

**Familiar Collaboration and Women Writers in Eighteenth-
Century Britain: Elizabeth Griffith, Sarah Fielding and
Susannah and Margaret Minifie**

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D.Phil. Thesis

St. Hilda's College

University of Oxford

Michaelmas Term, 2007

ABSTRACT

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Between 1740 and 1770, a number of women writers choose to make explicit in their printed texts their collaboration with a 'familiar': a family member or close friend. In so doing, they strategically enact their personal relationships through the medium of print in order to claim for themselves a level of literary power and delineate the terms on which they entered the marketplace as authors. This thesis argues that familiar relations expressed along a horizontal axis – those of husband, wife, brother, sister and friend – offer a relatively flexible model of familiar relations in which women could acquire a level of agency in self-definition, supported by ideologies that valued women's contribution to the polite sphere of sociable conversation. It demonstrates that Elizabeth Griffith, Sarah Fielding, Jane Collier, and Susannah and Margaret Minifie not only engage in collaborative literary production that is thoroughly inflected with the pressures of their historical context but that through familiar collaboration women writers display their professional authorial personae and generate social and literary criticism. Through close readings of carefully selected collaborative texts in the corpus of each writer, including the material history of the texts themselves, and the relationships expressed through those texts, this thesis highlights the complexity with which family relations interacted with print culture in the period. Far from using the familiar relation as a means of modestly retiring to the domestic sphere these women writers used their familiar relations as a basis from which to launch, describe and defend their authorial careers.

Acknowledgements

I can claim that my thesis is entirely my own work, but I did not accomplish it alone:

To the academic staff at Queen's University, Belfast, for getting me started,

To the Arts and Humanities Research Council for generously funding me through four years of graduate study at Oxford,

To the Fellows, staff and students of St. Hilda's College, Oxford,

To Dr. Ros Ballaster for her patience, persistence and unstinting support,

To my loved ones, family and friends,

Thank you.

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Chapter 1. Introduction: the context for collaboration

At mid-eighteenth century, a number of women writers chose to make explicit in their printed texts their collaboration with a ‘familiar’: a family member or close friend. In so doing, they strategically enact their personal relationships through the medium of print in order to claim for themselves a level of literary power and delineate the terms on which they entered the marketplace as authors. These collaborative texts are addressed here as a site of intersection of changing models of authorship, social interaction and family relations, and a means by which these are subjected to critique by women writers. They invoke manuscript literary culture and a mass print market, domestic conversations and dramatic performance, and relations between men and women within and outside families in ways that are designed to have impact across a multiplicity of contexts. Through a close and nuanced reading of each of these texts and attention to the literary context in which they were produced, including the material history of the texts themselves, this thesis argues that these particular women writers were professional, strategic authors thoroughly engaged in the major critical debates of the period. Reading their familiar, collaborative texts highlights the complexity with which family relations interacted with print culture in the period and provides evidence that far from using the familiar relation as a means of modestly retiring to the domestic sphere, Elizabeth Griffith, Sarah Fielding, Jane Collier and Susannah and Margaret Minifie used their familiar relations as a basis from which to launch, describe and defend their authorial careers.

Collaboration theory has not yet achieved a workable way of theorising collaboration within a specific historical context. Literary output in any form regularly includes the input of two or more individuals. Some obvious examples of

collaboration in a broader sense at the textual level include acts of dictation, translation, editing, proofreading, transcribing and, in a print context, compositing. The most visible context for collaboration in a modern context is the theatre, where the performance of a play depends on a collaboration between the writer, the actors, the director(s), the set designers and lighting technicians and even, arguably, the audience, to produce a coherent dramatic event. If the definition of textual collaboration is extended along a temporal axis, potential collaborators in a single text can include earlier authors and future readers. Jack Stillinger includes an author interacting with earlier sources and influences as examples of ‘composite creativity’ in the writings of John Keats, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and John Stuart Mill, as well as addressing the more familiar instances of the textual input of editors, friends and co-writers.¹ Stillinger also observes that no text exists in a ‘pure’ state; any text can be ‘altered’ through contact with readers.² Such a wide-ranging definition of collaboration does little to pinpoint our concern here with the authors’ conceptions of their collaborative practice at a specific historical moment.

In a recent study, claiming ‘historicist aims’, collaboration theorists Marjorie Stone and Judith Thompson have coined the word ‘heterotext’ in order to highlight contingent and shifting authorial agency or subjectivity within texts:

We propose that the paradigm of the unitary author, which has thus far proven to be more resistant to transformation than the idea of the unitary text, should similarly be replaced by a conception of authors as ‘heterotexts,’ woven of varying strands of influence and agency, absorbing or incorporating differing subjectivities, and speaking in multiple voices. The concept of heterotextuality, acknowledges that when we speak of authors, we are speaking of culturally constructed identities inextricably linked to the works that authors produce.³

¹ Jack Stillinger, *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 23.

² Stillinger, *Multiple Authorship*, 185.

³ Marjorie Stone and Judith Thompson/Judith Thompson and Marjorie Stone, ‘Contexts and Heterotexts: A Theoretical and Historical Introduction’, in Stone and Thompson (ed.), *Literary Couplings: Writing Couples, Collaborators, and the Construction of Authorship* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 3-37, 25; 19.

The literary practice of collaboration is thus an important area of critical enquiry, purely in terms of registering the possibility of a multiplicity of contributors to any given text and therefore, the contingency of any firm concept of 'authorship'. Studies like these ground critical investigation into actual examples of literary collaboration in a theoretical basis, but theoretical studies of collaboration have significant limitations. Although such studies make a compelling claim for the status of 'the author' as a culturally constructed identity, their primary focus on 'authorship' as a category that is available for contestation runs a strong risk of flattening out the specific historical circumstances of textual production.⁴ Collaboration may be used to demonstrate the falsity of a literary paradigm, such as Stillinger's 'solitary genius', rather than being analysed as a literary phenomenon on its own terms, within its own particular context.

Collaborative literary practice inevitably takes on a variety of forms and meanings depending on the historical moment of the text's production. Rapid social change throughout the eighteenth century, including changes in the way texts were being produced and disseminated, greatly influenced the self-conceptions of the authors of the period. Clifford Siskin has observed that the unprecedented and highly visible proliferation of writing enabled by the expansion of the print market caused a level of anxiety over the possible social effects: 'the new technology of writing gazed self-reflexively on its own unknown potential'.⁵ Writers throughout the eighteenth century embed in their writings a strong awareness that assigning meaning to acts of

⁴ Selected further reading of collaboration theory includes: Whitney Chadwick and Isabelle de Courtivron (eds.), *Significant Others: Creativity and Intimate Partnership* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993); Vera John-Steiner, *Creative Collaboration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); M. Thomas Inge, 'Collaboration and Concepts of Authorship', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 116/ 3 (May, 2001), 623-630; Susan J. Leonardi and Rebecca A. Pope, 'Screaming Divas: Collaboration as Feminist Practice', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 13/2 (Fall, 1994), 259-270; Andrea A. Lunsford; Lisa Ede, 'Rhetoric in a New Key: Women and Collaboration', *Rhetoric Review*, 8/2 (Spring, 1990), 234-241; Janice Doane and Devon Hodges, 'Writing from the Trenches: Women's Work and Collaborative Writing', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 14/1 (Spring 1995), 51-57.

⁵ Clifford Siskin, *The Work of Writing: Literature and Social Change in Britain, 1700-1830* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1998), 3.

textual production was a social priority. Influenced by the variously competing claims of authorial status, social good and marketability, eighteenth-century texts often embed a level of self-reflexivity as they struggle to both stake their claim to a readership and to shape and define the literary world. A number of eighteenth-century texts are explicit in their reflection on acts of reading and representation, including those texts that announce their collaborative status.

The texts examined in this thesis use a variety of strategies to make their status as collaborative texts visible. In other words, they call attention to their mode of production. The primary purpose of this thesis is to explore why an eighteenth-century writer (or, more accurately, two writers) would make a point of drawing the reader's attention to the fact that the work sent into print was produced by more than one hand. Such acts of overt collaboration have significantly more to do with the writers' sense of the saleability of their texts in the print market than with a desire to expose the contingency of the category of 'the author'. Moreover, overtly to collaborate on a published text was strategically to align oneself within a specific literary world and to put forward a specific argument about what textual production might mean for society at large in light of the new technology of print. Michael McKeon argues that the emergence of modern categories of knowing involves the making explicit what had previously been implicit or tacit: 'modern knowledge is defined precisely by its explanatory ambition to separate itself from its object of knowledge sufficiently to fulfill the epistemological demand that what is known must be divided from the process by which it is known'.⁶ The aim of this thesis is to demonstrate precisely what is made explicit through acts of overt collaboration at

⁶ Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), xix.

mid-eighteenth century, and with what authorial purpose. The purpose can be either moral reform or marketability, but is typically both.

More specifically, this thesis examines how women writers were able to use collaboration and the concept of familiar relationship as a means of acceding to a level of literary power and authority. I suggest that ‘literary authority’ is partly measurable by the woman writer’s power to dictate the terms on which she entered the literary marketplace and to write her own authorial script. Women’s entry into print in greater numbers than ever before during the course of the eighteenth century forms an integral part of the changing face of contemporary literature and society.⁷ Analyses of women’s authorship have often registered a shift around mid-century in which a number of successful women writers embraced the limitations of increasingly narrow social conceptions of femininity as modest, virtuous and domestic as a condition of print market participation.⁸ The stereotype of ‘the modest muse’ as Betty Schellenberg terms Janet Todd’s use of the phrase, is challenged by Schellenberg’s account of women writers’ active participation in professional literary practice.⁹ When women’s literary collaborations are conceived in terms of a professional authorial strategy, the way in which shared authorship offers a level of scriptive power to women becomes clear. Overt collaboration was actively utilised by the writers in this study to construct an authorial ‘career narrative’. It demonstrates a strategic intervention into a print market that valued collaborative texts for their modelling of polite sociability, rather than a modest act of self-effacement. For some

⁷ Cheryl Turner notes that numbers of women writers increased rapidly and declined before 1740, followed by a gradual increase throughout the mid-eighteenth century, and culminating in a ‘dramatic surge’ in the 1780s in line with print market expansion more generally (Cheryl Turner, *Living by the Pen: Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1992), 39).

⁸ See Jane Spencer, ‘The Terms of Acceptance’, in *The Rise of the Woman Novelist: From Aphra Behn to Jane Austen* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 75-103; Janet Todd, ‘The Modest Muse: Women Writers of the Mid-Eighteenth Century’, in *The Sign of Angellica: Women, Writing and Fiction, 1660-1800* (London: Virago, 1989), 125-145.

⁹ Betty A. Schellenberg, *The Professionalization of Women Writers in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 3.

women writers, professions of modesty become in themselves a form of active print-market engagement and can be used to promote their agency in self-definition in ways that can be somewhat opaque to the modern reader.

A related implication of the concept of ‘literary authority’ is the power that collaboration offered women writers to make women visible as readers, writers and critics. Close attention to how reading, writing and criticism is performed in these texts suggests that the women writers in this study consider their authorial activities to be enabled by ideologies of sociability. Women’s contribution to the polite sphere was valued in the period; they were thought to add a much-needed polish of civilisation to sociable situations. Elizabeth Eger has observed that certain exceptional women could often function as ‘cultural standard bearers of considerable influence’.¹⁰ Within a conversational model of sociable interaction, educated women were therefore uniquely ‘visible’ in a context that tended to brand female display shameful and unfeminine. While the status of the well-educated woman as an index of a civilised nation is not without its problems and inconsistencies, the practice of polite sociability, enshrined in the act of conversation, nonetheless offered a model for women writers to exploit in entering the print market. The collaborative texts examined in this thesis enact the terms of their collaboration by dramatising acts of reading, writing and criticism that occur within conversational models, in which women readers, writers and critics play a starring role.

Studies that highlight women writers’ active engagement with the print market and with other writers have become even more crucial in light of critical focus on family relations as an index of contemporary literary practice, whether actual or metaphorical. Recent critical studies, such as those of Ruth Perry and Jane Spencer,

¹⁰ Elizabeth Eger, ‘Representing culture: “The Nine Living Muses of Great Britain” (1779)’, in Elizabeth Eger, Charlotte Grant, Cliona O Gallchoir, Penny Warburton (eds.), *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere, 1700-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 104-132, 112.

that have drawn links between family relations and textual production have tended to assert a view of women, including women writers, as dramatically disenfranchised in life and in fiction.¹¹ These studies dovetail neatly with the ‘modest muse’ model of female print-market entry. Susan Staves contends:

What is particularly striking about this mid-century shift [into the wider acceptance of women writers in print] is the way women writers won acceptance by playing the roles of daughters, sisters, or wives to literary men. And they did so at the moment when the culture was celebrating the properly hierarchical family as the source of the highest human pleasure and the basis for right social order.¹²

Drawing on the links that Staves, Perry and Spencer identify between family relations and text, this thesis contends that certain kinds of family relation were less ‘properly hierarchical’ than Staves assumes. A level of flexibility in the distribution of power was offered by relations along a horizontal spectrum: those of husband, wife, friend, sister and brother. Especially when enacted through the medium of text, these horizontal relations drew much of their energy and textual appeal from challenge, contestation and debate. Far from tamely dramatising a predictable gendered hierarchy, acts of communal writing with a family member appear to have given the women writers in this study a strong capacity to express their professional authorial agency and identity. Thus, rather than assuming that collaboration has integral or transhistorical links to power structures, I identify how power relations are played out through acts of collaboration.

The combination of print collaboration with a family member seems inevitably to bring into play the question of public and private spheres of activity, which I will briefly address here in order to clarify my critical perspective on the

¹¹ See Ruth Perry, *Novel Relations: The Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture, 1748-1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Jane Spencer, *Literary Relations: Kinship and the Canon, 1660-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹² Susan Staves, *A Literary History of Women's Writing in Britain, 1660-1789* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 230.

matter. In the texts examined in this thesis, a ‘private’, or personal, relationship is displayed in the ‘public’ forum of text in ways that are designed to impact in both spheres, or across both spheres, suggesting that a strict demarcation of public and private spheres is not necessarily a useful model for these authors’ collaborative literary activity at mid-eighteenth century. Participation in sociability and conversation carry an implication of bourgeois public sphere activity in the sense that participation constitutes individual acts of intervention into a rational discursive space set apart from the mechanics of government; the ‘ceaseless circulation of polite discourse among rational subjects’, as Terry Eagleton describes it.¹³

The question of women’s access to the ‘public sphere’ is a vexed one. Markman Ellis describes the ‘hegemonic masculinity of coffee-house sociability’, applicable even where women had a visible, disruptive presence in coffee houses as owners or servers.¹⁴ Women’s energetic claims to a level of capacity for reason equal to that of men suggests a desire for access to a dominant discourse, but it does not necessarily follow that women who claimed rationality thereby conceived of themselves as accessing a ‘public’ role. Nancy Fraser offers a model of a ‘multiplicity of public arenas’, including women-only spaces, as an alternative to the hegemonic bourgeois (masculine) public sphere.¹⁵ Paula Backscheider finds Fraser’s model congenial in addressing the cultural importance of eighteenth-century women’s friendship poems.¹⁶

¹³ Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism: From the Spectator to Post-structuralism* (London: Verso, 1984), 14.

¹⁴ Markman Ellis, ‘Coffee-women, “The Spectator” and the public sphere in the early eighteenth century’, in *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere*, ed. Eger et al., 27-52, 37.

¹⁵ Nancy Fraser, ‘Rethinking the Public Sphere: A contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy’, *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (2nd edn., London: Routledge, 1999), 518-536, 522.

¹⁶ See Paula Backscheider, ‘Friendship poems’, in *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and Their Poetry: Inventing Agency, Inventing Genre* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 175-232.

If, however, as Lawrence Klein argues, ‘good conversation was premised on the co-operation of the sexes’, then a rigid two-sphere model offers a peculiar choice between acknowledging women’s participation in the public sphere, conceding that ‘conversation’ cuts across both spheres, or rejecting the model altogether.¹⁷ None of these options satisfactorily address the complex issues of power that are generated by the genteel woman’s social role. Klein observes elsewhere that even when the theory of women’s increasing confinement to the private sphere is taken seriously, the ‘discourse of domesticity would still be largely a record of male worryment’ and that it is too crude an analysis to assume that women’s interventions into the public sphere were necessarily transgressive, or that such interventions demonstrate a gap between theory and practice.¹⁸ Noting women’s consciousness that they were ‘behaving publicly and that their behaviour implied its own sanction’, Klein calls for a more nuanced approach to understanding women’s consciousness of their behaviour.¹⁹ McKeon offers just such an account when he observes: ‘The dialectic of personal identity and its alienability organizes contemporaries’ responses to the experience of publication’.²⁰ McKeon’s analysis acknowledges that writers of the period were aware of the potential tension between their ‘public’ and ‘private’ selves, and in fact, utilised that tension in their print productions. Samuel Johnson in the *Rambler* observes that ‘for many reasons a man writes much better than he lives’.²¹ His comment recognises that a gap exists between private life and publication. Ironically however, in making

¹⁷ Lawrence E. Klein, ‘Gender, conversation and the public sphere in early-eighteenth century England’, in *Textuality and Sexuality: Reading theories and practices*, ed. Judith Still and Michael Worton (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 100-115, 110.

¹⁸ Lawrence E. Klein, ‘Gender and the Public/Private Distinction in the Eighteenth Century: Some Questions about Evidence and Analytic Procedure’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 29/1 (1995), 97-109, 101.

¹⁹ Klein, ‘Gender and the Public/Private Distinction’, 102.

²⁰ McKeon, *Secret History of Domesticity*, 84.

²¹ Samuel Johnson, *Rambler* No. 14 (Saturday, 5 May 1750), in *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, III-V: *The Rambler*, ed. W.J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), III, 75.

reference to the gap he reinforces a supposed connection between life and writing, suggesting that this was a connection that his readers would have recognised.

Clare Brant observes that in the context of discussion of the letter, ‘personal’ is a more useful word than ‘private’, registering the significance of individuals and their relationships in the literary context, without suggesting actual hidden activity.²² In the context of collaborative texts, particularly those produced within a family relationship, the question of the ‘personal’ is in urgent need of clarification. It suggests that somehow through reading collaborative texts it is possible to gain an insight into the nature of the personal relationship that existed between the collaborators. I would strongly contest this view, particularly in light of the difference between gendered economic and social power inequities and the power relations that may be enacted through print. This thesis operates on the assumption that relationships expressed through print are necessarily performed – structured in such a way as to give a particular, carefully crafted impression to the reader.²³ ‘Conversation’ offered a particularly congenial model through which social authorial identity could be performed, critiqued and transformed. As I explain further in Chapter 2, conversation was a mode of social participation that simultaneously invoked a performative dynamic and the potential to reveal an authentic self, a further instance of the ‘dialectic of personal identity and its alienability’ that McKeon identifies.

Collaborative texts reveal very little about their authors’ personal lives, and it would be naïve to assume that they do. Instead, they illustrate what the writers

²² Clare Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 5.

²³ The idea of collaboration as performance was suggested to me by reading Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990). Butler’s argument that gender identity is ‘performatively constituted’ (25), an ‘ongoing discursive practice’ (33) offers a conceptual model of the means by which the authors in this study performatively construct their own narrative of authorship in their published texts.

thought would be the most useful performance of their particular relationship for their authorial purposes and desired textual effect. Through close readings of the texts it becomes possible to see the extent to which performance hinges on recognition. The enactment of an authorial identity is only effective if it can be read as such, and an individual's performance must necessarily be limited by the collaborator's or the reader's willingness to accept the validity or the intelligibility of the performance. The capacity to achieve a coherent performance is always limited by what the reader's social context will permit him or her to see. Close attention to the texts' performativity makes it possible to see how the writers' enactment of an authoritative print persona is dependent on a recognition of authority that draws from a cultural background in which certain types of performance are both legible and valued. Collaborative texts are often able to model a process of performance and recognition within the text itself that widens the external reader's capacity to 'recognise'. Social and literary critique is generated from such acts. It is for these reasons that I devote Chapter 2 to exploring the socio-literary background to the primary texts, particularly the concepts of sociability and familiarity as they can be applied within print culture. I do not wish to suggest that there is a direct link between the texts discussed in Chapter 2 and the primary texts addressed in subsequent chapters, but that a sense of context is crucial to understanding how the writers' performance of their authorship should be read, and what cultural, financial or practical benefit accrues to collaborative authors.

Chapter 3 addresses the literary relationship between Elizabeth Griffith and her husband Richard Griffith as enacted through the collaborative *A Series of Genuine Letters between Henry and Frances* (1757-1770). The Griffiths exploit the flexibility of the letter form in ingenious ways in order to create authorial personae that are heavily inflected by a sense of writing occurring within a personal relationship. Using

the model of education as the basis for their writing relationship, they transform a correspondence figured as private into the model for their professional writing lives, reflecting at every stage on the convergence of their personal and writing selves, and how each inflects the other. This chapter argues that the Griffiths' particular model of print production was especially congenial for Elizabeth Griffith, enabling her to claim print authority from the basis of her supposedly personal correspondence. The steady growth in reflection on the writers' professional careers and their burgeoning fame throughout the *Series of Genuine Letters* demonstrates the authors' awareness of the market context of their texts, and illustrates a collaborative process within which Elizabeth Griffith gradually accedes to a level of scriptive power that ultimately exceeds that of her husband.

Chapter 4 considers Sarah Fielding's sequel to her best-known novel, *The Adventures of David Simple* (1744), a text to which her brother Henry Fielding made a substantial contribution. *Familiar Letters between the Principal Characters in David Simple and some others* (1747) continues the work that *David Simple* does in delineating a moral reading and writing community structured around sibling ties and mediated through friendship. Their collaboration also to some extent anticipates the final text of the *David Simple* trilogy, *Volume the Last* (1751). I argue that in *Familiar Letters*, as much as in the other two *David Simple* works, Sarah Fielding simultaneously engages in an energetic critique of print culture and begins to develop a recognisable professional authorial persona. Although her relations – both literary and personal – with Henry Fielding have typically been seen as problematic, their overt collaboration in this particular text enables Sarah Fielding to defend women's contribution to literary culture while registering the tensions between an immediate interpretive community signalled by the familiar letter, and the wider print market.

Chapter 5 marks a turn to literary collaboration between women, rather than between women and men, and addresses *The Cry* (1754), Sarah Fielding's collaboration with her friend Jane Collier. I consider female friendship to have been a very specific type of 'familiar' relation, and one within which both authors were able to make a confident claim to professional authorship. It is a sustained display of acts of narration through conversation and verbal and textual negotiation. An experimental novel that explicitly draws from the theatre as a model, *The Cry*'s collaborative nature permits its preoccupation with themes of performance, spectatorship, community and friendship, and social and literary authority to be made visible and subjected to ironic critique by the authors.

Chapter 6 considers the collaboration between the sisters Susannah and Margaret Minifie in *The Histories of Lady Frances S_____ and Lady Caroline S_____* (1763). This epistolary novel has typically been seen, if considered at all, as a purveyor of feminocentric fantasy rather than a thoughtful, critical work of literature. I do not substantially contest this view, but argue that the novel presents a useful example of collaboration in a thoroughly market-driven context, in which the type of fantasy purveyed is significant. The authors demonstrate a consciousness that they write purely for the market, and thus are able to explore ways in which consumer culture can be imaginatively shaped according to the authors' needs. Consumerism interplays with themes of sisterhood in the novel, offering a fantasy of female authorial power in which sisterhood is offered as a reading position from which to engage in a form of moral consumption.

Thus, as well as being divisible into sections of women collaborating with men and women collaborating with each other, it is also possible to trace a trajectory across the chapters of imagined primary readers, from Elizabeth Griffith's sole lover-

reader, to Sarah Fielding's friendly interpretive community, to the Minifies' mass consumer market. Each of these texts plays primarily to an imagined reading context, but none are exclusive, and all incorporate readings at various levels. All of the chapters show texts reflecting on the circumstances of their production, at the level of form and content, with a view to enabling and defending the women's entry into print. Each chapter deals with a different kind of relationship, and how that particular relationship is read is crucial to understanding the collaborative dynamic enacted in the texts. At the same time, every text must be seen as part of a longer career narrative. Familiar collaboration served a particular function for each woman writer in the course of her professional writing life. Before turning to the specific examples and close readings however, it is helpful to interrogate at greater length the socio-literary context in which each of these texts was produced, in order to begin to suggest why these authors chose to make their collaborative literary practice explicit in the way they did.

Chapter 2: A ‘sociable’ and ‘familiar’ literary culture

Familiar collaboration is a visible manifestation of sociable literary behaviour between family members or friends. As such, familiar collaboration directly evokes a number of discourses that at mid-eighteenth century were in a state of flux: those of sociability, familiarity and authorship. Interpersonal relations became the focus of sustained attention at the beginning of the eighteenth century as transformations in the economy, the family, the political system and society at large brought in new ways of conceiving of oneself and one’s relations in society. Of particular significance are the new credit economy and growth of the mercantile community, the expansion of trade, the greater mobility of the individual, growth in literacy, greater leisure time and more leisure activities and higher incidence of travel for pleasure.

J.G.A. Pocock theorises that social change brought about a multiplication of opportunities for the individual to encounter other people or objects in commercial or leisured contexts, providing ‘an indefinite and perhaps infinite enrichment of his personality’.²⁴ The multiplication of the kinds of sociable interactions in which one could participate, combined with a psychological need to assign moral value to the emergent commercial systems, meant that major strands of philosophical thought of the eighteenth century were devoted to theorising sociable interaction. Theoreticians of sociability attempted to mediate between the potentially contradictory goals of instituting universal standards of correct sociable behaviour, and associating that behaviour with personal moral worth. By mid-century, ‘conversation’ was thought to be a powerful tool of moral refinement, and was a mode of sociability in which it was

²⁴ J.G.A. Pocock, ‘Virtues, rights and manners: A model for historians of political thought’, in *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 37-50, 49.

expected women would participate and, indeed, a mode that valued their participation highly.

Social change impacted on discourses of the family in the sense that the social meaning of particular types of relationship came under scrutiny. The argument of this thesis rests on the historical premise that during the eighteenth century the conception of a society structured hierarchically around extended networks of family and kin gave way to a more flexible model of society in which certain social relations could be understood as being ordered along a structurally horizontal spectrum. Ruth Perry observes a shift in conceptions of the family throughout the eighteenth century ‘from an axis of kinship based on consanguineal ties or blood lineage to an axis based on conjugal and affinal ties of the married couple’.²⁵ Alongside Perry’s study, which emphasises the growing importance of the horizontal tie of marriage, this chapter argues that the horizontal ties of siblinghood and friendship could, like the marital relation, serve as ways of envisaging a freer, more egalitarian mode of relation than vertical ties, such as the father-offspring relation. The horizontal relations in this thesis are mediated through the concept of ‘friendship’, a bond that invokes both the family relation and the sociable relation. A further important term is ‘familiarity’ which, I will argue, is particularly suggestive when viewed through the medium of print.

The expansion of the print market throughout the eighteenth century broadened the numbers of individuals engaging in a further very specific type of social encounter between reader, author and text. Authorship in the eighteenth century was subject to a strikingly wide range of definitions. Changes in modes of writing, in available technologies of the printed text, in aesthetic discourses, in the status of

²⁵ Perry, *Novel Relations*, 2.

authorship, and in the means of distribution of texts, meant that authorship was an unstable category through much of the period that is examined here. Manuscript culture persisted alongside print, and often overlapped with it. Literary sociability was manifested in both manuscript and print culture, indeed, it was part of the means by which the two could overlap, and a way of conceiving the act of writing itself. Social behaviour among authors was not a novel phenomenon, attested by the existence of seventeenth-century literary coteries. In the relatively small print market of the early- to mid-eighteenth century, social connections were often crucial to professional success. However, eighteenth-century literary culture was not merely ‘social’ in the sense that it is possible to trace literary connections and networks throughout much of the century, but ‘sociable’, in the sense that those literary connections and circles were understood to have specific meanings and perform specific social functions. The ideological weight placed on sociability in the period meant that social authorship was endowed with cultural kudos, and became worthy of self-conscious display. Many of the institutions of literary culture, in both manuscript and print, were designed to demonstrate the phenomenon of literary networking in order to display not only an author’s social connections, but his or her active participation in the values of sociability itself. Even literary criticism was inflected with the values of sociability, and therefore was more available to women than might be assumed.²⁶

This chapter address certain aspects of sociability, familiarity and authorship in order to show the particular value of displays of literary sociability in the form of overt collaboration at the mid-eighteenth century. It argues that discourses of sociability were simultaneously imagined in performative terms and in ways that invoked moral authenticity. The combination of skilled display and didactic purpose

²⁶ It may be observed that the terms ‘literary’ and ‘print’ are used to refer to the production and consumption of text. These terms are not used interchangeably; ‘literary’ should be taken to refer to both manuscript and print production and consumption, and ‘print’ to print only.

embedded in conversation, its availability to women, and its status as critical idiom made it an ideal authorial model through which women writers could draw attention to their literary skills, their rational capacity and their morality. Collaboration with a family member enabled women writers to use their personal relationships to illustrate their didactic literary exempla; family relations are a lens through which to engage in social and literary critique. The implication of a 'real' family relationship embedded in the collaborative texts gives weight to the criticism, and ensures that the women writers themselves are seen to practice what they preach. Horizontal family relationships and sociability extend to the very heart of textual production and consumption, since the concept of 'familiarity' is not only a way of describing a relationship at mid-eighteenth century, but a specific mode of writing, embedded in form and style. Thus, discourses of sociability, familiarity and authorship are not only mutually influential, but on occasion, mutually constitutive.

Through discussion of a number of influential authors and their texts in the first half of the eighteenth century, this chapter will demonstrate the opportunities that literary and familiar sociability offered to women writers. The texts have been selected because they illustrate pertinent examples of literary sociability in action and enlarge our understanding of the way authorship, familiarity and sociability intersect. The first section traces discourses of sociability and the self through the first half of the eighteenth century. The second section demonstrates how sociability was enacted in eighteenth-century literary culture, particularly, but by no means exclusively, in the case of women authors. The third section argues that horizontal familiar relations have the potential to impact on conceptions of literary production and consumption. The fourth section examines two 'familiar' influential forms: the letter and the periodical essay, specifically in *The Female Spectator* (1744-46). The letter is

included because every collaborative text in this thesis makes use of the letter form in some way or another; in many ways the letter exemplifies sociable and familiar literary practice. The chapter ends with the use of a ‘case-study’ of literary sociability in *The Female Spectator* to illustrate the way Eliza Haywood, a consummate professional, used literary sociability as a formal and rhetorical model.

The sociable self

Eighteenth-century writers identified a supposedly natural human inclination to seek social interaction, leading to sociability becoming intimately intertwined with philosophical reflections on selfhood. The conception of the innately sociable individual led to the construction of a model of selfhood that depended on sociable interaction for its coherence. Of particular note are the writings of Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Earl of Shaftesbury, Frances Hutcheson and David Hume. Although in many ways very different, all make the basic link between natural social affection and moral rectitude. Shaftesbury claims in ‘An Inquiry concerning Virtue, or Merit’ in his *Characteristicks of Men, Manner, Opinons, Times* (1711) that ‘there is naturally in every Man such a degree of social Affection as inclines him to seek the Familiarity and Friendship of his Fellows’.²⁷ In ‘Sensus Communis’ he observes that ‘a Life without *natural Affection, Friendship, or Sociableness*, wou’d be found a wretched one, were it to be try’d’.²⁸ Frances Hutcheson in *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725) describes the ‘agreeable, innocent, good-natur’d, and easy state of Mind, as we are conscious of while we enjoy pleasant Conversation,

²⁷ Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, ‘An Inquiry concerning Virtue’, in *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinons, Times*, ed. Philip Ayres, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), I, 189-274, 255.

²⁸ Shaftesbury, ‘Sensus Communis: An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour’, in *Characteristicks*, ed. Ayres, I, 35-83, 67.

enliven'd by moderate Laughter'.²⁹ These authors make associations between man's natural inclination to socialise and an imagined 'moral sense' that inspires the individual to seek beauty in those around him. Shaftesbury considers the social affections to act simultaneously as the spur to virtue and the reward thereof:

VIRTUE, which of all Excellencys and Beautys is the chief, and most amiable; *that*...which upholds Communitys, maintains Union, Friendship, and Correspondence among Men; *that* by which Countrys, as well as private Familys, flourish and are happy...³⁰

The sentence, with its building of clause upon clause, mingles sociability, virtue and beauty in ways that elide which of these abstracts might be antecedent to the other. In so doing, it invokes an iterative process in which virtue inspires sociability inspires virtue and so on, rather than a static model of causality.

Hutcheson, the originator of the phrase 'moral sense', though not of the concept itself, explains social affection and virtue in terms of a love of beauty, arguing that 'we remember the Associations, Friendships, Familys, natural Affections, and other human Sentiments: our moral Sense determines us to approve these lovely Dispositions where we have most distinctly observ'd them'.³¹ David Hume puts the case for the association of virtue and sociability the most succinctly in his description of the test of individual virtue in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40):

We consider him with all his relations in society; and love or hate him, according as he affects those, who have any immediate intercourse with him. And 'tis a most certain rule, that if there be no relation of life, in which I cou'd not wish to stand to a particular person, his character must be so far allow'd to be perfect. If he be as little wanting to himself as to others, his character is entirely perfect. This is the ultimate test of merit and virtue.³²

²⁹ Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, ed. Wolfgang Leidhold (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2004), 171.

³⁰ Shaftesbury, 'An Inquiry concerning Virtue', 273-4.

³¹ Hutcheson, *Inquiry*, 115.

³² David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 386.

Thus, by mid-century, theories of social interaction to some extent documented an imagined system wherein one could locate the authentic, virtuous self in social processes of affective recognition.

However, intense discussion of ‘natural’ virtue masked a troubling flipside of sociable interaction: the possibility of social performance in the pursuit of ‘politeness’. Lawrence Klein argues:

“Politeness” was the art of sociability, the art of pleasing in company, an art involving self-presentation, inter-subjectivity, and self-love. Social status was not something granted, but rather something up for grabs. The theory of politeness aimed to show how social opportunities could be maximised. Social personality, defining itself in the course of social commerce, was a matter of technique, not status. Moreover, the tendency of this outlook was to assert the independence of the social realm from the realm of moral values. It appeared to break the continuity between moral and social personality, exploring the disponibility of the social self, and pioneering its transformation into a role-player.³³

Klein’s assessment emphasises a certain freedom and lack of ties to hierarchies of status that come with the artistry of sociable self-fashioning. In fact, the potential freedom and flexibility of social role-play was strictly limited by an understanding that conversational freedom worked in favour of moderation, discipline, and the institution of social norms. ‘Politeness’ or correct social behaviour, appears both liberatory and a force for social moderation and discipline. As Shaftesbury observes: ‘All Politeness is owing to Liberty. We polish one another, and rub off our Corners and rough Sides by a sort of *amicable Collision*’.³⁴ Shaftesbury’s call for a ‘Freedom of Raillery’, invoking the possibility, as Klein observes, of the display of wit in a social situation, is tempered by the image of collision; through an iterative process of conversational exchange, participants are disciplined and moderated.³⁵ Conversation

³³ Lawrence Klein, ‘The Third Earl of Shaftesbury and the Progress of Politeness’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 18/2 (Winter, 1984-5), 186-214, 191.

³⁴ Shaftesbury, ‘Sensus Communis’, 39.

³⁵ Shaftesbury, ‘Sensus Communis’, 42.

is thus both the mode of display of politeness and a process through which polite mores could be established, maintained and reinforced.

As the century progressed, this power of conversation to moderate, rather than maximise the freedom offered by sociable role-playing receives greater emphasis. Hume imagines that conversation offers the means by which society can institute normative standards: 'The intercourse of sentiments, therefore, in society and conversation, makes us form some general inalterable standard, by which we may approve or disapprove of characters and manners'.³⁶ Interestingly, however, the crisis point of the *Treatise* deals with the possibility that the self barely exists except in acts of conversation. Calling himself 'some strange uncouth monster', Hume finds intellectual cheer and solace in social activity: 'I converse, and am merry with my friends'.³⁷ Susan Manning reads this section of the *Treatise* as Hume's understanding that 'Language...may not only be our primary means of describing reality; its structures may actually be constitutive of that reality. Perception, articulation – and perhaps even existence – are mutually formative: in speaking, we do not merely know but create ourselves'.³⁸ It is perhaps significant that this section of the *Treatise* is marked so heavily with anxiety. Although Hume regains his intellectual confidence through conversation, his assertion that society's manners can be moderated through conversation conveniently ignores the potential instability of the term.

Conversation was seen as an inordinately powerful moral force, with a capacity to both display and transform individual identity. It was also subject to a wide range of meanings in the period. The definition of 'conversation' could range from a polite mode of socialising to 'criminal conversation' that generally meant

³⁶ Hume, *Treatise*, 385.

³⁷ Hume, *Treatise*, 172;175.

³⁸ Susan Manning, 'Literature and philosophy', in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, IV: *The Eighteenth Century*, ed. H.B Nisbet and Claude Rawson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 587-613, 592.

adultery, and was common enough to be shortened to ‘crim. con.’ in contemporary reports of scandalous court cases. That the power of conversation was a cause of some anxiety is illustrated by the rash of sermons on the topic.³⁹ Sermons are a particularly apposite means of examining social anxiety, as these, more than most other texts, are inspired by a drive to regulate. Richard Lucas’s sermon, ‘The influence of conversation’ (1708), was one of the most evidently popular: it was reprinted numerous times throughout the century.

Lucas’s sermon begins with a focus on the transformative power of conversation. He warns that ‘a custom of talking unconcernedly and loosely does naturally make way for carelessness and liberty in our Actions’.⁴⁰ Conversation is a means by which the individual character may be constituted and modified for better or worse. However, Lucas takes an opposite stance when he addresses the issue of the nature of Christian discourse: ‘The Man of Letters, the Man of Business, the Man of Pleasure, never wants Matter; Books furnish the one, Business the other, and their Vices and Diversions the third. ’Tis strange that a Christian alone should be barren’.⁴¹ Here, Lucas divides society into ‘types’ of men, suggesting that their conversation will reflect their individual typologies (the conversation of a Christian reflects his Christianity), rather than that their character typologies will be constituted through conversation. Conversation appears as a powerful mode of self-definition and self-transformation; it is both in need of regulation in itself, and imagined as the means by which social regulation may occur.

³⁹ Some examples are: Rice Adams, ‘The excellency, wisdom, and usefulness of an upright and sincere conversation’ (London, 1708); Richard Chambre, ‘The duty and necessity of a Christian conversation’ (London, 1711); Sir William Dawes, ‘The nature and necessity of a Christian conversation’ (London, 1705).

⁴⁰ Richard Lucas, ‘The influence of conversation, with the regulation thereof’ (London, 1708), 8.

⁴¹ Lucas, ‘The influence of conversation’, 15.

By contrast, secular texts on conversation focus less on morals and more on manners. The sheer number of such texts illustrates the extent to which sociability was in part constituted through the medium of text.⁴² First and foremost, knowledge of the conversational arts was one of the means of defining the gentleman. Translations from French and Renaissance Italian texts demonstrate the influence of salon and courtly models for conversation. However, where the number of people who might conceivably engage in polite society was growing to encompass individuals outside the aristocracy, the idea of gentility was a useful means of policing such growth. Gentility, civilisation and politeness were terms that permitted the controlled expansion of the elite to include certain sets of individuals who could internalise the norms and ideologies, and master the required social forms and manners, of politeness. Some of the titles suggest that the function of such manuals was to offer the gentry a flattering reflection of itself, rather than to teach the labourer how to ape the gentleman. For example, *Models of conversation for persons of polite education* (1765) incorporates an implicit contradiction: people of polite education should not need models for conversation. However, such titles also suggest the iterative conversational model described by philosophers like Shaftesbury and Hume, in which acts of conversation, and reflection on conversation, constitute an ongoing process of civilisation.

⁴² For example, John Constable, *The conversation of gentlemen considered in most of the ways, that make their mutual company agreeable, or disagreeable. In six dialogues* (London, 1738); Jean Baptiste Morvan, Abbé de Bellegarde, *Models of conversation for persons of polite education. Selected and translated from the French* (London, 1765); *The art of conversation; or, the polite entertainer: calculated for the improvement of both sexes, ... By a nobleman of distinguished abilities* (London, 1757); *Reflections on conversation, more particularly that of gentlemen, or men of parts. Wherein are consider'd what observations in reading are proper* (London, 1751); William Cook, *Conversation: a didactic poem, in three parts* (London, 1796); Evan Lloyd, *Conversation. A poem* (London, 1767); Benjamin Stillingfleet, *An essay on conversation* (London, 1737); Stephano Guazzo, *The art of conversation... Written originally in Italian* (London, 1738); Pierre Ortigue Vaumorière, *The art of pleasing in conversation. Written by the famous Cardinal Richelieu. Translated out of French* (London, 1708).

Secular texts, more so than sermons or philosophical treatises, offer a sense of the context in which conversation was thought to have taken place. Shaftesbury, certainly, made it clear that conversation should take place in ‘the Liberty of *the Club*...among *Gentlemen and Friends*’.⁴³ His context for conversation is strikingly egalitarian; by excluding women and the lower orders, the equality of gentlemen prevails. Later texts, however, written by those with perhaps a less elevated claim to gentility, manifested a much greater sense of hierarchical social context. These suggest that rather than being a free-ranging exploration in which all might participate, polite conversation was very much structured around rules of status and accepted mannered behaviour. Henry Fielding’s ‘Essay on Conversation’ (1743) constructs an imagined conversant rather like Fielding himself, whose claim to gentility was not at issue, but whose somewhat precarious financial status may have made him particularly aware of issues of social hierarchy.

The gentry (supposedly) have a claim to dignified independence; although they do not need to scramble for favours from the elite, their lack of title is also crucial in establishing their social place. Fielding suggests that one should avoid both ‘an abject and base Servility’ and ‘an impudent and encroaching Freedom’ with superiors, recommending instead, ‘that golden Mean, which declares a Man ready to acquiesce in allowing the Respect due to a Title by the Laws and Customs of his Country, but impatient of any Insult, and disdaining to purchase the Intimacy with, and Favour of a Superior, at the Expence of Conscience or Honour’.⁴⁴ A certain kind of equality exists among the genteel of any status in the assertion of personal independence and freedom of conscience. Hierarchy persists, but is expressed through a discourse of the mere social forms of respect rather than personal reliance on the

⁴³ Shaftesbury, ‘Sensus Communis’, 45.

⁴⁴ Henry Fielding, ‘An Essay on Conversation’ in *Miscellanies*, I, ed. Henry Knight Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 119-152, 132.

patronage of those in power. Importantly, Fielding considers failure in condescension to inferiors ‘impious in a Christian Society and most absurd and ridiculous in a trading Nation’.⁴⁵ Conversation invokes commerce; the flow of conversation up and down the social scale mirrors the flow of goods and services that maintains Britain’s national status, and which itself is perceived as part of the civilising process. The necessity, indeed, the desirability of trade, requires that hierarchy become more flexible, not that it disappear altogether.

Much of Fielding’s ‘Essay’ is taken up with instructions on the conversational art, implicitly acknowledging the need to educate those who lack social polish.⁴⁶ Significantly, however, his emphasis that good-breeding consists in ‘the Art of pleasing, or contributing as much as possible to Ease and Happiness of those with whom you converse’ reiterates the link between sociability and natural goodness.⁴⁷ Learning the conversational arts is ascribed to a natural desire to see others happy, rather than to cynical motives of social aspiration. The claim that the moral self is displayed, or even to some extent constituted, through conversational interaction – that one’s ‘character’ is most clearly visible in the social context – is utilised in printed texts that define and model the conversational arts. Some of these texts, such as *The art of conversation; or, the polite entertainer: calculated for the improvement of both sexes* (1757) offer an education not only in the correct conversational mores, but in reading character through dramatic ‘scenes’ of conversations. Such texts may display conversational ‘struggle’, as inappropriate speeches from participants are challenged or revised by others, signalling the use of conversation as moderating tool for didactic purposes. Contemporary print texts, both

⁴⁵ Fielding, ‘Essay on Conversation’, 141.

⁴⁶ For example, Fielding warns against jargon, noise, violence, slander, reflections on countries, religions or professions, blasphemy, indecency, references to any past unpleasantness, etc. (Fielding, ‘Essay on Conversation’, 142-152).

⁴⁷ Fielding, ‘Essay on Conversation’, 123.

fiction and non-fiction, draw heavily on the question of social role-playing. The idea of character constituted through conversational display is of central importance. However, the freedom of performance is heavily moderated by didactic imperatives: that which one's peers will recognise and sanction as appropriate.

This brief overview serves to delineate the number of discourses implicated in participation in sociable conversation. Correctly displayed, the sociable individual could be seen as progressive, moral and civilised. As the title of *The Art of Conversation...calculated for the improvement of both sexes* suggests, women had a role in sociable conversation; indeed, by mid-century, were seen to be a crucial factor in the conversational civilising process. Although Fielding's reader appears to be gendered male, his context for conversation is very obviously mixed company. For example, he recommends that profanity or indecency be avoided in conversation, for the twofold reason that it gives pain to the ladies, and that it is vulgar and irrational.⁴⁸ Hume's essays (published between 1741 and 1742), more consciously sociable texts than the *Treatise* and consequently much more popular, delineate a contemporary concept of what I shall designate 'heterosociability': the idea that conversation between men and women was the most desirable form of sociable interaction.

In 'Of Essay Writing', Hume deplores what he calls the 'separation of the learned from the conversable world'.⁴⁹ Through this separation, learning has become 'barbarous', 'chimerical' and 'unintelligible' through its dissociation from politeness, and conversation has become 'unentertaining' and 'unprofitable' through its dissociation from history, poetry and philosophy.⁵⁰ The 'commerce' or 'league' that Hume proposes between the learned and conversable worlds depends partly on the

⁴⁸ Fielding, 'Essay on Conversation', 148.

⁴⁹ David Hume, 'Of Essay Writing' in *Selected Essays*, ed. Stephen Copley and Andrew Edgar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 1-5, 1.

⁵⁰ Hume, 'Of Essay Writing', 2.

existence of a man like himself, who is willing to act as an ‘ambassador’ from the world of learning to the world of conversation.⁵¹ However, it also depends on the acquiescence of ‘the fair sex, who are the sovereigns of the empire of conversation’, and, when possessed of ‘sense and education’ are ‘much better judges of all polite writing than men of the same degree of understanding’.⁵²

The one area where women fail, observes Hume, is in their judgement of ‘books of gallantry and devotion’, in which women’s ‘tender and amorous disposition’ and tendency to be ‘easily affected’ clouds their capacities.⁵³ This flaw, however, can be corrected if women ‘give encouragement to men of sense and knowledge to frequent their company’.⁵⁴ The model of heterosociability that Hume proposes is based on the common perception that conversation will moderate and correct any false tendencies in either party. For Hume, however, this process works between the sexes to civilise and polish men’s conversation, and to correct women’s leanings towards false taste. Hume’s polite gallantry in denoting women the sovereigns of conversation serves both to emphasise and undermine his point that women’s preference for gallantry is indicative of debased taste. In one breath he elevates women’s conversational role to the level of conversational arbiters, crucial in the progress of polite society, and in another, through his tone and style of address, he relegates them to secondary citizens, marked by a failure in rational judgement. This doubleness in women’s conversational role wherein women are given primacy while their judgement is simultaneously called into question, could be both limiting and enabling. Women’s civilising role depended heavily on a rather restricted version of

⁵¹ Hume, ‘Of Essay Writing’, 2.

⁵² Hume, ‘Of Essay Writing’, 3.

⁵³ Hume, ‘Of Essay Writing’, 4.

⁵⁴ Hume, ‘Of Essay Writing’, 4.

femininity which required that women be modest, sensitive and virtuous in order to properly moderate men's tendencies to roughness.

However, Hume's attempt to conflate learning and conversation marks a social value placed on educated conversation in which participants will not only please each other, but instruct each other as well. At mid-eighteenth century, the woman who united the powerful qualities of learning and virtue was accorded an unusually high cultural value. Eger argues:

Enlightenment discussions of the fine arts (and their public) not only acknowledged the contributions of both sexes to a model of social progress but also promoted the cultural achievements and moral virtues of women as integral to its future definition and development.⁵⁵

Eger takes a painting by Richard Samuels, 'The Nine Modern Muses of Great Britain' (1779; see appendix) as evidence for the claim that women had a role in social and cultural progress. A number of texts published from mid-century onwards that salute educated women serve a similar purpose, to confirm Britain's civilised national identity. The best known of these is probably George Ballard's *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain* (1752). Harriet Guest argues that for eighteenth-century thinkers, 'the idea of learning as a form of fashionable elegance, and of the learned woman as a moralized figure of display and desire, confirms that national identity is...not corrupt or a sign of barbaric masculine isolation, but civilized and progressive'.⁵⁶

Noticeably, the majority of such representations of women as agents of civilised culture are written by men. Texts such as those by Ballard, Hume and Fielding illustrate a tendency for commentators on conversation to focus on the process of constructing the gentleman, with all the gendered connotations the word

⁵⁵ Eger, 'Representing culture', in *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere*, ed. Eger et al., 106-107.

⁵⁶ Harriet Guest, *Small Change: Women, Learning, Patriotism, 1750-1810* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 69.

implies. Part of masculine gentility is a proper appreciation for the civilising power of femininity – as defined by men. However, the possibilities made available for women by the presentation of the educated, polite, sociable woman as an ideal should not be overlooked. Samuels's painting and Ballard's *Memoirs* illustrate the sanctioning of women's visibility in ways that did not transgress against what was seen as proper femininity. Participation in the civilising process of educated conversation was enabling for women in the sense that women were able to display themselves as simultaneously moral, educated and demonstrably of social value, even of national value. Thus, educated conversation offered a model within which women could both confirm their own value and launch a social critique, enabled by the possibilities that conversation offered for both self-display and behaviour imagined to be socially moderating.

By the mid-eighteenth century conversation, although in some ways associated with the freedom of role-play and the possibility for an ongoing process of self-construction, was also accorded a firmly didactic, disciplining role in society. Although social change and the expansion of trade meant greater flexibility in the context for conversation, and the loosening of strictly hierarchical ties, conversation was as much a means of registering status as escaping it. Above all, conversation was imagined as a process, an endless cycle of exchange in which what could be accorded recognition and valued as civilised was filtered away from what could not. Ascription of sociability to a desire to please, or to natural affection, to some extent elides the instrumentality of social connections. This section has partially demonstrated the role of print in the construction of social norms of conversation in that it uses several well-known and influential texts as the basis for its analysis. The next section analyses more closely the phenomenon of what might be designated a sociable literary culture

in the first half of the eighteenth century. It argues that literary culture in many ways illustrates not just the usefulness of social networks, but the cultural value accorded to sociable display, and demonstrates the ways in which the various discourses of sociability examined here can be read as influencing and influenced by sociable literary behaviour. In particular, it explains further why women were particularly enabled by sociability to engage in authorial and critical activities, and thus, the value of collaboration to women writers.

Sociable literary culture

There is no single model for ‘authorship’ in the eighteenth century. Eighteenth-century literary culture incorporated a variety of modes of authorship, from a predominantly manuscript-based mode of writing and circulation, centred on small coteries and literary networks of friends and relations, to the newly emergent mass print culture. These two forms of literary production appear to be diametrically opposed to each other, but could often overlap in significant ways. As print culture expanded beyond London, and the public’s demand for printed materials grew, means of disciplining the apparently uncontrollable mass of print grew alongside print culture, in particular, the institutions of literary criticism and attempts to create some form of national canon. A sense of changing literary culture, variation of modes in authorship and widespread implicit and explicit debate about the most desirable manner of literary production and consumption is crucial to understanding how the collaborations examined here operate. This section examines a number of aspects of literary culture that were inflected by discourses of sociability, women’s role in sociable authorship and critical discourse and its availability to women.

Dustin Griffin’s work on literary sociability is a useful starting-point for investigations of social authorship and collaboration, although it has significant

limitations. When he reminds us that collaboration was common ‘even in the careers of the major writers’ (referring to Pope, Swift, Dryden and Johnson), he demonstrates that sociable literary culture was the norm, neither aberrant, nor gendered, nor solely associated with second-rate authors.⁵⁷ Griffin contends that eighteenth-century literature grew out of the social context of ‘good-natured emulative combat’, asserting a sense of equality in social literary production: ‘The poet appears in print among his peers’.⁵⁸ In a later essay, Griffin observes that literature was often consumed socially as well as produced socially, whether in private literary social circles, or in public spaces like the coffee-house or the theatre.⁵⁹ Griffin also notes a characteristic development of literary networks that had their roots in some form of identification between their members, as with the Tory Scriblerus Club, for example, although he points out that few literary projects were directly attributable to the club itself.⁶⁰ For Griffin, however, literary networking appears troublesome, a possible limitation on the genius of a writer. Citing Pope as an example of an author who ‘managed to extricate himself from [his] social circumstances’ despite his rootedness in literary networks, Griffin argues: ‘To emphasise the social dimension of authorship is not to reduce the author to the voice of the community, a Foucauldian “author-function”, some necessary instrument through which writing is presented to a reading public’.⁶¹ Such wariness of sociable authorship suggests that literary communities somehow set

⁵⁷ Dustin Griffin, ‘Critical Opinion: Augustan Collaboration’, *Essays in Criticism*, 37/1 (January, 1987), 1-10, 1.

⁵⁸ Griffin, ‘Critical Opinion’, 7;8.

⁵⁹ Dustin Griffin, ‘The social world of authorship 1660-1714’, in *The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660-1780*, ed. John Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 37-60, 41-2.

⁶⁰ Griffin, ‘The social world of authorship’, 50-51.

⁶¹ Griffin, ‘The social world of authorship’, 59; 42. Griffin does not argue that the growth of professional authorship is in any sense more ‘liberating’ for an author than literary production through social networks, pointing out that such a narrative of change and progress is too simplistic a description of a period in which different forms of literary production existed side by side, and were used tactically by authors. However, his suggestion that the best authors rose above their social circumstances through skill and talent does nonetheless imply that he sees literary sociability as a limitation for good authorship.

limits to the author's imagination. However, it is important to understand that authors did not need to extract themselves from their communities to write their own opinions, or in their own voices – for some authors, communities could be enabling in this respect. When writing is conceived as a social and sociable activity, when the meaning of writing itself is rooted in the idea of conversational exchange, address or debate, then the idea that an author is limited by his (or her) social circle simply becomes a meaningless proposition.

Literary sociability was manifested in both manuscript and print culture, indeed, it was part of the means by which the two could overlap, and a way of conceiving the act of writing itself. By examining texts that give a sense of literary networking in action, it is possible to see how sociability could be used both as a means of exhibiting a desirable quality in an author, and a way of thinking through the meaning of putting pen to paper. Sociable authorship operated in a variety of ways within the context of a multiplicity of authorial possibilities. Jane Barker is an excellent example of a woman author who made full use of the variety of means of textual distribution in the early eighteenth century, and exemplifies aspects of a literary culture conceived as sociable. Her poems were circulated in manuscript among her circle of male Cambridge friends and printed in *Poetical Recreations* (1687), a volume that contained poems by several hands. However, Barker subsequently produced a manuscript in which her printed poems are substantially revised, asserting that the printed text was published without her permission. Some of the revised poems appear in Barker's prose works, printed later in her career between 1713 and 1726. Three of her prose works, *Love Intrigues* (1713), *A Patch-Work Screen for the Ladies* (1723) and *The Lining of the Patch-Work Screen* (1726) are structurally determined by an imagined female coterie, centred on Barker's

mouthpiece, Galesia.⁶² *Love Intrigues* begins with a dedication to the Countess of Exeter, and the *Patch-Work Screen* texts are published by sale of copyright. Barker's literary career, even in potted form, is highly suggestive, incorporating coterie manuscript exchange between men and women, the publication of a coterie-authored text, and single-authored printed texts, published by sale of copyright, that nevertheless take feminocentric literary coterie as their structuring principle. Literary sociability seen throughout the career of a single author can have numerous forms and meanings attributed to it. For Barker – a Catholic, unmarried, female, Jacobite author – literary community, whether real or imagined, must have been a powerful way of working through her marginalised societal status. Even though, as King observes, Barker was an 'odd woman largely cut off from family, community and other traditional sources of meaning', she still actively intervened in a literary culture envisioned as sociable.⁶³

Margaret Ezell's investigations into manuscript culture in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries reveal that manuscript culture was neither quintessentially a private activity, nor confined to either gender. In *Writing Women's Literary History* Ezell argues that we are too quick to assume that the lack of published material by women in the late seventeenth century is evidence of women's exclusion from the literary world. In fact, she argues, 'Manuscript circulation was a socially acceptable literary practice and, in short, is the opposite tradition from that of isolation, alienation, and competition'.⁶⁴ In *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print*, Ezell develops this thesis, commenting: 'By denying the significance of script

⁶² For more substantial information on Barker, see Kathryn King, *Jane Barker, Exile: A Literary Career 1675-1725* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000). For information on the revised poems of *Poetical Recreations* see Kathryn King, *The Poems of Jane Barker: The Magdalen Manuscript* (Oxford: Magdalen College, 1998).

⁶³ King, *Jane Barker*, 15.

⁶⁴ Margaret J. M. Ezell, *Writing Women's Literary History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 57.

authorship, manuscript circles, and social texts, we have in the name of democracy apparently disenfranchised the participation of the majority of the literate population of the period'.⁶⁵ Manuscript culture was often, but not always, closely linked to early modern coterie culture. Early forms of literary transmission often took place within literary coterie, using manuscript exchange and poetical address as a means of establishing authorial reputation. The use of coterie names derived from romance, such as Barker's 'Galesia', Katherine Philips's 'Orinda' or Mary Chudleigh's 'Marissa', suggests that these authors' conception of their authorial identity was constituted through their participation in literary circles.

Manuscript culture and coterie-like behaviour persisted well into the eighteenth century, not wiped out by the newer technologies of print, but existing alongside, overlapping, and even providing a means of grounding aspects of print culture in the recognisable world of manuscripts. Certainly, the sociable aspects of manuscript culture persisted, offering a sense of social materiality to a print text that could appear disembodied, and adrift from its social context. Letter circulation was a further means of establishing a reputation as an author, and as Melanie Bigold demonstrates, was used extensively by authors like Elizabeth Rowe, Catharine Cockburn and Elizabeth Carter. Bigold argues for 'the continuation and equal status of manuscript circulation as an accepted method of engaging with the wider republic of letters' throughout the eighteenth century.⁶⁶ Ezell also suggests that correspondence networks 'provided educated women as well as men with opportunities for intellectual engagements and insights which their circumstances,

⁶⁵ Margaret J. M. Ezell, *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 102.

⁶⁶ Melanie Bigold, 'Women of Letters, Manuscript Circulation and Print Afterlives in the Eighteenth Century: Elizabeth Rowe, Catharine Cockburn and Elizabeth Carter', D.Phil. thesis (Oxford University, 2006), 4.

excluded from universities and learned societies, might not immediately suggest'.⁶⁷

Formal letter exchange on a weighty topic of literature, politics or religion was perceived as a valid means of intervening in the major intellectual topics of the day rather than a private individual exchange.

Within the world of print, an author could solicit patronage, publish by subscription, or sell copyright in the text outright to a bookseller. The former two modes of publication maintained a sense of social culture by demonstrating to the reader the elegant, titled, or literary connections of the author. Sale of copyright in theory meant that the author was alienated from the text, which would appear before a faceless and indistinguishable mass readership. In actual fact, this version of mass print culture is perhaps overstated. As Terry Belanger has described, at the beginning of the century, fewer than one hundred booksellers had a virtual monopoly on the book trade in England, centred primarily in London and the trade carried on largely through personal relationships and networks of contacts.⁶⁸ James Raven's detailed description of the eighteenth-century London book trade emphasises that the twenty or so large publishing booksellers were public figures, possessing an aura of mystique through their contacts with the literati.⁶⁹ That booksellers as well as authors could be famous in their own right illustrates the visibility of the print process. The closeness of the book trade suggests that 'mass print culture' of the eighteenth century, was, by today's standards, rather small. Moyra Haslett argues that even supposedly anonymous texts were not as anonymous as they now appear: 'That questions of attribution were resolved, if sometimes incorrectly, by eighteenth-century readers

⁶⁷ Margaret J. M. Ezell, *The Patriarch's Wife: Literary Evidence and the History of the Family* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 73.

⁶⁸ Terry Belanger 'Publishers and writers in eighteenth-century England', in *Books and their Readers in Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. Isabel Rivers (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1982), 5-25.

⁶⁹ See James Raven, 'Investing in Books: The Supremacy of the Booksellers', in *The Business of Books: Booksellers and the English Book Trade, 1450-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 119-153, 121-23.

suggests that the publishing world of this period had a confident belief in itself as a knowable community'.⁷⁰ The practice of publication by subscription, apart from being potentially more lucrative than sale of copyright, operates partly through the reader's recognition of the listed names, and elevation of the author by association. The undifferentiated mass of readers, while appealing as a literary trope, may not have been so faceless. Nor should we automatically dissociate print from sociable networking, or indeed, sociable networking from professional authorial behaviour. Authors – especially women authors – could be ingenious in mediating the variety of possibilities of self-construction offered by literary culture at the time.

Recent studies have emphasised the professional strategising that lay behind women writers' sociable literary activities. Sarah Prescott suggests that for early eighteenth-century women writers, actual or implied literary sociability was a mode of authorship that purported to set itself against the struggles of the commercial print market, even as it exploited the possibilities of sociability as a marketing tool as a means to get into print: 'An emphasis on morality, provinciality and an amateur status could itself be an effective marketing ploy, not a symbolic retreat from the literary marketplace and literary culture in general'.⁷¹ Schellenberg argues that retrospective devaluation of women writers portraying themselves as writing from a community denies women's active intervention as professionals in literary culture, and their use of sociability as a professional authorial strategy:

Thus much of what the women writers in my study group and their readers articulated as the signs of their success – placement in a male-defined tradition, substantial subscription lists headed by prestigious names, the satisfaction of a loyal group of readers, recognition for their expert craftsmanship or for their

⁷⁰ Moyra Haslett, *Pope to Burney, 1714-1779: Scriblerians to Bluestockings* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 15.

⁷¹ Sarah Prescott, *Women, Authorship and Literary Culture, 1690-1740* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 8.

modelling of valued social qualities – came or be devalued or deemed irrelevant as measures of literary achievement.⁷²

Texts that overtly presented themselves as having emerged from a sociable literary world therefore modelled valued qualities that reflected favourably on the author – particularly if the social literary world in question was peopled by respected and influential individuals.

One particular text that illustrates the purpose of sociable authorship is Mary Barber's *Poems on Several Occasions* (1734), which shows how Barber utilises patronage, subscription, and the aid of a circle of distinguished literary figures to get her manuscript poems into print. The volume begins, not with a direct dedication, but with a letter from Jonathan Swift to the Earl of Orrery, humorously describing how Barber has sought his advice on how best to write a grateful dedication to the Earl without the taint of flattery.⁷³ This letter is followed by a second from Barber to the Earl of Orrery, containing the true dedication, expiating further on the Earl's virtues and generosity as patron.⁷⁴ The dedication is followed by a preface authored by Barber, in which she alludes to a number of sources from which she has received aid and encouragement:

I wrote some few occasional Verses, and was encouraged to print them by several Persons of Quality and Distinction, who generously offer'd to solicit a Subscription for me. This, added to the Goodness of some Men of Genius, who with great Condescension undertook to correct what I had written, together with the Prospect of some Advantage to my Family, drew me into a Resolution of publishing the following POEMS.⁷⁵

The preface is followed by a lengthy list of subscribers, including Burlington, Arbuthnot, Bathurst, Gay, and Pope, not to mention a bevy of titled subscribers. Even Robert Walpole is listed, suggesting that literary networks could supersede political

⁷² Schellenberg, *Professionalization*, 14.

⁷³ Mary Barber, *Poems on Several Occasions* (London, 1734), iii-viii.

⁷⁴ Barber, *Poems*, ix-xvi.

⁷⁵ Barber, 'The Preface', in *Poems*, xvii-xxx, xxii-xxiii.

allegiances. After the list of subscribers comes a poem in Barber's honour by Mrs Grierson, whom Barber has described in the preface as an exemplar of unparalleled good nature, virtue and learning.⁷⁶ Grierson addresses Barber as 'Sapphira', invoking the coterie practice of assigning pastoral names as a poetic coterie identity. The first poem by Barber in the text is addressed to 'the Hon. Miss Carteret, now Countess of Dysert'.⁷⁷ By the time the reader arrives at Barber's poems, he or she has a very thorough sense of Barber's participation in the most elevated literary network imaginable for the period.

There is also a strong sense of printed text emerging from a context of manuscript exchange. Barber's use of both patronage and subscription methods shows her extracting the maximum amount of social status and financial profit from her volume. Through her address to a patron she gains a link to the aristocratic world, and through subscription she shows evidence of her connections in fashionable literary London. Barber's text is a dramatic example of how intimations of a sociable manuscript culture could be exploited for the purposes of print, and how sociability itself is presented as a quality of poetry and the poet that is worthy of display. As the selected examples demonstrate, women and men wrote together as much as within homosocial circles. Texts such as Barker's *Poetical Recreations* or Barber's *Poems on Several Occasions* model, not just the values of sociability, but the values of heterosociability in which men and women participate equally in literary circles and networks. These texts demonstrate the idea of a sociable literary culture as something recognisable and coherent to eighteenth-century readers, and from which the collaborative authors examined in the forthcoming chapters draw heavily. Moreover, collaborative authors did not merely perform sociability as a means of aligning

⁷⁶ Barber, *Poems*, xxvii-xxix.

⁷⁷ Barber, *Poems*, 1.

themselves with a polite conversational community, they used that performance as a means of critically interrogating sociability, socio-literary relationships and literary culture itself.

Critical discourse offers a further example of the uses to which literary culture put sociability. The potential of art and art criticism in creating and demarcating the practice of polite sociability was identified very early in the period by the periodical press. Joseph Addison engages in the active construction of the early eighteenth-century idea of the gentleman-critic in the *Spectator*. As David Marshall observes of the *Spectator*: ‘It aims not only to improve polite conversation in the world but also to draw its readers into the sort of conversation that will make them conversant with the best authors and critics’.⁷⁸ To give an example, Addison’s *Spectator* series on the pleasures of the imagination identifies an imagined community of taste, constituted by individuals marked by an apparently natural capacity for artistic appreciation. Addison conceives of taste as consisting of sociable engagement with the artistic object; a man of true taste can ‘converse with a Picture, and find an agreeable Companion in a Statue’.⁷⁹ In his preamble to the series in *Spectator* 409, in which he attempts to give an ‘Account’ of ‘*fine Taste*’, Addison argues that the best writing emerges from conversation between authors: ‘I cannot think that *Corneille, Racine, Moliere, Boileau, la Fontaine, Bruyere, Bossu*, or the *Daciers*, would have written so well as they have done, had they not been Friends and Contemporaries’.⁸⁰ Conversation is the structuring principle for the process of cultivating taste, whether through reading or engaging in spoken dialogue. Authors, through conversation with

⁷⁸ David Marshall, ‘Shaftesbury and Addison: criticism and the public taste’, in *The Eighteenth Century*, ed. Nisbet and Rawson, 633-657, 638.

⁷⁹ Joseph Addison, *Spectator* No. 411 (Saturday, June 21, 1712), in *The Spectator*, ed. Donald Bond, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), III, 538.

⁸⁰ Addison, *Spectator* No. 409 (Thursday, June 19, 1712), in *The Spectator*, ed. Bond, III, 527; 529.

each other, produce works of genius, which may then be used to cultivate taste in others. Sociability through writing is imagined as self-perpetuating.

Notably, however, the use of the word ‘secret’ recurs throughout the series of papers, directly contravening the focus on speech and dialogue by invoking a silent, private experience of artistic consumption, as in ‘secret Refreshment in a Description’, ‘secret Satisfaction’ or ‘secret Pleasure’.⁸¹ The word ‘secret’ does invoke secrecy, as in ‘information not to be shared with others’, but the context of Addison’s use of the word suggests the other senses of the word as well, both as used in ‘secreted’, when something is hidden or stored away, and in the physiological sense of animal secretion, where some form of matter is extracted and stored out of another substance in the body. Addison’s use of the word refers to an internalised description of physical artistic appreciation, implying that taste is literally in the blood, a reaction of both body and mind. The idea of secrecy helps to firmly demarcate the limits of sociability in society and criticism by denoting taste a naturally occurring phenomenon that is to some degree beyond the power of communication. To converse about and through literature, therefore, is both to display one’s own credentials as a possessor of natural taste, and to cultivate and refine one’s taste through sociable interaction – in other words, to find ways to perform what is ‘secret’: that which is part of one’s intrinsic nature, much as a display of good manners in sociability itself was supposed to reflect an individual’s good nature and desire to please others.⁸² A sense of the possibilities of tasteful and polite conversation in the reformation of public taste persisted. At mid-century, Eliza Haywood in the guise of the Female Spectator is able to assert that, ‘the Choice of our Amusements, Recreations, and

⁸¹ Addison, *Spectator* No. 411; No. 412 (Monday, June 23, 1712); No. 413 (Tuesday, June 24, 1712), in *The Spectator*, ed. Bond, III, 538; 542; 545.

⁸² McKeon argues that Addison’s emphasis on secrecy ‘reminds us that this distinction between the general incapacity of mankind and the singular capacity of the few is also one between public and private pleasures’ (*Secret History*, 365).

Employments is not only a Proof of having a *good Taste*, but will also enable those to acquire it who have it not by Nature'.⁸³ The power of sociable display to aid in reforming and reconstituting the self is invoked to promote social reform.

Criticism in this period could be a 'social act', articulated through polite and rational conversation.⁸⁴ As Addison's language demonstrates, however, polite conversation or social interaction was not only the proposed context for criticism, but an imagined means by which an individual might relate to a work of art. James Basker identifies a contemporary critical shift, expressed through the periodical press, away from rule-bound, orthodox criticism in favour of 'common sense' criticism and 'a focus on the power of art to affect its beholders'.⁸⁵ In this kind of criticism, the network of relationships between artist, work of art and consumer is that which is under scrutiny, more than the inherent qualities of each. The status, the identity and the meaning of the artist, the art and the consumer are all determined by a complex interplay of effect and affect, constituted through acts of artistic consumption rather than production. Widespread debate about who is reading and how they read betrays anxiety about the possibility that rational conversational exchange is not a stable process of grounding meaning in community values, but a way of highlighting the contingency of authorial identity and artistic meaning in a work of art. Frank Donoghue argues that professional criticism emerged at mid-century partly because it was thought necessary to 'police the relations between that new variety of readers, the books they were buying, and the authors of those books'.⁸⁶ Authors' attempts to

⁸³ Eliza Haywood, *The Female Spectator* (Vol. III, Book XV) in *Selected Works of Eliza Haywood*, Set 2, Vols. II & III: *The Female Spectator*, ed. Alexander Pettit and Kathryn R. King (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2001), III, 80.

⁸⁴ Douglas Lane Patey, 'The institution of criticism in the eighteenth century', in *The Eighteenth Century*, ed. Nisbet and Rawson, 3-31, 12.

⁸⁵ James Basker, 'Criticism and the rise of periodical literature', in *The Eighteenth Century*, ed. Nisbet and Rawson, 316-332, 322.

⁸⁶ Frank Donoghue, *The Fame Machine: Book Reviewing and Eighteenth-Century Literary Careers* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 10.

stabilise, or to explore the lack of stability in, the relationship between author and text, text and reader, and author and reader should therefore be considered an intervention into criticism. Contemporary critical practice permits us to read relationships that are constituted through textual conversation as a critical lens, or a means of commenting on authorship, print culture, or reading. Conversely, relationships expressed through text engage in social criticism, in that the critical discussions enacted reflect back on the relationship in ways that are suggestive, didactic or subversive.

The way that criticism imagines itself as engaged with social relations between author, text and reader suggests a broad potential for the application of critical discourse that challenges the dominance of the figure of the naturally tasteful gentleman-critic. Laura Runge argues that eighteenth-century constructions of the critic worked to exclude women from the role:

In its best construction, women's education should be limited and subordinated to male interests; in its worst, female learning signifies the collapse of civil and moral order. Although a classical education was remotely possible for some women, pervasive prejudices effectively prevented a woman's easy familiarity with the Ancients and, consequently, disqualified her from the socially constituted role of the critic.⁸⁷

Where women engaged in overt acts of criticism, continues Runge, they suffer from attempts to accede to a hegemonic discourse gendered male: 'Although in different ways, female critics position themselves in relation to the dominant languages of critical analysis, and their expression often includes uncomfortable dialogism rather than the gentlemanly ease of Addison'.⁸⁸ Runge's assessment of what could be read as enacting the social aspect of criticism as 'uncomfortable dialogism' suggests that she does not take into account the ways in which concepts of sociable criticism could be

⁸⁷ Laura L. Runge, *Gender and Language in British Literary Criticism 1660-1790* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 34.

⁸⁸ Runge, *Gender and Language*, 128.

enabling for women, or even constitute a means of investigation of critical form itself. Terry Castle observes of eighteenth-century women critics that ‘one cannot avoid noticing in their works the often distorting effects of cultural prejudice. Exaggerated self-consciousness – a stylized display of authorial timidity or self-effacement – frequently mars eighteenth-century feminine critical rhetoric’.⁸⁹ Castle also argues that attention to morality by women critics helped to establish a feminine realm of knowledge and was a means by which women ‘compensated for their profound sense of professional insecurity’.⁹⁰ Runge and Castle both demonstrate a firmly gendered critical model, then assume that women’s criticism could only be seen as anxious attempts at emulation rather than sustained and strategic interventions into critical discourse. As this thesis proves, Elizabeth Griffith, Sarah Fielding, Jane Collier and the Minifie sisters all seek to explore the ways in which the literary relationships expressed through their familiar collaboration impact on social conceptions of the relations between author, text and reader. In so doing, they make their status as woman critics visible, and aim to delineate the terms in which they envisage their print-market entry.

The attempts of Griffith, Fielding, Collier and the Minifies to apply critical rhetoric to interpersonal familiar relations and vice versa should also be read as a challenge to the dominant alternative to the figure of the gentleman-critic: the rabble of petty critics. Notably, anti-critical images should also be seen in light of strictures on sociability. The poor critic is seen to have failed in the conversational arts. As print culture expanded, the exchange of critical opinion was as likely to be described as dissonant and conflicted as genteel and tasteful. Pope’s *Essay on Criticism* (1711) offers a vision of the ideal of the sociable gentleman-critic:

⁸⁹ Terry Castle, ‘Women and literary criticism’, in *The Eighteenth Century*, ed. Nisbet and Rawson, 434-455, 437.

⁹⁰ Castle, ‘Women and literary criticism’, 438.

Blest with a Taste exact, yet unconfin'd;
 A Knowledge both of Books and Humankind;
 Gen'rous Converse; a Soul exempt from Pride;
 And Love to Praise, with Reason on his Side?⁹¹

The critic's 'Gen'rous Converse' and 'Love to Praise' mark his excellence. By contrast to the ideal is the anti-critical picture of the numerous poor critics, those ten who 'Censure wrong for one who Writes amiss'.⁹² These critics are 'heavy mules', 'half-learn'd witlings' and 'Unfinish'd things'.⁹³ They are defined by lack; they are barely human, reinforcing the sense that sociable affections are a natural human phenomenon.

The negative image of the would-be critic who censures from spite, jealousy or a lack of judgement or education is as persistent as the image of the rational gentleman-critic, and is equally inflected with contemporary concepts of proper conversational behaviour. At mid-century, the critical rabble could be associated with the popular print market, as Johnson's Rambler observes:

I cannot but consider myself amidst this tumult of criticism, as a ship in a poetical tempest, impelled at the same time by opposite winds, and dashed by the waves from every quarter, but held upright by the contrariety of the assailants, and secured, in some measure, by multiplicity of distress. Had the opinion of my censurers been unanimous, it might, perhaps, have upset my resolution; but since I find them at variance with each other, I can, without scruple, neglect them, and endeavour to gain the favour of the publick, by following the direction of my own reason, and indulging the sallies of my own imagination.⁹⁴

Johnson's observation that public critical conversation has broken down illustrates the potential difficulty of a mass readership. Even as the author claims to ignore critics, he still imagines himself as constituted through relation to them, in the striking image of the ship propped up by competing gales. The Rambler's desire to gain 'the favour

⁹¹ Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Criticism in Poetical Works* ed. Herbert Davis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), 63-85, 82, ll. 639-642.

⁹² Pope, *Essay*, 64, l. 6

⁹³ Pope, *Essay*, 65, l.39; l.40; l. 42.

⁹⁴ Samuel Johnson, *Rambler* No. 23 (Tuesday, 5 June, 1750), in *The Rambler*, ed. Bate and Strauss, III, 130.

of the publick' acknowledges a print market context in which public favour may be precarious, fleeting and fickle and in which the author may struggle to imagine a stable relationship between him or herself and the reader. Griffith, Fielding and the Minifies' exploitation of sociability to make themselves critically visible must also be seen in the context of a negotiation within print culture as a whole to render relations between author, text and reader manageable. The use of 'familiarity' as a term of reference in print culture is therefore particularly loaded, as it registers a potential model of relationship between author and reader. The next section considers the issue of 'familiarity' in literary culture and the extent to which it can be mapped on to the actual familial relation.

Familiarity

In a society that scrutinised so closely its social relations and the way in which people interacted in social settings, examining family relations was an obvious associated move. McKeon points out that while the eighteenth century 'may justly be seen as witnessing the birth of the sociological imagination, which demystifies what appears given by recognizing it as, not natural, but social or cultural', the troubling flipside of this new socio-cultural imagination was 'its dependence on a knowledge of what is *truly* given, without which the demystification loses all coherence'.⁹⁵ The question of what kinds of duties and affective bonds inhered in apparently 'natural' family relations were intimately tied up with possible modes of relation outside the family, and to what extent these should replicate familial ties. For women, whose independence from the family was rarely at issue, the question of family duties and responsibilities was arguably less urgent than for men. It was expected that women

⁹⁵ Michael McKeon, 'Historicizing Patriarchy: The Emergence of Gender Difference in England, 1660-1760', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 28/ 3 (Spring, 1995), 295-322, 303.

would remain closely associated with their immediate families in the roles of daughters, wives and mothers.⁹⁶ An important shift, however, was in the flexibility of roles that various familial relations offered; relations structured along a horizontal spectrum could, for some women, offer the potential to define the woman's role along less rigid lines than might be assumed. In particular, the somewhat egalitarian relation of 'friendship' provides a model for horizontal familial relations that is enthusiastically adopted by the writers in this study. Moreover, the extent to which family relations were scrutinised and constituted through print should not be neglected. Family relations constructed in and through print offered a way in which women could make a claim to a level of equality as authors, in spite of the very real socio-economic gender inequalities of the period.

The impact of print, particularly that of the genre of domestic fiction on constructions of the family has been documented by Nancy Armstrong and Christopher Flint. Both suggest that what we now recognise respectively as the domestic woman and the modern nuclear family, formed around domestic ideologies, existed in print some time before becoming a noticeable social phenomenon – what Flint calls 'a semiotic event'.⁹⁷ In representing family relations domestic fiction subjected every form of family relationship to intense observation. Flint observes:

The intense detail of the prose fiction, its protracted form, and its sentence-by-sentence scrutiny of the verbal and familial intricacies of relationships evinces an idealized, self-sufficient community of affective individuals whose relationships to each other are concise and fully legible.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ For more on women's role within middling families see Margaret Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender, and the Family in England, 1680-1780* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

⁹⁷ See Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 258; Christopher Flint, *Family Fictions: Narrative and Domestic Relations in Britain, 1688-1798* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 10.

⁹⁸ Flint, *Family Fictions*, 16-17.

Drawing on the etymology of the word 'relation', Flint demonstrates that 'narrative fiction...seems to subordinate these versions of the self to linguistic relations, to the rigid logic of classification, to, in effect, the conception of the family'.⁹⁹

Representations of family relations tend to be seen in terms of social changes that enact a shift from strictly hierarchical systems to a more modern 'horizontal differentiation of discrete interests', as McKeon puts it.¹⁰⁰ A cultural shift to a supposedly horizontal or egalitarian model for political and social relations may work to obscure and/or reinforce women's continued unequal status.¹⁰¹ Ellen Pollak argues that incest narratives in the eighteenth century were figured as both 'transgressive and liberatory', and were one of the means by which the place of the family within the new political theories was constituted, working to articulate and obscure contradictions in the cultural shift from hierarchical to supposedly egalitarian models of familial order.¹⁰² According to Pollak, incest narratives are partly a means of reinscribing male rights over women, while simultaneously invoking a (masculine) transgression against the patriarchal order:

[W]hat is at stake in modern theory's representations of incest and its prohibition is not so much protection against the acting out of incestuous pleasures as it is the maintenance of a whole structure of social relations and the asymmetrical power dynamics of their attendant sexual arrangements (some of which arrangements tacitly encourage incestuous acts).¹⁰³

Pollak's analysis of a phenomenon that she calls 'intercestuality' – the means by which incest narratives signal 'the absence of origin that underpins modern representational regimes' – suggests the possibilities enabled when reading family

⁹⁹ Flint, *Family Fictions*, 21.

¹⁰⁰ McKeon, 'Historicizing Patriarchy', 300.

¹⁰¹ See for example, Carole Pateman, 'The Fraternal Social Contract', in *The Disorder of Women: Democracy, Feminism and Political Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), 33-57. Pateman argues that contract theory enacts a 'regime of the brother' that asserts male dominance over women as much as any 'regime of the father'.

¹⁰² Ellen Pollak, *Incest and the English Novel, 1684-1814* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 4; 17.

¹⁰³ Pollak, *Incest and the English Novel*, 17.

through textual representation is inverted so that textuality itself is seen as being constructed through familial narratives.¹⁰⁴ However, her insistence that such narratives typically work to assert masculine rights over women is open to challenge if horizontal familiar relations are subjected to closer scrutiny.

When Pollak observes that some socio-sexual arrangements ‘tacitly encourage incestuous acts’ she refers in particular to the similarity between the father-daughter relation and the marital relation. A focus on the similarities between these two relations tends to result in a critical reinscription of women’s dependent status. Caroline Gonda, for example, argues: ‘A daughter’s relationship with her father, then, must not simply inculcate obedience; it must also help to construct the particular kind of female heterosexuality which her society requires in her’.¹⁰⁵ Eleanor Wikborg argues that in fiction, a woman’s very conception of herself as a subject is often ‘precariously dependent on the father-lover’s willingness to allow her to so construe herself, and the loss of his favor is thus dramatized as a real threat to the development of her identity’.¹⁰⁶ Certainly the imagined crucial moment in a woman’s life, the move from her father’s house to her husband’s house, offered a convenient model for debating the relative importance of duty, self-interest and affective sentimental identification in a variety of family relations. However, the qualitative difference between vertical and horizontal relations should not be ignored.

Ruth Perry registers a shift in conceptions of the family throughout the eighteenth century ‘from an axis of kinship based on consanguineal ties or blood lineage to an axis based on conjugal and affinal ties of the married couple’.¹⁰⁷ As

¹⁰⁴ Pollak, *Incest and the English Novel*, 130.

¹⁰⁵ Caroline Gonda, *Reading Daughter’s Fictions, 1709-1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), xv.

¹⁰⁶ Eleanor Wikborg, *The Lover as Father Figure in Eighteenth-Century Women’s Fiction* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), 8.

¹⁰⁷ Perry, *Novel Relations*, 2.

Perry describes the shift, she explains that a move from an agrarian land-based economy to a cash-based market economy resulted in a loss of power for women of every social status, in which women came to be primarily defined by their gender and capacity to reproduce, rather than by their economic usefulness to the family. Perry thus draws the distinction between the father-daughter relation and the husband-wife relation in terms of the social value of the woman within that context: 'shifts in the social and economic purposes of kinship over the previous half-century resulted in a reconception of the daughter's place in the family as temporary, partial, and burdensome'.¹⁰⁸ Perry's argument, despite its pessimism, recognises that marital relationships were qualitatively different from father-daughter relations. It is also suggestive of a social priority placed on *constructing* relationships within and outside the immediate family context. Elizabeth and Richard Griffith for example, conceive of their marital relationship within the model of textual conversational exchange, a model that offers Elizabeth Griffith significant room for manoeuvre in defining the terms of that relationship.

Sibling relations are beginning to be recognised as one of the means by which the individual can work through the question of identity in terms of horizontal relations. Juliet Mitchell argues that lateral sibling relations are highly suggestive in the formation of personal identity:

Siblings also point to the importance of laterality for understanding the interpenetration of violence, power and non-reproductive sexuality; for the engendering of gender as a difference forged out of the matrix of sameness.¹⁰⁹

Perry admits the psycho-social importance of siblinghood: brothers and sisters 'retained something of their earlier significance to one another as keepers of one another's social identities and earliest memories. Their shared intergenerational

¹⁰⁸ Perry, *Novel Relations*, 42.

¹⁰⁹ Juliet Mitchell, *Siblings: Sex and Violence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), 225.

histories along with their sexual difference made their relationship key to their social reproduction and authentication'.¹¹⁰ Significantly, Leonore Davidoff notes a growing social pattern of formalising sibling or other lateral relations through marriage in the second half of the eighteenth century, observing:

[A] shift from "clan to kindred" from ancestors, or lineage, to interlocking exchanges of horizontal kin groups which accompanied the shift from closed estates and hierarchy to free floating capital and the formalizing of offices through more meritocratic criteria. Within this general transition, by the early nineteenth century across Europe sibling and cousin relationships reached a peak of intensity reflected at emotional and cultural levels, including a high incidence of cousin marriages and minority pattern of brothers from one family marrying sisters from another or brother and sister from one family marrying sister and brother from another.¹¹¹

The sibling relations presented in the texts of Henry and Sarah Fielding and Margaret and Susannah Minifie suggest that while the sibling bond may have diminished in instrumental social importance in the eighteenth century, it was uniquely available for appropriation in the fantasy construction of affective familial bonds conceived as impacting on conceptions of print.¹¹² Relations between women, though inflected by status in the same way as other social relations, also provided a model for considering the role of women's friendships and relations of sisterhood both within the family and in heterosociable society, including within literary culture.

Evidence that horizontal relations were conceived as potentially somewhat equal and available for construction is evidenced by the use of 'friendship' as a term that mediates horizontal relations of marriage or siblinghood. As Naomi Tadmor demonstrates, friendship could operate as a category of relation that described

¹¹⁰ Perry, *Novel Relations*, 112.

¹¹¹ Leonore Davidoff, 'Kinship As A Categorical Concept: A Case Study Of Nineteenth Century English Siblings', *Journal of Social History*, 39/2 (Winter, 2005), 411-428, 412-13.

¹¹² Naomi Tadmor argues that domestic fiction rigidly inscribed power inequalities between siblings, symbolised by conventions of naming, which 'define status and roles' and are contrary to 'egalitarian' and 'affective' models of family ('Dimensions of inequality among siblings in eighteenth-century English novels: the cases of *Clarissa* and *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*', *Continuity and Change*, 7/3 (1992), 303-334, 309-10). I do not argue that authors ignored hierarchies altogether, but that horizontal family relationships offered a more flexible approach to power balances, and were more available for reconfiguration and contestation.

everything from consanguinal family relations to social relations outside the family, including that of marriage. Friendship was a way of registering both an emotional tie and a practical tie: ‘This language of “friendship” proposed a powerful fusion of familial sentiments and familial instrumentality’.¹¹³ Haywood’s *Female Spectator* equates blood ties and friendship, taking it for granted that friendship entails the same responsibilities as family membership when she advises: ‘[W]here Proximity of Blood, or the more binding Ties of Friendship afford a reasonable Expectation of Relief in any Exigence of Fortune, it would be foolish Pride to withhold the Knowledge of it’.¹¹⁴ The setting of her comment in the context of financial embarrassment illustrates the fusion of affection and instrumentality that Tadmor identifies. Language that conflated friendship and family was a further means of registering the growing importance of social networks in which constructed relationships, rather than kinship links, were becoming of greater importance. However, this language works both ways, because it suggests that in constructing a relationship of friendship, one takes on similar responsibilities and duties to those one has for and to one’s blood kin.

The closeness of friendship to the family relation impacts on literary practice through the use of the term ‘familiarity’, a term that registers an affective social relation akin to that of a family relation, but that also implicitly inscribes a level of equality. The Rambler, in considering friendship, observes:

Friendship is seldom lasting but between equals, or where the superiority on one side is reduced by some equivalent advantage on the other. Benefits which cannot be repaid, and obligations which cannot be discharged, are not commonly found to increase affection; they excite gratitude indeed, and heighten veneration, but commonly take away that easy freedom, and familiarity

¹¹³ Naomi Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England: Household, Kinship, and Patronage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 191.

¹¹⁴ Haywood, *The Female Spectator* (Vol. I, Book III), in *The Female Spectator*, ed. Pettit and King, II, 115.

of intercourse, without which, though there may be fidelity, and zeal, and admiration, there cannot be friendship.¹¹⁵

Johnson's context for friendship is rooted in a social world of politics, business, the arts and networks of mutual support. However, his statement that friendship requires 'familiarity of intercourse' illustrates a contemporary value placed on familiarity, particularly within print.

Familiarity implicitly extends family relations beyond the immediate family circle. It can be argued that many eighteenth-century novels are about the construction of new families, based on the bonds of love, respect and identification that the blood family may have failed to provide.¹¹⁶ The importance placed on marriage choice reflects a new emphasis on relationships of familiarity constructed through affective identification. Narrative is partly a means to describe this process, but is also crucial to its enactment, as it is typically through narrative itself that bonds of familiarity are achieved. Significantly, establishing mutual identification and 'character' more often than not takes place through the medium of conversation. A recurrent instance in eighteenth-century fiction is a tableau in which two characters, meeting for the first time, exchange their 'histories'. The exchange is generally stylised, following a typical pattern of narrative. The pattern is usually the character's provenance and the major events of his or her life so far. Once the characters have exchanged stories, it is understood that they now owe each other some level of duty of care; they have established familiarity. The listener is now prompted to engage in helping the narrator with the crisis if there is one, offering money, aid, or at the very least, advice or critical commentary.

¹¹⁵ Johnson, *Rambler* No. 64 (Saturday, 27 October, 1750), in *The Rambler*, ed. Bate and Strauss, III, 344.

¹¹⁶ A pertinent example is Sarah Fielding's *David Simple*, addressed at some length in Chapter 4.

Interpolated tales in fiction can also be read as reflections on reading, or consuming stories. A character ‘obliges’ another character with their story, and they bond over a process of mutual interpretation. Paul Hunter makes the point that as the population became more mobile in the early eighteenth century a need arose to ‘provide cultural substitutes for home, family, and community’.¹¹⁷ Reading became a way of helping to work out one’s place in the world, aided by texts that disseminated news, gave advice and represented fictional characters undergoing the same kinds of trials. Hunter identifies ‘familiarity’ as one of the key generic features of the novel.¹¹⁸ There is a sense in which the reader is invited to become familiar with the people in the text, to be a part of the interpretive community of the text through engaging in the process of narrative. Story exchange and the sharing of narrative helps to cement a bond of reciprocity and identification, constituting an interpretive community.

Stylised exchanges of stories in interpolated tales model processes of familiarisation, establishing sympathy and involvement between characters, and implicitly, between author, character and reader. A single example, from Frances Sheridan’s *The Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* (1761) will suffice to illustrate the point. Sidney, on stepping out of her chariot one morning, finds her attention drawn by the ‘silent anguish’ in the looks of a girl on the street.¹¹⁹ Sidney asks some few questions, and on finding ‘curiosity excited’, exhorts the girl, Miss Price, to ‘relate to me the particulars of her story’.¹²⁰ Sidney is ‘infinitely charmed’ with Miss Price’s lengthy story of distress at the hands of a perfidious gentleman, and undertakes to provide financial aid for her and her father in their distressed situation, in typical

¹¹⁷ J. Paul Hunter, *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-Century English Fiction* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1990), 78.

¹¹⁸ Hunter, *Before Novels*, 23.

¹¹⁹ Frances Sheridan, *The Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph*, ed. Patricia Coster and Jean Coates Cleary (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 391.

¹²⁰ Sheridan, *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph*, 392.

sentimental fashion. Moreover, however, Sidney arranges for Miss Price to marry the brother of her maid, Patty Main, and the affair is concluded with the girl ‘disposed of very much to all our satisfaction’.¹²¹ In this instance, the elevated benevolence of the bestower of charity on the poor and deserving that is the hallmark of sentimental fiction is preserved by the difference in class between Sidney and Miss Price. Nevertheless, let us remember first that, to eighteenth-century minds, Patty is very much in Sidney’s ‘family’ as her personal maid, and second, that Patty has developed a strong affective tie with Sidney through her refusal to leave Sidney in her time of distress. Miss Price’s marriage to Patty’s brother therefore functions as her formal institution in Sidney’s extended family.¹²²

The use of narrative as a constituent of the bonds of familiarity reflects a wider expectation of the relation between text and reader, and registers ‘familiarity’ as primarily an aesthetic relation, based on recognition of certain qualities in the narrator. Particularly in sentimental works, the reader was expected to identify with and feel the same melancholy for the distresses of the characters as Sidney does for Miss Price. Johnson’s *Rambler*, stating the conventional view at mid-century, observes:

All joy or sorrow for the happiness or calamities of others is produced by an act of the imagination, that realises the event however fictitious, or approximates it however remote, by placing us, for a time, in the condition of him whose fortune we contemplate; so that we feel, while the deception lasts, whatever motions would be excited by the same good or evil happening to ourselves.¹²³

¹²¹ Sheridan, *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph*, 418.

¹²² See Sheridan, *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* for Patty’s refusal to leave Sidney even though she cannot pay her: ‘Let me but attend on you, and the two dear children; I desire nothing. – I want nothing’ (332). Later, Patty helps to support the family through her piecework (347), and when Sidney finds herself in comfortable circumstances again, she rejoices because she can provide for her ‘affectionate, worthy Patty’ (365). The loyalty, affection and resourcefulness of Patty contrasts strikingly with Sidney’s hapless mother and careless brother, George.

¹²³ Johnson, *Rambler* No. 60 (Saturday, 13 October, 1750), in *The Rambler*, ed. Bate and Strauss, IV, 318-19.

In the above example, Sidney demonstrates her capacity for identification by listening to and responding sympathetically to Miss Price's story, and the reader is expected to share her point of view. 'Familiarity' in Johnson's formulation is implied by a capacity in the reader to imagine him or herself in the same position with the narrator of a story.

Acts of story exchange extend the boundaries of ties of affective duty in the family to include anyone with whom one can construct bonds of identification and sympathy. Catherine Gallagher posits that at mid-eighteenth century, fictional characters began to be understood as those with whom a reader would find it easiest to identify: 'A story about nobody was nobody's story and hence could be entered, occupied, identified with by anybody'.¹²⁴ The idea that a reader might become familiar with a character was the basis for fiction's appeal and a means by which authors or characters could challenge cultural norms. To identify with a character means to sympathise with their actions, and to understand their motivation. Griffith, Fielding and the Minifies use conceptions of sociability, friendship and familiarity to model in their authorial practice the way they envisage the reception of their texts. When the relation between authors, texts and reader is imagined in the social terms of friendship or familiarity, the act of writing for the print market becomes significantly more manageable; indeed, the print market itself can be imagined as a kind of extended family, with reciprocal ties of affection and duty. Eighteenth-century authors and readers recognised that, as Susan Greenstein contends, 'our response to character is a social one'.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670-1820* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 168.

¹²⁵ Susan Greenstein, 'Dear Reader, Dear Friend: Richardson's Readers and the Social Response to Character', *College English*, 41/5 (January, 1980), 524-534, 526.

This section has set out the basis for horizontal relational models that will be more fully explored in the course of the forthcoming chapters. As each of the authors examined uses the familiar relationship enacted in their collaboration in different ways it would be reductive to enumerate each relational model here. The most important aspect of horizontal familiar relations is the flexibility that they offer to women to define their particular role within the model. Eighteenth-century society maintained a strong sense of differential status within its interlocking horizontal groups, but horizontal structures opened power relations to contestation, especially when enacted within a literary context. It is also important to recognise the extent to which discourses of family were perceived to impact beyond the immediate domestic environment. Familiarity and friendship are one example of the extension of models of family relations into the wider world. A further example is the way in which individual conduct in personal and familiar relations was considered to reflect on behaviour in other contexts. As the *Female Spectator* comments: ‘Of this I am certain, that the better we regulate our actions in *private Life*, the more we may hope of *public Blessings*, and the more we shall be enabled to sustain *public Calamities*’.¹²⁶ Her comment illustrates Guest’s identification of a ‘permeable periphery between public and private life, where philanthropy, benevolence, and sympathy seem to link domestic affections with concern for the general good of society’.¹²⁷ Modelling familiar relations through the medium of text, therefore, offers the basis from which, not just the particular relation, but society at large, can be transformed. The final section explores the letter and the periodical essay: the two forms that most effectively illustrate the contemporary interrelation of discourses of sociability, familiarity and authorship.

¹²⁶ Haywood, *The Female Spectator* (Vol. 2, Book VIII), in *The Female Spectator*, ed. Pettit and King, II, 296.

¹²⁷ Guest, *Small Change*, 48.

Familiarity as form: the letter and *The Female Spectator*

A wide array of literary forms are predicated on, construct, or display social relationships in the eighteenth century. The letter, the essay, the sermon, the verse epistle, and the dialogue all encode either some form of direct address, or conversational performance. The interpolated tale dramatises the act of verbal storytelling. Prefaces and addresses to the reader, even dramatic prologues, suggest attempts at conversation with a reader or audience; through the author's self-presentation, the reader is enabled to view the author as an acquaintance. At a more complex level, several different genres might interact with each other, particularly in periodicals, which were nominally in essay form, but which also made active use of letters from readers (whether real or not), and cautionary, satirical or illustrative stories, invoking a circulation of text between authors and readers, rather than a one-way flow. Many of these forms do not merely display sociable conversation, they actively reflect on conversation and sociability, and rely on a 'familiar' form of address for their efficacy.

Betty Schellenberg argues that mid-eighteenth-century literature used conversation to construct a model of consensus, enacting 'the circumscription of socially threatening individualistic desire in a plot structure that models a community of consensus as the ideal unit from which a stable society is constructed'.¹²⁸ However, many sociable texts inscribed debate, discussion and revision as part of conversation. As Haslett suggests, 'eighteenth-century texts might be situated in the context of disputatious print culture, in which all published texts were open to creative misreadings, revisions and defences'.¹²⁹ This section examines the popular form of

¹²⁸ Betty A. Schellenberg, *The Conversational Circle: Rereading the English Novel, 1740-1775* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 4.

¹²⁹ Haslett, *Pope to Burney*, 26.

the letter, and ends with a case-study of Haywood's *Female Spectator* (1744-46).

Haywood's periodical exemplifies the central concerns of this chapter and provides a useful means of tying the various themes together through a study of the work of a professional woman writer.

The concept of a 'familiar' style held many embedded cultural assumptions. Primarily, it assumed a certain level of accessibility, making texts available to those without a classical education. The flipside of this assumption was that the writers of 'familiar' texts had a purpose in writing that was primarily didactic. Just as conversation was thought to reform morals and refine manners, the circulation of 'familiar' essays and letters inscribed this process on a textual level. A familiar style was held to be the means by which social reform could be achieved and manners could be modified in a way that did not institute a pedagogical hierarchy, but instead relied on the process of textual circulation and readers' enjoyment to institute an ongoing process of social reform. In many cases, familiar texts were designed to be models of good practice in sociable writing and conversation. The topics addressed, and the style and language adopted suggested appropriate conversational style and content. In particular, critical discussions were enacted and authorised through circulation of narrative and exchanges on social observation and moral reflections. Moreover, the envisioning of a particular reader with whom the author converses on terms of familiarity, like conversation, is dependent on processes of performance and recognition of politeness in writing. It holds out the possibility of a print culture in which the reader and author can be knowable to each other, grounding literary culture in a sociable setting in which shared values are enacted and refined. The assumption of certain shared values is what gives a sociable literary performance its force, and makes the idea of familiarity coherent, but in many cases, critical debate and

disagreement give vitality to the imagined literary world, and explain why textual conversations and circulations are, in a sense, self-perpetuating. The consumption of conversational texts was held to be in itself a sociable act. Texts that were conversational or sociable were designed to inspire further conversation and continue the cycle of debate, discussion and social reform.

The letter form invokes sociability through representing conversation. As with conversation, the letter veered uneasily between representing an authentic version of the self and a skilled performance. As Clare Brant comments:

‘Conversation is performative and so are letters’.¹³⁰ Johnson in the *Rambler* argues that ‘the question among those who establish rules for an epistolary performance is how gaiety or civility may be properly expressed’, illustrating his awareness of the difference between authenticity of emotional intent and the performative nature of writing.¹³¹ Bruce Redford says that the letter-writer must ‘capture the artful spontaneity of conversation’.¹³² The circulation of letters suggests a sociable network, and could function in the same way to improve manners and morals. The privileging of an easy, familiar epistolary style that gave the impression of having been dashed off without undue labour suggests the value placed on authenticity in the letter.

However, the existence of letter-manuals that gave models for such a style acknowledges the performative aspect of letters, and holds out the possibility of the proper letter as an authorial skill that can be mastered and used professionally as well as personally. Letter manuals that doubled as conduct books, showing correct epistolary form while at the same time using the content as a moral guide to correct behaviour, illustrate the ever-present links between manners and morals.

¹³⁰ Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters*, 22.

¹³¹ Johnson, *Rambler* No. 152 (Saturday, 31 August, 1751), in *The Rambler*, ed. Bate and Strauss, V, 45.

¹³² Bruce Redford, *The Converse of the Pen: Acts of Intimacy of Intimacy in the Eighteenth-Century Familiar Letter* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 5.

The title of Samuel Richardson's first publication makes this double function explicit: *Letters written to and for particular friends on the most important occasions, directing not only the requisite style and forms to be observed in writing familiar letters; but how to act justly and prudently in the common concerns of human life* (1739). In his introduction, Richardson makes the case for the letter as the best inculcator of morals through the typicality of its language. He claims that folly will be exposed 'by Arguments, tho' *easy and familiar, yet new and uncommon*'.¹³³ The 'familiarity' of the style, which interlinks the two definitions of 'easily recognisable' and 'denoting a close relationship' is seen as the means by which didactic arguments can best be conveyed. This awareness of the close links between familiarity and didactic purposes made conduct books in the form of a letter to a relation coherent.¹³⁴

The familiar letter is grounded in the letter as a sociable form. The willing of friendship in the familiar letter keeps the reader in view, it displays a relationship between individuals rather than a solitary consciousness. Rather than a one-way, or even two-way exchange of letters, the familiar letter will often project the effect of an epistolary network. Familiar letters were understood to be produced and consumed in social contexts. A letter may be written by various hands, explicitly or implicitly, with individuals other than the correspondent adding postscripts or conveying their sentiments through the primary correspondent. Similarly, a letter could be read in company, read *to* company and passed around from person to person.¹³⁵ Familiar

¹³³ Samuel Richardson, *Letters written to and for particular friends on the most important occasions* (3rd edn., London, 1746), [iii].

¹³⁴ See, for example, Sir Herbert Croft, *A Brother's Advice to his Sisters* (London, 1775). Croft uses his familiar relationship to denote a mode of authorship that is anti-professional, in keeping with his aristocratic status: 'Let but the dear persons, for whom it is written, derive either pleasure or profit from it! (ie. his book) and you shall see me smile at what the world calls fame' (13-14). Of course, if this claim were true, there would be no need for the book to appear in print.

¹³⁵ Ezell argues that the preservation of certain letters suggested their status as formal documents for display as well as repositories of basic information (*The Patriarch's Wife*, 73); Bigold discusses at some length a letter-book compiled by the Countess of Hertford, including some of Elizabeth Rowe's letters ('Women of Letters', 25 ff.).

letters are the means of cementing and extending social bonds. The use of the relation of familiarity in the letter form asserts the value of a kind of intimacy to do with shared tastes and values over consanguinity. The familiar relation may even be constructed in and through the exchange of letters, especially when distance limits the possibility for personal conversation. The familiar letter was a useful tool for representing the kind of social networks underpinned by kinship structures, but extending outside the domestic environment as well. The dual face, or what might be called the artificially natural style of the familiar letter, mirrors the familiar relation itself as always wavering between being natural – bestowed by blood or proximity – and being constructed, as a conscious process of the building of affective ties between two individuals.

In some ways, the letter form was particularly congenial to women's display of their literary skills. Numerous collections of authentic women's letters from the eighteenth century show women participating in epistolary networks in order to communicate gossip, maintain family connections, share information, and discuss political, literary and social issues.¹³⁶ For an educated gentlewoman, the letter offered a means of literate – and often literary – interpersonal and social engagement. Alison Hurley argues that letters from spa towns 'allowed the Bluestockings to engage in a heady conversation that ultimately could not be set aside as an alternative to reality or separate state; instead, spa conversations enabled these women to address themselves

¹³⁶ Some examples are the letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu in *The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, ed. Robert Halsband, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965-67); for discussion of the Bluestocking letters of Elizabeth Montagu, Sarah Scott, Elizabeth Carter, Catherine Talbot and Elizabeth Vesey see Sylvia Harcourt Myers, *The Bluestocking Circle: Women, Friendship, and the Life of the Mind in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); for discussion of the letters between Caroline, Emily, Louisa and Sarah Lennox see Stella Tillyard, *Aristocrats* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1994); for extended discussion of women's use of the letter as a means of increasing authorial reputation and establishing exemplary status see Bigold 'Women of Letters'.

more directly to the world in which they lived'.¹³⁷ Elizabeth Goldsmith argues: 'The attributes of feminine writing that were praised by male commentators – a charming carelessness, a facility of expression – reflected a growing antischolastic, aristocratic prejudice that suddenly gave new esthetic credentials to the discourse of women'.¹³⁸ Brant, noting the sheer range of eighteenth-century letters in life and literature, warns against overplaying the idea that the letter was an empowering mode for women: 'letters had liminal meanings for those in power and powerful meanings for liminal people'.¹³⁹ She also argues against too strong a critical focus on the love-letter in assessments of women's letter-writing in the period: 'Entranced by fiction that fetishised letters as substitutes for and extensions of women's bodies, to be seized, caressed, possessed, violated, critics see only erotic relations between letters and women's bodies'.¹⁴⁰

Texts made use of the letter form in a range of ways, often exploiting its status as material document to be lost, forged, imprinted with tears and kisses or kept as evidence. The variety and flexibility of the letter in the period precludes a fixed conclusion about its meaning or function, but certainly it can be said that the letter was sociable, familiar and used by women writers. The letter form is always concerned with constructing models of reading and writing, positing a literary culture hinging on the sociable, familiar, circulation of text. The women writers discussed in this thesis draw heavily on the letter form to invoke authentic correspondence and literary networks and friendships. A case study drawn from the periodical press

¹³⁷ Alison E. Hurley, 'A conversation of their own: watering-place correspondence among the Bluestockings', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 40/1 (Fall, 2006), 1-21, 2.

¹³⁸ Elizabeth C. Goldsmith, 'Authority, Authenticity, and the Publication of Letters by Women', in *Writing the Female Voice: Essays on Epistolary Literature*, ed. Goldsmith (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989), 46-59, 47.

¹³⁹ Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters*, 15.

¹⁴⁰ Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters*, 19.

provides an example of sociable and familiar literary display in action, including the use of the letter.

An examination of the uses to which *The Female Spectator* puts the periodical essay illustrates both its flexibility and its use in advancing the cause of the woman author, reader and critic. It also usefully ties together the themes of sociable display, didactic purpose and familiar style that are the central concerns of this chapter, and shows how they might be exploited by a canny woman writer. Certain aspects of *The Female Spectator* are worthy of particular note. The circumstances of its production are framed as sociable; it draws on the model of the Spectator Club, but is much more analytical in its description of the mode of its production. Like many periodicals, it prints letters from its readers, not all of them complimentary, and engages in critical debate with those letters. Finally, it is very clear on its didactic purposes and how these are enacted through its performance and examination of sociable interactions.

The imagined sociable mode of production of *The Female Spectator* is a feminocentric circle of women in different stages of life (and thus claiming different types of expertise), the function of which is primarily to moderate. Mira, the widow of quality and Euphrosine the virgin have no visible authorial role to play, but they do have a final say in what gets published: ‘we lay our several Productions on the Table, which being read over, every one has the Liberty of excepting against, or censuring whatever she disapproves; nothing to be exhibited to the Publick, without the joint Concurrence of all’.¹⁴¹ These women appear very rarely, except where the Female Spectator finds herself in need of moderation in her sentiments:

¹⁴¹ Haywood, *The Female Spectator* (Vol. I, Book II), in *The Female Spectator*, ed. Pettit and King, II, 53.

I was going on to recite some other Instances of the Mischiefs, which, for the most part, are the Consequence of laying young People under too great a Restraint, when *Mira* came in, and seeing what I was about, took the Pen out of my Hand; and told me I had already said enough; if I proceeded to expatiate any farther on that Head, I should be in Danger of being understood to countenance an Extreme on the other Side, which was much more frequently fatal to our Sex.¹⁴²

The social mode of production for *The Female Spectator* is a convenient conceit that illustrates the moderating effects of sociability, and demonstrates the Female Spectator's politeness, rather than providing a direct commentary on social authorship. A wider reading community is invoked once *The Female Spectator* starts incorporating letters, as it picks up on the possibilities of textual conversation and critical exchange that its supposed collaborative nature suggests. Kathryn King points out that there is no reason to assume that these incorporated letters were written by Haywood; at least, she argues, 'the question of their authenticity is one that should, in my view, remain open'.¹⁴³

Textual evidence for the authenticity of these letters is given when the Female Spectator starts addressing her correspondents directly at the end of her monthly books.¹⁴⁴ These brief addresses to correspondents are not meant to pique the public's interest, because they rarely say what the topic of the letter mentioned is. They serve only to mark that the Female Spectator's participation in a literary network, and her provoking of conversational response from members of the public. Inclusion of letters from readers was one of the ways that periodicals denoted their participation in a writing and reading sociable community, invoking textual

¹⁴² Haywood, *The Female Spectator* (Vol. I, Book I), in *The Female Spectator*, ed. Pettit and King, II, 32.

¹⁴³ Kathryn R. King 'Preface' to *The Female Spectator*, ed. Pettit and King, II, vii-xii, viii.

¹⁴⁴ For example, at the end of Vol. III, Book XVII: 'Since our last, we have received several Letters, but have not, as yet, had time to examine which, or whether any of them, are proper to be conveyed to the Public by our Canal; – we can only say, that the Authors of those which are so, may depend on their being inserted, and that such as are refused have nevertheless a Claim to our thanks for their good Intentions' (*The Female Spectator*, ed. Pettit and King, III, 175-76). In Book XVIII, the Female Spectator announces that none of the letters mentioned have any pretence to a place in the periodical (*The Female Spectator*, ed. Pettit and King, III, 177).

circulation rather than one-way flow. Letters to the Female Spectator are varied: some are critical, others admiring, some ask questions, one asks the Female Spectator to resolve a coffee-house dispute, and some ask her for her thoughts on social issues, such as the use of tea, or the state of the stage.¹⁴⁵ Without fail, the Female Spectator reads these letters critically, giving her judgement on the sentiments expressed therein, and very often her advice. Where the letters contain a story, she subjects the narrative to critical analysis, demonstrating how textual sociability promotes social and sociable criticism.

The stated purpose of the essays in *The Female Spectator* is ‘the Rectification of Manners’.¹⁴⁶ This didactic aim is accomplished through critical conversation. Criticism for the Female Spectator serves a primarily didactic function as part of a repertoire of polite conversation. In her discussion of taste, and in line with contemporary thought, she invokes a strict affiliation between aesthetics, manners and morals: ‘In effect, nothing can be called a *true Taste*, that is not regulated by *Reason*, and which does not incline us to what will render us *better* and *wiser*’.¹⁴⁷ Later in the same book she asserts that social behaviour is an indicator of good taste, ‘if we allow *Good-nature* and *good Breeding* to be some of the Requisites of a *good Taste*, as certainly they are’.¹⁴⁸ The Female Spectator follows these assertions with a lengthy list of suggested reading materials that will promote good taste in women, linking good taste with a proper education. By engaging with a wide range of reading, women will be able to claim capacity for good taste in judgement:

¹⁴⁵ Vol. II, Book VIII (*The Female Spectator*, ed. Pettit and King, II) gives an representative sample of letters, including the letter on the state of the stage (267-75), a letter on tea (280-83), a letter from a woman who needs advice on choosing a lover (285-88), and a letter of criticism (292-94).

¹⁴⁶ Haywood, *The Female Spectator* (Vol. III, Book XIV), in *The Female Spectator*, ed. Pettit and King, III, 57.

¹⁴⁷ Haywood, *The Female Spectator* (Vol. III, Book XV), in *The Female Spectator*, ed. Pettit and King, III, 76.

¹⁴⁸ Haywood, *The Female Spectator* (Vol. III, Book XV), 79.

‘The Knowledge of Nature, of the World, and of Ourselves, will enable us to judge all around us’, which improvement will be reflected in women’s social behaviour: ‘Our Actions will be endearing, our Behaviour engaging, to all who are Witnesses of it’.¹⁴⁹ Critical knowledge of books and society are affiliated with, and linked to, social interaction.

Through participation in textual discussion and criticism with the public, the Female Spectator dramatises how textual circulation can act as a tool of reform, while the didactic aim is always softened under the pleasure of critical debate and discussion. It also thoroughly inserts women into the critical sphere of debate, by envisaging the topics for debate and criticism to be so wide-ranging that anyone should be able to participate, and by displaying the Female Spectator herself engaged in such acts of criticism. Although *The Female Spectator* is supposedly solely produced by women, the Female Spectator addresses both male and female consumers, invoking the heterosocial conversation that was so highly prized at mid-century. Letters are printed from both men and women, and the Female Spectator refers to ‘my Readers, of both Sexes’ when discussing second marriages.¹⁵⁰ ‘The Querist’ in Book IX writes from the context of a tavern debate, on behalf of ‘a Set of Gentlemen, who are most of them your Subscribers, and all Admirers of your Speculations’.¹⁵¹ Although the Female Spectator says that her advice is directed primarily to women readers because, ‘as I am a Woman, I am more interested in their Happiness’, she observes that men stand as much in need of reform as women do.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Haywood, *The Female Spectator* (Vol. III, Book XV), 99.

¹⁵⁰ Haywood, *The Female Spectator* (Vol. III, Book XVI), in *The Female Spectator*, ed. Pettit and King, III, 115.

¹⁵¹ Haywood, *The Female Spectator* (Vol. II, Book IX), in *The Female Spectator*, ed. Pettit and King, II, 330.

¹⁵² Haywood, *The Female Spectator* (Vol. III, Book XV), 104.

Ultimately, the sociable critical discussion in which *The Female Spectator* partakes should be read as a performance of the values of sociability in which the reader is invited to partake. Although the Female Spectator is a teacher, the way in which her teaching functions is through her willingness to engage with readers' concerns and engage in conversation with them. In this way, Haywood bypasses the problem of appealing to an uncertain public taste because through the interplay of conversation she is able to simultaneously appeal to the public taste through her willingness to consult on it and respond critically and refine that taste through her own capacity in the role of knowledgeable author-critic. The author's role and the reader's role are mutually formative in this sense; neither has the absolute power to dictate what is written about in the pages of *The Female Spectator*. In this way, Haywood cleverly manipulates the demands of the marketplace to her own reformatory purposes. In so doing, she helps to make visible the way that events in women's lives can be turned to critical purposes, and advances the potential for women to project themselves as engaging in sociable debate that encompasses everything from marriage choice to international politics, and applies the same logic of the interplay of manners and morals to both.

The final book of *The Female Spectator* includes a letter that signifies the success of the undertaking:

I observe, with great Pleasure, that you tread closely in the Steps of your late Brother and Predecessor, the *Spectator*, of immortal Memory, in that Part of his Lucubrations where he endeavours to promote Religion, Morality, and Good Manners: And that, like him too, you are thankful for any Hint from an ingenuous Correspondent, and have a very happy Talent of improving and enforcing it.

A Design so noble claims the Assistance of every able Hand, and your instructive and good-natured Manner of executing it, encourages Persons of all Ranks and Capacities to contribute something to your Stock.¹⁵³

¹⁵³ Haywood, *The Female Spectator* (Vol. IV, Book XXIV), in *The Female Spectator*, ed. Pettit and King, III, 391-92.

The invocation of the *Spectator* as brother to the Female Spectator is significant in that it uses siblinghood as an index of similarity. Although there was a time lapse of nearly forty years between *The Female Spectator* and the *Spectator*, Haywood played on readers' familiarity with the *Spectator* as a marketing device, calling Mr. Spectator her brother as a way of invoking familiar recognition.¹⁵⁴ This letter is metonymic of the whole mode of production of *The Female Spectator*, as it legitimates the aims of the periodical through the reader's recognition of the didactic aims, followed by response in the form of 'assistance', keeping up his or her part of the process of interaction. Such a letter is critical in itself, not only because it is flattering to the author, but because it makes visible the receptive recognition that is the necessary condition of the successful performance of the reforming power of sociable and textual interaction.

I have used this case-study to demonstrate the kinds of uses to which a woman author could put discourses of sociability and familiarity in the context of print culture. Sociability is something to be modelled; it is a valuable commodity. It is also a powerful tool for both self-definition and social reform. It can be used to engage in social and literary critique while at the same time exploited to determine the precise terms on which women writers would enter the literary marketplace, and how their texts should be read. Unlike Haywood, whose use of imaginary collaborators is something of an ironic posture, the texts in the chapters that follow tend to collapse the distinction between life and writings partly in order to promote their authors or characters as exemplars of virtue and their writings as authentic testaments to genuine familiar relationships. Through participating in familiar collaboration, the authors demonstrate their expertise in the matter of interpersonal relations constructed through

¹⁵⁴ See *The Female Spectator* (Vol. I, Book I), in *The Female Spectator*, ed. Pettit and King, II, 17.

text. Like Haywood, however, they strategically merge the social value placed on sociability with the emerging print market in order to produce texts that enact a dynamic of social reform through literary conversation within a market context.

For Griffith, Fielding, Collier and the Minifies, familiar collaboration must have been in part motivated by financial and practical considerations. The overt nature of their collaborations suggests an active marketing strategy that exploited the value placed on social and interpersonal relationships. Through participation in literary collaboration, the authors display their polite and virtuous credentials. However, these authors make a virtue of practical considerations, using familiar collaboration as a means of intervening in numerous intersecting – and occasionally conflicting – discourses, with not always predictable results. The collaborative mode offered opportunities to produce saleable, reformative texts that also made visible the scene of women's reading and writing in a professional, authorial context. Although women's writing was never entirely unproblematic, familiar collaboration seems to have offered a means for women to exert a level of personal agency in constructing their authorial identities through exploitation of the discourses of sociability and familiarity.

Chapter 3. Reading and Writing for One Another: Elizabeth and Richard Griffith's *A Series of Genuine Letters Between Henry and Frances*.

If authors exploited sociability in order to make their texts sell, then Elizabeth and Richard Griffith were two individuals in desperate need of a bestseller at mid-century. Their *Series of Genuine Letters Between Henry and Frances*, published in six volumes between 1757 and 1770, drew heavily on the cultural value assigned to heterosociability, with the aim of displaying the exemplary personal and literary qualities of its authors. Framed as the authors' genuine personal correspondence, partly before their marriage, but primarily after it, the Griffiths in their personae of Henry and Frances exchange letters that combine expressions of love and affection with educated and critical discussions of reading, ultimately utilising the *Series* as a sustained commentary on authorship itself. The *Series*, due in part to its relentless drive to self-promotion, interacts consistently with contemporary social and literary debates. This chapter analyses the way that epistolary collaboration in the *Series* offered an authorial model to Elizabeth Griffith that enabled her to embark on long-term literary career. I argue that the *Series* strategically conflates the relation of marriage, the value of conversation as a didactic tool and the flexibility of the letter form in order to delineate a workable model for female professional authorship. Perhaps most interestingly, its formal use of letter exchange makes the complex process of constructing the exemplary woman author within the matrix of heterosociable conversational exchange uniquely visible.

Elizabeth Griffith had a long and varied professional career.¹⁵⁵ Born in 1727 in Wales and raised in Dublin, her father Thomas Griffith was actor-manager at

¹⁵⁵ For biographical information on Elizabeth Griffith see Elizabeth Eger, 'Elizabeth Griffith (1727-93)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)

Dublin's Smock Alley theatre. Her family were not wealthy, and she took to the stage as an actress in Dublin between 1749 and 1751. She also acted on the London stage at Covent Garden between 1753 and 1755. Richard Griffith, unrelated to Elizabeth, was a gentleman-farmer of Kilkenny. The couple met in 1746. Richard's father wished him to marry money, so they married secretly in 1751, after Richard's unsuccessful attempt to persuade Elizabeth to be his mistress. The Griffiths struggled financially for much of their lives; the decision to publish their courting letters in 1757 was probably primarily motivated by the need for money. These volumes were well-received enough to be used as the basis for the Griffiths' professional development, but never brought in enough money to solve the couple's pecuniary embarrassments.

After a failed attempt at manufacturing linen, Richard got involved in political and legal affairs in Ireland, which required a lot of travelling. The enforced periods of separation meant that the Griffith's letter-writing activities continued well past the period of courtship. The earlier volumes of the *Series* make very clear the struggles that the couple underwent to establish themselves. Elizabeth Griffith worked as a paid companion for some time, and Frances's letters chafe at the conditions of 'servile Constraint' and dependency in which she is forced to live.¹⁵⁶ Both moved to London in 1764 to pursue their literary careers with greater assiduity. Apart from the *Series* the Griffiths also produced *Two Novels. In Letters. By the Authors of Henry and Frances* (1769), comprising *The Delicate Distress* by Elizabeth Griffith and *The Gordian Knot* by Richard Griffith. Ultimately, Elizabeth Griffith was the more

<<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/11596>>; Susan Brown, Patricia Clements, and Isobel Grundy, (eds.), Elizabeth Griffith entry: Overview screen within *Orlando: Women's Writing in the British Isles from the Beginnings to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press Online, 2006)

<<http://orlando.cambridge.org>>

¹⁵⁶ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *A Series of Genuine Letters between Henry and Frances*, III & IV (London, 1766), III, 50.

successful author, publishing in a range of genres that included poetry, novels, plays, translations, criticism and a conduct essay.

Elizabeth Griffith did not sustain a particularly high level of literary popularity. Clara Reeve says of Griffith in 1785 that her ‘Novels are moral and sentimental, though they do not rise to the first class of excellence, they may fairly be ranked in the second, they are very unexceptionable and entertaining books’.¹⁵⁷ Nevertheless, there is evidence that in the later stages of her career, Elizabeth Griffith had gone some way to establishing herself as an exemplary woman writer, one of the panoply of virtuous and educated ladies that reflected so well on the state of the nation. In 1779, she appeared in Richard Samuels’ painting, ‘The Nine Modern Muses of Great Britain’. She also appears in two poems of female worthies, namely Mary Scott’s *The Female Advocate* (1772) and Elizabeth Benger’s *The Female Geniad* (1791).¹⁵⁸ Although these testaments to her position as cultural icon situate her in an idealised feminocentric sphere, alongside sister-muses and other women authors, her early collaborative entry into print and her lifelong interest in the dynamics of the marital relationship positions her within a heterosociable context.¹⁵⁹ The idealised ranks of virtuous and intelligent ladies also rather obscure the strategic professionalism that lay behind their self-presentation. Elizabeth Griffith, as her publishing record shows, was thoroughly embedded in professional literary London.

The *Series* consistently mediates between a genteel ideal and market forces. Setting out a model for professional authorship in which men and women respond

¹⁵⁷ Clara Reeve, *The Progress of Romance*, 2 vols. (Colchester, 1785), II, 45. Renewed critical interest in eighteenth-century women writers has led to a Kentucky University Press critical edition of *The Delicate Distress* (1997) and the inclusion of Griffith’s play *The Times* in the Oxford World Classics compendium *Eighteenth-Century Women Dramatists* (2001).

¹⁵⁸ See Mary Scott, *The Female Advocate; a poem* (London, 1774), 24-25; Elizabeth Benger, *The Female Geniad; a poem* (London, 1791), 43-44.

¹⁵⁹ Also represented in the Samuels painting: Anna Letitia Barbauld, Elizabeth Carter, Angelica Kauffman, Charlotte Lennox, Catherine Macauley, Elizabeth Montagu, Hannah More, Elizabeth Sheridan – all women distinguished by their virtue and participation in the arts.

politely to each other's texts contributes to the reconfiguring of the marriage relationship, where love is supported and enabled by polite friendship. At the same time, the insight into the authors' virtuous personal relationship and display of sociability boosts their professional careers and registers the authors' exemplarity. This model was enabling for Elizabeth Griffith, who is presented in the course of the *Series* in the roles of virtuous woman, tasteful and educated letter-writer, professional author, loving wife and thoughtful critic. Conversation, as well as modelling genteel exemplary practice, enables the process of contestation, struggle and debate through which the woman writer can carve out a space for herself in the professional marketplace.

Charting the development of exemplary professionalism

When reading the *Series*, it is important to distinguish between the first two volumes, which marked both authors' first entry into print, and the later volumes, which chart the development of their professional careers concurrently with their publications in other genres. Certain characteristics extend across all six volumes: the Griffiths' conflation of the language of romance and friendship, for example, or their insistence that their correspondence is a genuine reflection of their relationship. However, each set of volumes serves a different authorial purpose and uses subtly different strategies to make a claim to the reader's notice. The difference may be conceived as the staging of a personal conversation between two individuals in the first volume, by which means the Griffiths can make a claim to exemplarity, versus a sustained conversation with print culture itself in the subsequent volumes. The latter conversation is enabled by the incorporation of references to earlier volumes of the *Series* and other published works of the authors. Thus, the later volumes not only maintain the exemplary personae of the first two volumes, but offer the reader a

purportedly genuine insight into the personal lives of well-known authors. This distinction is important, because it registers a difference in the basis for the market appeal of the *Series* over the course of the thirteen years during which the Griffiths established their professional authorial careers. This section, through charting the recurrent themes and variations in the volumes of the *Series*, provides a context for subsequent close readings of the Griffiths' use of the educational model in the first two volumes, their exploitation of the letter form and the work that they do to insert themselves into print culture.

All six volumes were published by subscription, permitting the *Monthly Review* to sneer: 'whence the Reader may, perhaps, infer the rank, or, at least, the circumstances of the *Writers*'.¹⁶⁰ The Griffiths do not hide their poverty in the *Series*. Henry's preface to the second edition describes the failure of his linen manufactory and states baldly that he finds himself, 'with a Wife and Children in my Arms, without Trade, Profession, Patrimony, or Employ'.¹⁶¹ The first two volumes, published by subscription in 1757 met with enough success for a 'Revised, Corrected, Enlarged and Improved' second edition to be published in 1761, which included several puffs and a preface written 'To my Sex' by Frances. Volumes III and IV were published in 1766, and a third edition of the first two volumes in 1767. These were followed by an edition of all four volumes in 1770, along with a separate publication of Volumes V and VI. A final edition of all six was published in 1786. No substantial changes are made after the second edition of the first two volumes of 1761.¹⁶² The number of editions suggests a reasonable level of public popularity for the *Series*, although the number of subscribers to the 1786 edition, at around 300, is slightly less

¹⁶⁰ 'Review of *Letters between HENRY and FRANCES*', *Monthly Review*, XVII (London, 1757), 416-23, 416-17.

¹⁶¹ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *A Series of Genuine Letters between Henry and Frances*, 2 vols. (2nd edn., London, 1761), I, xlv.

¹⁶² The 1761 edition is the text quoted in references to Vols. I and II, unless otherwise stated.

than the number of subscribers to the original 1757 edition, around 350. The majority of the editions of the *Series* were published by Johnston, but the four-volume edition of 1770 seems to have been printed for the authors as no printer or bookseller is given, and the 1770 edition of volumes V and VI were printed for Richardson and Urquhart. The *Two Novels* were printed by Becket and de Hondt.

As far as the Griffiths had any long-term relationship with a bookseller it seems to have been with Johnston, as he published Richard Griffith's *The Triumvirate* (1764) and Elizabeth Griffith's dramatic poem *Amana* (1764). However, Elizabeth Griffith's translation of *The Memoirs of Ninon de L'Enclos* (1761) was printed for the Dodsleys, and her literary works after 1770 were predominantly printed for Cadell. This variety of booksellers suggests an attempt to make as much money as possible from each individual sale. However, Elizabeth Griffith's loyalty to Cadell after 1770 suggests that by this time she may have built up a stronger relationship with him than with any other bookseller, perhaps implying a more stable career at this later stage than in earlier days. There is some evidence in the *Series* that Frances begins to take on responsibility for sales, denoting a more overt professionalism than is seen in earlier volumes. In the final volumes, Frances says of her attempt to sell her novel, 'I find the Booksellers will give nothing worth taking for it'.¹⁶³ In volume VI, Henry tells her to 'perform a Pilgrimage to *Thomas à Becket*'s shrine...*Go to then*, transmute thy Fame into *Credit*, and raise *Monies* for thyself'.¹⁶⁴ It is known that Elizabeth Griffith engaged in a sustained correspondence with David Garrick between 1767 and 1773 in which she solicits his help in the writing and performance of her plays, so it is not unlikely that Frances's professional behaviour in the *Series* offers some indication of the Griffiths' authorial practice, albeit a carefully crafted one. The *Series* then, in

¹⁶³ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *A Series of Genuine Letters between Henry and Frances*, V & VI (London, 1770), V, 15.

¹⁶⁴ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, VI, 60.

part, documents a growth in professional authorial behaviour. However, all the volumes insist that the letters are genuine.

Throughout the volumes of the *Series*, there is a strong emphasis on the authenticity of the letters. It is claimed that they have been written solely for their recipients rather than for publication. Authenticity in the letter form is signalled by literary shortcomings and lack of strict narrative. In a puff to the first two volumes a ‘Clergyman of Taste and Literature’ says of the collection: ‘They have all the *Naivete* which recommends principally that kind of Writing, and which is wanting to *Pliny*, *Balzac*, and *Voiture*. They have indeed more Faults; are more incorrect, than any of them; which makes them carry the true Air of Originals, which they certainly are’.¹⁶⁵ After the puffs, the volumes begin with a letter from Henry to the Editor (who is unnamed), and a letter from the Editor to the public.¹⁶⁶ Henry explains that he has tried to organise the letters, but has largely failed, calling them ‘these hasty and incorrect Pieces, wrote in the Hurry of an omnipotent Correspondence, many of them in the midst of Business, or Company, and several in the Height of Sickness, or in the Intervals of Whist’ and claims that he is sending the originals to the editor for comparison with the copies.¹⁶⁷ The Editor argues that the letters’ value is located in their presenting ‘the genuine Pictures of two Persons, whose Sense, Wit, and universal Benevolence do well intitle them to the publick Esteem’.¹⁶⁸ He continues: ‘when I declared my Design of publishing, and applied a second time to have the Chain [of gaps in correspondence] connected, I was told by *Henry*, that he did not

¹⁶⁵ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, I, iv.

¹⁶⁶ The *Monthly Review* assumes that the couple acted as their own editors (‘Review of *Letters between HENRY and FRANCES*’, 417).

¹⁶⁷ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, I, ix-x.

¹⁶⁸ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, I, xv-xvi.

think it fair dealing with the Publick; besides, he thought they appeared, at present, more genuine than a complete *Suite* of Letters would do'.¹⁶⁹

The preface to Volumes V and VI makes a similar claim in a letter from 'The Editors to the Publick' which refers to the 'broken Correspondence – owing to the Authors of it not having had the least Design, or Purpose, from first to last, of publishing their Letters while they were writing them'.¹⁷⁰ It is very likely that the persona of the Editor(s) is a convenient fiction designed to throw responsibility for publication away from the Griffiths and vindicate the authenticity of the letters. The Editor also serves as an independent reader of the letters, and can suggest possible reading approaches for a member of the public, based on admiration for the characters presented, which Henry would have been unable to claim directly for himself. If the letters were genuine, then they speak volumes about the power of ideologies of polite sociability in the period.

Elizabeth Eger seems to agree that the letters were genuine: 'While other novelists had aimed to deceive their readers as to the authenticity of their epistolary fictions, few had used real letters to weave a sentimental narrative'.¹⁷¹ It makes sense to assume that the letters went through, at the very least, a strict editing process, even if they had some basis in reality. The supposed authenticity of the letters is framed as the basis of their market appeal, offering a true insight into real human lives and characters. Ironically, the Griffiths appear to self-consciously subscribe to public notions of what constitutes good writing, because the letters' genuineness is part of what makes up their value for the eighteenth-century audience. The letters' imagined genuineness authenticates their authors as worthy characters whom readers may imitate. It is only through their status as personal documents that the letters and their

¹⁶⁹ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, I, xvii-xviii.

¹⁷⁰ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, V, [vii].

¹⁷¹ Eger, 'Elizabeth Griffith', *ODNB*.

authors can acquire value in the print market. However, the way in which the letters offer insight to the public through their supposedly genuine status varies between volumes, serving a range of authorial purposes as the *Series* progresses.

The first two volumes of the *Series* document the process through which a potentially amatory relationship between Henry and Frances is converted into a rational and polite conversation through the refining power of virtuous letter exchange. Thus they enact a particular kind of narrative, drawing from novels like Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) to depict the virtue, wit and sensibility of their authors. As the next section will address at greater length, the trope of education is utilised to enact the refining process of heterosociable conversation. What is at stake for Frances in these early volumes is not a claim to authorship, but a struggle to define the terms on which she can participate in educated polite conversation. I will argue that the first two volumes, although they claim to document a loving scriptive relationship, are predominantly characterised by debate and contestation. Indeed, it is the spirited debate that gives these early volumes their appeal. Importantly, these first volumes complete much of the work that is necessary to establish 'Henry and Frances' as public figures. Subsequent volumes, while they reiterate the authors' status of virtuous, witty, exemplary literary partners, do not substantially contribute to the construction of these personae. Instead, they focus on a minute examination of the processes by which two marginal, though polite, figures can create a professional niche for themselves in the contemporary print market.

Volumes III and IV represent something of a watershed for the Griffiths, since they document their decision to move to England in firm pursuit of a literary career, a move that symbolises a gradual change in status from quasi-amateur to avowedly professional. If Volume III is read straight after Volume II, marking a gap

of a number of years, the switch from personal, bookish correspondence to self-conscious authorial conversation is a marked one. At this point, the unique possibilities offered by the *Series* for career narration become clear. Frances and Henry engage in a conversation with print culture itself, discussing possible projects, incorporating references to their other works and even engaging in implicit dialogue with reviewers of the first two volumes of the *Series*. Volumes V and VI project a model of confident professional authorship, in which it is noticeable that both parties are more independent, engage in good-natured competition and describe their own personal authorial pursuits, although they still claim to only write for one another, and their insistence that their relationship is unique is as strong as ever. By this point, the letters' claim to genuineness offers insight not solely into the marital relation, but into the personal world of recognised authors, a subtly different basis for the claim to value. The personal letters of professional authors are more valuable for the access they offer to the writing process than for their representation of the authors' personal characteristics. These volumes are less an attempt to define the authors' own status than a means by which they imagine the world of print exchange. As their marital relationship has been structured around the exchange of text, so is the exchange of text defined via the marital relationship.

A dispassionate marriage

As argued in Chapter 2, the extent to which the husband-wife relationship reproduces the dynamic of the father-daughter relationship can be overstated.¹⁷² Practically speaking, however, the practice of coverture invested all the financial and legal power in the person of the husband and wives were peculiarly vulnerable to emotional or physical cruelty. 'There are some men', says Haywood severely in *The*

¹⁷² See Chapter 2, p. 54.

Husband (1756), ‘too many I am afraid, who value themselves more upon their sex than they do upon their virtue or endowments; and, merely because they are men, imagine they have a right not only to command, but to exact a blind, implicit, and indeed a slavish obedience from their wives’.¹⁷³ The Griffiths’ work, however, is a pertinent example of the reproduction of ideologies that advocated a companionate, affective husband-wife relationship. In an historical period that decried tyranny in all its forms, a tyrannical husband was vulnerable to social critique if not actual practical intervention, as was a father who sought to sell his daughter to the highest bidder. Cynthia in *David Simple* says of a man who informs her that he has struck a bargain for her with her father: ‘I made him a low Court’sey, and thanked him for the Honour he intended me; but told him, I had no kind of Ambition to be his *upper Servant*. Tho,’ indeed, I could not help wondering how it was possible for me to escape being charmed with his *genteel Manner* of addressing me’.¹⁷⁴ The man who viewed a wife as merely another servant in the gentleman’s household was roundly criticised in favour of the man who sought intellectual companions and helpmeets in a wife. The latter type of man, as Cynthia’s comment suggests, would be seen as much more genteel than the boorish tyrant.

The fact that Fielding felt the need to include such a scene in her novel illustrates the real distance of companionate marital ideals from reality. Hunt observes that the instrumental kinship networks around which much of middling society operated meant that kindness to a wife could have material benefits for the husband, as it would keep her relations supportive of his business efforts, arguing that ‘the suggestion is strong that the wife’s separate estate became “normalized” over the

¹⁷³ Eliza Haywood, *The Husband. In answer to The Wife*, in *Selected Works*, Set 1, Vol. III: *The Wife, The Husband and the Young Lady*, ed. Alexander Pettit and Margo Collins, 139-269, 149.

¹⁷⁴ Sarah Fielding, *The Adventures of David Simple*, ed. Peter Sabor (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998), 86.

course of the eighteenth century'.¹⁷⁵ Despite the institution of such checks and balances of ideals of gentility, and economic incentives and protections, husbands were still inordinately powerful.¹⁷⁶ On the understanding that marriage was still a seriously unequal relationship of power in the eighteenth century, the Griffiths present their marriage as operating along a horizontal spectrum, opening up certain idealistic and egalitarian possibilities for the marriage relation, at least when expressed through writing. The Griffiths were perhaps in an unusual situation; as impoverished gentlefolk, and both authors, neither could claim economic superiority, and both worked to support the family in a field to which women had a level of economic access. There is a sense that in terms of being equally poor, the Griffiths achieved more equality than many married couples. Yet they also represent the exceptionality of their marriage, and appear to consider it to be a worthy model for imitation.

The exceptionality of the marriage depicted in the *Series* depends on its enactment of a model of Humean polite heterosociable conversation in which male gallantry and feminine modesty permit both to shine in the practice of educated, virtuous conversational exchange. The first two volumes of the *Series* undertake a certain amount of cultural work in depicting a move from cynical libertinism to educated rationality. They depict not just the practice of polite heterosociable conversation but the process by which it can be made possible, in a way that Hume's essays cannot. The *Series* uses conversation not only to demonstrate the polite capacities of its authors, but the capacity of the conversational process to transform the individual into a fully modern, heterosociable discursive subject. Although much of the focus is on the virtuous woman's capacity to transform the libidinous man into a rational lover, both the man and the woman are transformed. Both claim that

¹⁷⁵ Hunt, *The Middling Sort*, 159.

¹⁷⁶ For a fuller treatment of marriage in the period, especially with regards to property, see Perry, *Novel Relations*, Chs. 5 & 6, 190-287.

epistolary conversation teaches them to love rationally. It is also significant that they conceive of the transformation they undergo in terms of novelistic narrative.

The prefatory material of the first two volumes of the *Series* set out the particular appeal of the ‘story’ of Henry and Frances. The way in which epistolary exchange transforms Henry’s passion into rational affection is stated repeatedly. An anonymous puff says of Henry and Frances: ‘this Pair of polite and happy Lovers seem to have used their Passions as they were designed by Providence, to inspirit their Reason, and to actuate their Moral, not to subject these to their arbitrary Dominion’.¹⁷⁷ Henry’s letter to the editor claims that ‘I reasoned myself into a real Passion for her’.¹⁷⁸ The editor states the case most succinctly in describing Henry:

His Acquaintance with *Frances* was accidental, and commenced, on his Part, as an Affair of Galantry; but finding no Probability of Success, and being enamoured with her Writings, Conversation, and Character, became, at last, a real and honourable Lover.¹⁷⁹

The value of the *Series*, according to these commentators, is the way in which it enacts the process through which the passions can be moderated and transformed into honourable, rational affection through conversation and writing. The insistence of the prefatory material on this process suggests that its enactment was thought to have a level of print-market appeal.

The means by which the process of transformation occurs is partly through conversational set-pieces in which Frances is permitted to shine. A particularly significant incident occurs near the beginning of the first volume in which Henry and Frances stage a ‘battle of the sexes’ through which Frances is able to stake her claim to recognition as an intellectual subject. In response to Henry’s claim that women prefer fools, Frances says: ‘Observe that I enter the Lists and draw my Pen, as

¹⁷⁷ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, I, iii.

¹⁷⁸ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, I, vii.

¹⁷⁹ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, I, xxii.

Champion, for the Honour of my injured Sex'.¹⁸⁰ Beginning with the claim that 'Souls are not of different Genders', Frances defends women's possession of rational capacity equal to that of men, blaming custom and poor education for examples to the contrary, and citing the many excellencies of women:

Your own Reading can furnish you with Instances in Women, of every manly Virtue, even of personal Courage, and Contempt of Death; sufficient to prove the Force of my Reasoning; which, however, I shall not enumerate, lest, my Memory failing me, you should pertly say, these Examples were but just sufficient to establish the contrary Rule, by their Exceptions to it. In Answer to which, I shall make the Reply, that a Lyon did once to a Man, "you keep the Art of Painting in your own Hands".¹⁸¹

By pointing out that women are victims of inaccurate representation Frances suggests the breadth of her own reading and thereby her own personal claim to equal rational capacity. She goes on to conclude:

Thus un-educated, and unimproved; or, what is worse, condemned to a wrong Education; it is as unfair to censure us for the Weakness of our Understandings, as it would be to blame the *Chinese Women* for little Feet; for neither is owing to the imperfection of Nature, but to the Constraint of Custom.¹⁸²

The claim that there was no sex in souls was a well-established rhetorical move that drew on Cartesian philosophy. Erica Harth, speaking of the effects of Descartes' philosophy in France says, 'For educated, upper-class women, his philosophy was like a university without walls'.¹⁸³ The idea that the individual mind, free from restrictions of gender, could accede to the truth, gave women the necessary ammunition to demand an education, as Frances does here. However, her rhetoric also serves a function in the context of ideologies of polite conversation.

Frances draws her defence of women to a conclusion with a rhetorical flourish lifted from Hume: 'Oh! let us once be free; for know, that Arts and Sciences

¹⁸⁰ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, I, 59.

¹⁸¹ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, I, 60.

¹⁸² Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, I, 62.

¹⁸³ Erica Harth, *Cartesian Women: Versions and Subversions of Rational Discourse in the Old Regime* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 3.

cannot raise their Heads under despotick Sway'.¹⁸⁴ Hume's claim that arts and sciences could not flourish under tyrannical government forms part of an essay in which he also describes his model for polite interaction between the sexes:

What better school for manners than the company of virtuous women, where the mutual endeavour to please must insensibly polish the mind, where the example of female softness and modesty must communicate itself to their admirers, and where the delicacy of that sex puts every one on his guard, lest he give offence by any breach of decency?¹⁸⁵

Frances's invocation of Hume reproduces his relation of political government and relations between the sexes. Her defence of women thus serves several purposes. The claim for women's equality of rational capacity argues that women can engage in intellectual pursuits alongside men as subjects in their own right. Her own ability to marshal this tissue of arguments demonstrates her personal intellectual capacity, and her fitness to participate in educated conversation with Henry. Her arguments also invoke a context of polite heterosociable conversation as the ideal model for relations between the sexes. Through conflating misogyny with tyranny, Frances sets out a model of marriage that depends on shared genteel intellectual pursuits, within which women can claim equality, or even superiority. Although such claims skirted the obvious problem of men's retention of political and economic authority, her model is intended to make visible women's contribution to heterosociable conversation.

Henry, in response to Frances's defence of women bestows the recognition that she requires, signalling his conversion from libertine misogyny and his acquiescence in the polite heterosociable conversational model for interaction, gallantly claiming: 'as I formerly hated the whole Sex, on account of one Woman, I

¹⁸⁴ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, I, 64.

¹⁸⁵ Hume, 'Of the Rise of the Arts and Sciences' in *Selected Essays*, ed. Copley, 56-77, 74. The direct quote to which Frances alludes runs thus: '*That it is impossible for the arts and sciences to arise, at first, among any people, unless that people enjoy the blessing of a free government*' (59).

shall henceforward love them all for the Sake of another'.¹⁸⁶ His emphasis on Frances's exceptionality, while it confirms her equal position within the marital conversation, contests her defence of the whole sex. It is necessary that Henry and Frances emphasise their exemplary status, even while, through an enactment of the reformatory power of polite conversation, they imply that they offer a model for imitation. The editor to Volume V asserts that the marriage 'is worthy both of Notice and of Imitation', attempting to combine the two potentially contradictory concepts of exceptionality and imitability.¹⁸⁷ In Volume V, Henry claims:

We are, indeed, my amiable Woman, the most extraordinary Couple that ever lived; and our Loves will hand us down to Fame, though our Wit should fail. But what is more critically remarkable in so extraordinary an Instance, is, that I am convinced no other Man with you, nor any other Woman in the World with me, could have formed so rare a Union.¹⁸⁸

The authors' exemplarity justifies the publication of the letters, even though they hold out the possibility that others may undergo a similar transformation through the power of sociability.

The move from love to marriage is given greater force through its conception as the plot of a novel. Henry says in his preface to the first two volumes, 'the following Series of Letters form in Truth, the whole Compass of our Novel'.¹⁸⁹ This insistence on the reforming power of letters would have been instantly recognisable to eighteenth-century readers as the central plot of Richardson's *Pamela*. Unlike Pamela, however, Frances is able to acknowledge that she loves Henry, but at the same time spurn his unmannerly advances: 'That I do love you, I own, and confess it more freely, since I find I have, thank God, sufficient Strength to acknowledge it with Safety; for, I am glad to find, I do not love you better than

¹⁸⁶ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, I, 67.

¹⁸⁷ 'The Editors to the Publick' in Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, V, viii.

¹⁸⁸ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, V, 280.

¹⁸⁹ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, I, xl.

myself'.¹⁹⁰ Letters in the style of the virtuous rebuff seem to have been particularly valued by readers; the 'Clergyman of Taste and Literature' in the prefatory material says that this letter is 'a Master-piece of good Sense, Virtue, Wit, Spirit and Language'.¹⁹¹ Although the conversion narrative takes Henry as its subject, Frances also claims that she has undergone a conversion based on a move away from romantic literary notions:

I well remember a Time, when I would have exchanged the most advantageous Proposal of Marriage, for a Letter signed *Orondates*, *Cyrus*, or any other heroick Name. I can now, with great Pleasure, boast a Change in my Disposition, almost to a direct Contradiction of my former Sentiments; and can assure you, that I think it a very high Triumph for a Woman, under five and twenty, to have surmounted all the Romance which could possibly be crammed into a little female Soul.¹⁹²

Frances's assertion presages the reformation of the heroine of Charlotte Lennox's enormously successful *The Female Quixote* (1752), published slightly after this letter was supposed to have been written.¹⁹³ It suggests a similar appeal to a stereotype of women having their heads turned by reading romances. The surmounting of romantic notions ushers in a new, rational way of reading that values the familiar over the heroic, just as Henry's conversion suggests the triumph of middle-class virtue over aristocratic libertinism. Both models of conversion depend on the elevation of the rational, virtuous woman as an agent of reform.

At this point in the *Series*, Henry and Frances assert the value of the public dissemination of their letters because its trajectory conforms to the reformatory power attributed to the novel and enacted in novels like *Pamela* or *The Female Quixote*. The discourse of fictionality provides a language in which the letters' print value can be asserted, even as they claim to be genuine insights into a real love affair and marriage.

¹⁹⁰ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, I, 93.

¹⁹¹ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, I, iv.

¹⁹² Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, I, 236.

¹⁹³ Although, since the *Series* was not published until 1757, it is quite possible that the Griffiths exploited Lennox's novel rather than pre-empting it.

In attributing reformation to the dissemination of text, the *Series* models the process of didactic reform, which can then, in theory, make society as a whole more polite. The Griffiths' use of the trope of education extends the initial model of transformation from libidinous lust to rational affection to offer a model in which, once the will to polite conversation has been established, both parties (and their readers) can continue to improve.

The trope of heterosociable education

The woman's claim to equal participation in rational, heterosociable conversation is only the beginning of the story. Once established as a rational subject, Frances must struggle to define her role within that conversation in terms that are suitable for her purposes. Again, this debate occurs primarily within the first two volumes of the *Series*, although it recurs occasionally in the later volumes as well. The *Series* draws heavily from contemporary versions of ideal heterosociability in which the man and the woman bring complimentary qualities to the conversation and thus engage in a process of mutual refinement. One of the qualities that the man could offer the woman was the benefit of knowledge, since men were typically more widely read and had greater access to formal education than women. The polite woman brought a refined taste and a civilised modesty to the conversation, moderating an imagined male tendency to uncouth behaviour. It is possible to see these ideologies enacted in the *Series*; both Henry and Frances claim to receive an education from the other. Moreover, both figure their education as pleasurable, even erotic, suggesting the imagined pleasure of the process of reform, and the way it can be reconciled with the marital relationship.

Didacticism enacted through conversation figures the letters in the role of teaching tools for the public at large. In the *Series*, a model of educated heterosociable

converse is enacted in displays of critical engagement through shared reading and writing. Thus, the published letters both enact a regime of mutual education, and suggest themselves as didactic models for public consumption, or potential agents of public reform. The reader, through exposure to the reforming power of the protagonists' conversational exchange, is also reformed. Because textual conversation makes visible the contribution of both the man and the woman, the reader gains the benefit of both male and female conversational qualities. However, the elevation of the woman as the didactic agent of reform masks the potential inequities of the model. In the first two volumes, Frances must undergo a sustained, and thoroughly gendered, struggle to participate in conversation on her own terms, and not those dictated by her husband-teacher. Importantly, she is at her most modest and self-effacing when she is engaging in debate with her husband; rather than permitting her modesty to signal that she acts under his aegis, she uses displays of modesty to define her own version of her conversational role.

The Female Spectator suggested that a husband was the best, and most pleasurable, source of education for a woman:

She would receive Instruction from his Mouth with double Pleasure, and it must certainly be an infinite Satisfaction to him to perceive the Improvement his fair Pupil daily made under his Tuition: - Nothing in my Opinion could more endear them to each other, nor be a greater Proof of their mutual Affection.¹⁹⁴

This statement is made in the context of a discussion of how men's arguments against women's education oppress women. Seen in this light, Henry's willingness to engage in intellectual conversation with Frances makes him a comparatively enlightened specimen of eighteenth-century masculinity. The Female Spectator suggests that education could be part of the business of love. Henry and Frances deliberately

¹⁹⁴ Haywood, *The Female Spectator* (Vol. II, Book X), in *The Female Spectator*, ed. Pettit and King, II, 364.

conflate erotic pleasure and education through adoption of the personae of Abelard and Heloise, invoking the couple who most famously mingled the erotic, the instructional and the epistolary. Frances on occasion seems to render herself abject, telling Henry ‘Whatever Sense, Accomplishment, or Merit, I have, were inspired from your Precept, Example, and Instruction; and, like *Pygmalion*, you are become enamoured of the Works of your own Hands’.¹⁹⁵ She is even willing to imagine herself as having been created through conversation with Henry. Brant argues that the *Series* inscribes a hierarchy in which ‘Frances concedes masculine superiority in return for the fantasy of being taught’.¹⁹⁶ However, the erotic hierarchy is never predictable, and elsewhere, Frances imagines herself empowered through the educative relationship:

How earnestly, how passionately, do I languish to be a Partner in the rational Delight you mention! to have the Essence of Wisdom, Learning, Eloquence, and Truth, from thy harmonious Tongue, ’till, raised by Gratitude and Rapture, I catch my kind Instructor in my Arms, and teach even him what it is to love!¹⁹⁷

The idea that learning could function as a kind of foreplay is potentially problematic, as it eroticises the power difference between master and pupil. However, the power hierarchy is inverted when Frances claims that she will teach Henry to love, taking on the role of erotic instructor in the game of education.

The game generally takes the form of Henry sending Frances reading material. It is clear that he is monitoring her reading to some extent when he observes: ‘I have already given you every Book from my Study, which I presumed might adorn a Lady’s Library’.¹⁹⁸ Initially, Frances is a willing player of the role of Heloise to Henry’s Abelard, calling him ‘my *Abelard*, my only Orthodoxy ----- in speculative

¹⁹⁵ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, I, 30.

¹⁹⁶ Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters*, 119.

¹⁹⁷ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, I, 217-18.

¹⁹⁸ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, I, 200-201.

points'.¹⁹⁹ Later in the first volume she admits: 'I am quite sensible of my own Incapacity to engage on any Topick with you, and, if ever I venture to give my Opinion on Subjects, that I neither am, nor ever shall be Mistress of, it must be owing to a strong Reliance on your Indulgence, and to the Pleasure I always took in having you for a Preceptor'.²⁰⁰ Indeed, her modesty at this stage is almost overpowering; although she asserts opinions in favour of Cowley, Pope, Montaigne, Shakespeare and other authors, she hedges much of her writing about with assertions of incompetence.²⁰¹ Henry lends Frances books and instructs her in how best to read them, taking on the role of teacher by setting specific tasks for Frances to do:

I hope you are reading *Brown* upon the *Characteristics*, and writing Notes upon it: I am sure you are, because I desired it. I should be glad to have your Opinion upon the Definition of Virtue, given in the last Lines of the third Section of the second Essay, upon the moral Obligations of Man to Virtue. I give you fair Play, by telling you that I think this Definition false and imperfect, and only ask you, how it is so...This is a severe Trial of my dear Pupil; for, I own, when first I read the Book, I was fully satisfied with the Definition.²⁰²

Similarly, he advises her to 'Read much, reflect more; read and reflect the Things proper to improve your Mind, and to regulate your Life. Be all that I can wish in Woman - For you can - '.²⁰³ The premise on which both Henry and Frances operate is that she needs shaping and regulating through reading in order to be a fit companion. Frances claims: 'I never take up a Book but with a Design of rendering myself more worthy of your personal or epistolary Converse. I am well convinced, that not all the Authors I can ever read, will prevent my falling short of the *ne plus ultra*'.²⁰⁴

¹⁹⁹ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, I, 200.

²⁰⁰ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, I, 286.

²⁰¹ Frances's opinions: 'I shall conclude with some Lines of Cowley, tho' you call him a surfeiting Author' (I, 2); of Pope she says, 'I think he had less Merit, tho' more Charms, than many of our English Writers' (I, 208); she calls Montaigne a 'favourite' (I, 109) and refers to 'my darling Shakespear' (I, 110).

²⁰² Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, II, 249-50. 'Brown' is John Brown, *Essays on the Characteristics of the Earl of Shaftesbury* (London, 1751).

²⁰³ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, II, 334.

²⁰⁴ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, I, 219.

However, the flow of education is not all one way. Henry also uses the word ‘preceptor’ in reference to Frances’s qualities of taste and refinement, which he imagines educating him in turn. The evidence of such a process is seen primarily in Henry’s assertions of Frances’s refining power. For example, he claims in Volume I: ‘If I appear to have a better Philosophy, or more refined Sense than formerly, it is but to accommodate myself to your Sentiments and Taste; which, by the Continuance of your Favour, may perhaps strengthen Habit into Nature’.²⁰⁵ Particularly in the early volumes, Frances’s innate reformatory power is a constant topic in Henry’s letters. He claims that she is ‘fitter to be yourself the Preceptor, than the Pupil’.²⁰⁶ In imagining whom he would trust to recommend reading, he envisions a person rather ‘of a refined Taste than of deep Learning, and of more natural Understanding than great acquired Knowledge. In short, my dearest *Fanny*, you should be my *Minerva*, my Preceptor’.²⁰⁷

His use of the term ‘preceptor’ tends to refer to Frances’s innate feminine qualities rather than her educated opinions, but this has much to do with the model of heterosociability that the *Series* presents. Since both parties bring complimentary qualities to the conversation, both parties gain something from the conversational exchange, and thus both are improved and made more polite. Likewise, Frances is not unwilling to challenge what she sees as Henry’s impolite scriptive behaviour. She complains: ‘Your *Latin* Sentences always vex me. I feel a sort of Disappointment, as if a Line was blotted; or a certain Impatience, such as curious People are affected with, upon observing a Whisper in Company...*Pen me no more of your Whispers*, but speak out for the future’.²⁰⁸ By refiguring her own potential educative failure of not

²⁰⁵ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, I, 184.

²⁰⁶ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, I, 213.

²⁰⁷ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, II, 18. The source of this quote is unidentified.

²⁰⁸ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, II, 371.

understanding Latin in terms of Henry's impolite social behaviour, Frances is able to challenge Henry without exposing herself.

However, the process of education is not always harmonious. Frances does not wish to sacrifice what she considers her feeling femininity to her philosophical education. The struggle that results turns on the question of the meaning of philosophy and its appropriate application within a heterosexual relationship. Henry seems to consider that by educating Frances he makes her somehow more than a woman. Henry claims of Frances, 'there is indeed, in your Understanding, so little of Effeminacy, that I frequently consider you, not only as a Man, but a Man of Letters too'.²⁰⁹ Frances responds in a way that is perhaps frustrating for the modern reader of the letters:

It is the Charter of our Sex, to be Fools; and the numberless Weaknesses, which intitle us to your Regard and Protection, create a peculiar kind of Affection, which it is natural to feel for Creatures in our Power. But should we once disclaim that *powerful* Weakness, which renders us alike Objects of Love and Pity, we are no longer intitled to that Indulgence and Partiality, which the wisest of us want, and the simplest have a claim to. Let me therefore intreat my dearest *Harry*, to look on my Friendship for him as truly masculine: But let my Understanding still claim all the Privileges of the feminine Gender.²¹⁰

Frances's claim to the 'privilege' of weakness implies that she is willing to avoid the struggle for an equal place in the heterosociable relationship in order to reap the rewards of enfeebled femininity. However, if the argument is charted throughout the second volume, it becomes clear that Frances's elaborate postures of modest weakness should be seen in the context of certain circumstances in her particular relationship with Henry, in particular, her ill health throughout her first pregnancy.

Early in the second volume, Henry laments: 'I wish, my dear *Fanny*, I could make you as good a Philosopher in Practice, as you are in Theory'.²¹¹ Conversational

²⁰⁹ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, I, 234.

²¹⁰ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, I, 238.

²¹¹ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, II, 56.

gambits like these usually occur when Frances has complained either about her personal circumstances or Henry's lack of feeling towards her. A fairly common complaint is that he seems able to leave her without manifesting emotion: 'I have seen you quit me, with as much Indifference as you would a common Acquaintance; while my poor foolish Heart has heaved, and Eyes strained to follow you'.²¹² She attributes his apparent indifference to his philosophical temper, which Henry claims he has 'endeavoured to practise myself into'.²¹³ Henry is often impatient with her emotional letters, requesting that she 'quit that plaintive elegiac Strain, you accost me with, every second or third Post. You are either sick, angry, or jealous, I observe, once a Week'.²¹⁴ His proposed remedy is a 'short Sketch of *Natural Philosophy*'.²¹⁵ According to Henry, Frances's feminine weakness is a failing that should be remedied through the educative process: 'You are but a young Philosopher, and frequent Occasions of exercising your Temper, are requisite to prevent your dwindling into mere Woman again'.²¹⁶

One exchange in particular highlights the problem. During Frances's first pregnancy, she is generally ill and anxious. At one point she writes, 'I cannot help observing, with what vast calmness you have endured my Misfortunes...I should be glad to see one of our modern Philosophers endure the Loss of Health with that Indifference, they recommend to others'.²¹⁷ By implication, she attacks male philosophers for presuming to understand the trials that befall the female body. Henry's response is angry:

The Reason of applying those philosophic Lectures, which you are offended at, was from this Blunder: That I thought the Loss of Health, Fortune, Friends, or

²¹² Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, II, 10.

²¹³ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, II, 13.

²¹⁴ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, II, 330.

²¹⁵ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, II, 330.

²¹⁶ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, II, 352.

²¹⁷ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, II, 91-92.

any other Unhappiness of Life, was the proper Season to recommend such Medicines; and it ought to be observed, I did not use such Reflections to shew how *I* could bear your Misfortunes, but to instruct and assist *you* to support yourself under them.²¹⁸

Henry's anger comes from Frances's refusal to accept his teaching and adopt his 'philosophical' attitude. Frances's struggle comes from a desire to be able to define in her own terms her place within the conversational model. She is unwilling to adopt what she sees as an unfeeling 'philosophical' way of life; she struggles to integrate her feeling heart with her education. That she can only define her femininity in terms of 'weakness' may be a function of the period in which she lived, or may be her own unwillingness to attempt to recast it in less abject terms. However, she succeeds in creating a space for herself within a model of heterosociable conversation that permits her to unite the qualities of education and feminine sensibility, and she does this without fracturing the relationship itself.

In the final suite of letters in the second volume, Henry and Frances revisit the topic and implicitly agree to disagree. Frances says, 'I never was, am not, nor ever shall be a *Philosopher*; and what is more, I am far from regretting that want of Sensibility they boast of...But enough upon a Subject, that you and I can never agree about. I rejoice however, to think that it is the only one, we ever had a Dispute on'.²¹⁹ Henry contents himself with observing that 'Stoicism is too much Bravery for a Woman'.²²⁰ The positioning of these letters at the very end of the first two volumes signals the end of the debate, although neither has won the argument or converted the other, and similar issues arise in subsequent volumes. This particular debate highlights the uses to which Frances puts the rhetoric of modesty and weakness; often it is a means by which she is able to assert her own opinion on the necessity of a

²¹⁸ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, II, 94.

²¹⁹ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, II, 408.

²²⁰ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, II, 409.

feeling heart, an integral part of her subsequent authorial persona. She is enabled by the formal model of conversational letter exchange that the *Series* adopts, in which both feminine emotion and feminine authorial excellence are displayed to advantage.

Epistolary models

The *Series* purposefully blends amatory models for letter-writing with the familiar letter mode, a blend that is supposed to denote a marriage based on rational affection and maintained through conversational letter-exchange. Henry and Frances, refer to each other as both friends and lovers. The idea of friendship moderates that of love, and suggests a social relationship as well as an amatory one. The letters, through making it clear that they are designed to invoke both love and friendship, challenge the potential generic distinction between the amatory and the familiar. The letters also mediate between an embodied, material exchange of letters and a disembodied intellectual relationship expressed through text or print. The letter form to some extent calls into play such opposing concepts. Janet Altman claims that the ‘paradox of epistolarity is that the very consistency of epistolary meaning is the interplay within a specific set of polar inconsistencies’.²²¹ The Griffiths prove themselves masters of epistolary form by exploiting to the limit its potential to express two or more things at once. This section refers to all six volumes of the *Series*, since Henry and Frances maintain the blend of amatory and familiar throughout their epistolary publications.

The amatory mode of letter writing depends on the figure of the abandoned woman for its rhetorical force. Functioning more as a kind of introspective brooding, the amatory letter permits the reader to gain a voyeuristic insight into a woman’s emotional state, laid bare on the page. The narrative of abandonment takes the form of

²²¹ Janet Gurkin Altman, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1982), 190.

a woman lamenting her seduction while expressing her continued desire and longing for the beloved. Linda Kauffman looks for the positive aspects of such narratives when she contends that the abandoned woman uses her narrative as a means of self invention, transforming herself from the 'Woman who Waits' into the 'Woman who Writes'; thus the woman can claim a level of scriptive authority and power within her powerless circumstances.²²² Such narratives often weave a fantasy of the presence of the absent beloved, as Perry contends: 'love is available even when lovers are not, in the solitary pleasures of reading and writing love letters'.²²³ Although Frances is not seduced and abandoned *per se*, several of her letters invoke the amatory style. Displays of amatory affection within a marriage challenge the common idea that the lover and the husband were very different people, because marriage removed the necessity for the man to be gallant and charming. Henry and Frances use the amatory mode to reassert the exceptionality of their marriage. The effect of the invocations of amatory style in the later volumes can be pathetic or occasionally almost satiric.

In a particular sequence of letters in Volume III, Frances demonstrates her awareness of the possibility that letters may represent introspection rather than communication. At one point she says, 'I know you need not Memento's, and it was to indulge my own, not to rouse your Reflections, that I have pursued these Thoughts'.²²⁴ In a similar vein, she asserts, 'I have a Kind of Pleasure in this imaginary Correspondence, such as I have often experienced in talking to your Picture, or uttering my Tenderness in Whispers, when you were fast asleep'.²²⁵ Frances adopts a self-referential amatory model in order to indulge in the pleasure of acting out her emotional state. There is a certain kind of mournful pleasure in the

²²² Linda S. Kauffman, *Discourses of Desire: Gender, Genre, and Epistolary Fictions* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 25.

²²³ Ruth Perry, *Women, Letters and the Novel* (New York: AMS Press, 1980), 101.

²²⁴ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, III, 7.

²²⁵ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, III, 53.

indulgence of emotional longing, affiliated with the possession of taste and sensibility, as Frances explains:

[T]he tender Regret which we feel, for the Absence of a Person we love, on such Occasions, is infinitely more delightful than the bare enjoyment of any Pleasure, free from those elegant Sensations: But, at the same Time, I readily grant, that these make-shift Pleasures fall short, very far short, of mutual Delight.²²⁶

Such assertions help to reinforce the picture of Frances's emotional sensitivity and femininity. Particularly when she is ill or depressed, she is inclined to tax Henry with unkindness, in a move that picks up on the debate over philosophical temperament in Volume II. In response to a letter in which she speaks of an illness and her possible death, Henry says, with a manifest lack of sympathy: 'you will not exert that Strength of Mind, which you may find yourself Mistress of, if you will but take a little Pains to try'.²²⁷ Frances replies indignantly, 'May I, if I live, be able to acquire the Strength, you wish me possessed of! Or may you, in some Degree, become more indulgent, as better used to my Weakness and Deficiencies'.²²⁸ Frances's apparent inclination to play the sensitive, emotive epistolary heroine offers Henry two roles within the amatory script in which he can respond to her complaint. He can be a hero and offer sympathy and manifest distress on her account, or he can be a cruel and uncaring anti-hero. Frances reads his attempt to stiffen her backbone as cruelty. This sequence of letters is rather tragic and pathetic, signalling misinterpretations, mixed messages and the breakdown of communication between the pair, and exposing the contingency of the epistolary relationship.

Both parties occasionally refer to the property of the letter as embodiment of the absent beloved, a common conceit in amatory epistolary discourse. This is played out through images of physical interaction with the letters. Henry says of Frances's

²²⁶ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, III, 44.

²²⁷ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, III, 91.

²²⁸ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, III, 93.

letters, 'I kiss the Seal, and ravish the Contents'.²²⁹ Frances says, in a tender moment, 'I wish I could impress it on your Lips with Ten Times the Warmth that I have pressed this Paper to my own'.²³⁰ The letters as physical objects, subject to the vagaries of the postal service, reinforce the sense of intimate amatory exchange on which the *Series* depends for its claim to authenticity. However, amatory associations are also made comical, as when Henry writes, 'I kissed your last Billet, as it was, in some sort an Emblem of yourself, short and sweet'.²³¹ His comment, rather than taking the letter as symbol of the body seriously, converts it into matter for playful insult. Later nods to the amatory are much more lively and often quasi-satirical, as when Frances observes, 'how infinitely ought I to prefer the pleasing Pain of lamenting your Absence, not only to the being rendered uneasy by your Presence, but even to our being indifferent toward each other together!'²³²

Playing on the adage that absence makes the heart grow fonder, Frances suggests that absence may be preferable to presence, turning the hoped-for reunion that gives amatory letters their poignancy on its head. Frances also suggests that Henry's long absence has rendered her as good as unmarried:

I grow rather impatient at the Kind of forlorn and widowed Life I have led so long; and positively declare, that if you absent yourself much longer, I shall begin to consider myself as a maiden Gentlewoman (and many such *Maidens* I believe there are) and shall not suffer you to approach me nearer than any other male Creature, before you shall have suffered the Pains and Penalties of a spick and span new Courtship.²³³

Playfully dramatising her abandonment through fantasises of demanding a new courtship, Frances converts the rhetoric of abandonment and female weakness into the

²²⁹ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, I, 113.

²³⁰ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, VI, 229.

²³¹ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, I, 44.

²³² Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, IV, 150.

²³³ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, VI, 206.

discourse of female power to keep men at a distance. Such displays of wit and flights of the imagination fit better in the familiar letter mode than within the amatory epistle.

The familiar letter differs from the amatory letter in the *Series* in that it denotes friendship rather than romantic love, and depends on witty conversational exchange rather than plaintive affection. In the preface to the second edition of Volumes I and II of the *Series*, an anonymous letter appears, endorsing the text. The writer reveals some confusion about the nature of the letters, saying that ‘there are many Subjects treated of in this Collection, which are not the proper Business of Lovers’.²³⁴ His comment suggests that the *Series* was unusual in its purposeful mixing of the amatory and the familiar. The purpose of the invocation of friendship is to make the claim for the value of the letters in published form; the lovers’ writings, because they range over a wide variety of subjects beyond that of love alone, are worthy of public notice. Henry claims in his letter to the Editor that, ‘I have actually, several times, by the meer Force of Contemplation, worked myself into such an Enthusiasm about her Knowledge, Genius, and Understanding, that...I have wrote *Latin*, Philosophy and Metaphysicks to her’.²³⁵

On several occasions, both Henry and Frances make clear distinctions between love and friendship, only in order to show how their relationship supersedes such distinctions. Frances argues that pure friendship may exist between man and woman: ‘As Friendship then is independent of Love, and self-sufficient in it’s own Nature, why may it not subsist, from it’s own Purity, between Persons of different Sexes?’²³⁶ However, Henry’s reply accuses her of over-refinement, arguing, ‘I believe it is possible in Nature, though not in human Nature, that there may be such a refined Love as you describe; but then it must be reserved for that State, where we shall live

²³⁴ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, I, iii.

²³⁵ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, I, vi.

²³⁶ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, I, 18.

without Food, and, wrapt up in Hallelujahs, resign the Pleasures of Sense for a Song'.²³⁷ His early refusal to countenance the idea of pure friendship is balanced by his gradual move towards the possibility of rational affection that idealistically blends love and friendship. In pondering which he would choose if forced, he says:

In such a Dilemma, I should consider myself, like the Paradise of *Erasmus*, suspended between Heaven and Hell; for though Enjoyment, either of your Conversation or Person, would be Heaven to me, the Deprivation of either would be Hell. This Equality of Sentiment is not owing to any Luckiness in my Composition, setting the Balance between the Rationale and Irrationale of my Constitution; but to your extraordinary Merit, which makes me think the Enjoyment of your Person would be almost rational; and, in Return, the Sprightliness of your Converse, and Poignancy of your Wit, "darts through the Soul, and almost gives Enjoyment".²³⁸

In framing his rational affection in erotic terms and his erotic desire as rational, Henry sets up an idealised model of affection between the sexes that refuses to distinguish between spiritual and sexual love. However, within this model, both Henry and Frances place a greater priority on friendship than on love. Henry says, 'I would never sacrifice one Sentiment of Friendship to all the Extravagance of Love'.²³⁹ Frances says, 'I declare solemnly, I have felt a higher Satisfaction in considering myself as your first Friend, than I ever did in thinking myself the Object of your Affection'.²⁴⁰ Where love is subsumed into friendship, the basis for a lasting, rational affection is established.

The move from Henry's cynical libertinism to rational affection is primarily predicated on the exchange of letters, through which Henry comes to appreciate the properties of Frances's mind as well as her person. The letters, in a sense, *are* the relationship, implied by Henry's figuring his affection in the language of print: 'I, with all Sincerity, commend my Love to you, corrected and amended from the Errors

²³⁷ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, I, 20.

²³⁸ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, I, 112. Quotation unidentified.

²³⁹ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, I, 191.

²⁴⁰ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, II, 54.

of the former Edition, the *Impression* still remaining the same; which, tho' the *Type* is small, I still retain, for the Fairness and Beauty of the *Character*'.²⁴¹ Such an association reinforces a sense of a relationship that has its primary existence in disembodied text. Henry, in his letter to the Editor in Volumes I and II, declares that he maintains his affection for Frances by reading over her letters to him: 'whenever I found my Resolution stagger...I used to take out a Parcel from this Collection, sometimes more, or less, according to the Disorder in my Affection, and so read away till I had swallowed the *Quantum sufficit*, to restore the full Health of my Attachment to her'.²⁴² Henry pursues this conceit all the way through the six volumes, telling Frances in Volume VI: 'Whenever you happen to be dull, dispirited, or dissatisfied, either with yourself or me, take up any Volume of the Series and read a *Quantum sufficit* for your Cure'.²⁴³ Frances concurs with Henry's perspective on the power of correspondence to keep a flame alight, although she adds an ironic twist:

I am very certain that we should never have loved one another, half so well as we do, if it were not for the constant Correspondence we have held together, all our Lives; which afforded us each an Opportunity of expressing those fond Sentiments in our Letters, that we were both too sturdy to utter on a *tête à tête*.²⁴⁴

The idea that letters offer opportunities to express sentiments that cannot be spoken directly suggests that the relationship is maintained through individual acts of reading and writing in the form of letter exchange.

The letter form offers Frances the opportunity to exploit the critical commonplace that women were the masters of the epistolary form, a claim specifically linked to heterosociability by the 'Clergyman of Taste and Literature' in the prefatory material to the second edition of the first two volumes, who calls women

²⁴¹ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, I, 158-59.

²⁴² Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, I, vi.

²⁴³ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, VI, 21.

²⁴⁴ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, IV, 178.

‘the Sex, who beat us all to nothing in Conversation and Letter-Writing’.²⁴⁵ The emphasis on genuineness throughout the *Series* operates in Frances’s favour; it plays on the market for untutored, artless letters that were particularly associated with women. From her assertion in Volume I that ‘my Letters have always been Originals, not Copies’, to her claim in Volume VI that ‘I write just as I speak - extempore. One needs no Preparation to utter Truth’, Frances’s letters self-consciously subscribe to contemporary expectations surrounding women’s letters.²⁴⁶ However, the letters highlight her facility in playing the different roles associated with women’s letter-writing; she is by turns plaintive, witty, loving, critical and flirtatious. Her capacity to adopt the tone and register required for the occasion reveals, not her untutored, artless emotion, but her status as a skilled writer.

The letter-form offers to Frances the possibility of collapsing the distinction between life and writing to display herself as exemplary as both a woman and an author. As the *Series* starts self-reflexively to meditate on its own virtues through incorporations of outsiders’ opinions, Frances gains the majority of praise for her letter-writing, playing out Henry’s prediction that, ‘if ever I appear in Print, it shall be humbly attending on you’.²⁴⁷ As Henry describes an encounter with one fan he says, ‘He then declared, that he liked your Letters so much better than mine, in the *Series*, that he went thro’ the two Volumes a second Time, first looking for the Sign *Frances*’.²⁴⁸ On another fan, this time female, he says, ‘it has been enviously doubted, whether you, or any Woman in Europe, could be capable of writing the Letters of *Frances*...the very Hand itself, she says, seems to be the proper Vehicle to convey

²⁴⁵ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, I, iv.

²⁴⁶ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, I, 195; VI, 260.

²⁴⁷ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, I, 232.

²⁴⁸ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, II, 379.

such tender, refined, and delicate Sentiments'.²⁴⁹ The direction of praise specifically at Frances enables her to develop a professional authorial persona that is nevertheless based on her supposed personal correspondence and the personal qualities it supposedly reveals.

Henry makes the professional aspect of the letters explicit in Volume VI:

I think (though I never reckoned them) that there appears to be more of my Letters than your's in the Collection: But then, how do they appear? After I have flourished away in Soliloquy for several Posts together, you step in with One or Two little Billets that foil all mine, by making them appear but *Foils* to yours. I have more of Philosophy in my Writings, but you more Tenderness; mine employ the Head, but yours affect the Heart - Unequal Strife for Fame; the many feel, the few only comprehend: I look wise, while I am reading some of my own. I weep on perusing many of your's.²⁵⁰

The gendered model of letter-writing described by Henry draws on the critical assumption that the excellence of women's letters lay in their tenderness and capacity to affect the heart. The gendered model appears in this instance to deny Frances wisdom and relegate her to a feminised emotional realm. However, Henry's reference to fame reveals that his model is not that of a private correspondence, but that of professional print culture. Observing (correctly, as it turned out) that Frances is much more likely to achieve authorial fame than he himself is, he ascribes her imagined professional popularity to her personal emotional capacity. The popular taste for novels that affected the emotions in the second half of the eighteenth century meant that it was very much to Frances's professional advantage to indicate her own writing's capacity to display tenderness. The letter form offers a means by which both authors can construct a professional persona, but these excerpts illustrate that particular advantage accrued to Frances in the process. Henry and Frances's

²⁴⁹ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, V, 151.

²⁵⁰ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, VI, 259-60.

conversations with print culture itself reveal a sustained effort from both parties to enact a discourse of professional authorial practice.

Conversations with print culture: developing professionalism

Because the *Series* hinges on the exchange of text between two authors, much of it is critical, in the sense that it displays instances of one party reading and commenting on the other's letter writing and vice versa. At the same time, throughout the volumes of the *Series*, there is a steady growth in Henry and Frances's conception of their own professional status. Their portrayal of themselves participating in polite and mutually improving heterosociable conversation is part of the means by which they embark on the narration of their authorial identities. As the *Series* progresses, discussions of other writing projects, incorporations of outsiders' readings of earlier volumes of the *Series* and references to well-known personalities in the arts widen Henry and Frances's conversation to display a dialogue with print culture itself. Such references are obviously designed to improve their status as authors, and thus boost the popularity of their print productions. At the same time, the model of exchange of writings that they base their marriage on allows them to maintain a sense that their discussions of professional authorship are merely a natural development from their early letter exchanges; part of heterosociable discourse and not a vulgar appeal to the marketplace.

The Griffiths' collaboration gives them an unusual freedom to write their own career narratives. By 1757, the year of the publication of the first two volumes of the *Series*, both the major professional review journals, the *Monthly Review* and the *Critical Review* were established. Although the professional review was still in its early stages, the idea that readers, reviewers and the market had the power to make or break an author's career was becoming accepted. Donoghue suggests that from 1750

onwards ‘literary careers were chiefly described, and indeed made possible, by reviewers’.²⁵¹ He is pessimistic about the opportunities afforded women to participate in the ‘dialectic that generated narratives of professional accomplishment’, suggesting that a woman writer could either posit herself as writing solely for other women, or ‘present her writing to the general public as work endorsed and mediated by a male literary sponsor, thus aiming to share in the legitimacy that the man might command’.²⁵² By contrast, as shown above, Frances demonstrates the potential for exploitation of collaboration with a man in order to generate a career narrative that directs fame and approbation specifically at her ‘author’, Elizabeth Griffith. At the same time, the incorporation of reviews into the text itself to some extent bypasses the unpredictability of reviewing on the open market, instead privileging the critical standards engendered within the heterosociable affective model of conversation on which Henry and Frances’s marriage is based.

In the course of the first two volumes of the *Series*, both Frances and Henry ‘review’ each other’s letters in the process of building a rational, affective relationship. It is understood that their mutual facility in letter-writing is integral to their courtship. For Frances, Henry’s letters are ‘entertaining and improving’.²⁵³ She considers that his ‘Writings might well vie with any, of the greatest Masters in the Art of Pleasing’.²⁵⁴ Henry goes even further in his praise of Frances: ‘I declare, I never met with Writings in any Language more sensible, more delicate, or more correct, than most of your Letters’.²⁵⁵ In their capacity to read and critically appreciate each other’s letters, Henry and Frances extend their model of heterosociable conversation into the critical realm, utilising it in order to display, and thus exercise and improve

²⁵¹ Donoghue, *The Fame Machine*, 3.

²⁵² Donoghue, *The Fame Machine*, 161; 162.

²⁵³ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, I, 71.

²⁵⁴ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, I, 237.

²⁵⁵ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, I, 262.

their literary taste. In the following volumes, they extend their critical eye to each other's professional literary projects, suggesting that this is a natural move from their readings of each other's letters, as well as conveniently publicising their other works within the pages of the *Series*. Henry is more likely to incorporate outsiders' readings than to offer his own opinion. Reporting on Lady F___'s opinion of *Amana*, he says, 'She has read your *Amana* and is highly pleased with it: But she is angry with you for poisoning the Heroine'.²⁵⁶

By contrast, Frances provides thoughtful readings of Henry's manuscript of the *Triumvirate* and the various essays which are incorporated into the text: 'I received your very ingenious, and truly philosophic, Essay. I am charmed with it. The Reasoning, and Reflections, are strong and conclusive, and afford vast Satisfaction to the Mind... Your Stile, and Language too in this Piece, is finely adapted'.²⁵⁷ Criticism permits the Griffiths to pad out the third and fourth volumes of the *Series* with Henry and Frances's own poems and essays and the work of others, including a suicide note and a dramatic poem in blank verse by the Bishop of Ossory.²⁵⁸ These predominantly non-epistolary texts widen the context for Henry and Frances's letter exchange to encompass the practice of manuscript exchange as well, displaying their engagement in sociable literary practice.

Frances not only critiques Henry's work, she reports on her defence of it to outsiders. Of Mr. ___, who has suggested that Henry's writings suffer from 'rather too great an *Audacité*' Frances reports: 'I said, that all Authors, of any Character at all, had something peculiar, in their Manner of expressing themselves; and that Writers are as much distinguished by their Style, as Printers by their Type'.²⁵⁹ Incorporation

²⁵⁶ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, III, 20.

²⁵⁷ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, III, 142.

²⁵⁸ See Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, IV, 85-88; 103-123.

²⁵⁹ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, IV, 59-60.

of outsiders' opinions is one means by which Henry and Frances refute any potential critique of their writings partly through dialogue with the outsider in question. Sometimes this is explicit, and consists in the anonymous reporting of opinion. At other times, the dialogue is implicit. In Volume III, Henry reports the words of the Bishop of ___, who says, 'those fond Epithets, and Passages of Love and Tenderness, which you would have struck out of the Publication, rather shew the Letters to be genuine, than give them the Air of a Novel'.²⁶⁰ Henry's reporting suggests careful selection in order to refute the criticism that the letters included too much amatory 'billing and cooing' as the *Monthly Review* expressed it.²⁶¹ The *Series* offers both authors the means by which they can not only report flattering views of their work, but reply to the criticism they have received and defend their authorial practice. The development of manifestations of professional authorial engagement reflects a growing confidence in Frances's authorial persona.

In the final two volumes, it is made clear that both Henry and Frances are fully engaged in the pursuit of professional writing careers and their conversation surrounds their own distinct projects rather than incorporating readings of each other's work. However, Frances still asserts that Henry's approbation is of the highest value to her, maintaining the sense of a reading and writing partnership: 'I shall never be satisfied about it till you have given your Opinion on the Writing; for your Approbation is the only Stamp that can render such Coin current with me'.²⁶² In Volume V, both are engaged in writing their novels, *The Delicate Distress* and *The Gordian Knot*, and are able to engage in good-natured, sometimes combative discussion of their separate projects. Henry asks, 'What are you doing with your

²⁶⁰ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, III, 4.

²⁶¹ 'Review of *A Series of Letters between Henry and Frances*. Vols. 3 and 4', *Monthly Review*, XXXVI (February, 1767), 154-55, 154.

²⁶² Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, VI, 18.

Novel?’ and Frances replies, ‘I have gone on with my Novel briskly since we parted’.²⁶³ Later Frances asks, ‘Have you, like that Sophister Alexander, cleft the *Gordian Knot* in twain; or left it, like the *true Lover’s Knot* for Death alone to loosen?’²⁶⁴ On finishing *The Gordian Knot*, Henry says that Frances has slowed him down ‘by objecting to the Methods I had before devised to obviate the seeming inextricable Difficulties I had involved myself in very early in the Work. You did this, I suppose, to prevent my *leaving you behind*’.²⁶⁵

Both Henry and Frances make their contact with famous names obvious. Henry writes that he has met Laurence Sterne (whom he refers to under the name of Sterne’s narrative persona Tristram Shandy) at Scarborough, and that Sterne ‘comes every Morning into my Bower, and claims the Privilege of looking into my Manuscripts. He said flattering Things upon what I have wrote of *The Gordian Knot*. He read the Memoir of my Life, and actually dropped Tears as he went on’.²⁶⁶ Meanwhile, back in London, Frances writes, ‘Mr. G[arrick] has presented me with the new French Comedy, entitled *Eugenie*, to try my Hand upon for this Winter’.²⁶⁷ These references give the impression of the couple’s embeddedness in the literary and dramatic professional networks of the period. Their fashionable connections add to their market value as authors, while their persistence in the letter-exchange mode of narrating their professional careers enables them to project such name-dropping and references to their other work as part of a personal correspondence that gives a unique insight into the life of the author. The *Series*, while maintaining the sense of Henry

²⁶³ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, V, 11; 15.

²⁶⁴ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, V, 20.

²⁶⁵ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, V, 255.

²⁶⁶ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, V, 87.

²⁶⁷ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, V, 233. Griffith translated *Eugenie* as *The School for Rakes*, which was successfully performed and subsequently published in 1769.

and Frances as each other's first and best readers, simultaneously displays and disavows professional authorial practice.

That these published volumes are crafted to give a certain impression becomes very obvious when the background to Frances's reference to Garrick is examined. The liveliness of the letters masks the real struggle that Elizabeth Griffith faced in her playwriting career. The reference to Garrick implies that Frances is moving in elevated literary networks; in reality, she was pestering Garrick for help, using every weapon at her disposal. Betty Rizzo's account of Griffith's correspondence with Garrick argues that in order for Griffith to further her career she had to 'exploit men through playing up her own weakness and to exhibit sickly images of dependent women in a condition which she knew to be positively dangerous'.²⁶⁸ Rizzo emphasises Griffith's expressions of her own ill health, financial embarrassment, and the superiority of Garrick's judgement compared with her own. For the most part, Rizzo gives an accurate summary of the exchange. However, the letters on the topic of *Eugenie*, the play that Frances claims Garrick has given her 'to try my Hand upon for this Winter' reveal that Griffith was not unwilling to tutor Garrick in the correct social forms, and make claim to her own artistic integrity despite her professions of modesty. For example, in May, 1768 she writes:

Though I have given up my whole thoughts and attention to "Eugenie," ever since I had the pleasure of seeing you, I cannot yet make out a plan adequate to *my own ideas* of the alteration I wish to make, or render *them* sufficiently clear to you. I must therefore entreat that you will permit me to proceed in this work, without calling upon me to explain my intention till I have executed my own scheme, which shall then, with the greatest humility and gratitude, be submitted to your superior judgment.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁸ Betty Rizzo, "'Depressa Resurgam': Elizabeth Griffith's Playwriting Career", in *Curtain Calls: British and American Women and the Theater, 1660-1820*, ed. Mary Anne Schofield and Cecilia Mackeski (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1991), 120-142, 134.

²⁶⁹ Elizabeth Griffith to David Garrick (May 14th, 1768), in *The Private Correspondence of David Garrick: with the most celebrated persons of his time*, ed. James Boaden, 2 vols. (London, 1831-2), I, 299.

The tone in this extract is not cringing or servile; it is a confident request that Garrick permit her to execute her own literary judgement. These letters enact a similar struggle to the debates Frances undergoes with Henry in which she attempts to distinguish between the social forms of politeness and the real meaning of words, in order to exploit the gap.

In July, Griffith falls victim to her own rhetoric: sending Garrick a copy of the first act of *Eugenie* with the fulsome phrase, ‘nothing but my reliance upon your good-nature, and the generous promise of your assistance, could make me venture to lay it before you in its present weak state’.²⁷⁰ A subsequent letter illustrates the pitfalls of her modest rhetoric – Garrick has taken her at her word:

I am extremely sorry that the diffidence I expressed, in regard to the work I sent you by my son, should alarm or prepossess you against it. There are few people in the world who have a humbler opinion of themselves or their writings than I, but I must be vain indeed, if I did not suppose that any dramatic performance might receive the highest improvement from your hand...I flatter myself, however, that you will find it not unworthy your attention, as the few persons I have shown it to pronounce it to me more interesting than any thing they have seen for a long time.²⁷¹

In this letter, Griffith sternly draws Garrick’s attention to the difference between conventional expressions of feminine modesty, and her real pride in her work, implying that he has contravened the rules of sociability by taking her professions of incapacity seriously. This exchange casts light on Frances’s modesty in the *Series* and also her sense of herself as a professional author. Elizabeth Griffith seems to have seen modesty in terms of formal social behaviour, rather than a real reflection of authorial practice. Frances’s lone passing reference to Garrick in the *Series* illustrates that Griffith had a much stronger sense of the need to craft a professional identity than her modesty would suggest. For Griffith, perhaps, formal modesty and confident

²⁷⁰ Elizabeth Griffith to David Garrick (July 18th, 1768), in *Correspondence*, ed. Boaden, I, 307.

²⁷¹ Elizabeth Griffith to David Garrick (July 20th, 1768), in *Correspondence*, ed. Boaden, I, 308.

professionalism were not mutually exclusive, because sociable rhetoric enabled the practice of both.

The *Series* therefore, strategically and carefully intervenes in a range of contemporary discourses, most notably that of sociability between the sexes. It does this in order to make a claim for the personal exemplarity of its authors, and to make a version of their authorial practice visible as part of a sustained development of their professional authorial personae. The model of epistolary conversation that they adopt offers an insight into their professional practice, but it is one that is crafted to display the authors to advantage. Heterosociable conversation seems to have offered Frances the flexibility to develop a workable professional model for authorship over a number of years. The process of authorial development that the conversation enacts allows her to use her role within the conversation to shape its direction; even though she may claim modesty and incapacity, she turns those claims to her personal and professional advantage. However, the Griffiths' blend of the amatory, the epistolary and the heterosociable was unevenly received, suggesting that the principles of heterosociability did not necessarily translate into print culture to the extent that the Griffiths might have hoped.

Reading the *Series*: the Griffiths' reception

The *Series* offers a variety of positions from which to read its volumes, partly based on its blend of epistolary styles. Typically, reading love letters involved an act of voyeurism and reading familiar letters an act of participation. The former's intimate status denotes the registering of personal experience and private emotion; the latter's sociable status permits any reader to posit him or herself as recipient to some extent. Henry, in his preface to the first two volumes claims, 'I have always preferred familiar Letters to any other Manner of Writing...they make up a mixture from the

two greatest Pleasures of Life; they partake of *Society* and *Retirement*'.²⁷² Henry again invokes the letter as a tool of sociable conversation when he claims, 'I am more entertained with the private Letters of eminent Men, than I am with their more public Writings; because, in the former Case, I fancy I am conversing with them, but in the latter, I only hear of them'.²⁷³ These comments suggest that the reader of letters will imagine him or herself as engaging in the conversation alongside the participants.

This conversational mode of reading enacts a reformatory dynamic; as the conversationalists are reformed, so is the reader through conversation with writers of taste and discernment. However, the amatory aspect of the *Series* invites a more voyeuristic reading, in which the reader is a silent spy on the private business of a love affair and marriage. The *Series*'s blending of the two modes of writing offers a dynamic of reading in which a personal relationship is constituted through the act of reading. In a sense, the reader is invited to develop an affective relationship with the writers, mimicking their conflation of affection and critical conversation to suggest a relationship constituted through a process of affective criticism. An examination of the reception of the *Series* suggests that while this model could be acted out within the pages of the *Series*, it did not necessarily translate effectively into the pages of the professional reviewing journals. However, the responses of certain other contemporary readers suggest that the model of reading enacted within the volumes of the *Series* could, on occasion, effectively translate to the world outside the text.

The 'Clergyman of Taste and Literature' favours Frances in his reading of the *Series*, as other incorporated readers do: 'shall I say she excels in Expression, Wit, and Spirit? Partiality to the Sex, who beat us all to nothing in Conversation and Letter-Writing, may incline me to judge so: possibly a woman of Taste and Sense

²⁷² Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, I, xlvi.

²⁷³ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, I, 175.

may prefer his'.²⁷⁴ His preference for Frances, as he claims, is based less on his taste for women's letters than on his own masculine reading position. He suggests that a woman reader may find herself drawn to Henry's letters. Setting up a gendered model of reading in which each sex complements their own gendered characteristics in consuming the writing of the other, he invokes the idea that readers will react to the letters in the same way as Henry and Frances react to each other's letters. Bizarrely, his assertion seems to be confirmed in the case of Frances Burney, certainly 'a woman of taste and sense'. In May of 1768 Burney writes in her diary, 'I am reading the "Letters of Henry and Frances" and like them prodigiously'.²⁷⁵ On finishing the letters she records her admiration of Henry:

I own I differ from him in many of his thoughts, but in far many more I am delighted with him. His sentiments shew him to be a man possessed of all the humanity which dignifies his sex; his observations, of all the penetration and judgment which improves it, and his expressions, of all the ability, capacity and power which adorn it. I cannot express how infinitely more I am charmed with him at the conclusion than beginning. Some of his opinions – I might say many of them – on divine subjects, I think, would be worthy a sermon – and an excellent one too.²⁷⁶

Burney concludes her record of her thoughts on the *Series* with the serious pronouncement, 'I will take a turn in the garden, and re-peruse my thoughts on these genuine, interesting Letters'.²⁷⁷ Burney manifests the kind of serious, intense response to her reading that might be expected from a bookish sixteen-year old. However, her comments are also illustrative of ways of consuming the *Series*.

Burney's assumption that the letters are genuine enables her to produce the kind of response that the *Series* encourages in its modelling of affective reading. By

²⁷⁴ Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Series*, I, iv.

²⁷⁵ Annie Raine Ellis (ed.), *The Early Diary of Frances Burney, 1768-1778*, 2 vols. (London: George Bell and Sons, 1889), I, 8. Burney seems to have been reading the first two volumes, since she later writes, 'I hear that more volumes are lately published. I wish I could get them, I have read but two' (I, 13).

²⁷⁶ Ellis (ed.), *Early Diary of Frances Burney*, I, 10.

²⁷⁷ Ellis (ed.), *Early Diary of Frances Burney*, I, 11.

the time that Burney has finished the *Series* she is half in love with Henry merely through reading his letters. Her observation that she prefers him at the end rather than the beginning illustrates the apparently real appeal that the reformed Henry holds for contemporary women readers. Burney prefers Henry when he treats of serious subject rather than in his gallant, quasi-amatory moments. Her preference suggests that the expressions of fondness in the *Series* were not thought to be available for the reader's appropriation. Burney does not imagine herself as the Frances of the *Series*, receiving the affection of her lover; instead she responds to the author-Henry as Frances Burney the critic. However, her response encompasses more than rational enjoyment. She responds emotionally as well; she is 'delighted' and 'charmed' with Henry's scriptive persona, which she uncritically assumes to be representative of Henry the man, describing his writing as 'so elegantly natural, so tenderly manly, so unassumingly rational'.²⁷⁸ Burney's response to the *Series* illustrates the peculiar power of these letters to affect a reader on simultaneously emotional and critical levels, generating the kind of affective criticism modelled in the course of the *Series* itself.

Burney enacts a gendered model of reading in which, as a woman and a reader, she responds to Henry as both a man and an author. An alternative model for reading is offered by the poet and landscape gardener William Shenstone, who enacts an identificatory model of reading rather than a gendered model. In a letter dated 1762, he writes:

[D]o not the verses to Dr. Cornwallis (now Bishop) affect you sensibly...they do *me*, whenever I read them; and I cannot help applying them to myself. I feel somewhat of the same sensation when I read "The Letters of Henry and Frances," in which (from self-partiality, no doubt) I find myself extremely like Henry.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁸ Ellis (ed.), *Early Diary of Frances Burney*, I, 12.

²⁷⁹ William Shenstone to Mr. Graves (20th May, 1762), in William Shenstone, *The Works in Verse and Prose, of William Shenstone, Esq.*, 3 vols. (5th edn., London, 1777), III, 335. The identity of 'Mr. Graves' and the 'verses to Dr. Cornwallis' are unknown.

Shenstone enacts a more novelistic reading of the letters, choosing the character with whom he most identifies rather than responding to an imagined real person. His mode of reading is a response to the fictive implications of the *Series*. Rather than admiring the characters' displays of sensibility, he himself engages in a reading process which depends on sympathetic identification. That he self-deprecatingly considers his choice of identification an instance of 'self-partiality' again suggests the broad appeal of Henry's persona. Although Shenstone does not enlarge on exactly what aspects of Henry he imagines he is like, the way Henry is constituted through polite and educated heterosociable conversation as gallant, refined and literate suggests his role as a model of modern masculinity, available for identification from male readers as well as ardent admiration from female readers. What may be concluded from the instances of Burney and Shenstone's individual reception of the *Series* is that part of the appeal of the *Series* was the number of levels of reading possibilities that it offered, enabled by the blend of authenticity, fiction, personal affection and educated social commentary.

An examination of the *Series*'s reception in the professional review journals rather contradicts this flexible picture in which a reader could find a variety of ways to respond positively to the *Series*. Ironically, the two major review journals give such diametrically opposing reviews that it almost appears as if they have read entirely different texts. Their contrasting reviews should demonstrate the pitfalls of the *Series*'s blending of styles, genres and genders. This examination is limited to the reviews of the first four volumes, as they display a particular response to the early years of the Griffiths' authorial careers. Broadly speaking, the *Monthly Review* on the whole dislikes the letters and objects to the project as a concept. The *Critical Review* is reasonably enthusiastic. The journals respond to one particular aspect of the *Series*,

for example, either personal references or critical conversations, and in so doing that aspect implicitly takes on gendered connotations. These reviews suggest that, faced with a text written collaboratively by a man and woman, reviewers struggled to place the text on one side or the other of the gendered divide. Notably, the reviews also make it clear at what point the monikers of Henry and Frances became associated with the Griffiths. In the reviews of the first two volumes, the reviewers have no idea who the authors of the *Series* are. After the generally well-received first two volumes, the Griffiths must have claimed authorship in preparation to garner the fruits of success, around the time when they moved to London to pursue their literary careers.

The *Monthly Review* says of the first two volumes of the *Series* that it appears to be ‘the fruit of a real correspondence betwixt a philosophical but fond couple’.²⁸⁰ The reviewer raises objections to both the philosophy and the fondness. On the habit of quoting from their reading, the reviewer considers that this ‘gives their letters an air of affectation and bookishness, which, were it not for those passages which relate to the personal concerns of the Writers, would almost induce a suspicion of their having been penned merely for the press’.²⁸¹ Having been penned for the press would obviously decrease the value of the letters as the reviewer associates literary discussion with deliberate performance, or ‘affectation’. The reviewer goes on to suggest that the primary value of the letters is in their sentimental aspects:

[T]hey afford many things fit to instruct and entertain a sentimental Reader; who will be equally affected and pleased with the frequent warm and natural expressions of conjugal tenderness, that are interspersed throughout the whole: though it must be owned, that some few of these, perhaps, may partake of that fond kind of fiddle-faddle jargon, which foolish Lovers, doating Parents, and loquacious Nurses, are so apt to pour out upon their mistresses, and their children; and which few besides those who are in the same circumstances, know how to relish, or endure.²⁸²

²⁸⁰ ‘Review of *Letters between HENRY and FRANCES*’, *Monthly Review*, XVII, 416.

²⁸¹ ‘Review of *Letters between HENRY and FRANCES*’, *Monthly Review*, XVII, 417.

²⁸² ‘Review of *Letters between HENRY and FRANCES*’, *Monthly Review*, XVII, 417.

Although sentimental expressions of tenderness are seen to be of value, and both instructive and entertaining, this reviewer very much associates such expressions with effeminacy and childishness, not befitting a grown man. The review provides an extract from a letter of Henry's on the practice of quoting authors, and uses this letter to illustrate Henry's foolishness in deriding a practice he and Frances have been guilty of, taking the opportunity of making the reviewer's own moral point: 'This is, indeed, a striking instance of our blindness to our own imperfections'.²⁸³ The extract from Frances's letter is particularly representative of feminine sensibility; it is a letter in which Frances accuses Henry of cruelty, and herself of 'wild rhapsody'.²⁸⁴ The extract also includes an assertion on Frances's part that her letters are for Henry's eyes only, and 'were wrote from my heart to your's, without a view of extorting praise, and were never designed for the unfeeling vulgar'.²⁸⁵ This extract invokes gendered expectations of women's writing as the repository of personal, private emotion. The reviewer has tailored his extract to exaggerate the feminised amatory aspect of the letters. In designating the text feminine, the reviewer implicitly feminises Henry as well.

The *Monthly Review*'s opinion of the second set of volumes is similar.

Having identified the Griffiths as the authors, they use the story of the publication of the *Series* to tell their own satirical version:

Henry and Frances are, it seems, a Mr. and Mrs. Gr-ff-th, of the kingdom of Ireland. Being both of a literary turn, and their circumstances, too, a little *poetical*; - and love and air rather too thin a diet for mere mortal lovers; - their first scheme for turning their wit to a substantial account, was to publish their pretty love-letters. This project succeeded so well, that, behold! we have now a *second Series*; with this comfortable assurance, however, that there are to be NO MORE *last words*: for which, we believe, their subscribers will not be

²⁸³ 'Review of *Letters between HENRY and FRANCES*', *Monthly Review*, XVII, 420.

²⁸⁴ 'Review of *Letters between HENRY and FRANCES*', *Monthly Review*, XVII, 423.

²⁸⁵ 'Review of *Letters between HENRY and FRANCES*', *Monthly Review*, XVII, 422.

inconsolable, - four volumes of literary billing and cooing *before folks*, being enough, in all conscience, - for the *by-standers*, at least.²⁸⁶

The reviewer's tone reiterates the *Monthly Review*'s inclination to read the *Series* as little more than a succession of private love letters and uses this reading to suggest a combination of voyeuristic embarrassment and boredom on the part of the readers, and effeminate toying on the part of the authors. This review ends, however, with an admiring reference to Elizabeth Griffith's *Ninon de L'Enclos* and the statement: 'We could wish to see more of this lady's translations from the best French writers'.²⁸⁷

By contrast, the *Critical Review* is generally admiring of the *Series*. The review of the first two volumes is somewhat equivocal. Initially, the reviewer appears to take a similar line to the reviewer of the *Monthly Review*:

These fragments of a correspondence betwixt a gentleman and a lady of the kingdom of Ireland, are not without their merit, and discover the authors to have been a most happy and most deserving pair of lovers. Yet as they relate chiefly to particular incidents solely interesting the two parties themselves, we are at a loss to assign any good reason for their appearing in print. Even in the opinion of Henry, *several of them are not worth reading*. Why then should they be obtruded upon the public, which has long been oppressed with an inundation of private history?²⁸⁸

This reviewer reiterates the lack of public interest in personal letters, manifesting a confusion about how they should be read by anyone other than Henry and Frances themselves. However, as the review continues, it becomes clear that the question of why the letters are in print is at least semi-rhetorical. The reviewer turns the emphasis on the ways in which the letters differ from the received perception of the childishness or effeminacy of amatory letters: 'They contain very little of the fooleries of love, and have no resemblance to the productions of a raw university student, or the passionate

²⁸⁶ 'Review of *A Series of Letters between Henry and Frances*. Vols. 3 and 4', *Monthly Review*, XXXVI (London, 1767), 154-55, 154.

²⁸⁷ 'Review of *A Series of Letters between Henry and Frances*. Vols. 3 and 4', *Monthly Review*, XXXVI, 155.

²⁸⁸ 'Review of *A Series of genuine letters between Henry and Frances*', *Critical Review*, III (London, 1757), 428-32, 428-29.

transports of an unexperienced love-sick maid'.²⁸⁹ This reviewer chooses extracts from the *Series* that illustrate its authors' displays of taste and education. In particular, the review reproduces Frances's defence of women of Volume I, projecting a picture of the educated and refined, rather than the sentimental 'Henry and Frances'. The reviewer concludes:

These extracts are not culled as false examples to deceive the public, which will find the work all of a piece, interspersed with moral and judicious reflections; though it would have been more useful, had those reflections been methodized; and more entertaining, had the strokes of private history been such as could have interested the passions of the reader.²⁹⁰

This reviewer finds private expressions of affection as distasteful as his colleague in the *Monthly Review* does, but his comment illustrates how a shift in focus to the educated conversation enables a more positive reading of the *Series*. However, such a shift thereby ignores the way the authors use displays of taste to reconstitute their personal relationship.

The *Critical Review*'s opinion of the third and fourth volumes is even more enthusiastic: 'We here meet with the same warmth of tender affection, and the same moral and religious strains, which recommended the former letters, though we think with a greater and more agreeable variety of subjects'.²⁹¹ Where the previous reviewer wished to find the letters' reflections 'methodized', this reviewer even finds value in the lack of organisation between letters, 'because it gives rise to many beautiful transitions from the sprightly to the serious, and from the witty to the moral, which form the soul and beauty of an epistolary intercourse'.²⁹² The extracts in this review are meant to illustrate the ease of correspondence, elevating the Griffiths as masters of

²⁸⁹ 'Review of *A Series of genuine letters between Henry and Frances*', *Critical Review*, III, 429.

²⁹⁰ 'Review of *A Series of genuine letters between Henry and Frances*', *Critical Review*, III, 432.

²⁹¹ 'Review of *A Series of Genuine Letters, between Henry and Frances. Vols. III and IV*', *Critical Review*, XXIII (London, 1767), 30-36, 30.

²⁹² 'Review of *A Series of Genuine Letters, between Henry and Frances. Vols. III and IV*', *Critical Review*, XXIII, 33-34.

the epistolary form rather than focusing on the quality of their reflections, offering yet another position from which to admire the *Series*. It also reproduces some of their poetry, reinforcing their status as polite amateurs. The only negative hint in this review is a reiteration of the by-now established dislike of amatory sentiment: ‘there are certain overflowings of affection between lovers which they can only feel, understand, and be pleased with’.²⁹³

None of these reviews adopt a gendered pose of readerly acquiescence in a textual dynamic that mixes emotional affection and tasteful criticism – the mode of reading which the *Series* tries to enact. Instead, all these reviewers assign lovers’ talk and expressions of conjugal affection to a sometimes explicitly feminised private realm. The *Critical Review* on Volumes III and IV comes the closest to reading the *Series* holistically, that is, in a way that takes into account all its different aspects. However, the majority of professional readers seem to have ignored the flexibility of response that the *Series* enabled, and reductively work to fit the *Series* into already-existing models of letter narrative. The creativity demonstrated by individual readers of the *Series* in finding a position from which to read suggests that some readers were able to respond to the flexibility of gender, letters and authorship expressed in the Griffiths’ collaborative work. However, within the model of professional criticism, the affective reader response that the Griffiths’ work seems to demand is not accepted by reviewers.

The *Series* demonstrates the means by which Elizabeth Griffith was able to establish herself as a professional author in the sphere of print. It does this, not solely through establishing her authority in the moralised, emotional sphere, although it

²⁹³ ‘Review of *A Series of Genuine Letters, between Henry and Frances. Vols. III and IV*’, *Critical Review*, XXIII, 36.

plays off these associations, but through establishing a dynamic of educated, heterosociable conversation. It exploits ideologies of polite conversation achieving their apotheosis in the heterosociable context to display Elizabeth Griffith's persona of Frances engaged in acts of educated reading, writing and criticism. The process of education and mutual reform which the scriptive conversation dramatises shows the constitution of a marriage based on the exchange of text. The exchange enacts a process of sociable performance and critical recognition that installs a gendered mode of reading and writing. In so doing, it suggests ways in which the marriage relationship could operate through the medium of text in ways which were favourable to a more balanced relationship of power between husband and wife, dependent on complementary qualities rather than on the husband's superiority.

Through a purposeful mixing of epistolary genres, the *Series* demonstrates how the epistolary form could be used to combined love and friendship, authenticity and fiction, and a personal relationship with the printed form to produce a text that could be used as a model for an idealised heterosociable relationship for public consumption. At the same time, the *Series* works to promote the exemplarity of its authors, creating a marketable model of genteel, yet professional authorship that worked particularly in Elizabeth Griffith's favour. The *Series* also makes visible the process of struggle and contestation that the woman author must undergo in order to stake her claim to authority in the literary conversational sphere. Frances uses her authority within the realm of heterosociable conversation, and the flexibility of the conversational mode itself to work towards the creation of a persona that is at once feminine – emotionally sensitive and modest – and thoroughly professional. The next chapter will demonstrate how Sarah Fielding goes even further than Elizabeth Griffith in defining her authorial persona in collaboration with a male family member. Sarah

Fielding employs satire and moral philosophy rather than modesty to stake her claim to a place in print.

Chapter 4. ‘A Friend of the Author’: Henry and Sarah Fielding’s collaborations and the brother-sister relationship in *Familiar Letters between the principle characters in David Simple*

Of all the authors addressed in this thesis, Henry and Sarah Fielding are the most instantly recognisable pairing. Substantial critical attention has been paid to Fieldings as individual authors, as participants in a literary relationship and as brother and sister. However, the text examined in this chapter, *Familiar Letters between the Principal Characters in David Simple, and some others* (1747) has received limited critical attention. To some extent it seems to be regarded as something of an embarrassment, reflecting poorly on the corpus of both authors.²⁹⁴ *Familiar Letters* is indeed a difficult text, but not wholly for reasons of aesthetics. Marking the culmination of the literary relationship between Henry and Sarah Fielding, it illustrates like no other text the possibilities and pitfalls for the literary outworking of a personal and professional brother-sister relationship. It is particularly remarkable how *Familiar Letters* carves out its own space, and makes a case for the woman writer as reader, author and critic. Women writers of the eighteenth century, but even more particularly of the 1740s were required at every step to defend their very presence in print. Sarah Fielding ingeniously links this necessity to women’s experiences in order to show that the moral self-reflexivity required in daily life, within the familiar community, is precisely what qualifies women to take on the roles of critics and moral judges.

The text of *Familiar Letters* reflects its title. It is a miscellany of letters, some purportedly written by the major characters of Sarah Fielding’s successful

²⁹⁴ Linda Bree, for example, says of *Familiar Letters*, ‘the combination of moral essay and epistolary form seems an uncomfortable one’, noting that Fielding does not follow Richardson in putting the epistolary form to good novelistic use (*Sarah Fielding* (New York: Twayne, 1996), 48).

novel, *David Simple* (1744), including David, Cynthia, Camilla, Spatter and Varnish. Other letters are exchanged between characters with conventional romance names. Modern editions of *David Simple* may include the final narrative part of the trilogy, *Volume the Last* (1751), in which Sarah Fielding kills off most of the main characters, but leave out the middle text, which is demonstrably unappealing to modern readers, lacking any kind of narrative structure whatsoever. For some, *Familiar Letters* is a rag-bag of scraps of stories and moral observations cobbled together under pressure. However, *Familiar Letters* can also be read as a manifesto of Sarah Fielding's career aims at this time, and as a register of the tensions of gender, print culture and authorship that is only made possible by the presence of outside contributors to the text.

In this text, Sarah Fielding develops issues she had begun to identify in *David Simple* and which would continue to concern her for the rest of her career. Therefore, it is an important text in the narrative of Sarah Fielding's authorial development, and should be read as such. In the text, Henry Fielding occupies a number of shifting and complex positions specifically as the brother and fellow-author of the writer of the text. His textual presence is both crucial to the enactment of Sarah Fielding's arguments and an expression of the tensions of authorship. The resulting work, through the complex interplay of both siblings' contributions simultaneously models an idealised reading community – one that promotes the value of women to the literary sphere – and registers scepticism about the effectiveness of that community within print culture. This chapter examines the complex relations between the siblings less in terms of the exact nature of their personal relationship, which must remain speculative, but in terms of how they used the making public of

that relationship to outline their versions of print culture and the resulting textual effect.

It does not make sense to ascribe differences between the siblings wholly to a strictly gendered authorial model as Joseph Bartolomeo, for example, does by considering the Fieldings a ‘matched pair’.²⁹⁵ To be sure, Sarah Fielding is conscious of gender issues in *Familiar Letters*, but she aims to defend women’s contribution to the literary sphere, not to falsely reify gender difference. Close readings of the Fielding siblings’ literary interactions, especially within *Familiar Letters*, illustrate the complexity and multiple applications of the sibling relationship beyond a strictly gendered division. This chapter explores the relationship of siblinghood and print culture in both Fieldings’ work prior to 1747, explains how Sarah Fielding uses the model of a literary sphere structured around heterosociable siblinghood to defend women’s authorial and critical capacity in *Familiar Letters* and assesses the impact of Henry Fielding’s contributions to *Familiar Letters*. It argues that Henry Fielding should be seen as an enabler of Sarah Fielding’s work, not because she passively accepted his help, but because through an active process of recognition and contestation in which he participates, she was able to develop a recognisable authorial presence in the sphere of print.

Critical assessment of Sarah Fielding has struggled to explain satisfactorily her relationship with either Henry Fielding or later in her career, with Samuel Richardson. Sarah Fielding’s friendship with Richardson may have already been taking root in 1747, both the time of the publication of *Familiar Letters* and when both men were working on their two important novels, *Clarissa* (1748-9) and *Tom Jones* (1749). It is assumed she occupied the rather uncomfortable position as a

²⁹⁵ Joseph F. Bartolomeo, ‘Plotting the ‘Masculine’ and ‘Feminine’ Hero: *Joseph Andrews* and *David Simple*’, in *Matched Pairs: Gender and Intertextual Dialogue in Eighteenth-Century Fiction* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002), 58-89.

mediator of the outright antipathy between Richardson and Henry Fielding, both of whom struggled to subsume her into their differing visions of the newly articulated form of the novel. Martin Battestin and Clive Probyn speculate that Sarah Fielding's position was one of tension between two dominant rival men: 'On the one hand there was her deep family and artistic loyalty to Henry, and on the other an unrestrained artistic admiration for Richardson's writing'.²⁹⁶ Peter Sabor suggests: 'Far from acting as a bridge between the rival novelists...Sarah Fielding served, unwittingly, to drive them ever further apart'.²⁹⁷ These readings tend to address Sarah Fielding's work from the starting point of the supposedly bitter rivalry between Richardson and Henry Fielding, rather than investigating the particularity of her professional relationship with each man.

Feminist critics have often found a reading of Sarah Fielding's authorial position between the supposed rival authors unsatisfactory, and seek to approach her work as independently as possible of either Henry Fielding or Richardson. Dale Spender finds it galling that Sarah Fielding supposedly cannot be assessed on her own terms, commenting, 'While all the accounts of Henry's life suggest that Sarah was a devoted and uncritical sister, it is possible that had Sarah Fielding been free to provide her own version, she might have told another tale'.²⁹⁸ The assumption that Sarah Fielding was not 'free' to tell her own story hinges on an understanding of patriarchy as repressively monolithic. Jane Spencer's analysis configures the Fieldings-Richardson triangle in terms of a struggle between 'brothers' over 'the sister', claiming that each man tried to appropriate Sarah Fielding's work into his own vision

²⁹⁶ Martin C. Battestin and Clive T. Probyn (eds.), *The Correspondence of Henry and Sarah Fielding* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), xxxi.

²⁹⁷ Peter Sabor, 'Richardson, Henry Fielding, and Sarah Fielding', in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1740-1830*, ed. Thomas Keymer and John Mee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 139-156, 153.

²⁹⁸ Dale Spender, 'Sarah Fielding and misrepresentation', in *Mothers of the Novel: 100 good women writers before Jane Austen* (London: Pandora, 1986), 180-193, 189.

of the novel, while Sarah Fielding pursued her own independent literary goals.²⁹⁹ Schellenberg deplores what she calls the ‘fixed attention’ to Henry Fielding’s contributions to Sarah Fielding’s work, blaming this tendency on the selection of only a few texts from a single author’s oeuvre rather than the mapping of an active career trajectory.³⁰⁰ While Schellenberg’s major point, that women writers’ professional goals require critical recognition, is one that offers a context for understanding *Familiar Letters*, Schellenberg is too quick to dismiss Henry Fielding’s input in Sarah Fielding’s work, which can be seen as part of a career strategy in itself. By seeking to extract Sarah Fielding from her familial and social context, these critics neglect the way that Sarah Fielding was able critically to exploit her relations with men in order to project a sociable vision of the production and consumption of literature.

In *Familiar Letters* both Henry and Sarah Fielding self-consciously explore the relation of siblinghood, addressing simultaneously the relation of kinship, and the metaphorical possibilities it offers to comment on print culture. In fact, the very uncertainty that the kin relation implies makes it a perfect metonymic vehicle to register both the possibilities and pitfalls of a transfer from a patronage to a market print culture. Thus, the Fieldings, through the act of collaboration, find a way to comment on kinship, gender and print culture all at the one time, demonstrating how these issues are intimately linked through the very state of uncertainty in which they co-exist.

Collaborative literary practice offers a means by which the production and consumption of literature can be stabilised through friendly acts of reading; at the same time it provides a space in which debate and struggle over the terms of an

²⁹⁹ Spencer, *Literary Relations*: ‘Where Henry Fielding claims his sister for the comic epic poem, Richardson claims her for the Richardsonian novel’ (152) but ‘she maintained a distance from them’ (163).

³⁰⁰ Schellenberg, *Professionalization*, 96.

imagined emergent mass print culture can take place. Both Henry and Sarah Fielding are ultimately sceptical about their authorial roles in *Familiar Letters*, and about the moral impact of their work. Both authors' scepticism appropriately manifests itself through the registering of the necessity of sociable literary performance, simultaneously reinforcing and contesting the literary mode that the text advocates.

Henry and Sarah Fielding in collaboration

Collaboration for Henry and Sarah Fielding seems to have been a productive blend of the literary display of an affective relation of kinship and professional authorial practice. When *Familiar Letters* was published in 1747, the Fielding siblings had been living together for three years following the death of Henry's wife, Charlotte, in 1744. Their cohabitation provides a context for Henry's strong presence in the text of *Familiar Letters* – he contributed a lengthy preface and five letters, as well as possibly having some hand in the final section, 'A Vision'.³⁰¹ However, the siblings had worked together on literary endeavours previously to this period. It is thought that the earliest examples of Sarah Fielding's work occur in *Joseph Andrews* (1742) and in *A Journey from This World to the Next*, which appeared in the second volume of Henry Fielding's *Miscellanies* in 1743.

Joseph Andrews includes the footnote that the 'Letter from Leonora to Horatio' was written by 'a young Lady', who is generally assumed to be Sarah Fielding.³⁰² J. F. Burrows and A.J. Hassall have constructed graphs of 'textual differentials' between the two authors in order to discern who wrote the Anna Boleyn

³⁰¹ See Sheridan Baker 'Did Fielding write "A Vision"?' and J.F. Burrows "'A Vision" as Re-vision', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 22/4 (Summer, 1989), 548-565 for debate over which Fielding contributed what to 'A Vision'.

³⁰² Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews* ed. Douglas Brooks-Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 91. See note to p. 91 suggesting Sarah as the writer of the letter (387).

narrative in *Journey from this World to the Next*.³⁰³ According to their scheme, both authors had a hand in writing the Anna Boleyn narrative in what Burrows and Hassall call a ‘hurried, half-desperate collaboration’.³⁰⁴ By contrast, *David Simple* seems to have been published in the first instance without any input whatsoever from Henry Fielding, although he substantially revised the second edition, and added a preface, in which he calls Sarah ‘the real and sole Author of this little Book’.³⁰⁵ *David Simple* did not carry Sarah Fielding’s name, merely the tag ‘by a Lady’, but its success allowed her to create a recognisable author-brand as ‘the author of David Simple’, which was the moniker she used on most of her later works. It seems likely that the association of Henry Fielding with the second edition both identified Sarah Fielding as the author of *David Simple* and contributed to the success of the work. Likewise, *Familiar Letters* was certainly a strategic exploitation of the success of *David Simple*, and presumably Henry Fielding’s contributions added status to the text.

Sarah Fielding’s whereabouts prior to the publication of *David Simple* are unknown. Henry Fielding’s movements in the same period are also uncertain. If the suppositions about Sarah Fielding’s contributions to *Joseph Andrews* and *Journey from this World to the Next* are true, then the siblings must have been in close contact, on literary matters as well as on family terms. This supposition is supported by Sarah Fielding’s use of Henry Fielding’s publisher, Andrew Millar, to publish *David Simple*. Probyn and Battestin suggest that Thomas Harris, James Harris’s younger brother, was the go-between for Sarah Fielding and Andrew Millar. James Harris had been a friend to both Fieldings since the early 1740s. His presence in a network whose ties

³⁰³ See J.F. Burrows and A.J. Hassall, ‘Anna Boleyn and the Authenticity of Fielding’s Feminine Narratives’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 21/4 (Summer, 1988), 427-53.

³⁰⁴ Burrows and Hassall, ‘Anna Boleyn’, 452.

³⁰⁵ Henry Fielding, ‘Henry Fielding’s Preface to the Second Edition’ in Sarah Fielding, *David Simple*, ed. Sabor, Appendix 1, 343-49, 344. Sabor’s edition takes the first edition as copy-text, with Henry Fielding’s preface and amendments appended.

were marked by exchange of favours and literary cooperation is evidenced by letters from Henry Fielding in 1742/3 and 1744 asking for corrections to a translation of *Demonsthenes* and asking to borrow money – in both cases to be passed on to Andrew Millar.³⁰⁶ Harris contributed two dialogues to *Familiar Letters*, corresponded with Sarah Fielding and Jane Collier in 1751 and collaborated with Sarah Fielding after Henry's death in the preparation of a memoir which was never published. Hugh Amory shows that many of the subscribers to Henry Fielding's *Miscellanies* reappear on the subscription list of *Familiar Letters*, suggesting that the Fieldings worked together on gathering subscriptions for their respective publications.³⁰⁷ It is possible that living with Henry gave Sarah a wider circle of acquaintance from which to garner subscriptions, although the presence of Samuel Richardson and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu on the list of subscribers to *Familiar Letters* but not that of the *Miscellanies* suggests that Sarah Fielding made contacts of her own as well.

When Sarah Fielding wished to announce a delay in the publication of *Familiar Letters*, she placed an announcement in Henry Fielding's journal, *The True Patriot* in February 1746.³⁰⁸ In the advertisement, she refers to her subscribers as her 'Friends', a typical formulation perhaps, but when used by Sarah Fielding, one that carries a certain burden of self-positioning. The evidence suggests that, to some extent, the Fieldings' interactions should be seen in light of a wider network of literary connections within which both Fieldings operated. It seems likely that moving in Henry Fielding's circle gave Sarah Fielding access to people with whom she might not have interacted if she was living instead with her sister or a female friend.

However, it is by no means obvious that it was solely through Henry Fielding's

³⁰⁶ Henry Fielding to James Harris (27th Feb. 1742/3); Henry Fielding to James Harris (10th Oct. 1744), in *Correspondence*, ed. Battestin and Probyn, 29; 42.

³⁰⁷ See Hugh Amory, 'Virtual Readers: The Subscribers to Fielding's *Miscellanies*', *Studies in Bibliography*, 48 (1995), 94-112, 100.

³⁰⁸ Quoted in Sabor, 'Introduction' to *David Simple*, vii-xxxix, xi.

influence that Sarah Fielding found her way into print and continued to bolster her authorial career. That Sarah Fielding chose to publish *Familiar Letters* by subscription rather than by sale of copyright suggests both that she was exploiting the popularity of *David Simple* and situating herself within a network of contacts, in which Henry Fielding was included. Subscription presents a compromise between private manuscript exchange and open market sale of print that places Sarah Fielding on the cusp of the two literary traditions and mirrors the kind of print culture that *Familiar Letters* seems to invoke. *Familiar Letters* assumes a shared language within a text-sharing community set in opposition to the wider world, but also widens the scriptive community beyond the immediate family circle. This is appropriate for a text in which Sarah Fielding explores the agency of text-sharing communities in enabling women's role within literary culture.

Baker argues that the delay in printing *Familiar Letters* is evidence that Sarah struggled to complete the text, and was forced to turn to Henry and James Harris for help: 'By page 156 of volume II, Sarah's pen had visibly begun to falter'.³⁰⁹ Assuming that Henry Fielding was in the thick of writing *Tom Jones* at the time, he considers Henry Fielding's contributions to *Familiar Letters* a generous act of help. To counter Baker's image of a struggling woman writer seeking the aid of a magisterial literary behemoth, we should take into account Sarah Fielding's contributions to *Joseph Andrews* and the *Miscellanies*. The siblings' mutual contributions to each other's work suggests a dynamic of affective literary support, which included literary hints to each other's work in the pages of their own. Sophia in *Tom Jones* (1749) is represented reading a book which she calls 'the production of a young lady of fashion, whose good understanding, I think, doth honour to her sex, and

³⁰⁹ Baker, 'Did Fielding write "A Vision"?', 550.

whose good heart is an honour to human nature', of which Mrs Western comments that 'the author is of a very good family'.³¹⁰ The book in question is thought to be *David Simple*, and the combination of good head and heart that Sophia admires is very much in tune with the values promoted in Sarah Fielding's works. Similarly, in *Familiar Letters* 'Leonora' quotes Henry Fielding's contention in the preface to *Joseph Andrews* that the object most 'proper to mirth' is affectation.³¹¹

Within the text of *Familiar Letters*, the siblings refer to each other in very similar terms when each defends the other from public criticism. Henry Fielding ends his preface:

To conclude, I hope, for the Sake of my fair Country-Women, that these excellent Pictures of Virtue and Vice, which, to my Knowledge, the Author hath bestowed such Pains in drawing, will not be thrown away on the World, but that much more Advantage may accrue to the Reader, than the Good-nature and Sensibility of the Age have, to their immortal Honour, bestowed on the Author.³¹²

The emphasis on Henry Fielding's personal knowledge of the author and the sarcastic use of 'Good-nature and Sensibility' are echoed in Sarah Fielding's introduction to her brother's letters:

Note. *The following five Letters were given me by the Author of the Preface. I should have thought this Hint unnecessary, had not much Nonsense and Scurrility been unjustly imputed to him by the Good-Judgment or Good-Nature of the Age. They can know but little of his Writings, who want to have them pointed out; but they know much less of him, who impute any such base and scandalous Productions to his Pen.*³¹³

The tone of fierce defensiveness from both siblings, with their insistence that their personal knowledge of each other and each other's writings supersedes mere debased public opinion, creates a picture of a close writing relationship. Their mirroring of

³¹⁰ Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, ed. R. P. C. Mutter (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 231.

³¹¹ Sarah Fielding, *Familiar Letters between the Principal Characters in David Simple and some others*, 2 vols. (London, 1747), I, 285; 286-87. See Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*, Preface, 6.

³¹² Henry Fielding, 'Preface [to *Familiar Letters*]' in Sarah Fielding, *Familiar Letters*, I, iii-xxii, xxi-xxii.

³¹³ Sarah Fielding, *Familiar Letters*, II, 294.

each other's language suggests an unproblematic relationship in which biological siblinghood and their position as brother- and sister-authors to each other complement and reinforce each other. Sarah Fielding's perception that writing style should be instantly recognisable incidentally contradicts a picture of the timid female author, hiding behind male mentors, character masks and anonymity. In fact, she utilises her relationship with Henry Fielding to help construct a career narrative that signals the particular phrases that the reader should look for in her work. In particular, the allusion to 'the Mazes, Windings and Labyrinths, which perplex the Heart of Man' in Henry Fielding's preface to *David Simple* provided Sarah with the recognisable authorial goal of describing the secrets of the human inner world which she used in various critical circumstances to identify and defend her writings from that moment forward.³¹⁴ That Sarah Fielding was later to reiterate this phrase as her special defence of her own authorship suggests a canny awareness of the possibilities of collaborative career-shaping. Sociable literary relations were therefore significant for Sarah Fielding in her professional practice, but investigation of the more specific relation of siblinghood demonstrates that both Fieldings used the relation of siblinghood to imagine literary culture in their published works prior to 1747.

Siblinghood and print culture

Eighteenth-century representations of the sibling relation do not denote a 'brother-sister culture', the term that Valerie Sanders uses in her analysis of nineteenth-century sibling relations, but references show that eighteenth-century

³¹⁴ Henry Fielding, 'Preface to the Second Edition', 345. Sarah Fielding uses this phrase again in *Familiar Letters* (see below), and later in *Remarks on Clarissa* (London, 1749) when Bellario admires Richardson for his 'Use of every Labyrinth, in the several Minds of his Characters' (36). In *The Lives of Cleopatra and Octavia* (London, 1757) she refers to 'secret Springs and Motions' of her characters' actions (ii) and in *The Countess of Dellwyn* (London, 1759) she calls Shakespeare 'the deepest Penetrator into the inmost Recesses of human Nature' (vii) and argues that 'the smallest Incidents most clearly unravel the intricate Labyrinths of the human Mind' (xv). See Chapter 5 for further discussion of Fielding's attempts to 'paint the inward mind'.

writers were not blind to the possibilities engendered by representations of that particular axis of kinship.³¹⁵ Sibling relations are obviously important in a child's development of identity. The patterns of rivalry and emulation that develop within the sibling bond are part of a formative process that may even continue beyond childhood. The delineation of the limits of representation of the sibling relationship concern themselves with sex and death; that is, incest narratives and fratricide narratives. Both can be traced in eighteenth-century popular pamphlets and novellas. For example, *Memoirs of Love and Gallantry, or, the various foibles of the fair* (1734) is concerned with the passion that Sylvia develops for her brother Henrick. Sylvia's desire for her brother is portrayed as monstrous, all of a piece with her corpulence and bodily odour. Equally monstrous is the crime of fratricide. In the pamphlet, *The Bristol Fratricide* (1741), the narrator asserts, 'When a Brother rises up against a Brother, and murders him in cold Blood, the very Thought is so shocking that Nature itself is hardly able to support it'.³¹⁶ A child may struggle to achieve an identity that is different from the sibling, defined against what s/he sees as the sibling's predominant qualities. This struggle hinges on the understanding that the sibling is to some extent the same as oneself, and thus it is necessary to repress the qualities of sameness. Gender difference may be mutually emphasised in order to make a distinction, or allowed to stand in for difference so that qualities of sameness can be emphasised. In fiction, it is common for two siblings to be described as either entirely different or

³¹⁵ Valerie Sanders, *The Brother-Sister Culture in Nineteenth-Century Literature: From Austen to Woolf* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002).

³¹⁶ *The Bristol fratricide: being an exact and impartial narrative of the ... catastrophe of Sir John Dineley Goodere, Bart. perpetrated by the contrivance, ... of his brother Samuel Goodere, Esq...* (London, 1741), 5.

virtual mirrors of each other. Siblinghood could also be used figuratively in the period, as a way of denoting a shared professional role.³¹⁷

Earlier works by both Fielding siblings demonstrates that both had given some thought to the sibling relationship in literature, and its potentiality in registering issues within print culture. Flint's argument that that mid-century authors made explicit 'the relevance of family to narrative acts' in order to interrogate both kinship and literary rhetoric is particularly relevant for the works of both Fieldings.³¹⁸ The premise of *Joseph Andrews* is that Joseph is 'Brother to the illustrious *Pamela*, whose Virtue is at present so famous'.³¹⁹ Henry Fielding's use of gender difference through the brother-sister relation makes Joseph's reiteration of Pamela's resistance to her master's sexual advances parodic, exposing both the gender bias inherent in celebrations of Pamela's virtue, and Richardson's consequently narrow definition of virtue as chastity alone.

By withholding the information that Joseph is in fact keeping himself pure not from any abstract concept of virtue, but for his sweetheart Fanny, Fielding warns the reader that the characters about whom they are reading cannot be wholly transparent, and that knowledge is in the hands of a narrator who may choose to reveal information at his leisure. William Warner suggests that Joseph's imitative reading of *Pamela* is Fielding's means of asserting that 'reading modern entertainment needs to become critical and reflective rather than emulous or

³¹⁷ References to brotherhood ranged from low to high. See for example, *The footman's looking-glass: or, proposals to the livery servants of London and Westminster, &c. for bettering their situations in life...By J.B. a brother of the cloath* (London, 1747); *The Right Honourable Sir Robert Walpole, (now Earl of Orford) vindicated, in the case of the late Lord Viscount Bolingbroke. By a brother minister in disgrace* (London, [1746]).

³¹⁸ Flint, *Family Fictions*, 28.

³¹⁹ Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*, 17.

automatic'.³²⁰ Henry Fielding does not substitute the authority of the narrator for the authority of character's actions. Warner relates Henry Fielding's refusal of narrative authority to the emergent print market, in which there is no fixed system of representation or single individual in whom ultimate authority can reside:

[T]he narrator's claim to authorial control seems to be a way in which to claim an authority over the action that he cannot finally make stand. Fielding (the historical writer behind the scenes) tempts the reader to accept the simulacrum of the author as an absolute authority, while at the same time he refuses to underwrite this figure's authority.³²¹

At the end of *Joseph Andrews* the threat of incest is raised when Joseph and Fanny are discovered to be brother and sister. The plot resolves through a complicated series of events when it is revealed that in fact Fanny is Pamela's sister and Joseph is no relation to either. Thus Joseph Andrews and *Joseph Andrews* are rescued from the incestuous mirroring of siblinghood, Joseph discovers that he a gentleman's son and order is restored.

However, mirroring is preserved if it is recalled that Joseph's marriage to Fanny is now nearly as unequal as Mr. B's marriage to Pamela, suggesting that relations of kinship in the world of print are as inescapable as those in nature. Sibling incest seems to stand for imitative reproduction on the print market, through the repetitive linkage of Joseph and Pamela. The most pertinent example is given in the final sentences of the book:

Joseph remains blest with his *Fanny*, whom he doats on with the utmost Tenderness, which is all returned on her side. The Happiness of this Couple is a perpetual Fountain of Pleasure to their fond Parents; and what is particularly remarkable, he declares he will imitate them in their Retirement; nor will be prevailed on by any Booksellers, or their Authors, to make his Appearance in *High-Life*.³²²

³²⁰ William B. Warner, 'Joseph Andrews as Performative Entertainment', in *Licensing Entertainment: the Elevation of Novel Reading in Britain, 1684-1750* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 231-276, 247.

³²¹ Warner, 'Joseph Andrews as Performative Entertainment', 264-5.

³²² Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*, 303.

These sentences state apparently categorically that Joseph will no longer slavishly imitate Pamela's example, by referring to John Kelly's exploitation of *Pamela's* popularity by continuing her story in imitation of Richardson in *Pamela's conduct in high life* (1741). The lure of the print market, in the shape of booksellers and authors is negated. Using the trope of siblinghood, Fielding distances himself both from the idea of imitative reading, as shown by Warner, but also from a print market that encourages repetitive reproduction of text. However, the final gesture towards *Pamela* and the implication of the author within the print market reveal that complete dissociation from market forces is impossible. Print culture and siblinghood are therefore intimately linked through a trope of unreliability in Henry Fielding's early work. Ellen Pollak makes the argument that Henry Fielding in *Tom Jones* associates the 'promiscuous semiosis' of modern print culture with maternity, thus reconfiguring his own work in a masculine tradition, and uses the threat of maternal incest as the central trope.³²³ In this context, implicit sibling incest becomes the salve that recuperates print into the patriarchal family through Tom's marriage to Sophia, with whom he has been raised almost as a sister. Reading *Joseph Andrews* in the light of links between incest and print reveals a much less confident recuperation process at an earlier stage of Henry Fielding's career.

David Simple, Sarah Fielding's first novel, is equally concerned with siblinghood and literary culture. In several important ways it sets up the possibility for examination of a literary community in *Familiar Letters*. The community instated by the end of the novel is structured around egalitarian sibling relations. Spencer claims that for Sarah Fielding, 'the fraternal bond was important as a means of imagining

³²³ Pollak, *Incest and the English Novel*, 147.

egalitarian social relations'.³²⁴ In *David Simple* and in *Familiar Letters*, Sarah Fielding imagines egalitarian social relations expressed through communal interest, defined against the self-interest of the majority of people. In particular, friendship is shown to be the cementing bond that makes the sibling relation worthwhile. At the same time, friendship is to some extent defined by the sympathetic identification implicit in the sibling relation. David Simple is, after all, 'in search of a friend', motivated to do so by the betrayal of his brother. Subsequent readers of the novel have commented that David's ostensible search for a 'friend' belies the ultimate marriage plot.³²⁵ However, David finds not just a wife but a community of individuals with whom to identify as friend and brother. The sibling relation between Camilla and Valentine blurs the line between friendship and siblinghood. Through marriage, all four become brothers and sisters to one another, but nevertheless, the word 'Friend' recurs constantly throughout the novel. Friendship offers a mediating term between other possible unnatural manifestations of siblinghood. These are malevolence and sexual attraction, seen in Daniel's betrayal of David and the suspicion of incest that hangs over Camilla and Valentine.

David Simple conforms to Flint's model of mid-century domestic fiction in that it interrogates the nature of the family by breaking it apart – the title character is motivated to go on his travels by the betrayal of his brother – and reconstituting it.³²⁶ However, Sarah Fielding makes it clear that she sees the sibling-structured community constituted by David, Camilla, Valentine and Cynthia as natural to the

³²⁴ Spencer, *Literary Relations*, 141.

³²⁵ For this reading of the novel, see Richard Terry, 'David Simple and the Fallacy of Friendship', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 44/3 (Summer, 2004), 525-544. Terry argues that *Volume the Last* exposes the pitfalls of sentimental friendship.

³²⁶ Flint, *Family Fictions*: 'Traditional notions of the family are estranged, reconstituted as novel concepts, and then finally presented as natural social norms' (4).

characters, but radical in the world's terms, as she describes the mutual happiness of the community:

And, as strong a Picture as this is of real Happiness, it is in the power of every Community to attain it, if every Member of it would perform the Part allotted to him by *Nature*, or his *Station in Life*, with a sincere regard to the Interest and Pleasure of the whole.³²⁷

By setting up her imagined community as a model for 'real Happiness', Sarah Fielding shows that she regards the typical operations of worldly communities as flawed. The internal operations of this egalitarian community are linked to print culture through the mode of story-exchange. Once the community has been constituted, its primary means of passing the time is in the exchange of stories. Thus Sarah Fielding begins to constitute the key defining features of her imagined community; observation, conversation and listening to and reflecting on stories. In so doing, the friends, siblings, and soon-to-be lovers both confirm their bonds of identification and exercise their critical faculties. On occasion, the companions disagree about the mode of discussion. Cynthia and Valentine, for instance are inclined to see things 'in a ridiculous Light', where David and Camilla are more likely to be 'grave'.³²⁸ However, such variations in personality function complementarily rather than oppositionally. The series of stories and observations, although they appear rather like filler material while the narrative gets around to cementing the double-marriage plot, are key to establishing the workings of the kind of community that Sarah Fielding advocates.

The story of Isabelle is a particularly important moment in this process because it illustrates the fragility of the community under the pressure of self-interest. The characters in Isabelle's story are linked by similar ties to those in David Simple's

³²⁷ Sarah Fielding, *David Simple*, 237.

³²⁸ Sarah Fielding, *David Simple*, 150.

community – siblinghood, friendship and marriage, a network of horizontal relations nominally linked both by natural ties of kinship and by ties of honour and friendship. However, Dorimene's self-interest in allowing her passion for Isabelle's lover, Dumont, to develop, leads to the collapse of the whole system. Where the community does not centre around the rules laid down by a central figure, Fielding points out, only rigorous self-monitoring and submission of self-interest to the interest of the community will hold the community together. The ability of the characters to recognise this to some extent requires them to be able to lose their fixed attention to their own individual narratives. Before hearing the story of Isabelle, both David and Camilla speculate on her melancholy by relating the story directly to their own histories, Camilla asking if Isabelle's misfortunes have been caused by a stepmother; David enquiring if Isabelle has a treacherous brother.³²⁹ After hearing the story, Camilla and Cynthia both assert that 'they had always thought their *own Misfortunes* as great as human Nature could bear, till they had heard poor *Isabelle's Story*'.³³⁰ While identification with characters is important for Sarah Fielding's vision of a society of friends who intimately identify with each other, it is important that the readers be able to judge critically. Similarly, true criticism for Sarah Fielding requires use of both the head and the heart, and moral criticism brings into play the heart's judgements, signalled by the possibility of sympathetic identification. Part of the effect of the story of Isabelle is to teach the characters to use story exchange as an abstract mode of entertainment and moral teaching, an early intimation of what would be a major theme of *Familiar Letters*.

Henry Fielding's preface to the second edition of *David Simple* has been seen as problematic. Janine Barchas argues that Henry Fielding's preface

³²⁹ Fielding, *David Simple*, 152.

³³⁰ Fielding, *David Simple*, 196.

‘recapitulates various mechanisms of mid-eighteenth-century social control, establishing the dominance of his discourse and the subservience of his sister’s’.³³¹ Barchas reads Henry Fielding’s deletions of the dashes that are so prominent in the first edition as a patriarchal rewriting of Sarah Fielding’s attempt to register women’s ‘coerced emotional silence’.³³² In order to redress this problem, Peter Sabor’s recent edition of *David Simple* takes the first edition with Sarah Fielding’s original preface as the copy-text, and adds Henry Fielding’s preface and his amendments to the second edition as appendices. Sabor observes that Henry Fielding’s changes to the text were ‘motivated less by a desire to expunge errors than to shape his sister’s novel into one reflecting his own concept of fiction’.³³³ The preface is undeniably patronising in places, and without a doubt attempts to incorporate Sarah Fielding into the classical model for prose fiction established by Henry Fielding in the preface to *Joseph Andrews*.³³⁴ As Donoghue observes, ‘If the preface to the second edition convinced its audience that Henry Fielding did not write *David Simple*, it also would have convinced them that he could have written it better’.³³⁵ I do not intend to contest this view, but wish to draw attention to the relationship with his sister and her text that Henry Fielding constructs in this preface in order to render his supposedly hegemonic stance more complex. As in *David Simple* and *Joseph Andrews* the simple fact of biological kinship is not enough to establish an appropriate mode of reading. Friendship is the term that both establishes the grounds of readership and is proven through acts of reading; it is the mediating term between siblinghood and fellow-authorship.

³³¹ Janine Barchas, ‘Sarah Fielding’s Dashing Style and Eighteenth-Century Print Culture’, *Journal of English Literary History*, 63/3 (Fall, 1996), 633-656, 635.

³³² Barchas, ‘Sarah Fielding’s Dashing Style’, 645.

³³³ Sabor, ‘Introduction’ to *David Simple*, xxx.

³³⁴ See Henry Fielding, ‘Preface to the Second Edition’: ‘I have attempted in my Preface to *Joseph Andrews* to prove, that every Work of this kind is in its Nature a comic epic Poem...’ (345).

³³⁵ Donoghue, *The Fame Machine*, 163.

In the preface, Fielding registers anxiety about a metaphorical literary family where he himself is the uneasy head:

There is not, I believe, (and it is bold to affirm) a single *Free Briton* in this Kingdom, who hates his Wife more heartily than I detest the Muses. They have indeed behaved to me like the most infamous Harlots, and have laid many a spurious, as well as deformed Production at my Door: In all which, my good Friends the Critics have, in their profound Discernment, discovered some Resemblance of the Parent; and thus I have been reputed and reported the Author of half the Scurrility, Bawdy, Treason and Blasphemy, which these few last Years have produced.³³⁶

Fielding pictures himself as a cuckolded husband, with infants attributed to him who are not actually his – and thus registers one of the most prevalent fears surrounding inheritance and the potential for women’s unlicensed sexuality to disrupt the stability of the system of primogeniture. However, Fielding intensifies the irony against himself when he argues that worse than cuckoldry is the actual attribution of those misshapen infants to him through tracing of supposed filial resemblance. The ill-nature of the critics is portrayed as worse than the harlotry of the Muses. The author’s aspiration to patriarchal authority is undercut by the very vulnerability of that role. The print market is described in terms of disruptive, unstable familiar relations, with Henry Fielding as the butt of the disruption, registering not confidence in a print-market context, but anxiety. This is emphasised by Fielding’s ironic use of the word ‘Friends’ to describe the critics, and his description of ‘the Injuries I have suffered from such unjust Imputations’.³³⁷ Fielding concludes this section of the preface by resolving to consider himself ‘at full Liberty to publish an anonymous Work’ in the future.³³⁸ Anonymity, he seems to resolve, must be preferred when there is no guarantee of a stable print market in which correct readings can be presumed.

³³⁶ Henry Fielding, ‘Preface to the Second Edition’, 343.

³³⁷ Henry Fielding, ‘Preface to the Second Edition’, 344.

³³⁸ Henry Fielding, ‘Preface to the Second Edition’, 344.

Henry Fielding in this preface follows the same trajectory as David Simple – initially alone and betrayed, he moves towards true friendship and a stable reading practice. The false friendship of the critics and false affection of the Muses is contrasted with the friendship of the sibling relation, providing the stability that the present print market lacks. Henry Fielding describes Sarah Fielding as ‘one so nearly and dearly allied to me, in the highest Friendship as well as Relation’.³³⁹ At this point, the brother-sister relationship is framed fairly straightforwardly, as an exemplum of the friendship within which good-natured reading can occur. Henry Fielding can praise *David Simple* without reserve, doing the critical work that Sarah Fielding cannot be seen to do, and to some extent, preparing the ground for the criticism embedded in *Familiar Letters*. By incorporating Henry Fielding as friend and sympathetic reader, the second edition of *David Simple* helps to cement a sibling-structured community of equals replacing a community marked by malevolence and self-interest. Indeed, Henry Fielding’s comments on the faults of *David Simple*, and his insistence that the novel is ‘the Author’s own’, can be read as a means of divesting himself of the taint of self-interest in its promotion, along with the implication of a level of understanding of his sister’s authorial autonomy.³⁴⁰

The implication that Henry Fielding is particularly qualified to recognise Sarah Fielding’s genius hinges on an understanding of siblinghood that crosses between the biological and the professional relationship. As a brother, both in kinship terms and in friendship terms, Henry Fielding is qualified to function as the ‘good-natured and candid reader’ that Sarah Fielding had hoped for in the preface to the first edition.³⁴¹ As a brother-author, a fellow professional, he is qualified to judge critically and objectively a work that he officially denudes of any links to his own in the

³³⁹ Henry Fielding, ‘Preface to the Second Edition’, 344.

³⁴⁰ Henry Fielding, ‘Preface to the Second Edition’, 344.

³⁴¹ Sarah Fielding, ‘Advertisement to the Reader’ in *David Simple*, ed. Sabor, 3.

preface. Henry Fielding's preface does not silence Sarah Fielding's authorial voice as much as it marks the beginning of a process through which both Fieldings explore the possibilities of the sibling relation as a mode of commentary on authorship and print, and the seeds of the establishment of a network of reliable readers that would be further explored and complicated in *Familiar Letters*. Where critics have argued that Henry Fielding's comments on Sarah Fielding's work have been 'calculated to draw her work into the orbit of his', they neglect the more complex uses of the sibling relationship that the Fieldings exploit.³⁴²

Sarah Fielding's literary community

In *Familiar Letters*, Sarah Fielding uses the sibling-structured community to set out a number of her particular authorial concerns, and critically to interrogate the way her imagined scriptive community should function and the values it should hold. At this point in her career, the sibling-structured community enabled her to define her own authorial practice and defend her own entry into the print market. While addressing Sarah Fielding's contributions before those of Henry Fielding may be somewhat artificial, given that Henry Fielding's preface begins the text, it is only through delineating Sarah Fielding's artistic goals in *Familiar Letters* that Henry Fielding's preface becomes coherent, and can be mapped on to a more sustained use of the masculine voice throughout *Familiar Letters*. Prefaces are generally written after the rest of the text is complete; therefore it makes sense to assume that Henry Fielding's preface responds to the body of the work. Addressing Sarah Fielding's contributions first makes it possible to read Henry Fielding's preface, not as the filter through which the rest of the text should be read, but as a critical response to Sarah Fielding's artistic goals. That the material form of the text discourages such an anti-

³⁴² Spencer, *Literary Relations*, 147.

linear reading should not disguise the way that the text models critical conversation through its episodic, epistolary structure.

Familiar Letters extends and develops the happy ending of the sympathetic sibling-structured community of *David Simple*. The narrator's final words in *David Simple* anticipate the work that *Familiar Letters* would do:

If every Man, who is possessed of a greater Share of *Wit* than is common, – instead of insulting and satirizing others, would make use of his Talents for the Use and Pleasure of the Society to which he happens more particularly to belong; – and they, instead of hating him for his *Superior Parts* – would, in return for the Entertainment he affords them, exert all the Abilities Nature has given them, for his Use, in common with themselves, what Happiness would Mankind enjoy, – and who could complain of being miserable?³⁴³

Fielding's advocacy of using one's talents for communal pleasure and instruction closely resembles Hume's 'conversable world', in which 'every one displays his thoughts in observations in the best manner he is able, and mutually gives and receives information as well as pleasure'.³⁴⁴ Hume's formula for well-bred conversation provides a blueprint for the operations of Sarah Fielding's community. The 'amuse and instruct' formula was a critical phrase derived from Horace that encapsulates the purpose of textual production, particularly in the defence of novels.

In *David Simple* Sarah Fielding represents a community of individuals who pass the time by making observations on the world around them and telling each other stories. In *Familiar Letters* she embeds these observations and stories in the mode of letter-exchange, making explicit the connection of community and literary culture. The *dulce* and *utile* aspects of the 'moral Romance' of *David Simple*, the printed novel, mirror the modes by which the ideal community should function, implicitly linking the sharing and exchange of stories within the familial community with the operations of an ideal print culture. Using wit for the benefit of others,

³⁴³ Sarah Fielding, *David Simple*, 238.

³⁴⁴ Hume 'Of Essay Writing', 1.

sharing talent for the use and pleasure of society, these are the characteristics of a community predicated on the sharing of text, and suggest a vision of print culture as Sarah Fielding would have liked to have seen it. One of her characters condemns an all-male conversational group whose conversational mode fails because ‘they rather meet like Prize-Fighters, in hopes of gaining a Victory, than like Friends to instruct and please each other’.³⁴⁵ Competition or desire for personal gain destroys conversation because it undermines its primary purpose – to instruct and please.

In *Familiar Letters* the conversational model for textual interaction within the community provides a starting point from which Sarah Fielding can both interrogate the nature and purpose of the communal sharing of text in literary culture, and make women’s role as readers, writers and critics visible within it. Mika Suzuki argues that the function of epistolary exchange in *Familiar Letters* is to reiterate shared values between the characters and, by extension, the reader:

The society of Sarah Fielding’s main characters is a world of perfect communication and familiarity where every moral value is shared. They do not feel the need to confess their emotions as they can correctly anticipate the others’ reactions. They only exchange ideas about the world seen from the spectator’s viewpoint, so as to confirm their moral ideas and beliefs.³⁴⁶

Suzuki’s perception of the purpose of textual exchange in Fielding’s work conforms closely to Schellenberg’s idea of the exclusive ‘conversational circle’, which she argues is paradigmatically enacted in Fielding’s *David Simple*. Schellenberg suggests that the ‘circle’ structure is fundamentally unstable, predicated on the necessity of subsuming ‘fractures created by the necessity of excluding conflict, of acknowledging ultimate individuality of consciousness, and of reintegrating the egalitarian circle

³⁴⁵ Sarah Fielding, *Familiar Letters*, II, 8.

³⁴⁶ Mika Suzuki, ‘The “Words I in fancy say for you”: Sarah Fielding’s Letters and Epistolary Method’, *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 28, Eighteenth-Century Lexis and Lexicography (1998), 196-211, 211.

within existing social structures'.³⁴⁷ Significantly, Schellenberg links the fragmentation of the idealised social circle with Fielding's own uncertain authorial status and perceived need to seek out more powerful mentor figures such as her brother or Richardson.³⁴⁸

The focus of the readings of Schellenberg and Suzuki on moral values within Fielding's familiar community, while accurate to some extent, limit Fielding's vision by ignoring the other work that Fielding accomplishes in her representation of community, namely, the way that the community is used to present a sustained vision of a print culture informed by shared values – but transformed by the radical nature of those values. She thus models a means of social integration of radical values through acts of reading and textual consumption. Fielding does not passively represent the values of sociability; instead she uses them as the basis from which to embark on social critique.

Sarah Fielding seems to have been aware that polite conversation not only suggests a purposeful and improving reciprocal exchange of ideas, but also has an artful element. Throughout *Familiar Letters* conversational communities are interrogated for both the quality and the authenticity of their conversation. In the very first letter, Cynthia tells Camilla that she has spent three hours with Valentine, 'in great pleasure, reciprocally conveying our Ideas to each other, without any Disguise or artful Concealment of our Thoughts'.³⁴⁹ Far from being a pedestrian repetition of the view of conversation as a reciprocal conveying of ideas, Cynthia makes the point that neither she nor Valentine is an artful conversationalist; neither has anything to conceal. This comment prompts description of an all-female conversational group in which each woman fails as a conversationalist: 'One Lady was so forward, she was

³⁴⁷ Schellenberg, *The Conversational Circle*, 23.

³⁴⁸ Schellenberg, *The Conversational Circle*, 23.

³⁴⁹ Fielding, *Familiar Letters*, I, 54.

almost impudent; another so bashful, that she must be quite a Fool; a third so insipid, she had nothing to say for herself; and a fourth talk'd so eternally, nobody could have an Opportunity to speak in her Company'.³⁵⁰ These women fail at conversation because they have not adequately mastered the social conventions. Fielding shows her awareness that conversational norms invoke both an authentic self and one's ability to correctly perform accepted social manners.

The ideal familiar conversational behaviour is able to display social forms as an authentic signal of a moral self. Cynthia tells Camilla early in the collection: 'I every day reflect on my Happiness, that I am married to a Man whose own Behaviour sets an Example to all his Companions to treat me with real good Breeding'.³⁵¹ Later, she comments on 'the Disagreeableness that one meets with in all Companies, where Familiarity excuses Ceremony; for then Nature uncurbed, appears in her true colours, and Selfishness cannot be hid'.³⁵² Sarah Fielding represents the variety of potential meanings for artfulness or sociable performance. For those who are truly good-natured, artfulness is merely a formal extension of a desire to please others, the epitome of politeness and good-breeding. Artfulness can take the form of social glue, hiding the ill-nature of those beneath. In a sociable society, the latter is preferable to a rejection of artfulness in all its forms. The capacity to critically distinguish between the two forms an important theme in Sarah Fielding's text.

Artfulness invoked by conversation provides a starting point for a more sustained critical interrogation of artful performance. Although Cynthia suggests that artfulness has a social purpose in hiding people's true natures, the majority of Fielding's text is devoted to demonstrating means by which artfulness can be penetrated to reveal true character through appropriate reading. Throughout *Familiar*

³⁵⁰ Fielding, *Familiar Letters*, I, 55.

³⁵¹ Sarah Fielding, *Familiar Letters*, I, 96.

³⁵² Sarah Fielding, *Familiar Letters*, I, 177.

Letters Sarah Fielding draws links between social conversation, the reading of social character and the reading of text. David Simple in a letter to a ‘Gentleman in Yorkshire’ comments, ‘I had much rather be let into the various Labyrinths of [men’s] Minds, than read Volumes stuffed with the Chaos of Matters of Fact, where Characters are undistinguishable’.³⁵³ David’s description of his reading of the gentleman’s account of his own experiences in search of a friend shows that he reads absolutely in the moment. Initially in great hopes that the gentleman has found his friend, he is all the more disappointed when the discovery of the friend’s affair with Clarissa reveals him to be of unsound moral character, and ‘an Example, that what Men can do with Impunity, they execute with Intrepidity, in following their own Inclinations’.³⁵⁴

The gentleman’s story is particularly powerful, since it flatly contradicts the claim that through patience, a wife will regain her husband; the wife in the gentleman’s story dies of neglect, emphasising the negative results of following one’s selfish inclinations. David reserves his chagrin for Clarissa, whose primary crime as he sees it is that she has ‘overturned the Peace of a whole Family at once’.³⁵⁵ David concludes: ‘I am greatly shocked at the Consideration, that I may daily unknowingly converse with such Wretches’.³⁵⁶ David in this case presents himself as someone in great need of an education in character. Too inclined to trust to his own first impression, and guided solely by his heart, he is constantly in danger of being hoodwinked by those whose inner ugliness cannot be read on their faces. Communication of stories that warn about the duplicity of the immoral world is

³⁵³ Sarah Fielding, *Familiar Letters*, I, 318-19.

³⁵⁴ Sarah Fielding, *Familiar Letters*, I, 307.

³⁵⁵ Sarah Fielding, *Familiar Letters*, I, 319.

³⁵⁶ Sarah Fielding, *Familiar Letters*, I, 320.

therefore necessary to equip the innocent to make appropriate character judgements in life.

Transparency of language, sincerity and lack of affectation are thus central to the interpretive literary community. More so, however, is the critical capacity to tell the difference between the true and the false. This can be seen in Camilla's story of the woman whose husband refuses to believe she loves him because she will not feign an overwhelming passion for him. As she describes the situation:

[M]y Husband will not distinguish the Effects of that Passion, which is unsullied by Vanity, unmixed with anything but itself, from such Effects as constantly attend Passions made up of very different Ingredients; and in forming which (notwithstanding any Appearance they may make to short-sighted Eyes) real Love has the least Share.³⁵⁷

As well as advancing the idea that 'falsity' is not a duty for women, this women's predicament is shown to have come about through her husband's distinct lack of critical skills in being able to see the difference between true and false love, and thus reading her character incorrectly. By contrast, Camilla comments of the lady, 'I thought there was something very artless and sincere in her representing of her own Sensations on all occasions'.³⁵⁸ Artlessness and sincerity are fragile in that they are only valued within the ideal community of correct readers, but they are also the means by which members of the community can instigate bonds of identification. However, beyond the immediate community, 'character' recognition through reading can also act as a wider force for social cohesion.

Fielding uses the concept of 'character' to play on her readers' recognition of familiar characters from *David Simple*. The exchange of letters between Spatter and Varnish, in which Spatter criticises everyone and Varnish applauds everything, with the latter adding as a postscript that his mother died '*in a violent Rack of Pain*' is

³⁵⁷ Sarah Fielding, *Familiar Letters*, II, 131.

³⁵⁸ Sarah Fielding, *Familiar Letters*, II, 142.

only intelligible – and comical – if the reader is familiar with these characters’ unique traits from reading *David Simple*.³⁵⁹ The ‘Gentleman from Yorkshire’ writes to David Simple because he has identified him as a kindred spirit, having read the story of his search for a friend. A similar situation occurs when Cynthia receives a letter from ‘Lavinia’, who claims her friendship as a fellow witty woman who has suffered from her intelligence: ‘if I said any thing the least out of the common way, I was always told, that it was to shew my *Wit*...so that in the midst of Company I have hitherto seemed to live in a World by myself, and to talk quite a different Language from all that I have conversed with’.³⁶⁰ Lavinia’s plight is familiar to readers of *David Simple* who have seen Cynthia narrate similar trials before meeting David. Although Lavinia seeks Cynthia’s friendship as it will allow her to convey her thoughts ‘without Constraint’, invoking linguistic transparency as the premise of the ideal conversational community, the reader’s recognition of Lavinia depends not her language, but on the familiarity of her plight. The circulation of familiar stories enables sympathetic recognition, or repudiation of those who are unsympathetic.

An example of this process depends on Fielding playing on the word ‘novel’. Camilla, writing to Cynthia, sends her a ‘novel’ given to her by an acquaintance, in which Belinda, having fallen in love with a man, supports him financially in secret even when he marries someone else. Belinda’s character is ‘novel’ in the sense that she behaves in an unusually self-sacrificing way, as well as being a novel in the sense of being framed as a short piece of prose fiction. Camilla relates that the woman who gave her the novel expects her to laugh at Belinda’s foolishness, and perhaps implicitly at the author who wrote her that way. Cynthia’s reply advises Camilla to ‘On no account be intimate with the Lady who thinks

³⁵⁹ Sarah Fielding, *Familiar Letters*, I, 230.

³⁶⁰ Sarah Fielding, *Familiar Letters* II, 207.

Belinda to be an unnatural and monstrous Character'.³⁶¹ This self-conscious display of correct reading illustrates how the circulation of stories helps to build a community of readers, marked less by their commitment to transparency and authenticity than by their shared capacity to recognise and become familiar with a variety of characters, and judge these critically, both in fiction and in life.

Through depiction of women's participation in the critical community Sarah Fielding reveals that critical judgement is not only available to women, but crucial for their survival. The first interpolated tale, narrated by Camilla over several letters, tells the story of Isabinda and her trials in finding a husband. Warned by her mother to avoid marrying for looks alone, she delays marriage in order to discover the true characters of the men who are courting her. Cynthia responds, providing commentary and an account of her own observations at Bath. When Isabinda is accused of being a jilt because she has rejected a number of marriages, Cynthia excuses her dealings with 'Coxcombs' because of her youth, considering 'the Gratification of a light Vanity very excusable, and well adapted to the Age between Childishness and that Maturity, when the Mind is settled enough to form a Judgement of both Men and Manners'.³⁶² Cynthia's refusal to condemn what might be called Isabinda's coquetry is a significant departure from eighteenth-century norms and a defence of the idea that a woman should exercise judgement in her choice of husband.

In Camilla's following letter, Isabinda describes with much more detail the temperament of each of her suitors, suggesting that she has now arrived at the age of 'Judgement'. At this point, she makes her own defence of women taking time to make judgements in marriage choice:

³⁶¹ Sarah Fielding, *Familiar Letters* II, 183.

³⁶² Sarah Fielding, *Familiar Letters*, I, 81.

I have often wished there were some bounds set to what Men call Encouragement, that it might not be thought a Crime in us to desire some little time for Consideration, before we put ourselves entirely in a Man's power; and that the Gentlemen would be so indulgent, as to allow us the Liberty to make a difference between drinking Tea, or sitting in company every now and then an hour with a Man, and being married to him.³⁶³

Knowledge of men's characters is not entertainment or fancy, but is absolutely necessary to a woman's survival. Sarah Fielding implicitly argues that judgement, one of the accepted critical faculties in the eighteenth century, is something women have by virtue of having to make the marriage choice. If they lack it, they may find themselves condemned to lifelong misery, 'entirely in a Man's power'. Isabinda eventually retires to the country, and in her tranquil state, meets a man whom she grows to love based on her esteem for his character. Sarah Fielding's critique of passion is shown to not just be based on distrust of sexuality, but on an awareness of the need for critical detachment in the choice of a mate.

Fielding mingles a display of women engaging in critical acts with a defence of women's intelligence and a critique of those who denigrate women's contribution to literature. Cynthia shows a piece of poetry written by a woman to Corydon and Elmira, and Elmira, 'fixing her Eyes on a Glass opposite her, said she believed *some Women* might be capable of writing, if they had not *Judgment* enough to know it was not proper for them'.³⁶⁴ The heavy italics suggest irony; here Elmira's fixation on her own reflection makes her flawed idea of the meaning of 'judgement' comical, even without Cynthia's comment that she 'could not help smiling' at their ridiculous words.³⁶⁵ Corydon replies, 'with a Sneer composed of Folly and Malice':

Do you think, Madam, those lines are really a Woman's? I dare say this Lady has some Husband, Father, or Brother, who gave them to her, though they pass in her Name; for without Learning, it is impossible for any one to write so well.

³⁶³ Sarah Fielding, *Familiar Letters*, I, 128.

³⁶⁴ Sarah Fielding, *Familiar Letters*, I, 94.

³⁶⁵ Sarah Fielding, *Familiar Letters*, I, 93

Cynthia responds by asking him, ‘if he imagined none could express their Thoughts in any Language who did not understand several?’³⁶⁶

The satire against people who do not appreciate intelligent women continues in the second volume, where Cynthia describes a husband who is thrown into an ill humour on realising that his wife is superior to him, and is only happy when dropping Greek sentences because he knows she will not understand them. When the ladies leave after dinner, Valentine reports to Cynthia what happened:

[He] looked very happy, drank one Bumper of Wine, said, “Now the Women are gone, we may enjoy ourselves;” then fell fast asleep, and never spoke a word afterwards... We both concluded the Gentleman was only afraid, he should hear something uttered by Woman above his own understanding, and whilst he was in that Fear, could not sleep in peace.³⁶⁷

In portraying those people who do not prize female intelligence as either malicious or ridiculous, Sarah Fielding attempts to normalise the idea of the writing woman, defending women’s participation in a print culture imagined as the circulation of text for the purposes of building relations of friendship and familiarity based on sympathetic recognition and identification. These, I argue, are the primary themes of her text. However, *Familiar Letters* does not merely display her arguments but enacts and complicates them through incorporation of Henry Fielding’s contributions. In so doing, she makes specific use of the masculine voice, not, as I argue, to lend her work ‘masculine’ authority, but to incorporate friendly and familiar critical recognition of her own arguments.

Utilising the masculine voice

Susan Staves’s analysis of the literary relationship between Henry and Sarah Fielding argues for a gendered division of literary labour in which she contributes

³⁶⁶ Sarah Fielding, *Familiar Letters*, I, 93.

³⁶⁷ Sarah Fielding, *Familiar Letters*, II, 123.

feminine first-person narratives to his early works, and ‘Sarah occasionally relied on Henry for contributions to her books where specifically masculine authority seemed required’.³⁶⁸ The concept of a gendered division of labour, while appealing, ignores the interplay of authority between the two authors that collaboration brings. Because social authorship depends on exchange and process, it is reductive to approach a text like *Familiar Letters* as divided strictly into masculine and feminine parts.

Nevertheless, the idea of masculine literary authority is one that recurs throughout the text, and needs interrogation. Much of Sarah Fielding’s representations of her characters and the values these representations endorse is given weight and greater coherence by Henry Fielding’s contributions. This is visible particularly in his Preface, in which he uses various phrases whose meaning becomes clear only in the retrospective light of reading Sarah Fielding’s letters. The association of the male voice with authority that the female voice is seen as lacking does not permit a reading in which masculine authority can be used within terms outlined by the woman, with the specific purpose of defending women’s participation in the literary community. Insofar as Henry Fielding is a ‘friend’ to Sarah Fielding, much of his contribution to her text operates within the parameters that she has set and reinforce her particular literary values, breaking down the concept of gendered characteristics in reading and writing rather than reinforcing them.

It is significant that Henry Fielding’s preface is introduced as having been written by a ‘Friend of the Author’.³⁶⁹ Friendship for Sarah Fielding invokes a sibling-like relation of mutual sympathy and shared moral codes. As Fielding’s brother, Henry Fielding could use ‘friend’ to describe a relationship close to patronage, inscribing a power imbalance and situating his sister as the lesser author in need of

³⁶⁸ Staves, *A Literary History of Women’s Writing in Britain*, 252.

³⁶⁹ Henry Fielding, ‘Preface [to *Familiar Letters*]’, iii.

help. However, Sarah Fielding's sibling-friendships are maintained through the sharing of stories, and engaging in acts of social and literary criticism. In the context of a preface, the position of friendship can also imply the position of a sympathetic reader. It signals Sarah Fielding's own participation in the kind of egalitarian literary community she depicts in her text, in which women have an active role. In the preface, Henry Fielding constructs a view of criticism that depends on friendship for its operations, defending her text from the 'trifling Reader', and 'Tyros in the critical Art', who he says, 'are in truth as incapable of knowing any of the Faults, as of reaping any of the Beauties of an Author'.³⁷⁰ Drawing links between trifling, condemnatory reading and tyranny, he suggests that his own approach to the text is more friendly:

As to the Matter contained in the following Volumes, I am not perhaps at liberty to declare my Opinion: Relation and Friendship to the Writer may draw upon me the Censure of Partiality, if I should be as warm, as I am inclined to be in their Commendation.³⁷¹

The reading of friendship seeks the beauties of the text. In other words, a friendly reading of a text seeks to recognise the author's unique literary capacities. He goes on to invoke Sarah Fielding's critical faculties when he calls *Familiar Letters* 'this Book, whose Beauties (if it have any) require the same Attention to discover them, with which the Author herself hath considered that Book of Nature, whence they are taken'.³⁷² By casting Nature as a book that Sarah Fielding has read critically, he adds to her defence of women as writers and critics. He invokes her own dismissive approach to society's denigration of women writers when he claims that, 'The Objection to the Sex of the Author hardly requires an Answer'.³⁷³ His position as

³⁷⁰ Henry Fielding, 'Preface [to *Familiar Letters*]', x.

³⁷¹ Henry Fielding, 'Preface [to *Familiar Letters*]', xii.

³⁷² Henry Fielding, 'Preface [to *Familiar Letters*]', xii-xiii.

³⁷³ Henry Fielding, 'Preface [to *Familiar Letters*]', xv.

sibling and friend to Sarah Fielding, in her terms, qualifies him to read her work appropriately.

The question of the woman's capacity for criticism becomes a significant theme of the text in part through Henry Fielding's interpolations. Through a complex interplay of voices and arguments throughout *Familiar Letters*, women's critical faculties are displayed and defended. The presence of a masculine voice in the text does not silence the woman's critical voice; instead it provides the necessary recognition within the model of social authorship that permits a revisioning of women's critical faculties. Runge argues that the eighteenth-century critical trinity of wit, knowledge and judgement were framed as inaccessible to women, whose knowledge was limited to the emotional sphere. In her discussion of Sarah Fielding's *Remarks on Clarissa* (1749) she argues:

The mid-century discourse of polite femininity grants women expertise in a unique private epistemological realm, specifically manifest in issues of romance, emotion, morality, and education of the young. Nonetheless, this domestic orientation does not accord to women a liberal knowledge of the world and the contingent right to judge.³⁷⁴

In particular, Runge argues that Sarah Fielding's adoption of the male persona of Bellario in *Remarks* and that of Miss Gibson as the representative female perspective subsumes Sarah Fielding's own female critical voice behind the mask of a male character: 'Gibson's account relies on her private reading experience; it is authorized by personal testimony and not, like Bellario, by a tradition of authors and scholars'.³⁷⁵

The question of whether the woman's critical voice is buried under the mask of a male character, or masculine authority, is crucial to *Familiar Letters*, in which a similar pattern can be identified. All the overt critical claims that *Familiar Letters* makes are deployed in the voice of a man, either that of Henry Fielding or a male

³⁷⁴ Runge, *Gender and Language*, 122.

³⁷⁵ Runge, *Gender and Language*, 153.

letter-writer, but the final outcome is not to mask Sarah Fielding as critic, but to create the context in which she can make claims about women's capacity for criticism.

Henry Fielding's preface to *Familiar Letters* has consistently been read as a straightforward attack on Richardson, particularly in Henry Fielding's argument that, 'no one will contend, that the epistolary Style is in general the most proper to a Novelist, or that it hath been used by the best Writers of this Kind'.³⁷⁶ Linda Bree, for example, attributes this '(at best) tactless' comment to Henry Fielding's disapprobation of the growing friendship between Richardson and Sarah Fielding.³⁷⁷ Henry Fielding's subsequent schema of epistolary texts and his following comment that 'Love-Letters, and Letters of Conversation' containing only 'the private Affairs of Persons of no Consequence to the Public, either in a political or learned Consideration, or indeed in any Consideration whatsoever' would seem to support the view that Henry Fielding was challenging Richardson at the expense of his sister's work.³⁷⁸ However, it makes more sense to read Henry Fielding's critique of epistolarity in order to demonstrate how he perceives that Sarah Fielding's text differs from the typical epistolary production. He makes it clear that he sees Sarah Fielding's letters as 'designed Deviation from the common Road'.³⁷⁹

Henry Fielding devotes several pages to the epistolary style precisely in order to show that Sarah Fielding has made it possible to use letters as a tool of criticism, a point of contrast to those letters that, as Henry Fielding sees it, encourage uncritical reading of the affairs of people 'of no Consequence to the Public'. He differentiates Sarah Fielding's text from Richardson's work not to appropriate it for himself, but to point out that the reader should read for critical commentary as well as

³⁷⁶ Henry Fielding, 'Preface [to *Familiar Letters*]', ix.

³⁷⁷ Bree, *Sarah Fielding*, 13.

³⁷⁸ Henry Fielding, 'Preface [to *Familiar Letters*]', vi.

³⁷⁹ Henry Fielding, 'Preface [to *Familiar Letters*]', iii-iv.

plot. Importantly, however, this point is not fully clear – in fact, it reads rather unintelligibly, even as patronising – until the reader has encountered Sarah Fielding's letters. Similarly, Henry Fielding observes that readers may be surprised to see such a high quality of observation of human nature from one who 'hath *seen so little of the World*'.³⁸⁰ His claim that Sarah Fielding has seen little of the world initially reads like a conventionally patronising assumption of the limitation of women's sphere. However, Henry Fielding's solution is to argue that knowledge of human nature is not gained by living in the world but from 'True Genius, with the help of a little Conversation'.³⁸¹ Sarah Fielding's letters that deal specifically with criticism and its role in fiction help us make sense of this commentary.

An exchange of letters between 'Ferdinand' and 'Theodosius' seems to function as a critical manifesto. It is provided at the end of the first volume of letters, a place designed for high impact. The exchange starts from the contemporary saying that wit and judgement are incompatible. Theodosius attributes this saying to maliciousness, 'for nothing is so much the Object of Envy, and consequently of Spite and Ill-nature, as Wit'.³⁸² In fact, argues Theodosius, wit and judgement are really the same thing: 'But here by Wit I would be understood to mean true Wit; namely, a Capacity of comprehending various Ideas, and a power of joining them properly together: And if this Definition be true, what is that Power but Judgment itself?'.³⁸³ Theodosius directly contradicts Locke, who originally distinguished between wit and judgement in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690).³⁸⁴

³⁸⁰ Henry Fielding, 'Preface [to *Familiar Letters*]', xiv.

³⁸¹ Henry Fielding, 'Preface [to *Familiar Letters*]', xv.

³⁸² Sarah Fielding, *Familiar Letters*, I, 333.

³⁸³ Sarah Fielding, *Familiar Letters*, I, 338.

³⁸⁴ See John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), Book II, Ch. 11: 'For Wit lying most in the assemblage of *Ideas*, and putting those together with quickness and variety, wherein can be found any resemblance or congruity, thereby to make up pleasant Pictures and agreeable Visions in the Fancy: *Judgment*, on the contrary, lies quite on the other side, in separating carefully, one from another, *Ideas*, wherein can be found the least

Theodosius defends himself from a potential charge of arrogance in contradicting ‘great men’ by suggesting that Locke himself is evidence of the truth of his proposition. He does not name Locke, but calls him, ‘The Man who, I think, gives the clearest Definition of Wit and Judgment, by that very Definition proves they do go together; and yet allows that they may not’, making Locke the most likely candidate for this reference.³⁸⁵ A link is drawn between the work of Locke and that of Sarah Fielding when Theodosius comments that ‘his Inquiries into the Labyrinths of the human Mind, are very subtle and fine’.³⁸⁶ The work of fiction writing that Sarah Fielding does is thus brought into line with philosophy. Wit and imagination, the speciality of the fiction-writer, are combined with judgement, the speciality of the moralist and philosopher, in a way that both demonstrates Sarah Fielding’s erudition, and makes a case for her writings. Sarah Fielding situates Theodosius’s letter in a moral framework, reading critical judgement as being often motivated by ill-nature. Theodosius concludes that he would like to teach men that ‘if they would but take half the pains to come at the only thing truly valuable, namely, Goodness, and a Love of the Society they are Members of, they might attain real Happiness’, thus maintaining the moral framework of his observations and invoking Sarah Fielding’s strictures on community at the end of *David Simple*.³⁸⁷ Theodosius’s implication that much criticism is tainted by the poor morality of the critics allows Sarah Fielding to add another critical perquisite to the list: a good heart. Moral criticism is not merely a means of creating space for women within print culture, but a way of envisioning a reformed print culture in which women are able to play an active role.

difference, thereby to avoid being misled by Similitude, and by affinity to take one thing for another’ (156).

³⁸⁵ Sarah Fielding, *Familiar Letters*, I, 339.

³⁸⁶ Sarah Fielding, *Familiar Letters*, I, 339.

³⁸⁷ Sarah Fielding, *Familiar Letters*, I, 351.

Henry Fielding's preface seems to acknowledge a domestic, moral context for Sarah Fielding's work, but does not use this context as a pretext for denying women knowledge and the right to judge. Theodosius addresses himself to the final quality in the critical pantheon: knowledge, usually associated with a classical, masculine education. Sarah Fielding exploits the various possible meanings of 'knowledge' to defend her own position. Theodosius claims:

Another Fallacy taken hold of, in order to support Mens darling Pleasure of imagining they have some Branch of Understanding superior to that of their Neighbours, is that common Saying, that such a Man has indeed great Parts, but he knows nothing of the World.³⁸⁸

Knowledge is here constituted as world experience, rather than formal education. This letter recalls Henry Fielding's preface where he suggests that readers may be surprised to see such a high quality of observation in on who 'hath *seen so little of the World*'.³⁸⁹ Theodosius draws a link between Henry Fielding's phrase and critical knowledge when he argues that people who talk of knowledge of the world refer solely to their own world, concluding:

[I]f by the Knowledge of the World is meant the diving into the secret Motives of Men's Actions, and the being acquainted with the deepest Labyrinths of the human Mind, this certainly may as well be learn'd amongst one Class of men as another.³⁹⁰

Theodosius exposes the idea of knowledge as itself being biased by the narrow viewpoint of those who define it and, significantly, recapitulates the phrase 'Labyrinths of the human Mind' that Sarah Fielding uses to describe her authorial identity. By redefining knowledge, and claiming that it can be gained anywhere, Sarah Fielding makes a radical claim for the capacity of the woman author/critic in the areas of wit, judgement and knowledge. Henry Fielding's preface thus provides

³⁸⁸ Sarah Fielding, *Familiar Letters*, I, 342.

³⁸⁹ Henry Fielding, 'Preface [to *Familiar Letters*]', xiv.

³⁹⁰ Sarah Fielding, *Familiar Letters*, I, 343.

recognition for Sarah Fielding's critical claims, adding the coherence of a personal dimension to the abstract arguments outlined by Theodosius.

Henry Fielding does not offer an identificatory reading of Sarah Fielding's letters; instead he distances himself from them by claiming that they are primarily useful to women:

[I]f she should have exposed some of those nicer Female Foibles, which have escaped most other Writers, she hath at the same time nobly displayed the Beauties and Virtues of the more amiable Part, which abundantly overbalances in the account. By comparing these together, young Ladies may, if they please, receive great Advantages: I will venture to say, no Book extant is so well calculated for their Instruction and Improvement.³⁹¹

Here the patronising tone is again in evidence, as Henry Fielding situates Sarah Fielding's text in the conduct-book tradition and fails to mention that the target of Sarah Fielding's criticism is not merely women, but the whole of society, encompassing both men and women, who are equally inclined to pride and self-interest. However, he is right to identify the strand in the text that seems more directed at women, in the sense that women have a greater need to exercise their critical faculties on those around them if they are not to be victims of a society that oppresses them. His recognition of her critical aims should not be read as the stamp of male approval but part of a performative enactment of the dynamic of reading that Sarah Fielding displays among the characters in her text. His position as a man is, in a sense, less important than his position as a brother and friend to Sarah Fielding, as it is through these relationships that he is able to participate in a process of communal reading, the terms of which are defined by his sister.

This apparent prioritising of reading qualities over gender, and the use of a friendly reader in the person of a family member to make coherent a defence of women's criticism, suggest that the Fieldings do not reproduce gendered

³⁹¹ Henry Fielding, 'Preface [to *Familiar Letters*]', xix-xx.

characteristics in reading and writing in *Familiar Letters*, but use them in order to break down a perceived division. Gender does not necessarily operate to promote a complementary scene of sociability for Sarah Fielding. She shows awareness that mixed sociability may only serve to exaggerate gendered characteristics in a letter from 'Cleomenes' observing the behaviour of a mixed party of pleasure when their boat is overturned in a storm:

I plainly perceived, that the Ladies were at that very Instant affecting more Fear than in reality they felt, to prove their Tittle (sic) to that Timorousness and Softness, which are esteemed so amiable in their Sex; and the Gentlemen were equally as much affected in their pretended Unconcern, to shew they were possessed of that Courage so necessary to recommend them.³⁹²

Her awareness that those gendered attributes which are deemed appropriate by society can be performed indicates Sarah Fielding's suspicion of the idea that one gender has a greater claim to any particular mode of being. Her conflation of morality with criticism, and her tendency to ascribe bad behaviour in both genders to pride or self-interest promotes intelligence, a good heart and a strict moral code of equal necessity to both genders. Her use of the male voice to authorise female, particularly her own, writing and criticism, seems therefore to be playing with and challenging gendered assumptions, rather than reproducing them. However, while Henry Fielding's contributions enact and reinforce Sarah Fielding's literary values, his contributions also enact a challenge to her reading and writing community, serving to complicate the picture she sets out.

Henry Fielding's letters

Sarah Fielding's response to the random encounters of society and print culture is to imagine a sympathetic scriptive community whose values are enacted and reinforced via the circulation of text and stories. Within her literary community,

³⁹² Sarah Fielding, *Familiar Letters*, II, 65.

women have equal value as readers, writers and critics with men. The random textual encounter is stabilised by the guarantee of a friendly critical reading, driven both by intelligence and a warm heart. The literary community can be extended outside its immediate environs through a dynamic of familiarity established between author, character and reader which demands a reading similar to that enacted between the letter-writers in the text. Although Sarah Fielding is sceptical about the private motivations of the majority of people, the possibility of participation in the ideal reading and writing community is held out as an alternative to selfish, individualistic desire. Henry Fielding appears to share Sarah Fielding's concern about the potential unruliness of print culture, as suggested by his opening remarks to *David Simple*, comparing the muses to harlots and print productions to bastard children. In the letters he contributes to *Familiar Letters*, Henry Fielding registers scepticism, and offers a very different solution to the problem. His contestation of her model of print inscribes formal debate of the issues she has identified, especially that of performance.

Henry Fielding's five letters consist of one 'state of the town' letter from Valentine to David Simple, a travel letter from a French man giving his impression of England, a conventional town and country letter exchange and a love-letter from Valentine to Cynthia. All of these letters are noticeably performative, in that they conform to generic expectations of the uses of the letter form. In the town and country exchange, for example, the reader sees 'Miss Prudentia Flutter' describing her hurried town life, and claiming that 'to be genteel, you must do what every body does'.³⁹³ The reply, from 'Miss Lucy Rural' describes simpler country pleasures, and claims that, 'we are not only more innocent, but much more merry and happy in the Country'.³⁹⁴ The stock names and the predictable sentiments, drawing from a recognised literary

³⁹³ Sarah Fielding, *Familiar Letters*, II, 330.

³⁹⁴ Sarah Fielding, *Familiar Letters*, II, 333.

representation of the suspect pleasures of the town contrasted with virtuous rural retirement, make this exchange entirely conventional, designed to reinforce contemporary stereotype rather than to engage in character exploration.

Similarly, the letter from Valentine to Cynthia is designed to show the author's mastery of language and gentility in his philosophical defence of love. Calling himself 'the Champion of Love', Valentine's meditation on Cynthia uses her as an occasion for a dissertation on the delights of love itself.³⁹⁵ It may be significant that Cynthia is the recipient of this letter, which could signal a validation of the witty, intelligent woman, but although Valentine calls her 'the Delight of my Eyes, the Joy of my Heart, my Admiration, my Esteem, and my Glory', he never singles out any of her unique characteristics.³⁹⁶ Cynthia is not valued for her personal attributes, she is merely the beloved object of convention. The overtly performative nature of these letters suggests an appeal to the lowest common denominator for recognition. Rather than producing letters which demand sympathetic recognition based on shared moral and literary values, which would fit into Sarah Fielding's model of print culture, Henry Fielding depends on a model of shared stereotypes and generic expectations for literary value, in an almost parodic version of Sarah Fielding's literary community.

The first letter, from Valentine to David Simple, incorporates the particularity of local references and contemporary culture uncharacteristic of Sarah Fielding fictional contributions. Valentine reflects Henry Fielding's positive views of the current Pelham government, who are 'the very Men, whom you and every honest Person would wish to be intrusted with it'.³⁹⁷ 'This', continues Valentine 'will be abundantly sufficient to cheer you in that Love, which I know you sincerely bear your Country: for this will thrive in every different Branch, as the several Branches are

³⁹⁵ Sarah Fielding, *Familiar Letters*, II, 341.

³⁹⁶ Sarah Fielding, *Familiar Letters*, II, 350-51.

³⁹⁷ Sarah Fielding, *Familiar Letters*, II, 295.

governed and directed by Men of proper and adequate Ability'.³⁹⁸ Ironically, Valentine's assumption that he knows David Simple's sentiments conforms to Sarah Fielding's model of shared values; patriotism however, has not until now been a primary concern of any of her characters. Valentine uses his pro-government propaganda to embark on a commentary on the moral and artistic state of the nation. Morals, according to Valentine, are in a 'deplorable State', marked by 'a total Disregard to all true Honour and Honesty'.³⁹⁹ The polemic, which until this point has appeared reasonably conventional, turns to authorship: 'In reality, what the Ministry are to the State, the Bishops to the Church, the Chancellor and Judges to the Law, the Generals to the Army, and the Admirals to the Fleet; that is a great and good Writer over the Morals of his Countrymen'.⁴⁰⁰ In Valentine's version of authorship the writer is an arbiter of the country's morals rather than a participant in the conversational exchange that refines morals.

The problem of debased morality writes Valentine, is that caused by the fact that 'there is no one Patron of true Genius, nor the least Encouragement left for it in this Kingdom'.⁴⁰¹ Taste is also debased, and "'Till some Patron then of the Muses shall again arise in this Nation, you will not be very curious in inquiring after their Productions'.⁴⁰² Where Sarah Fielding had envisioned a heterosocial print culture in which friendship and bonds of identification had guaranteed instruction and entertainment through the circulation of text, and made space for women writers within this vision, Henry Fielding challenges her ideas by providing an alternative in the form of a return to a vertical structure in which patrons legislate public morality through private literary sponsorship. However, Henry Fielding's challenge runs the

³⁹⁸ Sarah Fielding, *Familiar Letters*, II, 295.

³⁹⁹ Sarah Fielding, *Familiar Letters*, II, 296; 297.

⁴⁰⁰ Sarah Fielding, *Familiar Letters*, II, 298.

⁴⁰¹ Sarah Fielding, *Familiar Letters*, II, 303.

⁴⁰² Sarah Fielding, *Familiar Letters*, II, 304.

risk of excluding women's writing altogether. Structured as a letter between men, there is no place for the woman writer in Fielding's conservative vision. The elevated professional roles of bishops, judges and generals were not only unavailable to women, it would have been inconceivable to imagine a woman undertaking such a career. Where Sarah Fielding could imagine a modest professionalism that exploited the possibilities for women in a model of literary production that drew from a smaller-scale model of textual exchange within a circle of equals, Henry Fielding's professional authorial model remains inaccessible to women.

The effect of Henry Fielding's contributions, therefore, is to challenge Sarah Fielding's model of print culture. Where she seeks transparency of language and artlessness, his letters are overtly artful. Where she suggests a model of literary exchange and building familiar relationships to stabilise the random encounters of print, he demands a return to patronage and a legislation of morals by great men. In a sense however, his interpolations are appropriate. Both siblings are ultimately sceptical about the moral state of the nation. Sarah Fielding's display of the possibilities of a community of shared values based on friendly readings, in which Henry Fielding participates, is always aware of the values of the world outside which are antagonistic to her own. Neither artlessness, linguistic transparency nor friendship can be guaranteed. Henry Fielding makes an ironic point about the arbitrary nature of semantics when his travelling Frenchman applies all kinds of bizarre semantic logic to place names in London: 'The next Place of Note, as we ascend this River, is *Fox-Hall*, or rather *Fox-Hole*, the first Syllable of which is corrupted into *Vaux* by the Vulgar, who tell a foolish Story of one *Vaux* who resided here, and attempted to blow up the *Thames*'.⁴⁰³ The nonsense of the French traveller, mixing arbitrary etymology and

⁴⁰³ Sarah Fielding, *Familiar Letters*, II, 308.

historical anecdote, exposes the contingency and instability of language and interpretation. The Frenchman is perhaps the archetype of an unfriendly reader.

In a sense, Henry Fielding's contributions reinforce the uniqueness of Sarah Fielding's vision by depicting the extreme alternative in which textual encounters are entirely random and meaningless, with no stability of relation between author, text and reader. Henry Fielding's contributions simultaneously challenge Sarah Fielding's concerns, and performatively demonstrate that her sceptical outlook is justified through enacting a series of misreadings. The 'failures' in the Fieldings' collaboration may even foreshadow the destruction of the *David Simple* community in *Volume the Last*. Significantly, neither Fielding's vision is applicable to the new print context with entire plausibility. In debating the state of society and the relevance of print to the legislation of public morality, both Fieldings seem to register the challenge of delineating a workable model. Ironically, even as both Fieldings look towards an apparently diminishing literary past, and appear to look with dismay on contemporary society, they energetically work throughout *Familiar Letters* to develop their own collective and individual authorial print-market personae.

The reception of *Familiar Letters*

This chapter has challenged the idea that Sarah Fielding was somehow working in the shadow of her more famous brother. These readings of *Familiar Letters* allow a further challenge to be made to the claim that she was in the shadow of Richardson, or indeed, that any assessment of her work could only have been inflected by knowledge of the rivalry between the two men. Allen Michie observes that 'the names Richardson and Fielding seem destined for eternal contrast...the ghost

of one author haunts the criticism of the other'.⁴⁰⁴ Focus on the supposed rivalry between the two men means that either of their comments on the work of Sarah Fielding appears loaded with meaning for each other. At times, Sarah Fielding appears to be the unfortunate conduit of Richardson's antagonism to Henry Fielding. After the publication of *Amelia* (1751), Richardson writes with undisguised glee to Lady Bradshaigh:

Poor Fielding! I could not help telling his sister, that I was equally surprised at and concerned for his continued lowness. Had your brother, said I, been born in a stable, or been a runner at a sponging-house, we should have thought him a genius, and wished he had had the benefit of a liberal education, and of being admitted into good company; but it is beyond my conception, that a man of family, and who had some learning, and who really is a writer, should descend so excessively low, in all his pieces.⁴⁰⁵

It is hard not to condemn Richardson's apparent delight in giving his undiluted and unflattering opinion of Henry Fielding to the latter's nearest relation. However, the exaggeration of rivalry is a known marketing technique, and without a doubt helped to establish the works of Henry Fielding and Richardson in the public consciousness. Moreover, Richardson's comment that Henry Fielding 'really is a writer' suggests a level of respect that highlights the danger of taking remarks like these too much out of context.

Richardson's response to *Familiar Letters* has been seen as a similar comment, an attempt to bring Sarah Fielding's work into the orbit of his. However, in light of the reading of *Familiar Letters* above, it is possible that Richardson was one of the few readers on record who responded to *Familiar Letters* as a specifically collaborative text. In an affectionate letter to Sarah Fielding of 1756, Richardson calls

⁴⁰⁴ Allen Michie, *Richardson and Fielding: The Dynamics of a Critical Rivalry* (London: Associated University Presses, 1999), 13.

⁴⁰⁵ Samuel Richardson to Lady Bradshaigh (February 23, 1752), in *Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson* ed. John Carroll (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 198-99.

her ‘my much-esteemed Sally Fielding, the author of David Simple’.⁴⁰⁶ After some further compliment, he says:

I have just gone through your two vols. of Letters. Have re-perused them with great pleasure, and found many new beauties in them. What a knowledge of the human heart! Well might a critical judge of writing say, as he did to me, that your late brother’s knowledge of it was not (fine writer as he was) comparable to your’s. His was but as the knowledge of the outside of a clock-work machine, while your’s was that of all the finer springs and movements of the inside.⁴⁰⁷

Although this passage seems to sum up Richardson’s opinion of the Fielding siblings, it is significant that he makes this observation having read *Familiar Letters*. He seems to have been responding to the distinction drawn through the different contributions of the Fielding siblings between letters that are used to elaborate character and letters that are purely performative.

In granting Sarah Fielding ‘knowledge of the human heart’ he responds to her presentation of herself as an author, rather than bestowing his own personal seal of approval. In other words, this response should be read as a recognition of Sarah Fielding’s authorial persona, reinforced by his use of her market name as ‘the author of David Simple’, rather than attempting to align her work with his own. Indeed, as Sarah Fielding’s admiration of *Clarissa* includes her use of the phrase ‘every Labyrinth, in the several Minds of his Characters’, it might be argued that she is more inclined to draw his work into the orbit of hers than vice versa.⁴⁰⁸ Although both Richardson and Fielding invoked the other’s work in their reading of Sarah Fielding’s texts, to suggest that they did so solely as part of their own personal rivalry neglects the way that both authors enacted a process of recognition of Sarah Fielding’s works within the terms of literary community that she herself sets out. Rather than arguing

⁴⁰⁶ Samuel Richardson to Sarah Fielding (Dec 7, 1756), in *Correspondence*, ed. Battestin and Probyn, 131.

⁴⁰⁷ Samuel Richardson to Sarah Fielding (Dec 7, 1756), in *Correspondence*, ed. Battestin and Probyn, 132.

⁴⁰⁸ Sarah Fielding, *Remarks on Clarissa*, 36.

that both sought to encompass her work within their own version of the novel, it seems that both recognised her as an author in her own right, with particular professional and moral aims. Sarah Fielding's work provides a third term within which the Richardson-Fielding binary can be rendered more complex.

Moreover, other readers, while they energetically debate the relative merits of Richardson and Henry Fielding, analyse Sarah Fielding's work in terms entirely separate from those applied to either her brother or Richardson. The letter exchange between Catherine Talbot and Elizabeth Carter shows both women reading *Clarissa*, *Tom Jones* and the works of Sarah Fielding, and giving their critical opinions. Although both women make comparisons between the characters of Tom and *Clarissa*, Sarah Fielding's work is not mentioned as reflecting on either. Talbot, describing a trip she has taken, says:

In the coach we amused ourselves with some of the seventh volume of Mad. de Sevigné's Letters, and some of Mrs. Fielding's. 'Tis vexatious in the last-named book to find such a mixture of refinement *a perte de vue* proceeding from her inclination to support, I fancy, a false system, and deduce every variety of action from the sources of pride and vanity. But where she writes naturally one loves and honours her extremely; there is a goodness of heart and delicacy of sentiment that makes me think you happy in her acquaintance.⁴⁰⁹

It is noticeable that the scene of consumption for *Familiar Letters* is sociable, in the context of a carriage-ride. Talbot comments in the same letter, 'I scarce know a greater pleasure than reading over a book one is fond of with persons of taste and candour, to whom it is entirely new'.⁴¹⁰ Talbot's criticism takes issue with the logical path followed by Fielding in the philosophical scheme of *Familiar Letters*, using 'refinement' in the sense of Fielding's attribution of all human behaviour to refer to limited first principles, rather than her attempts to 'refine' society. Although Talbot's criticism is negative, it does Fielding the justice of recognising the existence of a

⁴⁰⁹ Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter (July 21, 1753), in *A Series of Letters between Mrs. Elizabeth Carter and Miss Catherine Talbot from the Year 1741 to 1770*, 4 vols. (London, 1808-09), II, 131.

⁴¹⁰ Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter (July 21, 1753), in *A Series of Letters*, II, 131.

philosophical system and debating it. That Sarah Fielding is given the same benefit of critical thought that is extended to Henry Fielding and Richardson suggests that she is taken seriously as an author with her own specific characteristics, rather than being seen as merely Henry Fielding's sister or a woman in Richardson's circle.

In the long term, the *David Simple* trilogy established Sarah Fielding as the writer of friendship, to be invoked in contexts where friendship was at issue. Several novels later in the century make passing reference to David's search for a friend. Such references illustrate the power of the David Simple 'brand' that Sarah Fielding managed to establish, conceived by later (and lesser) authors as instantly recognisable. One of the characters in *Edward. A Novel* (1774) writes, 'No longer an enemy of matrimony, I confess it is the only state on earth where felicity may be found. I confess, with David Simple, that it is the state of friendship'.⁴¹¹ Such references could also be made with irony. One of the essays in Jane Gomeldon's *The Medley* (1766) observes, 'Lady Annabella has succeeded in the Search of *David Simple*, and found a Friend. Her present Whim is to despise Men'.⁴¹² *David Simple* even seems to have found his way into the Irish parliament. The parliamentary register for 1783 to 1784 contains the comment: 'if the British armies patrolled the continent of America, like David Simple, looking for friends, and if with more good fortune than his, they found some, I should think it has been clearly proved that they did not leave any behind them'.⁴¹³ Such widespread references are testament to the success of the *David Simple* works, or at least the first of them, and to Sarah Fielding's claim to stand alongside other authors of the 1740s rather than in the

⁴¹¹ *Edward. A novel*, 2 vols. (London, 1774), II, 148.

⁴¹² Jane Gomeldon, *The medley: consisting of thirty-one essays, on various subjects* (Newcastle, 1766), 191.

⁴¹³ *The Parliamentary register: or, history of the proceedings and debates of the House of Lords of Ireland, the first session of the fourth Parliament ... which met the 14th of October, 1783, and ended the 14th of May, 1784* (Dublin, 1784), 8.

background of the literary canon. Arguably, the tendency was not necessarily to insist on connections between the Fielding siblings. Clara Reeve asserts that Sarah Fielding's works were 'not unworthy next to be mentioned after her brother's; if they do not equal them in wit and learning, they excell in some other material merits, that are more beneficial to their readers'.⁴¹⁴ In light of other references to Sarah Fielding throughout the century, Reeve's comparison between the Fielding siblings begins to look like an anomaly rather than standard practice. As *Familiar Letters* suggests, Sarah Fielding became partly known as the author of friendship in collaboration with Henry Fielding. This does not mean, however, that she was from that time forward condemned to be seen in his authorial shadow.

In light of the reading of *Familiar Letters* in this chapter, Sarah Fielding appears as an author who neither succumbed to the dominating influence of either Henry Fielding or Richardson, nor carved her own blazing authorial path. Instead she exploited the literary contacts she had in order to maximise her sales potential, at the same time as using the concept of sociable authorship to establish her own personal authorial version of a reformed print culture that suited her model of authorship that depended on friendly reading. Her model of print culture is strikingly egalitarian; although it makes the case for women as readers, writers and critics, it avoids a model of reading and writing that is inflected with gendered preconceptions. Henry Fielding's contributions to *Familiar Letters* make her arguments coherent within the social model that she depicts, because they offer a friendly reading and recognition of her authorial aims that completes the process of sociable literary production. Noticeably, however, both siblings are ultimately sceptical about the possibilities of

⁴¹⁴ Reeve, *Progress of Romance*, I, 142.

truly achieving an encounter with print culture that would have any reforming effect on its moral values. The way they enact their collaboration reflects their scepticism, inscribing debate, contestation and even competing models of the print culture in which both were active participants. The divergence of their modes of writing registers the ultimate uncertainty of a print culture that potentially lacks either a firm guiding hand or any commitment to shared moral values or linguistic transparency. As the next chapter will show, there was more at stake in community than gender for Sarah Fielding. Her collaboration with Jane Collier, although perhaps more confident in its experimentation, is equally sceptical about the possibility of the communication of communal literary values.

Chapter 5. 'Painting the inward mind': Sarah Fielding and Jane Collier collaborating in *The Cry*

The collaboration between Sarah Fielding and Jane Collier in *The Cry* is distinct from all the other collaborative works discussed in this thesis. Firstly, it does not take place within a relation of strict familiarity, although the two friends were living under the same roof at the time of writing, and their relationship was 'familiar' in the sense of the word discussed in Chapter 2. Moreover, unlike the other texts discussed, *The Cry* does not make the letter form its primary mode of narration, although the authors use letters in several significant ways. Nevertheless, *The Cry* provides a fascinating counterpoint to other texts examined here. I have argued that collaborative texts tend to enact the terms of their collaboration. This is also true of *The Cry*, but I argue that Fielding and Collier not only engage in performance, but explicitly draw attention to the performative nature of authorship as a means of throwing interpretive responsibility on the reader. As a defence of women making themselves visible in the public sphere of print as authors and critics it has no parallel in its period. Moreover, Collier and Fielding are among the most self-reflexive collaborators of the eighteenth century.

Self-consciously embarking on experimental fiction, Fielding and Collier rigorously explore and question the meaning of participation in a community and a family, the transparency of language, the nature of authorship and authority, and women's place within the authorial community. Collaboration for Fielding and Collier appears to have given them a level of authorial confidence, suggested by several claims to authorial expertise within *The Cry* and in other contexts. Moreover, the persistence of ironic critique of community and authority throughout *The Cry* suggests that the rhetorical collaborative stance proved fruitful as a basis from which

to explore their major concerns in the text. The friendship between Collier and Fielding is a useful lens through which to consider the ways female friendship engaged with wider society, and the different ways it could operate. Female friendship enacted through shared intellectual pursuits allowed Fielding and Collier to depict some alternatives to the marriage plot for women, while still remaining thoroughly engaged in heterosociable conversation and debate within the sphere of print. For Fielding and Collier mingling female friendship and literary critical activities is a means of analysing what criticism should mean and how it should be practised. A brief exploration of depictions and perceptions of female friendship in this period will illustrate the paradigm in which Collier and Fielding operate. Rather than partaking in a ‘romantic’, utopian, separatist female friendship, I argue that Collier and Fielding preferred to work within consciously realistic terms, using friendship either as an ironic shorthand for a relationship they acknowledge to be idealistic, or as a practical relationship, providing means for women of living in the world.

Women’s friendships in the eighteenth century

The idea that friendship is the highest and purest form of relationship dates back to classical antiquity, and was influential throughout much of history, including in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Discourses of friendship, however, denied that women were capable of such an elevated tie. Michel de Montaigne, whose essays were widely read in the eighteenth century, sets out his classical idea of ‘loving-friendship’, which he claims is the highest and best form of friendship, ‘perfect and entire’ in ‘Sur l’amitié’ (1580).⁴¹⁵ Montaigne’s description of his friendship with

⁴¹⁵ Michel de Montaigne, ‘On affectionate relationships’, in *The Complete Essays*, trans. M.A. Screech (London: Penguin Classics, 1991), Book I, 205-219, 207.

Etienne de La Boétie emphasises its distance from other, more pedestrian sorts of friendship, by drawing on the idea of twin souls:

Our souls were yoked together in such unity, and contemplated each other with so ardent an affection, and with the same affection revealed each to each other right down to the very entrails, that not only did I know his mind as well as I knew my own but I would have entrusted myself to him with greater assurance than to myself.⁴¹⁶

Such intense identification with another, argues Montaigne, bears no relation to the love between family members, which are undermined by ‘inequality’.⁴¹⁷ Women are ‘not normally capable of responding to such familiarity and mutual confidence as sustain that holy bond of friendship’.⁴¹⁸ Whether Montaigne refers to women’s friendship with men or with each other is unclear, but unimportant; women were not capable of friendship.

In contrast to such claims, the bond of friendship was one that preoccupied a large number of women writers of the eighteenth century. Emma Donoghue calls the eighteenth century ‘the single richest era for the literature of passionate friendship between women’.⁴¹⁹ Katherine Philips is one significant poetic example; Backscheider enumerates many more, with particular focus on Mary Barber, Elizabeth Singer Rowe and Jane Brereton.⁴²⁰ Female friendship can be imagined as a – sometimes eroticised – utopian counter-culture, or a ‘safe space’ for women, influencing themes of retirement in friendship poetry: a ‘relatively egalitarian world, remote from politics and power, in which the conventional hierarchy of gender is mitigated or evaded’ as Dorothy Mermin argues.⁴²¹ Katherine Philips, for example,

⁴¹⁶ Montaigne, ‘On affectionate relationships’, 213.

⁴¹⁷ Montaigne, ‘On affectionate relationships’, 207.

⁴¹⁸ Montaigne, ‘On affectionate relationships’, 210.

⁴¹⁹ Emma Donoghue, *Passions Between Women: British Lesbian Culture, 1668-1801* (London: Scarlet Press, 1993), 112.

⁴²⁰ Backscheider, ‘Friendship poems’.

⁴²¹ Dorothy Mermin, ‘Women Becoming Poets: Katherine Philips, Aphra Behn, Anne Finch’, *Journal Of English Literary History*, 57/2 (Summer, 1990), 335-55, 336.

writes a friendship poem in which she invites 'Ardelia' to 'the boisterous World disdain'.⁴²² Backscheider argues that the friendship poem is 'part of a safer, women-centred space'.⁴²³ Although Backscheider pays close attention to the ways women poets figured female friendship as a valuable, socially relevant tie, it is still considered in light of its alternative 'sub-altern' status.⁴²⁴ I would argue that, while the theme of retirement is a useful one, there is much of value to be gained from assessing women's friendships in an instrumental, heterosociable context.

From the perspective of literary sociability, many of the writings on female friendship can be situated within a wider literary network in which women writers address men as well as women, and used both male and female contacts as a means of participating in sociable debate and intellectual exchange. Female friendship in this context is less a salve to the wounds of patriarchy than one of several possible links within a wider network of horizontal literary relations. Claudia Limbert documents Philips's likely friendships with contemporary literary and musical men, including Francis Finch, John Birkenhead and Henry Vaughan who set some of her poetry to music. She also posits connections between Philips and Andrew Marvell, Abraham Cowley, John Milton and Jeremy Taylor.⁴²⁵ Anne Finch engaged in poetical exchanges with Alexander Pope, had an acquaintance with Matthew Prior and a friendship with Jonathan Swift, who addressed verses to her under the name of Ardelia.⁴²⁶ Mary Chudleigh addressed a poem to Dryden 'on his excellent Translation

⁴²² Katherine Philips, 'A Retir'd Friendship. To Ardelia', in *The Collected Works of Katherine Philips, the matchless Orinda*, ed. Patrick Thomas, 3 vols. (Stump Cross: Stump Cross Books, 1990-93), I, 97-98, 98, l.34.

⁴²³ Backscheider, 'Friendship poems', 176.

⁴²⁴ Backscheider, 'Friendship poems', 194.

⁴²⁵ Claudia A. Limbert "'The Unison of Well-Tun'd Hearts': Katherine Philips' Friendships with Male Writers', *English Language Notes*, 29/1 (September, 1991), 25-37.

⁴²⁶ For Finch's acquaintances with male writers see Barbara McGovern, 'London and its Literary Life', in *Anne Finch: A Critical Biography* (Athens & London: The University of Georgia Press, 1992), 89-107; for Finch and her poems of female friendship see McGovern, 'Female Friendships and Women Writers', in *Anne Finch*, 108-127.

of *Virgil*'.⁴²⁷ When literary address and poetical exchange are seen in a predominantly heterosocial context it becomes crucial to examine how female friendship fits in within that paradigm. Collier and Fielding in *The Cry*, through the use of literary quotation and allusion, situate themselves firmly in a heterosocial literary sphere, quoting widely both from the classics and from historical and contemporary male writers. Although female friendship is a relation which they depict highly favourably, neither the author-narrators of *The Cry* nor its characters attempt to imagine a utopian vision of a world comprised solely of women.

As seen in Chapter 2, friendship in the eighteenth century was both an instrumental and an affective tie. Susan Lanser argues that women could be excluded from the instrumental organising of society along horizontal lines: 'friendship was particularly useful in anchoring a "horizontal" society in which men of worth and men of rank, the well-educated, the well-born and the well-off, could form propitious alliances'.⁴²⁸ Even in a culture that assigned a high value to social ties, women's friendships could potentially be scandalous, invoking a threat to the institution of marriage, even the entire heterosexual order. George Haggerty, for example, contends that Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall* (1762) is a 'lesbian' novel because it 'insists on intimate relations between women as an alternative to the male-centred experience of marriage'.⁴²⁹ However, women's friendships with men and with each other could also be a means by which they not only made good use of their social connections, but portrayed their moral and social competence. Elizabeth Wahl, expressing both sides of the argument, observes that representations of sexualised female intimacy 'tended

⁴²⁷ Mary, Lady Chudleigh, 'To Mr. Dryden, on his excellent Translation of *Virgil*', in *The Poems and Prose of Mary, Lady Chudleigh*, ed. Margaret Ezell (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 70-72.

⁴²⁸ Susan S. Lanser, 'Befriending the Body: Female Intimacies as Class Acts', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 32/2 (Winter, 1998-99), 179-198, 181.

⁴²⁹ George E. Haggerty, *Unnatural Affections: Women and Fiction in the Later Eighteenth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 102.

to link the dangers of female homosexuality with the dangers of female community and women's aspirations for intellectual and personal autonomy'.⁴³⁰ Women's friendships, however, could be used to 'claim a degree of cultural visibility and moral value for their relationships with other women'.⁴³¹ Lanser, pointing out that class status marked the line between a mere 'romantic' friendship and full-blown Sapphism in the public consciousness, contends that female friendship 'intersected with the project of establishing a gendered gentry consciousness by functioning as a status symbol marking women as well-connected and well-bred'.⁴³² Friendship ideals were undermined by differential status. The masculine independence of the genteel conversationalist found its opposite in the figure of a female 'Humble Companion'.⁴³³

Female companionship conventions often resulted in the exercise of tyranny by a dominant mistress over a socially inferior companion, a relationship that could be seen as equal to or worse than marriage.⁴³⁴ Sarah Fielding and Jane Collier had already registered to devastating effect the potential that female companionship had to turn sour. In *David Simple*, Cynthia describes her life as a companion to a woman of a higher social class:

[S]he began to treat me as a *Creature* born to be her *Slave*: whenever I spoke, I was sure to offend her; if I was *silent*, I was *out of humour*; – if I said any thing in the softest Terms, to complain of the Alteration of her Affection, I was *whimsical* and *ungrateful*. – I think it impossible to be in a worse Situation.⁴³⁵

⁴³⁰ Elizabeth Susan Wahl, *Invisible Relations: Representations of Female Intimacy in the Age of Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 14.

⁴³¹ Wahl, *Invisible Relations*, 98.

⁴³² Lanser, 'Befriending the Body', 186.

⁴³³ Jane Collier, *An Essay on the Art of Ingeniously Tormenting*, ed. Katherine A. Craik (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006): 'To the Patroness of an Humble Companion', 21-34.

⁴³⁴ See Betty Rizzo, 'Satires of Tyrants and Toadeaters: Fielding and Collier', in *Companions Without Vows: Relationships among Eighteenth-Century British Women* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 41-60.

⁴³⁵ Sarah Fielding, *David Simple*, 90.

Cynthia refers to such treatment as the ‘Art of tormenting’.⁴³⁶ Collier picks up this phrase in 1753, the year before the publication of *The Cry*, in *An Essay on the Art of Ingeniously Tormenting*, which portrays a similar situation, although within a satiric framework rather than a sentimental one. Collier’s text devotes an entire chapter ‘To the Patroness of an Humble Companion’, describing in great detail how a woman might exercise her power over her female companion by torturing her with verbal abuse, reminders of her dependency, and insults.⁴³⁷ The social world that Collier and Fielding depict is far from egalitarian, except perhaps in women’s equal capacity to value social status above considerate treatment of others.

Both Collier and Fielding are remarkably practical in their exploration of the possibilities of female friendship, pointing out that financial concerns must be addressed before utopian retirement can occur. Collier observes ‘the anxiety people show, to possess fortune enough to render themselves independent’, suggesting, although she does not state it explicitly, that women’s independence could be seen as both desirable and possible.⁴³⁸ The availability of a female friend may have given some women an extra choice between marriage or impoverishment or dependency. By pooling resources, some women were able to live together, forming a family unit of their own. Certainly there is evidence that some women managed to evade or escape marriage or dependency to live with a female companion: Sarah Scott and Barbara Montagu are one mid-century example, Sarah Ponsonby and Eleanor Butler – the ‘Ladies of Llangollen’ – a later instance. Although Bree assumes that Sarah Fielding did not marry because of her lack of dowry, the idea that she and Jane Collier may have chosen their single state is not entirely out of the question.⁴³⁹ Fielding is

⁴³⁶ Sarah Fielding, *David Simple*, 89.

⁴³⁷ Collier, *Art of Ingeniously Tormenting*, 21-34.

⁴³⁸ Collier, *Art of Ingeniously Tormenting*, 22.

⁴³⁹ Bree, *Sarah Fielding*, 5.

particularly sceptical of the value of marriage compared to true friendship in her novels. It is certain that Sarah Fielding used her female friends to good effect, living first with her sisters, then with Jane Collier for some time, then alone in the later half of the 1750s, near Bath, where she was known to many of the more prominent Bluestocking women: Elizabeth Montagu, Sarah Scott, Elizabeth Carter and Catherine Talbot. Her independent status, however, was always precarious due to her lack of finances.

In the context of a mid-century culture that offered the potential for female friendships either to be socially valuable, risible or anxiety-provoking, the way that female friendship is presented in *The Cry* is highly significant. Fielding and Collier seek to normalise women's intellectual friendship while simultaneously subjecting friendship to a rigorous interrogation. On the one hand they register the traps of idealised friendship, the way that differences in status can undermine friendship, and the risk of false friendships. On the other, they demonstrate, not that women friends were inevitably women's best option to find community, but that there was an important place for female friendship within a heterosocial community of moral individuals.

Within a matrix of heterosocial exchange, female friendships, whether intensely romantic, intellectual or both, can operate to disrupt or undermine masculine assumptions. By making female friendship visible and key to the life cycle of women as novelistic heroines or learned figures in society, the point is made that marriage is not the sole relationship of importance in a woman's life. The use of the terms of friendship as a means of imagining an egalitarian idealised relation helps to reconfigure what marriage ought to be. Moreover, cohabitation with a female friend is portrayed as offering women a choice in life apart from marriage, meaning that

women can hold out for a good man rather than be forced to marry for the sake of societal protection and status.

The most significant way that Fielding and Collier use friendship is in the implicit defence of women's intellectual friendships that *The Cry* enacts at the levels of form and content. Earlier in her career, in *David Simple*, Fielding makes an ironic point about women's intellectual friendships, when Cynthia describes an incident in her childhood:

I became acquainted with a young Lady, in whose Conversation I had the utmost Pleasure, but I had not often an Opportunity of seeing her; for as she was too fond of Reading, my Mother was frighten'd out of her Wits, to think what would become of us, if we were much together. I verily believe, she thought we should draw *Circles* - - - and turn *Conjurors*.⁴⁴⁰

Fielding raises the spectre of witchcraft to comment on society's perception of young women who maintain an intellectual friendship. This is evidence both that Fielding was alive to the possibilities that female friendship could hold for self-development and education, and that she identified a need to advocate women's friendship and women's education in the face of distrustful societal norms. Helping to make female intellectual friendship virtuous is therefore an important aim for Fielding. In the *David Simple* trilogy, Fielding emphasised female wit and natural intelligence more than learning. In *The Cry*, she displays both, possibly because female learning was becoming more socially acceptable, possibly because she herself was pursuing her studies in the classics with greater assiduity. As a forerunner of the Bluestockings, it might even be said that Fielding helped to smooth the way for social acceptance of virtuous female intellectualism in friendship. The way that Collier and Fielding construct their own friendship, and the way they imagine friendship operating in women's lives, for better and worse, suggest that they were both very much aware of

⁴⁴⁰ Sarah Fielding, *David Simple*, 84.

the precariousness of women's friendships. However, before *The Cry* was published, Collier and Fielding had already begun to use their printed work to display their particular friendship.

***The Cry* as collaborative publication**

The Cry was published by the Dodsleys early in 1754. By this time, Sarah Fielding and Jane Collier had been living together for three years after the deaths of Sarah's three sisters in 1750. The text of *The Cry* is unusual for Sarah Fielding's work in that it does not bear the familiar legend 'by the Author of David Simple'. Neither does it claim to be 'by a Lady' – it bears no authorial inscription at all. Printed by sale of copyright, it has no subscription list by which friends of the author might be identified. Certainly it was not a secret that *The Cry* was the product of Fielding's pen, partly evidenced by the response of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu who, linking the works of Fielding and Collier together, commented, '...if I would write in the Style to be admir'd by good Lord Orrery, I would tell you the Cry made me ready to cry and the Art of Tormenting tormented me very much. I take them to be Sally Fielding's'.⁴⁴¹

The Monthly Review's piece of April 1754 noted only that the work was 'the production of a lady', but added an asterisk before going to print in which the editors note, 'When this was wrote, the author of *David Simple* had not laid claim to the CRY'.⁴⁴² By what means Fielding 'laid claim' to *The Cry* is not known, but it must have occurred by the end of 1754, when the instalments of the *Monthly Review* were bound for publication. Although there is strong evidence for the collaborative nature

⁴⁴¹ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu to the Countess of Bute (Sept 22, 1755), in *Complete Letters*, ed. Halsband, III, 88. Lady Mary thinks the 'Fable' of *The Cry* 'absurd', but the 'Sentiments generally just' (88).

⁴⁴² 'Review of *The Cry. A New Dramatic Fable*', in *Monthly Review*, X (London, 1754), 280-82, 282.

of *The Cry* – the text, for example, uses the first person plural in narration - that Fielding singly is attributed authorship is perhaps significant. It is possible that her style was recognised by her readers and the work attributed solely to her through recognisable phrases or particular concerns. It is likely that the initial anonymity of the text was intended to signal a new departure in literature for Fielding. Slow sales may have prompted her to claim the text, giving it the added weight of her moniker, but if this was a marketing strategy, it was ultimately ineffective. Sales of *The Cry* were poor, and few readers were able to appreciate its merits.⁴⁴³

Equally unprecedented in Fielding's publications is that the Dodsleys printed this particular work, given that Andrew Millar published all of the *David Simple* works and the later works, and Richardson printed *The Governess*, which was then sold by Millar. There was no obvious connection between Collier and Dodsley either, as *The Art of Tormenting* had also been published by Millar. It is likely that Richardson had a role in the mediation between Fielding (and Collier?) and Dodsley. In a letter dated 17th Jan, 1757, Richardson considers ways in which *The Cry* could be repackaged and sold again:

Should not our friend Mr. Dodsley advertise the cry, on the filling of the town? Suppose you make Ferdinand as worthy of his mistress at last, as he was at first; and by the help of a few cancellings, publish a second edition of it? I cannot bear that a piece which has so much merit and novelty of design in it, should slide into oblivion.⁴⁴⁴

The letter suggests that Richardson was proactive in helping Fielding to market her work and used his connections for her benefit. In this case she did not take his advice, as no second edition of *The Cry* was ever published, possibly because Fielding had

⁴⁴³ Catherine Talbot, for example, said that Ferdinand's 'hard-hearted, dishonest, lying, unnatural absurdity of behaviour at last provoked me absolutely beyond all patience' (Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter (Nov 26, 1754), in *A Series of Letters*, II, 188. Comments like this one were probably what provoked Richardson to suggest changing the ending.

⁴⁴⁴ Samuel Richardson to Sarah Fielding (17th Jan, 1757), in *Correspondence*, ed. Battestin and Probyn, 135.

other projects she preferred to attend to, such as *Cleopatra and Octavia* (1757), or possibly because she preferred not to publish an adulterated version of her most interesting and exceptional work. It is the forceful novelty of *The Cry*, published with the rider, 'A New Dramatic Fable', and organised by dramatic scenes rather than chapters that supports the idea that Collier and Fielding saw themselves as manufacturing an entirely new mode of novel-writing. In these circumstances, the appearance of a text materially unmarked by anything to link the text to the authors might have been a strategic aim to prevent readers coming to the text with preconceptions – a material manifestation of the desire for a 'candid reader' stated in the Preface to *The Cry*.

My assumption that Collier had enough involvement in *The Cry* to be accurately designated Fielding's collaborator has only recently become a common one, and is still contested by some critics. Bree, Sarah Fielding's biographer, assumes Fielding's sole authorship.⁴⁴⁵ Prior to, and even subsequently to, the emergence of the most persuasive evidence for collaboration, the discovery of Jane Collier's commonplace book – discussed at further length below – there has been some resistance to designating *The Cry* a collaborative text and to theorising it as such. Mika Suzuki, for example, claims in a footnote that there is not enough evidence for collaboration, citing Collier's letters to James Harris in 1753, which mentioned *The Art of Ingeniously Tormenting*, but not *The Cry*.⁴⁴⁶ Paul Burditt in his investigation into literature of the 1750s mentions that Collier had a role in *The Cry* but attributes it in large part to Fielding and treats it as a single-authored text in his analysis.⁴⁴⁷ Deborah Downs-Miers in her analysis of subversive feminist messages in *The Cry*

⁴⁴⁵ Bree, *Sarah Fielding*, 91.

⁴⁴⁶ Mika Suzuki, 'Sarah Fielding and Reading', *Eighteenth-Century Novel*, 2 (2002), 91-112, n.4, 110.

⁴⁴⁷ Paul Burditt, 'The Novels of the 1750s: a literary investigation', D.Phil. thesis (Oxford University, 2006), 100.

refers solely to Fielding.⁴⁴⁸ Interestingly, Ellen Gardiner concedes the collaboration, but in analysing *The Cry*, refers to ‘Fielding and Collier’ as if they were one author, failing to address whether the collaborative nature of the text influences a critical reading of it.⁴⁴⁹ That this thesis treats of ‘overt’ collaboration is made more problematic by the contention surrounding the attribution of *The Cry*, but the assumption of the ‘we’ voice in the preface at the very least supports a multiple-author reading. Moreover, Collier and Fielding in the early 1750s had already established themselves as literary friends and sometimes partners, in more or less public ways.

The earliest evidence of Collier and Fielding in textual interaction is in a joint letter written to James Harris in 1751, in which they thank him for sending them a copy of *Hermes*. In a manner that Battestin and Probyn suggest could be ironic and Sabor describes as projecting an ‘image of enfeebled femininity’, they portray themselves as children grateful for instruction from a parent, rather than authors critically approving a literary work, and they decline to be censured as ‘Women who, having pick’d up a few scraps of Horace, immediately imagine themselves fraught with all knowledge’.⁴⁵⁰ The fact of his sending *Hermes* to them at all suggests that they must have been able to appreciate it, so it is highly likely that their pose of deference was playfully ironic. Certainly their subsequent collaborations are striking in their air of confidence, suggesting that their mutual literary activities were a

⁴⁴⁸ Deborah Downs-Miers, ‘Springing the Trap: Subtexts and Subversions’, in *Fettr’d or Free?: British Women Novelists, 1670-1815* ed. Mary-Anne Schofield and Cecilia Macheski (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1986), 308-323.

⁴⁴⁹ Ellen Gardiner, ‘Friendship, Equality, and Interpretation in *The Cry*’, in *Regulating Readers: Gender and Literary Criticism in the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (London: Associated University Presses, 1999), 110-133.

⁴⁵⁰ Battestin and Probyn (eds.), *Correspondence*, xxix; Sabor, ‘Introduction’ to *David Simple*, xv; Sarah Fielding and Jane Collier to James Harris (28th Dec, 1751), in *Correspondence*, ed. Battestin and Probyn, 125.

valuable support to them in their perception of themselves as authors.⁴⁵¹ Collier wrote the preface to Fielding's *Volume the Last* in which Collier is denoted 'A Female Friend of the Author'. Collier confidently describes the character of Fielding and seems authorised to speak for 'the Author of *David Simple*', referring to 'our Author, who...would on all Occasions chuse to pursue the unaffected Simplicity she has a Desire to recommend'.⁴⁵² Collier implies that her personal and intimate knowledge of 'the Author[']s' aims and desires makes it possible for her to speak on Fielding's behalf. Collier also strikes a critical tone, undertaking to defend the new volume of *David Simple* with a critical discussion of true and false kinds of novelty, pointing out that true novelty 'consists in putting known and remarkable Characters into new Situations'.⁴⁵³ The theme of familiarity mixed with literary critical pursuit – making criticism itself almost a familiar activity – is common in Collier and Fielding's collaborations.

Collier's preface is strikingly different from Henry Fielding's prefatory contributions in its focus on the author of the main text rather than the author of the preface. She equally presents a defence and explanation of the text, but delineates Sarah Fielding's goals, albeit in terms that suggest that she shares those goals. Her preface constructs her relationship with Fielding as a productive blending of generous friendship and shared critical literary insight. Finally, Collier makes several explicit nods to Sarah Fielding in *The Art of Ingeniously Tormenting*, unsurprisingly found in her section on how to torment a friend. In the tormentor's advice to 'be very lavish to him of your advice to do impossibilities' Collier adds a footnote saying, 'See Mr

⁴⁵¹ In their introduction to *The Cry*, Fielding and Collier pour scorn on 'contemptible prefaces' (*The Cry: A New Dramatic Fable*, 3 vols. (London, 1754), I, 8), pointing out that they would not present a work to the public that they thought below the public's consideration. This startling level of authorial confidence is highly unusual for this period.

⁴⁵² Jane Collier, 'Preface' to *Volume the Last* in Sarah Fielding, *David Simple*, ed. Sabor, 241-42, 241.

⁴⁵³ Collier, 'Preface', 242.

Orgueil to David Simple, Vol. the last, Bk. VI, ch. 4'.⁴⁵⁴ In the same paragraph, Collier footnotes the phrase 'the life of a toad under a harrow' with the note: 'This exemplified by the author of David Simple, in *Familiar Letters*, vol. I, letter 5, vol. ii, letter 21'.⁴⁵⁵ If Fielding was by this time known as the expert on the writing of sentimental friendship, drawing a link between her satiric work and Fielding's is an ingenious way of Collier proving her case in this section, and making her satiric point more effective by providing a moral background for her nightmare vision of false friendship. The detail of the reference and the focus on the two less-popular *David Simple* works suggest that Collier was also giving a friendly plug to Fielding's books; free marketing essentially. From these prior instances of literary interaction it can be deduced that Collier and Fielding are the most likely collaborators for *The Cry*, and that some work had already been put into their construction of a literary friendship.

The potentially collaborative nature of *The Cry* was first addressed by Carolyn Woodward in 'Who wrote *The Cry*?: A Fable for our Times' in 1996. In this essay she points out that in November 1753, Fielding sold half the copyright to Robert Dodsley, who agreed to be responsible to Fielding or "whomsoever" she might appoint' for the proceeds from the other half.⁴⁵⁶ However, the list of potential collaborators extends far beyond Collier. Anna Barbauld, for example, attributed *The Cry* to Collier and Ursula Fielding, Sarah's sister. Woodward concedes that this attribution is a reasonable assumption based on Ursula's letters, but since Ursula was dead by 1753, is fairly unlikely. Other potential contributors listed by Woodward include James Harris, Margaret and Arthur Collier, and Ursula and Henry Fielding.⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵⁴ Collier, *Art of Tormenting*, 62.

⁴⁵⁵ Collier, *Art of Tormenting*, 63.

⁴⁵⁶ Carolyn Woodward, 'Who wrote *The Cry*?: A Fable for our Times', *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 9/1 (October, 1996), 91-97, 95.

⁴⁵⁷ Woodward, 'Who wrote *The Cry*?', 96.

Woodward concludes that, ‘*The Cry* presents a cogent, thoroughgoing, and richly textured argument for the collaborative nature of writing’.⁴⁵⁸

Following on from this early identification is the strongest evidence in the form of the discovery of Jane Collier’s commonplace book, transcribed by Margaret Collier and described by Michael Londry in the *Times Literary Supplement*, containing an allegory that appears to describe Fielding and Collier’s perspective on their collaboration. The allegory, itself written collaboratively according to Londry, is entitled ‘Sally and Jenny’s Emblem (1754) concerning *The Cry*’ and is reproduced here in full:

Sally is an excellent Spittle fields weaver – Jenny, buys raw Silk upon Change and makes Mantuas –

Says Sally to Jenny “I have thought of an exceeding pretty pattern for a flower’d Silk, the colours must be green purple &c ’Tis a long way to Change to buy the Raw Silk and a great deal of Trouble to Chuse them – ”

Jenny is struck with the description Sally has given her of the Plan, & hastens to Change, buys all the Silks, sorts them, and lays them in Sally’s way.

Sally begins weaving, and a sweet flower’d brocade it turns out: but instead of weaving it in one long continued Piece, she sometimes weaves a Yard, sometimes half a quarter, sometimes breaks off in the Middle of a flower, and finishes not that Flower ’till some days after, and when she has wove a large Quantity between.

– As soon as the Raw Silk is used up she gives it all in a heap to Jenny: Jenny takes her Scizzars in hand; cuts it, fits it, makes the flowers all Joyn according to the Pattern designed by Sally (as nearly that is as she could comprehend her meaning) and then it comes out, a compleat Gown and Petticote for any young Lady in Town.⁴⁵⁹

Londry claims that the ‘Emblem’ ‘both assuages and aggravates our puzzlement’.⁴⁶⁰

While the ‘Emblem’ does not detail exactly the role of each author in the construction of *The Cry*, there are certain illuminating details that can be drawn from it without too dramatic an assault on credibility.

⁴⁵⁸ Woodward, ‘Who wrote *The Cry*?’, 96.

⁴⁵⁹ Margaret Collier, ‘A Copy of My Sister’s Commonplace Book’, 39th leaf, quoted in Michael Londry, ‘Our dear Miss Jenny Collier’, *Times Literary Supplement* (March 5th, 2004), 13.

⁴⁶⁰ Londry, ‘Our dear Miss Jenny Collier’, 13.

The most immediately striking aspect of the ‘Emblem’ is the extended needlework metaphor. Collier and Fielding construct their writing activities in terms of women’s work, in particular, professional women’s work: that of a silk weaver and a mantua-maker (rather than, say, domestic embroidery). If the construction of *The Cry* as a ‘dramatic fable’ is taken into account, encompassing a wide range of interpolated tales, dramatic speeches, philosophical observations and digressions, the metaphor of piecework seems very apt. I conjecture from the ‘Emblem’ that Fielding came up with the original plan for the work – certainly the focus of the work on ‘the labyrinths of the human mind’ is characteristic of Fielding.⁴⁶¹ The raw silk that Collier is depicted as purchasing could refer to research – collecting illustrative stories, the classical and contemporary literary references the book is littered with, or noting philosophical arguments that the characters in the book engage with. Fielding, in her character as weaver of silk, seems to have done the actual writing, but in a haphazard, non-sequential manner. Collier, as mantua-maker, edits and rearranges Fielding’s writings to make an organised narrative, producing a finished manuscript, ‘a compleat Gown and Petticote for any young Lady in Town’. The description of flowered silk is an accurate representation of contemporary court-dress, a mantua and petticoat made of elaborately woven and embroidered silk (particularly flowers), designed for display in public, rather than to be worn about the house. Interestingly, flowered silks in the 1740s and 50s were often designed to render accurate representations of flowers, rather than romantic or artistic impressions. The attempt of *The Cry* to be true to nature, therefore, is implicit in this silk metaphor. I will return to this idea of display in my close reading of *The Cry*, because it has a very apt application in the text’s preoccupation with spectatorship and perception.

⁴⁶¹ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, I, 14.

Several aspects of the 'Emblem' are more problematic. The first is the strong feminocentricity of the creative context and the imagined market, supporting a 'women writing for women' picture which the text itself does not wholly support. Although there is a strong drive in *The Cry* to document women's concerns and experiences, ultimately, the text advocates moral reform for both sexes, and its readers are imagined as a heterogeneous group. It is perhaps more important to emphasise the display aspect of court-dress rather than the sex of the individual wearing it. *The Cry* as published artefact is imagined as itself participating in a heterosocial public environment, the silks evoking more the sex of its authors than that of the people who will be admiring it. The other interesting point of the 'Emblem' is the bracketed note, 'as nearly that is as she could comprehend her meaning', which registers the impossibility of absolute transparency of communication in meaning. *The Cry* as collaborative text attempts to perform its own premise – that true friendship means linguistic transparency, literally, the ability to speak with one voice – but this (apparently throwaway) comment in the 'Emblem' contests the ideal of transparency.

The strongest lasting impression left by the 'Emblem' is of the value placed on their writing activities by Collier and Fielding. They present themselves as skilled professionals, constructing an item for public display and admiration. It is notable, also, that they identify their differing skills at the outset, and thus maximise their collaborative potential. Their use of 'Sally' and 'Jenny' invokes a relation of friendship and familiarity that sits comfortably alongside the professional aspect of their activities. However, the division of labour does not necessarily imply strictly equal authorial responsibility. 'Jenny' seems to perform much of the manual labour, hastening to town to purchase silk, and stitching the resulting scraps together, whereas

‘Sally’ seems to figure as the more creative partner.⁴⁶² Friendship is expressed through professional literary activity; as for other collaborators explored here and throughout much of the century, professional activity is not seen as inimical to friendship, but as a natural and productive part of it. However, the tensions in the ‘Emblem’ remind us, as Collier and Fielding both do in their published works, that real friendships are unlikely to match up to an idealised, egalitarian union of souls.

Reading *The Cry* – lessons in being candid

Plot is somewhat incidental to *The Cry*, functioning more as a hook on which to hang literary and moral criticism, exploration of characters’ psyches and philosophical enquiry. The novel, instead of being divided into chapters, uses the conventions of drama and is divided into acts and scenes. The author-narrators of the introduction defend their strategy on the grounds that ‘we shall be the better enabled by these means to give life and action to our history’.⁴⁶³ The novel is set in the great hall of an imaginary castle, constructed by readerly fancy. Portia, the principle character, narrates the story of her life to a motley rabble of listeners, both men and women, who are the Cry, ‘composed of all those characters in human nature, who, tho’ differing from each other, join in one common clamour against Truth and her adherents’.⁴⁶⁴ The Cry’s most salient feature as audience is their prejudice and false reasoning. As Portia narrates, the reader is enabled to see the reactions of the Cry, and how Portia defends herself against their attempts to discredit her. Also present is Una, the Spenserian representative of Truth, who lends her support to Portia’s narration,

⁴⁶² I am grateful to Kate Rumbold for her comments on my reading of the ‘Emblem’.

⁴⁶³ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, I, 16. I use the term ‘author-narrators’ throughout this chapter to refer to the narrative commentary and criticism in *The Cry*. I have added the word ‘author’ to ‘narrator’ because much of the material to which I refer is not strictly narrative, and is more often prefatorial, critical and self-reflexive, exploring the meaning of authorship. The phrase should not be read as necessarily a direct reference to the persons of the authors themselves.

⁴⁶⁴ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, I, 20.

and keeps the Cry in check. The story that Portia narrates, in brief, describes her acquaintance with a family through the introduction of the jealous and conniving Melantha.

Nicanor, the good-natured but weak-willed father, has run through his own fortune and most of that of his children in his intrigues with his mistress. He has three children: Oliver, the Machiavellian elder brother, who relishes the opportunity to exert power over his family by supplying financial support in the wake of Nicanor's extravagance, and the twins Ferdinand and Cordelia, perfectly good-natured younger siblings to Oliver. Portia quickly strikes up a close friendship with Cordelia, and falls in love with Ferdinand. At this point, another character steps forward to relate her story: Cylinda. Cylinda, though witty, and good-natured, has fallen victim to her own intelligence and a faulty education, and has elevated her own understanding above Christian moral dictates. An early acquaintance with Portia ended abruptly when Portia's mother took her away from Cylinda's pernicious influence.

It quickly transpires that it is Cylinda who was the mistress on whom Nicanor spent his family's money, although it is made clear that the fault lies with Nicanor, not with her. Cylinda narrates how she fell in love with a married man, Eustace. When she sees a letter written by Eustace's wife in which she laments the loss of her husband's affection, Cylinda repents of her past errors. The story now turns back to Portia. Ferdinand travels to Barbados to make his fortune, but through a combination of Oliver's machinations, and Ferdinand's own whimsical humour, Portia comes to believe him to have become a dissolute rake. She resolves to retire to the country to escape him, but he follows her, confesses that he only assumed the character of a rake to test whether her virtue could supersede her affection and begs her pardon. She grants it and they are married. Portia argues that Cylinda should be

forgiven her faults and offers Cylinda her friendship. Neither Cordelia nor Cylinda marry, instead choosing to live their lives with Portia and Ferdinand in retirement.

At its most basic, *The Cry* dramatises the act of reading, with Una functioning as the ‘candid reader’ the narrators desire, and the Cry as a set of ‘morose critic[s]’, who are marked by a prejudiced determination to seek out fault.⁴⁶⁵ Reading, the author-narrators tell us, is an act of collaboration between author, text and reader in community: ‘every reader by his own disposition, in a great measure, contributes to his own entertainment’.⁴⁶⁶ A reader who actively pursues entertainment and instruction will be sure to find them; those who seek faults will find those too, but they will lose the pleasure to be gained from reading. *The Cry* challenges its readers to bring an open and active mind to the reading process, to be prepared to exercise judgement and imagination. By dramatising the act of reading, *The Cry* makes a critic of every reader. Mika Suzuki reads anxiety into *The Cry*’s dramatisation of reading, suggesting that Fielding hoped to control her readers’ responses as much as possible, delivering conduct-book-style literary maxims for her readers to apply to their lives rather than exploring possible multiplicity in meaning. Suzuki claims, ‘Her anxiety is that of a modern professional author who has to present the text to a mass of anonymous and unpredictable readers’.⁴⁶⁷ Suzuki partly bases her argument on the assumption that Fielding did not circulate her writings among friends in order to give her ‘the cocoon of an understanding circle of readers’.⁴⁶⁸ I make precisely the opposite claim.

Fielding and Collier by literally ‘staging’ reading can explore the real ramifications of what it means to be a reader in anonymous print culture, what is

⁴⁶⁵ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, I, 1.

⁴⁶⁶ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, I, 1.

⁴⁶⁷ Suzuki, ‘Sarah Fielding and Reading’, 109.

⁴⁶⁸ Suzuki, ‘Sarah Fielding and Reading’, 109.

meant by textual and literary authority, and the instability of language as a tool of communication. In a work that strongly professes a moral viewpoint, we are guided as readers to follow the arguments made by the principle characters and the narrators, and to arrive at the same conclusions. However, throughout the text and explicitly stated by the narrators, is the premise that every individual reader has the capacity to think for themselves as they have, to weigh up the arguments and make their judgement. The narrators offer only this incitement to readerly candour: 'we still claim this candour at the hands of our readers, that they condemn not any sentiment which is stamp'd by the approbation of our UNA, till they have thoroughly consider'd and given it a fair examination...we have not publish'd any such sentiment without having first ourselves carefully examined it on all sides'.⁴⁶⁹ *The Cry* offers questions for readers to consider never fully answered by the text, such as the nature of true mental independence, whether ideal community can really guarantee linguistic transparency, and to what end the individual (woman) should read and learn. Although the text nudges the reader in the direction of 'correct' answers, through use of irony and undermining received wisdom, the text presents a sustained critique of reading and readers that does not absolutely demand a single fixed response.

At first perusal, *The Cry* appears to consist of a very disparate set of parts, including interpolated tales, critical essays and dialogue and philosophical observation, all mediated by the perverse interpretations the Cry insist on putting on everything that is brought up for discussion. Into the basic premise that the text explores the act of reading can be fed numerous other thematic concerns, such as the nature of friendship and community, the meaning of authority, women's role in society, how the psychological nature of man can be successfully written and much

⁴⁶⁹ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, I, 24.

more. A close reading of the apparently disparate elements of *The Cry* reveals each of these themes can be connected with any of the others; this is a text that is truly ‘in conversation’ with itself. Thus, any attempt to draw out and discuss discrete themes becomes a fairly arbitrary proposition. In the sections that follow, it is necessary to allow for the contingency of the ordering of themes and to expect some level of cross-contamination between sections. First, I address the dramatic and visual imagery in *The Cry*, arguing that Fielding and Collier use the theme of spectatorship to make visible the means by which they attempt to ‘paint the inward mind’.⁴⁷⁰ Second, I consider the exploration of friendship and community in *The Cry*, arguing that Collier and Fielding do not merely advocate friendship and community, but subject them to a rigorous critique, calling into question the possibility of truly transparently communicative friendship. Finally, I address the negotiation with literary and social authority in *The Cry*, arguing that Fielding and Collier situate their text within a community of more or less authoritative texts, challenging and exploring the tension between authority and individual freedom. While not all of these arguments are specifically gendered in the text, Collier and Fielding are explicit in assigning value to the role of women within each of these debates. Female friendship and female learning, the two distinguishing marks of the authors, are celebrated and advocated, transformed into norms within the world that the text creates. Perhaps most importantly, what appear to be grand philosophical or linguistic debates are repeatedly brought to a familiar level, and shown to be crucial in negotiating one’s way through society as a woman.

⁴⁷⁰ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, I, 11.

Spectatorship and the use of the visual in constructing writers and readers

When Fielding and Collier compare their text to a court-dress, they call attention to the use of spectatorship and the visual that persists throughout the text. The subtitle of the text 'A New Dramatic Fable' encapsulates two major uses of the visual: the authors' use of allegory to tell the story, and their use of theatrical conventions. Given that the text proposes to display the inner workings of the mind, the foregrounding of the visual appears at first somewhat perverse, since the mind is not technically accessible to the naked eye. Portia says, 'In all language conversant about the human mind, we are under a necessity of adopting metaphors taken from outward objects'.⁴⁷¹ In fact, the concern of the text with visual metaphor and imagery throws into relief the idea of true perception, that it is possible to look past the immediate evidence of the eye and search for the truths hidden below. In a sense, the authors make visible the necessity of metaphor and allegory to access truth, casting doubt on the reliability of the eye in truly seeing. The theatrical implication that texts, stories, lives, are of necessity performative, explores the possibilities of performing truth, and by what means fiction can make claims to truth.

The author-narrators argue that the dramatic flavour of *The Cry* is designed to draw the reader's interest to the principal characters, by giving them their own voice and permitting them to describe their own mental states: 'the nearer things are brought to dramatic representation, the more you are acquainted with the personages, and interested in the event of the story'.⁴⁷² The creation of an internally coherent world, in which knowledge of characters can be claimed by their speaking in their own voice, was also made for epistolary fiction but, in the case of *The Cry*, the dramatic element makes explicit the authorial puppet-strings behind the characters.

⁴⁷¹ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, II, 26.

⁴⁷² Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, I, 17.

While the mode of narration may be supposed to permit the reader to feel sympathy, even friendship, with the characters, the reader is not so involved in the story as to forget its allegorical nature. The constant interruptions and digressions from the Cry and the author-narrators, who preserve ‘the privilege of being our own chorus’ make visible the reader’s privilege of interpretation in collaboration with the author-narrators, Una and even with the Cry, who provide opinions against which better interpretations can be tested for candour.⁴⁷³ The Cry are repeatedly described as a bad audience at a theatre. They give ‘a play-house groan’, and ‘applause as loud as that which generally rattles from the gallery in the theatre’; they are ‘the picture of a play-house audience...each being eager to vent some criticism on what they had heard’.⁴⁷⁴ The Cry, in their bid to make as much noise as possible, bear a strong resemblance to the theatre audience in *David Simple*, who produce, ‘Whistles – Cat-calls, Groans – Hollowing, - beating with Sticks, - and clapping with Hands’.⁴⁷⁵ The theatre itself is invoked as a venue for prejudice.

In *The Cry*, the narrators expect that readers, rather than passively watching, will also exert their own judgement, not only on the characters, but also on the prejudiced audience. Portia’s thoughtful use of Shakespeare, ‘that grand master of human nature’, shows that she has considered his plays in terms of the light they throw on the characters rather than as mere entertainment to be consumed passively, demonstrating her own capacity for active reading.⁴⁷⁶ The reader is the audience, not of the plot of the text and the characters, but of the playhouse itself. *The Cry*, then, provides the best of both drama and novels, in that it presents characters with whom

⁴⁷³ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, I, 16.

⁴⁷⁴ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, III, 197; III, 77; II, 309.

⁴⁷⁵ Fielding, *David Simple*, 54.

⁴⁷⁶ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, I, 112. For further discussion of Sarah Fielding’s thoughtful use of Shakespeare see Kate Rumbold, ‘Sarah Fielding and “That grand master of human nature”’ in “‘All the Men and Women Merely Players’: Quoting Shakespeare in the Mid-Eighteenth-Century Novel’ D.Phil. thesis (University Of Oxford, 2007), 156-202.

the readers can identify and feel acquainted, but also displays instances of thoughtful analysis, making clear that it expects the reader to do the same. This expectation is considered in light of a pact between author and reader to engage in collaborative creativity:

The reader may also be said to partake of the invention of the author, when he finds his own acquaintance in the true representations of nature. Thus the reader who hath most truly considered and digested the sentiments which he reads, must be a man of the best taste, and must find most pleasure in the perusal of authors worth the reading.⁴⁷⁷

Partly through flattery and invocation of a reader's desire to display good taste, the author-narrators challenge the reader to exert his imaginative and judgemental faculties in the way the characters do.

In the introduction the author-narrators claim that their step into allegory 'shall not be out of sight of our reader'.⁴⁷⁸ This is the first of many references to sight and the visual in the text of *The Cry* that refer beyond the dramatic paradigm in which the text is situated. Using Shakespeare's mention of 'the mind's eye', the author-narrators comment that 'we are so far from accepting the assistance of mental glasses or spectacles, that we often strain our mind's eye, even to blindness, and at the same time affirm that our sight is nothing less than perfect'.⁴⁷⁹ What 'mental glasses' might consist of is not stated, but it seems likely that the reference is to an author's use of a literary trope as the means to best communicate truth. In order to 'paint the inward mind' according to truth and nature, the author-narrators claim that it is necessary to step into the realm of fantasy; the painter can address the visual sense, but 'the poet is obliged to make use of allegories, metaphors, and illustrations from outward objects, and from things visible, to deduce the evidence of things not seen'.⁴⁸⁰ The poet

⁴⁷⁷ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, II, 4.

⁴⁷⁸ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, I, 14.

⁴⁷⁹ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, II, 2.

⁴⁸⁰ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, II, 3.

becomes a philosopher, demonstrating propositions and using evidence to make the necessary intellectual points. Portia argues that laws in nature are themselves fables of the human condition: she claims that the story of a ship on fire that moves towards other ships to set them alight is ‘the noblest of fables, writ by the hand of nature herself’ to suggest a human mind that desires to communicate what she calls the *turba*, her word for the demon-like drive to falsehood in the mind. A man in the grip of the *turba* is ‘like the poor wounded stag’ or ‘like a mad dog’.⁴⁸¹ The tendency of nature to provide powerful visual images about which humans can allegorise or draw likenesses is used to defend the truth of those allegories or similes.

Fiction, the telling of stories using poetic conventions, is the means by which truth – the inward state of affairs – can best be communicated. Fiction is closer to nature than stories about real people.⁴⁸² The trope of seeing or of display, keeps the reader alert to the authorial performance that enabled the narrative. The authors dissect their text to make their methods available to the perception of every reader. The ‘labyrinths of the human mind’ – what is unseen beneath the surface and made visible through characters’ acts – are reproduced in the exposure of the labyrinths of textual production. The trope of seeing or perception conflates the capacity for literary criticism with the capacity for moral judgement and penetration.

Although the display depends heavily on the capacity of the reader-spectator to perceive or see properly, the trope of seeing exemplifies the skill of the authors as expert vivisectionists of text and character. They both create the display and provide the mental glasses to see it properly. At the same time, they draw ironic attention to textual creation as performance, inviting the reader to assess the text’s fidelity to

⁴⁸¹ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, II, 123.

⁴⁸² In a disclaimer similar to Henry Fielding’s contention that ‘I describe not Men, but Manners; not an Individual, but a Species’ in *Joseph Andrews* (164), the authors warn their readers not to avoid creating ‘personal libels’ out of their characters (*The Cry*, I, 18). This point demonstrates a mid-eighteenth-century trend towards explicitly fictionalised texts as shown by Gallagher in *Nobody’s Story* (163 ff.).

nature, and warning that nature and textuality are not necessarily the same thing – the flowers on the dress are not real flowers, only clever imitations. Una rarely speaks, and we are required to assess her opinion through her body language and her facial expressions as described by the author-narrators. Although Collier and Fielding elevate their status as master-craftsmen, making a forceful point about women's capacity to write in the process, they are more concerned with educating the reader to become a critic in his or her own right, claiming less a capacity to deliver truth than a mode of empowering the reader to seek it for him or herself. The community of author, text and reader is never as transparent as the reader would like; this point is made at more sustained length in *The Cry*'s critique of friendship and community which is explicitly linked to books and reading.

Friendship, community and language in *The Cry*

The words 'friend', 'friendship', 'converse' and 'conversation' recur persistently throughout the text. Friendship is the overriding theme of *The Cry*, and conversation is considered the bedrock of a good friendship. The text itself performs its foregrounding of conversation and friendship in its references to books and characters as friends, in the way it produces narrative as dialogue, and in the conversations across sections that it holds with itself. However, the sheer number of times that any of these words are used means that in some sense they become overdetermined. The text insists on the possibility of open conversation and meaningful friendship even as it increasingly uses the words in an ironic or inverted sense to show conversational failure and false friendship. The reliability of language as a communicative tool in friendship and in literature is consistently debated, meaning that the proliferation of terms of friendship or conversation itself has the effect of questioning the tenets of community. Although the central characters

ultimately settle down into a harmonious and ideally egalitarian community structured around marriage, friendship and siblinghood much as in *David Simple*, the text relentlessly gestures towards the impossibility of adequate communication.

The Cry addresses friendship early on, when Portia describes her acquaintance with Cordelia, to whom she is instantly drawn. Portia's friendship with Cordelia is described as the ultimate ideal, based on reciprocal affection and absolute transparency of communication. According to Portia, when with Cordelia, 'my whole soul is open, and my words with an unreserved and joyous confidence, fearlessly express the very inmost thoughts of my heart'.⁴⁸³ The same qualities that are looked for in the friend are looked for in the husband; this point is made by Ferdinand and Cordelia's being 'twins in their minds, as well as by birth'.⁴⁸⁴ As is common in the novels of the period, Portia comes to love through friendship with her lover's sister, but Fielding and Collier use the trope to elevate friendship and advocate equality of mind in marriage as well as providing a convenient means by which Portia can access the love plot. The epigraph from *Paradise Lost* to the fourth part, Scene X, is 'Among unequals, what society / Can sort, what harmony or true delight?'.⁴⁸⁵ This quotation arises in the context of Adam's plea for an equal companion; the lines following are:

Which must be mutual, in proportion due
Given and received...
...Of fellowship I speak
Such as I seek, fit to participate
All rational delight.⁴⁸⁶

These lines speak most pertinently of Adam's need for a female partner, but also of his desire for social communication. Scene X is most concerned with the unfitness of Melantha to be a partner for Ferdinand because of the difference in their humours,

⁴⁸³ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, I, 39.

⁴⁸⁴ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, I, 270.

⁴⁸⁵ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, II, 139.

⁴⁸⁶ John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (London: Penguin, 1996), Book 8, 195-6, ll. 385-91.

illustrating the gap between the Edenic scene of perfect reciprocity and the now-fallen contemporary world. Portia draws a similarity between choice of marriage partner and a more general choice of social circle: ‘half mankind waste their time amongst those with whom they would least chuse to converse, in order that the absent may be told that they are admitted into such a society’.⁴⁸⁷ Friendship and marriage are held as similar, mutually reinforcing relations, both consisting in good conversation. Equality, similarity and harmony are the marks of a good conversation, as they are to a true friendship or a marriage of equals. Importantly, however, it is only the friendship between Portia and Cordelia that does not suffer any setbacks and maintains its idealised status, whereas Ferdinand proves himself unworthy of Portia by his testing her, showing that she is superior to him as a partner. Although the conversational mode is set in a heterosociable context, this particular female friendship emerges as the most perfectly reciprocal. The author-narrators speak with one voice, using the first-person plural throughout most of the text. Their narrative voice implicitly encapsulates a union of similar equals, displaying the female friendship that the text represents.

However, Portia’s extolling of her perfect friendship is set in the context of discussion of all kinds of false friendships, the evidence of which we see later in the text. Such ‘prostituted’ friendships include instances where fear of being duped incites an unequal friendship where one party is open-hearted and the other reserved, and friendships based on love of flattery, which make ‘all friendship appear as a crafty contest for imposition’.⁴⁸⁸ We later see evidence of these sorts of friendship in the wiles of Oliver and Melantha, who fear that advantage may be taken of them, and so dupe others and seek friendships in which they can maintain the upper hand. Oliver

⁴⁸⁷ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, II, 142.

⁴⁸⁸ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, I, 33; I, 44.

pretends friendship to Ferdinand and rescues Cordelia from an unwanted marriage by agreeing to support his family. However, he acts only from ‘a tyrannical power of making people feel the weight of what he pleased to call an obligation’ rather than from real kind-heartedness.⁴⁸⁹ Portia says of Oliver’s behaviour, that ‘small is the mischief which can come from an open enemy, in comparison of that which is perpetrated under the cloak of professed friendship’.⁴⁹⁰ Melantha only pursues men in whom she suspects her friends are interested, so that she can have the triumph of the men giving her the preference. The language of friendship that Melantha uses to Portia, calling her ‘her dearest most favourite friend’, is revealed as meaningless in its hyperbole.⁴⁹¹ The way that Melantha unsuccessfully imitates Portia with the hope of attracting Ferdinand is a grotesque mockery of the identification and sympathy in which true friendship consists. For example, when Portia suppresses her sorrow at saying goodbye to Ferdinand for Cordelia’s sake, Melantha puts on ‘the mask of boisterous mirth’.⁴⁹²

Fielding and Collier show the dangerous possibilities of friendship when Portia condemns the notion of platonic friendship between men and women as a pernicious trap to female innocence.⁴⁹³ More dramatically, when it is revealed that Portia and Cylinda had embarked on a friendship truncated by the removal of Portia by her mother, Portia exclaims:

O *Cylinda*, in *Portia* you now see standing in your presence your formerly much coveted friend; and during my whole youth, I never from my own inclinations felt so strong an opposition to the commands of the best of mothers, as when I was torn from your conversation... Your spritely conversation was peculiarly adapted to my disposition; and to what pernicious lengths my joy and delight in you might have carried me, I now shudder to think of.⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁸⁹ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, I, 278.

⁴⁹⁰ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, II, 157.

⁴⁹¹ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, II, 136.

⁴⁹² Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, III, 154.

⁴⁹³ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, I, 92.

⁴⁹⁴ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, III, 105-106.

In the assumption that Cylinda must have influenced Portia, rather than vice-versa, friendship is imagined as an unstable relation, corrupting rather than steadying. Moreover, it is made clear that conversation is not a reliable guide to propriety of friendship, as it is only by the intervention of her mother that Portia is saved from a friendship she found appealing, conversationally speaking. Even the unlicensed sexual relation between Nicanor and Cylinda is described as friendship.⁴⁹⁵ While friendship may be a useful way to describe an ideal relationship of sympathy and reciprocity, it is much more likely in this text to be used ironically or euphemistically.

The potential for communities to be disrupted by false friendship or miscommunication is also made clear. The flurry of letters exchanged and the numerous conversations in the fifth and final part of the text, which contain forged or false information and in which characters are duped, expose the fragility of communication even between the most open of characters. Ferdinand's whim to test Portia, exacerbated by Oliver's plotting and machinations, results in Portia abjuring her ideal community altogether, even her friendship with Cordelia, to retire into hiding where she almost dies. In calling insistently into question the possibility of open communication even between friends, the ideal of stable community is rendered more complex than the author-narrators' 'we' would imply. Although the authors portray themselves as being able to speak with one voice, as the bracketed note in the 'Emblem' suggests, they were aware that such an ideal is confined to fiction, and that the desire for social status and mastery tends to run against such ideals. Thus, while Portia and Cordelia's friendship is held up as ideal, it is used as a model against which other relations are tested and found wanting rather than as an aspirational goal for readers in itself.

⁴⁹⁵ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, III, 38.

The terms of friendship and open communication are repeatedly applied to reading throughout the text. Unsurprisingly, the Cry are terrible communicators and conversationalists, as bad at speaking as they are at listening. Their prejudice encourages them to twist words, to exploit the multiplicity of possible meanings and place negative interpretations on the things Portia says. Portia calls them ‘discoverers in conversation’, like a critic whose characteristic is ‘a resolution to censure’ and who ‘multiplies words’.⁴⁹⁶ At one point, in frustration, Portia asks, ‘Why, O ye Cry, do you by leaving out my words, and putting in your own, entirely change my meaning?’⁴⁹⁷ From the outset, although unable to produce their own coherent definitions, the Cry are portrayed as being masters in the exploitation of the potential of language for uncertainty.

Equally, when the Cry attempt to communicate anything, they either draw from a set of stock phrases and clichés, or descend into noise, hubbub and ‘universal babble’.⁴⁹⁸ An example is the Cry’s commentary on the nature of women:

[T]here arose amongst the Cry a kind of clamor, which is often dignify’d with the name of argument. The subject which they at present chose to make a matter of debate, was the capacities and dispositions of women: how far their understandings could reach, and to what limits they were bounded: whether women were generally cold or amorous, proud or humble, sordid or generous: with many more questions of dispute, not worth relating, which clamor or argument experienced the customary fate, was maintained by noisy vociferation, and ended in an undecided unintelligible confusion.⁴⁹⁹

The very attempt to essentialise the nature of woman is shown to be ridiculous and brushed off as ‘not worth relating’, but the overwhelming impression of noise and clamour emphasises the impossibility of productive communication with the Cry, for they speak only to be heard, not to engage in dialogue. As a guide to the ‘candid’ reader what not to think, or how not to read, they are effective, but as biased and

⁴⁹⁶ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, I, 117; I, 118; I, 119.

⁴⁹⁷ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, I, 54.

⁴⁹⁸ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, II, 84.

⁴⁹⁹ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, III, 201-202.

unreformed (and unreformable?) readers themselves, it is hard to see why Portia would make the effort to try to engage them in conversation at all. It is made clear that while their minds are closed, she will never achieve anything and is engaged in a fruitless task. This aspect of the text is a rather poignant and pessimistic commentary on the way that both women and books are more likely to be socially condemned for sport than offered a candid reading. In the same way as the text makes women aware that they should not read transparently when a man makes love to them, it equally advocates that women should not expect to be read transparently, no matter how morally they behave. Society and social relations are always an act of negotiation. Thus textual negotiation becomes paradigmatic of women's condition, and reading correctly becomes both a matter of moral concern and a means by which women can survive in a society that is predisposed to judge them unfairly. The desire for a candid reader, therefore, is intimately linked to the condition of women's authorship.

In a sense, the text constructs its own conversational network. In the patterns of dialogue, Portia uses illustrative tales to defend her assertions. However, the plot itself is to some extent an illustrative tale, raising the question of whether the story teaches us to reason, or illustrates the truth of the proposition we have arrived at prior to reading through reasoning.⁵⁰⁰ Story and rational debate participate in an exchange through which each supports the other. Given that the events of the novel are Portia's personal story, it is not surprising that her rational reflection is directed towards her own experiences. However, the *Cry* often raise issues for debate, which then feed into the main plot. For example, the *Cry* accuse Portia of being too trusting in embarking on her friendship with Cordelia. Portia responds that fear of being duped in friendship makes a person inclined to act irrationally, telling an illustrative tale to prove her

⁵⁰⁰ In other words, does *The Cry* create good readers, or does it only offer its moral to those who are already good readers? Its unenthusiastic reception perhaps suggests the latter more than the former.

point.⁵⁰¹ In the second part, we are told that Oliver has a suspicious mind, and fears to be duped.⁵⁰² The truth of Portia's assertion is illustrated, at the same time as the experiential grounds for her assertion are explained, which is the basis for her authority to tell her own illustrative story. The logic of the text is often circular in this way, proposing conversational exchange in which text mediates between personal experience and observation, rational critique and other texts. The network of allusion that occurs across all five sections suggests that *The Cry* is more tightly structured than it appears at first. The text encourages the reader to make thematic links, to consider where knowledge comes from, and to be an active participant in the textual conversation.

In order to encourage a dynamic mode of reading, dependent on a model of conversational exchange and reciprocity, the text draws similarities between books and friends. Portia says: 'I deal with my living acquaintance as I do with authors: there are some books whose proper habitation is a window, in order that they may lie ready at hand to employ a leisure minute, but which we can lay down without regret on the entrance of the most trifling visitors'.⁵⁰³ Cylinda compares 'entertainment from outward objects' unfavourably with 'the imagined company of these ancient poets and philosophers'.⁵⁰⁴ The narrators reiterate a point made in *Remarks on Clarissa* when they remark that when an author 'introduces his reader to the acquaintance of a character with which his imagination is warmed, his whole soul is delighted; and with whom he cannot avoid for the time playing at a kind of fancy'd friendship'.⁵⁰⁵ The same qualities are portrayed as making a good reader and a good friend who is also a

⁵⁰¹ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, I, 35-38.

⁵⁰² Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, I, 207.

⁵⁰³ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, II, 33.

⁵⁰⁴ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, III, 61.

⁵⁰⁵ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, III, 125.

good conversationalist. Portia, describing her conversation with Cordelia and Ferdinand, invokes the qualities that the authors seek in their readers:

I desire nothing more from my companions than good-humour and a readiness to be pleased. Wit and vivacity may produce entertainment, may be the luxury of conversation; but while the necessary ingredients, good nature and kindness of heart, are absent, my soul is depressed, and I am as far from having any pleasure as I should be from being fed with painted food or carved luxuries.⁵⁰⁶

Readiness to be pleased is aligned with candour in acts of reading. Good conversation and reading are therefore moralised as indicating a good nature. It is significant that Portia uses the metaphor of painted food or carved luxuries, as these images pick up on the comparisons which are drawn throughout the text between writing, painting and sculpture. Writing is understood as appropriating the visual as a means to access the internal psyche; the image of painted food therefore implies a false emphasis on outer performance rather than inward reality. Thus, writing, reading and conversation are implicitly drawn together as similarly sociable acts which, if no underlying basis of good nature can be discerned, are shown to be hollow performances. This is why Portia claims that ‘a capacity for writing holds so very low a place in my esteem, when weigh’d in the balance with an honest heart’.⁵⁰⁷ Performance of sociable intercourse such as writing, reading or conversation is meaningless unless illustrative of moral worth.

‘The most approved authors’: literary authority and independent minds in *The Cry*

The Cry is an overtly erudite text. Every scene has a literary tag prefixed to it, in English, Latin, French, and even Italian, mixing the classics with quotations from contemporary plays, essayists and poets. Both the narrators and the narrating characters quote freely from Montaigne, Bossu, Chaucer, Milton, Pope, and

⁵⁰⁶ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, II, 61-62.

⁵⁰⁷ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, I, 167.

particularly Shakespeare. Much of the fourth part of the text is devoted to an extended engagement with the philosophy of Shaftesbury, as well as the various classical philosophical schools. Through engagement with this vast body of work, Collier and Fielding display their own learning and that of their characters, and dismiss as malevolent those who would deny women's capacity for education. Extensive quotation can be read as part of women writers' submissive entry into print, a modest gesture towards more authoritative writers, or literary fathers, as Spencer might put it.⁵⁰⁸ However, in their concern with learned women and women's capacity for criticism, both moral and literary, Fielding and Collier engage critically with the idea of literary authority itself, warning against the conflation of textual authority with moral authority. Women are encouraged to avoid passive submission to literary authority, while submitting their learning aims to a wider moral authoritative framework.

The deft and extensive handling of quotation and allusion in *The Cry* does not subsume women's literary 'voice' to a more authoritative range of male voices, but is an examination and exploration of the nature of authority itself, and the role of authority in reading. At the same time, Collier and Fielding explore the idea of independence, and its relation to authority. Tyrannous exercise of authority is contrasted with conversation between texts, in which textual authority is modified by other texts in circulation, and by the critical interrogation of their readers. This principle can be exemplified by the assertion in the prologue to the third part: 'If modesty and candor are necessary to an author in the judgment of his own works, no less are they in his reader'.⁵⁰⁹ Prejudice in 'contending for the mastery' of knowledge

⁵⁰⁸ See Spencer, *Literary Relations*, Ch. 1 'Fathers and Mentors', 18-72.

⁵⁰⁹ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, II, 9.

in any context ultimately leads to an imperfect assessment of truth.⁵¹⁰ The numerous quotations in *The Cry* should therefore be seen as invoking this kind of textual conversation, by which means *The Cry* inserts itself into a print culture envisaged as conversational.

The Cry is designed to draw attention to its authors' wide-ranging reading. The introduction and the prologue to each section function as critical essays in which the strategies adopted by the authors in the narration of the tale are explained, analysed and defended. For example, in the prologue to the fourth part, the narrators defend the introduction of Cylinda by a discourse on the 'nature of an episode', quoting a definition from Le Bossu in which an episode is defined as 'an interesting incident not absolutely necessary to the fable, nor yet so detached from it, as to carry the reader quite out of sight of the chief personages, or the first intent of the poem'.⁵¹¹ The narrators, rather than allowing the comment from Le Bossu to stand as their sole defence, add their own supplementary commentary and illustration: 'Might we not add also another essential to the above description of a proper episode, namely, that it ought to be such an incident as is introduced in order to call forth some characteristic virtue of the principal personage?'⁵¹² The authors portray themselves as both capable of appropriately applying their own reading to their authorial choices and advancing their own critical contentions. The final comment of the prologue to the fourth part proceeds to throw the weight of critical interpretation back onto the reader: 'Yet if strict criticism should still frown on our method, let candor and good-humour forgive what is done to the best of our judgment, for the sake of perspicuity in the story, and

⁵¹⁰ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, II, 11.

⁵¹¹ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, II, 250. For Le Bossu on episodes see Rene Le Bossu, *Monsieur Bossu's treatise of the epick poem: containing many curious reflexions, ... necessary for the right understanding and judging of ... Homer and Virgil*, trans. W.J., 2 vols. (London, 1719), I, 121-136.

⁵¹² Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, II, 250.

the delight and entertainment of our candid reader'.⁵¹³ The reader is made responsible for, rather than rigidly applying critical conventions to the text, determining through their own unprejudiced reading experience whether the episode is genuinely effective. The narrators lend some critical hints to defend their choices, but ultimately, insist on being judged through the readers exercising their own intellectual capacity, rather than expecting every text to blindly follow strict, authoritative critical rules.

These textual displays of the authors' critical capacity are paired with a spirited defence of learning in women very early in the text. When Portia embarks on a discussion of logic, the Cry expose themselves by rehashing clichéd phrases on women's learning, concluding that 'for a woman to pretend to understand logic, or any other kind of learning, which was properly a man's business, it must and would subject her to deserved contempt, and she would be despised and neglected by all mankind'.⁵¹⁴ To the Cry's comments are added other stereotypes of the learned woman. Portia describes a conversation she overhears in which the educated Miss C is described as 'proud and lazy' and 'a slattern'.⁵¹⁵ Portia is quick to explain this attitude as 'a contrivance invented by envy', a means to disparage that which we do not possess.⁵¹⁶ She is also quick to expose men who flatter women with their lack of learning, and the women who are taken in by such language, translating such professions as saying, 'I am stark mad in love with ignorance, and thus shall I allure her by calling her fool'.⁵¹⁷ The weight of opprobrium on those who would refuse women's learning is heavier than the active support for women's learning. Portia even says that she is 'distant' from thinking that 'what is call'd a learned education, is by

⁵¹³ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, II, 251-52.

⁵¹⁴ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, I, 126.

⁵¹⁵ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, I, 147.

⁵¹⁶ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, I, 158.

⁵¹⁷ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, I, 152.

any means necessary, or even proper for women in general'.⁵¹⁸ Portia's only argument is that if a woman has pursued a course of learning 'without neglecting any of the necessary duties of her station', she should not be 'reviled as a slattern, or ridiculed as an absurd animal'.⁵¹⁹ The aim throughout *The Cry* is not to recommend learning wholesale, but to explore exactly what kind of learning may be safely recommended. Portia advises against 'a superficial desire of seeking after knowledge' where the seeker is unable to digest or apply what is learnt.⁵²⁰ In these cases, Portia argues, learning is used as an 'opportunity for exerting insolence, or rather impertinence'.⁵²¹ Tied up closely with this debate is the nature of authority, and the idea that learning alone does not bestow authority; rather, it is the moral application that is made of the learning that is of value.

The author-narrators explain that they have attached tag quotes to each scene 'in order to give a sanction to our own sentiments by those of the most approved authors'.⁵²² Their explanation might conceivably be read as feminine deference, if much of the rest of the text did not explicitly question the nature of textual authority. Given that this is so, the phrase, 'the most approved authors' should be read in an ironic light, as a means of bringing the issue of textual authority to the fore. It is not made clear who exactly should be read as bestowing the approval; the implication is that the phrase is a deliberate exploitation of conventional wisdom. Portia says: 'when we toss about the sayings of philosophers, and do not take care to enter into their true meaning: we only disguise and cover over falsehood by the sanction of acknowledged authority'.⁵²³ We are told that '[t]he name of an acknowledged authority hath always

⁵¹⁸ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, I, 157.

⁵¹⁹ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, I, 158.

⁵²⁰ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, I, 127.

⁵²¹ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, I, 137.

⁵²² Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, I, 18.

⁵²³ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, II, 171-72.

great weight with the *Cry*', suggesting that supposed authority can contribute to prejudice rather than adding substance to debate.⁵²⁴ Similarly, Portia makes fun of the elevation of the classical poets to God-like status, when she imagines the perplexity of an Indian visitor to England:

But in his visits to our great and public schools, would it be possible for him to avoid reflecting on the want of veracity in his friend, who told him that the Christians worshipped but one God? would he not be apt to think that the Christians had as many gods as the heathens, only bearing different names? for one he would think was worshipped under the name of *Homer*, another of *Virgil*, and another, who had no small number of votaries, was called by the name of *Horace*... Would it be possible to make this pagan believe that *Homer*, *Virgil*, &c. were only the names of certain men who wrote for the amusement of themselves and others, in the respective language of their countries?⁵²⁵

Portia exposes the gender bias in the elevation of a classical education in eighteenth-century culture. She treats the great classical poets on a level equal to contemporary eighteenth-century poets and novelists 'who write for the amusement of themselves and others'. Similarly, she defends simple, popular tales that illustrate moral maxims, dismissed by the *Cry* as vulgar 'proverbs and old saws'.⁵²⁶ Admiration of fine writing is useless without the proper application of the moral contained within it. As Portia argues: "'Tis the application alone which gives value to any sort of knowledge, and renders it useful or agreeable'.⁵²⁷ Portia contends that the same wisdom may come from a proverb or a classical tale, and that a reader, to benefit properly from his reading 'must see useful knowledge contained in the most vulgar language, as well as admire it in a fine writer'.⁵²⁸ Class or gender bias, Portia reveals, only serve to obscure the true value of a moral education, and when learning is only used as a means of asserting individual superiority, it has no function in society.

⁵²⁴ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, I, 176.

⁵²⁵ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, II, 41-42.

⁵²⁶ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, I, 182.

⁵²⁷ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, I, 182.

⁵²⁸ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, I, 183.

Portia's critique of the uses to which learning is put in society calls into question the extent to which the reader should apply his or her own interpretation to a text. The author-narrators of *The Cry* beg for candour from their readers, and as I have shown above, work hard to expose and decry biased or prejudiced reading. Implicitly, social norms like the value of a classical education are called into question as contributing to prejudiced readings. The idea of candid reading, as expressed by the narrators and characters in the text, seems to rely to some extent on maintaining independence of mind. The idea of independence of mind is first introduced in the context of a woman who, it is imagined, has received a faulty education, and expects to be courted assiduously in flattering language. When, inevitably, her raised hopes are dashed, she suffers 'gnawing discontent' and cries 'tears of rage and vexation'.⁵²⁹ Portia points out that 'by finding out that grand secret of keeping her mind independent', the woman would discover neither rapture at being given the preference at a ball, nor mortification at being passed over.⁵³⁰

Independence of mind enables a woman to read correctly. For example, a woman of independent mind is able to discern that when her lover flatters her in 'adulating language' she is able to make the correct translation as:

Madam, I like you...and it will conduce much to my pleasure and convenience, if you will become my wife: that is, if you will bind yourself before God and man to obey my commands as long as I shall live. And should you after marriage be forgetful of your duty, you will then have given me a legal power of exacting as rigid a performance of it as I please.⁵³¹

Independence of mind appears to be that which helps women to make sensible choices given the limited options available to them in eighteenth-century society. Reading actively, rather than slavishly following societal or romantic notions of love, is not just recommended to a woman, it is vital to her survival in unequal

⁵²⁹ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, I, 65.

⁵³⁰ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, I, 64.

⁵³¹ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, I, 70.

circumstances. Portia warns that a woman should never marry unless she meets the man whom ‘she can obey with pleasure’.⁵³² The plot adds weight to this assertion when the virtuous Cordelia is not rewarded with a husband because ‘it happened to be her fate never to meet with a man with whom she could have chose to have entered into so solemn and irrevocable an engagement as marriage’.⁵³³ Marriage, and the dependency it inevitably brings, is depicted as a choice that hinges on independent assessment of the options, rather than a submission to societal norms and customs.

However, in contrast with Portia’s recommending independence of mind, Cyllinda’s story renders independence a more problematic idea. Cyllinda asserts that the ‘loss of liberty which must attend being a wife, was of all things the most horrible to my imagination’.⁵³⁴ Determined to be ‘entirely independent’, Cyllinda scorns ‘making my mind dependent by anxious solicitude for the presence of another’.⁵³⁵ The point is driven home when she reads Eustace’s wife’s letter, asserting her pleasure in the ‘subordinate dependence’ of marriage.⁵³⁶ The reader has some sympathy with Cyllinda when she says of Eustace’s wife, ‘[I] knew not whether I should despise her as the most mean-spirited creature breathing, or fix my whole love and admiration on such an uncommon picture of patience and unmoved affection in a wife’.⁵³⁷ We share Cyllinda’s perplexity to some extent on how to read Eustace’s wife, although we are given a sharp nudge from the response of the Cry, who consider her ‘an object of the highest contempt’.⁵³⁸ Cyllinda, despite her lapses in common morality, is fundamentally an attractive character for the reader – lively, entertaining and possessed of a great deal of intelligent wit. Her advocacy of independence also

⁵³² Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, II, 244.

⁵³³ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, III, 300-301.

⁵³⁴ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, II, 320.

⁵³⁵ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, II, 335; III, 15-16

⁵³⁶ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, III, 92.

⁵³⁷ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, III, 99.

⁵³⁸ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, III, 99.

becomes attractive by association, especially since it seems to bear some relation to Portia's advocacy of independence of mind. The reader is made to work hard to distinguish the ultimate difference between independence Portia-style and independence Cylinda-style.

The answer is in Cylinda's manner of reading. In her descriptions of the philosophers she has read, it becomes clear that she ultimately sees independence as a slavish reliance on philosophical authority. Cylinda claims, for example, that the Epicurian system of pursuit of pleasure 'carry'd me off in triumph as its captive; with all my former systems led in chains, gracing its chariot wheels'.⁵³⁹ It is this dependence on philosophical systems that permits her to be independent in human relations, which ultimately brings her to an even more dependent position in her relations with Eustace, as she is 'enslaved to the most rigid of all tyrants, an uncontrollable passion'.⁵⁴⁰ Interestingly, political language is used to good effect in Cylinda's story: she hunts for a 'monarch' to wield 'despotic power' over her; she has a 'political regard' to herself; she establishes a 'democracy' in her bosom.⁵⁴¹ Her imagining of herself as an independent sovereign state blinds her to the social value of relationship. Although 'well-stock'd with social inclinations', her mistaking of textual authority for moral authority requires her to ultimately acknowledge that 'no creature placed in a social community can injure himself alone'.⁵⁴² It is Cylinda's 'social inclinations' that make her recoverable into the fold of virtue, once she has confessed and repented her errors in judgement. The tyranny of the individual philosophical systems to which Cylinda submits should be seen in contrast to an idea of textual conversation in which every textual statement is available for discussion and

⁵³⁹ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, III, 8.

⁵⁴⁰ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, III, 80.

⁵⁴¹ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, III, 2; II, 336; III, 4.

⁵⁴² Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, III, 2; III, 281.

modification. Independence of mind is moderated to mean a healthy critical interrogation of textual authority and societal prejudice in a social context, rather than an extreme elevation of one's own intellectual perceptions. Only through conversation with trustworthy individuals who share an appropriate moral code can one safely exercise one's independent mind.

There is one single textual authority that appears to be unquestioned in *The Cry* and that is the Bible, the text that provides the moral substance against which other texts are to be judged. Part of the questioning of other kinds of authority has to do with their elevation to a status on a level with the word of God, as Portia comments of Homer, Virgil and Horace. It is made clear that Cylinda has received little religious instruction, attending church out of habit rather than out of fixed religious principles. She has 'never heard the sacred writings mentioned with half the reverence which was paid to the heathen authors'.⁵⁴³ Ellen Gardiner argues that one of the most subversive strategies used by Fielding and Collier is that they transform the use of the Bible from a means of enjoining submission to authority on women into a means by which women can wield authority as literary and social critics.

Comparing Portia's reported death and rebirth to the Resurrection, Gardiner argues that Portia comes to embody the 'Word of the Lord, a female Savior figure'.⁵⁴⁴ Portia is certainly authorised to dispense mercy at the conclusion of *The Cry*; quoting her Shakespearean namesake, she says that mercy '*droppeth as the gentle dew from heaven*' and ultimately argues that mercy is summed up in the Biblical idea of Christian charity.⁵⁴⁵ That her mercy is exercised on Cylinda, the fallen woman, is perhaps more subversive. Gardiner suggests that the transformation of Ferdinand should be seen as Portia accomplishing what Clarissa cannot: the reformation of the

⁵⁴³ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, III, 102.

⁵⁴⁴ Gardiner, 'Friendship, Equality, and Interpretation', 129.

⁵⁴⁵ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, III, 289; III, 291.

rake.⁵⁴⁶ However, given that Ferdinand's rakish behaviour is all an act, it is perhaps more appropriate to say that Cylinda is the rake that is reformed. That *The Cry* depicts a woman behaving rakishly, who does not suffer either death or social downfall, suggests that Fielding and Collier believe that sexual sin is not the sole indicator of a woman's virtue, or her life. Portia does not merely refuse to condemn Cylinda, she offers her friendship, even a permanent place within her family. Rather than challenging the authority of the Bible, Portia displays how its teachings might be applied in a radical way, to promote equality and friendship rather than as a weapon to punish or a tool of oppression. Portia condemns men who, 'after they have gratified their own pride by pretending to a nice examination of the merits of their fellow-creatures, presume to call a small relief, in a manner squeezed out from the hardness of their hearts, by the sacred name of charity or mercy!'⁵⁴⁷ It is perhaps in the biblical context that good and candid reading is the most important skill, to prevent biblical precepts from being appropriated to assert superiority. The kind of authority bestowed by the Bible is not the kind that presumes to dictate, but the ability to refrain from exercising the level of judgement that properly belongs to God.

The Cry deals with dramatic display, literary criticism, community and authority. As a sustained display of acts of narration through conversation and verbal and textual negotiation, it invites its readers to accurately perceive and respond to the authorial mastery behind the relatively basic plot. By opening up typical familiar and social interactions to extended critical discussion it familiarises criticism, arguing that criticism needs to be applied not as a means of acceding to false and empty authority, but as a way of moving towards better and more morally justifiable relations among

⁵⁴⁶ Gardiner, 'Friendship, Equality, and Interpretation', 131.

⁵⁴⁷ Fielding and Collier, *The Cry*, III, 291-92.

members of society and social groups. Female friendship is proposed as a model for reciprocal and egalitarian social and familiar relations, but the nature of society as often inimical to the desire for perfect friendship and mutuality is also exposed. Collaboration for Fielding and Collier in *The Cry*, then, is more than a way of displaying the authors' capacity for moral and scriptive community; it is used as a basis from which to critique the assumptions about books and relationships that are proposed as being held by society. Collaboration is a somewhat ironic stance that draws attention to some of the most crucial themes of the text. The next, and final chapter examines how, unlike Fielding and Collier, who use the *Cry* to register their scepticism about the open print market, the Minifie sisters embrace the market and seek ways to turn it to their own authorial ends.

Chapter 6. Collaboration in the Marketplace: Margaret and Susannah Minifie, *The Histories of Lady Frances S___ and Lady Caroline S___*

I have argued throughout this thesis that eighteenth-century collaboration was a deliberate authorial stance that had much to do with a perceived market for texts that performed some form of sociability. All the authors I have examined were operating within a print culture that demanded saleable texts; all attempted to meet a perceived market demand. However, all the texts examined so far have had other virtues to recommend them to their audience, in their thoughtful negotiation with relations of power, with the print market and with their authorial personae. This final example, of the Minifie sisters, examines literary collaboration in a thoroughly market-driven context. We have become accustomed to valuing texts that appear to negotiate or subvert what we perceive to be dominant ideologies, rather than manifesting collusion with them. Texts produced solely for the marketplace are therefore in some sense, and to some extent, tainted, mere repositories for discourses of power that reassert the status quo. Texts that contain much of what we are inclined to regard as simple ‘bad writing’ – exaggerated prose, implausible plot, lack of variation in characterisation – we are disinclined to read through aesthetic preference. If a text manifests one of these qualities, it is suspect; if both, then it is hardly worth our attention.

Arguably, retrospective condemnation has little meaning if mutations in concepts of reading over time are taken into account – but both the Minifies and their novels were derided nearly as much in their own time as they are now, as

Schellenberg has shown.⁵⁴⁸ Collaboration offers a lens through which to view the Minifies that sidesteps the vexed question of their aesthetic merits. It is agreed that such merits are limited. However, the Minifies illustrate in ways that no other text examined here does, how collaboration could operate within a consumer context, and how the relation of sisterhood could be negotiated through tying together themes of sisterhood and authorship. By tracing the issues raised by the Minifies' attempt to produce a novel designed solely to amuse without corrupting (rather than actively instructing), we can learn a significant amount about women's situation in relation to consumer culture in the period. The Minifies' novel represents an active intervention into consumerist discourses, enabling the reader to envisage new ways for women to relate to a consumer culture that tended to direct them into increasingly narrow models of femininity.

Susannah Minifie, later Susannah Gunning (1739/40-1800) and Margaret Minifie (dates unknown) were the daughters of James Minifie, a Somerset clergyman. The sisters' early entry into print was collaborative, with their first novel, *The Histories of Lady Frances S___ and Lady Caroline S___* appearing in 1763. They collaborated again on *The Picture*, published in 1766. Rather confusingly, in 1764 an unattributed novel was published called *Family Pictures*, of which there is a certain eighteenth-century attribution to Susannah Minifie, although it may not have been written by her.⁵⁴⁹ The Minifies together and separately were reasonably prolific, publishing throughout their lifetimes, and exploiting any means possible to find a market for their novels. Twelve novels are attributed to one or both of them between 1763 and 1800, excluding Susannah Gunning's poem *Virginus and Virginia* (1792).

⁵⁴⁸ Schellenberg, 'Harmless mediocrity: Edward Kimber and the Minifie sisters' in *Professionalization*, 120-140.

⁵⁴⁹ The eighteenth-century attribution in question is that of David Rivers in *Literary memoirs of living authors of Great Britain*, 2 vols. (London, 1798) in which both *The Picture* and *Family Pictures* are listed among Gunning's novels (I, 229).

Their two overtly collaborative novels were *The Histories of Lady Frances S___ and Lady Caroline S___*, printed for Dodsley and sold by subscription, and *The Picture. A Novel*, printed for the authors and sold by a bookseller. The difficulty in firm authorial attribution in their subsequent works illustrates the extent to which the two were conflated in the public imagination. In 1768, Susannah Minifie married General John Gunning, brother to the famous society beauties, Elizabeth and Maria Gunning. They had a daughter, Elizabeth, who followed her mother into print in 1794 with the quasi-autobiographical novel, *The Packet*, a novel that suggested that Elizabeth had inherited her mother and aunt's capacity for authorial self-fashioning in the interests of success in the print market.⁵⁵⁰ Elizabeth Gunning subsequently had a long career publishing sentimental novels well into the nineteenth century.

The family is best-known for the 'Gunninghiad' society scandal of 1791, in which General Gunning threw Susannah and Elizabeth out of the house following a scandal involving forged letters and uncorroborated rumours of Elizabeth's engagement to the Marquess of Blandford and romantic attachment to the Marquess of Lorne. This scandal produced a flurry of pamphlets, one, the *Letter to the Duke of Argyll* (1791) authored by Susannah Gunning herself. In their lifetimes they were victims of satire. James Gillray's 'Margaret's Ghost' (see appendix) satirises Susannah Gunning's literary style, and Lady Harcourt coined the term 'minific' to refer to their 'breathlessly hyperbolic prose'. Nevertheless they enjoyed a degree of literary popularity, comfortably producing a number of sentimental novels throughout most of their lives.⁵⁵¹

⁵⁵⁰ See Pam Perkins, 'The Fictional Identities of Elizabeth Gunning', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 15/1 (Spring, 1996), 83-98.

⁵⁵¹ Pam Perkins, 'Gunning, Susannah (1739/40-1800)' *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <<http://www.odnb.com/view/article/11750>>; Susan Brown, Patricia Clements, and Isobel Grundy, eds., Susannah Gunning entry: Overview screen within *Orlando* <<http://orlando.cambridge.org>>; Susan

In one of very few considerations of the Minifies' work in contemporary criticism, Todd contrasts the thoughtful sentiment and elevation of feminine values of novelists like Sarah Fielding and Frances Sheridan with the straightforward fantasy of popular novelists like the Minifies. Todd contends that whereas Sheridan and Fielding illustrate the limits of the sentimental ideal and occasionally challenge or subvert it, *Lady Frances* and other novels by similarly popular writers like Frances Brooke are:

...representative of the women's novel in the mid-eighteenth century in both content and technique. Tissues of clichés and influences, artificial in language and characterisation, they purvey a common fantasy: of passive femininity sometimes made powerful through death but more usually through the extreme reverential attitude of others towards it.⁵⁵²

There is no doubt that Todd finds the cult of sensibility somewhat distasteful, although she acknowledges that the fantasy of powerful femininity that diffuses itself to all around it – particularly in the way that potentially powerful men are rendered docile and domesticated in the presence of triumphant female virtue – is a potent one.⁵⁵³ Rather than dismissing *Lady Frances* as fantasy, I would prefer to ask exactly what kinds of fantasies it describes, whose ends in particular they serve, and how these fantasies operate in a consumer context.

Todd's identification of a fantasy of female power over potentially threatening men is certainly one aspect of the novel, but it appears to me that the relations between the women of the novel present a further potent fantasy enabled by collaboration, specifically a fantasy of agency, mobility and strong female relationships that are not dominated by relations with men. The contradictions inherent in the marketing of what might be described as 'moral fantasy' expose the contradictions of femininity itself. Moreover, the way the book is narrated by women

Brown, Patricia Clements, and Isobel Grundy, eds., Margaret Minifie entry: Overview screen within *Orlando* <<http://orlando.cambridge.org>>.

⁵⁵² Todd, 'The Fantasy of Sensibility: Frances Brook and Susannah Gunning' in *The Sign of Angellica*, 176-191, 177.

⁵⁵³ Todd, 'The Fantasy of Sensibility', 185.

other than the eponymous heroines suggests a level of critical thoughtfulness on the part of the authors over how exactly one reads paragons of femininity. Ultimately, this chapter shows how the Minifies use literary collaboration, first as a means of positioning themselves and their book within a consumer context, and then to suggest how sisterhood, expressed through epistolary exchange and the shared consumption of stories of exemplary women, offers readers a position from which to read which enables them to participate in a fantasy of active intervention into women's lives and plots.

The Minifie sisters' first novel, *The Histories of Lady Frances S___ and Lady Caroline S___* is structured around the stories of two sisters who display all the ideal feminine attributes of beauty and virtue. The sisters, Lady Frances and Miss Dalton/Lady Caroline are more similar than they are different. Those around them consider that both have achieved the pinnacle of female perfection; even their plots might be seen as 'sister-plots' in that both find themselves abandoned and friendless and require the intervention of less elevated characters to save them. The reproduction of ideal femininity that sisterhood suggests, along with the plot similarities, form part of a meditation on ideal womanhood and its public consumption. Both Lady Frances and Lady Caroline are in danger of becoming fallen women of no reputation, respectively through elopement and through attempted seduction. The mirroring in plot not only exposes the lack of variation in models of ideal womanhood, but the lack of available plots in which women can act as protagonists. The text plays on the scandalous associations of the public representation of women, but provides a safe context in which such base associations can ultimately be repudiated.

Lady Frances and Lady Caroline – their persons and their stories – are made available for consumption by the other characters through the letter-narrative, and

thus to the wider world through the printed text. Sisterhood provides the structuring narrative in which ideal femininity, excess and consumption can be explored. It also becomes a means of rescuing the sisters and the text from a potentially tragic denouement, through construction of a heterosociable community based around sororal ties cemented through intermarriage. The next section addresses the question of sisterhood in the eighteenth century, including how the *Minifies* represented their own relationship. I will argue that representations of sisterhood could invoke consumer culture and the print market through suggesting excess, proliferation and repetition, rather than a more traditional reading of sisterhood defined through a matrix of difference. I will also argue that the *Minifies* provide a useful example of a presentation of sisterhood that suggests a means of rewriting what might be seen as a classic plot, that of the lone and abandoned woman. Both these themes are crucial to my subsequent reading of the *Minifies*' first novel.

Sisterhood and the *Minifies*

The word 'sisterhood' as used in the eighteenth century was most prominently applied to nuns and prostitutes, both groups of women defined by their position outside Protestant British polite society, and both potentially threatening in their challenge to the dominant model of a woman's life structured by heterosexual marriage. To some degree sisterhood appears to have symbolised a homosocial space set apart from heterosociable polite society. An important eighteenth-century example of the use of the word 'sisterhood' occurs in a letter written from Ursula ('Patty') Fielding to Mrs John Barker, while she was living with her sisters, Sarah, Beatrice and Catherine: 'All the sisterhood desire much love to you. Kitty is at work. Sally is

puzzling about it and about it (sic). Bea playing on her fiddle, and Patty scribbling'.⁵⁵⁴ The context invokes an industrious female domestic community. Intense sisterly affection is well-documented in the period. Frances Burney showed great affection for her sister, illustrated by this extract from her diary in January, 1769: 'My sweet Susette is almost well. I think of nothing else but to thank God Almighty enough, which I am obliged to run out of the room to do twenty times a day, for else I cannot breathe'.⁵⁵⁵ Terry Castle picks up on the importance of sisters in Austen's fiction in her review of Austen's letters in the *London Review of Books*. Castle documents the 'primitive adhesiveness – and the underlying eros – of the sister-sister bond' between Austen and her sister Cassandra.⁵⁵⁶ Castle also draws on a sense that real sisterhood occurs away from men and their preoccupations, suggesting that for Austen, 'Men are fools and imaginists and know nothing of the droll, shared cynicism of intelligent women'.⁵⁵⁷ Noticeably, all these examples of sororal relations occur in the context of unpublished documents: letters and diaries. We might conjecture from this picture that sororal bonds offered eighteenth-century women a source of emotional support and practical help, but that sisterhood as a social relation had limited social relevance outside the private experience of individual women.

Spencer argues that the image of women writers as a sisterhood of muses that began to develop in the mid-eighteenth century could be seen as a metaphor for women's separate place in the national literary canon. She notes that the muse image obscures women as commercial and professional writers, instead conceiving of

⁵⁵⁴ Ursula Fielding to Mrs. John Barker (25 Oct, 1748), in *Correspondence*, ed. Battestin and Probyn, 182.

⁵⁵⁵ Ellis, *Early Diary of Frances Burney*, I, 38.

⁵⁵⁶ Terry Castle, 'Sister-sister' (review of Deirdre le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*), in *London Review of Books*, 17/15 (3rd August, 1995), 3 & 5-6, 3.

⁵⁵⁷ Castle, 'Sister-Sister', 5.

women writers in sentimental terms.⁵⁵⁸ In Spencer's formulation, the dissemination of the image of a literary sisterhood of women occurs concurrently with the rise in domestic ideology that both enabled more women to claim literary authority by associating writing with genteel morality, and severely limited the terms on which they accessed the literary marketplace. Given not only that the climax of *Lady Frances* is the discovery that Miss Dalton is Lady Frances's sister, but that it devotes substantial textual space to the building of relations of sisterhood through letter-exchange, the text certainly suggests that the sororal relation has a certain emotional primacy in women's lives. However, it also asserts the importance of active demonstrations of sisterhood within a heterosocial community, suggesting that the idea of private, domestic sisterhood is inadequate for analysis of this text.

Literary representations of sisterhood are often structured around difference between sisters. Sarah Annes Brown points to the 'ur-narrative of sisterhood', the story of contrasting sisters Mary and Martha, to argue that representations of the differences between sisters always denotes the need for some form of choice on the part of the reader.⁵⁵⁹ To some extent this phenomenon has been seen as transhistorical, embedded in Western consciousness. Masako Hirai points to differences between sisters as a means of representing abstract conflicts such as the conflict between reason and emotion in narratives from *Antigone* to *Women in Love*.⁵⁶⁰ Such analyses not only highlight the convenience of the female body as a metaphor onto which an abstract principle can be projected, but embed competition and difference as the structuring principle of sisterhood. Even where sisters are represented as engaging in cooperation, their relationship tends to be subordinate to

⁵⁵⁸ Spencer, *Literary Relations*, 191-93.

⁵⁵⁹ Sarah Annes Brown, *Devoted Sisters: Representations of the Sister Relationship in Nineteenth-Century British and American Literature* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 4.

⁵⁶⁰ Masako Hirai, *Sisters in Literature: Female Sexuality in Antigone, Middlemarch, Howard's End and Women in Love* (London: Macmillan, 1998), 8.

the demands of the courtship plot. As Amy K. Levin points out, ‘The world of heterosexual romance makes as little space for female friendship as it does for sisterly bonding’.⁵⁶¹ Spacks identifies a tendency to portray sisterhood in terms of a matrix of contrast in her analysis of several eighteenth-century novels in which sisters are portrayed. She argues that women novelists used the classic fairy-tale formulation of the good and bad sister in order to explore both the pleasures of self-indulgence and the rewards of self-restraint.⁵⁶² The Minifies’ presentation of sisterhood complicates this idea of sisterhood as difference. I argue that sameness and replication are the key structuring principles of *Lady Frances*, and that the model of replication suggests ways in which the relation of sisterhood could operate to delineate an active role for women, even if solely in the realm of consumerist fantasy.

Women’s experience of sisterhood in the eighteenth century must have been complicated, structured by patterns of both cooperation and competition, particularly in the marriage market. In several different areas, patterns of sameness are more pertinent than patterns of difference where sisterhood is concerned. Hunt points out that discussion of liberal theories of individualism have often neglected the issue that ‘some people [– women, servants, and slaves –] were simply expected, liberal theory or no, to be significantly less “individualistic” than others’.⁵⁶³ In families where women were not expected to contribute to the family economy, women could only define themselves by their accomplishments, and their chances of making a good marriage. In a context in which women are only defined by their place in society, one sister is very much like another, and may have been conceived in terms of excess or superfluity. More particularly since each marriageable woman would require a dowry,

⁵⁶¹ Amy K. Levin, *The Suppressed Sister: A Relationship in Novels by Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century British Women* (London: Associated University Presses, 1992), 52.

⁵⁶² Patricia Meyer Spacks, ‘Sisters’, in *Fetter’d or Free?*, ed. Schofield and Macheski, 136-151, 137.

⁵⁶³ Hunt, *The Middling Sort*, 82.

which would drain family resources. Katherine Sobba Green lists Susannah Gunning among two dozen or so writers of ‘the feminocentric courtship novel’ between Richardson and Austen, in which women, although initially introduced by their ‘blazon’ – the list of attractions, education, fortune and accomplishments that makes them objects of value in the marriage market – become in the course of the plot, subjects rather than objects of patriarchal exchange.⁵⁶⁴ The assertion that a woman is inherently more than the sum of her fortune and accomplishments becomes part of the novelistic fantasy. If women are the equivalent of consumer items on the marriage market, their individuality appears negligible. A contemporary example of sisters on the marriage market shows the extent to which women could be treated as virtually indistinguishable, and the extent to which representation of sisters could become aligned with a culture of consumption.

A useful contemporary example of sisters is provided by the Gunning sisters, Maria and Elizabeth, who were famous beauties of the early 1750s and later sisters-in-law to Susannah Gunning. Their story bears many of the hallmarks of fantasy: poor but virtuous women capture first the eye of fashionable London and then an aristocratic husband apiece. Caroline Gonda reads the Gunnings as an example of ‘women in the public eye’, emphasising the sisters’ uneasy status as public spectacles: ‘To the extent that these women were actors on a public stage, it was mostly not to a script of their own making, or under their own direction and management’.⁵⁶⁵ The Gunning sisters became famous initially for their beauty, and subsequently for their capacity to create a gawking mob wherever they went. Robert

⁵⁶⁴ Katherine Sobba Green, ‘The Heroine’s Blazon and Hardwicke’s Marriage Act: Commodification for a Novel Market’, *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*, 9/2 (Autumn, 1990), 273-290, 287.

⁵⁶⁵ Caroline Gonda, ‘Misses, Murderesses, and Magdalens: women in the public eye’ in Eger, et al., *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere*, 53-71, 68.

Jones's analysis of Elizabeth Gunning as sitter in numerous contemporary portraits reinforces the problematic nature of a beautiful woman's public presence:

In these terms, to be beautiful is not only to possess an engaging physical presence, with all the complexities of recognition and evaluation that fact implies, but to be positioned in relation to a series of moral injunctions, which on the one hand raise and endorse women's public presence, while on the other they damn the beautiful woman as the source of enervating effeminacy.⁵⁶⁶

The very fact of the Gunnings' presence in the public eye had the effect of aligning them with other 'public women', namely actresses and prostitutes. Their presence in contemporary portraiture suggests their status as commodities, even when represented singly. However, I would like to consider the extent to which their sisterhood intensified both their public presence and their status as commodities. Apparently regarded as virtually interchangeable, it was the effect of excess and multiplicity that sisterhood brought them that arguably catapulted them into such exalted spheres.

The poem *The Charms of Beauty* (1752) that Jones cites as evidence that the Gunnings could stand for a powerful conflation of beauty and virtue treats the sisters as if they were multiple versions of the same person.⁵⁶⁷ The poem starts from the premise that the Gunning sisters come as a package deal: 'Long have the GUNNINGS – both *divinely Fair* - / Unrival'd shone in Beauty's glorious Sphere'.⁵⁶⁸ Similarly, the poem states: 'Thus when a GUNNING shews her charming Face, / *All other Beauties unregarded pass*'.⁵⁶⁹ The use of the indefinite article in 'a Gunning' shows that the specific individual Gunning is not a relevant concern. The indefinite article recurs in the context of marriage choice: 'With Reason then our noble E[ar]l may chose, / A beauteous GUNNING to adorn his House', suggesting that even in the choice of

⁵⁶⁶ Robert W. Jones, *Gender and the Formation of Taste in Eighteenth-Century Britain: The Analysis of Beauty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 122.

⁵⁶⁷ Jones suggests that *The Charms of Beauty* argued that the Gunnings' beauty and virtue 'had the ability to convert appetite into admiration' (Jones, *Gender and the Formation of Taste*, 141).

⁵⁶⁸ *The charms of beauty; or the grand contest between the fair Hibernians, and the English toasts, a poem* (London, 1752), 3.

⁵⁶⁹ *The charms of beauty*, 5.

marriage partner, it makes very little instrumental difference which sister is chosen.⁵⁷⁰ The poem calls the Gunning sisters ‘two twin Stars’ who by uniting their beauties, ‘form a Radiance exquisitely bright’.⁵⁷¹ The spectacle of beautiful sisters is supposed to be more appealing, more spectacular, than a single beautiful woman. Inadvertently, *The Charms of Beauty* exposes a lack of variation in models of ideal womanhood. If both sisters are beautiful and virtuous, then there is no other way of distinguishing between them. Horace Walpole believed that the Gunnings would not have caused such a stir if they had not been sisters: ‘I think there being two so handsome and both such perfect figures is their chief excellence, for singly I have seen much handsomer women than either; however, they can’t walk in the park, or go to Vauxhall, but such mobs follow them that they are generally driven away’.⁵⁷² The mobs that surround the sisters reinforce the sense of excess that follows them. The Gunning sisters amaze by there being *two* such examples of beauty; they provoke an excessive response both in paeans to their feminine qualities, and in the great rabble that their presence creates. Jones observes that *The Charms of Beauty* is unusual in that it depicts the sisters sympathetically; the Gunnings were more frequently represented as inspiring folly and vice.⁵⁷³ As consumer goods, they are perceived as representing potentially both the capacity to refine, and the capacity to corrupt, and both these effects are intensified by their multiplicity.

An instance of contemporary commentary on the Minifies themselves reinforces the evidence of links between sisterhood and excess, and associates both with the world of text. An observation by Elizabeth Carter on her reading matter and

⁵⁷⁰ *The charms of beauty*, 7.

⁵⁷¹ *The charms of beauty*, 6.

⁵⁷² Horace Walpole to Horace Mann (18th June 1751) in *The Letters of Horace Walpole*, 9 vols., ed. Peter Cunningham (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1891), II, 259.

⁵⁷³ Jones, *Gender and the Formation of Taste*, 141.

the Minifies is particularly suggestive in the context of eighteenth-century print culture:

I have not met with “Light Summer Reading for the Ladies.” Indeed, it would be à pure perte to spend my time in reading novels here; for most of them are so perfectly like the gossiping among the Misses in a country town, that it is only making a few visits, and one may have it all original and fresh. I owed your Light Summer Reading a spite, for your preferring it to my Knights of Malta. Indeed, I will never give up the point, that the nine geniuses of the nine Miss Minifies, however clubbed and compounded, can ever arrive at the amusement of one Vertôt.⁵⁷⁴

If sisterhood can represent proliferation, or superfluity, then sisterhood can be mapped on to the idea of a print culture marked by a proliferation of second-rate novels. The deliberate extravagance of the ‘nine Miss Minifies’ comment aligned with novels that are ‘like the gossiping among the Misses in a country town’ suggests a kind of infinite reproduceability and proliferation shared by sisters and bad novels alike. What is more, the editor of the letters takes Carter’s joking ‘nine Miss Minifies’ comment seriously, adding in a footnote: ‘Nine sisters, who about that time wrote several novels jointly, which were then reckoned ingenious, but which have been since cancelled by the many admirable performances of that kind as to be no longer known’.⁵⁷⁵ The editor, from the retrospective viewpoint of 1808, gives credit to the Minifie sisters for part-inauguration of a certain kind of genre fiction, easily ‘cancelled’ by the subsequent proliferation of similar, but better novels. Links between sisterhood and consumerism turn on an idea of sisterhood that symbolises excess and repetition. However, the Minifies also suggest ways that sisterhood can be used to denote active intervention and plot determination, through their representation of their relationship during the Gunninghiad scandal of 1790-91.

⁵⁷⁴ Elizabeth Carter to Catherine Talbot (July 09, 1768), in *A Series of Letters*, III, 165-66.

⁵⁷⁵ Footnote to the above, in *A Series of Letters*, III, 166.

The Gunninghiad scandal offers a chance to see how the relation of sisterhood could be strategically used in a published text to critique the tyranny of husbands. Susannah Gunning's *Letter to the Duke of Argyll* (1790) was written in an attempt to exonerate Elizabeth Gunning of the twin charges of forgery and coquetry. Gunning documents her daughter's every movement during the days between which suspicions of forgery start to circulate and she and Elizabeth are ejected from the house by General Gunning, taking the opportunity to cast herself and her daughter in the role of injured innocence and helpless victims in the whole affair. It is half a public defence, and half an outraged tale of injured femininity. However, the narrative is given a twist by the presence of Margaret Minifie, unmarried and living with her sister and her family, and who plays a crucial role in the outplaying of events both in supporting her sister and as a more independent observer than the protagonists. She interjects into Gunning's impassioned, overwrought narrative with a report on the conversation held between her and General Gunning in which he orders his daughter to leave his house in London if she will not be persuaded to leave the country.

Margaret Minifie's prose style forms a significant contrast to Gunning's; unmarked by italics, exclamation marks or rhetorical questions, it signals reasonably independent reporting of events. Where Gunning claims a mother's authority and a subjective emotional interest in the life of her daughter, Margaret Minifie is able to claim the more objective perspective of a sister and aunt. Simultaneously, her role of emotional supporter to the Gunning women is emphasised in Susannah Gunning's narrative in her description of 'our *little* circle, composed *only* of a *daughter*, a *mother*, and an *aunt*, whose hearts were *more* closely cemented by a *tryed* and *well founded* confidence in each other's *rectitude*, than by the *natural* ties that have united

them' (italics in original).⁵⁷⁶ On Elizabeth's ejection from her father's house, her mother and aunt accompany her, and it is Margaret's money that provides for them, since, in true romance heroine style, Susannah and Elizabeth Gunning have only a guinea between them.⁵⁷⁷

Margaret's interposition has the effect of rescuing the narrative from becoming entirely the stuff of sentimental fiction, and transforms what might have been merely a tragic tale into a social critique. Her unemotive rendering of the General's command that Elizabeth should leave is much more effective than Susannah Gunning's overwrought ranting. Ros Ballaster identifies a theme in eighteenth-century literature derived from *The Arabian Nights Entertainment* in which narrative is redirected from a tyrannical male listener into the safe hands of a sister, permitting a covert critique of despotism:

Here, the exchange or comparison between sisters or sister plots (plots that mirror each other in a family resemblance) seems to serve a wider narrative purpose than that of realism or representational fidelity. Rather it functions to correct or instruct or temper despotic authority by transferring the power of directing the course of a story, a life, into cooperative and sociable hands.⁵⁷⁸

Ballaster argues that sisterhood represented the listening position of a 'disinterested but sympathetic observer or spectator who acts to save rather than govern' showing how sisterhood offers a position from which to read that provides an alternative to a straightforward dyadic model of powerless narrator and powerful auditor. In Gunning's *Letter to the Duke of Argyll*, affectionate sisterly imposition into the 'plot' itself overlays the narrative of injured femininity that Gunning adopts in her address to a powerful male figure. Margaret Minifie, in her dual role of go-between and emotional support, becomes the mediating term that permits a more dispassionate

⁵⁷⁶ Susannah Gunning, *Letter to the Duke of Argyll* (4th edn., London, 1791), 64.

⁵⁷⁷ Gunning, *Letter to the Duke of Argyll*, 106.

⁵⁷⁸ Ros Ballaster, 'Playing the Second String: The Role of Dinarzade in Eighteenth-Century English Fiction', unpub. (Forthcoming in Felicity Nussbaum and Saree Makdisi (eds.), *Arabian Nights and its Imitators in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford University Press, 2008)).

reporting of the General's tyranny than the victim of it could relate. Simultaneously Margaret's provision of emotional and financial relief from male tyranny demonstrate a possible escape from the imagined trap of male power.

That an eighteenth-century audience would have read Margaret's part in the affair as significant is suggested by Gillray's cartoon, 'Margaret's Ghost' (1791; see appendix), in which he satirically depicts the scene in the *Letter* where Margaret reports the General's decree to Susannah and Elizabeth Gunning. The writing on the print reads: 'I was sitting by the bedside of my smiling-injured-innocent lambkin, and holding one of the sweet-tender hands of my amiable-gentle-dovelike cherub, when her aunt came into the room, with a face paler than ashes—"What is the matter, Auntee Peg," says my chaste, adorable, kind-beneficent-enchanted-heart-feeling-beneficent-paragon of goodness, "what's the matter, Auntee Peg, what makes you put on such a long face?" The description of 'paler than ashes' and the 'long face' are lifted directly from the *Letter*; the rest is Gillray's satire on Susannah Gunning's rhetoric, although he does not have to greatly exaggerate her inflated style, which here is very similar to other parts of the *Letter*. That he chose this particular scene to depict however, is of significance.

The caption 'Margaret's Ghost' alludes to the name of a ballad by David Mallet, 'Margaret's Ghost' collected in *Reliques of ancient English poetry* (1765), and derived from an earlier ballad, 'Fair Margaret and Sweet William', also reproduced in the *Reliques*. These ballads tell the tragic tale of the appearance of the ghost of the spurned Margaret to her lover William while he is asleep on the evening of his marriage to another woman. The Gillray cartoon seems to evoke the ghostly, 'pale

and wan' appearance of Margaret at the bedside.⁵⁷⁹ Mallet's version focuses much more strongly than the original ballad on Margaret's forsaken status, for example, in the lines: 'Why did you promise love to me / And not that promise keep?'⁵⁸⁰ These lines exploit the story's potential for representing the stock figure of the abandoned woman. In a sense, the Margaret of Gillray's print has also been the victim of male perfidy, but the print draws attention to the difference between the ghostly Margaret, who is a real victim, and Margaret Minifie, whose histrionic stance implicates her in the overwrought hyperbole of the Gunning 'tragedy'.

The print foregrounds Margaret's 'long face' – so long, in fact, that her chin is almost level with her waist – her waving arms and bulging eyes. The satire here operates by contrasting Gunning's tragic tones in her description of the society scandal, with the more conventional tragedy of William and Margaret, in order to emphasise the gulf between the two. Gillray recognises that Gunning's *Letter* rather unsuccessfully attempts to paint Gunning and her daughter as tragic heroines. However, again, Margaret's presence dispels the tragedy, in this case converting it into satire rather than comedy. Since Margaret is not directly affected by the General's strictures, her ghostly appearance become laughable rather than tragic. Gillray's satire of the relationship between the three women, in which they appear to encourage each other in their histrionics, is merely a reverse picture of Susannah Gunning's depiction of the women as having 'no *separate* interest' in the *Letter*.⁵⁸¹ For Gunning, the relations among the women are a source of support in the face of tyranny; for Gillray, their close relations denote their shared foolishness in portraying their experiences as tragical. Both ways of reading the relationship suggest that the

⁵⁷⁹ 'Fair Margaret and Sweet William', in *Reliques of ancient English poetry*, 3 vols. (London, 1765), III, 121-25, 123.

⁵⁸⁰ 'Margaret's Ghost', in *Reliques of ancient English poetry*, III, 310-13, 312.

⁵⁸¹ Gunning, *Letter to the Duke of Argyll*, 106.

close bonds of sisterhood to an eighteenth-century audience could model a community that provided an alternative to the picture of the lone, tragic woman. In earlier fictions, becoming either a nun or a prostitute was a plausible conclusion to a tragic tale of an abandoned woman. Perhaps the conclusion of a tragic tale through sisterly intervention, whether viewed satirically or sentimentally, can be read as a remnant, or a recasting, of this convention. Through sororal collaboration, the Minifies' representation of sisterhood negotiates both the potential for sisterhood to stand for sameness, even excess and proliferation, and its potential to suggest a means by which a sister's active intervention can reconfigure the abandoned, cast-off woman plot from tragedy to comedy.

Marketing Lady Frances

An examination of the Minifies' early publishing history shows that even from the very outset of their authorial careers, the sisters had a shrewd eye to what would sell. Contemporaries may have considered them to be marginal contributors to a print market glutted with sentimental novels by women, but in fact, James Raven estimates that women contributed only 14% of new titles printed between 1750 and 1769. The real upwards trend in women writers came in the later eighteenth century. However, Raven also comments that between 1763 and 1764 there was a brief peak in which between a third and a quarter of all novels were by women.⁵⁸² This fluctuation may have been due to a change in the perceived market for women writers on the part of the writers themselves, who published once only to fall into oblivion, with only a few continuing on to publish subsequently. Similarly it may have been a response from the booksellers, who identified a possible market trend and accepted more

⁵⁸² James Raven, *British Fiction 1750-1770: A Chronological Checklist of Prose Fiction Printed in Britain and Ireland* (London: Associated University Presses, 1987), 18.

women-authored novels, but took fright when the market began to appear saturated with women-authored novels in the eyes of reviewers. Or it may be a random anomaly. Either way, whether by accident or design, the Minifies chose a particularly opportune moment to release their first work to the public eye. It is clear that from the outset they hoped to distinguish themselves as authors of a certain type. They were vigorous in marketing themselves as working from an idealised, sentimental writing community, but one in which the claims of fashionable consumption hold a powerful sway.

The publishing details of *Lady Frances* show the Minifies portraying their virtuous, somewhat retired but not rustic, participation in a heterosocial community; but a community which strongly suggests the primacy of women and sororal ties. In writing fiction, the Minifies fictionalise their authorial selves, designing personae that fit with the kinds of characters presented in their novels. The title page of *Lady Frances* is unusual in that it proclaims itself to have been ‘Written by the Miss MINIFIES, *Of Fairwater, in Somersetshire*’. The use of the name is atypical in itself – neither Frances Brooke nor Frances Sheridan, both publishing around the same time, put their names to the title page of their early works, preferring to market later novels as ‘by the author of...’, thereby creating a career narrative that built on earlier successes. Raven notes that the Minifies were two of a very few women writers who put their name to their work.⁵⁸³ This confident laying-claim on the part of the Minifies may be designed to stake a claim to a certain type of authorial mode. Schellenberg observes, ‘Clearly, it was to the Minifies’ advantage to establish a “brand name” associated with the positive markers of female sex, youth, and country residence,

⁵⁸³ Raven, *British Fiction, 1750-1770*, 22.

which could be attached to each new product as a guarantee of safe amusement'.⁵⁸⁴ To this summary might be added the desire to foreground the fact that the Minifies were sisters, invoking the kind of writing community that the Minifies represent in their text, one in which young women exchange letters, stories and gossip in ways that highlight their sentimental identification with one another, inviting the reader to become a participant in the epistolary network alongside the characters.

The reference to Fairwater in Somersetshire instantly situates the sisters outside the metropolis, writing from the kind of virtuous rural setting of which they make so much in the novel. Indeed, the very first sentence is, 'Charming delightful Ashley! how reluctantly did I quit thy peaceful solitude for the noise and hurry of London'.⁵⁸⁵ Fairwater was a real place, located just outside Taunton. However, the Minifies were far from living in rural retirement, and far from unfashionable. That they were able to get their novel printed by the fashionable Dodsley brothers suggests connections beyond their immediate social circle. Rivers places the Minifies as living together in Bath at this early stage of their careers.⁵⁸⁶ Certainly the range of polite connections detailed in their subscription list suggests that they were at least occasional visitors to Bath, and active participants in the social scene there. Part of Margaret Minifie's novel *The Cottage* (1769) is set there.

It is possible that the Minifie sisters moved to Bath in the late 1760s, but we can conjecture from the list of subscribers that, even if the Minifies had only limited connections with Bath, they had certainly taken to heart the social ethos around which the resort town functioned even at this early stage of their career. As Peter Borsay has shown, resort towns often served as 'fountains of civilization' in this period,

⁵⁸⁴ Schellenberg, *Professionalization*, 132.

⁵⁸⁵ Margaret and Susannah Minifie, *The Histories of Lady Frances S____, and Lady Caroline S____, written by the Miss Minifies, of Fairwater, in Somersetshire*, 3 vols. (London, 1763), I, 1.

⁵⁸⁶ Rivers, *Literary memoirs of living authors of Great Britain*, I, 229.

providing a locale in which a quest for personal status through displays of dress, equipage and other luxury consumer goods could be combined with the practice of polite sociability and civilised artistic appreciation.⁵⁸⁷ To some extent this was true of the majority of urban centres, but Bath in particular experienced Borsay's 'urban renaissance' in a highly concentrated form, and its ethos provides certain suggestive ways of reading the Minifies' fiction. In resort towns like Bath we see a heady combination of conspicuous consumption and civilising sociability, reflected in the Minifies' novel, which considers sociability and sociable display as an item for consumption, as well as providing the means by which consumption might be reconfigured.

The enormous list of subscribers to *Lady Frances* reinforces the picture of the Minifies as anything but retired. Schellenberg observes that the Minifies offered readers 'contemporaneity and a flattering self-image in their references to fashionable amusements, familiar reading, and national celebrities', suggesting that while the Minifies apparently claim to write from a position of rural retirement, the implication was that retirement did not mean out of touch with fashionable culture.⁵⁸⁸ *Lady Frances* has 774 subscribers, a noticeable number of whom are Right Honourable or titled, including Lord North. The Bishop of Bath and Wells appears along with several Fellows of Exeter College, Oxford. One 'Mr. Calcot' (sic) is listed as having written *Thoughts Divine and Moral*; this is presumably meant to reflect well on the moral status of the Minifies.⁵⁸⁹ 339 of the subscribers to *Lady Frances* are women,

⁵⁸⁷ Peter Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance: Culture and Society in The Provincial Town, 1660-1770* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 261.

⁵⁸⁸ Schellenberg, *Professionalization*, 135.

⁵⁸⁹ This instance is also a demonstration of the literary networks operational in areas outside London. Wellins Calcott's *Thoughts Divine and Moral* was first published in London in 1756. Subsequently it went through multiple editions in various English cities, including Birmingham, Coventry and Manchester. The fifth edition, published in Exeter in 1764 includes 'Rev. Mr. Minifie, Rector of Staple-Grove, Somersetshire' among the list of subscribers. Until Calcott had subscribed to *Lady*

making 44% of the total number of subscribers. Among the female subscribers there are several sets of sisters each purchasing their own copy of the novel. The subscription list is not feminocentric, but heterosocial, mixing the metropolitan titled with the local gentry, and men with women, reflecting a polite, but aspirational sociability. However, the substantial number of female subscribers of whom many are sets of sisters reinforces a sense of feminocentric authorial community in which sisterhood plays a significant role.

The dedication to Lady Tynte is also of some significance. She is identified as being ‘Of Haswell, in Somersetshire’ in the dedication, but in fact Lady Anne Tynte lived at Halswell House in Bridgewater with her husband Sir Charles Tynte, Member of Parliament for Somerset until 1774 and patron to the Minifies’ father Reverend James Minifie, whose living was held at the behest of the Tynte family. Certain aspects of the Tyntes can also be traced in the novel. Sir Charles Tynte was an enthusiastic improver of his property. Like many fashionable landowners he refashioned the gardens at Halswell, building, for example, a Temple of Harmony in the classical style (which still stands today). The Minifies’ devotion of so much textual space to describing an elegantly improved garden suggests an appreciation of the kind of landscaping supposed to denote both taste and status. Both Tyntes subscribed to the novel, with a whole twelve sets for Lady Tynte. Again, we see the importance placed on local ties in local print culture, meant to suggest not that the Minifies are unfashionable, but that fashion and consumption were as powerful on a local level as in the metropolis. Their participation in local networks of fashion and influence projects an image of the Minifies as being rather like the subjects of their novels – women equally comfortable with sociable interaction and refined retirement.

Frances and until a copy of his *Thoughts* was published locally, Rev. Minifie does not subscribe. This is evidence of active literary networking at a local level in the South-West of England around this time.

The importance of Lady Tynte as dedicatee is partly in her gender – the dedication paints her as chaperone to the novel, saying, ‘We have ventured to send into the world, under your Ladyship’s protection, a Novel’, as if the novel is a virgin young woman about to be thrust upon the marriage market.⁵⁹⁰ The Minifies blur the distinction between themselves as authors and the novels they produce, projecting their novel into the position of a vulnerable young woman.

The dedication of an implicitly feminine novel to a female patron reinforces what Janet Todd calls a ‘sense of a primarily feminine culture’ in the Minifies’ writings.⁵⁹¹ Runge suggests that addresses to women and identification of the novel as female construct an idealised feminine coterie of author, text and reader: ‘By describing the novel itself as a female with whom the posited reader can identify, the constructed female readership serves as the site of fantasized femino-centric desire’.⁵⁹² The ‘feminine culture’ from within which the Minifies construct their authorship is a purposeful blend of the retired utopia of female friendship and the elevation of women’s contribution to the heterosocial sphere of polite conversation and fashionable consumption. In this way, they exploit various cultural ideas in order to claim possession of a mythical combination of feminine qualities: ideally virtuous, yet retaining a capacity to participate dynamically in heterosociable discourse, and thus claim a level of agency in the plots of their own lives.

By promoting the authors and their text as consumables within fashionable culture, *Lady Frances* shows what the Minifies believed would have current market appeal. Professional reviews, in holding the Minifies to an aesthetic standard that they had apparently already discarded, respond uneasily to the blatant appeal to market forces in the Minifies’ self-presentation; they can say little of the Minifies’ work that

⁵⁹⁰ Minifies, ‘To Lady Tynte’, in *Lady Frances*.

⁵⁹¹ Todd, ‘The Fantasy of Sensibility’, 191.

⁵⁹² Runge, *Gender and Language*, 92.

the Minifies have not already implied themselves. As with Elizabeth Carter's conflation of the Minifies' novels and the 'gossiping of Misses in a country town', reviews such as these are somewhat problematic, because they attempt to denigrate what the Minifies have already identified as their primary selling-point. It is implied that the critical standard is inappropriate for application to a mere consumer item. The *Critical Review* initially takes a tone of double-edged gallantry:

The taste for novel writing and novel reading is grown so universal amongst us, that it might be deemed a *crimen lesae majestatis* against the public, to call it in question; more especially as it would be encroaching on the privileges and pleasures of the fair sex, who have an indisputable right to amuse themselves in whatever manner they please: we cannot, therefore, but be of opinion that the Miss Minifies, of Fairwater, in Somersetshire, were, at least, very innocently, if not usefully, employed, in writing the *Histories of Lady Frances and Lady Caroline S___*, a work greatly superior to the common run of loves, adventures, memoirs, &c. which have appeared for some years past.⁵⁹³

The reviewer implies that out of all the bad women's novels in the world, *Lady Frances* is one of the better ones. The review goes on to reprint the most sentimental scene in the book (the death scene of Sophia Worthley), as if to drive home the point that women's novels are primarily about scenes of sensibility. Runge argues that gallant criticism projects an 'illusion of female mastery' of the novel, implicitly assigning the novel the sole task of exploring and controlling the feminine.⁵⁹⁴ In refusing to make a difference between writing novels and reading them, the reviewer suggests that there is little difference in skill or motivation between the two, denying the possibility of professional writing of genre fiction. Market-driven novels are typically aligned with women and their 'amusements', a claim that situates the novel in the context of leisured women's daily lives. The review ends on a positive note, predicting that the Minifies will 'one day rank amongst the first authoresses of this

⁵⁹³ 'Review of *The Histories of Lady Frances S___ and Lady Caroline S___*', *Critical Review*, XVI (London, 1763), 108-117, 108.

⁵⁹⁴ Runge, *Gender and Language*, 86.

authoress-creating age'.⁵⁹⁵ Even here, however, there is a shadow of excess, a suggestion that the 'authoresses' are too many to enumerate.

The *Critical Review* strikes a similar, but less indulgent tone in reviewing *The Picture*, the Minifies' second collaborative novel:

We should be sorry to say any thing severe upon female productions, as we would rather prompt than suppress any attempts of the ladies that may tend to amuse, if not to instruct, the gay circle of their acquaintance, which the miss Minifies (or their bookseller) seem to have particularly studied, as these volumes are peculiarly calculated to gratify a certain set of readers who pique themselves more upon the number of the pages they peruse, than the knowledge they obtain from them.⁵⁹⁶

The difference between the number of pages perused and the content of those pages draws the key difference between amusing novels, that can be consumed and discarded, and forms of literature that also instruct. The emphasis on writing to amuse one's acquaintance, rather than the public at large, works to disavow any level of professionalism in the Minifies' authorship. Again, backhanded gallantry tends to undermine 'female productions' – by claiming to be sorry to say anything severe the reviewer marks his desire to be severe.

Other professional reviews of the Minifies' works use a different strategy, again suggesting proliferation: reviewing their novels after a review of a different novel, and merely noting that the Minifies' novel is to all intents and purposes the same. The *Monthly Review* reviews *Lady Frances* immediately after a glowing review of Brooke's *History of Lady Julia Mandeville*, which compares Brooke's work favourably to Richardson's. The review of *Lady Frances* runs simply:

Another imitation of Richardson's manner. It is a sober, moral tale; and presents us with some affecting situations; but, on the whole, we think the *Miss Minifies*

⁵⁹⁵ 'Review of *The Histories of Lady Frances S___ and Lady Caroline S___*', *Critical Review*, XVI, 117.

⁵⁹⁶ 'Review of *The Picture*', *Critical Review*, XXI (London, 1766), 288-90, 289-90.

of *Fairwater*, if there are such names, have not yet eclipsed the merit of Clarissa, Roderic Random, or Tom Jones.⁵⁹⁷

This reviewer presents the novel as one of a number of similar novels, rather than a work that stands alone. As Schellenberg points out, the qualifier, ‘if there are such names’ registers the recognition that the Minifies have established a saleable brand.⁵⁹⁸ Otherwise, the reviewer flatly states that *Lady Frances* is not as good as male-authored novels, whose ‘merits’ are understood to be so entrenched in criticism that they need not be enumerated. Despite the patronising tones taken by reviewers, to some extent they responded to the Minifies’ presentation of themselves in marketing their novels.

While such reviews attempt to bring the marketplace under control by constructing an imagined reader who would consume novels on the basis of aesthetic standards rather than by length or level of amusement, the Minifies’ deliberate appeal to a reading community that rejects these standards always undermines their efforts; reviewers are forced to acknowledge the continuance of proliferation and imitation in the print market. These reviews suggest that novels such as those written by the Minifies had to negotiate a number of issues even when writing purely for a consumer market. In their negotiation of consumer print culture, the Minifies seem to suggest, not that the market or the reader needs reform, but that there is a need for amusing novels that, if not instructive, are at least not damaging. Although the Minifies insist that their productions are moral tales, ‘written with the warmest sentiments of virtue and honour’ to abide by contemporary standards of moral fiction, they make no secret of the fact that they write primarily to ‘amuse’.⁵⁹⁹ In order to meet both the demands of morality and of amusement, the novel is obliged to perform some fantastic plot

⁵⁹⁷ ‘Review of *The Histories of Lady Frances S___ and Lady Caroline S___*’, *Monthly Review*, XXIX, (London, 1763), 160.

⁵⁹⁸ Schellenberg, *Professionalization*, 132.

⁵⁹⁹ Minifies, ‘To Lady Tynte’, in *Lady Frances*.

twists, attempting to simultaneously vindicate youthful autonomy, and parental jurisdiction.

***Lady Frances* and consumption**

Writing in a highly feminocentric context, in which the model for individual autonomy and desire was still fixed on the scandalous, immoral, amatory fiction of the early eighteenth century, the Minifies are forced to negotiate a rather contradictory course. In a sense their situation is no different from Warner's formulation of how writers of the 1740s by making prose fiction 'realistic', moralised – partly by incorporating the plots of amorous novels – and 'licensed' what became known as the novel.⁶⁰⁰ In other words, argues Warner, Fielding and more particularly, Richardson, reinvented the market itself, creating a demand for moral, realistic fictions, where prose fiction previously had been understood to be almost solely for escapist amusement. His argument, while highly relevant to the novels of the Minifies, does not cover their particular brand of feminocentric escapism. *Lady Frances* needed ways of 'licensing' itself and its consumption that did not rely solely on claims to realism. To some extent the Minifies were able to exploit the sentimental code that associated taste and moral rectitude with the capacity to appreciate displays of suffering. We can see appeals to the sentimental reader in such scenes as the death of Sophia Worthley, surely one of the most overwrought deathbed scenes in the history of fiction. However, they use other strategies as well. *Lady Frances* uses a display of consumption to justify itself and the terms on which it exists, and it explores women's position in relation to consumption. The novel's definition of reading pleasure, or what exactly constitutes an amusing fantasy, is significant.

⁶⁰⁰ Warner, *Licensing Entertainment*, especially Ch. 1, 'The Rise of the Novel in the Eye of Literary History', 1-44.

In several ways, *Lady Frances* aligns itself with a specific kind of consumer culture, a culture that by mid-century had affiliations with politeness and sociability. A capacity to purchase consumer goods for display was a mark of civilisation, reflecting positively on oneself and on the nation as a whole. Guest observes that, in particular, the woman of fashion began to acquire significance not just as an embodiment of the corruptions of commercial luxury, but as a sign of polished politeness. By mid-century, she can be read as the fruit of national commercial prosperity, and a figure of civilised sensibility and humanity.⁶⁰¹ Harriet Guest identifies the contradictions in the newer ways of reading the fashionable woman, as potentially both luxurious and civilised, pointing to ‘the capacity of consumerism to engender a newly fantastic sensibility, poised between the associations of feminine desire and display with the associations of sexual promiscuity on the one hand, and an increased humanity and superadded civility on the other’.⁶⁰² Consumer goods also carried potentially negative associations with luxury and excess, signalling dissipation.

Women of the middle and upper classes became increasingly symbols of consumption, both as consumers, and as potential items for consumption themselves. Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace points out that the eighteenth-century saw a rise in the commodification of women through pornography, arguing that ‘British culture projected onto the female subject both its fondest wishes for the transforming power of consumerism and its deepest anxieties about the corrupting influences of goods’.⁶⁰³ The Minifies’ marketing technique of conflation of their own authorial personae and the characters in their novels suggests that they deliberately exploited a market that

⁶⁰¹ Guest, *Small Change*, 85.

⁶⁰² Guest, *Small Change*, 86.

⁶⁰³ Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects: Women, Shopping and Business in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 5.

sought to consume women in the form of feminocentric texts. *Lady Frances* seeks to mediate between the positive and negative poles of consumer culture by making women both the agents and the objects of consumption, suggesting refinement rather than excess. It thereby illustrates the pleasures and contradictions of consumption for women.

Early in the novel, Lucy attends a masquerade, at which the reader gets the first glimpse of Lady Frances. The masquerade is a marker of fantasy; it is also a very significant type of fashionable amusement. G.J. Barker-Benfield makes links between the masquerade and the novel in the opportunities it offered women for consumerism and self-fashioning: 'like the masquerade, the novel made possible the expression of female wishes, the proliferation of self-conceptions and gender transformations'.⁶⁰⁴ Debate over the propriety of masquerades, particularly for young women, was current well into the early nineteenth century, and the association of masquerades with promiscuity and inappropriate display were well-known, and were probably at the core of their particular appeal. In the way the masquerade is presented, we are meant to read the characters as fashionable, but virtuous.

The authors exploit the rakish associations of the masquerade to maintain the interest of the reader. For example, Lucy comments that she and her company are 'promiscuously engaged' by a variety of characters including kings, chimney-sweepers and the devil.⁶⁰⁵ The inclination to dress as a chimney-sweeper or the devil reveals the carnivalesque at the heart of the masquerade, the sense that everything is disordered and available for disruption, including social hierarchy and even morality.

⁶⁰⁴ G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 185. For a sustained analysis of the eighteenth-century masquerade see Terry Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnavalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1986). Castle calls the masquerade a 'machine for feminine pleasure' (254) and 'not so much a festive hiatus as a way of articulating a subterranean will to power' (256).

⁶⁰⁵ Minifies, *Lady Frances*, I, 10-11.

Yet the text works hard to maintain the innocuousness of this scene, and to defend the characters' strict morality. Lucy manifests some discomfort with her dress:

I have already told you that mine was of my brother's choosing; and represented the dress of Diana: never had I such difficulty in complying with any request of his, knowing myself incapable of moving in so exalted a sphere. – My robe was azure, spangled with stars: on my head I bore a large silver crescent, in my hand a bow and quiver. The oddity of my habit drew on me more questions than I could answer with propriety; and the wittings being far more numerous than the wits, by a thousand impertinencies gave me fresh cause to repent of my complaisance. I am not fond of this diversion; and if ever I go to another; it must be in a domino.⁶⁰⁶

Lucy, having been absolved of the responsibility for her dress, is given the opportunity to experience being the centre of attention, and an object of desire, while disavowing that she is the kind of woman who would consciously engage in promiscuous display. Moreover, the unwanted attention of the 'wittings' suggests that a woman who displays herself is thereby inviting impertinent advances from the men around her. Knowing that Lucy must claim, by the tenets of modest femininity, that she is 'not fond of this diversion' illustrates the double bind of the fashionable woman. To not go at all would be prudish; to go and enjoy herself would be dissipated and vain.

By contrast with the difficult situation in which Lucy finds herself, her description of Lady Frances is unmarked by discomfort:

Her hair, brought over her head in a large tuft, supported the circle of royalty that adorned it; being a coronet of jewels: the shining brown, and fineness of its texture, adding lustre to their natural brilliancy. She had a robe and sandals of the purest white; richly embroidered with gold: and her whole form was so noble, that those who stood near her, appeared diminutive, as wanting charms to attract a look; while she, without seeming conscious of her power, engrossed them all.⁶⁰⁷

Here Lucy visually 'consumes' Lady Frances; by displaying her appreciation of her fine clothes, and her beauty, she is able to signal her own position as a woman of taste

⁶⁰⁶ Minifies, *Lady Frances*, I, 18-19.

⁶⁰⁷ Minifies, *Lady Frances*, I, 16.

and fashion without being forced into the awkward double bind of personal display. Scopic appreciation of idealised femininity is posited as much more stable than any attempt at emulation. The scene reveals that ideal femininity is a fantasy for tasteful consumption, rather than a model for women readers to imitate.

Jones argues that mid-century discourses on beauty inaugurate ‘a new form of sociability, which, though it originates in the plenitudes of polite conversation, takes as its primary symbol the spectacle of a virtuous woman’.⁶⁰⁸ *Lady Frances* participates in the association of beauty with virtuous femininity in that the characters signal their moral worth particularly through their refined appreciation for virtuous female beauty. As their impressions are communicated to each other via letters, they help to create a sense of community bound together by shared tastes, and maintained by invitations to participate in consuming the spectacle of virtuous femininity. However, as Jones points out, such discourses in practice tend to threaten to become the antithesis of virtue, and degenerate into ‘folly, luxury, effeminacy’.⁶⁰⁹ Interestingly, one of the effects of the text’s commodification of beauty is that it diverts appreciation of the female form onto other women. Male appreciation of women’s bodies is too evocative of sexual desire. In particular, all-male communities are represented as encouraging sexual immorality.

It is during an alcohol-fuelled discussion of ‘the power of beauty’ at Lord Edgmoore’s house that Lord Ormsby is encouraged by his male companions to seek out Miss Dalton.⁶¹⁰ Subsequently we hear Lord Ormsby’s description of Miss Dalton in church (after having heard her described by a local peasant):

The good man’s plain but beautiful simile of an angel came fresh to my memory, as I had leisure to examine her person, to which it was entirely

⁶⁰⁸ Jones, *Gender and the Formation of Taste*, 115.

⁶⁰⁹ Jones, *Gender and the Formation of Taste*, 116.

⁶¹⁰ Minifies, *Lady Frances*, II, 213.

applicable. Indeed I was struck with the same wonder at first seeing her, as if till then I had been used to nothing but deformity.⁶¹¹

This scene attempts to limit any amatory connotations through its devotional setting, and avoidance of any specific description of Miss Dalton's beauty. Nevertheless, Lord Ormsby's designs on Miss Dalton are purely sexual at this point. Elsewhere he appreciates her virtue and her learning, describing her as having 'perfect knowledge' of Greek and Latin poetry and a 'sprightly wit temper'd with modest severity, conveying all the awe of virtue'.⁶¹² However, these other virtues only inflame his desire – the text demonstrates that virtue and beauty inspire lust in men rather than refined or sentimental admiration. Sir William, Lucy's virtuous suitor, concentrates on her perfections of mind over body, signalling his own refinement: '[T]o her face I am yet a stranger; when I spoke of her as a fine woman, I meant her shape, air and manner; but above all, the beauties of her mind: for without them, none of your sex, my sister, can be truly lovely'.⁶¹³ Sir William's definition of beauty as a function of the mind rather than the body permits him to maintain his participation in the community of taste without raising the spectre of sexual desire.

By contrast, when Lucy describes Lady Frances, she is permitted to dwell more lingeringly on her physical form:

Any thing half so lovely, half so enchantingly majestic as she appeared to me at that instant, had I never before seen. Sleep, all-healing sleep, had given her new beauties, and tinged her snowy skin with purer vermilion than art and labour together could have bestowed on their most assiduous votaries. – Her dress was negligently becoming, put on as if she only thought it necessary, not ornamental. – It was a fine white muslin negligee, wrought in Dresden sprigs; fancied with elegance, and chiefly of her own performance. – Her hood, ruffles, and handkerchief, were all made of Brussels lace, setting off to advantage the natural clearness of her complexion.⁶¹⁴

⁶¹¹ Minifies, *Lady Frances*, II, 223.

⁶¹² Minifies, *Lady Frances*, II, 234; 235.

⁶¹³ Minifies, *Lady Frances*, I, 25.

⁶¹⁴ Minifies, *Lady Frances*, II, 90-91.

Lucy's description of Lady Frances's dress as 'necessary, not ornamental' signifies the rejection of luxury of dress and proper feminine refined taste – both on Lady Frances's part, and on Lucy's part for being able to recognise it. Lucy's appreciation of Lady Frances's physique displays Lucy's artistic taste. What we see in *Lady Frances* is a diversion of dangerous discourses of heterosexual desire into a homosocial feminocentric context. Within a heterosociable community, women are portrayed as having a greater capacity to arbitrate over matters of taste where the standard of taste is a beautiful and virtuous woman. However, rather than neutralising desire, such scenes merely shift the location of desire to a homosocial community. Lucy's claim that she has never seen anything 'half so lovely, half so enchantingly majestic' lends a force to her words that invokes the trope of the ardently prostrate suitor.

This quasi-homoerotic trope recurs again and again in *Lady Frances* in different situations, suggesting that one of the means by which a feminocentric writing community can be constructed and maintained is through shared consumption of the female form. The act of consumption implicates the reader, who consumes the text and the women in it, and thereby participates in the shared pleasure of the epistolary community. Consumption of women by other women implies a safer context for both consumption and for feminine display, implicitly avoiding the problem of overt public display and (hetero)sexual desire, and privileging bonds of admiration between women. Where female bonds are initiated through acts of consumption, they are cemented through the construction of a relationship of sisterhood.

Sisterhood in *Lady Frances*

In *Lady Frances*, sisterhood is a powerful trope for denoting the importance of female relations within a heterosociable world. Although *Lady Frances* is ultimately a conservative text, it suggests ways in which sisterhood – and siblinghood – can be an occasion for women to assert a level of authority in a heterosocial sphere. Cooperation between siblings, particularly sisters, is a theme in *Lady Frances*; on several occasions, tragedy is averted through the intervention and mediation of sisters or sister figures. Sibling bonds are generally important in *Lady Frances*. They are part of the common fantasy of certain literary genres in which the younger generation resolve problems themselves without adult intervention. That we see this type of fantasy at work in *Lady Frances* is a powerful suggestion of its having identified, and aimed itself at an adolescent or youthful market in which it is often acknowledged that parental power or authority can be arbitrary and unsympathetic, without any attempt to suggest that it should not exist. However, for novels like this one, the absence of parental authority is used to demonstrate the impossibility of reconciling patriarchal strictures with personal autonomy. Only through fantastic plot twists can these be resolved. Moreover, it is more often the women in the text who are concerned with upholding patriarchal standards, suggesting that their freedom of action comes at a price. Nevertheless, there is considerable flexibility between siblings in this novel, and the happy ending is represented by the formation of a community built around sibling, and more particularly sororal links. Arguably, the construction of sisterhood by the means of the circulation of writing is a central goal of the text.

In the depiction of brother-sister relations in *Lady Frances*, sisters are accorded a high degree of influence and arbitration in the lives of their brothers. On Lord Ormsby's repentance of his brush with vice in his attempt to trick and seduce

Miss Dalton, he charges Sir William to reveal all to his sister and Juliet and begs them to help him resolve the problem: 'Expose my crime to my dearest sister, convince her of my repentance, and let your petition be joined to miss (sic) Hamilton's, to prevail on her pardon to me, and think on some means to alleviate the distress of this admirable girl'.⁶¹⁵ Lady Lucy is not only her brother's moral guide – it is her pardon he asks for – but his rescuer, through her willingness to visit Miss Dalton and thus preserve her reputation. Lady Lucy also says that had her brother's fault been irreparable, in other words, had he seduced Miss Dalton, 'I would never more have consented to see him'.⁶¹⁶

This plot feature accords a high level of both moral power and power of action to sisters. As Lord Ormsby himself says, 'I shall be finely managed between two such girls; but how bad must be the crime, that cannot bear the gentle reproofs of a sister and a friend?'⁶¹⁷ Throughout all the drama, the Earl, the father of Lord Ormsby and Lady Lucy, is kept wholly in the dark as to the misdeeds of his son and heir. Juliet advises Lucy to keep the matter quiet, suggesting that to reveal it would be 'productive of very bad consequences'.⁶¹⁸ In fact, the Earl chooses to remain ignorant, as Lucy describes:

Indeed, indeed (he kindly held his hand before my mouth) you shall not disclose it, my Lucy; could it give me pleasure, I am sure you would be the first in communicating it; and, if the contrary, why should I desire to destroy the happiness I now enjoy? – Such a father! O my Juliet, heaven grant his peace may never be disturbed.⁶¹⁹

The gesture of holding a hand across Lucy's mouth to prevent her telling him anything he would not wish to hear devolves responsibility on Lucy for resolving the situation. Lucy responds by taking the patriarchal burden on herself and strongly

⁶¹⁵ Minifies, *Lady Frances*, III, 11.

⁶¹⁶ Minifies, *Lady Frances*, III, 14.

⁶¹⁷ Minifies, *Lady Frances*, III, 55.

⁶¹⁸ Minifies, *Lady Frances*, III, 111.

⁶¹⁹ Minifies, *Lady Frances*, III, 114-5.

advising her brother to conquer his passion for Miss Dalton. Ultimately, however, Lord Ormsby's taste is vindicated by the discovery that Miss Dalton is, in fact, Lady Caroline, Lady Frances's sister, and thus a worthy match for him.

Although the text appears to advocate the values of obedience and submission to authority, it implicitly undermines its own overt ideology by refusing to condemn those characters who fail to live up to the values it asserts. For example, Lord Henry gives a moral talk to Lady Frances on the value of submission to parental authority even when parents are behaving tyrannically:

The utmost failure in a parent's duty, for a duty is certainly owing from them, does not excuse the slightest breach in that of a child; who owes to them its existence. On the contrary, how meritorious is a strict observance of it, when *their* behaviour is not altogether such as it ought to be. It is this circumstance only, which can make obedience meritorious.⁶²⁰

Lord Henry's fine words about submitting oneself to the will of Providence are exposed as useless in the face of Lady Frances's experience in London. She is expected to marry a man she abhors and, trapped by her parents' commands, elopes with Charles Worthley, the man she loves. When her parents cast her out, she seeks, and finds, succour from Lucy, who receives her as a sister, and who will later become her sister through the marriage of Miss Dalton and Lord Ormsby. The text's failure to condemn Lady Frances for her scandalous and shocking act, directly contradicts the ideology of submission that Lord Henry has been preaching. Tragedy is averted through the availability of a sister-figure, and the daughter's right to self-determination is vindicated at the expense of parental demands. In both the cases of Lady Frances and Miss Dalton, patriarchal values are set against youthful self-determination. Plot twists permit autonomy to stand and be vindicated in this novel, exposing autonomy as a novelistic fantasy. However, in both cases, the mediation of a

⁶²⁰ Minifies, *Lady Frances*, II, 14-15.

sister-figure permits a more flexible perspective, an alternative to a dramatic conflict, providing the means by which the classic tragic stories can be modified. In both cases, a lone woman is abandoned or cast out, with her reputation potentially in tatters. Both find safety, if not resolution, through the intervention of a woman who will ultimately become a sister.

The novel demonstrates that the bonds of sisterhood are a crucial familiar relation, and the means by which communities are held together. By the end of the novel, nearly all the young characters have become siblings through the bonds of marriage. Lady Caroline's marriage to Lord Ormsby, Lady Lucy's marriage to Sir William, and the discovery of Lady Frances's sibling relationship with Lady Caroline (formerly Miss Dalton) cement the community that has previously been held together purely by bonds of mutual admiration. What is interesting, however, is that the bonds between women, whether related or not, are shown to facilitate the marriage bond by pre-empting it in one way or another. Juliet and Sir William are twins, 'thought the exact resemblance of each other'.⁶²¹ By marrying Sir William, Lucy gains the fruits of her friendship with Juliet, as if she is marrying both brother and sister. Juliet comments to Lucy that she will never give her heart away in marriage 'till I am certain it will meet with no rougher usage than you have shewn it'.⁶²² Although Lucy meets Miss Dalton after Lord Ormsby does, it is she who, to all intents and purposes, conducts the marriage proposal after Miss Dalton is discovered to be Lady Caroline. Soon after the discovery, Juliet narrates a conversation held between Lucy, Lady Frances and Lady Caroline. Lucy has just raised the issue of her brother:

Indeed, my dearest Caroline, said Lady Frances, I am so poor, that you must consent to return some of those obligations, which, without your assistance, I cannot pay the least part of: I mean not, my dear, the bestowing yourself and

⁶²¹ Minifies, *Lady Frances*, I, 23-4.

⁶²² Minifies, *Lady Frances*, I, 77.

fortune on Lord Ormsby, because it is what his birth and merit intitles him to expect; the manner of bestowing them, is only left us to express a sense of those favours we can never cancel, being of no less a nature than both our preservation in distress. – Lady Caroline could no longer withstand it, and throwing her arms about Lady Lucy’s neck, I am all your own, my amiable friend, she cried, I gave you my heart when you last blessed me with your presence at R--- It is still yours, do with it as you please, command it where you please, and you shall ever find it an obedient one. – My delighted Lucy returned her caresses, thanking her for the power with which she was invested; saying, that before she would deliver it up, she must first convince her it would be to the sincerest convert beauty and innocence ever made.⁶²³

Here Lady Frances posits Lady Caroline’s marriage to Lord Ormsby as a favour to Lucy, rather than as a result of Lord Ormsby’s personal qualities. Lady Caroline allows Lucy to have the direction of where her heart should be bestowed and Lucy stands in for Lord Ormsby in persuading her that he is in love with her.

The friendships developed among these women not only facilitate the marriages but in many ways take precedence, or even contest the primacy of marriage to a young woman’s life. Chris Roulston’s examination of visual representations of sisterhood in the period can be usefully applied to the Minifies’ work: ‘The harmony achieved through similitude rather than difference and contrast, which defines marital portraiture, creates a quality of intimacy that threatens to displace the heterosexual ideal’.⁶²⁴ The intimacy of the relations between the women in *Lady Frances*, even to the extent that they act as stand-ins in the romantic circumstances of a marriage proposal, mean that many of the most emotionally climactic scenes in the novel occur between women.

The visual appreciation of consumption, combined with the emotional intensity of the bonds of sisterhood and sororal friendships, create a heady mix in which marriage is considered to be an important, but not necessarily the sole, event or relationship for a woman. The way that marriage is integrated into already-existing

⁶²³ Minifies, *Lady Frances*, III, 231-33.

⁶²⁴ Chris Roulston, ‘Framing Sensibility: The Female Couple in Art and Narrative’, *Studies in English Literature*, 46/3 (Summer, 2006), 641-655, 645.

ties of siblinghood or friendship may also constitute a significant fantasy: that heterosexual matrimonial imperatives and women's friendships need not necessarily be at odds. Donoghue observes that 'by the mid-century marriage was fairly commonly described as the funeral or grave of friendship'.⁶²⁵ Sisterhood, like the plot of a romantic novel, ends with marriage. Although this is true of *Lady Frances* to some extent, the marriages at the end of the novel are both the standard resolution to a comic romance plot and a means of cementing female friendship and community through the creation of sibling ties.

Sisters in collaboration: women reading and writing

The display of women reading and writing letters that is the hallmark of epistolary fiction brings together the two major themes of sisterhood and consumption, and indicates the exact function of the Minifies' literary collaboration. It is through writing and the sharing of text that a community predicated on sororal bonds is performed. The nexus of shared literary pleasure is premised on communal acts of consumption. Lucy comments that Juliet's custom of always writing is 'A very good one...as it entertains your friends'.⁶²⁶ Structurally, the novel enacts first a display of shared consumption of a sentimental tale between Lucy and Juliet, and then moves from passive consumption to active participation, engaging in a fantasy of participation and construction of sister-bonds that has its roots in consumption.

By showing the characters entering into the story they have been consuming, and becoming active agents in its resolution, *Lady Frances* weaves a fantasy of agency for its readers that is predicated not merely on the display of feminine subjectivity through writing, or the passive consumption of scenes of virtue in

⁶²⁵ Donoghue, *Passions between Women*, 125.

⁶²⁶ Minifies, *Lady Frances*, III, 117.

distress, but on practical intervention into the feminine plot. The novel displays women reading and writing letters to one another, constructing an epistolary network whose bonds resemble those of sisterhood, and are ultimately formalised as such. Sisterhood therefore offers a position for the reader to occupy in consuming the novel; by constructing sisterhood, the Minifies also construct their readers' position in relation to the text. Readers are invited to become 'sisters' to the women in the novel; refiguring consumption and its attendant objectification of women, the novel offers community-building to its readers, based on the motif of sharing stories of remarkable women.

The practice of collecting exemplary learned women that gained momentum at mid-century and in subsequent decades can be linked to the popular print market and to consumerism, as well as being seen in a polite and cultured context. Paula McDowell situates eighteenth-century anthologies of learned women in the context of the 'female worthies' tradition in popular culture, noting the increasing homogenisation of the ideal of female worth in the eighteenth century and comparing anthologies of significant women to collector's items for consumption, 'like artifacts in a cabinet'.⁶²⁷ McDowell notes that the collector's attitude to the life and works of significant women tended to be less analytical than adoring, drawing on the supposed soothing and erotic appeal of virtue.⁶²⁸ *Lady Frances* to some extent thematises the consumption of ideal women, but by other women rather than by men. Lady Frances and Miss Dalton are represented as female worthies in the sense that they conform to the ideal of awe-inspiring beauty, virtue and even learning. Lady Frances is shown reading Seneca, and a supposed poem of hers, 'To Hope' is included in the text.⁶²⁹ We

⁶²⁷ Paula McDowell, 'Consuming Women: The Life of the "Literary Lady" as Popular Culture in Eighteenth-Century England', *Genre*, 26/2-3 (Summer/Fall, 1993), 219-252, 237.

⁶²⁸ McDowell, 'Consuming Women', 238.

⁶²⁹ Minifies, *Lady Frances*, I, 178; 50-52.

are told that Miss Dalton has ‘a perfect knowledge’ of Greek and Latin, and that her particular qualities of virtue and education are erotically appealing to Lord Ormsby.⁶³⁰

Lady Frances reproduces the idea that pleasure can be gained from reading accounts and histories of virtuous women, but situates that pleasure firmly in a feminocentric sphere in which erotic conquest is displaced onto the maintenance of bonds of friendship and support among women. The undertones of homoeroticism identifiable in this novel are present because the Minifies transpose tropes that would have been identified as erotic in a heterosexual context onto relations between women.

The context of the consumption of the stories of Lady Frances and Miss Dalton is highly feminocentric, suggesting that pleasure in reading is a shared activity among women, and a means of maintaining community, rather than an act of private consumption. Much of the story of Lady Frances is narrated by herself, but transcribed by Lucy over a number of letters to Juliet. This provides the occasion for Lucy and Juliet to reflect on the story they are hearing and for the novel to represent the shared pleasure of mutual consumption of stories, and enact scenes of shared reading. Lucy, writing to Juliet, explains that she will transcribe the narrative, ‘which my giving you in her own words will not only entertain myself, but raise in your breast those delightful sensations, ever sure to flow from a humane and gentle disposition’.⁶³¹ The story is embedded in the context of its shared consumption by two women; both entertainment and the power of sentiment to affirm virtue are asserted. It is made clear that Juliet also shares the story with the aunt and cousins with whom she lives, when she says that ‘we all’ commiserate with Lady Frances and her treatment by her mother.⁶³²

⁶³⁰ Minifies, *Lady Frances*, II, 234.

⁶³¹ Minifies, *Lady Frances*, I, 36-37.

⁶³² Minifies, *Lady Frances*, I, 62.

At the same time, the reader is given the distinct impression that by sharing stories of virtuous women, the ‘common cause’ of the whole sex is advanced.⁶³³ Lucy complacently reflects: ‘Every instance of merit in one of our own sex, undoubtedly reflects a degree of lustre on the whole’.⁶³⁴ Although Lady Lucy calls her reporting of Lady Frances’s narrative ‘an empty echo’, she also confesses to feeling pride that she has been granted the privilege of reporting it.⁶³⁵ This expands the idea of novel reading beyond the passive pleasure of private sympathetic identification, invoking a wider female community symbolised by the epistolary network within the novel modelling appropriate reading practice. The novel does not interrogate the sentimental community it constructs in the main narrative, but by placing this narrative within the context of an epistolary exchange between two virtuous, but non-heroic women, it holds out a fantasy of community building based on shared, specifically literary, pleasure between women.

In particular, the novel locates pleasure in reporting tales of virtuous women without suggesting that emulation is either possible or advisable. Although Lucy and Juliet make clear their pleasure in reading and sharing the story of Lady Frances, and uncritically endorse her trembling sensibility, they rarely display it themselves. While the narrators take pleasure in holding up Lady Frances as the epitome of virtuous womanhood, reaffirming their bond through the sharing of stories of virtue in distress, they themselves are much more practical in their outlook on the world. This can be seen particularly in their shared attitudes to love and marriage. Lucy describes a proposal she has received and expresses her determination, ‘to insist on the prerogative my father has given me, to approve or disapprove, as I think fit’.⁶³⁶ She

⁶³³ Minifies, *Lady Frances*, II, 4.

⁶³⁴ Minifies, *Lady Frances*, II, 3.

⁶³⁵ Minifies, *Lady Frances*, II, 4.

⁶³⁶ Minifies, *Lady Frances*, I, 8.

casually dismisses the rejected suitor: 'I have now reason to hope it will be the last trouble I shall receive from that quarter'.⁶³⁷ Juliet, too, refers to suitors lightly; on a man who is very fond of dogs, and 'enters a lady's drawing-room with the same ease he would his kennel', she comments: 'This gentleman has lately honour'd me with an offer to be at the head of his pack; but I should have so many rivals, that upon my word I cannot accept it'.⁶³⁸ Their lightness mirrors the novel's treatment of the match between Lady Lucy and Sir William, Juliet's brother. Juliet teases Lady Lucy about her brother's affection, and the progress of their romance is almost never referenced. Juliet once goes so far as to inform her correspondent, Harriot, that her brother 'has the honour to have his proposals meet a favourable reception from the Earl, and Lady Lucy who sees his merit, and generously owns her approbation of it'.⁶³⁹

The matter-of-fact way in which this match is handled in the narrative contrasts strongly with the minute, emotionally loaded descriptions of the love affairs of the two main characters. For example, Charles's reaction to being told that Lady Frances's parents disapprove of him as a husband: 'Must I, must I, my Lord, said he, relinquish all my fond expectations? May I not still love her? Oh, suffer me still to adore her. He could say no more'.⁶⁴⁰ The witty Juliet is particularly unfit to be a sentimental heroine: a classic 'lively' woman in the model of Richardson's Anna Howe, or Sarah Fielding's Cynthia, she is predominantly inclined to satirise the silliness of those around her, for example, in her description of Mr Bloomer, the beau, 'a coxcomb'.⁶⁴¹ She is also aware of the gap between ideologies of femininity and the experience of real women. After giving a conduct-book speech on proper behaviour during marriage, she reflects:

⁶³⁷ Minifies, *Lady Frances*, I, 9.

⁶³⁸ Minifies, *Lady Frances*, II, 120; 121.

⁶³⁹ Minifies, *Lady Frances*, II, 181.

⁶⁴⁰ Minifies, *Lady Frances*, II, 8.

⁶⁴¹ Minifies, *Lady Frances*, I, 70.

Shall I, quite unexperienced in these matters, pretend to prate? or am I sure of not running into those very follies I have been censuring. On examining my heart, I find it would be a little refractory, and it is likely I should not be that good humble domestic I have been describing.⁶⁴²

Juliet signals here that while she is schooled in the ideology of ideal femininity – which she identifies as being located in the domestic sphere – she is realistic about her own limited capacity to accede to the ideal. The structure of the story exposes the ideal as a convenient, even appealing fiction, and situates the representation of ideal femininity as a display for consumption rather than a model for emulation.

In consuming stories of ideal femininity, readers could only be passive. Consumption of scenes of distress was thought to provide the reader with the opportunity to exercise his or her finer feelings, and to offer an occasion for a display of taste and moral refinement. Lord Kames's *Elements of Criticism* (1762), published the year before *Lady Frances*, advances the eighteenth-century argument that works of art that exercised the emotions should be considered to be socially useful in their promotion of the social passions.⁶⁴³ Much of what has been discussed here suggests that *Lady Frances* was very much a product of this mode of thinking. By consuming the story of Lady Frances, Lucy and Juliet exercise their taste, social sympathies and moral refinement. Their capacity for refined consumption and sociability makes them virtuous, rather than any act they themselves perform. However, as the text moves on to the story of Miss Dalton/Lady Caroline, Lucy and Juliet actively intervene in the resolution of the story. By reading their actions in the context of Richardson's *Clarissa*, and the propensity of his readers to request changes to the story, we can

⁶⁴² Minifies, *Lady Frances*, II, 184-5.

⁶⁴³ See Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, ed. Peter Jones, 2 vols. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2005). Kames, observing that fiction creates an 'ideal presence' – an impression that the reader is an eyewitness to all that occurs – argues: 'In appearance, at least, what can be more slight than ideal presence? and yet from it is derived that extensive influence which language hath over the heart; an influence, which, more than any other means, strengthens the bond of society, and attracts individuals from their private system to perform acts of generosity and benevolence' (I, 74).

understand better how *Lady Frances* should not be judged to be purely a derivative copy of Richardson, but an active engagement with his works and a literary interpretation of the imagined power of sisters to reconfigure certain types of plot.

The effect of Richardson's work on women writers who came after him has not been underestimated. Richardson appears to have both inspired and circumscribed the possibilities for women writers at mid-century. His close focus on female subjectivity, his use of the epistolary mode of writing, and his lack of classical pretensions made him a model for subsequent women writers. Indeed, the mid-eighteenth century novel might be said to be distinguished in particular by a rash of women writers producing poor copies of Richardson's works, as suggested by the *Monthly Review* calling *Lady Frances* 'Another imitation of Richardson's manner'. The tendency to read novels in this light was exacerbated by the insistence of reviewers on comparing every novel they reviewed to those of Richardson and Fielding, already seen as the high watermark of fiction by the 1760s. The *Critical Review* says that *Lady Frances* is written, 'after the manner of *Clarissa*, in a series of letters'.⁶⁴⁴ It also faults *Lady Frances* for not being as good as *Clarissa* when the reviewer points out that, 'contrary to Mr. Richardson's method (which is, perhaps, the best) of employing the *leading characters* in the relation of their own adventures, our authors thought proper to make the subordinate characters tell the greater part of the story'.⁶⁴⁵ This reviewer is only able to look for what he expects to see in a novel of Richardson's – minutely detailed representations of virtuous feminine subjectivity – and is therefore disappointed.

⁶⁴⁴ 'The Histories of Lady Frances S____ and Lady Caroline S____', *Critical Review*, XVI, 108.

⁶⁴⁵ 'The Histories of Lady Frances S____ and Lady Caroline S____', *Critical Review*, XVI, 110.

One presumes that the Minifie sisters, like many women of the second half of the eighteenth century, were familiar with Richardson's works.⁶⁴⁶ Imitators they may have been, but passive copyists they were not. We know from collections of responses to *Clarissa* that some readers had an active hand in shaping the story in correspondence with Richardson. *Clarissa* seems to have been a text with which readers felt peculiarly involved and many were left disheartened by the death of Clarissa and the failure of Lovelace to reform.⁶⁴⁷ Castle identifies 'a subversive fantasy of rewriting received (male) texts' among women writers of the mid-eighteenth century.⁶⁴⁸ The fantasy that a reader might intervene to change the outcome of a text must have been a potent one for women who objected to the idea that Clarissa could only die at the end of her tale. To some extent, both Lady Frances and Miss Dalton reproduce different parts of the history of Clarissa – Lady Frances in being urged to marry a man she finds repulsive, and Miss Dalton in her abduction by the (would-be) rake, Lord Ormsby.

Where Lucy and Juliet had passively consumed the tale of Lady Frances, they intervene to rescue Miss Dalton from her lone and powerless state. It is understood that by the time they reach her she is no longer in danger of rape or seduction from Lord Ormsby, who has requested their intervention as a means of making reparation for his rakish intentions. It is not made absolutely clear how Lucy and Juliet rescue Miss Dalton merely by visiting her, but the lurking influence of Lord Edgmoore, who hopes to ruin Miss Dalton as a means of revenging himself on her guardian Mr Nevison, suggests that she is in a state of danger while she remains in the house under the protection of Mrs Rogers, who is in the employ of Lord Edgmoore. It

⁶⁴⁶ See Schellenberg, *Professionalization*, 129.

⁶⁴⁷ See for example, Janice Broder, 'Lady Bradshaigh reads and writes *Clarissa*: The Marginal Notes in her First Edition' in Carol Houlihan Flynn and Edward Copeland (eds.), *Clarissa and Her Readers: New Essays for the Clarissa Project* (New York: AMS Press, 1999), 97-118.

⁶⁴⁸ Castle, 'Women and literary criticism', 444.

is made clear that Lucy provides a better chaperone in the person of Mrs Johnson, thus helping to preserve Miss Dalton from attack. Miss Dalton claims that she is indebted to Juliet and Lucy, 'more for my reputation than life'.⁶⁴⁹ Mr Nevison adds his applause, calling Lucy and Juliet, 'those guardian angels of innocence'.⁶⁵⁰ By visiting Miss Dalton, Lucy and Juliet invite her to join in a safe, feminine community that Clarissa lacked.

However, in their claiming of the agency to rescue Miss Dalton, Juliet and Lucy enact the role of knight-errants in a scene that is overlaid with both sentimental and erotic overtones in Juliet's narration:

Suppose virtue in her most amiable form, suppose her too dejected and oppressed, yet supporting all her dignity in the midst of misfortunes: and if to these you can suppose a thousand other nameless beauties, you will then be able to form some idea of Miss Dalton. Tho' the shock she had undergone, had faded the roses on her cheeks, it had not robbed her mouth of its coral ornaments nor her skin of its transparent whiteness; over which is spread so delicate a languor, with features so speaking, that you almost know her thoughts before she delivers them by words... Growing faint on our approaching the bed, Lady Lucy supported her in her arms, and so much did she seem affected, that had I just then entered the room, a stranger to both, scarcely should I have known which to call the greater sufferer. Miss Dalton's faintness being owing to her too sudden joy or surprize, she soon recovered; when raising her head, which Lady Lucy had placed on her own bosom; and seeing me on the other side, holding one of her hands, which I could not help pressing to my lips, she looked at both sweetly tender, and the tears gushed from her eyes. O my dear creature, said Lady Lucy, don't torture me with such melting silent expression; speak to me, my love, tell me if you can bear near you, the sister of the man who has so greatly injured you? – Can I, my noble Lady Lucy, do you ask? – Ought I not to be doubly thankful, that though God has been pleased to visit me with afflictions, he now vouchsafes to send a guardian angel for my protector? – Exalted excellency! Lady Lucy called her, and kissed her with affection.⁶⁵¹

In this scene we can see a reproduction of the female gaze that is posited as best appreciating female beauty and virtue, and the erotic appeal of virtue in distress lodged in a feminocentric context. We can also see the supposed power of stories to promote identification and sympathy, as, having encountered Miss Dalton only in the

⁶⁴⁹ Minifies, *Lady Frances*, III, 64.

⁶⁵⁰ Minifies, *Lady Frances*, III, 84.

⁶⁵¹ Minifies, *Lady Frances*, III, 41-44.

pages of her brother's letter, Lucy immediately claims her as an intimate. This can only happen because in a sense Miss Dalton functions as a cipher of fictional distressed womanhood, and thus instantly recognisable and available for intimacy. By 'rescuing' Miss Dalton, Lucy acts a role that would more often have been available for men, hence the somewhat erotic charge that permeates this passage, as has also been seen elsewhere in this novel.

The Minifies substitute female intimacies and community for distressed femininity, suggesting a means by which the lone woman can be recuperated. In doing so, they implicitly rewrite the plot of *Clarissa*, not through empowering a Clarissa-character, but her readers, who are represented as intervening in the plot itself. Ultimately, Miss Dalton marries Lord Ormsby and becomes a sister to Lucy, suggesting that sisterhood provided a certain position for readers to simultaneously sympathise with, appreciate as a consumer item, and imagine oneself in a faintly eroticised relation with, images of beautiful and virtuous femininity.

Collaboration therefore, for the Minifie sisters, is initially predicated on consumption. By presenting themselves writing from within a non-professional feminocentric authorial community, they offer a fantasy of epistolary intimacy among young women in which the reader is invited to participate. Representing the circulation of stories of remarkable women for other women's consumption, rather than offering imagined models for emulation renders consumption both an index of feminine taste and refinement, and a means of constructing bonds between women. The authors portray the feminocentric epistolary network as a safe venue for public display of exemplary femininity, avoiding the association with excess or desire that

self-display would automatically entail. Sisterhood both suggests the excess of consumption and helps to regulate it.

The Minifies demonstrate the importance of the relation of sisterhood by constructing it in ways that permit active intervention within a heterosocial sphere, particularly in terms of rescuing. Throughout the novel, bonds of sisterhood are constructed through epistolary exchange, and acts of rescue and aid, and formalised by intermarriage at the end of the novel. The reader is invited to share the characters' pleasure at consuming stories of exemplary women. Juliet's comment that Lucy's conversation 'fastened [the] chains' of those who spoke to her is peculiarly apt, since it is Lucy who is the central link in the network of sibling bonds that are in place by the end of the novel; in a sense she is the novel's true protagonist, despite its title.⁶⁵² Sisterhood, translated into literary terms, is the means by which readers can imagine both consuming stories of exemplary women, and actively intervening in and rewriting their plots. Through collaboration in *Lady Frances*, the Minifies perform possible interpretations of sisterhood in a consumer context, simultaneously constructing the reader's pleasure in consumption, and appealing to a powerful literary fantasy of feminised authorial agency.

⁶⁵² Minifies, *Lady Frances*, III, 58.

Conclusion

For the women writers in this thesis, engaging in collaborative practice with a family member represented a sustained and active engagement with the literary sphere; neither an entry into print under the aegis of a more powerful male, nor a retreat to a homosocial, feminocentric world. Enabled by ideologies of sociability that valued women's capacity to arbitrate and moderate sociable conversation between the sexes, Griffith, Fielding and the Minifies display their own sociable authorial practice to boost the market value of their texts. The flexibility offered by familiar relations that operated on a horizontal axis enable women writers to engage in displays of textual familiar conversation that construct personal relationships through delineating models of literary production and consumption, and enacting a process of struggle and contestation of gendered power structures.

The result of their literary performance was that they, and their female characters and personae are made unusually visible in the roles of readers and writers within the model of literary cooperation. Perhaps most importantly, however, was the opportunity that the intersection of authorship, sociability and familiarity offered to women writers to visibly engage in critical practice in ways that are designed to impact across a variety of contexts. Griffith's *Series*, Fielding's *Familiar Letters* and *The Cry*, and the Minifies' *Lady Frances* reveal the extent to which sociability, familiarity and print authorship could be mutually constitutive. For these women writers, engaging in criticism requires that all three contexts become open to critical transformation. As such, collaboration must be understood to be a part of eighteenth-century women authors' professional practice: a means by which women writers could acquire an active role in shaping the literary culture in which they sought to play a part.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of this thesis is that despite the fact that it claims to address familiar relationships, the relation of friendship recurs in every chapter. Elizabeth Griffith uses friendship to expand the amatory marital relationship into the rational, textual sphere. Sarah Fielding both embraces and critically interrogates the concept of friendship in much of her work. The *Minifies* explore the ways that friendship can be cemented and maintained through the construction of bonds of sisterhood. Friendship seems to have been the means by which a variety of familial and social relations could be imagined and described in the eighteenth century, and yet no critical study of the intersection of friendship and literature has appeared since Janet Todd's *Women's Friendships in Literature* in 1980 and perhaps Betty Rizzo's *Companions without Vows* in 1994. The time may be ripe for a critical appraisal of the role of friendship both among women and men and between women and men of the eighteenth century, exploring not just how friendships are represented in literature, but how 'friendship' mediates and constructs the literary world itself. Such critical work would be an obvious extension of the work this thesis has done to contribute to a model of reading that seeks to interrogate relationships as well as individual authors and their texts.

This thesis has sought to examine the models of reading, writing and criticism put forward by each writer, and to demonstrate that the performance of collaboration had a visible effect on the way eighteenth-century texts are produced and consumed. Rather than claiming that printed texts reveal anything about the personal relationship of the authors, I have sought to demonstrate the way the authors each exploit various social ideologies and literary culture to construct a saleable and congenial model of authorship. To point out that the eighteenth century was a time of rapid social and literary change is hardly a radical proposition. However, my

argument demonstrates that in the context of rapid change, it is crucial that individual case studies such as those of the women writers in this thesis are examined closely. Otherwise we run the risk of reading in ways that attribute individual behaviours to monolithic and hegemonic causes. Interpersonal relationships, particularly when expressed through text, are never static. Conversation offers a model in which relationships are dynamically constituted through an iterative process. Only through close attention to the mechanics of that process can we see beyond our own critical models to approach even slightly closer to the individual concerns of eighteenth-century women writers themselves. The authors in this thesis do not consider their collaborative practice to be exciting because it highlights radical multiplicity, or the contingent nature of authorship. Rather, for these authors, collaboration was an obvious and natural development of sociable literary practice, and a means of making explicit and assessing that practice within the changing literary context.

Appendix

Richard Samuel, 'The Nine Living Muses of Great Britain' (1778; exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1779)

Elizabeth Griffith is shown on the right of the print, seated almost with her back to the viewer, holding a tablet.

Also pictured are Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Elizabeth Carter, Angelica Kauffmann, Charlotte Lennox, Catharine Macauley, Elizabeth Montagu, Hannah More and Elizabeth Sheridan.

[This picture has been removed for copyright reasons and can be viewed at the National Portrait Gallery website]

James Gillray, 'Margaret's Ghost' (1791)

Margaret Minifie is pictured to the right of the print, Susannah Gunning is seated while Elizabeth Gunning languishes in bed.

[This picture has been removed for copyright reasons and can be viewed at the National Portrait Gallery website]

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