufficiently isolated that the Vicomte de Valmont is able to rape her and then coerce her into continuing a sexual relationship with him, on threat of exposure.

Similarly, in *Clarissa* (1748), the titular character’s family locks her in her room when she resists their attempts to marry her to the rich but cruel and unattractive Mr Solmes; this abuse and imprisonment again isolates Clarissa to such an extent that she is vulnerable to the predatory villain

⁶⁴ For literature on courtship, see, for example: Holloway, *The Game of Love*; Nicole Eustace, “‘The Cornerstone of a Copious Work’: Love and Power in Eighteenth-Century Courtship,” *Journal of Social History* 34, no. 3 (Spring 2001); Barclay, *Love, Intimacy and Power*; Margaret E. France, “Cutting Edge Courtship in Eighteenth-Century London,” *ABO: Interactive Journal for Women in the Arts, 1640-1830* 10, no. 1 (Spring 2020).

⁶⁵ Mary Granville Pendarves Delany, “Letter IV,” in *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Mrs Delany*, ed. Sarah Chauncey Woolsey (Boston, MA: Roberts Brothers, 1879), 19.

⁶⁶ “Letter V,” 20.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

Lovelace, who then abducts and later rapes her. Samuel Richardson explicitly cited his disapproval of this form of abusive parenting as a major influence in the writing of *Clarissa*, saying in a letter that he meant ‘to admonish Parents [against] forcing their Children’s Inclinations, in an Article so essential to their Happiness, as Marriage’.⁶⁸

In Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* (1814), the heroine Fanny Price is again bullied by her relations to accept a proposal from the wealthy but immoral Henry Crawford, but successfully resists.⁶⁹ In this later work, the negative consequences of this abuse are inflicted on Fanny’s relatives, instead of Fanny, but Austen’s position is still made evident through the narrative. Crawford seduces and ruins Fanny’s cousin, bringing social disgrace to her proud relations, while Fanny is rewarded for her defiance with the marriage of her choice. This is by no means an exhaustive list of instances in which this plot point was deployed during the era, but merely some of the better-known examples.⁷⁰

However, while young men and women both generally believed that romantic love was an essential component of courtship and marriage, the ways in which they conceptualised marriage often differed markedly. To most men, marriage marked an important step in the fulfilment of their masculine potential. As Maureen Waller notes in *The English Marriage*, it ‘represented the transition from irresponsible youth to adult maturity, when a man and wife set up their own household, with all its privileges, burdens and responsibilities.’⁷¹ For many, though not all, it would be the first time they could command their own households and exercise their presumed rights to domestic leadership. Naturally, there were exceptions to this rule; there were single householders, whom Helen Metcalfe differentiates from men who lived away from their family homes as renters or lodgers.⁷² However, the identification of these single householders is complicated by several factors.

⁶⁸ Samuel Richardson, “To Aaron Hill, 29 Oct. 1746,” in *Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson*, ed. John Carroll (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 71.

⁶⁹ See: Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park: A Novel*, 3 vols (London: T. Egerton, 1814).

⁷⁰ For more on narratives around seduction and women’s agency, see: Katherine Binhammer, *The Seduction Narrative in Britain, 1747-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

⁷¹ Waller, *The English Marriage: Tales of Love, Money and Adultery*, 114.

⁷² Katie Barclay, “Review of the Single Homemaker and Material Culture in the Long Eighteenth Century, by David Hussey and Margaret Ponsonby,” *Economic History Review* 67, no. 2 (2014): 585; Helen Metcalfe, “To Let or for Lease: ‘Small, but Genteel’ Lodgings for Bachelors in and About the Late Georgian Town,” *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 44, no. 1 (2021): 4.

The first is the fluidity and complexity of eighteenth-century household compositions; of those few single men who headed their own households, some had previously been married. For example, Naomi Tadmor discusses the lives of two single householders: Thomas Turner, and his neighbour John Jones.⁷³ Neither Jones nor Turner, however, were bachelors, but rather childless widowers.⁷⁴ These men had not established their households for themselves alone, but in anticipation of marital domesticity. During the eighteenth century, Tadmor observes that roughly one third of English marriages ended with the death of a partner ‘before the end of the wife’s fecund period’, which could lead to episodes of (usually) temporary singleness for men.⁷⁵ During these times, they would technically qualify as single householders, though they clearly did not establish their households with that intent. This further reduces any estimate of the number of men who deliberately established their own bachelor households.

The second factor complicating academic efforts to establish how many bachelors commanded their own households by themselves is the specific and (from a modern perspective) rather misleading contemporary definition of singleness; according to Samuel Johnson’s 1755 *Dictionary of the English Language*, ‘single’ simply meant ‘unmarried’. Under this definition, a man who lived with a male lover or a female mistress was still a single man, as was the case for barrister William Hickey, who lived publicly with his courtesan partner, and whom David Hussey and Margaret Ponsonby refer to as ‘a lifelong singleton’.⁷⁶ While Hickey’s case is unusual in that he wished to marry his partner but she refused, other men in similar arrangements clearly considered themselves single.⁷⁷

This is no more clearly evidenced than by the regularity with which eighteenth-century men ejected their mistresses from their households as soon as they were able to locate wealthier women willing to marry them, as Worcester innkeeper and chapman Richard Eaves did to Catherine Essex in 1774.⁷⁸ Essex was employed as a servant in Eaves’ household when they began a relationship. They

⁷³ Naomi Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England: Household, Kinship and Patronage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). See Chapter 1, in particular.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁷⁶ Hussey and Ponsonby, *The Single Homemaker and Material Culture in the Long Eighteenth Century*, 1.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Henry Cowper, *Reports of Cases Adjudged in the Court of King's Bench: From Hilary Term, the 14th of George Iii. 1774, to Trinity Term, the 18th of George Iii, 1778. Both Inclusive.*, 1st American ed. from 2nd London ed., 2 vols., vol. 2 (Boston: John West and Co., 1809), 742.

lived together for eight years, during which time they had two children; however, by June of 1774, Eaves was ‘upon the point of marriage with a person of large fortune, and wanting to remove the said Catherine Essex and the child from him’.⁷⁹ He did so without difficulty, by arranging for her to marry a blacksmith from the same parish. There are countless records of similar dismissals, many of which were crueller than Eaves’ arrangement, which was allegedly undertaken with Essex’s consent.⁸⁰ No small number of these records appear in proof of marriage actions, wherein women took legal action to be recognised as the wives, rather than mistresses, of their partners. There is, therefore, clear difficulty in delineating the actual marital status of the persons involved, as the couples themselves and their acquaintances often had different opinions. For the majority of unmarried young men, however, whether they spent their bachelorhood at home, in institutional lodgings, or in rented rooms, marriage signified a very material change in their way of life.

The significance of marriage in allowing young men to fully and publicly realise their masculinities, however, does not appear to be the primary focus of their feelings about it. To many men, marriage also offered the promise of a lifelong intimacy and closeness previously inaccessible to them, whether in their platonic homosocial friendships, in transactional relationships with sex workers, and even in romantically-motivated pre-marital relationships, which the men in them understood to be, to a degree at least, temporary and transient. James Kenney repeatedly remarked in his diary that he ‘wd [sic] not marry’, ‘never could marry’ his pre-marital love Mary McMahan, because she was a working woman and he was the son of a minor gentleman.⁸¹ Naturally, there were exceptions to all of these categories; some men did shirk convention and marry a kept mistress or a woman beneath their rank; some men formed profound homosocial friendships that did provide long-term intimacy and support; and, of course, some men sought out homo-romantic or homosexual relationships in their younger years or throughout their lives. However, heterosexual marriage was conceptualised as a unique sort of intimacy, and not one that could be experienced through alternative means.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ For more information, see: Leah Leneman, “Wives and Mistresses in Eighteenth-Century Scotland,” *Women's History Review* 8, no. 4 (1999); Rebecca Probert, “From the Restoration to the Regency: Kept Mistresses and Legal Contracts,” (Warwick School of Law, 2009).

⁸¹ Quoted in: Adelman and O'Neill, “Love, Consent, and the Sexual Script of a Victorian Affair in Dublin.”

Men were clearly aware of this understanding, as their life writings show a clear desire for marriage as an opportunity for intimacy as well as power.⁸² During his time as a student at the Middle Temple, for example, Dudley Ryder wrote of his passionate longing for ‘a pretty creature concerned in me, being my most intimate friend, constant companion, and always ready to soothe me, take care of me and caress me’, and remarked that ‘the prospect and hope of an agreeable woman for my wife’ was one of his two major wishes in life.⁸³ This reflects both the comparative isolation that bachelors risked, and shows that young men saw marriage as an opportunity to receive love, support, and companionship.

Complicating these images of marriage as a source of love and companionship was, of course, the proliferation of literature produced throughout the century—sometimes satirical and sometimes, depressingly, genuinely misogynistic—bemoaning the alleged horrors of matrimony and the evils of women, which men clearly both wrote and engaged with as readers. In the poem, *The Pleasures of a Single Life* (1701), allegedly inspired by ‘the many DIVORCES lately Granted by Parliament’, the narrative follows a preternaturally relaxed and happy young man, who has never experienced a negative emotion in all his years, until he encounters women. He promptly abandons all his hobbies—his love for books, time spent with his friends, and good wine in moderation—in order to pursue a beautiful nameless woman. He falls in love with her, discovers that emotions are often uncomfortable, and promptly blames his anxieties on the object of his affections. The narrator courts and marries this woman, only to decide a few weeks later that he does not, in fact, like being married. He compares the married state to ‘the Blustering Month of *March*, [which brings on] unwelcome pains, And finds, or Breeds, Distempers in our Veins’, and bemoans ‘the dull drudgry of a Marriage-Bed’.⁸⁴ She later commits adultery, which he takes as proof of her wickedness, and not a reflection on his lacklustre performance as her husband, and the rest of the poem is spent complaining about how dreadful she and all other women are.⁸⁵

⁸² See, for more information, Amanda Vickery, “What Did Eighteenth-Century Men Want?,” in *Royal Historical Society/Gresham College Annual Lecture* (The Cruciform, University College London: Royal Historical Society and Gresham College, 2010).

⁸³ Diary of Dudley Ryder, quoted in: *ibid.*, 4; Dudley Ryder, “Thursday, June 30, 1715,” in *The Diary of Dudley Ryder: 1715-1716*, ed. William Matthews (London: Methuen & Co., 1715).

⁸⁴ *The Pleasures of a Single Life, or, the Miseries of Matrimony*, (London: F. Nutt, 1701), 9; *ibid.*, 10.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, Title Page.

This kind of literature clearly had an effect on men's perceptions of marriage, but they did not generally consume negative literature exclusively, and were exposed to a range of influences on the subject, including the information of their friends and family. For example, Dudley Ryder remarked, of a conversation with two of his male cousins, that they 'had a great deal of conversation together, the chief part of it turned upon matrimony and the pleasures and delights of that state.'⁸⁶ It is not surprising then that men's life writing presents a complex picture of what men thought about marriage, wherein they attempt to reconcile dire predictions of marriage with the happier outcomes they observed both in life and other literature, the result usually being a positive image of marriage.

To women, however, marriage constituted a certain loss of selfhood and independence; they must submit themselves to the rule of their husbands, and prioritise his happiness, the good of the household, and the care of any children above their own person and selfhood. In *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (1797), the English Anglican curate Thomas Gisborne explicitly stated that wives exist 'in a state of subordination to [their husbands]'.⁸⁷ The attainment of masculinity in this manner, therefore, was dependent upon a woman's submission. It is true that there are many examples of women who attained authority and independence through their marriages, but there does appear to be an expectation of sacrifice within that exchange; the autonomy of a daughter for the authority of a wife. It is worth noting that social hierarchy of the family was decidedly patriarchal and, therefore, daughters and wives *both* ranked beneath the male head of the household, if there was one. However, while daughters usually participated in domestic work, unless their mother was dead or incapacitated, most daughters would not have the same burden of responsibility for the running of the household as a wife. The independence achieved by attaining one's own household through marriage was at least matched by the responsibilities associated with such a position. It is perhaps unsurprising then that many young women did not appear particularly desirous of rapidly entering the married state, or that there does not appear to be significant evidence of young women in this age group being very much grieved by their singlehood.

⁸⁶ William Matthews, ed. *The Diary of Dudley Ryder: 1715-1716* (London: Methuen & Co., 1939), 47.

⁸⁷ Thomas Gisborne, *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex*, 5th ed. (London: A. Strahan, 1801), 239.

On the contrary, many women's letters and diaries from this period show a marked disinterest in exchanging the relative independence of their unmarried states for the 'state of bondage' that marriage signified.⁸⁸ Anna Seward, for example, an English author, poet, and intellectual, wrote of her decision to reject several marriage proposals from men to whom she felt no romantic attachment: 'my liberty', she recalled, 'seemed a thousand times preferable to the dispiriting fetters of an unimpassioned connexion.'⁸⁹ In a similar vein, Jane Austen, writing to her niece, Fanny Knight, advised her that 'anything is to be preferred or endured rather than marrying without affection', and begged her 'not to think of accepting [her suitor] unless you really do like him'; Knight clearly agreed with this sentiment as she soon refused to marry him.⁹⁰

Anna Seward's letters clearly reflect the idea that women negotiated their attitudes towards marriage and courtships theoretically or hypothetically, and without reference to specific men. When she was 25, Seward wrote to a friend that 'the chances are extremely against a woman ever marrying, who resolves not to approach the altar of Hymen without she is led thither by a man she prefers to all the rest of his sex.'⁹¹ Effectively, she states that if a woman is determined not to marry, unless it be to

⁸⁸ Elizabeth Stedman to Elizabeth Graeme, 16 December 1764, *Elizabeth Graeme Fergusson Correspondence* Historical Society of Pennsylvania, quoted in: Eustace, "'The Cornerstone of a Copious Work': Love and Power in Eighteenth-Century Courtship," 523.

⁸⁹ Anna Seward, *Letters of Anna Seward: Written between the Years 1784 and 1807*, 6 vols., vol. 4 (Edinburgh: George Ramsay & Company, 1811), 175; *ibid.*

⁹⁰ Jane Austen, "18th of November, 1814," in *Letters of Jane Austen: Edited with an Introduction and Critical Remarks by Edward, Lord Brabourne*, ed. Edward Hugessen Knatchbull-Hugessen (London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1884), 282; *ibid.*

⁹¹ Anna Seward, *The Poetical Works of Anna Seward; with Extracts from Her Literary Correspondence*, ed. Walter Scott, 3 vols., vol. 1 (Edinburgh: James Ballantyne and Co., 1810), cxciv. This edition of Seward's letters was edited twice; first, by Seward herself when she prepared them for publication, and second by Scott after her death. Surviving originals have not since been republished and I could not access them in manuscript form, so these quotes may have been edited. However, this suggests that either, they are Seward's words, and they reflect her opinions, or they have been adjusted by Scott, presumably to make them fit for public consumption; regardless, both possibilities demonstrate that the opinions espoused within the text were sufficiently prevalent that their publication was unproblematic for those involved. Additionally, it should be noted that Seward's sexuality is the subject of ongoing academic discussion, with scholars varyingly claiming her for the canon of lesbian writers or placing her relationships with women within the sphere of homoromantic friendship while simultaneously ascribing romantic significance on her relationships with men, with or without sexual intimacy. Given that this tension largely arises from the fact that Seward's intimate relationships with men appear to be near indistinguishable from her relationships with women, albeit less frequent and arguably less passionate, I have chosen to read her writings through a bisexual lens. For work discussing Seward's amorphous queer identity, see, for example: Jon Redfern Barrett, "'My Stand': Queer Identities in the Poetry of Anna Seward and Thomas Gray," *Gender Forum*, no. 39 (2012); Norma Clarke, "Anna Seward: Swan, Duckling or Goose?," in *British Women's Writing in the Long Eighteenth Century: Authorship, Politics and History*, ed. Jennie Batchelor and Cora Kaplan (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Fiona Brideoake, "'Extraordinary Female Affection': The Ladies of Llangollen and the Endurance of Queer Community," *Romanticism on the Net*, no. 36 (November 2004); Claudia Thomas Kairoff, *Anna Seward and the End of the Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 2012).

marry a man whom she loves above all other men, it is highly unlikely that she will marry at all. She assumes that women will have determined hypothetically whether they wish to marry or not, and, if they do, under what circumstances, before it becomes a real consideration. Seward also makes numerous references to the idea of women choosing not to marry at all, as Seward herself did. This clearly demonstrates the divergence of men's and women's attitudes towards matrimony as a concept.

As discussed above, men and women generally enjoyed roughly a decade of personal development prior to being permitted by circumstance to consider matrimony seriously. In the absence of socially-legitimate, long-term romantic relationships, young men and women often had access to various alternatives that attempted, in different ways, to provide similar emotional or sexual fulfilment to that which marriage offered.

For example, young men could pursue transactional relationships with sex workers, particularly if they lived in London. From the middle of the century, roughly one in every five London women was in some way involved with the sex industry.⁹² While some of these women were bawds, the vast majority were sex workers of varying types.⁹³ A middle-of-the-road sex worker, neither a courtesan of the wealthy nor a streetwalker of the poor, might charge two guineas or thereabouts for each sexual encounter, but many charged in shillings and pence.⁹⁴ In 1788, *Harris' List of Covent-Garden Ladies* announced that Mrs Tarbot, of Titchfield Street 'does not refuse the King's smallest picture [for a single skirmish], but for a whole night's siege expects three of the largest.'⁹⁵ In less oblique terms, she might charge either a penny or sixpence for a singular sex act, but if a man wished to hire her services for an entire night, he could expect to pay three half-crown coins, or seven and shillings and sixpence.⁹⁶ And Mrs Tarbot was hardly amongst the most inexpensive service providers

⁹² Dan Cruickshank, *The Secret History of Georgian London: How the Wages of Sin Shaped the Capital* (London: Random House Books, 2009), xi.

⁹³ A bawd was the female keeper of a brothel or bawdyhouse; nowadays, such a woman might be called a madam. I am using the term 'sex worker' to refer to any person providing any degree of sexual service for monetary compensation.

⁹⁴ Cruickshank, *The Secret History of Georgian London: How the Wages of Sin Shaped the Capital*, x.

⁹⁵ *Harris's List of Covent-Garden Ladies: Or, Man of Pleasure's Kalender, for the Year, 1788*, (London: H. Ranger, 1788), 23.

⁹⁶ Given that it would be a very odd range of prices indeed if large and small were being used here to denote value, with the lower price therefore coming in at a farthing and the higher at three five guinea coins, we shall assume the author means the actual physical size of the coins. The smallest coin was the penny, at 12mm in diameter. There were almost no pennies in circulation during the majority of the eighteenth century, but the value might be made up of more common coins of smaller denominations. The smallest coin in regular circulation was the

in the city; her lodgings were on Titchfield Street, a convenient and relatively upmarket location at the time, being located very near to the fashionable and popular Oxford Street.

Of course, this does not mean that every young man in Georgian England engaged with sex workers or indeed sought out premarital sexual encounters of any variety. In a letter to his friend in 1764, Josiah Wedgwood wrote with excitement of ‘the blissful day when [my wife] will reward all my faithfull [*sic*] services & take me to her arms, to her nuptial bed, to pleasures which I am yet ignorant of & you my dear friend can much better conceive, than I shall ever be able to express.’⁹⁷ He was then 33 years old. Apart from the popular moral objections to engaging with sex workers, there were also practical reasons that one might wish to avoid pre- and extra-marital sex. Venereal disease was a serious concern; it ran rampant throughout major cities across the world, and there was little in the way of treatment for those who caught it. Mercury remained the gold standard for the treatment of syphilis, and it remained as completely ineffective in curing the infection as it was likely to cause severe damage to mental stability. Cundums, as they were then called, were in use by many sex workers to prevent transmission of venereal diseases. However, they were not entirely reliable in that capacity owing to their being reusable, and merely washed between uses. Furthermore, male clients expected that they would be provided by the sex workers themselves, which suggests that the sex worker might have been better protected than her clients.

However, it is clear that transactional sexual experiences were accessible to a large proportion of young men during the century, and it seems that many did procure the services of sex workers in the years before they married. In the early eighteenth century, Dudley Ryder recorded numerous personal engagements with sex workers in his diary, as well as occasions on which he observed other men interacting with them. After an evening visit to Lambeth Wells, for example, Ryder noted that ‘there was a good deal of company but all made up of rakes and whores’.⁹⁸ However, despite the relative

threepence, though that was more commonly found earlier in the century. The second smallest coin in regular circulation, and the more commonly encountered piece, was the sixpence, while the largest coin in regular circulation was the half crown, at 33mm. Crowns did exist, but they were not in regular circulation. A half crown was worth two and a half shillings. Based on this information, ‘the king’s smallest picture’ could have indicated a value of anywhere between a penny and sixpence, while ‘the largest’ must have been a half a crown.

⁹⁷ Ann Finer and George Savage, eds., *The Selected Letters of Josiah Wedgwood* (London: Cory, Adams & Mackay, 1965), 26.

⁹⁸ Matthews, *The Diary of Dudley Ryder: 1715-1716*, 57.

availability of transactional encounters with women, emotional intimacy was far more difficult to procure before marriage. While sexual favours might be purchased at a relatively affordable price, if desired, long-term romantic relationships required money, regardless of whether one's prospective partner would be a mistress or a wife. In either case, a man would be expected to provide financial support to 'keep' his partner, which barred men from purchasing a relationship almost as effectively as it prevented them seeking matrimony.

Depending on their circumstances, men might find themselves cut off from existing connections or prevented from developing new intimate homosocial friendships by the obligation to relocate for work or further education. Naomi Tadmor observes that 'as many as two thirds of young men and women left home for years as servants and apprentices in other households before setting up on their own', and asserts that 'schooling, too, often involved some boarding, and children were also sent away to the houses of relations and friends for periods that could last between a few weeks and a few years.'⁹⁹ This was certainly the position in which Anthony Trollope found himself when he left his family home at the age of nineteen to take up a junior clerkship at the General Post Office in London, in 1834—a scant but vital three years before the ascension of Queen Victoria, which places him just barely within the bounds of the long eighteenth century. Writing about this period in his later years, he describes the abject loneliness of his position, living in meagre lodgings without any family in visiting distance. 'I belonged to no club,' he said, 'and knew very few friends who would receive me into their houses.'¹⁰⁰ Even worse, he recalled that 'there was no house in which I could habitually see a lady's face and hear a lady's voice.'¹⁰¹

Men's efforts to rectify this dearth of female company appear regularly in their life writing. In Dudley Ryder's diary, he recounts how one of his contemporaries, a Mr Hudson, tells Ryder 'how lonely he lived without any of his family with him', and the pair determine to pester the girls at the local boarding school for company and entertainment.¹⁰² This kind of mischief appears to be a popular

⁹⁹ Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England: Household, Kinship and Patronage*, 35; *ibid.*, 34-35.

¹⁰⁰ Anthony Trollope, *An Autobiography*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1883), 68; *ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹⁰² Ryder, "Sunday, August 21, 1715," 81.

pastime amongst young men. On various occasions, Ryder encounters several men of his acquaintance at the school door, not merely the lonely Mr Hudson, but also a Mr Milbourn and a Mr Gould, all with the same desire for the company of women—and, of course, Ryder’s own presence at the school door is not accidental on these occasions, much as he always affects to seem disinterested in these exploits.

But even when isolated young men managed to access female company, this did not remotely guarantee that the experience would satisfy their desire for companionship. In August, 1715, Ryder complained about feeling excluded in conversation with women because they wished more to speak to one another than to him and, when they did speak to each other, they appeared to be mocking him; he wrote that the women ‘vexed [him] two or three times by their sudden bursting out into laughter and then whispering together’.¹⁰³ These accounts reflect that young men felt the increasing importance of romantic love and struggled with the impossibility of accessing in socially-acceptable ways during their early adulthoods.

Comparatively, women do not appear to have mourned the absence of male counterparts during the same period of their lives. Their life writings reflect sincere love and intimacy between female friends, pleasure in their comparative independence, and often outright disdain for romantic heterosexual love and marriage. For example, in a letter to her friend Sally Logan, the young Peggy Emlen wondered how anyone could argue that ‘there can’t be friendships between girls’, for ‘if tis not true love and friendship, what is it I feel for thee? Nothing less I am sure’.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, Eliza Moode wrote to her friend Betsy Sandwith, ‘if you are as fond of me as I am of you, you could never lack for something or other to write to me. It is true that we see one another very often, But when two people like each other entirely There is even a pleasure in Thinking of each other’.¹⁰⁵ Elizabeth Graeme went further and wrote a poem entitled ‘On the Preference of Friendship to Love’, within which she asserted, in no uncertain terms, that:

¹⁰³ “Tuesday, August 9, 1715,” 73.

¹⁰⁴ P[eggy] E[m]len to Sally Logan, Philadelphia, 4th day afternoon, Marjorie Brown Collection of Margaret Emlen Letters 1768-71, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, quoted in: Eustace, “‘The Cornerstone of a Copious Work’: Love and Power in Eighteenth-Century Courtship,” 519.

¹⁰⁵ Eliza Moode to Babette, Friday Morning, 8 o’clock, Drinker and Sandwith Family Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, quoted in: Eustace, “‘The Cornerstone of a Copious Work’: Love and Power in Eighteenth-Century Courtship,” *ibid.*

Friendships Steady Flame as far;
Out shines that transient Blaze
As Mid Day suns a glimmering star.¹⁰⁶

In this poem, Graeme does not merely argue that a specific friendship outshines any romantic love, but rather that friendships in general outshine romantic love, suggesting that she believes this to be the case for all friendships. Women often wrote similarly loving and affectionate letters to their friends, which demonstrates that young women were loving, emotionally-articulate actors in their homosocial relationships, and that they were building significant connections with their peers from an early age.

This is entirely unsurprising given the way in which young women's day-to-day lives were structured. During the long eighteenth century, women spent the vast majority of their time with other women; as Amanda Herbert observes in her book *Female Alliances*, 'eighteenth-century British women, especially elite women... prayed, ate, worked, learned, read, recreated, and slept in the company of other women.'¹⁰⁷ In their very early years, both male and female children would be taught together by their mothers or governesses; however, the sexes would generally be separated soon after, either because they were being taught different subjects at home, because they were sent to study under tutors who might only teach boys or girls, or because they left home to attend segregated schools. Once their general schooling was complete, this state of separated affairs continued. Adolescent woman of the middling sort, gentry classes, and even aristocracy, spent the majority of their time in their own homes, or in the homes of close friends or employers, where they were either accompanied or supervised by their female friends or peers, older sisters or cousins, aunts, mothers, paid companions, female co-workers, or trusted family friends, and very often a combination of the above.

This social and occupational arrangement had the effect of creating an environment in which female homosocial relationships could and did flourish. Through consistently cohabiting with their female family members for a much longer period of time than most male children and young men, and by spending the vast majority of their days in female company, either occupationally, socially, or both,

¹⁰⁶ Elizabeth Graeme, "On the Preference of Friendship to Love," quoted in: David Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America* (Chapel Hill: 1997, 1997), 130.

¹⁰⁷ Amanda E. Herbert, *Female Alliances: Gender, Identity, and Friendship in Early Modern Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

with other women, young women were socialised to a much higher degree much more quickly than their male counterparts. This gave them a great deal of practice in forming deep and loving relationships based on personal and emotional intimacy and closeness, wherein the expression of love between friends was founded upon months or years of friendship, trust, conversation, and shared experiences.

On the subject of eighteenth-century female friendship, however, I will say no more, as it has already been analysed in wonderful detail by Amanda Herbert in *Female Alliances: Gender, Identity, and Friendship in Early Modern Britain*.¹⁰⁸ Suffice it to say that the historical evidence indicates that young women living in Britain during the long eighteenth century developed attitudes towards marriage that ranged from sensibly cautious to disdainful; that they had more opportunities to practice building emotionally-significant relationships with their female peers than men did with theirs; that they sincerely valued the friendships they built during this stage of their lives; and that, as a result, they did not feel the same emotional deficit that many young men appeared to experience during their single years. This led to many women developing a conception of love and intimacy that contrasted distinctly with the ideas that men developed during the same years of their lives.

The cultural backdrop against which young men and women received and negotiated their ideas about love, marriage, and courtship was, therefore, one of conflict. The material considerations that governed the business of marriage in earlier centuries had not been significantly diminished, and there were certainly still instances wherein young people were forced to marry against their will. However, it is clear that both love and women's romantic and sexual agency were becoming increasingly important features in the realm of courtship and matrimony and that these changes were being actively promoted to young men and women through popular culture. Complicating young people's experience of the increasing importance of romantic love, however, were the difficulties associated with attaining it in its most appropriate form, that being the heterosexual marriage. As mentioned above, the necessity of possessing adequate financial means to establish an independent household barred most people from entering the married state until their mid to late twenties. During this period of their lives, young men and women developed their ideas about love, marriage, and courtship in primarily single-sex social

¹⁰⁸ See: *ibid.*

spaces. However, young men and women had very different experiences during these years. Young men often found themselves separated from their existing relationships by the necessity of leaving home for work or study, and their life writings often expound on the loneliness and isolation that many young men experienced during this time. As a result, the emotional and social intimacy offered by marriage became an object of longing for many young men. By contrast, young women generally remained within the same homosocial communities of female relatives and friends throughout this period, which allowed them significantly more opportunity to practice developing profound, emotionally satisfying relationships with one another. Spared the social isolation experienced by their male peers, surrounded by networks of loving, emotionally supportive homosocial relationships, and fully aware of the legal and emotional risks posed to women by marriage, young women saw marriage in a very different light to their male peers, and the effects of these divergent experiences in early adulthood on the attitudes of young men and women was only compounded by the advice they received during these years.

b) Taking Direction

Young men and women were often taught to build romantic connections with one another through educational literature, such as conduct manuals, advice literature, and, for some, educational erotic literature. Conduct and advice literature provided explicit instructions to young men and women, though predominantly to the latter, about how to approach building significant platonic and romantic relationships in their lives. Erotic literature, though predominantly accessible to, written for, and read by men, also served an educational purpose in instructing men on how to behave in sexual and romantic situations with women; however, it did not effectively instruct them in how to establish such relationships. I will begin by exploring the advice women received about forming homosocial platonic relationships and heterosexual romantic relationships, and then compare this advice with that which men received on the same subjects.

Women were specifically instructed in how to form deep connections with one another. The qualities a woman should wish for in a friend and the pace at which such a friendship should progress so that both parties might be certain of one another's merits are both topics that receive discussion in multiple texts. In *An Unfortunate Mother's Advice to her Absent Daughters: In a Letter to Miss _____*

(1761), Lady Sarah Pennington warns her daughters of the dangers of precipitous intimacy with other women: ‘great Caution is necessary not to be deceived by specious Appearances... [A] precipitant Judgement sometimes leads into an unwary Intimacy, which it may prove absolutely necessary to break off, and yet that Breach be attended with innumerable Inconveniences; nay, perhaps with very material and lasting ill Consequences... Be slow in contracting Friendship, and invariably constant in maintaining it’.¹⁰⁹ Essentially, Pennington advises her daughters that it is safer to proceed slowly when starting a friendship, as this will hopefully avoid the possibility of a nasty break if two ill-matched people become close too quickly.

Girls were also warned about the possible social, rather than emotional consequences, of hastily made friendships. In *Rudiments of Taste, in a Series of Letters from a Mother to her Daughters* (1790), the anonymous writer known only as Cordelia advises young women to, ‘be careful not to form an acquaintance too hastily—many a virtuous girl has sunk for ever in the esteem of the world, by being seen in company with those of doubtful reputation.’¹¹⁰ She specifically warns that forming friendships ‘without the requisite investigation of that point [*id est*, their moral virtues], infallibly renders [a woman’s] own prudence suspected.’¹¹¹ This demonstrates that women were aware that they could be held socially accountable for the actions and characters of their friends, and that they ran the risk of being tainted by association if they chose their friends unwisely. It is also reflective of much of the advice young women received about how to avoid negative social and emotional consequences, most of which emphatically instructed women to proceed with their acquaintances slowly.

Literature further supported this sort of advice, with premature declarations of devotion amongst new friends being portrayed as suspicious and false; fictional women who professed their affection of other women either instantly or in terms far too extravagant for the degree of acquaintance shared generally did so for nefarious or selfish purposes. In Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* (1818), for example, Isabella Thorpe makes ‘frequent expressions of delight on this acquaintance with [the

¹⁰⁹ Sarah Pennington, *An Unfortunate Mother's Advice to Her Absent Daughters; in a Letter to Miss Pennington* (London: S. Chandler, 1761), 47-48.

¹¹⁰ *Rudiments of Taste, in a Series of Letters from a Mother to Her Daughters: To Which Are Added, Maxims Addressed to Young Ladies, by the Countess Dowager of Carlisle*, (Philadelphia: William Spotswood, 1790), 62.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*.

protagonist, Catherine Morland]’ during their first meeting, and the two rapidly become intimate friends. Her motives, however, are entirely selfish and Catherine later says of her, ‘she is a vain coquette... I do not believe she had ever any regard... for me, and I wish I had never known her.’¹¹² This plotline warns young women to guard themselves against being taken advantage of by distrusting premature declarations of love and intimacy.

Of course, there were those who dismissed the importance of female homosocial love and friendship throughout the long eighteenth century, and, on some occasions, even disclaimed its existence. In 1695, the French-English lexicographer and writer, Abel Boyer claimed that women were ‘so little affected by *Friendship*... because it tastes very flat and insipid, after the Relishing of *Love*’.¹¹³ In this, he evidently subscribes to the notion that female homosocial friendships existed as a temporary provision, meant to be relinquished after women reached a suitable age to be thinking of romantic love. Nearly thirty years later, in 1721, the French theologian and writer, François de Salignac de la Mothe-Fénelon asserted that ‘women do not naturally love one another; their ill Politicks put them generally at Variance’.¹¹⁴ Indeed, de la Mothe-Fénelon rather assumes then that women will prefer the friendship of men to that of other women; his warnings about how to choose a sensible friendship all pertain to male friends. For example, he remarks ‘that your Friend, whom you have a mind to raise to be your Confident, should be of such an advanc’d Age; and of such known Worth and Probity, that you may safely see *him* without giving Off- fence, and with all Security, to the Rules of Decency.’¹¹⁵ However, while these authors were widely read at the time, there is little evidence to suggest that their assertions reflected widespread social practice at any point.

These examples show that young women were routinely given explicit instructions as to how to develop homosocial friendships within which the participants could sincerely love, trust, and respect

¹¹² Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey: And Persuasion*, 4 vols., vol. 2 (London: John Murray, 1818), 239.

¹¹³ Abel Boyer, *Characters of the Virtues & Vices of the Age; or Moral Reflections, Maxims, and Thoughts Upon Men and Manners. Translated from the Most Refined French Wits, Viz. Montagne, Pascal, La Rochefoucault, St. Evremont. La Bruiere, Boubours, &C. And Extracted from the Most Celebrated English Writers, Viz. Bacon, Cowley, Sprat, Temple, L’estranger, Dryden, &C. Digested Alphabetically under Proper Titles* (London: Abel Roper, E. W*kinson, and Roger Clavell, 1695), 82.

¹¹⁴ François de Salignac de la Mothe-Fénelon, *Instructions for the Education of a Daughter, by the Author of Telemachus. To Which Is Added a Small Tract of Instructions for the Conduct of Young Ladies of the Highest Rank. With Suitable Devotions Annexed.*, trans. George Hickes, 2nd ed. (London: Jonah Bowyer, 1708), 311.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 312. My italics.

one another. This advice encouraged women to privilege the slow development of intimacy and the necessity of good character in a prospective friend, as well as warning them of the possible emotional and social consequences of hasty or ill-considered intimacy. Young women were evidently instructed to consider this advice in their adolescent friendships, long before most would be in a position to consider courtship or marriage, and this advice was effectively identical to the advice that they received with regards to developing romantic heterosexual relationships.

For example, writing at the turn of the eighteenth century, Mary Astell fervently advised women to exercise the authority they did have—that being the power of consent or refusal—to protect themselves by being slow to marry and cautious of men’s hastily formed attachments to them, for ‘she who Elects a Monarch for Life, who gives him an Authority she cannot recall however he misapply it, who puts her Fortune and Person entirely in his Power... had need be very sure that she does not make a Fool her Head, nor a Vicious Man her Guide and Pattern’. To this end, she advises that a woman ‘had best stay [*id est* wait] till she can meet with one who has the Government of his own Passions and has duly regulated his own Desires, since he is to have such an absolute Power over hers.’¹¹⁶

In a similar vein, Lady Sarah Pennington advises her daughters that ‘an unhappy Marriage [is] generally the Consequence of a too early Engagement, before Reason has gained sufficient Strength to form a solid Judgment, on which only a proper Choice can be determined. Great is the Hazard of a Mistake, and irretrievable the Effects of it!’¹¹⁷. She continues to advise them that they should privilege good qualities above temporal, by which she appears to mean worldly or material, possessions:

Rest not content with the Prospect of [ease arising from temporal felicity], but fix on a more eligible Point of View, by aiming at true Happiness; and, take my Word, that can never be found in a married State, without the three essential Qualifications already mentioned, Virtue, good Nature, and good Sense, in an Husband: remember, therefore, my dear Girl, this repeated Caution, if you ever resolve on Marriage, never to give your Hand to a Man who wants either of them; whatever other Advantages he may be possessed of, so shall you not only escape all

¹¹⁶ Mary Astell, *Some Reflections Upon Marriage, Occasion'd by the Duke and Dutchess of Mazarine's Case; Which Is Also Consider'd* (London: John Nutt, 1700), 32-33; *ibid.*, 33.

¹¹⁷ Pennington, *An Unfortunate Mother's Advice to Her Absent Daughters*, 75.

those Vexations, which Thousands of unthinking Mortals hourly repent the having brought upon themselves.¹¹⁸

Dr Gregory's advice also promotes careful consideration of one's own requirements in a partner, and specifically instructs young women to undertake this self-analysis alone, rather than with reference to any particular suitor. 'Before your affections come to be in the least engaged to any man,' he says, 'examine your tempers, your tastes, and your hearts, very severely, and settle in your own minds what are the requisites to your happiness in a married state; and as it is almost impossible that you should get every thing you wish, come to a steady determination what you are to consider as essential, and what may be sacrificed.'¹¹⁹ This reflects not only the type of practical, cautionary advice that women received regarding their courtships, but also demonstrates that they were encouraged to critically examine their own wants and needs in that regard long before they reached an age at which they would begin to seriously consider the possibility of marriage.

The examples of Astell, Pennington, and Gregory demonstrate that young women were given repeated and explicit cautions about how to choose a husband; particularly, they were advised to approach their relationships slowly and with care, and to privilege qualities like good sense and kindness over material advantages, so as to best guard themselves against future unhappiness.

In complement to this kind of advice, young women received specific warnings to prepare them for particular types of behaviour that might signify either a bad character or a lack of sincere emotional attachment. For example, they were warned against professions of romantic love offered too quickly, and advised that such declarations could not be founded on proper admiration. In *The Friend of Women*, De Villemert advises young women that 'love alone... detached from every other sentiment, is but a transitory fire, which extinguishes itself as soon as it is familiar with the object which gave it birth... In order for love to be constant and durable, it is necessary it should contract a close alliance with friendship'.¹²⁰ He adds that 'two [real] lovers are, then, tender friends, filled with zeal and esteem for

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 76.

¹¹⁹ John Gregory, *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters* (London: A. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1788), 182; *ibid.*

¹²⁰ Pierre-Joseph Bourdier de Villemert, *The Friend of Women*, trans. Alexander Morrice (London: Knight and Compton, 1802), 97.

each other; they think highly of each other; feel and express themselves in unison.¹²¹ This advice explicitly draws a connection between platonic homosocial friendship and romantic heterosexual love, which suggests that young women would place similar requirements on their male suitors as they did on their female friends.

In a similar vein, Mary Astell warned women against men who would marry them for shallow reasons alone. She asserts that ‘he who doats on a Face... he who is Charm'd with vain and empty Wit, gives no such Evidence, either of Wisdom or Goodness, that a Woman of any tolerable Sense shou'd care to venture her self [*sic*] to his Conduct.’¹²² In this, she advises women that a man who is quickly attracted to beauty and wit clearly demonstrates his fecklessness or vanity, which should demonstrate to any sensible woman that she should not submit herself to his authority.

Likewise, De Villemert remarked of men who flatter many women often that ‘all the tender declarations which they distribute so liberally among the sex have no affinity to their sentiments’ and that ‘the vile adorations and gross complaisances by which [these men] seek to please, are sufficient to make them suspected, and lead the women to distrust their attentions.’¹²³ He adds that ‘the rapidity with which [these men’s courtships] spring up and are extinguished, proclaim... sufficiently [that the heart is not really a party]. These are weak knots, which taste, or pleasure, unites for a time, and which caprice hardly ever fails to break. These brittle bonds are sufficient for... women more particular about words than sentiments; and these are the only ones who countenance men given up to the frolics of a heated imagination.’¹²⁴ De Villemert is, in this case, warning women about men he believed to be concerned only with engaging their affections to facilitate their seduction; however, it is easily applicable to men who declare their love and proposed marriage too quickly, when considered in the context of his advice that happy marriages must be based on considered friendship, as well as love or passion.

It is clear, therefore, that the advice that women received with regards to forming both platonic and romantic relationships was, in large part, thematically similar throughout the period: a successful

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Astell, *Some Reflections Upon Marriage, Occasion'd by the Duke and Dutchess of Mazarine's Case; Which Is Also Consider'd*, 33.

¹²³ Villemert, *The Friend of Women*, 92; *ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 94.

marriage must be founded upon both love and friendship, and friendship must be developed over an appropriate period of time, with adequate consideration given to the merits and faults of a potential partner. The consequences of a hasty match are expounded upon at length in conduct and advice literature and are rightfully presented as dire. At a point in history at which it was difficult to secure a divorce, women were warned time and time again that it was vital to choose wisely when entering the married state.

Men, comparatively, received very little explicit advice on forming relationships with either the opposite sex or each other. There was noticeably more advice and conduct literature produced for women than men, and the publications produced for men were primarily intended to advise men about how to conduct themselves in their public and professional lives, rather than in their private and domestic lives.

For example, in *Letters to His Son on the Art of Becoming a Man of the World and a Gentleman* (1774), Philip Stanhope, fourth Earl of Chesterfield, was primarily interested in advising his son on public and professional topics. He did, however, offer some advice on homosocial friendships that echoes that which was directed at young women by other writers. Stanhope advised his son to ‘be upon [his] guard against those who upon very slight acquaintance, obtrude their unasked and unmerited friendship and confidence upon you... but, at the same time, do not roughly reject them upon that general supposition. Examine further, and see whether those unexpected offers flow from a warm heart and a silly head, or from a designing head and a cold heart; for knavery and folly have often the same symptoms.’¹²⁵ He also warned him of the ‘incontinency of friendship among young fellows, who are associated by their mutual pleasures only, which has, very frequently, bad consequences. [Young men] indiscreetly pour out their whole souls in common, and... These confidences are as indiscreetly repealed as they were made... and then very ill uses are made of these rash confidences.’¹²⁶ While this advice is very similar to the advice young women received on the topic of their homosocial friendships, there is no suggestion that men should apply these same lessons to the formation of their romantic relationships.

¹²⁵ Philip Dormer Stanhope, *Letters Written by the Earl of Chesterfield to His Son*, 3 vols., vol. 2 (London: Thomas Tegg, 1827), 123; *ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

Thus, though men were taught to form healthy friendships with one another, they were not encouraged to pursue romantic relationships with the same guiding principles.

Additionally, the vast majority of Thomas Gisborne's work, *An Enquiry into the Duties of Men*, instructs men on their professional and public responsibilities, while just a single chapter towards the end of the second volume discusses their roles as husbands and fathers. Notably, this section does not instruct them on how they ought to behave as *prospective* husbands, but rather addresses the reader assuming that he is already married. One of the first things Gisborne informs men in this section is that 'the holy scriptures... guarding against the perpetual conflicts by which the peace and harmony of families would be destroyed, were a complete equality of rights to subsist between the husband and the wife, have expressly pronounced submission to be the general duty of the latter.'¹²⁷ In this way, he immediately instructs men to expect submission from their wives, while totally neglecting to provide any advice about how to go about acquiring a wife in the first place.

Men's conduct literature did sometimes instruct young men on what qualities they should look for in a prospective wife, as women's conduct literature did; however, this advice did not equip them to actually pay court to such a woman. For example, while *The Lover's Best Instructor, or, the Whole Art of Courtship* (c. 1770) promised its male readers both 'Proper Hints Concerning the Choice of a Wife' and, by its title, some useful instruction in their affairs of the heart, it utterly neglected to deliver on the latter promise.¹²⁸ It advised young men to choose a lady, not for her 'portion, but her family and alliances'; to 'avoid her in whom the love of pleasure appears to be a predominate passion, however enticing [*sic*] her wit, or however alluring her beauty'; to 'chuse one in whom there is nothing that disgusts [them, rather] than a celebrated beauty'; and 'after all... not to expect perfection'.¹²⁹ What it fails to do is to offer young men any practical advice on initiating a romantic connection with a woman, despite clearly writing with the assumption that men will be the ones proposing marriage. It does make reference to the kinds of behaviour required of young men in courtship settings, saying that 'most

¹²⁷ Thomas Gisborne, *An Enquiry into the Duties of Men in the Higher and Middle Classes of Society in Great Britain, Resulting from Their Respective Stations, Professions, and Employments*, 4th ed., 2 vols., vol. 2 (London: B. and J. White; Cadell and Davies, 1797), 465.

¹²⁸ *The Lover's Best Instructor, or, the Whole Art of Courtship*, (Wolverhampton: Thomas Smith, c. 1770), 5.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*; *ibid.*; *ibid.*, 6; *ibid.*, 7.

people, after they are married, imagine their point is gained, and lay aside all those little arts, that by hiding the natural infirmities, and avoiding disgusting indecencies, raised expectations which should not be disappointed. It should be remembered, that the same means which were used to gain affection, are absolutely necessary to preserve it'.¹³⁰ What is missing is, again, any explicit description of what these 'little arts' and 'means' were, and how men might attempt to perform them. This elision should not be taken to suggest that the information was common knowledge, but rather that there simply was not a great deal of advice to be had.

The author of *Advice to Young Gentlemen, Concerning the Conduct of Life* (1710), W. Vaughan, openly admits as much. In the single paragraph within which the author addresses the notion of romance, he states that he is 'at a loss what to advise you in the Affairs of Love'.¹³¹ In the absence of practical instruction, he simply cautions men 'never [to] suffer this Passion to get the better of our Duty, or transport us above the sense of our Honour', and to 'pay a deference to the ladies, [for] their Conversation is both pleasant and useful.'¹³² He adds that 'a reprimand from the pretty Mouth of that Lady we wish to please, has often a better effect than all the Advice in the World; and I know some Gentlemen who are indebted to that fair Sex for the greatest part of their Merit.'¹³³ To give Vaughan due credit, this is not at all bad advice, since women are certainly the best authority on how they wish to be treated; however, it is nothing like the detailed instruction that women received on similar topics, and I could find no similar advice in comparable texts throughout the century. Regardless of its failings, advice literature was not the only potential source of information accessible to men during this period. Erotic literature also offered its readers romantic advice.

While erotic literature did not completely fill the hole left by men's advice literature, there is strong evidence to suggest that it went some way towards doing so. Eighteenth-century erotic literature fulfils a markedly different role in the lives of young men than the vast majority of modern pornography does in the lives of their current counterparts. Modern visual pornography is generally primarily or

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ W. Vaughan, *Advice to Young Gentleman, Concerning the Conduct of Life* (London: Bernard Lintott, 1710), 21.

¹³² Ibid., 22; *ibid.*

¹³³ Ibid.

exclusively concerned with providing graphic visual detail of various sex acts, without reference or significance given to any relationship between the participants. While eighteenth-century erotic literature also provides depictions of sex acts, with varying degrees of detail, it is firmly grounded, almost universally, in the relationships between the participants. The most popular pieces of prose pornography centre on loving sexual relationships between men and women. Wedding nights, secret meetings between unmarried lovers, and loving contractual relationships between men and sex workers were some of the most popular scenes in eighteenth-century erotica.

For example, *A Dialogue Between a Married Lady and a Maid* (1740) exclusively features accounts of loving couples, either already happily married or imminently to be so. *The School of Venus* relates the amorous encounters of two young women and their respective lovers, both couples unmarried but openly attracted to and affectionate towards one another and participating voluntarily in their sexual relationships. *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* also features almost exclusively affectionate or loving sex scenes, with the exception of two quite impersonal casual sexual encounters (between Fanny and a sailor, and Fanny's colleague and a flower seller, respectively), one attempted rape, one completed rape, and several unsatisfying but consenting sexual experiences with one of Fanny's clients. During the rest of the many sex scenes, Fanny is depicted as feeling varying degrees of romantic affection or love for the persons with whom she engages sexually.

In *Vénus dans le cloître, ou la Religieuse en chemise* (1683) Sister Agnès and Sister Angélique are presented as loving 'Intimate Friends'; Sister Angélique tells Agnès that she has 'for [her] all the tenderness that a heart is capable of'.¹³⁴ The loving and affectionate relationships seen in erotic literature from the long eighteenth century are a far cry from the overt objectification and near-grotesque dehumanisation of the subjects in many of the Victorian pornographic works that followed them, which suggests that they fulfilled a very specific role in the lives of their readers. Rather than functioning purely as masturbatory aids or the like, eighteenth-century erotic literature could be, and often was, educational, philosophical, or emotional, as well as sexual. In fact, most popular texts, such as those

¹³⁴ Abbé Du Prat, *Venus in the Cloister, or the Nun in Her Smock. In Curious Dialogues, Addressed to the Lady Abbess of Loves Paradise, by the Abbot Du Prat. Done out of French.* (London: H. Rodes, 1683), 2; *ibid.* *Venus in the Cloister* was published in English in London within a year of its publication in France in 1683, and then again in 1724.

referenced above, usually included at least three of these elements, and the pathetic features of these texts suggest that they served an emotional role in their readers' lives.

The consistent depictions of loving relationships in the most popular eighteenth-century erotic texts suggests that these texts went some way towards meeting the readers' emotional and educational needs, in addition to the sexual appeal they held. When they could not access romantic love themselves, and when conduct and advice literature neglected to educate them on how to behave within romantic contexts, erotic literature offered explicit depictions of men as loving, romantic, and sexual actors.

Men also learned romantic practice from their engagements with sex work. Both inhabitants of and visitors to the demimonde utilised the language of love to glamorise and romanticise what might otherwise be considered base transactions. Female sex workers were routinely referred to as nymphs, charmers, and daughters of love or Venus, while male clients were called gallants, lovers, or paramours.¹³⁵ This lexicon deliberately drew on the imagery and ideology of Classical love, with its references to Greco-Roman culture and mythology. It also blurred the distinctions between men's roles in transactional sexual or romantic relationships and their roles in traditional courtships, particularly through the use of the word 'gallant', which could mean, apart from simply a 'splendid man', 'a whoremaster, who caresses women to debauch them' or 'a wooer... who courts a woman for marriage'.¹³⁶ These kinds of appellations formed part of a performative practice whereby transactional sex could offer men experiences of apparent love and romance, with little of the romantic initiative or emotional investment and intimacy that would be required of them in a courtship setting.

Even men who did not engage with sex workers personally would likely have been exposed to the lexicon of this subculture through their homosocial friendships and access to popular literature. Though some transactional relationships were likely emotionally significant to one or both participants, this use of loving and romantic language was associated with the instigation of a purely sexual relationship; it was not dependent upon the mutual development of an emotional, intellectual, and romantic relationship. It is reasonable to assume that exposure to or engagement with the scripts and

¹³⁵ For examples, see: *Harris's List of Covent-Garden Ladies: Or, Man of Pleasure's Kalender, for the Year, 1788*.

¹³⁶ Definitions from Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language: In Which the Words Are Deduced from Their Originals, and Illustrated in Their Different Significations by Examples from the Best Writers* (London: W. Strahan, 1755).

language of sex work led men to associate the language of romantic love with the primarily visceral emotions of sexual desire and attraction to a person, rather than on the simultaneous existence of both an emotional connection with and a physical attraction to the said person. This may have been part of the reason that young women were warned to avoid men who attempted to court them with premature romantic verbiage as this kind of behaviour could suggest that they had a history of engaging with sex workers.

Furthermore, sex workers and their clients not only utilised the language of love, but often its performance. The ads in *Harris's List of Covent-Garden Ladies* (1788) demonstrate that the performance of romantic or domestic intimacy could be purchased. While some entries refer either primarily or exclusively to the lady's physical appearances or sexual talents, many also prioritise her genteel accomplishments, conversational style, attractiveness as a companion, or affectionate behaviour. In the case of Miss G—rge, for example, 'her tell-tale dark eyes, speak indeed, the tender language of love, and beam unutterable softness'.¹³⁷ In other words, she performs romantic love for her clients. For this service, she charges five guineas, rather than the one or two guineas generally charged by the women in *Harris' List*. Similarly, Miss L—st—r is not merely beautiful, but 'sings well, [and] is a very chearful [*sic*] companion'.¹³⁸ Mrs H—rv—y has 'love-swimming eyes', 'a beautiful face, an elegant form, and a graceful manner' and is also an 'agreeable companion... good humoured girl, and the most enchanting bedfellow'.¹³⁹ Miss M—l—sw—rth is 'a friend to mirth and good humour, without vulgarity' and has 'good nature, affability, and love depicted in all her actions'.¹⁴⁰ There are many more such advertisements in the various editions of *Harris's List*, which shows that the performance of romantic love was highly valued and sought after in transactional sexual relationships.

It is, therefore, evident that both young men and women were given similar advice by educational literature with regards to how to build significant platonic homosocial relationships, with advice literature consistently advocating that young people favour strong connections built slowly over a longer period of time, and that they privilege good qualities and trust over other factors. Furthermore,

¹³⁷ *Harris's List of Covent-Garden Ladies: Or, Man of Pleasure's Kalender, for the Year, 1788*, 41.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 61; *ibid.*; *ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 88; *ibid.*

young women's advice literature explicitly instructed young women to approach their romantic, heterosexual relationships in a similar way, asserting that they should prioritise the building of trust and emotional connection and distrust men who claimed to love them immediately, without allowing sufficient time for an attachment to form. However, while young men's advice literature often offered its readers instruction on how to choose an appropriate wife, it gave them very little idea of how to go about instigating and developing a romantic relationship with a woman, and failed to draw a connection between romantic and platonic relationships that would have compensated for the dearth of advice provided about the former. In the absence of useful information from this quarter, young men learned how to participate in relationships from other sources, particularly from erotic literature and from their exposure to transactional sex and the romantic culture surrounding it. Through their exposure to the latter, they would learn the practice of performing romance upon the instigation of a transactional sexual relationship. This practice, however, while likely fulfilling an emotional desire in young men, evidently caused difficulties when they attempted to apply similar tactics on women to whom they were attempting to pay court, as it was in direct contrast to the behaviour that women were taught to value in their suitors. The conflict between the advice and instruction received by young men and young women serves to explain the differing ways in which they approached courtships in their own lives.

ii. Opening Night: Performing the Scripts

As outlined above, men and women underwent differing life experiences and forms of socialisation during their youths, and this resulted in a discrepancy between their understandings and expectations of love and courtship. While women received copious advice and instruction regarding the qualities one should look for in a potential husband, the necessity of a prolonged courtship to allow time to build an intellectual and emotional connection, and the likelihood that precipitous proposals were not motivated by real emotion, as well as gaining extensive experience building profound homosocial relationships, men had little such education or experience to boast of, and what they had was often decidedly unhelpful to them. From their exposure to the culture surrounding transactional sex, men were used to deploying romantic language based on little to no emotional foundation; rather, the existence of sexual attraction and desire was, in the context of transactional sex, sufficient reason to speak of one's love for the object

of that attraction. It is unsurprising then that men, when turning their minds to marriage, appear to have viewed sexual attraction to a socially-appropriate woman as ‘love’, and to consider that attraction adequate grounds for a proposal. We can see the effects of these differing understandings and expectations between men and women in countless courtships throughout the period.

For example, on 15 February 1761, a 27-year-old minor gentleman by the name of John Courtney wrote in his diary that he ‘was confirmed in [his] resolution to propose marriage to a Miss Newsome. Four days later, he added that he ‘[dared say] the young lady [might] begin to guess that [he] love[d] her’.¹⁴¹ On 26 February, he approached Miss Newsome’s family to declare himself and, on 1 March, he was soundly rejected by proxy, thanks to the kind offices of Miss Newsome’s aunts.¹⁴² He had met Miss Newsome on the 3 February, and done nothing at all to establish even the barest hint of a friendship between them before deciding that he was in love with her and proposing marriage. Courtney pursued ten women in similar style before eventually managing to persuade one of them to marry him, which demonstrates that this was not the foolhardy mistake of a romantic novice, but a practice that Courtney legitimately expected to work. Evidently, Courtney sincerely believed himself to be in love after an extremely short acquaintance with a woman, and considered this sufficient reason to propose, whereas the women he attempted to court had vastly different expectations of him and disbelieved or distrusted his claims of love. Of course, it is entirely possible that the ten women he pursued simply were not attracted to him or interested in him, and that the length of courtship would have made no difference to their resolutions to reject him; however, given that he was rejected by ten women, this would constitute a stroke of extraordinarily bad luck for Courtney. Furthermore, in the end he married a Miss Mary Smelt, a woman he had known for six years by the time he proposed. Given that he did not manage to make himself repellent to Smelt despite the years of their acquaintance, it seems likely that it was Courtney’s breakneck approach to courtship that comprised the bulk of the problem.

Women’s attitudes towards men’s courtship practices are also clearly documented by the same examples; after all, on the other side of every man’s rejected marriage proposals is a woman issuing that rejection. Women’s lives, letters, and life writings reflect their clear awareness that men were liable

¹⁴¹ The diary of John Courtney is quoted in: Vickery, “What Did Eighteenth-Century Men Want?.”

¹⁴² For record of John Courtney’s affairs, see: *ibid.*

to presume themselves in love both rapidly and without sufficient cause. Anna Seward, for example, was strongly inclined to scepticism as to the seriousness of men's romantic attachments during their courtships. In a letter to an unnamed friend, she states that said friend's soft eyes 'must have flattered a husband into tender expectations, which [her] superior intelligence, cheerful acquiescence, and the most punctilious sense of duty, would be, of themselves, incompetent to satisfy. I mean, if he were himself attached to his bride with any thing [*sic*] resembling passion.'¹⁴³ Seward evidently believes that her friend's suitor has built up expectations of her friend's romantic love towards himself based purely on the gentleness of her expressions, which the reality of her feelings will not support once they are married. Seward further asserts that she is sure this discrepancy would disappoint him, if he were, in fact, actually in love with her properly. Whatever admiration or infatuation he does feel, Seward dismisses it a shallow attachment; it is not, she says, 'any thing resembling passion'.¹⁴⁴

Similarly, in 1796, Seward recalled that, in her youth, she 'had proposals of marriage from several [men]... but such sort of overtures, not preceded by assiduous tenderness, and which expected to reap the harvest of love without having nursed its germs, suited not [her] native enthusiasm, nor were calculated to inspire it'.¹⁴⁵ This clearly implies that the men who proposed to her did so based solely on their own feelings of romantic interest, without having made any effort to establish an emotional or intellectual connection with her.

Historical evidence demonstrates that the rejection of men's marriage proposals was, if not commonplace, not at all unusual, which further demonstrates the disparity between men's and women's understandings and expectations of courtship and love. In 1804, the 27-year-old attorney Henry Woollcombe's first proposal was rejected by mail, and Hussey and Ponsonby describe how for the next twenty or so years, 'his singularly unfortunate, even gauche, attempts to realise this dream [*id est* marriage] punctuated his diary with sad regularity'.¹⁴⁶ But his experience was not singular, by any stretch of the imagination. In 1715, Dudley Ryder reported in his diary that his cousin, Watkins, was

¹⁴³ Seward, *Poetical Works*, 1.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ Seward, *Letters of Anna Seward*, 4, 178.

¹⁴⁶ Hussey and Ponsonby, *The Single Homemaker and Material Culture in the Long Eighteenth Century*, 8.

‘upon the affair of matrimony, after disappointment in two attempts before.’¹⁴⁷ Without particular feeling, he adds that Watkins ‘talks that he has good hopes’ but thinks they are ‘upon as little foundation as his former were.’¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, Ryder was quite correct; by October of that year, he could cheerfully report that Watkins had ‘made love and proposals of marriage to four several young women within this year and they have all failed.’¹⁴⁹ In his unbothered record of his cousin’s four rejected marriage proposals, Ryder clearly demonstrates that such rejections were not shocking, but rather to be expected as a part of life.

It is, therefore, evident that disparate socialisation and conflicting sources of advice resulted in men’s conception of love being founded on the presence of sexual desire towards a socially-appropriate, marriageable woman, while women’s conception of love was dependent upon the existence of an emotional and intellectual connection, as well as trust and respect. This is evidenced by the discrepancy between what men believed they should do in their courtships and what women wanted from their suitors, and the resultant slew of rejected marriage proposals to be found throughout the century.

iii. Final Thoughts

Men’s and women’s distinct experiences as young adults guided them to develop different ideas about love, romance, courtship and marriage. Many women, particularly those who faced no financial impediment to or social discouragement from remaining unmarried, understood marriage to be a dangerous sacrifice of independence and legal protection, justifiable only by the presence of genuine love between members of a couple. Naturally, this prompted advice writers of both genders to emphatically instruct women on the vital importance of careful consideration and the development of mutual love and friendship before agreeing to be married, and to women absorbing and reiterating this advice to one another. This led to women privileging slower courtships, wherein they had time to develop an emotional connection to their suitor, and rejecting rapid courtships as the product of insufficient or insincere affections. On the other side of things, while men risked the loss of some independence through marriage, they were not subject to the same degree of legal risk as women and

¹⁴⁷ Ryder, “Saturday, July 2, 1715,” 46.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ryder, “Tuesday, October 4, 1715,” 113.

their primary interest in marriage appears to be as a remedy to loneliness and lack of emotional support. During early adulthood, the culture surrounding sex work and the language of romantic love, as well as the relative dearth of more rational instruction, as compared to the volume received by women, both influenced men to associate ideas of romantic love predominantly with sexual desire for any socially appropriate woman. It also guided men to presume that the near immediate use of language of love and romance would be as effective within courtship as it was within transactional sexual engagements. This was most certainly not the case, and the discrepancies between the attitudes of men and women are evidenced by the regularity with which young women rejected the proposals of young men throughout the course of the eighteenth century.

Chapter 2

Only the Power of Refusal? Sexual Consent and Female Agency in the Long Eighteenth Century in Britain

In observing the similarities between marriage and dancing, Mr Henry Tilney, of Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, remarks that, in both, "man has the advantage of choice, women only the power of refusal".¹⁵⁰ He is, of course, speaking in stereotypes—the same ones, incidentally, that are so familiar to eighteenth-century historians and consumers of eighteenth-century historical fiction alike. Essentially: men act; women react. While, at the surface level, this appears true enough, the reality of sexual and romantic power dynamics between men and women in the eighteenth century is far more complicated than it first appears, and sexual practice specifically was governed by a complex and conditional socio-sexual script, wherein consent played a vital role. Significant research has been conducted into rape and sexual violence, as well as into seduction, coercion, and other negative and/or problematic sexual behaviours, during the long eighteenth century; however, there is comparatively little research on consent as an isolated practice.¹⁵¹ Existing scholarly references to consent are near universally incidental to discussions of rape, which means that none of the primary source materials under consideration can offer a representation of clear and legitimate consensual interaction, as agreed by both parties.¹⁵² Even in those texts that explicitly consider consent, there is an emphasis on the ambiguity of consent in cases or representations of sexual violence, rather than mutually-affirmed

¹⁵⁰ Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey: And Persuasion*, 4 vols., vol. 1 (London: John Murray, 1818), 171.

¹⁵¹ For research on rape and sexual violence, see, for example: Barclay, "From Rape to Marriage: Questions of Consent in Eighteenth-Century Britain."; Rudolph, "Rape and Resistance."; King, "Rape in England 1600-1800: Trials, Narratives and the Question of Consent." For seduction, coercion, etc., see, for example: Binhammer, *The Seduction Narrative in Britain, 1747-1800*; Marcie Ray, "Savage Love: The Indifferent Woman, Violent Seduction and 18th-Century French Cantatas," *Early Music* 44, no. 1 (November 2016); Katie Barclay, "Emotions, the Law and the Press in Britain: Seduction and Breach of Promise Suits, 1780-1830," *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 39, no. 2 (June 2016).

¹⁵² For example, while King's thesis on "Rape in England 1600-1800" (see footnote above), dedicates its conclusion to a discussion of 'Sexuality, Gender and Consent', the thesis is near wholly evidenced by deposition materials from the Ely and Northern Assize Circuit and literary representations of sexual violence; naturally then, none of the source material provides any representation of consent, only a lack thereof.

consent itself.¹⁵³ In literature that attempts to examine sexual practice as a whole, consent is often excluded from the discussion.¹⁵⁴ Of course, research into the history of rape and sexual violence is immensely valuable. However, this elision in the literature has resulted in consent being conceptualised as an unknown variable in analyses of sexual conduct; historians unanimously agree that its presence or absence impacts the way in which we study and judge particular sexual events, but there has been little attempt to actually quantify this variable. That, broadly speaking, is what I intend to do in this chapter.

Before proceeding further, however, a note about the scope of this chapter: I am aware that, despite the physically-active role men generally were expected to play in initiating sexual encounters with women, men also experienced sexual violence and coercion during the long eighteenth century, and that their agency and ability to give consent is worthy of discussion; however, this is beyond the scope of my thesis. Additionally, as I am concerned with analysing how consent functioned in ordinary settings between heterosexual partners who were able to exercise agency, I will not be considering the question of consent in circumstances wherein one or both parties were legally or culturally unable to give consent, i.e. in child marriages. Though existing work on the subject does discuss consent in a legal context, and provides a valuable contribution to the literature on non-consent, it is not directly pertinent to my argument.¹⁵⁵ I will also not be examining the way that sexual consent was practiced between same-sex couples; this is an avenue for future research, but will not be explored in this chapter due to time constraints and limited access to historical archives.

My primary aim is to demonstrate that eighteenth-century socio-sexual scripts prioritised consent and female agency. I argue that these scripts featured both verbal and nonverbal requests for consent, depending on the participants' degrees of sexual experience; that they privileged nonverbal communication of female consent in most sexual situations; and that they recognised women as active

¹⁵³ See, for example: Hanlon, “*Fanny Hill* and the Legibility of Consent.”; Barclay, “From Rape to Marriage: Questions of Consent in Eighteenth-Century Britain.”

¹⁵⁴ See: A. D. Harvey, *Sex in Georgian England: Attitudes and Prejudices from the 1720s to the 1820s*, rev. ed. (London: Phoenix Press, 2001). *Sex in Georgian England* contains a chapter each on rape and seduction, but no dedicated discussion of consent.

¹⁵⁵ For work on child marriage and consent, see: Johanna Rickman, ““He Would Never Consent in His Heart”: Child Marriage in Early Modern England,” *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 6, no. 2 (Spring 2013).

sexual agents. Additionally, I assert that women deliberately exercised their sexual agency within these frameworks by making their bodies sites of communication.

To these ends, I will first outline how consent was conceptualised theoretically during the period, so as to provide a broader contextual framework within which to situate my analysis. Next, I will identify the key elements of received and reiterated sexual scripts through the analysis of contemporary erotic, conduct, and advice literature. I will demonstrate that men were instructed to verbally request consent before having sex with an inexperienced woman, and informed that failure to do so would reflect negatively on them. Additionally, I will show that men were taught to expect women to communicate their sexual consent and desires nonverbally, and were expected to observe and interpret these physical performances correctly. Following this, I will isolate the specific ways in which consent could be performed physically and nonverbally. Finally, I will show that women were encouraged to communicate nonverbally in other heterosocial situations, and that they practiced nonverbal communication in non-sexual situations. In this way, I will demonstrate how communication around sexual consent and female agency operated within the complex and situational socio-sexual scripts of the long eighteenth century.

i. Conceptualising Consent

The majority of work on eighteenth-century socio-sexual practice is built on the foundations of a modern understanding of consent, within which consent is understood to mean ‘agreement’; however, I argue that this is not reflective of the idea of consent as it existed within the eighteenth-century cultural imaginary, wherein consent was understood as an act of deliberate submission. In order to properly situate ourselves in this cultural space and time, it is necessary to explicitly outline how our own current understandings differ from those held by our eighteenth-century subjects, and *why* they differ. The modern Oxford English Dictionary defines ‘consent’ as ‘Voluntary agreement or acquiescence in what another proposes or desires; compliance, concurrence, permission’; essentially, to consent is to say ‘yes’.¹⁵⁶ This modern definition is known as ‘affirmative consent’. By comparison, Samuel Johnson’s

¹⁵⁶ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., 20 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), continually updated at <http://www.oed.com/>. All future modern dictionary references will be from this edition of the OED, unless otherwise specified.

1755 *A Dictionary of the English Language* defines the noun ‘consent’ as ‘the act of yielding’ and the verb as ‘to be of the same mind; to agree’.¹⁵⁷ This definition will be referred to as ‘submissive consent’ in the following discussion.

One would be justified in observing that both the modern and the eighteenth-century definitions make allowance for either a passive or an active demonstration of consent. Both use the word ‘agree’ to indicate an active demonstration, and the modern dictionary uses ‘acquiescence’, meaning ‘passive assent... or compliance’, to indicate the passive option, while the eighteenth-century definition uses ‘yielding’, meaning ‘To give up the conquest; to submit’, ‘comply’, or ‘concede’.¹⁵⁸ However, the order in which these definitions appear is switched between the two; the modern definition gives the active demonstration precedence over the passive, while the eighteenth-century definition places the passive demonstration well above the active. Johnson’s definition of consent as ‘the act of yielding’ not only appears first in that entry, but is demonstrated with three example sentences, as opposed to the solitary examples provided for each of the four additional meanings, and the total lack of examples provided for the definition ‘to be of the same mind; to agree’.¹⁵⁹ This clearly demonstrates that while both meanings existed and continue to exist simultaneously, they were by no means equally weighted. Given the ways in which our respective dictionaries present these meanings, it is clear that modern usage favours the notion of active or affirmative consent, while the eighteenth-century usage favoured the implication of submissive consent.

Having established how the eighteenth-century definition differs from our modern understanding, let us examine the conditions associated with each. Today, people generally believe that consent must be voluntary, that the consenting person must have sufficient agency to either give or refuse their consent; the use of coercion, therefore, delegitimises consent even if the coerced party is made to verbally say ‘yes’ or participate in the suggested action. However, these conditions are not universally present in eighteenth-century understandings. While the use of the word ‘act’ in Johnson’s definition echoes the modern requirement for agency in the giving of consent, ‘yielding’ bears an

¹⁵⁷ Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*. All future references to Johnson’s dictionary will be from this edition.

¹⁵⁸ *Oxford English Dictionary*; Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*.

¹⁵⁹ *A Dictionary of the English Language*; *ibid*.

entirely different connotation to ‘agreeing’. It is, therefore, evident that consent was generally understood as an act of deliberate submission during the long eighteenth century.

This understanding of consent applies across the socio-cultural spectrum. The necessity and nature of consent was frequently discussed in the context of debating the relationship between a monarch and their subjects. Julia Rudolph observes that Whig theorists in the preceding century, in particular, argued that ‘civil authority is... conferred upon rulers through compact’, *id est* contract, and that ‘legitimate government is founded upon consent and formed by a contract of free individuals’; furthermore, one such author ‘argues that submission is due only to the just exercise of the civil authority’.¹⁶⁰ In fact, sexual and marital relationships were often used by contemporary writers as a metaphor for the relationship between a monarch and their subjects, with the monarch being viewed as the ‘head’ of the body politic in the same way that a husband was considered the ‘head’ of the familial body. Rudolph notes that, according to contemporary Whig theorists, ‘the social and political order was indeed based on the law of nature’, meaning that the monarch is effectively the husband of the people.

Furthermore, rape is frequently deployed as both a metaphor for and a literal indicator of monarchical tyranny. In 1689, Gilbert Burnet made the connection between sexual and monarchical relationships clear in *An Enquiry into the Measures of Submission* (1689), warning that if the king’s men were permitted to commit crimes against his people in his name, then ‘from single Rapes and Murders proceed to a Rape upon all our Liberties and a Destruction of the Nation’.¹⁶¹ Effectively, he asserts that a monarch must govern by the *consent* of the people, else their government is perceived as a form of political assault; in other words, the monarch’s position of political power was dependent upon the willing submission—the *consent*—of subjects. Thus, it is clear that consent was cross-contextually understood to signify the willing submission of one party to the will of another.

This definition is supported by eighteenth-century erotic representations of consent, which explicitly frame consent as an act wherein one partner voluntarily submits themselves, both physically and mentally, to the will of their partner. In John Cleland’s *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1749),

¹⁶⁰ Rudolph, “Rape and Resistance,” 164; *ibid.*, 163; *ibid.*

¹⁶¹ Gilbert Burnet, *An Enquiry into the Measures of Submission*, (London: 1689). Quoted in Rudolph, “Rape and Resistance.”

when Fanny Hill consents to have sex for the first time, she remarks to the reader that ‘it was enough [that] I knew his pleasure to *submit* joyfully to him, whatever pain I foresaw it would cost me’.¹⁶² Another character in the same text describes how she ‘*yielded* at length’ to a young man attempting to cajole her into sexual activity, and specifies that he acquired her ‘tacit blushing consent’.¹⁶³

Similarly, in *A Dialogue between a Married Lady and a Maid* (1740) Philander says to his new bride Octavia, ‘now, my Dear, you must be complaisant, and put yourself intirely [*sic*] into my Management’.¹⁶⁴ To a modern reader, the phrase is distinctly reminiscent of the ‘lie back and think of England’ mentality so popularly ascribed to the past in general. However, ‘complaisant’ was defined as being ‘desirous to please’ and ‘complaisance’ could refer to an ‘act of adulation’ or ‘high compliment’.¹⁶⁵ Far from requesting passivity, Philander is asking Octavia to actively show her affection for him by her willingness to please him, and the latter part of his dialogue is effectively a request that she trust his guidance in light of the fact that, of the two of them, he has greater knowledge.

It is most commonly the female partner who offers her submission to the male partner; however, this is not universal. In *L’Escole Des Filles Ou La Philosophie Des Dames, Divisée En Deux Dialogues* (1668), an erotic-*cum*-educational dialogue (hereafter referred to as *L’Escole Des Filles*) between the sexually-experienced Susanne and her innocent friend Fanchon, both men and women are perceived as submitting to the will of their partners, even in entirely heteronormative sexual contexts. Susanne informs Fanchon that ‘when one loves well one is more pleased with the pleasure of others than with one’s own... Hence, if the boy wants to [have sex with] the girl sometimes when she is not in the mood, nevertheless... *she consents to him* doing it to her... And when it is the boy who is not in the mood and the girl who is, *he submits to her will* and has the same complacency that she had for him another time.’¹⁶⁶

¹⁶² John Cleland, *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (London: G. Fenton, 1749). My italics.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 2. My italics.

¹⁶⁴ *A Dialogue between a Married Lady and a Maid*, (London 1740), 37.

¹⁶⁵ Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*; *ibid.*; *ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ Michel Millot, *L’escole Des Filles Ou La Philosophie Des Dames, Divisée En Deux Dialogues*. (Fribourg: Roger Bon Temps, 1668). Translated from French using DeepL Translator. The original quote reads: “si le garçon veut faire cela à la fille quelquefois qu’elle n’est pas d’humeur, néanmoins, à cause qu’elle aime le garçon seulement, elle consent qu’il le luy fasse, non pas pour l’amour d’elle, mais pour l’amour de luy, qui fait qu’elle luy dit, en se decouvrant sur le lit:—Sus, mon cœur, prenez de moy vostre bon plaisir et faites à vostre volonté. Et quand c’est le garçon qui n’est pas d’humeur et que c’est la fille qui en a envie, il se soumet à son vouloir et a

In the later English translation of *L'Escole Des Filles*, entitled *The School of Venus* (1680), the idea that both men and women's consent implied submission is repeated, but the agency of both parties is made more explicit. After effectively the same contextual statement about a couple loving each other truly, Susanne's English counterpart Francis states that a woman, 'if she really love a man... *will permit him to fuck her* though she herself have no inclination thereunto, and *of her own accord* will take up her Smock, and say, get up dear Soul, and take thy fill of me, put me in what posture you please, and do what you will with me, and on the contrary, *when the Woman hath a mind to be fucked*, though the Man be not in humour, yet *his complaisance will be as great towards her*.'¹⁶⁷ Notice here that the author uses 'complaisance' in a similar context to that in *A Dialogue between a Married Lady and a Maid*, undermining the idea that sex in the eighteenth century was structured exclusively around male initiative. The use of the word 'complaisance' reflects the male character's awareness of his female partner's desires, and his sexual participation is framed as a submission to those desires, and an expression of his desire to please *her*, rather than *himself*. This demonstrates that the broader understanding of sexual consent as an act of deliberate and willing submission was not exclusively applied to women. In all cases, the definition of consent as a voluntary yielding of power or control from one party to the other remains constant.

Consent was not only conceptualised and, as will be discussed later, performed differently; it was also both limited and expanded in unfamiliar ways. As these contextual observations, however, do not serve to illustrate how consent was predominantly performed and read in received scripts, I will only mention them briefly, and ask that the reader trust that I am aware of them and have set them aside as an avenue for future research exclusively due to the restriction of the word count. As to limitations, it appears that consent to a sex act could not generally be fully retracted once it had been given. Consent could be given to some minor sexual activity—for example, kissing—without implying consent to penetrative sex, but consent to significant intimacy—for example, fingering—appears to imply consent to further intimacy in some situations.

la mesme complaisance qu'elle a euë pour luy une autre fois." 'Sus' is an archaic exclamation "used to exhort, to incite", according to *Le Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française* (1694). My italics.

¹⁶⁷ "The School of Venus," 31.

As to expansions, we come to the notion of retroactive consent. In the eighteenth century, there is strong evidence to suggest that consent could be given retroactively after a sexual assault or rape, and that this was considered a legitimate form of consent, albeit a less than ideal one. In Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, Harriet, one of Fanny Hill's colleagues at a rather genteel brothel, recounts the loss of her virginity by rape while she was unconscious. It is clearly depicted as a rape by contrast to other scenes in the text, as Harriet is not able to give or refuse her consent and she describes the encounter as 'the violation', after which she 'lay all discomposed in bleeding ruin, palpitating, speechless, unable to get off, and frightened, and fluttering like a poor wounded partridge'.¹⁶⁸ She further describes her rapist as the 'object...of [her] just hate'.¹⁶⁹ However, after he kneels before her in a 'posture of submission', and begs for her forgiveness with 'the most fervent entreaties, protestations, and promises', she 'pronounce[s] his pardon', and he kisses her.¹⁷⁰ By that point, she 'scarce regret[s]' the rape she had earlier been terrified by.¹⁷¹ Through apologies and kisses, he manages to obtain her 'tacit blushing consent all the gratifications of pleasure left in the power of my poor person to bestow', and the pair have consensual sex.¹⁷²

The consent to their later activities appears to override her earlier lack of consent, and retroactively changes their first encounter from a violent assault to a less-than-stellar-but-not-enormously-objectionable sexual encounter. This is, to a modern eye, utterly bizarre and unacceptable, but seems to align with some of the more disturbingly pragmatic views held during the time: that a rapist 'was a man worth money... and that it was a pity to hang him'; effectively, that it was better to wring any possible benefits from a rapist than it was to punish them.¹⁷³

Additionally, it seems that there was a greater number of legitimate reasons to consent to sex during the eighteenth-century than there are today; consenting purely for the benefit of a partner, for example, despite personal disinclination, was considered an act of love for both men and women, as

¹⁶⁸ Cleland, *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, 2; *ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*; *ibid.*; *ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ *Old Bailey Sessions Papers*, (1784), 362. Quoted in: Clark, *Women's Silence, Men's Violence*, 31.

discussed above.¹⁷⁴ Today, however, this would be considered a highly inappropriate attitude, and an infringement on the rights of both parties.

Some forms of coercion were also considered more or less problematic at various times during the period; notably, the problematics of the power imbalance between female servants and male masters was the topic of much social debate during the middle of the century, in particular, brought to a head by the publication of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (1740). Given the constraints of the body of evidence I have had access to, these observations may all prove to be more complex or situational; however, outlining those serves as a timely reminder that eighteenth-century understandings of consent were drastically different from our twenty-first century conceptions.

ii. Scripting Consent

a. Learning to Initiate Sexual Activity

Young men were taught to request sexual consent from their partners and to await receipt of consent or refusal before proceeding to further sexual activity, and this communication could be performed in a variety of ways depending on the circumstances of the participants. A request for, or suggestion of, sexual activity could be initiated by physical communication, verbal communication, or a combination thereof, unlike consent, which was consistently represented as being performed nonverbally, through physical actions or facial expressions. In erotic literature, the male partner is usually responsible for initiating sexual activity and then waiting for consent from his female partner, but there are some examples of couples reversing these roles if the male partner was sexually inexperienced. In particular situations, however, it was depicted as necessary for a male partner to verbally request sexual consent from his female partner before initiating penetrative sex; specifically, if his partner was a virgin, or was injured. These expectations are made most explicit in the representations of socio-sexual interactions that appear in popular erotic and instructional literature from the period.

Verbal requests for consent appear routinely in texts that feature sex between a virginal woman and a more experienced man. In *A Dialogue between a Married Lady and a Maid* (1740), for example, Horatio verbally asks for permission to have sex with his new bride, Tullia. He uses ‘the kindest

¹⁷⁴ See: Millot, *L'escole Des Filles*; “The School of Venus.”

amorous Words in the World to [Tullia], calling [her] his Soul, his Life, his Joy, and to desire [her], as [she] lov'd him, to lie still and to let him do what he had a Mind to, without any Hindrance'.¹⁷⁵ He then makes no further movement until he observes that Tullia 'began to be moved' by his words.¹⁷⁶ This suggests that verbally requesting and awaiting consent was sufficiently common practice to merit its recurring inclusion in erotic scenes.

The same requirement for a verbal request for consent is exemplified by fact that failure to do so is often treated negatively by erotic texts, as is the case in the scene wherein Fanny has sex with a man for the first time in Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*. In this scene, Charles initially fails to ask Fanny for her consent because he assumes she is 'no novice in these matters'; however, as soon as she tells him that he is 'the first man that ever served [her] so', he 'smothers [her] with kisses, begs [her], in the name of love, to have a little patience, and that he [would] be as tender of hurting [her] as he would be of himself.'¹⁷⁷ Fanny gives Charles a less than stellar review for his initial oversight, despite Charles' ignorance and her absolute adoration for him, referring to this early assumption as 'the opinion he proceeded so cavalierly upon'.¹⁷⁸ 'Cavalierly', at this time, had rather a more severe denotation than it does today, meaning 'Haughtily; arrogantly; disdainfully'.¹⁷⁹ This is the most negative thing she ever says about him, which suggests that she considers it rude that he initially neglects to pay appropriate respects to her virginity; in view of how quickly Charles changes tack upon being corrected, it is apparent that he, and by extension Cleland, also recognises the necessity of verbally requesting Fanny's consent in this situation.

The necessity of respecting physical injury, pain, or illness is also demonstrated on several occasions in *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*. In one instance, Charles verbally requests Fanny's consent prior to the second time they have sex, despite her lack of virginity, apparently out of respect for the injuries she sustained during their first time. She recounts how he 'very impudently asks a leave, he might read the grant of in my eyes, to come to bed to me'.¹⁸⁰ 'Impudent', at this time, simply meant

¹⁷⁵ *A Dialogue between a Married Lady and a Maid*, 18-19.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁷⁷ Cleland, *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, 1; *ibid.*; *ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ See: Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*.

¹⁸⁰ Cleland, *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, 1.

‘shameless; wanting modesty’, indicating Charles’ openness and lack of shame in his desires, rather than any particular rudeness or callousness.¹⁸¹

However, setting aside the extenuating circumstances of virginity or injury, it was not generally considered necessary to verbally request consent in sexual situations if both partners were sexually experienced. In such situations, physical action was considered an acceptable. In *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1749), one of Fanny’s keepers, Mr H—, attempts to initiate sex by ‘proceeding to back the sincerity of [a compliment to her looks] with proofs’, which implies that he is providing physical proof of his appreciation for her.¹⁸² Kisses in a bedroom or any other private space were also presented as being suggestion enough in most cases.

It is clear from the way that men in erotic literature are depicted as asking for and awaiting receipt of consent that men were expected and instructed to perform this socio-sexual role in most situations. These texts also demonstrate the situational factors that determined whether an initiation of or request for sexual activity had to be made verbally or could be made nonverbally, such as sexual inexperience or physical injury, pain, or illness.

b. Learning to Expect Nonverbal Consent

The scripts represented in eighteenth-century erotic literature demonstrate that men, and perhaps women, were instructed to expect sexual consent, especially female sexual consent, to be performed physically and nonverbally, rather than being communicated verbally.

In *A Dialogue between a Married Lady and a Maid*, for example, when Horatio asks his new bride Tullia ‘to lie still and let him do what he had a Mind to, without any Hindrance’, he is asking for her physical cooperation, not her verbal assent.¹⁸³ In Cleland’s *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, Fanny states that she gave ‘silent consent’ to a young sailor who propositions her in the street, and ‘suffered [herself] to be towed along... by this man-of-war... into the next convenient tavern’, which demonstrates that the sailor has understood Fanny’s nonverbal communication of consent.¹⁸⁴ In the same text, one of Fanny’s fellow sex workers, Harriet, describes how her rapist later ‘obtained of [her]

¹⁸¹ See: Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*.

¹⁸² Cleland, *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, 1.

¹⁸³ *A Dialogue between a Married Lady and a Maid*, 19.

¹⁸⁴ Cleland, *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, 2; *ibid*.

tacit blushing consent all the gratifications of pleasure left in the power of my poor person to bestow'.¹⁸⁵

In both examples from Cleland's *Memoirs*, the narrator references both the giving of nonverbal consent by the female partner, and the successful observation of this by the male partner.

Even more explicitly, in *The School of Venus* (1680), Frances states that 'the Wench must in some things appear a little shame-faced' and so she 'would only have [the woman] modestly infer by her Eyes, that she has a mind to do that which she is ashamed to Name, let her keep at a little distance, to egge on her Gallant, and make him more eager'.¹⁸⁶ Despite the insufficiency of this signal by today's standards, it is nevertheless significant that the purpose of these signals is clearly to facilitate the communication of female desire. It is more significant, however, that this instruction appears in *The School of Venus*, wherein the translator claims that the purpose of the work is to educate 'the ignorant [English] Maid', so 'that my dear *Country-Women*... may not therefore be longer slighted, for their ignorance in the *School of Venus*'.¹⁸⁷ Whether or not the translator's expectation that 'this must be a welcome book' to such a girl is intended to be tongue-in-cheek, the presence of so much instruction to women as to the best ways of conducting themselves in sexual situations strongly suggests that they anticipated having at least some female readers, which raises the possibility that some women were also exposed to such information.¹⁸⁸

These examples indicate that erotic literature instructed its readership, both male and possibly female, to understand that sexual consent should and would be communicated nonverbally rather than verbally. While instructional texts focus primarily on establishing that women should communicate consent nonverbally, other erotic literature also depicts men as communicating their consent in similar fashion. These texts, however, also demonstrate that nonverbal consent was considered an effective method of communicating sexual desire and consent, by representing women performing it and men interpreting it successfully.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ "The School of Venus," 55; *ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 26; *ibid.*, 25-26.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.

c. Learning to Communicate Nonverbally

The preference towards nonverbal female communication was not restricted to erotic literature. Socio-sexual scripts and practice necessarily exist in communication with, and as extensions and adaptations of, more general social and romantic scripts. Therefore, while instructional erotic literature openly aimed at women is thin on the ground, conduct literature does provide an idea of the script women received as to how they could and should communicate their feelings, desires, and, by extension, their sexual consent to men. Female silence was enforced in many areas of life and, therefore, the expectation that women should be silent *within* the bedroom, so to speak, is consistent with expectations placed upon women *without* it. Conduct literature, in particular, insists upon it with monotonous regularity.

‘Remember, my dear girl,’ remarks the Reverend John Bennett in his *Letters to a Young Lady* (1793), ‘that nature has given you *two* ears, and only *one* tongue’.¹⁸⁹ While this raises some questions about the number of ears and tongues nature deigned to give eighteenth-century *men*, it is entirely characteristic of the genre and, indeed, of public opinion. The Marchioness de Lambert advised women that ‘the greatest Prudence lies in speaking little’, while Hester Chapone observed that ‘many are of the opinion, that a very young woman can hardly be too silent and reserved in company’.¹⁹⁰ Chapone herself disagreed with this principle, however, instead advising her readers that ‘silence should only be enjoined, when it would be forward and impertinent to talk’, and stating that ‘when called upon, [they] must not draw back as unwilling to answer, nor confine [themselves] merely to *yes* or *no*, as is the custom of many young persons’.¹⁹¹ It is, therefore, evident that women were generally expected to be silent or, at the very least, quiet in public situations.

Despite the influence of more liberal-minded writers like Chapone, this barrage of cultural instruction on female speech appears to have been successful. When Karl Ludwig von Pöllnitz visited England in the early eighteenth century, he was astonished by the comparative silence of English women. On one particular visit, he recounts that ‘there was an Assembly of twenty Women, and not

¹⁸⁹ John Bennett, *Letters to a Young Lady, on a Variety of Useful and Interesting Subjects*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Philadelphia: W. Spotswood and H. and P. Rice, 1793), 13.

¹⁹⁰ Anne-Thérèse de Marguenat de Courcelles, *Advice of a Mother to Her Son and Daughter*, trans. Thomas Carte, 3rd ed. (London: John Hawkins, 1737), 65; Hester Chapone, *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind. Addressed to a Lady* (London: Weed and Rider, 1820), 148.

¹⁹¹ *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind*, 148; *ibid.*, 149.

one Man besides myself. They look'd upon one another, but did not speak a Word. I may defy you to show me any other Place where there's a Score of Women in Company, and not one Tongue stirring.'¹⁹²

Furthermore, the same conduct books that advocate such deliberate silence to women routinely complain of the social consequences of women taking this advice too much to heart; their own responsibility in this area is naturally ignored. Bennett, for example, having just reminded young women of their singular tongues, proceeds to vehemently castigate 'shy reserve' as 'the effect of downright prudery, ill breeding, or affectation' and entirely neglects to make any delineation between appropriate modesty and what he perceives as an offensive degree of reserve.¹⁹³ This shows that female silence was routinely prescribed and that women often absorbed these expectations and behaved accordingly in non-sexual situations.

Even books that advocated for female silence, however, did not suggest that women ought not to communicate at all, merely that they ought not to do so *verbally*. 'One may take a share in conversation without uttering a syllable. The expression in the countenance shews it,' Dr John Gregory explains in *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters*, 'and this never escapes an observing eye.'¹⁹⁴ This demonstrates that female silence was not considered indicative of female uncommunicativeness.

Though social constraints on the female voice were clearly effective in limiting women's verbal communication—at least in mixed company—there is evidence that women practiced sophisticated means of nonverbal communication. Fans, ribbons, fashion, and cosmetics were all reappropriated for this purpose, to differing degrees throughout the century.¹⁹⁵ A lady could convey fury by the expedient of snapping open her fan 'in such a manner, that it [makes] a Report like a Pocket-Pistol' or flirtation by 'the amorous flutter' of the same item.¹⁹⁶ She might use ribbon bows, known as knots, on her sleeves or breast to signify emotional attachment, as referenced in a poem in the *London Magazine*: 'Knots

¹⁹² Karl Ludwig Freiherr von Pöllnitz, *The Memoirs of Charles-Lewis, Baron De Pollintz: Being the Observations He Made in His Late Travels from Prussia Thro' Germany, Italy, France, Flanders, Holland, England, &C* (London: Daniel Brown, 1737), 461.

¹⁹³ Bennett, *Letters to a Young Lady*, 1, 77; *ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ John Gregory, *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters* (London: A. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1793), 28.

¹⁹⁵ Aileen Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe 1715-1789* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1984), 113.

¹⁹⁶ Joseph Addison, "No. 102: Wednesday, June 27, 1711," in *The Spectator*, ed. Henry Morley (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1891).

below and knots above; Emblems of the ties of love'.¹⁹⁷ She might show her mood or romantic status, though not her politics, through the symbolic placement of patches. Joseph Addison's oft-cited description of political patching of such is most likely pure satire, intended to ridicule either women who took the practice of patching too far by Addison's standards or women who did, in some way, publicise their political allegiances or, most likely, both.¹⁹⁸

While it is impossible to know, precisely, the degree to which these feminine modes of nonverbal communication were employed in place of speech, it is clear that they were common enough to inspire negative backlash from men. The use of fans, in particular, seems to have attracted wide range of complaints and satirical writings. The aforementioned Pöllnitz lamented that English women 'have but little Talk, and their main conversation is the Flutter of their Fans' and Joseph Addison wrote in *The Spectator* in 1711 that 'Women are armed with Fans as Men with swords, and sometimes do more Execution with them'.¹⁹⁹ Despite this, they allowed women to convey clear messages, both between themselves and to the opposite sex. Addison remarks that the motions of a fan are so entirely legible that, when properly deployed, he need only see the fan and not the face of a lady to 'know very well whether she laughs, frowns, or blushes'.²⁰⁰ Furthermore, though these methods of communication could generally be understood by the opposite sex, many of them remained uniquely feminine, which excluded men from fully participating in them; men could, for example, interpret the movement of a fan, but they could not reply in the same manner.

This did not go unnoticed by that sex. Benjamin Easie juxtaposes the efficacy with which women wield their fans to the communicatory worthlessness of men's accessories to comic effect. In August, 1711, he wrote to the *Spectator* that he had met a graduate of Addison's school, remarking that, through the use of her weapon, she has 'been the Ruin of above five young Gentlemen besides [himself]', and politely requests that these men 'be taught to manage [their] Snuff-Boxes in such a

¹⁹⁷ "Anacreon Imitated, Ode XXVIII: To a Painter," in *London Magazine: Or, Gentleman's Monthly Intelligencer* (London: R. Baldwin, 1755), 343.

¹⁹⁸ For further information see Addison, "No. 101: Tuesday, June 26, 1711," in *The Spectator*.

¹⁹⁹ Pöllnitz, *The Memoirs of Charles-Lewis, Baron De Pollintz*, 461; Addison, "No. 102: Wednesday, June 27, 1711."

²⁰⁰ "No. 102: Wednesday, June 27, 1711."

manner as [they] may be an equal Match for her'.²⁰¹ While clearly satirical, Easie's anecdote reveals a male awareness that women were able to communicate in ways that men were incapable, for various reasons, of imitating.

It is, therefore, readily apparent that though social constraints may have worked to dissuade women from communicating verbally in public spaces, women routinely practiced sophisticated modes of nonverbal communication. Furthermore, the regularity with which women successfully negotiated similar expectations to preference nonverbal over verbal communication in more general contexts strongly suggests that they may have negotiated socio-sexual scripts and expectations in the same way

d. Representations of Performing Consent Nonverbally

Erotic literature demonstrates that physical actions that furthered sexual contact, or that encouraged or facilitated a partner's actions during a sexual encounter, were considered legitimate ways of communicating one's sexual consent.

In *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, for example, consent is always conveyed nonverbally through various physical gestures. Most often this involves a female character opening her legs, either with or without prompting, or otherwise arranging herself to facilitate sexual activity. In one of the innumerable sex scenes in that text, Fanny recounts how she 'placed [herself] with a jerk under [her lover, Will], as commodious and open as possible to his attempts', and then says that her 'thighs disclose of themselves, and yield all liberty to his hand'²⁰² Another time, with Will again, Fanny describes how she 'prepared for rubbers in good earnest' by 'slipping then a pillow under [herself]' and 'guided [his penis] officiously with [her] hand... to its proper mark, which lay as finely elevated as we could wish; my hips being borne up, and my thighs at their utmost extension'.²⁰³ In a different scene, this time with her true love, Charles, Fanny relates how her 'thighs, now obedient to the intimations of love and nature, gladly disclose, and with a ready submission, resign up the soft gateway to the entrance of pleasure'.²⁰⁴ While there is no evidence of Fanny giving *verbal* consent in any of these scenes, she is undeniably giving enthusiastic *nonverbal* consent.

²⁰¹ Benjamin Easie, "No. 134: Friday, August 3, 1711: The Humble Petition of Benjamin Easie, Gent," *ibid.*; *ibid.*

²⁰² Cleland, *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, 1; *ibid.*

²⁰³ *Ibid.*; *ibid.*; *ibid.*

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

Similarly, in *The School of Venus*, Frances recounts how she ‘took pity [on her husband] and opened [her] Thighs’ to him and, later, how she ‘took him by the Prick and led him to the Bed, and throwing [her] self Backwards, and pulling him upon [herself]... [she] guided, and he thrust’ his penis into her.²⁰⁵ The regularity with which women in erotic literature are depicted as actively assuming physical positions to facilitate sexual activity, such as lying down and opening their thighs or drawing their lovers towards them, demonstrates that such physical actions were commonly understood to signal female consent to participate in sexual activity.

The physical elements of these scripted performances are also exemplified in contemporary artwork, such as that of Jean-François de Troy. To demonstrate this, I will analyse the poses, gestures, and composition with which de Troy visually depicts sexual consent and refusal within four of his paintings; specifically, I will establish a glossary of visual meanings using his contextualised, mythological works *Venus and Adonis* and *Susanna and the Elders*, and then apply these meanings to my interpretation of his non-contextualised *scènes galantes*, *La Déclaration de l’Amour* and *La Jarrettière détachée*.²⁰⁶ By analysing the depiction of consent and refusal within a purely visual format, we can see how women could effectively communicate sexual consent entirely without speaking.

Let us begin by considering the context and composition of de Troy’s mythological work *Venus and Adonis*, painted circa 1730. The painting depicts the pair in a moment of passion, clearly sometime after Venus has been struck with Cupid’s arrow and before Adonis has ignored her very sensible advice to avoid antagonising wild beasts with the capacity to kill him and antagonised a wild boar that promptly killed him. The pair are very much in love and de Troy depicts this in a decidedly uncomplicated way, portraying both Venus and Adonis as active participants in the sexual activity. Adonis is leaning forward as if to kiss the waiting Venus; his left hand is around her shoulder, holding her, and his right resting just beneath her breast. His posture suggests that he is in the process of shifting to a more horizontal position. For her part, Venus is partially reclined against the strategically-placed pillow behind her, clearly intended to cushion her head once she reclines fully; her lips are parted; her left hand is extended across the aforementioned pillow, leaving her body open to touch (as well as, it must be noted,

²⁰⁵ “The School of Venus,” 22; *ibid.*

²⁰⁶ See Appendix A, Figures 1-4.

preserving the audience's view of her nude form, and drawing their attention to the presence of the suggestive pillow); her legs are separated, with one leg hooked over Adonis' knee; and her right arm is around Adonis' waist, her fingers curled around his hip, holding him to her. For all that he is pressing her backwards, she is guiding him forwards.

Compare this to de Troy's *scène galante*, *La Déclaration de l'Amour*, painted in 1725. Though it is by no means identical to *Venus and Adonis*, it shares several of the compositional features that represent the active sexual participation of both subjects. Like Venus, the woman in *La Déclaration* is semi-reclined; like Venus, her left hand is resting on, and drawing the viewers' attention to, a strategically-placed pillow. This time, the pillow is on the arm of a sofa, and the woman's hand is upturned in a more fashionably dainty position, but the visual effect and suggestiveness of the positioning is the same. Additionally, her right hand is clasping the man's hand. While his is covering hers, her thumb is clearly pressing his fingers; in actuality, then, she is holding his hand against her own leg. This is significant in context because small, deliberate physical encouragements or acts of participation were modes of performing consent and demonstrating romantic interest at the time. The man's posture in *La Déclaration* is also similar to that of Adonis. He is leaning forward, his right hand extended to touch the woman, though in this instance he is holding her hand rather than her breast. Furthermore, while he is resting on his left knee, his right foot is braced to propel him back upwards and forwards, should his announcement be met with an invitation to do so. His attitude suggests precisely the same kind of forward momentum depicted in *Venus and Adonis* and it is very easy to imagine how both participants' actions will result in the pair assuming a horizontal position.

Unlike in *Venus and Adonis*, however, we have additional visual clues in the dress of both participants, which convey a degree of backstory. Of *La Déclaration*, Aileen Ribeiro remarks that 'dress is a crucial part of such a *scène galante*, particularly this voluminous, buttoned sacque with its tantalising lacing at the bosom, perfect for seduction.'²⁰⁷ She is quite right. The woman in the painting is wearing a *robe volante*, or 'flying dress', also known as a sacque. These are designed to be loose and

²⁰⁷ Aileen Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe, 1715-1789* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1984), 37.

comfortable, easy to put on and take off, and initially appeared as ‘informal negligée’.²⁰⁸ It closes down the front with silver frogs, rather than being pinned shut, either to a stomacher or itself, as was common on other early eighteenth-century gowns, such as the mantua. This is significant as frogs are rather easier to undo than a pinned or laced gown, and less likely to injure an eager lover.

Despite appearances, the woman *is* wearing stays. Though they are almost hidden beneath her gown, the right front panel and eyelets are visible just beneath the fringed collar of the robe. Ordinarily these would be laced tightly across a stomacher to provide support for the bust and back, and to create the conical torso shape so fashionable in the early eighteenth century. This woman’s stays, however, are not pulled tight to hold a stomacher in place; in fact, she does not appear to be wearing a stomacher, as her shift is clearly visible beneath the blue lacing ribbon. While she might appear to a modern eye to be quite conservatively dressed, she is in fact wearing the eighteenth-century equivalent of negligee. This kind of gown was initially considered too informal for full public or court wear due to its looseness, and at this point in time it would only be worn either in private or to casual social events, perhaps with intimate friends. However, it would not be worn even to casual events with the bodice open, no stomacher, laces untied, and shift exposed.

The shift is the layer closest to the skin and to be seen in one’s shift, though it covered the wearer from bust to knee, was indecent to say the least. In Cleland’s *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, Fanny recounts how she ‘[blushed] at now seeing [herself] naked to [her] shift’ when undressing in the presence of another woman before her induction to sex work. In Jonathan Swift’s *History of John Bulls* (1760), Mrs Bull asserts her determination by saying: ‘I’ll sell to my shift before I’ll be so used by that knave.’²⁰⁹ The shift was both literally and metaphorically the last shred of one’s decency and its visibility in this way in *La Déclaration* is highly suggestive. Her manner of dress is significant because it demonstrates that, while she appears relaxed and comparatively inactive, she has dressed herself in a deliberately suggestive way in preparation for her male guest. Her outfit is not, however, a display of consent to penetrative sex; it is, effectively, permission to apply.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 35.

²⁰⁹ Jonathan Swift, *The Works of Dr. Jonathan Swift*, vol. 5 (London: C. Bathurst, C. Hitch, and L. Hawes, 1760), 6.

For comparison, let us now consider de Troy's depiction of refusal in *Susanna and the Elders*. De Troy painted the story of Susanna and the Elders on multiple occasions, but the version I am analysing is the one currently held in the State Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg, Russia. In the story, Susanna is observed whilst bathing outside by two lecherous old men and, when she attempts to return to the house, they threaten to say that she was having an inappropriate meeting with a young man unless she consents to have sex with them. She refuses them. The moment of Susanna's refusal is a popular scene amongst painters throughout the centuries, and it is this moment that de Troy depicts in his eponymous work, *Susanna and the Elders*. In the Hermitage *Susanna and the Elders*, Susanna is turning her body away from the Elder on the right, balanced on the balls of her feet to shift her weight away from her attacker. Her face is turned back to him as she refuses his demand, and her expression is fearful. Her legs are pressed together, holding the fabric between the tops of her thighs to shield herself. Her right hand appears to be in the process of lifting the fabric to cover her breasts, making the visibility of her body a sign of her vulnerability and unwillingness to be seen, rather than any kind of coquetry.

Her left hand is outstretched to push the Elder away, though it clearly has no effect. It is certainly true that she does not appear to be exerting significant force, but this may be attributed to stylistic norms; it is quite rare for women, even those who are known for acts of legendary violence, to be depicted in art actually exerting physical force. Depictions of Judith slaying Holofernes, for example, usually decline to represent the strength required to hold down an adult man and slit his throat, with the notable exception of Artemisia Gentileschi's representation of the subject. It is also worth noting that holding an extremely tense pose for more than a few minutes is physically difficult, much less the hours required of artists' models, and it may simply have been considered more important to achieve consistency in the models' positioning to allow for accurate illustration than to recreate realistic physical strain. Whatever the reason, the lack of real exertion is a near universal stylistic norm in representations of mythological and biblical violence, even when the source material clearly implies a degree of struggle, resistance, or physical force generally. The meaning of her gesture, however, can be interpreted as an attempt at resistance based on the context of the story and the remainder of Susanna's body language and facial expression.

Let us compare this now to the physicality of the female subject in *La Jarretière détachée*. Like Susanna, her body is turned away from the male subject to her left, while she looks back at him to reject his advance. Like Susanna, her left hand is extended to push him away. Again, she does so without seeming to exert much force, but the significance of the action is the same: it is a physical representation of refusal. Like the Elder, the male subject in *La Jarretière détachée*, is grasping at the hand intended to repulse him, while reaching out to touch her with his other hand. The female subject's expression is not fearful, but rather closer to offence or annoyance.

Traditional interpretations of this second pendant, *La Jarretière détachée*, claim that it shows a moment of coquetry on the part of the lady. Jörg Ebeling asserts that the work '[depicts] the intimate rendezvous of a cheeky gentleman and a lady. The painting shows the crucial moment when the lady tries to reattach her detached garter. To do so, she has coquettishly raised her skirt and shows off her legs, which makes the interested gentleman leap from his seat, so that his tricorne falls to the ground'.²¹⁰ The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, contributes some nuance but retains the basic assessment of flirtation, stating that 'a man offers to help a woman reattach her garter, a common conceit in erotic painting and literature in eighteenth-century France. Her hand firmly rejects his advance, but the indecorous decision to reveal her leg in his presence suggests a ruse—perhaps inspired by the contents of the book she has discarded next to an already disrobed bronze statuette.'²¹¹ It is worth noting however that the statue mirrors the female subject's body language; she is also turned away, disinterested in the action taking place.

Traditional interpretations of this piece also lack attention to the woman's dress. While the woman in *La Jarretière* is also wearing a robe volante, there are striking differences in the way she is wearing it. She is wearing a decorated stomacher, covered in large bows. This would have been made of a stiffened or boned panel, which would have been pinned into her stays, given the lack of visible front lacing. This would likely be achieved using purpose-built tabs on either side of the panel, these

²¹⁰ Jörg Ebeling, "La Conception De L'amour Galant Dans Les « Tableaux De Mode » De La Première Moitié Du XVIII^e Siècle: L'amour Comme Devoir Mondain," *Littératures classiques* 2, no. 69 (2009). Translated from French using DeepL Translator. The original quote reads: "montre le moment décisif où celle-ci tente de rattacher sa jarretière qui s'est détachée. À cette fin, elle a relevé coquettement sa jupe et montre ses jambes, ce qui fait bondir prestement de son siège le cavalier intéressé par la situation, si bien que son tricorne tombe à terre."

²¹¹ "The Garter," Metropolitan Museum of Art, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/438126>.

being hidden by the front bodice pieces of the robe volante. There are also three slight circular shadows accompanied by small puckers in the fabric visible at regular intervals along both front sides of the bodice of the robe. These are visibly different to the two or three larger frogs or buttons that are holding the lower part of the front bodice closed. This suggests that this the robe bodice might have been pinned to the stomacher or stays in order to secure the loose front, since it is not gaping open despite the loose fit and the fact that she is leaning forward. It certainly could not be described as easy access, like the frogged sacque in *La Déclaration*.

Additionally, this dress clearly only opens roughly to the woman's waist, to allow it to be put on, as opposed to being entirely open down the centre front and closed with frogs. This indicates that this gown is intended to be worn in public, rather than exclusively in private; not at court, perhaps, but it would have been entirely acceptable when visiting friends or staying home to receive guests in the morning, as she is likely doing. It is evident that this woman is casually, rather than indecently, attired. Moreover, while her leg is exposed, it is exposed for a specific and, arguably, mundane reason: her garter, the presumably silk ribbon she is holding in her right hand, has come undone, and she has lifted her skirts to her knee in order to retie it. This would not have been an uncommon occurrence at all as silk is not a fabric well suited to gripping other fabric, meaning that they would have fallen down often. Furthermore, it is not easy to gracefully lift one's skirts in the way she is. You can see that she is obliged to bend awkwardly at the knee and hip in order to reach the garter, due to the long conical stays she is wearing, which prevent her bending easily at the waist. It does not seem a particularly sensible choice for an erotic conceit, when one might instead lounge across a sofa in one's negligee, as the woman in *La Déclaration* has chosen to do.

By comparing the physicality of the subjects in *Venus and Adonis* and *Susanna and the Elders* with that of the subjects in *La Déclaration de l'Amour* and *La Jarretière détachée*, it becomes clear that *La Déclaration de l'Amour* depicts the female subject both consenting to and participating in a sexual encounter with the male subject, whereas *La Jarretière détachée* depicts the female subject rebuffing a romantic or sexual proposition from the male subject. The physical positioning, gestures, and facial expressions of the female subject in *La Déclaration de l'Amour* clearly provide a demonstration of how

women could effectively communicate their consent within a framework wherein verbal assent was discouraged and considered unreliable.

The consistency of these depictions, in both art and literature, demonstrate that physical demonstrations of interest through facilitative or encouraging actions and body language were widely understood as ways of communicating sexual interest and consent.

e. Communicating Desire and Consent Through Facial Expressions

Facial expressions were also a means of communicating consent, with particular emphasis placed on the eyes and the mouth. Expressive eye contact and facial expressions were considered a clear sign of sexual desire and consent from both men and women, particularly ‘languishing’ expressions and smiles.

For example, in *The School of Venus*, Katherine describes how Roger would, on some occasions, show her his erection and look at her ‘with languishing eyes’ to request sexual intimacy.²¹² In the same text, Frances tells Katherine that when a man ‘begs of her to answer his Love’, silently ‘[looking] upon him with languishing eyes’ will convey her consent.²¹³ Similarly, in *A Dialogue between a Married Lady and a Maid*, the worldly, married Tullia asks her unmarried, inexperienced friend Octavia, ‘dost thou not find in [your fiancé] some Languishings, that express vehement Desires?’²¹⁴

In *The Sopha* (1737), Fatme’s sexual desire is communicated to the reader in the same way: the narrator remarks that ‘her eyes were all tenderness—She threw them with the most languishing cast round the room, and seemed with transports to wish for something she had not’.²¹⁵ Later in the text, a narrator remarks that ‘the charms of the beautiful mistress of this palace, added to the soft languish in her look, made me imagine I should not long want amusement’, further suggesting the sexual suggestiveness of this expression.²¹⁶ It is expressed most explicitly in this text as a sign of consent, when Phenime and Zulma ‘beheld each other with that tenderness, that fire, those silent languishments... which love alone, and the most perfect love can give’, at which point Zulma says to her, ‘if you at last

²¹² “The School of Venus,” 40.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 11; *ibid.*

²¹⁴ *A Dialogue between a Married Lady and a Maid*, 6.

²¹⁵ Claude Prosper Jolyot de Crébillon, *The Sopha: A Moral Tale, Translated from the French Original of Monsieur Crebillon*, 2nd ed. (London: T. Cooper, 1737), 21.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

are touched with my fond passion, and yet are fearful to give your love plain utterance, Oh! let those eyes, those eyes I so adore, divulge the happy tidings to my soul.’²¹⁷

Likewise, in *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, Fanny considers Will’s facial expression as a sign of his desire and consent, observing that his ‘eyes began to lighten with all the fires of inflamed nature, and his cheeks flush’d with a deep scarlet... his looks, [and] his emotion, sufficiently satisfy’d [her] that... [she] had no disappointment to fear’, at which point she proceeds.²¹⁸ It is, therefore, evident that expressive eye contact and facial expressions were considered acceptable forms of nonverbal consent, and that languishing expressions could be used by men and women to signal both sexual desire and consent.

Women could also communicate sexual consent nonverbally through smiling. While an unqualified smile, unaccompanied by additional physical or verbal encouragement, would not constitute a clear expression of consent today, the implications of a smile have changed over time. In the first instance, evidence suggests that people in the middle and upper classes smiled less overall in the eighteenth century than they do today. Smiles that showed the teeth were especially discouraged. When Madame Élisabeth-Louise Vigée Le Brun depicted herself smiling in a self-portrait in 1787, the slight parting of her lips incited a scandal at the Paris Salon. Her audacity prompted one journalist to describe the expression as ‘an affectation which artists, connoisseurs and people of good taste are unanimous in condemning’.²¹⁹ This is, of course, a French anecdote, but while the English and the French were generally at odds about everything from cosmetics to politics, they were remarkably similar in their opinions about smiling: a wide, open-mouthed smile was dangerously similar to laughter, and laughter was anathema to good manners.

The open-mouthed smile, uncaring of decorum, was strongly associated with the lower classes. In seventeenth-century Dutch art, for example, a toothy smile appears regularly on working-class subjects: musicians, artists, agricultural workers, etc.²²⁰ Whether it became known as bad manners in

²¹⁷ Ibid., 62; *ibid.*, 62-63.

²¹⁸ Cleland, *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, 1.

²¹⁹ Moufle D’Angerville, *Mémoires Secrets*, vol. xxvi (1787), 351-2. This translation appeared in Colin Jones, *The Smile Revolution in Eighteenth Century Paris* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

²²⁰ Angus Trumble, *A Brief History of the Smile* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 34-42.

the upper classes because of its common practice in the lower ones, or whether causality flowed in the other direction, the separation of the two was clear. But the wealthier classes also had other reasons to refrain from smiling too much. Dentistry was rudimentary at best and poor dental hygiene, like death, came to all, irrespective of class or status. It was, however, a particular risk to those in the upper levels of society, as they consumed far more sugar than those in the lower levels. The close-lipped smile, therefore, might be considered aesthetically advantageous for those wishing to conceal damage done to their teeth.

This kind of delicacy, however, was influenced by class. In the middle and upper classes, where physical beauty was so much a form of currency, the concealment of defects was significantly more culturally necessary than in the lower classes. Laughter was also thought to distort the face unattractively for much of the century; William Hogarth, in his 1753 *Analysis of Beauty*, remarked that ‘the lines that form a pleasing smile about the corners of the mouth have gentle windings... but lose their beauty in the full laugh’, as demonstrated by the illustrations from Hogarth’s text.²²¹ The art of a beautiful smile appears, by Hogarth’s standards at least, to be in operating the mouth without the visible use of one’s facial muscles, thus maintaining a smooth countenance.

By the turn of the nineteenth-century, dentistry began to become more sophisticated and the neo-classical movement ushered in an appreciation for ease and naturalism. While smiling in public remained an unfashionable habit in the eyes of the social elite, this ideology did not extend far beyond the reach of the Mayfair district. Amongst the middling sorts and the lower gentry, strict adherence to this principle was considered obnoxious and antisocial rather than attractive and modish; Jane Austen, for example, ascribes this view to Mr Darcy of *Pride and Prejudice* early in the novel to signal his snobbishness to the reader; in denigrating the breeding of Meryton’s inhabitants, Darcy remarks that Jane Bennett is ‘pretty, but she smile[s] too much’.²²² However, a smile is not merely an indicator of class, or an aesthetic feature; it is a communicatory expression whose implications change over time. Trumble notes that the smile ‘is a highly sophisticated concept, an expression of the emotions, a mode

²²¹ William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty* (London: J. Reeves, 1753), 130; *ibid.*, Plate II. See Appendix A, Figure 5.

²²² Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, 3 vols., vol. 1 (London: T. Egerton, 1813), 33.

of communication, a beacon of desire, [and] a ritual'.²²³ In Romantic poetry, the smile has 'the power to attract and fascinate, to stimulate desire.'²²⁴

In the eighteenth century, specifically, the mouth in general 'was a symbol of potency and sexuality' and an open-lipped smile had overtly sexual or provocative connotations.²²⁵ The narrator in *The Harlot's Progress*, for example, remarks that 'a pert young hussy, by her grinning, Betray'd she knew an art in sinning',²²⁶ and the women referenced in *Harris's List* are very often described as smiling with their teeth showing. A girl called Betsy 'sweetly smiles, unconscious of her pow'r', and her teeth are 'as white as the polish'd elephants, and [as] beautiful as white', which suggests that she displayed them visibly.²²⁷ Miss L—st—r at Union Street is described as 'smiling like the morn', and her lips 'when parted, display a casket of snow white pearls, ranged in the nicest regularity'.²²⁸ A Miss Nancy is described as being 'good humoured, with a pleasant smile upon her countenance' and a Miss Fanny is a 'merry, little lively tit... never to be met without a smile upon her countenance'.²²⁹ Mrs N—t—n of Suffolk-street has 'good teeth, which, by a perpetual smile, or rather grin, she has acquired a very convenient knack of shewing'; the fact that the frequent visibility of her teeth is worth remarking upon strongly implies that this was unusual.²³⁰

The sexual connotations of this type of smile are made more explicit in the description of a Miss Charlotte at King Street, Soho; in describing her teeth and eyes, the author remarks that 'she strongly points to your imagination a casket of orient pearls, the former of two living diamonds, whose language so forcibly invite[s] th[e] blind boy to the happy cloyster'.²³¹ The gleam of her eyes and the view of her parted lips is clearly and, one might say, unsurprisingly considered a seductive expression, which might account for its being discouraged in genteel young women. The nature of this suggestiveness is hinted in the description of another Betsy: 'a thousand Cupids dance upon her smiles',

²²³ Trumble, *A Brief History of the Smile*, 56.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Morag Martin, "Doctoring Beauty: The Medical Control of Women's *Toilettes* in France, 1750-1820," *Medical History* 49 (2005): 357.

²²⁶ *The Harlot's Progress: Being the Life of the Noted Moll Hackabout*, 6th ed. (London: J. Dourse, 1753), 17.

²²⁷ *Harris's List of Covent-Garden Ladies: Or, Man of Pleasure's Kalendar for the Year, 1788*, (London: H. Ranger, 1788), 89.

²²⁸ Ibid., 15; *ibid.*, 16.

²²⁹ Ibid., 107; *ibid.*, 137.

²³⁰ Ibid., 92.

²³¹ Ibid., 115-16.

says the author, and her teeth are ‘remarkably white, through which she plays the velvet tip with uncommon grace and ardour’.²³² Given that one’s teeth are not generally visible during this kind of recital, it appears that there is a mental association between the views of Betsy’s open mouth and of her performing oral sex. It is, therefore, apparent that the open mouthed smile, in addition to being considered generally ill-mannered in middle- and upper-class society, also possessed strikingly sexual connotations in some situations.

There is evidence to suggest that women were aware of this perception of smiling as an inviting gesture throughout most of the long eighteenth century. The Reverend Wetenhall Wilkes, in *A Letter of Genteel and Moral Advice to a Young Lady*, warns his readers that men ‘are apt to interpret every obliging Look, Gesture, Smile, or Sentence, of a Female we like, to the hopeful Side’, owing to ‘the double Temptation of Vanity, and Desire... so prevalent in [men]’.²³³ He further notes that men ‘often gather more Encouragement from a pleasing glance, than from [a woman’s] softest Words’.²³⁴ ‘The Language of the Eyes,’ he adds, ‘is very significant’ in a romantic context.²³⁵ While he means to tell women how to avoid encouraging men’s interest in them, he, by necessity, tells them which expressions and behaviours men will perceive as a sign of romantic attraction and which they will discount. His remark that men are likely to be encouraged by deed (‘a pleasing glance’) than by word is especially significant because it suggests that men considered nonverbal communication to be a surer method of knowing a woman’s feelings than a verbal statement could be.²³⁶

It cannot be argued that this was due to a lack of interest in the true state of her feelings; in fact, quite the opposite was true. The Reverend states that men ‘look upon a Woman’s Eyes, to be the Interpreters of her Heart’.²³⁷ The rationale seems to be according to the adage, ‘the eyes are the windows to the soul’, under which the communication of the eyes is perceived as more honest than a verbal message. Therefore, though women were not intentionally provided with a means of articulating their

²³² Ibid., 78; *ibid.*

²³³ Wetenhall Wilkes, *A Letter of Genteel and Moral Advice to a Young Lady*, Fourth ed. (London: C. Hitch, 1746), 158; *ibid.*

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 158-59.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 159; *ibid.*

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 158-59.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 158.

desires, the information they received regarding what behaviours should be avoided, lest they be perceived as encouragement, may have served to apprise them of ways in which they could signal their feelings. That is to say, that in teaching women how to say *no*, conduct literature may have also taught women how to say *yes*.

It is, therefore, evident that the smile had more significant communicatory value in the eighteenth century than it does today, which supports the notion that it might effectively be used as a method of communicating consent. These examples clearly demonstrate that consent was expected to be conveyed physically and nonverbally, and that it could be effectively communicated through physical actions that facilitated or encouraged sexual activity, or through facial expressions, particularly smiling and expressive eye contact.

f. Observing and Interpreting Nonverbal Consent

Erotic literature provides explicit instruction regarding men's responsibility to observe for and correctly interpret women's nonverbal socio-sexual communication; this includes not only their performances of sexual consent, but more broadly the communication of their sexual desires. These texts, however, also suggest that this responsibility was situationally transferrable to the female partner, if she had the advantage of experience over her male partner.

In *The School of Venus*, Frances states that, because a woman cannot communicate sexual arousal verbally, 'the Man must have a quick Eye and regard all her Actions, Sighs and words, so that nothing she wants may escape his knowledge'.²³⁸ This demonstrates that men were not merely instructed to watch their partners to ensure that they were consenting to sexual intimacy, but also to ensure that their partners' sexual desires were being met. Later in the text, as the plot builds up to the first kiss between Frances' less-experienced cousin Katherine and her new gallant Roger, we see Frances' depiction of men's responsibilities put into action. Katherine recounts that Roger, 'staring [her] full in the face, and all quivering and shaking... told [her] he had met [Frances] at the bottom of the stairs, and that [she] had spoken to him about [Katherine], desiring to know if it were with [Katherine's] consent.'²³⁹ Katherine 'return[s] no answer, but Smiling', and Roger 'immediately Kissed [her], which

²³⁸ "The School of Venus."

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

[she] permitted him without struggling, though it made [her] Blush'.²⁴⁰ Roger is focusing all his attention on Katherine's face so that he may read her response, and know how to react to it appropriately. When she smiles at him, he successfully interprets this as a sign of her desires and acts accordingly. He is still paying attention to her expressions even after this initial demonstration of willingness, as later, when they have been kissing a little while, he 'took notice of [her blush], and said, what do you Blush for'.²⁴¹ The inclusion of this exchange in a scene that is clearly intended to be more erotic than educational, in addition to Frances' instructions in the earlier educational section of the dialogue, demonstrates the normalcy of this kind of communication between sexual partners.

A similar example can be found in *A Dialogue between a Married Lady and a Maid*. In the *Dialogue*, Octavia relates an incident that occurred prior to her marriage, when she and her fiancé Philander were left alone: she says, 'he rushed into [her] Arms, and fell a kissing [her]... [she] felt... a certain Warmth run thro' [her] Veins, and a Trembling in all [her] Limbs... but he saw [her] blush as red as Fire, which made him hold a little, and take back his Hand, which already he had slipt into [her] Breasts'.²⁴² It is only when, 'having observed, that, for all [her] Blushing, [she] did not much chide him, as indeed [she] could not, he laid [her] along the Couch upon which [she] sat, and keeping [her] down with his Left-hand, as easily he might, in the Disorder [she] was in, he put his Right-hand under [her] Coats'.²⁴³ 'Disorder', in this instance, likely implies 'Discomposure of mind; turbulence of passions' rather than any kind of illness or negative state, as it might imply today.²⁴⁴ Though Octavia has verbally said nothing to object to his actions at that point, Philander stops and retracts his hand from her breasts when he sees her blushing, evidently perceiving her reaction as potential discomfort. The following lines demonstrate that he is clearly making an effort to observe and respond to nonverbal cues from Octavia, as her speech is minimal or non-existent throughout most of their interaction. He *observes* that she blushes but does not chide, meaning 'to reprove; to check; to correct *with words*', and then proceeds, which is textually what she wants him to do.²⁴⁵ This is significant because it demonstrates that, while

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² *A Dialogue between a Married Lady and a Maid*, 6-7. My italics.

²⁴³ Ibid., 7.

²⁴⁴ See: Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*.

²⁴⁵ See: *ibid.* My italics.

he is *watching* her face and body language for signs of her consent, he is *listening* for the possibility of refusal.

In *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, similar expectations suffuse the text. Another sex worker, Louisa, recounts how her first lover '[proceeded] immediately to those extremities, which all my looks, flushings, and palpitations, had assur'd him he might attempt without the fear of repulse' and remarks that 'those rogues, the men, read us admirably on these occasions'.²⁴⁶ In another scene, Fanny describes how her lover, 'easily, then, reading in my eyes the full permission of myself to all his wishes... scarce pleased himself more than me'. These examples yet again demonstrate an understanding of men's roles as interpreters of women's nonverbal communication, and reinforces the notion referenced in *The School of Venus* that this careful observation is necessary to ensure both the consent and the pleasure of one's partner. *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, however, adds another element of complexity to this script, by demonstrating that this responsibility did not exclusively fall to men, even in straightforward heterosexual contexts. Rather, when there was a marked discrepancy between the amounts of sexual experience possessed by the parties involved, responsibility for ensuring consent fell to the most sexually experienced partner.

This is best exemplified by the scene in which Fanny, by then a practiced sex worker, initiates sex with a young servant called Will, who is a virgin. In this scene, wherein Fanny has the indisputable advantage of experience, it is *her* that initiates the sexual contact and then waits for Will to communicate his consent or rejection. To this end, she describes how she 'ask'd him, *if he was afraid of a lady?*— and with that... [carried] his hand to [her] breasts, [and pressed it] tenderly to them.'²⁴⁷ She carefully observes his expression as she does so, recounting that 'the boy's eyes began to lighten with all the fires of inflamed nature, and his cheeks flushed with a deep scarlet: tongue-tied with joy, rapture, and bashfulness, he could not speak, but then his looks, his emotion, sufficiently satisfied [her] that [her] train had taken, and that [she] had no disappointment to fear.'²⁴⁸ Here, it is the male partner who is too bashful to speak, and who instead communicates his desire and willingness nonverbally through his

²⁴⁶ Cleland, *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, 2, Unpaginated.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

facial expressions, and it is the female partner who initiates the action and who takes responsibility for observing and interpreting her partner's nonverbal communication. This suggests that, while it is more common for erotic literature to depict a virginal woman and a nonvirginal man, and, therefore, to depict men as observers and interpreters and women as nonverbal communicators, these roles were dependent on the relative experience of the two parties, not merely on their sex.

It is, therefore, evident that men were expected to observe their female partners' nonverbal communications in order to confirm that they were consenting, as well as to ensure that their sexual desires were met. It is also clear that while the bulk of erotic literature produced during this period contained depictions of inexperienced women with experienced male partners and, therefore, depicted men undertaking this socio-sexual role, there is evidence to suggest that responsibility for observing, interpreting, and reacting to nonverbal communications of consent and desire could be transferred to the female partner, if the male partner was sexually inexperienced.

iii. Final Thoughts

It is therefore clear that, contrary to the general consensus of scholars in this field, consent was understood to be an act of willing submission for both men and women. My analysis of erotic literature further demonstrates that received socio-sexual scripts required the more sexually-experienced partner, usually the male character in this context, to initiate sexual contact and then observe his partner's reaction before continuing. Moreover, both advice or conduct literature and erotic literature show that consent was expected to be performed nonverbally by both men and women. Finally, further analysis of the ways in which consent is communicated in erotic literature and artwork shows that consent could be performed through physical actions made to facilitate or encourage sexual activity, or through particular facial expressions, specifically expressive eye contact and smiling.

Conclusion

The long eighteenth century in England was one of profound socio-cultural development; people were negotiating new ideas about love, courtship, and marriage in a society that now held up the notion of romantic marital love as an achievable ideal for most middle- and upper-class men and women in a way it simply had not been previously. This thesis demonstrates that, contrary to popular opinion, both scholarly and otherwise, the romantic and socio-sexual scripts that guided relevant interactions between men and women dictated a far higher degree of mutuality and men's respect for women's sexual and romantic agency than has previously been believed.

In Chapter 1, I demonstrated that men and women had distinct lived experiences throughout their protracted early adulthoods, which resulted in them developing strikingly different ideas about love, romance, courtship, and marriage. Effectively, the cultural influences and lived experiences to which women were exposed taught them to understand marriage as a legitimate risk, being a sacrifice of legal independence and protection, as well as a potential source of happiness. This understanding, as well as copious amounts of advice and moral literature on the subject, prompted women to approach their courtships with a degree of caution, and to prioritise the development of an emotional and intellectual relationship with their prospective suitors over the presence of romantic passion or sexual desire.

Conversely, the cultural influences and lived experiences to which men were subjected taught them to see marriage as primarily an opportunity to assert their independence, both within and without the home, and as secure companionship and emotional support from another person. Men were also aware that there was a degree of risk involved in marriage, but they were primarily concerned with the burdens of domestic responsibility or the fear of being cuckolded, rather than the necessity of losing their legal rights, as women were. However, men also received significantly less instruction on how to choose a prospective partner, or on how to conduct themselves in a courtship setting, from advice and conduct literature. Rather, their understandings of socio-sexual scripts were founded on the example of characters in erotic literature, and on their understanding of the scripts governing transactional sex and

relationships, the latter of which taught men to view romantic love as a predominantly visceral, sexual feeling and to think it appropriate to deploy the language of love and romance based purely on the presence of those feelings.

Young men brought these understandings with them when they began to embark upon the business of getting married, which goes a long way towards explaining eighteenth-century men's habit of declaring love and proposing marriage to any socially-acceptable woman they found attractive, without the least effort made to get to know her as person. This kind of socialisation of men, coupled with women's aforementioned desire to establish mutual emotional and intellectual connections with their suitors before determining if they loved or could love them, resulted in many a rejected marriage proposal after a month's acquaintance.

In Chapter 2, I established that consent was conceptualised as an act of willing submission within the eighteenth-century cultural imaginary; that this understanding was consistent across both sexual and non-sexual contexts; and that both men's and women's consent was understood conceptually in the same way. Through analysis of literary and artistic representations of sexual consent, I then demonstrated how sexual consent was requested, performed and interpreted within received socio-sexual scripts. Particularly, I showed that, in erotic literature from the period, and especially in literature that doubled as educational or instructional texts, men were consistently depicted as waiting for a nonverbal demonstration of consent from their female partner after they suggested or initiated sexual contact; furthermore, that when the female partner in a heterosexual couple was sexually inexperienced, that men were required to request consent verbally before initiating penetrative sex. Additionally, I demonstrated that, in couples wherein one partner was virginal, the responsibility for initiating sex and for paying attention to and interpreting physical performances of consent belonged to the more sexually experienced partner, regardless of that partner's gender. I further outlined the ways in which people, albeit predominantly women, could convey their consent nonverbally, by making their faces and bodies sites of communication. This demonstrates that respect for sexual agency was a significant part of all positive socio-sexual scripts, though the established physical and social power dynamics and gendered modes of communication meant that women's consent was more regularly identified as the focus of the script within representations of sexual interactions. It further demonstrates that consent was sufficiently

important within sexual situations that its performance and communication was effectively and consistently codified throughout the century, despite being uniformly conveyed physically and nonverbally.

My work comprises an important contribution to our understandings of courtship dynamics and socio-sexual scripts and practice during the long eighteenth century in Britain. Particularly, it complicates our accepted understanding of eighteenth-century gender roles within sexual and romantic relationships, and undermines the existing readings of eighteenth-century sexual and erotic practice as being dependent upon sexual violence or aggression by men against women. It draws attention to the evident and damaging discrepancies between men's and women's understandings of love and courtship. This contributes to our understandings of how men and women disparately experienced the social processes of romance and courtship and of why so many eighteenth-century men managed to collect numerous marriage proposal rejections during their lifetimes.

It is also the first scholarly attempt to explicitly identify the ways in which sexual consent was performed and interpreted during the eighteenth century in a purely practical sense. It is the first to combine analysis of literature and visual art to shed light on the presence of distinct nonverbal communication between sexual partners within socio-sexual scripts. My findings on this subject will be valuable not merely to the continued study of consent throughout history, but also to the study of sexual violence and the cultural conflicts surrounding it.

Despite my analysis of erotic literature comprising a primarily supportive element of my research, rather than the focus of it, I believe it also constitutes a valuable contribution to that field. In Chapter 2, especially, I proposed new ways of reading texts, and particularly John Cleland's infamous *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, that have previously been either dismissed by scholars for lack of literary merit or misinterpreted due to incomplete understandings of their relevant social and cultural contexts.

Naturally, however, due to the limited scope of a thesis, my work is not an exhaustive study of this subject matter. In this thesis, I have excluded queerness from my discussion almost entirely. I am fully aware of its existence throughout the century, and of its presence within the historical evidence I have used in my research, and I have tried to ensure that the potential queerness of some writers and

texts has received mention where relevant. However, I chose to focus exclusively on heterosexual socio-sexual scripts, due to a combination of the limitations of the project; the difficulties I had locating and accessing private sources that referred even to heterosexual sexual relationships; and my own firm belief that, while homosexual subcultures develop parallel to and in conversation with heterosexual subcultures, they should be studied independently of each other and should not be amalgamated uncritically in research. In the future, I would like to extend my research into courtship and socio-sexual scripts to examine same-sex relationships throughout the period.

While I have demonstrated how consent was conceptualised broadly within eighteenth-century socio-sexual culture, my discussion of its performance predominantly focused on its performance by women having sex with men. I do discuss one description of consent being performed by a man having sex with a woman from John Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*; however, I found sufficient source material in the process of my research to merit further exploration of consent as it was practiced between both male and female participants in homosexual couples and by men within heterosexual couples.

In this vein, I would also propose to extend my study of consent as both a concept and a performative practice to consider how men engaged with and enacted these ideas and scripts when they were in a position to respond to sexual advances, rather than initiating them. In the secondary literature I read for this work, men are almost universally assumed to be the sexually proactive parties in their relationships; or, at the very least, this is the way they were written about by scholars, likely because of the focus on rape and sexual violence in existing work on socio-sexual practice. In this thesis, however, I engaged with two explicit references to men performing a receptive sexual role in their interactions with women, from *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* and in *The School of Venus*, and am aware of several others that did not serve the purposes of my current work. Further research in this area would be an excellent opportunity to flesh out our scholarly understandings of socio-sexual practice, and to further complicate the alleged active/passive, aggressive/submissive dichotomies of eighteenth-century socio-sexual dynamics.

I also was limited to studying predominantly men and women from the middling and upper classes, owing to the fact that the bulk of the primary source material I had available to me was written

by members of those groups. While there is some documentary evidence of the personal lives of the lower classes, there is less of it and it is harder to access, particularly as I do not live in Britain and, therefore, had no access to local archives. In future, I would like to apply similar methodological frameworks to a study of socio-sexual scripts as they were developed, negotiated, and put into practice amongst members of the lower and working classes.

Though I had sufficient access to public sources from the period, such as literature and art, to provide me with a foundation to study socio-sexual scripts as they were fictionalised, made instructional, and received by readers, I had very little access to private sources, such as letters and diaries. As I had no access to appropriate archives, the majority of the letters and diaries to which I had access had been edited by a third party. These published life writings were often specifically edited to remove things that could potentially embarrass the writer's surviving family, and this could include mentions of sex, desire, or sexual relationships. The result was that I had comparatively little opportunity to analyse how people negotiated these received scripts in their own lives, particularly with regards to the explicitly sexual elements of these scripts. However, based on the evidence of the private sources that I did have access to, I believe further archival research would allow us to establish a better understanding of the way men and women understood and engaged with received socio-sexual scripts.

The majority of the scholarly writing on consent during the period, as I have repeatedly noted, is to be found in the literature on rape and sexual violence. When reading this secondary literature, I observed that the majority of work was concerned with sexual violence towards women. There is some work on sexual violence towards men; Thomas Foster, for example, has written on this subject in the context of colonial masculinities in America in the eighteenth-century, and there are discussions of sexual assault in studies of eighteenth-century sodomy. However, this scholarship does not define how men's consent functioned and was performed in socio-sexual scripts of the period. Further examination of men's sexual and romantic agency in consensual sexual encounters, both homosexual and heterosexual, would be a valuable addition to knowledge in this field.

Despite the limited scope of my thesis, my work constitutes a significant contribution to the literature on eighteenth-century romance and sexuality. My first chapter offers a new analysis of an under-researched stage in the eighteenth-century life cycle, and its effects on young men's and women's

attitudes towards courtship, love, and marriage, and my second opens an entirely new discussion on positive socio-sexual dynamics during the period.

Finally, to borrow and shamelessly bastardise a quote from George Washington: though, in reviewing the incidents of my candidature, I am unconscious of intentional error, I am nevertheless too sensible of my defects not to think it probable that I may have committed many errors. Whatever they may be, I fervently beseech my supervisory panel to avert or mitigate the evils to which they may tend. I shall also carry with me the hope that my markers will never cease to view them with indulgence.

Appendix A



Figure 1: La Déclaration de l'Amour



Figure 2: *La Jarretière détachée*

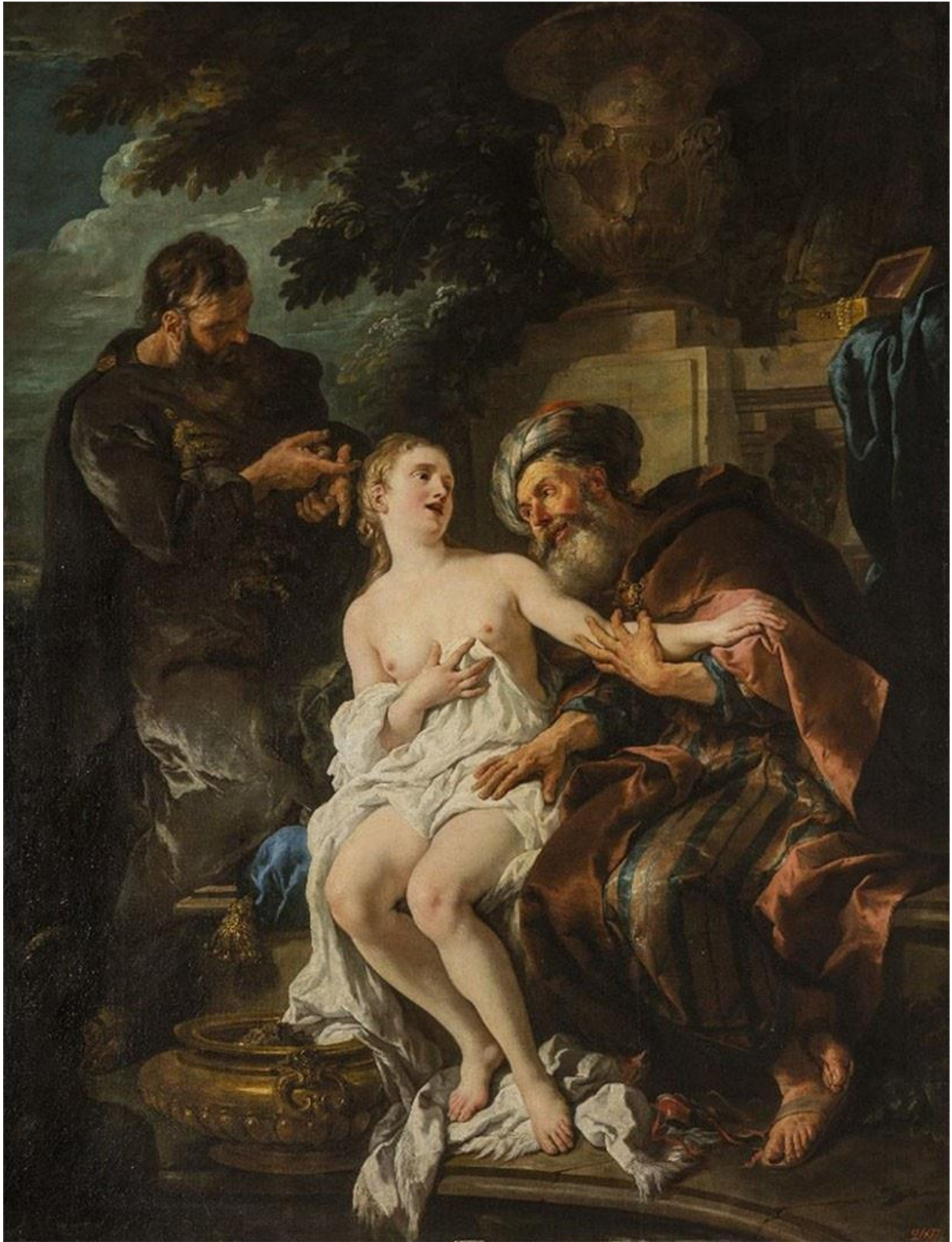


Figure 3: Susanna and the Elders



Figure 4: Venus and Adonis



Figure 5: Images of Smiling from William Hogarth's The Analysis of Beauty

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