Divorcing the Rake: Male Chastity and the Rise of the Novel, 1753-1857

by

Rachel Gevlin

Department of English
Duke University

Date:_______________________
Approved:

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Charlotte Sussman, Advisor

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Nancy Armstrong

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James Thompson

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Kathy Psomiades

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in the Department of
English in the Graduate School
of Duke University

2020

ABSTRACT

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Abstract

Loose understandings of naturalized sexual difference have worked for hundreds of years to bolster both the legal and social oppression of women. This dissertation, *Divorcing the Rake: Male Chastity and the Rise of the Novel, 1753-1857*, examines how novelistic rhetoric around sexual misconduct reinforced notions of sexual difference by naturalizing male hypersexuality while implicitly suppressing possibilities for female sexual desire. By looking at the sexual ethics forwarded by stories of adultery, bigamy, and divorce in the century between Hardwicke's Marriage Act (1753) and the Matrimonial Causes Act (1857), my research shows that the emerging genre of the novel refigured sexually profligate male characters, rendering them not only palatable but desirable to readers. Departing from eighteenth-century drama where the hypersexualized rake took center-stage, the novel purported to critique male sexual misconduct by juxtaposing minor rakish figures—such as Austen's Henry Crawford or Burney's Sir Clement Willoughby—against chaste male heroes in the mold of Richardson's Sir Charles Grandison. Representations of male sexual conduct during this period, therefore, idealized male sexual discipline by upholding male protagonists who willingly rejected sexual promiscuity. My work explores two seemingly counterintuitive effects produced by this idealization of sexual restraint. First, the alignment of male chastity with moral worthiness restricted women to monogamous marital desire by creating worlds in which "good" men opted for the same conservative sexual restrictions that were expected of women. Secondly, a good man's self-discipline was also paradoxically evidence of his natural virility: a learned practice of sexual restraint implied a biological proclivity

towards a transgressive level of sexual conduct. By idealizing male chastity, I argue, the novel not only worked to undermine the possibility of autonomous female sexual desire but also naturalized male hypersexuality, promoting compassionate reactions to male misconduct that were not afforded to women.

Dedication

To my parents, James Gevlin and Martha Robins, without whose support this work would not have been possible.

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1. Introduction

What happened to the rake? A hypersexual literary figure marked by his gender, playful disregard for convention, and explicit sexuality, the rake dominated Restoration drama and poetry but became increasingly muted in fiction throughout the first half of the eighteenth century. By the mid-1700s, when the novel emerged as the dominant literary form, the rake had been relegated to often villainous secondary roles, and a long line of chaste gentlemen—marked by their conspicuous lack of any sexual history—stepped in as the male protagonists of the novel. This dissertation traces the ideological ends to which this shift occurred. I argue that with the advent of the chaste gentleman, the novel recast—rather than replaced—the rake, offering readers an implicitly sexualized rendering of masculinity that made more palatable the naturalization of sexual difference.

The question of sexual difference, of what qualities, habits, or proclivities can be biologically ascribed to the male or female body, fuels my interest in this shift from rake to gentleman. Feminist biologists since the mid-1980s have questioned the extent to which modern studies of sexual difference are as objective as they purport to be, pointing to flaws in these studies' designs that repeatedly fail to account for socially determined variables. Likewise, feminist historians have illuminated the unstable and male-determined history of scientific studies on the differences between the male and female body, suggesting that modern notions of these studies as having progressed from subjective error to objective truth are naïve—if not dangerous. This dissertation aims to bring a literary lens to this discussion, asking what role the novel, as the primary vehicle of heterosexual romance for two hundred years, might have played in promoting

largescale assumptions around naturalized sexual difference. Specifically, I trace the ways in which the transition from rake to gentleman lent itself to notions of naturalized male virility, generating positive responses towards men's sexual misconduct that was not afforded to women.

"Misconduct," however, is a slippery term: what counts as crossing the line, and who decides? In my analysis of literary representations of male sexual misconduct, I attempt to historicize "misconduct" by putting this normative social term in conversation with eighteenth- and nineteenth-century legal history. I locate novelistic representations of masculinity in legal plots, turning to novels of adultery, inheritance, divorce, and bigamy (and, often, intersections of several of these themes) in order to examine the relationship between the idealized chaste gentleman and his rakish counterpart. Identifying such plots has not been a challenge; as recent Victorianist scholarship has shown, the nineteenth-century novel centered as much around marital breakdown as it did on the marriage plot itself, and I contend that a similar argument can be made for the latter half of the eighteenth century. Novels from the 1750s through the 1850s, I suggest, presented narratives of naturalized sexual difference that reinforced gendered biases inherent in divorce laws. In so doing, the novel in its emerging form worked to condone—rather than condemn—instances of men's pre- and extra-marital sex.

1.1 Historicizing Sex

Over the course of writing this project, more than one well-meaning graduate student colleague has, when I raised the topic of the history of sexual difference, asked me, "But isn't that up to science?" This question draws an implicit boundary between

scientific and humanistic thinking and grants to science a particular objective authority—an authority that the relatively recent field of feminist science studies has aimed to modify. Feminist scholars since the 1980s have been calling for a renewed evaluation of scientific studies of sexual difference. Biologist Anne Fausto-Sterling's *Myths of Gender: Biological Theories About Women and Men* (1985), an early pivotal text in the field, examines a series of studies related to sex differences (including, for example, those focused on intelligence, menopause, menstruation, and aggression) in order to show how flaws in the studies' designs have rendered their results largely meaningless. Fausto-Sterling operates from the position that "there is no such thing as apolitical science" (207), that all aspects of scientific discovery—from what gets funded to who designs an experiment to the details of that experiment itself—have been influenced by a complex web of socially determined factors, all of which detract from the still prevalent idealization of science as a perfectly objective course of study.[1]

Scholars of history have since taken this line of thinking into investigations of social constructions of sex. Joan Cadden's research on scientific ideas about sex differences in the later Middle Ages draws an explicit comparison between implicit bias in today's scientific practices and those biased but widely-held beliefs about sex and gender in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[2] Londa Schiebinger's *Nature's Body:*

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[1] Other scientists have since drawn from Fausto-Sterling's ideas. For a current example, Rebecca Jordan-Young has recently provided an updated evaluation of the science of sex studies that is similar to Fausto-Sterling's in approach (in that Jordan-Young also orients her research around a critical review of previous scientific studies), although her focus reflects a shift towards focusing on the brain. See *Brain Storm: The Flaw in the Science of Sex Differences* (2010).

[2] See Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (1993). Cadden explicitly positions herself as responding to Thomas Laqueur's work—discussed in detail below—

Gender in the Making of Modern Science (1993) examines the development of modern science in the eighteenth century and its attention to sex roles, arguing that the origins of racial and sexual discrimination can be traced to eighteenth-century taxonomies of botany. Likewise, Thomas Laqueur also marks the eighteenth century as a pivotal turning point in the history of sex, suggesting that during this period "sex as we know it was invented" (149).

It is Laqueur's research that has been most influential to my thinking for this project. Before the eighteenth century, Laqueur argues, the western world had for centuries believed in what he refers to as the "one-sex model," in which woman's anatomy was seen not as distinct from man's, but rather as a less perfect version of male anatomy. Under the one-sex model, both the female and the male body had testicles (although women's bodies housed theirs within), and both bodies produced semen. The one-sex model, then, likewise included a "one-sex economy of fluids" (40), in which all sexual fluid was ungendered (although today we would say it was gendered male), and in which the possibility that either party might produce "the more potent seed" went hand in hand with the understanding that women's desire for sexual intercourse was equally as strong as men's (40). Semen was understood as the necessary component of procreation—an act about which there was a great deal of anxiety, given the mortality rate of children—and the economizing of semen was thought to be a crucial component of *all* adult bodies, given that all bodies were essentially male.

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and argues for a more nuanced understanding of the "one-sex model" Laqueur proposed was ubiquitous prior to the eighteenth century.

This one-sex model broke down, however, with the eighteenth-century discovery that women need not orgasm in order to conceive. In Laqueur's words, the female orgasm became a "signifier without a signified" (150), an indicator of nothing in particular that opened up the space for women's sexual nature to be "redefined, debated, denied, or qualified" (3). If the female orgasm was not necessary for conception, the logic went, then there existed no biological impetus to please them. Moreover, the division between conception and pleasure in women rendered the female body distinctly different from the male body, about which there had never been any question regarding the simultaneity of orgasm and ejaculation. Women, now defined by their specifically female sex organs, were increasingly viewed as passionless—or, alternatively, as possessing a capacity for sexual restraint far greater than that of men.

It is this divide in which I am interested: a divide between women, who, supposedly, were naturally disposed towards controlling their drive for sexual pleasure, and men, who naturally lacked the capacity for this control. But there is, of course, nothing "natural" about it. If, as Laqueur shows us, sexual difference in the realm of desire and restraint stems from the relatively recent discovery that women need not orgasm in order to conceive, then sex—as well as gender—becomes socially determined.[3] The notion that men have a naturally weaker capacity for sexual restraint,

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[3] Three years before the publication of Laqueur's *Making Sex*, Judith Butler of course came to a similar conclusion. Butler argues in *Gender Trouble* that the distinction that is commonly made between sex (as biologically determined) and gender (as socially constructed) is false and antithetical to the project of feminism. Because the sexed body cannot signify without gender, the two are inextricably linked and thus both socially constructed. I focus more heavily on Laqueur's work here only because his attention to the history of science has been more instructive to this particular project than Butler's philosophical approach.

that their passions are biologically so much stronger than women's as to necessitate a great deal more effort to rein them in, is an eighteenth-century fiction.

What happens when we consider this eighteenth-century fiction alongside the novel and the transition from rake to gentleman that it represents? If modern notions of male sexual virility have been socially determined, then what role has the novel, as the primary channel for depictions of idealized heterosexual romance for over 200 years, played in this history? Although I arrived at this question through the work of Laqueur, I attempt to answer it through the framework of recent eighteenth-century scholarship on masculinity and divorce law.

1.2 Highlighting the Divorce Plot

Since Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel* in 1957, literary scholars from Nancy Armstrong to Talia Schaffer have relied on an understanding of the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century novel as deeply invested in "the marriage plot," underscoring the assumption that stories of divorce have no dominant place in our understanding of the early British novel. *Divorcing the Rake* shows that when we examine this history of the novel in relation to divorce law, however, a different story comes to light. Despite the difficulty of obtaining a divorce in the century between Hardwicke's Marriage Act (1753) and the Matrimonial Causes Act (1857), stories of adultery, bigamy, and divorce recurred frequently in British fiction during this period, revealing a persistent interest in the sexual politics of divorce law.

This project seeks to revise the entrenched narrative of the rise of the novel, prevalent among literary critics since Watt, that links the rise of the novel with the

marriage plot—which, as Kelly Hager has pointed out, is typically understood to be not a plot about marriage but about courtship. I join Hager and other Victorianist scholars whose recent work has served to contradict the self-assured but now widely dismissed comment of Franco Moretti's that "[e]very great narrative tradition has dealt with the theme of adultery, in France and in Germany, in America and in Russia. In England, nothing—absolutely nothing" (188). This claim of Moretti's, made in 1987, came eight years after Tony Tanner argued that although eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels tend to "move towards marriage," they gain their narrative "energy" from threats to the realization of the domestic ideal (*Adultery* 4). Despite Tanner's argument for the prevalence and narrative importance of adultery in the English novel, however, Moretti's insistence that the English novel had not "dealt with" the theme of adultery seemed to represent the general consensus, as critical focus continued to bend towards "the marriage plot" in the later years of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first.

The recent turn in criticism over the last decade has worked not only to upend Moretti's assertion, but to revise the lens through which Tanner approached the topic of adultery. For although Tanner's study of the novel addresses the prevalence of marital infidelity, it treats infidelity very much as a deviation—albeit an important one—from the primary courtship narrative. Hager, however, has taken a different tack, arguing that "marital failure appears so often in the novel that it constitutes a plot in and of itself" (6). She argues that although "we recognize that novels plot marital failure . . . we have yet to revise our understanding of the genre with those plots in mind" (5). To treat divorce as a narrative aberration rather than the primary plotline itself, Hager suggests, risks

reinforcing a correlation between successful marriage plots and the novel form—a correlation that works to reinforce the institution of marriage itself.

What Hager points to is both a problem of reading as well as one of canonization; to read *for* a plot other than the marriage plot requires an adjustment in how we approach canonized texts,[4] but it also demands the recovery of texts that historically have been overlooked due to their very failure to follow the conventional marriage plot. "Victorian novelists wrote failed-marriage plots," Hager argues, "but critics—both Victorian and Victorianist—may (have) be(en) reluctant to admit them to the canon because they need to believe in the myth of marriage" (31-2). If, as Hager argues, "marriage and the stability of literary meaning have become metaphors for each other" (32), then critics are culpable in repeatedly ascribing, decade after decade, ideological weight to the institution of marriage while denying attention to its historical instability and failure. Given that a bad marriage tending towards divorce was disproportionately likely to affect wives rather than husbands, this oversight risks obscuring a sexual double standard repeatedly at play in English law and English novels alike.

To the extent that "divorce plots" have entered into critical conversations, however, the focus has tended to follow trends in the law rather than trends in literature. Although critics such as Hager and, more recently, Maia McAleavey, purport to speak to the "the history of marriage law from the beginning of the eighteenth century through the turn into the twentieth century" (Hager 23), the bulk of their respective studies fall

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[4] Hager calls them "failed-marriage plots," Maia McAleavey centers on the "bigamy plot," and I focus my perspective on "the infidelity plot"—but though we differ in terminology, these shifts in attention all, I contend, do the same sort of work that Hager claims for herself.

largely in the second half of the nineteenth. Indeed, both Hager and McAleavey isolate their studies around the major legal shift that occurred with the Divorce Act of 1857, hypothesizing that the new possibilities for obtaining a divorce acted as a catalyst for novels of adultery and bigamy to enter the literary fray.[5] But once one readjusts one's glasses to read for a different kind of plot, it becomes clear that the eighteenth-century novel, too, is littered with marital unhappiness, infidelity, and legal intervention in the domestic realm.

I join a relatively small cohort of eighteenth-century scholars who aim to shift the historical narrative provided by Hager and McAleavey to show the prevalence of the divorce plot a century earlier. In the introduction to their recent collection of essays *After Marriage in the Long Eighteenth Century* (2018), Jenny Placidi and Karl Leydecker explicitly refer to Hager (as well as Tanner) when they argue that

> [t]he nineteenth century has been characterised as the heyday of the novel of adultery, albeit even more so in the European tradition, and the work of scholars in this line provides an important model for those invested in recovering the tradition of adultery narratives and failed marriage plots that make up a large part of eighteenth-century texts. (8)

This project, then, aims to revise a critical understanding of the divorce plot as a nineteenth-century phenomenon. Rather than looking to the Divorce Act of 1857 as a catalyst for changes in fiction, I begin my study a century earlier, focusing on literature that emerged in the years leading up to Hardwicke's Marriage Act of 1753. It was not, I contend, the increased access to divorce that led to an increase in narratives about unhappy marriages; rather, the prevalence of adultery and divorce plots in the eighteenth

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[5] I discuss this critical hypothesis at length, particularly with respect to McAleavey's work, in chapter 4.

century reflect the difficulty—especially for women—of extracting oneself from an unhappy marriage, particularly once marriage itself became the state-regulated institution that we know it as today.

1.3 Reframing Masculinity: The Reformed Rake and the Virile Gentleman

The chapters that follow, then, focus on narratives of marital disunion—narratives that, once we begin to look for them, appear everywhere in eighteenth-century fiction. I am less concerned, however, with how the material effects of infidelity and its subsequent legal proceedings impacted women—a question that a great deal of scholarly energy has already gone into[6]—than I am in how these same infidelity plots reoriented readerly sympathies toward male sexual misconduct. Although the stakes of adultery and divorce were significantly higher for women than they were for men, the wealth of eighteenth-century adultery plots worked to temper these inequalities, redirecting readerly compassion from women's powerlessness to the men and patriarchal structures that rendered them so.

Reading infidelity plots for instances of male sexual misconduct necessitates both an examination of narrators' renderings of male characters as well as female characters' responses (either voiced or merely privately considered) to their male counterparts. This seems obvious, and yet Tanner's *Adultery in the Novel* focuses exclusively on women's adultery, highlighting the pitfalls of restricting critical readings of infidelity plots to women alone. While Tanner's argument hinges on the "narrative energy" generated by

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[6] See, for instance, Staves, Stone (*Road to Divorce*), Tanner (*Adultery*), Turner, Vickery, and Wolfram.

infidelity—an energy that we can presumably link to the fact that an adulterous woman risked a significantly more dire end than an adulterous man—his focus obscures the repeated instances of both male infidelity and female suspicions of male infidelity throughout eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century novels. Although the law tended to leave these fictional men as untouched as it did actual adulterous husbands, a critical approach that treats male sexual misconduct as uninteresting or par for the course operates under the same double-standard (and, indeed, promotes that double-standard) as the laws themselves. Just as Hager argues for a reconsideration of the primacy of divorce plots in order to destabilize the critical maintenance of marriage, I am urging the necessity of scrutinizing "acceptable" sexual misconduct in order to understand the network of control that both allowed for it and rendered it natural.

In doing so, I join a host of eighteenth-century scholars who have turned their attention to masculinity in eighteenth-century literature. Because eighteenth-centuriests' interest in masculinities studies in the '90s was both embedded within a larger feminist project and also emerged along a similar timeline to queer studies, many scholars have directed their focus elsewhere than heteromasculinity.[7] Some important exceptions to this trend do exist, however. Scholars such as Claudia Johnson, Erin Mackie, Jason Solinger, and Paul Kelleher have in recent years provided important studies on eighteenth-century

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[7] We might take as examples: *English Masculinities: 1660-1800* (1999), a collection of essays that seem little concerned with heteromasculinity; *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England: Roles, Representations, and Responsibilities* (1997), which almost exclusively equates "gender" with "femininity"—out of ten chapters, only one (the first) focuses on men and masculinity; or even the recent *Jane Austen and Masculinity* (2018), in which several essays do address heteromasculinity, but manage to do so without naming it as such or remarking on it as a critical part of the scholar's argument. Both by omitting heteromasculinity as a subject of study as well as neglecting to note its centrality to an argument do similar work of naturalizing the actions and experiences of straight men as the neutral side of history.

heteromasculinity and the political work its representations generated. These studies all concern themselves, as I do, with developments and shifts in fictional representations of the eighteenth century's premier archetypes of heteromasculinity: the rake and the gentleman.[8]

I differ from Johnson, Mackie, Solinger, and Kelleher, however, in my focus on male sexual conduct. Rather than exclusively examining eighteenth-century heteromasculinity through the lens of gendered taxonomies (such as, for example, identifying the particular makeups of rakes, fops, mollies, and gentlemen) or through the concept of sentimentality, I am interested in the material representations—or omissions, which I take as its own material evidence—of men's sexual histories, present sexual conduct, and general beliefs about male sexual behavior. As such, I view taxonomies such as "rake" and "gentleman" not as isolated types, but rather as two opposite ends of a

[8] Claudia Johnson's *Equivocal Beings* (1995) identifies a growing unease throughout the 1790s with historically "masculine" traits that aligned men with violent action. Johnson argues that fiction from the 1790s and early 1800s displaced certain traits thought to be typically feminine (such as "tearfulness, irrationality, or susceptibility" (x)) onto idealized masculinity, producing a sentimental gentlemanly avatar to the violent male figure who had come to be associated with political upheaval. Erin Mackie's *Rakes, Highwaymen, and Pirates* (2009), on the other hand, argues that the gentleman did not "emerge" as an antithesis to a pre-modern form of masculinity, but rather that gentlemanly qualities had been embedded into the makeup of the very masculine "types" that we might think of as his opposites. Mackie examines the alignment of "prestige and criminality" in determining modern masculinity (1), arguing that "masculine power continues to rely on modes of privilege, aggression, and self-authorization that violate the moral, social, and legal dictates that constitute its own legitimacy" (2). Jason Solinger, in *Becoming the Gentleman: British Literature and the Invention of Modern Masculinity, 1660-1815* (2012), has argued that "the gentleman was never static," that the term "gentleman" was used in myriad ways throughout the eighteenth century "to authorize new forms of masculinity" (*Becoming* 3). Solinger pushes back against what he views as a "critical bromide: namely, the idea that novel's dialectical imagination stages a confrontation between female-gendered modernizing forces and male-gendered traditional ones," while in fact "eighteenth-century literature rewrote gender across the board" (4). And Paul Kelleher's *Making Love: Sentiment and Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century British Literature* (2015)—which opens with the telling explanation, "Truth be told, it took some time before I realized that I needed to write a book about heterosexuality" (1)—analyzes "heterosexual desire as the condition of possibility for morality as such" (8).

sliding scale of heterosexual conduct. Implicit to my argument is the notion that eighteenth-century men—unlike eighteenth-century women—had the privilege to move between these taxonomies, to evade a fixed fate that was tied to their sexual pasts. I argue that the emerging genre of the novel repeatedly set these figures up as isolated types only to dismantle the distinction between them, naturalizing notions of what it implicitly meant to be male.

In the chapters that follow, I show how the novel purported to critique male sexual misconduct by juxtaposing minor rakish figures with chaste male heroes in the mold of Richardson's Sir Charles Grandison—a figure who pointedly has no sexual history. Representations of male sexual conduct during this period, therefore, idealized male sexual discipline by upholding male protagonists who willingly rejected sexual promiscuity. I propose two seemingly counterintuitive effects produced by these depictions of sexual restraint. First, by idealizing men who regulated their sexual impulses, fiction simultaneously worked to confine female desires that threatened to unleash the "natural" force of male virility. The alignment of male chastity with moral education therefore restricted women to monogamous marital desire by creating worlds in which "good" men opted for the same conservative sexual restrictions that were expected of women. Secondly, a good man's hard-won chastity was also paradoxically evidence of his natural hypersexuality: a learned practice of sexual restraint implied a biological proclivity towards a transgressive level of sexual conduct. By idealizing male chastity, I argue, the novel not only worked to undermine the possibility of autonomous female sexual desire but also naturalized male hypersexuality, promoting compassionate responses to male misconduct that were not afforded to women.

1.4 Chapter Descriptions

My first chapter examines evolving notions of male sexual conduct in the period leading up to and immediately following Hardwicke's Marriage Act in 1753. I show how, by the end of their respective careers, Henry Fielding and Samuel Richardson were critically reexamining how the sexual conduct of their male protagonists intersected with the appeal these characters had for their female counterparts. It is no revelation that Richardson attempted something new with *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753), a novel that explicitly aligns moral goodness with male chastity, and yet criticism has largely shied away from addressing the apparent erasure of sex from the novel. Likewise, Fielding's *Amelia* (1751) has received far less critical attention than the author's earlier works, and the bulk of criticism that does exist gives little attention to Booth, whose adultery the novel foregrounds. By looking at these novels together in the context of their contemporary critical receptions and legal implications, I show how the early 1750s represent a turning point for reconciling male sexual conduct with desirability.

In my second chapter, I turn to the work of Ann Radcliffe to examine the relationship between adultery, primogeniture, and married women's property. One of the most popular novelists of the end of the century, Radcliffe mutes narratives of sexual profligacy that would have unambiguously been the driving tension of novels fifty years earlier by transferring these concerns of promiscuity onto her heroine's father and lover and ultimately rendering both concerns null. By creating narratives with resolutions that hinge on the secondary plotlines M. St. Aubert and Valancourt, Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) underscores purportedly progressive narratives of sexual conduct in

which the younger generation links property rights with sexual morality, venerating new representations of marital union in which both parties are equally sexually conservative.

My third chapter takes up depictions of adultery and divorce in Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) and *Mansfield Park* (1814). Although Austen's omission of sex from her novels has been the subject of much critical speculation, Austen's secondary characters are rife with sexual histories that are often played out in legal subplots. Austen's inclusion of divorce plots, I argue, reproduces the gendered biases of the laws themselves, seeking repeatedly to redeem male adulterers while demonizing sexually profligate women. By juxtaposing rakish figures notably lacking proper social "educations" with romantic male protagonists conspicuously lacking in sexual histories, Austen promotes a concept of naturalized male hypersexuality that makes requisite the restraint embodied by the gentleman.

Finally, I turn to *Jane Eyre* (1847) in order to think about how the juxtaposition of these narratives of chastity and promiscuity carry into the early Victorian novel through the bigamy plot. Here, the rake's sexual past does not render him an unsuitable romantic partner, but rather a sympathetic figure—a victim of restrictive divorce laws that have the power to deprive even a landed gentleman of legal autonomy. Not only a promiscuous man, but also an adulterer and a would-be bigamist, Rochester exemplifies, one hundred years later, the very problem that *Amelia*'s Booth is unable to resolve in 1751: how to negotiate male desirability with acknowledgement of past sexual conduct.

The transition that *Divorcing the Rake* unearths—from the explicitly sexualized figure of the rake to the implicitly sexualized figure of the gentleman—fills a critical void created by the disciplinary gap between law and masculinity studies. But this project also

destabilizes narratives of male virility and gendered bias that have carried into our contemporary moment. As the world becomes ever more concerned with the ethics of male behavior long considered natural, my research seeks to examine the socially determined origins of these assumptions.

2. The Rake's Progress: Reforming Sexual Conduct in *Amelia* and *Sir Charles Grandison*

Following the enormous success of *Pamela*, the 1740s saw a profusion of novels organized around the idea of courtship. These novels – which include all of those that we associate with today's literary canon from *Tom Jones* to *Clarissa* – follow characters navigating singleness as their narratives move towards conclusions of happy marital union or (if no such union can be had) death. The past several decades of literary criticism have offered an exhaustive exploration of the expectations and available resolutions for the women in these novels, but critics tend to treat men's predatory roles in these narratives as a constant, a question with an answer so obvious as to make it unworthy of our consideration.[1] Although critical narratives have moved away from slating female characters into passive, domestic roles – revealing the multiplicity of female sexual agency and its connections to what makes a woman "desirable" to a man[2] – male characters, as the figures who wield the upper hand in physical and economic terms, have not only retained control within courtship narratives but also in how we conceptualize male sexuality. As such, the question of what makes a "good man," what sort of man is figured as desirable by women, and whether or not these two categories intersect has been little explored. If woman's "virtue," as Pamela so repeatedly makes

[1] Exceptions to this assertion do exist, notably Erin Mackie's *Rakes, Highwaymen, and Pirates*, as well as Claudia Johnson's *Equivocal Beings*. Mackie's work, although occasionally literary, is much more concerned with historical representations of these figures, and where literature does enter her arguments, it deals more in fictional criminal biography than in courtship narratives. Likewise, Johnson is more concerned with male violence than male sexuality, and the later focus of her work (which is concentrated in the 1790s) suggests a gap in eighteenth-century masculinity studies that ignores connections between the novel and sexual promiscuity.

[2] See Armstrong.

clear, is the greatest determining factor in her worth to Mr. B, what, then, ought readers to make of our heroine pairing off with a hero who clearly holds no such sort of expectation of virtue for himself?

Looking closely at the novels of Richardson and Fielding, and especially at the authors' last two works, I plan to elucidate this question. Although the two writers are often paired, it is most often in order to speak of the deftness and depth of Richardson's writing compared to Fielding's blunt comedic style, or to comment directly on their infamous antagonism towards each other. As a result of the nature of these discussions, their last two works have both received far less critical attention than the novels that precede them and are often treated as "appendages" to the rest of the authors' bodies of works.[3] However, the two authors occasionally admired each other's work, as we shall see, and both writers grappled with the question of morality as it pertained to male sexual conduct in their last novels. Of each author's oeuvre, *Amelia* and *Sir Charles Grandison* stand apart from the earlier works in their respective handling of male sexuality by presenting us with heroes who are attracted to multiple women simultaneously; the temporal structuring of desire, therefore, becomes crucial to elucidating the male protagonists' sexual conduct. Unlike the novels of courtship that precede them, in which male sexual profligacy acts as a stepping stone on the path to becoming the "prudent" hero that both heroine and reader desire, *Amelia* and *Grandison* position two female love-interests simultaneously rather than sequentially.

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[3] See Sabor for a more extensive analysis of how *Amelia* and *Sir Charles Grandison* have been largely ignored by the critical narrative of the careers of Fielding and Richardson.

Deviating from earlier comic plots of rakish promiscuity, both novels' heroes attempt to retain readers' sympathies as they negotiate a two-woman plot into one that reflects the presumably happy monogamous ending that readers would have anticipated. In Fielding's case, this is accomplished through an adultery plot that would seem to undermine Tony Tanner's theory that it is only female adultery that launches narratives forward; Booth's infidelity to his wife in the early pages of the novel produces a guilt and a fear of discovery that plagues him for the rest of the text. Readers are asked to consider whether an adulterous man can be a suitable hero for the unshakably virtuous Amelia, and Booth's sexual conduct is thus foregrounded by requiring moral evaluation contemporaneously with his love for the novel's heroine. Richardson addresses the question of male sexual conduct differently, although he also sets it up as one of the major focuses of his novel by orienting two female love-interests opposite each other – although, by this last novel, explicit representations of sexual desire have been all but entirely subsumed in romance. *Grandison*'s two-heroine plot would seem to have established an unsolvable problem for itself, as neither Harriet Byron nor Clementina della Porretta outdoes the other in beauty, moral goodness, or love for the hero—a multi-heroine setup to which critics have devoted a great deal of attention.[4] What the interest in the equal footing of these female characters has overshadowed, however, is Richardson's alignment of his hero's moral goodness with chastity. In doing so, Richardson eradicates male sexuality from the plot entirely and transfers male desirability into the realm of the psychological.

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[4] See, for example, Doody; Conway, "Sexual Politics of Toleration"; Jones; and Yates.

In their last novels, Fielding and Richardson both foreground questions of male sexual conduct and desirability in ways that earlier texts – including the writers' own – had designated as secondary or tertiary narrative concerns. Earlier courtship novels had unequivocally upheld female virtue as aligned with male desire, and the dire legal and social consequences for a woman who fell from virtue were mirrored by these fictions. In its emerging form, therefore, novels reinforced social and legal parameters for female sexual behavior, equating desirable women with those whose sexuality had been properly controlled. With the shifting of the courtship novel's concerns into the psychological space of women, however, narratives could no longer represent sexual promiscuity on the part of men with the impartial or comic tone of the Restoration if writers wanted to appeal to a female audience – as Richardson's correspondents clearly attest to. Because of the internalization of narrative that Richardson brought about with *Pamela*, the sexual double-standard with respects to promiscuity was highlighted by the novel, and authors could not fall back on prior representations of the endearing or comic rake if they wanted to make the question of their heroines' choice of a husband either convincing or satisfying to a female readership. As such, although legal and social consequences for male sexual promiscuity remained (and remains) comparatively unaddressed, courtship novels fabricated a world for their audiences in which "good" men chose to be as sexually conservative as women had to be.

2.1 Courtship Novels of the 1740s

Women's sexual conduct had of course become a focal point of novels well before Richardson. Although Restoration drama made comic use of the promiscuity of

both sexes, chastity as a mark of desirable womanhood features in novels as early as *Oroonoko* (1688) and (somewhat counter-intuitively) *Love in Excess* (1719).[5] Defoe, in the novels in which he addresses women at all, puts that focus on sexual conduct. *Moll Flanders* (1722) and *Roxana* (1724) are tales of criminals, but featuring heavily in both of these heroines' stories is their sexual licentiousness: hence the crimes of Moll's prostitution and Roxana's polyandry. These female characters notably enact their sexuality, unlike those who would figure in mid-century novels, whose sexuality was transformed into polite discourse, letters, courtship rituals, and inexplicable fears and tremors. But even in later novels – as we shall see – female sexual conduct remains a primary concern, in spite of its shift in form. Not until the 1740s do we get anything comparable in prose fiction for men's sexual conduct, and not until the 1750s does this feature operate as the primary focus of a text – rather than acting as a secondary plot to a primary concern for women's sexuality. Looking at the earlier works of Fielding and Richardson can thus elucidate the ways in which they struggled to create sexual but morally desirable heroes, how these struggles can be seen as a trajectory that led towards the often-ignored final novel of each author, and how the unresolved question of male sexuality in Fielding's *Amelia* might have led to Richardson's decision to transpose the sexuality of Sir Charles Grandison into a more palatable – because nonsexual – form of rakishness.

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[5] Although many of the women in this novel are by no means chaste (indeed, Melantha makes sport out of sexual conquest), Melliora's principled adherence to virtue despite her admitted passion for D'Elmont ultimately puts a stop to his own promiscuity, in a strikingly pre-*Pamela* narrative.

Pamela (1740), of course, does not immediately appear to differ significantly from its own novelistic predecessors with respects to female sexual conduct, as it very much centers on rewarding its heroine's virtue. That Mr. B clearly lacks this virtue – and ultimately reveals he has had a child with another woman – is no real concern for the novel. Rather, Richardson directs all of our attention to Pamela's trial: whether she will retain her virtue and marry; whether Lady Davers and the rest of the community will accept her as Mr. B's wife; and how Pamela will react to the news of Sally Godfrey and her daughter. This focus on Pamela renders her aggressor and (future) husband both static and absolved: quote Sir Charles Grandison, "men will be men" (*SCG* II.407), a focus upheld by Richardson's first novel. Mr. B's sexual promiscuity (to say nothing of his use of force) is ever visible and of secondary concern. Because Richardson locates the outcome of this novel in the strength of his heroine's virtue, the attention given to Mr. B's behavior is filtered through the anxiety the reader must feel for Pamela. As Nancy Armstrong has shown, "Pamela's transformation from an object of desire into a female sensibility also transforms Mr. B"; in stripping Pamela to find her letters, Mr. B reworks typical notions of libertine desire by deflecting eroticism away from the female body and onto writing (Armstrong 117, 120). But to the extent that Mr. B is transformed here, it is only as to *how* he desires, and not as to whether or how much. Mr. B has refigured libertine desire, but a libertine he still is, and the revelation of his history with Sally Godfrey in Volume II shows that even though the form that his desire for Pamela takes may have changed, this does not erase his past – more traditional – libertine escapades.[6]

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[6] I differ here from Bonnie Latimer, who writes that "Richardson's novels generally, of course, do not see

Thus the "legitimate monogamy" that the novel upholds speaks specifically to Pamela's story, rather than Mr. B's; when the novel redefines love as a standard for marriage, subsuming fortune and birth as desirable qualities, this shift centers specifically around the woman. As Armstrong points out, both fortune and birth still remain necessary qualities of the ideal male suitor (Armstrong 129), but "virtue" – in its eighteenth-century association with chastity – is not addressed as a possibility. Men's passions might be redirected onto writing, but they are held as a given, in whatever form they take. This is not to suggest that Mr. B is morally depraved in terms of the novel, but that we can locate male virtue in the monogamy that Mr. B ultimately finds with Pamela, rather than in chastity – a distinction that some of Richardson's contemporary readers found dissatisfying.[7]

Fielding's major novel preceding *Amelia* deals more explicitly with its hero's libertinism in the traditional sense; *Tom Jones* (1749) does not transfer the passions of its protagonist onto the written word. Calling back to the loveable rakes of Restoration drama, Fielding blends comedy with an adroitness at seduction in order to endear the sexual exploits of his hero to his readers. We cheer at Tom's blundering escape from Thwackum's watchful eye, and we smirk at the imprint Molly has left on the grass – despite a hope (or perhaps because of an assurance) that Tom and Sophia will be united

rakes (reformed or otherwise) as marriage material" (Latimer 4). Latimer goes on to state pointedly that she does not make an exception for Mr. B, but her point is that *Pamela* does not *recommend* reforming a rake, rather than completely divesting Mr. B of this label. Richardson's first novel may not be "an argument for marrying rakes in general," but Mr. B's rakishness acts as a crucial narrative component of the novel.

[7] See Carroll, p. 104.

in the end. But ultimately, Fielding's novel invests itself not in the sexual conduct of its hero, but in the social proprieties of handling that sexual conduct – that is, in prudence. The narrative scrutinizes not the sexual acts themselves, but rather Tom's handling of their aftermaths; his growth into a marriageable man derives not from an increased sense of fidelity to Sophia but an increased sense of the proper way to respond in the wake of unfaithful acts. What makes Tom's exploits acceptable to the reader is his offer of marriage to Molly when he believes her to be pregnant – and, crucially, to have been faithful to him. Tom's discovery of Square behind the curtain in his lover's bedroom releases him from the protective and financial duty he owed her. Likewise, the major issue that arises between Tom and Sophia originates in his lack of prudence in using her name publicly at an inn. Never mind that Sophia is fully aware of Tom's former relationship with Molly, nor that he is sleeping his way across England as he attempts to track Sophia down; what is at stake is Sophia's reputation, as is Molly's. Thus, the focus of the novel, despite the fact that the narrative follows Tom much more closely than it does Sophia, concerns itself far more with questions of proper female conduct than it does with Tom's own sexual adventures. Regardless of whether the woman in question is invariably chaste (Sophia), invested in pleasure with little thought to the social consequences (Molly), or making use of her sexuality in a predatory manner (Lady Bellaston), the plot pivots on questions of women's reputation with regards to sexual conduct. Tom's own reputation comes into play not over questions of his promiscuity, but solely in situations where wealth and property are at stake.

Tom's promiscuity, then, would seem to follow the precedent that Tony Tanner articulates for the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novel, which he says increasingly

gain their narrative "energy" from threats to the domestic ideal embodied in marriage – threats specifically posed by women, not men (Tanner 4). Male sexual conduct, Tanner suggests, does not propel the novel's plot forward because it does not threaten the domestic sphere in the same way that a woman's infidelity does. Although I will be addressing "infidelity" and "adultery" in their traditional senses later in this chapter, it is crucial to note that although these are the forms that women's sexual trespasses outside of monogamous marriage generally take in novels, the same does not go for men. From *Roxana* to *A Simple Story* to *Vanity Fair*, the sexual wanderings of these novels' heroines are always put in the context of their marital status. For a woman to "wander" before marriage renders her unequal to the task of becoming a heroine; even Roxana starts out a loyal wife. For a male character, it is a rare case in which any emphasis is placed on his marital status, and the terms "infidelity" and "adultery" thus become much murkier terminology when we try to speak of men's promiscuity (although in certain novels, as we shall see, that a man has committed adultery is quite clear-cut). Tanner's assertion, then, follows to the extent that women's adultery propels novels' plots forward because it is specifically women whose sexuality is addressed in a legal context. Men's sexual conduct, however, as both Mr. B and Tom Jones show, is not absent from these plots – on the contrary, I argue that men's sexual wanderings are a critical part of these courtship narratives. Although sexual promiscuity on the part of male characters may not incite the same social or legal repercussions as it does for women, it "propels social subjects into imaginary spaces and temporalities" (Kipnis 44), opening up narrative possibilities and a potential for change that would not otherwise exist.

The courtship plot embodied by *Pamela* and *Tom Jones* reached immense popularity in the 1740s because, as Linda Bree (among others) has argued, it "showed . . . male and female readers how [the courtship] system could work, in an ideal form, combining these desirable materialities with the personal happiness of a love-match" (Bree 17). With respect to the early novels of Fielding and Richardson, however, the sexual/"love-match" solution for "how this system can work" rests in the woman: sexual promiscuity on the part of a male protagonist (Mr. B, Lovelace, Tom Jones) constitute educational missteps on the path to marital redemption, and their female counterparts act both as their guides and their rewards.[8] These missteps seem a given for men over the trajectory of the courtship plot, as does a lack of culpability for these sexual exploits. Molly Seagrim absolves Tom Jones by sneaking around with Square; Mr. B is freed from judgment over his relationship with Sally Godfrey once Pamela discovers that Sally is happily married in Jamaica; Lovelace absolves himself of his history with Miss Betterton by claiming that he had honestly told her he would never marry her. Each of these cases points to an involvement with a woman who, we are led to believe, is less worthy of male desire than the heroine of the novel – either because she is of a lower class or because she does not have the same unshakeable virtue as the heroine. Mr. B's case is, of course, somewhat unique in respect to how his absolution functions within questions of class; that his redemption for his previous relationship with Sally Godfrey allows him to marry another woman of the working class is, famously, an anomaly – and one that sets Pamela's virtue apart as a desirable quality that eclipses her working-class status. There is

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[8] A reward that, in the case of Lovelace, he clearly neither merits nor receives – but his tragedy is that there could have been a "right" way to woo Clarissa, despite his own sexual history.

a stated class difference, however, between Molly Seagrim and Sophia, as well as between Miss Betterton and Clarissa. *Tom Jones* and *Clarissa* both suggest that the women who are the agents of men's education in prudence are of the working class – groundskeepers' or tradesmen's daughters. The Sophias and Clarissas of early courtship novels, however, are the reward the male protagonists must strive for (in some cases more successfully than others). So long as the sexually promiscuous man also abides by his sense of duty to the working-class women who litter his path to the upper-class heroine,[9] the narrative does not condemn him. Only in the case of Lovelace, who does irreparable harm to the upper-class heroine herself, does the rake hero stay a rake.

Indeed, not only does the novel not condemn the male protagonist, but these early novels also suggest that these "other women" play a crucial role in developing his character and, by proxy, in developing the heroine's desire for him. Molly Seagrims and Sally Godfreys provide the heroine and the reader with definitive points of change for the male love interests: these women act as markers on a trajectory from imprudence to faithfulness. This is why Lady Bradshaigh's plea for a "moderate rake" in a letter to Richardson fits with the mold of courtship novels that precede *Grandison* (Carroll 171). Although the term "rake" carries with it a more devious, negative connotation than Fielding is apt to apply to his heroes, Tom Jones's profligacy – stopped short by his ultimate lesson in prudence – fits with what Lady Bradshaigh hoped to see in Richardson's next protagonist, and to apply the term "moderate rake" to Mr. B takes no stretch of the imagination. In moderation, rakishness becomes a desirable quality because

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[9] Indeed, "abiding by one's duty" is one of Lovelace's professed rules of rakedom. See *Clarissa*, p. 495.

it suggests a timeline of redemption, and without a narrative interiority for male emotions, external assessment of tapering promiscuity allows for the heroine and the reader to extrapolate moral growth through the man's actions, rather than his thoughts.

The courtship plot that Bree outlines as typical of the '40s and '50s, therefore, not only shows readers how one could successfully court and be courted in terms of family finances and personal affection, but also how this concept of personal affection must necessarily involve the navigation of the man's sexual history. A woman ought not to find fault with the existence of a sexual history (indeed, as we shall see, Charlotte Grandison's delicate handling of her own brother's chastity suggests that women should *expect* their future husbands to have a sexual past), so long as the man in question has both done his financial duty by the woman or women in question, as well as has only been involved with women of an equal or (ideally) lower class than his wife-to-be.

Tanner's assertion that it is not the infidelities of men that propel narratives forward might seem beside the point in outlining these stipulations for romantic protagonists. After all, courtship plots, by their very subject matter, would not seem to deal in adultery so much as in the staging to make adultery possible; pre-marital sex of the sort that Tom Jones and Mr. B indulge in does not fall under the legal purview of adultery. But although these early novels might not be driven by a man's *marital* infidelity, the basic premise of these courtship plots establishes a relationship before one exists in any official or legal sense; in fiction, unlike in our world, infidelity is capable of preceding any sort of formally acknowledged relationship status. Because these novels center on the interactions of one man and one woman, because – even where Blifils and Molly Seagrims and Mr. Williams and Sally Godfreys exist – it is clear from the

beginning of each novel who will ultimately be paired off with whom, Tom's philandering with Molly feels not only like a comical deviation, but also like a betrayal. Mr. B's history with Sally, even though it precedes his attempts to seduce Pamela, sullies the heroine's perception of him, making redemption of some sort *necessary*. Without these redemptive moments, the novels would suggest that the male protagonists have free rein to carry on sexual relationships with women other than the heroine without consequences. What Molly's affair with Square and Sally's marriage in Jamaica provide for the reader, then, is not only absolution for Tom and Mr. B, but an indication that they needed this absolution – that their sexual wanderings, though perhaps not adulterous in any legal sense, have gone against the grain of fidelity set up by the courtship plot of the novel.

Even though these early courtship novels allow for sexually promiscuous male protagonists – unlike those of the latter decades of the eighteenth century, as we shall see – their promiscuity comes with an element of external assessment by the women in the novels. Men's sexual histories are not the focal points of these plots, but they don't escape the heroines' or the readers' attentions – and these attentions foreshadow the extent to which Richardson and Fielding's last novels bring the question of male sexual conduct into the spotlight. In both of the authors' earlier novels that I've discussed, the man's promiscuity provides crucial information for both the heroine and the reader regarding his character. Sally Godfrey's existence acts as a final test of how we – and Pamela – will read Mr. B, and her marital happiness allows him our final stamp of approval. It is to Tom Jones's credit that he offers to marry Molly Seagrim, despite his love for Sophia: it shows us that he is willing to uphold duty over personal happiness.

Even Lovelace's history with Miss Betterton provides Clarissa and the reader with a critical piece of information: we cannot doubt that he impregnated Miss Betterton, but – according to Lovelace himself – he made no promise of marriage to her, and therefore can retain some identity as an Honest Man. A man's sexual conduct might not mark the defining act that propels these narratives forward, but male sexual conduct is ever-present throughout these plots and becomes crucial to the woman's assessment of men's characters. As such, the unfolding of this assessment does not propel but *sustains* the plot, opening up questions of reform or continued indulgence, change or stasis. Courtship novels are inherently fictions about choice, and infidelity is "at heart a drama about change. It's a way of trying to invent a world, and a way of knowing something about what we may want."[10] The unfaithfulness of male protagonists to the heroines provides female characters with concrete information about the world these suitors purportedly want for themselves, and a happy ending of a courtship novel ultimately shows that among the choices promiscuity has opened up for the male protagonist, faithfulness to our heroine eclipses them all.

2.2 Criminal Conversations: Male Sexual Conduct in Fielding's *Amelia*

Fielding's last novel provides us with an early example of a work that disregards the notion of "courtship infidelity" suggested above and focuses entirely on an actual marriage, much as the novels examined by Tanner would do a century later. By the time the novel opens, Amelia and Booth have been married for some time and already have

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[10] See Kipnis, p. 34. Kipnis speaks here not of infidelity but of adultery, although in courtship novels, as I have argued, they are one and the same.

several children. As John Cleland noted in a 1751 review of the novel in the *Monthly Review*, "The author takes up his heroine at the very point at which all his predecessors have dropped their capital personages" (Paulson 304), showing that even Fielding's contemporaries made note of his deviation from the typical courtship narrative. However, *Amelia* offers an exception, rather than an example, to Tanner's rule: Booth's infidelity to his wife is both one of the first actions of *Amelia* as well as the focal point of the novel as a whole; thus the novel takes on the difficult and precarious task of attempting to evaluate a man's sexual conduct *after* he has already found the sexual resolution of a "good woman" put forward by earlier novels of courtship.

Despite its title, I argue, the stakes of *Amelia* center much more around Booth than they do around his wife—a point that has been under contention since the novel first appeared. As John Cleland also noted in his review, "virtuous and laudable as the tenderness and constancy of a wife to her husband must for ever be considered, these affections are . . . too often esteemed as merely matter of pure duty, and intirely in course" (Paulson 304). Cleland's reading would suggest that although the novel deals with the often-ignored question of what happens to desire after the marital celebrations, its focus is on the constancy of the heroine, rather than the hero. And yet, neither Booth nor Fielding's narrator even uses Amelia's name until the beginning of Book II, well after her husband's infidelity has taken place, and as Patricia Meyer Spacks has pointed out, Amelia's unwavering constancy to Booth is the very thing that defines her character (Spacks 278). Because the first one hundred pages or so of the novel give no attention to Amelia herself – but rather pointedly draw attention to Booth's sexual liaison – the constancy and "marital affections" that the novel foregrounds are those of the husband,

not the wife. And yet, Cleland's reading of the novel also finds supporters in more recent criticism. Alison Conway has argued that Fielding focuses his "narrative on the plight of a virtuous woman," rather than on the plight of an un-virtuous man (Conway 37). While a great deal of the novel does follow Amelia's struggle to ward off her many adulterous admirers, her husband's own infidelity and creeping guilt takes such a primacy of attention in the early chapters that Booth's internal plot cannot help but bleed into Amelia's external struggles later in the novel, when his attempts to cover up his original indiscretion form a constant backdrop to the foregrounded action of the attempts on Amelia's virtue by other men.[11] Although Conway's argument pivots on the idea that Amelia's physical blemish – her broken nose and the scar its reconstruction has left – links her to a moral standard marked by a depth of character that Fielding's other heroines lack (and for which he famously much admired Richardson's Clarissa), no amount of facial reconstruction, I argue, could make Amelia's plight overshadow the depth of character caused by her husband's internalized guilt.[12]

Angela Smallwood writes in *Amelia*'s defense that its heroine exemplifies not insipidness – as many of the book's early twentieth-century critics accused her of – but a "tenderness" that posits her as the compelling moral center of the novel (Smallwood

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[11] An aspect of the narrative that at least one contemporary reviewer did pick up on. See Paulson and Lockwood, p. 291 (unsigned review in *London Magazine*, 1751).

[12] Indeed, Amelia's broken nose has received a staggering amount of critical attention, both in modern criticism of the novel and in its initial reviews. Along with the oft-cited anachronism inherent in Booth's military history, Amelia's facial blemish has received more critical focus than any other aspect of the novel. See the 1751 unsigned review in *London Magazine*, 'Criticulus' in the March 1752 *Gentleman's Magazine*, and Johnson's anecdotal comment, for just a few examples (Paulson and Lockwood 303, 349, 445).

169).[13] Moral center she undoubtedly is; her rejection of adulterous suitor after adulterous suitor, even in the face of dire financial necessity, offers the moral basis against which we are meant to read her husband's own internal guilt. But it is this guilt that receives the narrator's real attention. Fielding never truly puts into question Amelia's virtue; he refrains from revealing any real blemish on her own character (other than just her face) that would allow her depth or give her own personal narrative the possibility for change. Thus the ways in which she is "tested" by other men's desires *only* serve to provide this moral basis for her husband's actions. Spacks has suggested that Amelia's "changelessness" (Spacks 278)—for it is not only faithfulness that marks Amelia but an overarching refusal to allow any aspect of the plot to disrupt her unwavering state of composure—is a byproduct of Booth's change*ful*ness, and that the two work in tandem: "Providing the still point in a turning world, [Amelia] makes Booth's development possible" (Spacks 280).[14]

That Amelia is upheld as a beacon of unchanging virtue, aligning femininity with constancy, is of course nothing new: but the blatant correlation between sexual profligacy and masculinity strikes a chord in the opening pages of the novel that immediately sets Booth apart from the male protagonists who had come before. While unjustly imprisoned

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[13] Smallwood's argument hinges on the idea that other characters' persistent underestimation of Amelia's qualities of tenderness and steady friendship highlight those very qualities for the reader, ultimately situating them as ideals that Fielding is putting forward not only for women, but for men as well. This perspective, however, overlooks the much more complex and (as we shall see) unresolved question of whether Booth actually embodies these values by the end of the novel or, more interestingly, whether there are other values more strictly tied to his sexual conduct that the novel puts forward for him. See Smallwood, pp. 152-171.

[14] Conversely, Tiffany Potter has argued that Amelia's "sexual virtue eventually becomes something of an incarnation of libertinism in itself" (Potter 158), suggesting that Fielding's heroine is one libertine among many that the novel puts forward – and, as such, stimulates her own portion of narrative action equal to that of her husband's.

at Newgate, Miss Matthews – an old acquaintance of Booth's – seduces him in his cell, and the two live in what novel calls this "criminal conversation" for an entire week before Booth's release (*A* 177). The majority of the rest of the novel deals with Booth juggling his guilt in secret, while his beautiful wife remains virtuous in the face of numerous seductive advances from other men. Because Amelia is not apprised of her husband's infidelity until almost the end of the novel, the assessment of Booth's actions falls very much to the narrator and reader; that is, by contrast to Fielding's or Richardson's novels up until this point, Booth's sexual conduct does not function as a character-building point for the novel's heroine. This is not to say that Booth's character does not change over the course of the novel,[15] but the extent to which this change of character addresses his sexual conduct is restricted to his time at Newgate. The adultery he commits there both puts the plot in motion and sees to it that his moral juggling of its aftermath will be internalized for the remainder of the novel, given the much of the remainder of the plot hinges on his fear that Amelia will discover this infidelity.[16] Booth's sexual conduct is thus the driving force of the novel – both in itself and in that it allows Miss Matthews to blackmail him, thus throwing him into a series of further predicaments – but its usefulness as a narrative tool is separate from Amelia's own romantic assessment of him as a suitable partner. Amelia remains a fixed point of unwavering virtue, largely unaware of the quiet but ever-present infidelity plot that

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[15] Indeed, Spacks has pointed to the many ways that Amelia's "continuous state of being" is offset by the narrative separation between Booth's "goodness" and his "dubious actions": "By turns weak and strong, foolish and wise, self-indulgent and devoted to his family, he undergoes a process of growth through which he acquires fuller knowledge of his wife's excellence and his own weaknesses as well as of the truths of Christianity" (Spacks 277).

[16] As Amelia's reaction to his adultery reveals towards the end of the novel, however, this secrecy is more crucial to the plot than it is to their marriage.

pervades the novel, while the reader must grapple on his or her own with the question of what it means to have an inconstant hero.

Because Amelia, a paragon of what Peter Sabor has called "improbable and wearisome virtue" (Sabor 16), enters the narrative only in the second volume, the narrator's perspective is more closely aligned with Booth than with his wife – and thus more closely aligned with his adulterous aims (or "accidents," as Fielding calls them) in Volume I. The hero's pointed reluctance to describe his wife in any way – although both Miss Matthews and the reader are aware that he is married – smacks of an ashamed discretion, something akin to the modern-day removal of the wedding ring. Amelia's conspicuous absence from the first volume of the book does not receive much attention from the narrator once she does appear in Volume II. Rather, the narrator's tone in introducing her is indicative of his passivity towards Booth's infidelity generally.

When Amelia's name finally does appear, it is in the context of Booth being a victim of a cliché: "If the vulgar Opinion of the Fatality in Marriage had ever any Sanction, it surely, had such in my Marriage with my *Amelia*" (*A* 98). This sudden entrance of Booth's wife as a tangible character comes hand in hand with the sort of divestment of responsibility for this self-same "fatality in marriage" that Booth exhibits throughout the novel. Just as in *Tom Jones*, a personified Fortune plays a somewhat tongue-in-cheek but nevertheless large role in the protagonist's fate[17] – a far cry from

[17] I disagree with John S. Coolidge's assertion that "Fielding renounces the aid of Fortune" in *Amelia* (Coolidge 164); although I take his point that Booth's rationale for his actions – however "mistaken" Fielding might have intended them to seem – does generally set him apart from Tom Jones, whose dependence on Fortune's will is much more foregrounded than is Booth's. However, in the case of Booth's infidelity, the narrator himself speaks to the chance aspect of this particular act of adultery (as seen above),

Richardson, who, although also asking his readers to negotiate the sexual morality of a man who desires more than one woman, does not delegate the burden of answering this question to a personified goddess. Even as Fielding instills Fortune with the power to use "her utmost Endeavours to ensnare poor *Booth*'s Constancy," he presents the reader with an assortment of evidence in Booth's defense: "let [the reader] remember that Mr. *Booth* was a young Fellow, in the highest Vigour of Life; and lastly, let him add one single Circumstance, that the Parties were alone together; and then if he will not acquit the Defendant, he must be convicted; for I have nothing more to say in his Defense" (*A* 176). Youth, vigor, and opportunity – are these exhibits sufficient to plead Booth's case? Having foregrounded the question, Fielding seems unable to adequately address it and thus distances himself from the question of "defense" entirely. Fielding is neither truly defending Booth nor convicting him; rather, Fielding exempts *himself* from saying anything definitive on Booth's adultery, and in doing so allows space for his narrator and reader to inhabit a space of comfortable neutrality regarding marital infidelity.

By bringing the question of "defending" Booth to the reader's attention, however, Fielding ensured that a long line of critics would not take neutral positions on this matter at all – nor had they done so with respects to Fielding's earlier novels. George Sherburn's oft-quoted essay on *Amelia* says of Booth that "all his faults (which are not so many) are those of the eighteenth-century gentleman. No man of his station (except Sir Charles Grandison) could have refused the overtures of Miss Matthews in Newgate" (Sherburn

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which seems to be an attempt to release Booth from any sense of blame in the narrator's (if not the reader's) eyes.

149), bizarrely restricting male infidelity to an anomalous occurrence of the 1700s. John Middleton Murry wrote of Fielding's "sexual ethics" that Lady Booby's sexual invitations to Tom Jones must have been "irresistible to a young man of normal composition"; that Mrs. Waters's seduction of Tom leads the reader to the conclusion that "Tom really had not much chance"; and that Tom's idea that "one woman is better than none" is "a sentiment which, if not very exalted, is natural" (Murry 90, 93, 96). These mid-twentieth-century assessments of Fielding's sexual politics can be read not only as products of their own moment, but also, perhaps, as producing the particular critical reception of Fielding that followed. Conway, for example, argues that Fielding creates no neutrality but a confusion between Amelia's virtue and her desirability – a confusion that backs the ("presumably male," Conway says) reader into identifying more with her passionate admirers than with the moral center herself. Amelia's "praises are sung again and again, but only in order to account for yet another illicit passion . . . the narrator comes dangerously close to situating himself and the reader in the position occupied by the novel's libertines" (Conway 45). If Amelia's unshakable virtue renders her both the static moral center of the novel as well as an object of desire for seemingly all of the male characters (eligible and otherwise), the reader finds himself – or herself – aligned with the desirers, making the moral quandary of Booth one in which we are implicated. Although Fielding's wry ambivalence towards Booth's infidelity might suggest a neutral reading of the writer's sexual politics, critical responses illuminate the many ways in which this "neutrality" is more often read as exculpatory or even bemused, both by the (male) critics who established a certain response to Fielding by twentieth-century readers, and by the readers themselves, who, as Conway suggests, find themselves naturally

aligned with a male perspective that not only works in defense of male promiscuity but also renders us desirous and promiscuous readers. Fielding's earlier works primed readers for interpreting male promiscuity as simply "natural," or as humorous and benign rather than worthy of inquiry. But even in this last novel, where the author seems to grapple more seriously with male sexual conduct, the familiar tactic of shifting the man's sexual agency onto the will of Fortune reveals how slippery a slope exists between taking male sexual promiscuity as something worth questioning and taking it as an object of bemusement.

In spite of Fielding's occasionally jocular tone with respect to Booth's infidelity, however, the very structure of the narrative compels readers to desire a reconciliation between Booth and Amelia. Booth is differentiated from the many other profligate men in the novel by the very fact that he is the adulterous husband and not the ambitious "other man." Along with the attention his character receives in Volume I, his position as an "insider" in the central marriage of the novel, rather than an intruder from the outside, sets him up to elicit readers' sympathies. Although the novel does not follow the traditional courtship plot, readers in the early 1750s would have been familiar enough with the trajectory of these plots and the investments in a couple's success that the reconciliation and future marital bliss of Booth and Amelia would be a desire of readers – one that would potentially come into conflict with the way the novel simultaneously renders us complicit in attempts on Amelia's virtue. Thus the reader finds him- or herself invested in the moral redemption of a man whose sexual betrayal of the novel's paragon of virtue has been evident from the first pages. Because the narrator aligns the reader's perspective – both structurally and tonally – with the adulterous husband, the reader is

invested in a resolution to the plot that will be in his favor, despite the fact that this puts into question the very problem of faithfulness that the courtship plots with which readers would have been more familiar purported to resolve.

The familiarity of the courtship plot, when combined with our narrative alignment with the perspective of an adulterous hero, produces a conflict with the notion that this selfsame hero will redeem himself through narrative action. Fielding's last hero is no Tom Jones, and his sexual redemption, by the narrative formula of novels from the decade prior, ought to have preceded the narrative of the novel itself. Indeed, Peter Sabor has suggested that it is Booth's recounting of his romantic history – that is, his *past* actions – in the novel's first volume that provides the reader with the necessary information to judge his character (Sabor 8-9). Although Booth's inability to tell his wife of his infidelities course through much of the novel's narration, much of the external action of the story focuses on Amelia repulsing suitor after suitor. *Amelia* thus takes the active/passive roles established by earlier courtship novels and reverses them, situating the majority of the man's "action" in the first volume, and leaving the rest of the novel's external plot to hinge largely on the woman's *re*action to attempts at seduction.

Fielding therefore puts forth in his last novel a male protagonist whose interiority is incapable of translation through exterior actions; although his sexual promiscuity is what sets off the novel, the remainder of the text must grapple with the interior aftermath of this infidelity.[18] Jill Campbell suggests that Booth's inaction is a product of the shift

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[18] Smallwood suggests that this shift to Booth's interiority is an indication of his femininity, and that Amelia herself is representative of the "manliness" that Fielding wants to put forward as ideal: "Intensely alert to the issue of the moral identities of the sexes, *Amelia* asks where true manliness is to be found,

not only in genre but in gender that occurred over the decade that Fielding wrote his major novels: “Booth is rendered passive, uncertain, and dependent by the mixture of new and old expectations about masculine behavior that surround him,” “the masculine codes of Cavalier gallantry and of virtue” (Campbell 205, 215). Amelia herself, Campbell goes on to argue, is the real hero of the novel, because it is with her that “the emotional and aesthetic claims of tragedy and heroism” rest (Campbell 210). Accepting this argument, however, we would also have to consider what it is to have this new figure of the female hero in the context of knowing her to be just that: new, and working against the backdrop of a long history of active male heroes of which her husband clearly is not a part. The attention that the narrative gives Amelia in volumes II-IV of the novel, coming as it does after her conspicuous absence from volume I, only helps to draw our attention to Booth’s passivity, highlighting the question of how harsh a sentence – if, indeed, putative action is deemed at all necessary – the novel will ultimately give him for the actions he takes in volume I.

Fielding replaces Booth’s “active” role in the narrative not only by his wife’s reactive one, however, but also by the action of the many other men who stray throughout the novel. These more minor male characters, those whose lecherous perspectives Conway argues we are aligned with, ultimately receive much more blatantly negative treatment from the narrator than does Booth; Fielding cannot seem to reconcile his

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where conduct most becoming to human nature resides” (Smallwood 146). Smallwood’s assertion, however, implies not only that “true manliness” can be equated with ideal human nature, but also that the very concept of manliness is a fixed concept – rather than one that Fielding himself was struggling to define.

stringent ideas of adultery when it comes to other characters with his more bemused and forgiving attitude towards his protagonist. Although Booth is forgiven for his adulterous acts before he even comes clean, James is challenged to a duel for merely plotting to sleep with Amelia (*A* 495), and the narrator makes more than one comment to the effect that an adulterous man cannot be redeemed. On the penultimate page of the novel, Fielding writes, “So apt are Men, whose Manners have been once thoroughly corrupted, to return, from any Dawn of an Amendment, into the dark Paths of Vice” (*A* 515). Are we not, then, to suspect that Booth himself will be subject to this destiny? Structurally, if the novel repeatedly tests Amelia’s fidelity in order to position her as the moral center to which Booth cannot live up, the many other promiscuous men throughout the novel would seem to undo this comparative work by creating a sense of unease with respect to the premise of Booth’s reformed constancy. Not merely through the adulterous acts of the first volume of *Amelia*, but also through the characterization both of Amelia herself and the other men in the novel, does Fielding create a moral narrative quandary that seems incapable of resolution.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, many readers and critics have found the ending of *Amelia* unsatisfying and, in some cases, illogical. When Booth finally does reveal his infidelity to Amelia, the question of his guilt and her forgiveness is resolved relatively quickly. Although Amelia proclaims midway through the novel, “I mortally hate a Liar, and can forgive any Fault sooner than a Falsehood” (*A* 263), she later forgives her husband’s untruthfulness (which has lasted throughout the entire book) before he even confesses his affair to her. While Amelia does “wander in a kind of twilight” after his confession (*A* 480), relatively little is made of Booth’s adultery once it is out in the open,

contradicting not only Amelia's own purported sense of moral uprightness in truth-telling, but also the reader's expectations. Fielding's novel, having set itself up with the narrative problem of addressing a man's sexual conduct post-marriage – a problem that courtship novels purported to have already neatly resolved – ultimately settles this question in a way that feels *too* neat for the amount of attention he has given to Booth's secret.

Indeed, some of Fielding's contemporary readers felt disbelief and dissatisfaction at the novel's conclusion; numerous readers and reviewers commented on the unsuitability of Booth to be the male protagonist opposite the virtuous Amelia at all,[19] and a few of them went so far as Sarah Chapone did in a letter to Elizabeth Carter: "Don't you think Booth's sudden conversion a mere botch to save the author's credit as a moral writer?"[20] The novel's plot, set off by Booth's infidelity and sustained by the constant reminder of this infidelity through the unwavering virtue of his wife, feels somewhat deflated by the easy fix of Amelia's quick forgiveness and restoration of trust. This irresolute quality of not only Booth's morality but the majority of the characters in *Amelia* has been much commented on by others; Tiffany Potter notes that all of the novel's characters apart from Justice Thrasher – and including Amelia herself – are "morally and motivationally ambiguous" (Potter 146), and that it is this sense of ambiguity with which the novel leaves us. Likewise, Sabor has noted of the narrative voice in *Amelia* that "the speaker unwittingly mislead[s] the reader" (Sabor 10), telling us

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[19] See, for example, Paulson and Lockwood, p. 350 (letter from Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter).
[20] See Paulson and Lockwood, p. 318 (letter from Sarah Chapone to Elizabeth Carter, 1752). For similar comments in this vein, see Anne Donnellan's letter to Richardson, p. 319, as well as Richardson's own reply, p. 335.

something about one character that the action of the novel contradicts pages later. Campbell has similarly noted the instability of *Amelia*'s characterization: "[Booth] is not so different from the narrator of *Amelia* himself, who frequently offers incompatible descriptions of characters or accounts of events in succession, seeming to hold himself responsible for local coherence but not for a sustained and total vision of the novelistic world he describes" (Campbell 206). From the 1750s to today, readers of *Amelia* have found it difficult to pin down the novel's moral foundation, finding it liable to shift as soon as one thinks they have found steady ground.

However unstable this moral foundation may be, however, and however accustomed the reader might have become to it, one might still hold out hope that Fielding might resolve all of the reader's lingering questions about the novel's moral ambiguities in the final pages. And yet, the novel eliminates this hope when the narrator fortuitously renders the Booths' financial troubles null with the discovery of a long-lost inheritance for Amelia. Shifting from the moral questions of sexual conduct that have acted as undercurrents throughout the entire novel, Fielding patches up the problem of Booth's guilt with Amelia's immediate forgiveness (whether it is characteristic of her or not we can no longer tell) and concludes the novel with a resolution that would seem to have little to do with the problem of sexual morality it originally poses.

Perhaps Fielding's reluctance to end his novel with the reparation of the narrative complication it originally introduces and his choice to weave a newfound narrative problem and resolution into the final few chapters of the book signals that the author himself felt that Amelia's forgiveness of Booth was too easily gained and morally ambiguous a solution. By the end of the novel, the adultery plot that we have followed

from the start has shifted to a plot that hinges on Amelia's legacy, a resolution that many readers have found implausible. Mary Wortley Montagu wrote that Fielding's novels generally—and *Amelia* especially—"encourage young people to hope for impossible events to draw them out of the misery they chose to plunge themselves into, expecting legacies from unknown relations."[21] Critics in our own day have also pointed to the far-fetched and abrupt ending of the novel. Sherburn writes that "Fielding . . . turns his back on his larger theme, and content to make his worthy couple happy, lets them retire to Wiltshire and an untroubled country life" (Sherburn 157), and Campbell writes that "these events [of Amelia's inheritance] . . . have the status almost of a dream (of wish elevated to fictional plot)" (Cambell 204). The ways in which this "dream" ending could possibly interact with the narrative that has preceded it are not immediately clear. We know throughout the novel that the Booths suffer financially – indeed, it is their pecuniary want, along with Amelia's desirability, that drives many of the plot points forward, particularly when the two are negotiated together; Amelia's desirability is viewed as an exchangeable commodity by many of the wealthy men who would like her to stray from her marriage.[22] But the novel refigures itself around questions of property through more ways than just Amelia's persistent suitors.

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[21] See Paulson and Lockwood, p. 379 (letter from Lady Mary Wortley Montagu to the Countess of Bute, 1754).

[22] Some critics have written about this shift to a property narrative; Conway, for example, has argued that the erotic responses Amelia elicits from the men in the novel are transferred to the exchange of property that occurs as a result of the heroine recovering her portrait from Atkinson. The sentimentality with which Amelia receives her stolen portrait from a man who took it out of passion for her becomes linked with materialist eroticism when Amelia later pawns the portrait in order to feed her family. That is, after hundreds of pages of Amelia being thrown into precarious financial situations out of which her various admires could help her, the portrait that Atkinson restores to her gives Amelia a moral way to prostitute

Denied the inheritance that was due her, Amelia's poverty has been an ever-present concern throughout the novel, although Booth's fear of detection and Amelia's defensive negotiation of her many suitors rise to the surface of narrative concern. However, in these final pages, Fielding manages to tie Booth's adultery to the unjust poverty of his family: Booth's infidelities, we learn, are a direct result of his being poor, rather than having any moral deficiency. When the lawyer Murphy's forgery is discovered – a forgery that has disinherited Amelia and appropriated the money for himself – he is said to have "undone a poor family" (*A* 503), shifting the focus away from Booth and to his familial unit as a whole and positioning them all as victims of the law (both literally and figuratively). And after all, this reasoning follows, had Booth had the money to bribe Justice Thrasher in the opening pages, he would never have been in prison in the first place – and thus would never had entered into any criminal conversation with Miss Matthews. "Though not absolutely a *Joseph*, as we have already seen; yet could he not be guilty of premeditated Inconstancy" (*A* 413) – Booth's adultery, the conclusion of the novel leads us to believe, was merely an unfortunate incident caused by the unhappy culmination of circumstances and his wife's unjust state of poverty. Adultery on the part of men is thus relegated to the sphere of legality; Fielding's contradictory approaches to addressing it in moral terms are apparent through the final pages of the novel, but any satisfaction that the conclusion of the novel can offer is in questions of property and legal justice, and not in ethical questions of sexual conduct.

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herself (Conway 46). Conway's argument takes Amelia's desirability and examines how the novel transfers this desirability into a morally acceptable exchange of property.

If the dirty dealing of Amelia's family lawyer, the state of poverty that Murphy's greed throws Amelia into, and the unfortunate timing of Booth's arrest are to blame for Booth's own inconstancy, then the question of Booth's moral exoneration is rendered gratuitous to the novel's conclusion. But putting Booth's adultery into these terms overlooks the novelty of Fielding's last work. *Amelia* was perhaps the first novel that attempted to address the question of the morality of men's sexual conduct outside of a context of redemption. Because the framework to which Fielding turned to explore his theme was a legal category as well as a field for moral judgment, he could resort to contemplating adultery in its purely legal sense. Because the law itself falls short of treating adultery with any sort of severity, his novel simultaneously suggests that thinking about sexual conduct in terms of legality must of necessity leave questions of sexual morality unanswered. When Amelia, having informed Doctor Harrison of the many profligate schemes of their mutual acquaintance the Colonel, cries, "For sure all Mankind almost are Villains in their Hearts" (377), the doctor gives a lengthy explanation of the law and society's attitudes towards adultery:

> In the great Sin of Adultery . . . hath the Government provided any Law to punish it; or doth the Priest take any Care to correct it? On the contrary, is the most notorious Practice of it any Detriment to a Man's Fortune or to his Reputation in the World? Doth it exclude him from any Preferment in the State, I had almost said in the Church? . . . Is he not to be found every Day in the Assemblies of Women of the highest Quality? In the Closets of the greatest Men, and even at the Tables of Bishops? What Wonder then, if the Community in general treat this monstrous Crime as a Matter of Jest, and that Men give way to Temptations of a violent Appetite, when the Indulgence of it is protected by Law and countenanced by Custom. (377)

While Booth's criminal conversation can be traced back through his poverty and ultimately to the corruption of the legal system that deprived him of wealth, so is his

adultery highlighted as an act that intrinsically falls outside of the purview of organized institutions.

Against the grain of the courtship novels of sexual redemption that preceded *Amelia*, Fielding's final novel aligns us from the opening pages with an adulterous protagonist. Thanks to these very courtship narratives, we anticipate a redemptive ending for Booth, although the moral formulation of the novels of the previous decade would seem to preclude any possibility of forgiveness. Forgiveness, however, comes easily – perhaps too easily, failing to align with any sense of characterization that the novel has tried to establish. Fielding thus creates a new problem to take the central focus of the narrative, one that he solves in a way that struck both eighteenth-century and modern-day readers as improbable, and which he also tries to connect back to the original problem of infidelity in order to lend some order and logic to its too-simple solution. Perhaps because of this patchwork ending, critics of Fielding's novel have tended to regard the question of Booth's sexual conduct not as unresolved so much as "natural," something that requires no investigation because its answer is self-evident: a "good man" can stray from his marriage and his wife will forgive him. But Fielding ultimately only shows us the ways in which there is no clear sense of morality in place when it comes to male sexual conduct. *Amelia*, by posing a question it cannot answer, highlights both an exception and a complex addendum to Tony Tanner's assertion: Booth's adultery does set off *Amelia*'s plot, but the very absence of a clear value system for addressing male sexual conduct leaves Fielding unable to resolve the plot in these same terms.

2.3 Sir Charles Grandison: "The Jest of One Sex, and the Aversion of the Other"

In her introduction to *Sir Charles Grandison*, Jocelyn Harris writes that Richardson had not wanted to write this last novel, but that attacks on *Clarissa*, the infuriating popularity of *Tom Jones*, and the prodding of his many correspondents drove him to it (Harris vii). Harris concludes from Richardson's "Concluding Note to the Editor" that *Grandison* was meant to be a direct response to *Tom Jones*, and critics have taken their cue from *Grandison*'s primary modern-day editor.[23] Richardson himself by no means makes this clear. Although we can rest assured that he had Fielding in mind when he penned the following lines, he is conspicuously unspecific as to whether one novel is uppermost in his thoughts: "THE EDITOR of the foregoing collection has the more readily undertaken to publish it, because he thinks Human Nature has often, of late, been shewn in a light too degrading" (*SCG* Book III, p. 464). Richardson's letters reveal frequent enough comments on Fielding's "lowness" to warrant the suspicion that it is indeed Fielding to whom he's referring here, and his letters from the time that he began writing *Sir Charles Grandison*, in 1750, certainly indicate that he had *Tom Jones* and his "low" sexual morals in mind when he set out to construct a depiction of a "good man." But four years passed between Richardson's conception of his final novel and its publication, and *Amelia*, to which contemporary critics paid far more negative attention than they had to the morality of *Tom Jones*, appeared right in the middle of that timespan,

[23] See Richardson, Book III, p. 484, explanatory note to page 464 (2).

in 1751. A close look at Richardson's correspondence during these years suggests that, although the writer might have *originally* conceived of Sir Charles Grandison as a response to Fielding's more famous hero, he likely had Booth in mind as well as the novel progressed.

Tom Jones's popularity famously rankled Richardson and incited his irritation with the public's taste, to which an oft-quoted letter to Lady Bradshaigh in late 1749 testifies: "To draw a good man—a man who needs not repentance, as the world would think! How tame a character? Has not the world shewn me, that it is much better pleased to receive and applaud the character that shows us what we are . . . than what we ought to be?" (Carroll 133). That Sir Charles Grandison was meant to be a response to Tom Jones's character – a character whom, it seemed to Richardson, the reading public loved not in spite of but because he requires reform – readers can safely surmise from this letter. However, later correspondence shows that Tom Jones was not the only character whom Richardson had in mind. Although Fielding's last novel did not receive the overwhelmingly positive response that *Tom Jones* had before it – and thus perhaps incited Richardson's irritation with Fielding less – its "lowness," particularly with respect to its presentation of Booth, became a frequent topic of discussion both between Richardson and his correspondents, as well as among his readers.

No wonder, then, that Richardson focuses so pointedly on Booth's character rather than Amelia's in these letters, given that he read only the first volume of *Amelia*

before becoming disgusted by its content.[24] Still, although Richardson couldn't get past this first section that takes place at Newgate, Fielding's novel remained an object of interest from the time of its publication, in December 1751, throughout the following year. After sending a copy of Fielding's novel to Thomas Edwards, the latter replied, "Go on my good Friend to shew these [P]eople how they ought to write. Though [y]our prescriptions may perhaps work slowly, I do not doubt but that they will mend the age."[25] A few months later, in February of 1752, Anne Donnellan wrote to Richardson,

> I rejoice to find you proceed in the noble design of shewing the man of virtue in all the different circumstances of social life. But what can you mean by seeming uncertain whether you shall publish it? . . . Is it that we do not want such a pattern, or that you imagine there are others can give it better? Will you leave to Capt. Booth and Betty Thoughtless for our examples? . . . I only mention these, to excited Sir Charles Grandison to rescue us out of their hands.[26]

Richardson's replies to these pleas for a "good man" reveal that he was moving forward with the project, although he retained some hesitations about whether or not to publish it in his lifetime.[27] As anticipation for the publication of *Sir Charles Grandison* grew, however, it was not just Richardson's immediate correspondents who were drawing the connection between Fielding and Richardson's ideas of a "good man." Bluestocking Mary Granville Delany wrote to her sister in January 1752, "We are reading Mr. Fielding's Amelia . . . and I don't like it at all . . . I wish Richardson would publish his *good man*, and put all these frivolous authors out of countenance."[28] Both the author himself as well as his readers had *Amelia* on their minds as *Sir Charles Grandison* was

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[24] See Paulson and Lockwood, p. 335, letter from Samuel Richardson to Anne Donnellan, 11 February 1752, as well as Sabor, p. 4.
[25] Ibid., p. 287, letter from Thomas Edwards to Samuel Richardson, 23 December 1751.
[26] Ibid., p. 319, letter from Anne Donnellan to Samuel Richardson, 11 February 1752.
[27] See Carroll, pp. 182, 195-6.
[28] See Paulson and Lockwood, p. 313, letter from Mary Granville Delany to Mrs. Dewes, 18 January 1752.

written, and Harris's assertion that Richardson's final novel was a response to *Tom Jones* alone makes the same oversight with regards to Fielding's last work as the majority of modern criticism has done.

Grandison itself, of course, has often been bypassed by critics in favor of Richardson's earlier works, despite this final novel's enormous popularity for the eighty years or so after its publication.[29] The overwhelming majority of the critical attention the novel has received has focused on the dividedness of Grandison's affections – an aspect of the novel that many of Richardson's contemporary readers found difficult to reconcile as well. Although Grandison fulfills all of the standards of ideal masculinity for 1753 (handsome, wealthy, educated, polite), and though his character reveals numerous other qualities that would become staples of romantic heroes in later fiction (an affection for his sisters, his investment in charitable enterprises for the poor, expert horsemanship, and unwavering filial piety), critics of Richardson's novel have tended to focus overwhelmingly on the apparent non-ideal and perhaps even contradictory romantic situation in which we find him: simultaneously in love with two women.

Shortly after returning from a substantial time abroad in Italy, Grandison rescues Harriet Byron from another man's abduction plot, and the romantic tension that follows has all the makings of a typical courtship novel tending towards marriage. We follow Harriet as she closely observes Grandison, signaling to the reader that, from a narrative standpoint, Harriet occupies the position of "heroine." However, by the third volume of Richardson's tome, we have a good idea that Harriet is not the only woman in his life,

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[29] See Doody, p. 374. Doody suggests that the enormity of Richardson's impact – specifically with *Grandison* – on the novel resulted in a backlash against his works after the 1830s.

and by Volume V, the whole story has come out: that Grandison courted a young Italian heiress during his time abroad, and that he returned home to England when his beloved (Catholic) Clementina began to go mad from her inability to reconcile her feelings for him with his Protestantism. As Margaret Doody has pointed out, although Clementina does not enter the novel until the second half, and despite the fact that we receive the majority of her plot secondhand, the novel indeed has two heroines. Just as (and, indeed, in large part because) neither Harriet nor Clementina has a total hold on Grandison's affections, neither woman can completely subsume the other in the mind of the reader.[30] By this means, Richardson sets up a seemingly impossible narrative problem for himself: in the wake of a long literary history of rakish figures (two of the most infamous having been Richardson's own creations): How can Sir Charles Grandison love two women at once and still remain the ideal figure of masculinity that Richardson's project set out to define?[31]

Divided passion, then, has been the primary focus of most of the critics of Richardson's novel, from its 1753 reception until today.[32] Less examined remains Grandison's restraint of that passion: although he has made the conquest of multiple hearts, he has no experience with sexual pleasure – a key factor that Richardson's correspondents urged him to include in the makeup of an ideal suitor.[33] Richardson's decision to characterize his ideal masculine hero with an unprecedented level of sexual control was at least in some part a result of a conversation he had with Colley Cibber, one

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[30] See Doody, pp. 306-339, "Heroines."
[31] See Carroll, pp. 133 and 161.
[32] See Doody, Jones, and Conway ("Sir Charles Grandison and the Sexual Politics of Toleration").
[33] Ibid., 170-2.

of many correspondents of Richardson's who offered their opinions on the storyline during his writing process. In a letter to Lady Bradshaigh, Richardson writes that part of his resolve in rendering Sir Charles a virgin was the consequence of:

> The contention I had with Mr. Cibber, about the character of a good man, which he undertook to draw, and to whom, at setting out, he gave a mistress, in order to show the virtue of his hero in parting with her, when he had fixed upon a particular lady, to whom he made honorable addresses[.] A male-virgin, said he—ha, ha, ha, hah! . . . he laughed me quite out of countenance![34]

Cibber's derisive laughter recalls ingrained assumptions established by a long line of male literary figures: the libertines of Restoration drama and poetry, the love interests of amatory fiction, as well as the male characters in novels of Richardson's own day (including, of course, his own Mr. B and Lovelace). And Richardson himself agreed with Cibber, at least in part, as he struggled with the idea that a truly morally upright hero, such as he had created in Hickman, would not be convincingly desirable. "I am afraid, very much afraid, that the fine man would not have the young ladies' suffrages in his favour, if he had not more of Lovelace that of Hickman in him," wrote Richardson to Anne Donnellan.[35] The question of how much Hickman and how much Lovelace to include became one of Richardson's major challenges in writing the text. Lady Bradshaigh, we can suppose from their correspondence, argued for a "moderate rake," a man who might indulge in certain vices enough to make his character alluring, but who would cut these indulgences short before becoming an "abandoned profligate."[36] But where, Richardson prods, can that line be drawn? "I wish we could fix upon the number

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[34] Ibid., 171.
[35] Ibid., 164.
[36] Ibid., 171.

of times a man might be allowed to be overcome with wine, without be thought a sot. Once a week? Once a fortnight? Once a month? How shall we put it? Youth will have its follies. Why—but I will not ask the question I was going to ask, lest I should provoke your Ladyship."[37] Richardson's question is self-evident, and we need not now worry about the provocation of her Ladyship: How chaste need a hero be in order to be good? If the character of a "good man" hinges on some level of sexual restraint, where is the line between moral restraint and desirability?

These letters between Richardson and his female correspondents offer much of this sort of back-and-forth, all of which illustrates how much the author was wrestling with these questions. His letters do not reveal, however, him coming to any final conclusion on this point; rather, he leaves this to the novel itself. In the fifth volume of the novel, Charlotte Grandison reveals – in an almost whispered aside to Harriet – her suspicion that her brother is a "man virtuous, even as I believe, to chastity" (*SCG* I.497). Charlotte's motivations in revealing this fact are not immediately clear; Sir Charles's chastity – at least in his sister's eyes – does not necessarily promise to be a signifier of his goodness and eligibility for marriage, but rather seems to cause her significant mortification and anxiety over what impact his chasteness might have on his reputation, should the word get out. "Dear Harriet! Don't let the Ladies around you, nor the Gentlemen neither, hear this grace supposed to be my brother's. Nobody about us shall for *me*. I would not have my brother made the jest of one Sex, and the aversion of the other; and be thought so singular a young man" (*SCG* I.497). Charlotte worries that her

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[37] Ibid., 172.

brother's chastity would be laughable to men and repellent to women – indeed, that the many ways in which he exemplifies the ideal gentleman would not be enough to supersede the fact of his virginity. Sir Charles's desirability hinges, then, on a lack of restraint. Women's desire for him, based as it is on all of the many ways in which he visibly demonstrates ideal masculinity, is not enough (and many women do, indeed, desire him; he and Harriet are well matched for each other in that they are equally viewed as the ultimate object of desire to the opposite sex). Rather, for Sir Charles to fulfill all aspects of a perfect gentleman, he must be desired by women and have covertly acted on this desire. Not to do so, Charlotte worries, would be a mark of a lack of passion, an overabundance of restraint and control that renders him laughably unappealing to women. Charlotte Grandison's concerns for her brother's reputation echo Cibber's criticism; the impracticality of aligning virtue with sexual conduct in men echoes both in Cibber's scorn and in Charlotte's worry. A virtuous man is not one who is marked by sexual control, but rather one whose passion drives him to fulfill his sexual desires and, then, to redirect those desires for the "right" woman.

Richardson's hero thus consciously refigures what it means to be a desirable man. The focus of the novel as well as its criticism gets redirected from sexuality to psychology; the internal struggle of how to choose honorably between two equally desirable women conspicuously takes the place of earlier narratives in which the male protagonist's journey towards monogamous bliss involves one or more sexual liaisons with women other than the heroine. Although the psychological two-heroine plot of *Grandison* receives the primary attention of the narrative, the conspicuousness of the hero's sexual restraint – brought to light by his sister's concern over its reception –

signifies, I argue, a crucial and conscious move away from idealizing or even tolerating external displays of male sexuality. Moreover, I argue that this shift in representing male sexuality comes to be at the heart of the conservative ideal of male "goodness" that the novel, as a genre, put forth in the decades to come.

Although chastity had of course been long aligned with desirability in women, the question of how much of a sexual history would make a respectable suitor less so is much murkier. Because women's sexual virtue is defined by a rejection of male advances – a woman remains virtuous, quite reductively, by repulsing a man's desire for sex – a dichotomy is set up between a passive receptor and a sexual actor.[38] Women are relegated to sexual frigidity, but novels translate this into desirability – whereas men are simply viewed as sexual beings to various degrees, with little attention paid to what consequence those degrees have. As such, early novels do not put an emphasis on drawing male characters' qualities of goodness to much extent; rather, we see their actions, their mobility, their adventures in the world. Much of how we assess male characters comes through the eyes of their female counterparts, as the women they are courting add up small pieces of information with which to have a concrete idea of their future husbands. Our assessment of male characters comes less from narrative interiority than it does from external "readings" – almost exclusively by women – of how to translate the meaning of men's actions into feeling. This is true not only of rakish figures, who – multiple critics have pointed out – rely on performative aspects of their characters in order endear

[38] According to Thomas Laqueur, this passivity at least in part stems from the Enlightenment "discovery" of the female "contingency of delight," which revealed the non-binding relationship between orgasm and procreation and opened up paths in which to redefine female sexuality as inherently passive. See Laqueur, p. 3.

themselves audiences (both eighteenth-century as well as twenty-first), but also of male suitors who do not necessarily overtly display their sexual desires.[39] Determining how to balance a sexual past with desirability, therefore, involves a sort of double-reading that demands that we interpret these suitors as the female characters are "reading" them, that we understand how the "action" of their sexual conduct – or, in Grandison's case, the lack thereof – translates into desirable moral qualities. The struggle, for Richardson, was in shifting his hero's action from sexual prowess firmly into the realm of psychology without leaving his readers either laughingly incredulous or bored.

As others have noted,[40] Sir Charles's internal voice is conspicuously absent from the text. Just as Amelia does not appear until the second volume of the novel that bears her name, we hear only rumors of Sir Charles until the end of the first volume of *Sir Charles Grandison*. Harriet Byron's correspondence – with her cousin Lucy and other family members, with her friends in town, and, later, with Charlotte Grandison – both begins the novel and remains the primary narrative source throughout all seven volumes. Although we see letters from Grandison himself, they are almost always filtered through Harriet; we learn of Grandison's current doings through Harriet's observation of him, just as we learn his backstory after he allows Harriet to read his letters. Unlike *Clarissa*, in which Lovelace and Belford carry on an extensive correspondence about which Clarissa knows nothing, Richardson created in Grandison a character whose interiority is almost entirely up for Harriet's examination. Although the epistolary nature of the novel might suggest that this is equally the case for Grandison himself, we see no letters between the

[39] See Mackey, p. 35, and McGirr, p. 270.
[40] See Doody, p. 274, and Jones, p. 33.

hero and a third party in which he appraises Harriet's character with any level of intimacy.

Harriet's insight into Sir Charles's character and the fact that this insight is largely one-sided is a crucial aspect of the romantic triangle. That Harriet is able to evaluate Sir Charles in the intimate, interior space of letter writing allows for an assessment of him that is based not only on Sir Charles's exterior actions, but also on a communal appraisal of those actions. Harriet's esteem for Sir Charles grows largely from his reputation for goodness, from his sisters to his servants to the men whom he refuses to duel. In a letter to her cousin Lucy, Harriet writes, "Once Miss Grandison, speaking of her brother, said, My brother is valued by those who know him best, not so much for being an handsome man; not so much for his birth and fortune; nor for this or that single worthiness; as for being, in the great and yet comprehensive sense of the word, a *good man*" (*SCG* I.182). Charlotte's assurances, based on the assessments of others, is relayed to Harriet and, in turn, Lucy, creating a pervasive communal sense of Sir Charles's character that relies less on outward action than it does on approbation of a lack thereof. Sir Charles's characteristics – his assets as well as his few flaws – resist external observation and rely more heavily on word of mouth. He famously refuses to duel (*SCG* I.206), and the greatest instances in which he exemplifies brave heroics – when he rescues Harriet from Sir Hargrave, and when he defends Jeronymo della Poretta from the Banditti – are *re*active attempts to pacify other men. As Harris notes in her introduction, Richardson broke some of his own rules with respect to how many and what sort of exterior signifiers his hero could possess; Sir Charles is both handsome and well-dressed, qualities that

Harris views as "compromises" Richardson made in order to make Sir Charles more interesting to his readers (Harris xix).

But if good looks and fine clothes are the greatest exterior signs of Sir Charles's goodness, this attraction does not differentiate him from many of the other eligible men of the novel, including Mr. Greville, Sir Hargrave, and Mr. Grandison. What makes Sir Charles stand apart from these men, rather, is his resistance to acknowledging his good looks. Mr. Greville's vanity repulses Harriet from the early pages of the novel, whereas Sir Charles's silence on the topic of his own appearance works in tandem with Harriet's rejection of its importance: "What is beauty in a man to me? You all know, that I never thought beauty a qualification in a man" (*SCG* I.181). Harriet is less specific with regards to the positive ways in which she defines goodness; although the novel makes no doubt that Sir Charles's gentlemanliness rests on a resistance to dueling, action for reaction's sake, and unacknowledged good looks, Charlotte does not offer a concrete idea of what a good man, in the "comprehensive sense of the word," might look like. "I have met with persons," Harriet writes to her cousin, "who call those men *good*, that yet allow themselves in liberties which no good man can take. But I dare say, that Miss Grandison means by *good*, when she calls her brother, with so much pride, *a good man*, what I, and what you, my Lucy, would understand by the word" (*SCG* I.183). This unarticulated communal agreement on masculine goodness seems to rest on Sir Charles's reluctance to indulge in certain "liberties," and though neither Harriet nor Charlotte are specific as to what those liberties are, this moment gestures towards Charlotte's later revelation of Sir Charles's virginity. Grandison's goodness, then, directly hinges on restraint of sexual

passion (if not a complete lack thereof).[41] Not only is Sir Charles not a rake in need of sexual reform, but his exceptionalism in terms of all aspects of exterior, performative masculinity is the very thing that makes him desirable.

The most apparent way in which his character is flawed, however – his simultaneous love for two equally worthy women – reformulates the concept of masculine reform, rather than eradicates it altogether. With regards to sexual reform, Richardson makes clear from the first volume that Harriet will not even entertain the idea of reforming a rake: "What a dreadful, what a *presumptuous* risque runs she, who marries a wicked man, even hoping to reclaim him, when she cannot be sure of keeping her own principles!" (*SCG* I.26). Coming from a heroine who seems unshakably sure of her principles (as we see her defend them repeatedly to her persistent suitors), Harriet's notion that a woman who attempts to reform a profligate husband overestimates her own capabilities is especially poignant. Later, Harriet rails against the idea of reforming men's sexuality in its popular pervasiveness: "A reformed rake, they say, makes the best husband—Against general experience this is said—But by whom? By the vulgar and inconsiderate only, surely!" (*SCG* II.342). The novel, as Bonnie Latimer has pointed out, casts a wide net of disapproval with respects to the idea of marrying a rake: Sir Charles himself inveighs against the idea, Harriet warns Lucy about the prospect of reforming Mr. Greville after marriage, and Sir Charles's own father, Latimer argues, was a rake

[41] Conway argues for the former: Sir Charles's reserve "shields a divided heart from scrutiny until such a time as it can find a home in marriage" ("Sexual Politics of Toleration," p. 2).

who likely hastened his wife's death by his various indulgences.[42] Richardson leaves little room in this novel for rakes to reform; characters expound on the inefficacy of attempting sexual reform, and the narrative itself allows only those rakes who are old and infirm the possibility of faithful marital bliss.

Of course, Harriet need not worry about losing her principles with Sir Charles. If she (and if we, as readers) take Charlotte Grandison at her word, Sir Charles is thoroughly exempted from the question of rakish reform. But his attachment to Clementina subjects the narrative to a different sort of reform question, one in which the principles at stake are closely bound up not with one's identity as a sexual being, but rather one's sense of self as part of a religion and country. In the fifth volume of the novel, when the details of Clementina and Sir Charles's courtship are finally revealed in detail, we come to understand that a different sort of reform has been at the crux of their stalled romance. Clementina's Italian Catholicism is pitted against Sir Charles's English Protestantism, and neither is willing to concede these identities to the other for the sake of marital union. Sir Charles's proposed compromise – that they might split their time between England and Italy, and that their boys could be raised Protestant and their girls Catholic – elicits a response from Clementina that recalls Harriet's warnings about reforming a rake. She cannot trust herself, she says, to adhere to her own identity as a Catholic if she were to marry an English Protestant: "Were I to be thine, my duty to thee would mislead me from that I owe to my God, and make me more than temporarily

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[42] See Latimer, 4. Latimer also points to the novel's exception to this rule: Grandison orchestrates the marriage of Miss Mansfield and his own libertine uncle, telling her that "*your* goodness will make *him* good" (iv.271), revising his otherwise unshakeable notions of reform in order to suggest "appropriate" forms of transfer of property.

unhappy . . . Shall a wrong Religion have a force, an efficacy, upon *thee*, which a right one cannot have upon *me?*" (*SCG* V.565). The disjunction between Clementina's beliefs and the reality that Sir Charles presents drives her to madness; that Sir Charles can seem, on the level of principles, such a "good man," and yet refuses to accede to the Catholic belief system in which Clementina's entire identity operates, causes a level of confusion and despair that renders her temporarily insane. Thus although Sir Charles may be exempt from the historical precedent of rakish redemption, Richardson weaves this second type of redemption plot into the novel, both in order to disentangle Sir Charles from his relationship with Clementina in an honorable way (to disagree about religious identities is a moral alternative to disagreeing about sexual desire), as well as to reinforce Sir Charles's Englishness and his suitability for Harriet. Sir Charles's "unreformability" thus ironically makes him the perfect English gentleman. Clementina need not struggle with the question of reforming a rake, but in her eyes, Grandison is quite literally damned. Clementina's inability to save Sir Charles from the hell that awaits him only serves to solidify his fidelity to god, country, and – by proxy – Harriet Byron.

Although his virginity renders the question of his sexual reform null and void, it also places an emphasis on values aligned with the visible domestic sphere. Harriet knows, from the pervasiveness of Sir Charles's reputation as a Good Man, of his generosity to servants, siblings, wards, and male adversaries. She hears of his adversity to gambling and dueling, and he personally argues (at great length) "against any one's binding him or herself, by vows of perpetual celibacy" (*SCG* V.618), demonstrating that his own virginity is in no sense meant to be permanent. But although Richardson's epistolary structure makes these character attributes visible to Harriet, it is Sir Charles's

resistance to Clementina's conversion attempts that show him to be the perfect suitor for an English woman – an English Harriet – specifically. For Sir Charles loves and values Harriet and Clementina equally; Margaret Doody's assertion that there are two heroines is quite clearly stated by Sir Charles himself when he finally begins to woo Harriet: "I must always put these sister-souls upon an equal foot of excellence" (*SCG* VI.17). Although the two heroines might parallel each other in moral worth, however, Harriet has the successful courtship with Sir Charles because she does not *need* to reform him. How and where to raise their children, religious practices, national loyalties – the ingrained similarities between Harriet and Sir Charles on these points allow for them to pursue a romance in which the terms of their mutual existence are pre-written. Clementina's plotline reveals not a sexual difference between men and women, but the national and religious differences between herself and Sir Charles gesture towards the difficulty of achieving the ultimate union that the courtship plot seeks when the two parties ascribe to two opposing systems of value.

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Sir Charles Grandison, if we are to take his sister at her word, represents not only the epitome of the eighteenth-century male gentleman, but also how that epitome is bound up in male chastity. The question of whether or not we *do* take Charlotte Grandison's knowledge of her brother's sexual history (or lack thereof) as truth is, I believe, crucial to understanding the trajectory of male sexual conduct in the courtship novel. Unlike novels that came after – that, as I will later show, take up the chaste hero as a crucial aspect of domestic romance – Richardson articulates his protagonist's virginity, stating it as fact (albeit secondhand) rather than leaving it ambiguous and open to reader's

own assumptions. I have shown in this chapter how the removal of Sir Charles's sexual conduct from the plot was likely a conscious backlash not only to Fielding's *Tom Jones*, which follows typical early courtship narratives of male sexual redemption, but also *Amelia*, in which Fielding attempts to use male sexual conduct not in a context of redemption but as a tool to create the psychological depth he so admired in *Clarissa*. In doing so, however, Fielding set up an unresolvable problem for himself, thereby highlighting the absence of a clear value system for male sexual conduct outside of the redemption plot. With *Sir Charles Grandison*, Richardson offers one solution to this problem: a shifting of the question of redemption from sexual to religious expression, revealing his *resistance* to what would be "redemption" from Clementina's perspective to be an aspect of desire for Harriet. Although Sir Charles's worth is underscored by the entire English community that surrounds him, he is still an unreformed "bad boy" in the eyes of Clementina. Sir Charles's transgressions of a particular value system, however, leave him in no need of reform by his English wife-to-be, but rather render him the "moderate rake" for whom Lady Bradshaigh was hoping.

3. Terrifying Sex: Gendered Knowledge in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*

Sir Charles Grandison is not the eighteenth century's only chaste gentleman. Following the immense success of Richardson's last novel in the 1750s, novels in the latter half of the century similarly put forward heroes who embodied Grandison's ideal of sexual restraint, while relegating any form of rakishness to secondary characters who were often villainous in nature. Whether explicitly stated or simply omitted, the absence of late eighteenth-century male protagonists' sexual pasts is striking in the clear break it signifies from earlier fictions. This chapter explores one example of Grandison's legacy, locating it in a somewhat unlikely place: the Gothic novel. Although the concerns of the Gothic might seem distinct from those of the domestic novel that *Grandison* epitomizes, this chapter shows the potential for close alignment between the Gothic and the domestic through the former's reproduction of domesticated male virility. I argue that the hallmark of the Gothic—fear—derives in Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) from the gendered knowledge of male sexual conduct, linking sexual epistemology to patriarchal control. The fearful suspense for which *Udolpho* is known originates as much in the possibilities of sexual secrets to which Emily St. Aubert is not privy as it does in the mystery of the body behind the black veil.

My intention in this chapter is to knit together two critical histories of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*—on the one hand, questions of fear, paranoia, and knowledge, and, on the other, those of ownership—in order to argue that Radcliffe's novel genders sexual knowledge as a form of patriarchal property. Whereas the more longstanding critical debates of the novel have unearthed Radcliffe's strategies in withholding knowledge to

produce fear, these arguments tend to stop short of exploring those sections of the novel that veer more towards the domestic than they do the Gothic. Likewise, recent attention to property in the novel has taken a similarly demarcated approach, focusing on the practical threat that male property rights pose to the heroine but restricting this focus to the tangible property of the novel's various estates.[1] I aim to bring these concerns together by examining the novel through the lens not of the Gothic nor of the domestic, but of the "domestic Gothic,"[2] a generic fusion at the heart of which rests a gendered division in sexual knowledge and the fear it produces as a method of patriarchal control.[3]

This control manifests, I argue, in two somewhat unexpected places: Emily's father, M. St. Aubert, and her lover, Valancourt. Although Emily's uncle, Montoni, has repeatedly functioned as the villain in critical conversations around both what Emily does and does not know as well as what she does and does not own, it is M. St. Aubert and Valancourt, I suggest, who pose more subtle and lasting threats to the heroine. The portion of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* during which Emily lives in Montoni's ill-gotten

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[1] What the domestic novel looks like in the context of Radcliffe is itself a point of contention among critics. Scott Mackenzie, for example, writes, "Her novels are Gothic—really the apogee of the form's early ascendancy—but they are also domestic; home is ever-present, ever-discussed, ever-sought" (Mackenzie 409), suggesting that it is the novel's drive towards both the concept and the reality of "home" that characterizes it as domestic. Leah Orr, on the other hand, takes the importance of "home" to the domestic as a largely financial concern: "Radcliffe's fiction employs the supernatural and rhapsodizes on the sublimity of nature, but it does so while remaining grounded in concerns of property, much like the domestic novel" (Orr 71). For Orr, Radcliffe's plots repeatedly hinge on the "treatment of property and money as tangible objects" (81), underscoring the notion put forward by Nancy Armstrong that property is at the heart of the political-personal project of the "happy domestic life" (Armstrong qtd. in Orr, 85).

[2] It should be noted that I am not the first to use this term, although I am (so far as I am aware) the first to ascribe it to Radcliffe. Heiland, for example, refers to the "domestic gothic" as a concept developed by the Brontës (Heiland 6).

[3] In doing so, I acknowledge that I, too, participate in the "tendency toward bifurcation" that trails criticism of *Udolpho* (Castle 122). It is worth noting, however, that I do so *not*, as Castle describes, with the interest of delineating between the "two worlds" of the novel and the "normal/abnormal, rational/irrational, ordinary/extra-ordinary oppositions" embedded therein. Instead, I aim to draw attention to the domestic qualities of the novel as aspects that plague Emily throughout the plot, permeating her time at Udolpho as well as the sections that precede and follow it.

Gothic castle takes up a mere third of the novel's narrative space, despite having received a large majority of the critical attention. The more than two hundred pages that precede and follow the stereotypically Gothic centerpiece of the novel involve mysteries of their own, although these mysteries are not all related to Udolpho and its barbarous owner. Instead, Emily is plagued in these sections by concerns that would seem insignificant by comparison due to their very nature as domestic—rather than Gothic—anxieties: namely, the suspected sexual infidelities of her father and her lover. I argue that M. St. Aubert and Valancourt, who represent a feminized portrait of masculine violence that offsets the primitive force of Montoni, embody a domesticated narrative of masculine virility that replaces tropes of sexual violence represented by earlier Gothic as well as earlier domestic novels. And it is this domestication of masculine virility and its subsequent gendered segregation of sexual knowledge that poses the most durable threat to Emily's psychological wellbeing.

3.1 Domestic Mysteries

One might say that three major mysteries plague the heroine of Radcliffe's novel: one Gothic, one domestic, and one that links—thematically but also quite literally—these two genres together. Critics have by far given the lion's share of their attention to the typically Gothic aspects of the novel, although one of the most frequently discussed aspects of *Udolpho*—Radcliffe's rational explanations for each of her purported mysteries—works to destabilize the novel as fitting neatly within the generic confines of the Gothic at all. The two other mysteries that the novel puts forward, rooted in questions of male sexual conduct, receive similar treatment by the novel, however: these mysteries

and the fears they produce are similarly rendered illegitimate by the novel's end. The generic fusion that the novel represents therefore comes together through a gendered destabilization of knowing in which the reader as well as the heroine is taught to be mistrustful of her own perceptions. A brief history of *Udolpho*'s critical responses will explicate this point.

The question of what happens to Emily's aunt, Madame Cheron; the secrecy that surrounds Montoni's nefarious motivations; the source of the ghostly singing; and, most famously, the mystery of what lies behind the black veil: these are enigmas classic to the Gothic, and they are the reason *Udolpho* is categorized as such. But they are also the reason for the novel's somewhat conflicted critical legacy. Upheld as one of the most popular romances of its day,[4] *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) today serves as a representative text of the Gothic both on syllabi and in general critical discourse. Scholarship on Radcliffe, however, seems loath to classify her writing as typical of the Gothic, locating her work in hypothetical liminal spaces between romance and novel, the eighteenth-century novel and that of Romanticism, sentimental fiction and Gothic terror, or any number of combinations of the above.[5] Although the various categorizations of

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[4] As Donna Heiland has pointed out, the eighteenth-century meaning of the term "Gothic" is much more closely aligned with "romance" than with "novel." See Heiland, 4.

[5] Bonamy Dobrée, for instance, writes (in 1966) that "there is a great deal of the proper novel mingled with the pure romance" (qtd. in McNutt, 198), and Dan McNutt suggests (in 1975) that *Udolpho*'s popularity came from its "dual nature" between a "horror novel" and a "novel of sentiments" (McNutt 198). Maggie Kilgour (writing in 1995) has summed up this strain of criticism by noting that the Gothic has typically provided critics with "a generic missing link between the romance and the novel" (Kilgour 3), while Donna Heiland (writing in 2004) suggests that "the gothic tradition includes within it not only novels that are quite fantastic, but also novels whose realism has led critics to question whether they belong to the tradition at all" (Heiland 4). Offering somewhat of a counterpoint to this tradition of viewing the gothic as a variety of forms, Miles Robert (writing in 2014) has recently pushed back against what he sees as a *false* binary between Romanticism and the Gothic, especially with regards to Radcliffe (see "Popular Romanticism and the Problem with Belief," pp. 118-120). These critics provide merely the briefest of overviews with regards

Radcliffe's work differ among scholars, critics' impetus for pinning *The Mysteries of Udolpho* to a genre other than the Gothic tends to stem from the same place: the ending. For the dark and fantastic elements that established Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and its literary descendants as illustrative of the genre—murder, hauntings, magic mirrors, dissolute priests, predatory stepfathers, gigantic helmets falling from the sky—are in Radcliffe's fiction rationally explained away.[6]

Despite critics' persistent attention to these debates, however—debates that center themselves around the tension between Radcliffe's supernatural elements and her rational endings—two other mysteries, largely ignored by critics, plague Emily throughout the text. From the earliest pages of the novel, Emily is confronted with the possibility that, when it comes to her blissful family unit, all is not what it seems. Given reason to suspect early on that her father was not faithful to her mother, Emily keeps this suspicion to herself, only letting flickers of her suspicion rise to the surface of her consciousness—and

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to where to place Radcliffe among the terms Gothic, novel, romance, novel of sentiments, and Romanticism.

[6] Radcliffe's infamously rational endings have been a constant source of interest—if not disappointment and frustration—for critics. For a particularly brutal example, see Brendan Hennessy's chapter on Radcliffe, which opens (opens!) with a heavy-handed critique of Radcliffe's "over-complicated" rationalizations: "The novels of Mrs Radcliffe have a sameness about them: they are not strong in characterization, nor in speculation. The story can build up towards a powerful climax, as it does throughout *The Italian* (1797), but in most of her other books the author dissipates the interest by over-complicating her plots" (22). Daniel Cottom notes the "mechanical and unrealistic" way that Radcliffe's heroines "are continually being scared and then quickly relieved of their fright in an apparently pointless way," although he suggests that "these moments of fright indicate the extent to which the security of Radcliffe's heroines is strictly circumscribed by immediacy" (Cottom 64). Terry Castle sums up this strain of criticism in her own chapter on Radcliffe: "When it is not treated as a joke, Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) is primarily remembered today for its most striking formal device—the much-maligned 'explained supernatural'" (Castle 120). Notably, Castle pushes back against this line of thinking, suggesting instead that what makes *Udolpho* worth study is its rhetorical integration of the supernatural into the parts of the novel that occur outside of Udolpho itself—a phenomenon Castle terms "the supernaturalization of everyday life" (Castle 123).

the narration—often enough to remind the reader that it still lurks beneath her other concerns. Likewise, throughout the middle portion of the novel, Emily and the reader intermittently (although not always simultaneously) receive hints that Valancourt, Emily's lover, might be falling into an increasingly dissipated lifestyle in Paris. The possibility of her father's past infidelity and her lover's present philandering create a sense of unease, as both threaten Emily's domestic stability in ways more terrifying—because more familiar—than the supernatural.[7]

The common critique that scholars level at the typically Gothic aspects of *Udolpho* can likewise be applied to these domestic mysteries as well. *All* of the most terrifying aspects of Radcliffe's novel ultimately prove to be figments of Emily St Aubert's active imagination: the infidelities as well as the ghosts and murders. The link between the Gothic, paternal, and romantic mysteries of the novel is thus terror itself—or rather, given the unfounded nature of Emily's fears, paranoia.[8] This paranoia, more than the physical threats of the evil Montoni or the body behind the black veil, proves to be the

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[7] By "domestic stability," here and elsewhere in this chapter, I draw on Nancy Armstrong's discussion of the necessary invisibility of the connection between knowledge and power in maintaining a patriarchal hierarchy. Emily's sense of domestic peace hinges on her not knowing the limits of her own knowledge; the possibility that her father and Valancourt privately respond to a different set of sexual values outside of Emily's presence than they have publicly represented to her threatens to undermine her own way of making sense of the world. While this threat is primarily psychological, threatening to upend Emily's identity, it also necessarily carries implications for her financial stability, as the potential revelation of these men's infidelities puts at risk both Emily's inheritance as well as her marriage prospects (as will be discussed further below). See Armstrong, pp. 30-42.

[8] Radcliffe herself coined the difference between "terror" and "horror" in her posthumously published essay "On the Supernatural in Poetry" (1826). Terror, according to Radcliffe, is the obscure feeling of dread that *precedes* a dreadful revelation, while horror is the feeling of revulsion that follows "the dreaded evil" (150). I include a third term: "paranoia," the origin of which is more recent (paranoia's etymology dates back only to the mid-eighteenth century, and the word has only been used in a general sense—that is, outside the medical realm—since the mid-twentieth). Although similar to Radcliffe's "terror" in its associations with the feelings of anticipation and suspicion, I lean more heavily on "paranoia" going forward to underscore the ultimate unfoundedness of Emily's fears.

elements one ought to be most wary of. That *The Mysteries of Udolpho* does not sit comfortably within the generic definition of the Gothic or the domestic therefore suggests a delineation between particular modes of fear: on the one hand, the novel poses threats that present both Emily and the reader with tangible and often gruesome realities, while on the other, it rules out these very dangers, revealing them to be not the product of the novel's villains but rather of the overactive and fear-prone imaginings of its heroine.

At the heart of Radcliffe's novel, then, lies a propulsion towards a self-imposed critical destabilization of one's own perceptions and reactions—a destabilization that is highly gendered. The link between gendered knowledge and paranoia that the novel puts forth has clear roots in the Gothic; Donna Heiland has even suggested that gender is the very string that defines the genre.[9] But one of the most influential studies of gender and Radcliffe—Claudia Johnson's essay on the novel in *Equivocal Beings* (1995)—concerns itself with the more explicit and external forms of dominance that the novel puts forth. Johnson argues that the 1790s marked an era of political instability caused by the French

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[9] Heiland writes that what holds all Gothic novels together is that they "are always stories of transgression. The transgressive acts at the heart of gothic fiction generally focus on corruption in, or resistance to, the patriarchal structures that shaped the country's political life and its family life, and gender roles within these structures come in for particular scrutiny" (Heiland 5). Questions of gender have been at the forefront of criticism of the Gothic for the last several decades, and other feminist critics have read the Gothic or Radcliffe more specifically through the lens of late-twentieth-century feminist debates. Adela Pinch, for instance, in her study of the "period's fascination with trying to account for where feelings come from and what they are" (Pinch 2), reads Radcliffe's exhaustive interpretations of Emily's feelings alongside feminist debates of the 1990s, ultimately cautioning against the potentially simplifying power of the all-encompassing term "patriarchy" and suggesting that "a commitment to understanding daughters' feelings requires endless discrimination, a refusal to name prematurely" (Pinch 136). And then there are those who look to the Gothic to understand the shift in representations of masculinity over the latter half of the eighteenth century. Toni Wein, for example, in her study of masculinity in the gothic, suggests that women authors of the period "promoted . . . equality" between the sexes "by attributing to their heroes qualities conventionally linked to the feminine" (Wein 17). For Wein, female authors such as Radcliffe broke down the gender barriers traditionally ascribed to the Gothic, alerting readers to a cross-gender fluidity that actively works against interpretations of gender in the Gothic as a strictly bifurcated affair.

Revolution—an instability that drew from a growing unease with typically “masculine” traits associated with violent action. Fiction of the period responded to this unease, Johnson suggests, by displacing certain feminine traits onto idealized masculinity, rendering the “typically feminine” unstable (or “equivocal”)—a displacement that Radcliffe makes particularly evident. Setting *The Mysteries of Udolpho* in 1584 allows Radcliffe to “juxtapose ‘modern’ sentimental man with his effectively untrammeled avatar” (Johnson 98), a version of masculinity represented by the villainous and violent Montoni that is part of “an older, classical tradition of masculinity which represents emotionality as deviation from rational self-control” (Johnson 103). Montoni, as a condottiere engaged in civil wars,[10] is violent against land and women alike—a violence that Johnson views as indicative of a pre-modern association of masculinity with a passionate lack of self-discipline. This violence sets him in stark opposition to Emily’s father, M. St. Aubert, who professes a love and reverence for both the beauty of his estate and the women in his life: his late wife, Emily, and, mysteriously, the woman whom he keeps a miniature of in his private closet. This implicit tension between masculine types, Johnson argues, ultimately functions to direct readerly sympathy towards sentimental manhood, “reinforce[ing] our loyalty to paternal culture, and assuag[ing] our nervousness about violence to women by (re)figuring it as deserved” (Johnson 99).

My interest in the way sexual knowledge becomes gendered derives from Johnson’s reading but takes a distinctly different tack. Whereas Johnson views the dichotomy between masculine types as based on violence—on the unchecked pre-modern

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[10] Condottieri were mercenary captains hired under contract by either the monarch or (more likely in this case) the Pope during the Great Wars of Italy fought between 1494 and 1559.

rendering of masculinity and its relationship to the new, docile masculine type we see in M. St. Aubert—I view a similar tension based not on masculine violence but on masculine promiscuity. Montoni and his villainous cronies stand in for a particular version of manhood in which violence is explicitly linked to *sexual* violence, in which their proclivity for force speaks both to their roles in the civil wars and the violence this leads them to inflict on other men *as well as* the force they use to compel women into sexual submission. Moreover, the sexual violence inherent in Montoni's masculinity gestures not only towards an antiquated, pre-modern version of manhood left behind in the 1500s, but also to more recent fictional depictions of masculinity found in early eighteenth-century novels as well as earlier Gothics. What sets Montoni apart from *Clarissa*'s Lovelace, *The Castle of Otranto*'s Manfred, or *The Monk*'s Ambrosio, is the noncentral role he plays in the narrative. Unlike these earlier figures, whose violent and sexual passions run unimpeded through the primary plotlines, Montoni and the threat he poses to Emily takes up a relatively minor portion of the narrative. The hundreds of pages that do not concern him are instead taken up with what Johnson would refer to as the sentimental modern "avatar" of Montoni's antiquated masculinity.

The male characters and their associated mysteries that dominate the more than two hundred pages that precede and follow the stereotypically Gothic centerpiece of the novel are not all connected to Udolpho and its barbarous owner. Instead, Emily is plagued in these sections by concerns that would seem insignificant by comparison due to their very nature as domestic—rather than Gothic—anxieties: namely, the suspected sexual infidelities of her father and her lover. Tamer than the explicitly violent threat posed by Montoni and his associates, the narrative of domesticated virility that looms in

the background of M. St. Aubert and Valancourt takes on as threatening an aspect as it does precisely *because* of the way sexual knowledge is gendered. Unlike Montoni's supposed acts of violence, which derive from hierarchical structures of masculine force that make themselves clearly visible to all, the acts that Emily suspects her father and lover of committing point to a concealed network of control that function under the guise of domestic harmony. In its most frightening iteration, this network is upheld not only by scheming between men but between men and women as well, revealing the ways in which female collusion upholds patriarchal structures. Ultimately, the possibility of male infidelity as well as female collusion with male infidelity threaten Emily's domestic stability in ways that bring to light how crucial the commodification and hierarchization of knowledge is in retaining women's complaisance under patriarchy.

3.1 Illegitimizing Fear

Male sexual conduct and the gendering of sexual knowledge have a palpable historical link. Shifting the critical focus from the explicit violence of Montoni to the implicit sexual licentiousness of M. St. Aubert and Valancourt begs an examination of this history, which reveals the battle for sexually-related information—that is, concrete knowledge that a private sexual act unfolded when and with whom someone said it did—to have been a central and consistently problematic question in eighteenth-century legal disputes. Understanding how the gendered control of sexual information played out in cases of adultery, inheritance, and disputes over legitimacy of children elucidates Emily St. Aubert's destabilized relationship with the sexual truths of her own life—truths that never cease to feel unsettled.

The gendered battle over knowledge surfaces no more clearly than in eighteenth-century legal debates around the fate of children in adulterous affairs. Such affairs usually only led to legal action of any sort when property was under dispute,[11] and, when children were involved, the question of legitimacy—a question that, without access to late twentieth-century developments in paternity testing, rested solely on knowledge of the history of the mother's sexual liaisons—lay at the very heart of these disputes. In matters of separation, legitimacy of children proved to be a complicated and nuanced issue that could take on many different forms, depending on the degree to which the married couple pursued legal action. If a couple amicably agreed to a private separation, for example, then any child born to the wife—no matter how long after the separation had taken place—was assumed to be legitimate. If the wife gave birth to a boy, therefore, and if the couple had no previous children, then this could pave the way for the boy to inherit his mother's husband's property—even if the man was not actually his father. The only way that a husband who had agreed to private separation could prevent this from happening was to prove that he could not have had "access" to his estranged wife within a probable window for conception. As one might expect, providing such proof often proved difficult, and the issue of legitimacy arose in numerous cases of inheritance.[12]

It was therefore very much to the husband's benefit to pursue judicial separation or, when means and circumstances allowed, a full-blown parliamentary divorce. The law

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[11] "Property," in this case, referring either to the children themselves or the physical property they might later inherit.

[12] Lawrence Stone provides us with two examples of this in *Broken Lives*: *Beaufort* v. *Beaufort* and *Grafton* v. *Grafton*. In the Beaufort case, Lord Talbot—the man with whom the Duchess was having an adulterous affair—remarked upon learning their newborn child was a girl (and therefore held a significantly smaller claim on the Duke's property), "I am glad of it, for I don't desire to get heirs to other men's estates." See p. 125.

around judicial separation took the opposite stance on legitimacy as it did for private separations: if a child was born after a judicial separation had taken place, it was assumed to be illegitimate unless the mother could prove otherwise. Although private separations allowed for varying degrees of nuance and compromise between the spouses, often giving wives some privileges with regards to their children, both a woman's access to her children as well as the truth of their birth became increasingly limited the more the law intervened. In instances where the husband pursued a full divorce by Act of Parliament, he retained full custody rights over any children and could keep his wife from ever seeing them again—a practice that continued into the nineteenth century, although it was increasingly in decline.[13]

This sliding scale of credibility when it comes to the legitimacy of children—a scale that gives increasing weight to paternal rights the more involved the law becomes—puts in direct conversation the question of sexual knowledge with property law. For at the core of the question of legitimacy is, of course, the inherent inequality between the sexes when it comes to determining a child's paternity. Unless a man has restricted his wife's freedom of movement to such an extent as to completely rule out the possibility of her having had another sexual partner during the possible weeks of conception, it is the wife alone who can attest to the absolute legitimacy of their child. And, likewise, it is the wife alone who has the power to manipulate this knowledge, to turn her private hold on the

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[13] See Stone, *Road to Divorce*, pp. 174-180.

truth to the advantage of herself and of her child, should the child in fact be another man's.[14]

In addition to the intersection of law and knowledge in the question of legitimacy, debates over child custody add another layer to fathers' struggles to gain control through the arm of the law. Although fathers did hold nearly all the cards when it came to cases of child custody in the eighteenth century, even the slightest compromise made with a child's mother had the potential to reveal—as it often does today—that battles over child custody are as much about control and cultivation of the child's mind and allegiances as it is about the child's physical location. In the 1774 case of Richard and Elizabeth Lytton's one-year-old daughter, for example, the parents' negotiations resulted in Richard allowing the child to stay with Elizabeth for one year before being returned to her father. When Elizabeth refused to return the girl to Richard when the year was up, however, Lord Mansfield ordered that the girl be sent to school, where she stayed for several years as her parents continued to fight for her custody. During these years, Richard accused Elizabeth and her family of visiting the child so frequently as "to poison her mind with respect of me," and he repeated worried that his daughter was "bred up in principles

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[14] As Thomas Laqueur points out, it wasn't until the mid-nineteenth century, when scientists first discovered that conception hinged on the union of sperm and egg, that the role of fathers in conception became a matter of settled fact—and even then, it wasn't until over a hundred years later that we had any scientific method for determining paternity. For centuries before the sperm-egg relationship was discovered, a great deal of cultural energy was expended in trying to rationalize the importance—indeed, the superior strength—of men's role in conception as compared to women's, despite material evidence to the contrary. The first paternity tests were developed in the 1920s, but testing only gained its current level of accuracy in the 1980s. Given, then, that until quite recently "Paternity . . . could remain a matter of opinion and of will" (57), the anxiety that plagues questions of legitimacy in adulterous affairs takes on new clarity: despite women's significant disadvantages in all things legal, the access that women have to a superior amount of knowledge about *potential* fathers (even in cases where the number of partners makes determining the *exact* father impossible) is one advantage of which patriarchy has not been able to deprive women. See Laqueur, pp. 55-62.

utterly repugnant to my own" and "taught to hate her father as the most odious person possible" (Herts RO, cited in Stone, *Road to Divorce*, 176).[15] In this sense, fathers' legal control over their children acted as a way of maintaining control over the information to which their children had access to, as well as a way of preserving a favorable image of themselves.

The eighteenth century's paternal favoritism in matters of separation and child custody therefore reveals a struggle for knowledge between the sexes—a struggle that manifests through both biology and the law. As women had the potential to hold superior knowledge to men when it came to questions of paternal legitimacy, this knowledge threatened to undercut the system of patriarchal control that the law maintained through property rights and, crucially, inheritance. Men's use of the law in cases of separation and child custody counteracted the instability that female knowledge of legitimacy introduced to male control, by ensuring that estranged wives and their children were as restricted as possible from their husbands' wealth, on the one hand, and by preserving paternal sympathies in raising their children, on the other. In so doing, men prolonged patriarchal control, preserving legal power from one generation to the next by retaining control of property alongside control of information and, subsequently, emotional authority.

These links between property, gendered knowledge, paternal affection, and patriarchal allegiance become crucial in understanding Radcliffe's novel in light of its less typically Gothic mysteries. A section largely overlooked by critics, the first mystery with which the heroine grapples comes as early as the second chapter. Seeing a light in

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[15] Stone notes that Lord Mansfield's judgments in the Lytton case only survive as citations in a later case from 1804, *Eng. Rep.* 102: 1055.

her father's closet late at night, Emily worries that he is ill, but instead finds him in the midst of thoughtful sorrow, weeping over a collection of papers. Leaving her own candle on the staircase so as not to draw attention to herself, Emily quietly observes her father through a pane of glass, "detained there by a mixture of curiosity and tenderness." Over a mere half a page, a scant three paragraphs, this forceful mixture of feeling—of fondness and desire for knowledge—devolves from its initial presentation as simple concern for her father's grief into alarm over its cause, doubt of his marital fidelity, and suspicion of her own parentage.

The reader follows Emily in this destabilization of knowledge through a series of personal conjectures, conclusions, and reversals. "She could not witness his sorrow, without being *anxious to know* the subject of it;" Radcliffe writes, "and she therefore continued to observe him in silence, *concluding* that those papers were letters of her late mother" (*MU* 26, italics mine). Emily is "detained" at her father's door, intruding on what would otherwise be a private moment, because her care for him and her desire to understand are inextricably linked. And yet, Emily reveals that she *does* know the subject of his grief, for she has concluded almost immediately that her father must be grieving the recent passing of her mother. The question that detains her at her father's door, therefore, illogically coexists with an assumed answer to that very question. That Emily's curiosity detains her any further than this moment thus suggests that she is driven by the knowledge that *she does not yet know the limits of her own knowledge*; suspicious of her own conclusions regarding her father's grief, she remains at the door in order to have the extent of these limits revealed to her.

And they soon are. After continuing to watch her father for “a considerable time,” Emily sees him remove from his papers a “miniature picture,” which she “perceived . . . to be that of a lady, but not of her mother.” M. St. Aubert completes a series of gestures that demonstrate the strength of his feeling for this woman, “gaz[ing] earnestly and tenderly upon this portrait, put[ting] it to his lips, and then to his heart, and sigh[ing] with a convulsive force”: a pantomimed performance of affection for his unseen audience. Dumbstruck, Emily immediately tries to rationalize her father’s actions:

> Emily could *scarcely believe what she saw to be real*. She never knew till now that he had a picture of any other lady than her mother, much less that he had one which he evidently valued so highly; but *having looked repeatedly*, to be certain that it was not the resemblance of Madame St. Aubert, she became entirely convinced that it was *designed for that of some other person*. (*MU* 26, italics mine)

Upon seeing the portrait, Emily confronts a disjunction between her given perception of reality and that with which her senses present her. She “look[s] repeatedly,” a phrasing that suggests that she also looks away repeatedly (rather than maintain one sustained examination of the portrait). In this repeated looking-at and looking-away, Emily tries to reconcile two different versions of reality, each of which is bound up in two different versions of her father. The conclusion she draws from this looking, however, retains a sense of confusion and disorientation: although Emily becomes increasingly sure that the portrait is not of her mother, Radcliffe’s phrasing of what Emily *draws* from this conclusion—“that it was designed for that of some other person”—only serves to throw the reader, if not Emily herself, back into uncertainty. For when Radcliffe writes “for that of some other person,” to whom or what is “that” supposed to indicate? Is Radcliffe confirming, simply, the logical end of Emily’s suspicions: that the portrait, if not of her

mother, must be of another woman—a woman with whom her father was perhaps unfaithful? Or, conversely, does this encumbered turn of phrase act as a rejection of that first logic, suggesting that the portrait itself was designed for the eyes of another *man*, thus exonerating her father of her adulterous suspicions?

Emily's inconclusive conclusion in this moment is indicative of the sort of destabilization of knowing that characterizes her experiences throughout the novel. Indeed, second- or third-time readers of *Udolpho* will see in this scene a foreshadowing of the better-known mystery of the novel—that of Emily's encounter with the body behind the black veil. In this scene, Emily, with much hesitation and trepidation, lifts a black veil that covers a large picture in one of the rooms of Udolpho. But as soon as she has seen what the veil conceals, she "instantly let it fall—perceiving that what it had concealed was no picture, and, before she could leave the chamber, she dropped senseless on the floor" (*MU* 248-9), thereby concealing from the reader the horror that has caused her to faint. Adela Pinch, in her study of eighteenth-century epistemologies of feeling, reads this scene as symptomatic of the link between feeling and knowing: "Once one knows what something is, Radcliffe implies, one's feelings will be appropriate to it" (Pinch 114). The problem here, according to Pinch, is that Emily *thinks* she has seen what the black veil conceals—a ghastly corpse—but because she cannot bear to look at it a second time, she fails to see it for what it really is: a wax effigy meant to *mimic* a corpse. Emily repeatedly dwells in a grey area between knowing nothing and knowing everything, an area that muddles the logical link between knowing and feeling that Radcliffe would seem to represent as clear-cut. In the instance of the black veil as well as in her suspicions of her father's infidelity, Emily not only draws conclusions that

ultimately prove to be inaccurate, but she does so in a way that destabilizes any sense of sureness around her own perceptions of reality.

In both cases, Emily's respective paternal figures—on the one hand, her actual father, and on the other, her uncle and legal guardian—are in part responsible for her mystification, but M. St. Aubert surprisingly meddles more directly in the manipulation of Emily's understanding of the world than Montoni. Shortly before his death, for example, M. St. Aubert begins to reminisce with his host, La Voisin, about "the late marchioness," "a most beautiful and excellent lady"—a woman about whom Emily knows nothing, and yet of whom the remembrance brings tears to her father's eyes and causes his words to become "almost stifled by the violence of his emotions." Emily is "extremely surprised by her father's manner," but "for[bears] to express her feelings by any question" (*MU* 70), and before the conversation can go further, M. St. Aubert puts an end to it by interrupting his host and abruptly changing the subject. Emily does not dwell on this interaction any further, but her "extreme surprise," coupled with her restraint in expressing that surprise, places a pin in this scene for the reader who is tracing the evolution of this particular mystery. M. St. Aubert, through his tearful emotions, demonstrates the sentimental modern manhood to which Johnson points, but in so doing he also controls the information his daughter has at her disposal—thereby leading both her and the reader to draw conclusions about the mysterious woman of this scene, connecting her to the first mysterious woman about whom M. St. Aubert is secretive.

Secrecy around this mysterious woman becomes a pattern for M. St. Aubert, and his repeated attempts to keep Emily from knowing the details of his history with this woman augment the potentially grave significance of her existence. In its final

appearance, M. St. Aubert's furtiveness explicitly brings together concerns over property, paternal affection, and manipulative control of his daughter's access to knowledge. Lying on his deathbed, M. St. Aubert extracts two promises from Emily. The first of these returns us to those previous scenes of secrecy and the question of this mysterious woman; it is, in fact, the only time that M. St. Aubert raises the topic himself, although he does so only to prevent Emily from learning anything about it. He introduces the topic through a manipulation of paternal affection that effectively ensures the impossibility of Emily learning more about it: "I know you too well, my Emily, to believe, that you would break any promise, much less one thus solemnly given; your assurance gives me peace, and the observance of it is of the utmost importance to your tranquility" (*MU* 77). M. St. Aubert frames his request as one that can't but be carried out, resting his sureness on *his* knowledge of Emily's identity. But even as he expresses his certainty, he adds another incentive for Emily to keep her promise: to quote M. St. Aubert, "your peace requires that you should rest in ignorance" (*MU* 77). It is for Emily's own good, in other words, that she relinquish any possibility of knowing to her father.

This she does without compunction. Listening obediently to her father's minute instructions of how to open the secret compartment in his closet floor, Emily interrupts his request only to sob at the thought of returning home without him. When he finally voices the promise he expects Emily to fulfill, however, she hesitates. "Beneath the board I have described," M. St. Aubert instructs,

> 'You will find a packet of written papers. Attend to me now, for the promise you have given particularly relates to what I shall direct. These papers you must burn—and, solemnly I command you, *without examining them*.'
>
> Emily's surprise, for a moment, overcame her grief, and she ventured to ask, why this must be? St. Aubert replied, that, if it had been right for him to

> explain his reasons, her late promise would have been unnecessarily exacted. 'It is sufficient for you, my love, to have a deep sense of the importance of observing me in this instance.' St. Aubert proceeded. 'Under that board you will also find about two hundred louis d'ors, wrapped in a silk purse.' (*MU* 78, emphasis Radcliffe's)

M. St. Aubert goes on to explain why he keeps this money in this secure, hidden location—a somewhat self-evident explanation—but it is the linking of the money with his request, particularly in this moment of Emily's hesitation, to which I want to draw attention. The task that M. St. Aubert wishes his daughter to carry out is communicated in tones that teeter between commanding and affectionate; M. St. Aubert's "attend to me now" and "solemnly I command you" demand a patriarchal reverence that is almost biblical in tone. Emily's sudden reaction to his request, marked as it is by a paragraph break, jars us out of this tone and asks us, too, to question it. But M. St. Aubert obscures the reasoning behind his request by emphasizing filial obedience, a notion that inherently resists questioning. And as if to divert our attention from the rigidity of this emphasis—in contradiction, as it is, to the sentimental manhood he means to represent—M. St. Aubert abruptly turns to the question of property.

M. St. Aubert moves seamlessly from this first promise, regarding his hidden papers, to his second: that Emily never sell her childhood home, "the chateau." He even asks that she insist on an article in her marriage contract that the property should always be hers. M. St. Aubert's particularity on this latter point seems unnecessary, given both that M. St. Aubert is aware of and approves the already-established affection between his daughter and Valancourt, and that, with only the aforementioned two hundred louis to her name, Emily's estate is likely to be the most valuable asset in facilitating a marriage contract. But this injunction takes on a less curious meaning when we consider its pairing

with the fear and suspicion that the first promise is meant to promote. Although M. St. Aubert's sudden mid-paragraph turn to the question of property serves tonally to divert our attention away from the harshness of his attitude towards Emily's curiosity, it simultaneously links one concern with the other, connecting his daughter's powerlessness in legal matters to her forced ignorance of what men do behind closed doors.

The unease that Emily feels around this her father's mysterious portrait of another woman is augmented by the separate—but related—suspicions she increasingly has about her lover. The threat of male infidelity plagues Emily from both M. St. Aubert and Valancourt, as rumors of the latter's misdeeds in Paris mount up over the course of the novel. Although the narrator assures the reader repeatedly that "Emily's thoughts were still faithful to Valancourt" (*MU* 295), doubt in Valancourt himself builds steadily throughout the second half of the novel, first from the reader and then from Emily herself. The narrator tells us that Valancourt is "dazzled" by the "gaiety" of Paris, that he remembers Emily's image in hopes that it will "save him from himself," but that it increasingly "assumed a countenance of mild reproach." In order to avoid these feelings of guilt, Valacourt "endeavoured . . . to think of Emily as seldom as he could" (*MU* 295)—an early indication to the reader that Valancourt will not be as faithful to Emily as she stays to him.

More concrete hints of Valancourt's indiscretions reach Emily herself later in the novel, as Radcliffe deploys a similar narrative strategy with regards to Valancourt as she does with M. St. Aubert. Not privy to the information Emily might have gleaned from other sources, both men assume their own words to carry all possible weight with their listener—M. St. Aubert, in the case of his instructions to Emily to burn his papers, and

Valancourt, in a partial confession he makes to Emily regarding his life of debauchery in Paris. “I am unworthy of you, Emily . . . I am unworthy of you” (*MU* 503), Valancourt repeats without explanation when he sees her again. Later, he offers an additional vague indictment against himself when he cries, “I am not the same!—I am lost—I am no longer worthy of you!” (*MU* 513). From both her father and Valancourt, Emily is given just enough information to suspect that a domestic felicity might be built on fraudulent assumptions, but both men withhold the details of their misdeeds such that Emily cannot be sure of what she knows.

These vague indictments leave room for Emily to draw her own conclusions from her friend Count de Villefort, whose son has spent time in Paris while Valancourt has been undergoing his mysterious moral decline. Although the Count initially only tells Emily of Valancourt’s rumored penchant for gaming and laments the improbability of Valancourt shaking the “fascinating vice,” he quickly pivots to a more damning charge: “And—why should I conceal from you, that play is not his only vice? he appears to have a taste for every vicious pleasure” (*MU* 507). Nearly as vague in his accusations as Valancourt has been himself, the Count not only refrains from naming these other “vicious pleasures” here, but also follows this statement with an extended, agitated pause, during which Emily “expected what he might further say” with “increasing perturbation.” Eventually, however, the Count summons his courage for the ultimate coup de grace, telling Emily that her lover’s gambling has had him thrown in prison multiple times, “from whence he was last extricated, as I was told upon authority, which I cannot doubt, by a well-known Parisian Countess, with whom he continued to reside, when I left Paris”

(*MU* 507). Like M. St. Aubert, Valancourt's secret purportedly embodies the exact moral failing that threatens Emily's domestic peace more than all others: sexual infidelity.

Radcliffe reveals both secrets, furthermore, in similarly tangled knots of prose, requiring a reader who is interested in the minutia of these men's circumstances to read and re-read the ostensibly divulging phrases to be sure of their meaning. Radcliffe's use of short phrases and shifting pronouns in the Count's revelation of Valancourt's actions recalls the confusing phrasing of Emily's discovery of M. St. Aubert's secret portrait ("having looked repeatedly, to be certain that it was not the resemblance of Madame St. Aubert, she became entirely convinced that it was designed for that of some other person"). In the Count's phrasing, it takes a second reading to be sure of his meaning: is the Parisian Countess the "authority" whom he "cannot doubt," or the woman "with whom [Valancourt] continued to reside"? Was the Count told this information "when [he] left Paris," signaling his own distance from the source of the information, or rather does he know that Valancourt was living with the Parisian Countess when the Count himself departed the city? The second of these questions is left unanswered, and although the reader might conclude that the only logical answer to the first is that Valancourt had been living with this Countess, the Count's sentence—which one might think, as it purports to reveal a piece of information, might be more immediately revelatory—requires some untangling from the reader.

Both the case of Emily discovering her father's secret portrait and that of the Count's revelation represent moments in which the reader sees Emily learning a shocking piece of information about the fidelity of the men in her life. And yet, Radcliffe's prose in both moments also works to destabilize the information even as it is being imparted. With

both the early mystery of M. St. Aubert's secret portrait and the novel's later enigma of what has rendered Valancourt so unworthy of our heroine, the narration leaves the reader suspended and confused, wanting not only a simple, neat solution to each of these conundrums, but also wondering whether we have even successfully mapped the nuances of the problems themselves. In other words, Radcliffe creates a disconnect both between Emily and her world (whether this takes the form of her own perceptions or her interlocutors) as well as between the reader and Emily, as the reader struggles to determine the stakes and nuances of the information our heroine lacks.

The Valancourt plotline, then, serves to reinforce the emotional trajectory of the M. St. Aubert narrative: in both cases, Emily is led to suspect the men she loves of sexual misdeeds—notably, men who purport to stand for a rendering of sentimental masculinity opposed to the brunt forcefulness of Montoni—but in both cases, Emily likewise remains unsure of what she concretely knows. Emily's suspicions of Valancourt serve to intensify the suspicions she already held about her father, making male secrecy in regard to sex seem even more pervasive and thus more threatening to her domestic peace. In its final chapters, the novel circles back around to both mysteries, revealing Emily's fears about both Valancourt and her father to be as unfounded as her most gruesome imaginings about Udolpho. While Emily ultimately learns that she misjudged both men—thereby reinforcing an allegiance to these patriarchal figures through an emphasis on her own self-doubt—the case of M. St. Aubert throws the alliance between patriarchal control of knowledge and of property into stark relief.

The final pages of the novel resolve the mystery around M. St. Aubert's secrecy in a way that simultaneously presents and resolves questions of property and legitimacy.

The portrait of the mysterious woman over whom M. St. Aubert had been weeping turns out to be a depiction not of his lover but of his sister, a woman referred to only as "the Marchioness" in the extended backstory we receive from the narrator. The union that gave the Marchioness her title, the reader learns, was an unhappy one: married to the Marquis de Villeroi despite loving another, the Marchioness became increasingly aware of her husband's marital infidelity with his Italian mistress, Laurentini. Jealous of her rival and aware that the Marchioness's affections had previously centered on another man, Laurentini stoked the Marquis's jealousy by repeatedly suggesting that his infidelity was justified by his wife's. Ultimately, Laurentini convinced the Marquis to murder the Marchioness by slowly poisoning her in the hopes that they could then be together—but her plan ultimately backfired. Struck with remorse for the murder of his wife, the Marquis rejected his coconspirator and "spared her life on one condition, that she passed the rest of her days in prayer and penance" (*MU* 659). This is why, for the brief time that Emily knew Laurentini before her death, she had known her as a nun in the monastery of St. Claire. "Overwhelmed with disappointment . . . and, touched with horror of the unavailing crime she had committed," Laurentini leaves half of her substantial personal property to "the nearest surviving relative of the late Marchioness de Villeroi" (*MU* 661).

As Emily St. Aubert is both the nearest and the only relative of the Marchioness, this revelation relieves any potential anxiety around Emily's inheritance. It does so, however, just at the moment that this anxiety is raised for the reader. As the truth of

Emily's legitimacy and family history unfolds for the reader,[16] it also becomes clear that the reader's fears have not been the same as the heroine's. Those early scenes that instill doubt in Emily's mind of her understanding of her parents would reasonably suggest to the heroine—as well as to the reader—that her father has had an affair with the woman whose portrait he keeps, an affair that might have taken place either before or during his marriage to Emily's mother. We learn in the final pages of the novel, however, that this is in fact not at all the conclusion that Emily herself drew from seeing her father weep over another woman's portrait. Upon learning that the woman whose portrait her father kept had been not his lover but his sister,

> [Emily] was released from an anxious and painful conjecture . . . concerning her birth and the honour of her parents. Her faith in St. Aubert's principles would scarcely allow her to suspect that he had acted dishonourably; and she felt such reluctance to believe herself the daughter of any other, than her, whom she had always considered and loved as a mother, that she would hardly admit such a circumstance to be possible; yet the likeness, which it had frequently been affirmed she bore to the late Marchioness . . . awakened doubts . . . which her reason could neither vanquish, or confirm. (*MU* 663)

Emily's conjecture has been not simply that her father was unfaithful, but rather that his unfaithfulness resulted in her own birth—and that therefore the woman she had been raised to call "mother" was of no relation to her. This scenario, which assumes a

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[16] Certain critics of the novel have speculated on the role of inheritance law to the St. Aubert plotline. Robert Miles, for instance, points to what he sees as a link between Laurentini's fate and Emily's suspicions of her father's adulterous affair, arguing that the former clarifies the significance of property to Emily's situation. Just as Montoni took control of Udolpho upon Laurentini's disappearance, Miles suggests, Montoni similarly stands to take control of Emily's property should her legitimacy be called into question—a move that would effectively render her "disappeared" in a legal sense. Donna Heiland takes a slightly different tack with her focus on inheritance, arguing that Emily's many links to the various women throughout the novel—her mother, her aunts, Laurentini—only serve to reinforce the significance of paternity. No matter the apparent emphasis on these female-focused plotlines, Heiland suggests, the novel ultimately returns to the restoration of property and of faith in men, underscoring the patriarchal systems that uphold Emily's existence. See Miles, *The Great Enchantress*, 137, and Heiland, 74-5.

longstanding collusion between her parents in covering up the truth of both St. Aubert's sexual history and the circumstances of Emily's own birth, leaves readers with a series of dissatisfying questions.

The obvious conundrum lies in the question of why Emily would have turned to this scenario, so much more elaborate than the more obvious conclusion that her father had simply been with another woman at some point during his long life. And then there is the question of why Radcliffe waited until these final pages to reveal that *this* was the fear Emily had been suffering from all along, after allowing her readers to assume for the previous 600 pages that her father was simply a cheat. Finally, we might wonder from a critical standpoint whether the questions of inheritance and property that have drawn recent critics' attention hold much water, given that the novel ultimately puts at risk Emily's relationship to her mother and not her father.

Why does Radcliffe allow the reader to believe that Emily fears one scenario—that her father has been unfaithful to her mother—when in fact her fear turns out to be that her mother was not her mother at all, that she is the daughter of a woman she has never met who, presumably, was never married to Emily's father? The question of Emily's property to which other critics have pointed brings this aspect of Radcliffe's narrative strategy into sharp focus, although others have failed to notice the disjointedness between what the reader is led to fear on Emily's behalf and what Emily herself is afraid of. If, indeed, the woman whose portrait St. Aubert had hidden away had been a mistress or a lover from before his marriage to Madame St. Aubert, this would in no way have impacted Emily's legitimacy or her claim to his property. Assuming there had been nothing irregular about the marriage between Madame St. Aubert and Emily's

father, the transfer of property from one generation to the next would have occurred regardless of M. St. Aubert's pre- or extramarital affairs.[17] If, however, Emily had been the child of M. St. Aubert and another woman, an illicit affair that Madame St. Aubert had helped to cover up, then Emily's illegitimacy would have threatened her claim to inheritance, given that Montoni—as the closest male relation—would have stood to inherit instead.[18]

Other critics' discussions of property in *Udolpho* tend to overlook this dichotomy between what the reader is led to believe and what Emily herself believes. Robert Miles contends, for example, that Emily's suspicions of her father's adulterous affair clarify the significance of property to her precarious situation, because Montoni (as Emily's only relative) stands to gain her property if she proves to be illegitimate. Robert's assessment of the property transfer here is correct, but it is only significant insofar as it turns out, somewhat wildly, to be an unstated biproduct of what Emily herself has feared all along—and, perplexingly, a completely separate issue from what the reader has been led to fear. For Emily's primary concern is around "her birth and the honour of her parents"; her fear of illegitimacy stems not from any stated concern over her property rights, but rather from a "reluctance to believe herself the daughter of any other, than her, whom she had always considered and loved as a mother." Emily's disturbance comes not from a fear of poverty, but rather from the possibility that the woman she called mother was both of no relation to her and had conspired with her father to cover up his philandering. And

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[17] This is, of course, assuming that Emily does not have any siblings hiding in the wings. As the novel itself makes no mention of this possibility, however—either within its own reality or in Emily's fearful musings—I will leave that beyond the realm of hypotheticals worth consideration.
[18] See Miles, *The Great Enchantress*, 137, for an extended discussion of Emily's threatened inheritance.

this is a step beyond the reader's fears: until this revelation of Emily's private suspicions, all clues have directed the reader for the prior 600 pages to suspect M. St. Aubert of infidelity, with no indication whatsoever that his wife had been privy to it.

If Emily's suspicions had proved true and Madame St. Aubert had turned out not to have been the heroine's mother, this would have signified a necessary collusion between Madame St. Aubert and her husband to preserve the appearance of Emily's legitimacy to the outside world. Emily's fear, therefore, resides not only in the question of her father's infidelity, but crucially in the conspiracy that Madame St. Aubert would have both tolerated that infidelity and protected her husband from others' scrutiny for the sake of property. Whereas Valancourt's potential indiscretions threaten to destroy Emily's future domestic peace, they represent an isolated case: a personal flaw that simply signifies a good man gone bad. Suspicions of M. St. Aubert's past infidelity offers a similar problem, highlighting the concern that this rendering of sentimental manhood merely camouflages a virile masculinity that has been domesticated—but not done away with.

That the novel permits the reader to understand these infidelities to be the most pressing fear for all but the last ten pages ultimately serves to trivialize the very power dynamics that it would seem to unearth. Rather than fearing the emotional effects of male infidelity, Emily has been quietly living with a fear of female collusion with male infidelity—a fear that Laurentini's story renders very real, even as Emily's own parents' backstory acts as an assurance. Where infidelity turns out to have been accurately reported, therefore, it functions as part of a more gruesome tale of jealousy and murder, involving characters just close enough to the heroine to offer a happy resolution

regarding her inheritance, but just far enough away for their story to remain within the strictly Gothic confines of the novel. And the question of female collusion raised both by Emily's imagined fears of Madame St. Aubert and the very real horror of Laurentini serve to obscure the concerns of sexual licentiousness that the novel has encouraged the reader to fear for the majority of the novel.

This domestic Gothic therefore leaves the reader in a perpetual state of destabilized knowing that reflects the grey area in which its heroine constantly dwells. Any worries regarding Emily's financial security are rendered unnecessary as soon as they are raised; Emily's actual fear around her own mother's collusion with her father's marital unfaithfulness proves to be unfounded in the moment that other, more tangential stories of unfaithfulness and collusion prove to be true; and the major object of anxiety and suspense that the reader has been tracking in the domestic plot ultimately proves to be a fear misplaced. The reader's confidence in her ability to parse out the details of this plot, to find and apply the "proof" with which Emily herself constantly seeks to solve mysteries, is shaken by the final revelation that our fear and our heroine's fear has been misaligned all the while. What *The Mysteries of Udolpho* leaves one with is a patched-up mystery. Although Radcliffe provides rational explanations for all of her mysteries—Gothic and domestic alike—I would argue that it is not the rational explanations themselves that do the most work to render her novel generically unstable. Rather, the shaky circumstances under which each of the domestic concerns of the novel are resolved leave the reader in a prolonged state of unsureness, signaling a gendered hierarchy of knowing characteristic to both genres by promoting doubts in our own sense of what we know and don't know when it comes to concealed acts of male sexual conduct.

4. Adulterous Austen: Educating the Rake in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Mansfield Park*

It is a truth universally acknowledged that there is no sex in Jane Austen's fiction. Even for readers new to her work, Austen represents a sense of propriety in which sex is thought to play no role. In Austen criticism, references to "chasteness"—of her characters, her prose, herself—abound,[1] although opinions diverge as to what we ought to make of this apparent lack. I build here on Susan Morgan's suggestion that the omission of sex from Austen's works ushered in an era of reading for heroines' emotional conflicts, rather than for the threat of sexual assault that dominates novels in the latter half of the eighteenth century.[2] Taking a cue from Morgan, we might therefore think about Austen's works as distinct from her eighteenth-century precursors not for omitting narratives of sex, but for depicting heroines who are free of a preoccupying fear of sexual force. In comparison to Harriet Byron, Evelina, or Emily St. Aubert, Elizabeth Bennett and Emma Woodhouse face very tame dangers—humiliating themselves with an ill-timed jibe or joke, or having affection for the wrong man. In other words, Austen's novels offer heroines who risk the perilous outcomes of their own choices, and though this risk departs from the threat of sexual assault (readings of John Thorpe's carriage-driving aside), it is not divorced from sex as such, as the delineation between Austen's

[1] See, for example, Roger Sales, who writes that Austen's works align decorum with sexlessness in order to "explicitly and directly . . . promote particular ideas of Englishness" (11). See also Lee, who has shown with her recent excavation of the criticism of Marvin Mudrick (writing in 1952) to D.A. Miller (in 2003), there exists a long critical history of those who would like to make sense of the chasteness through the lens of Austen's own biography. For other recent examples of this ongoing conversation, see also Johnson, *Jane Austen's Cults and Cultures*, 16-67; and Jason Solinger, "Virginia Woolf and the Gentlemen Janeites."
[2] See Morgan.

paragon suitors and less suitable candidates crucially falls along distinctly sexual lines. Like the moral hero of Austen's beloved *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753) and his many literary descendants—Burney's Lord Orville and Mr. Delvile, Edgeworth's Clarence Hervey, even Radcliffe's Valancourt—the leading gentlemen of eighteenth-century fiction from *Grandison* on are strikingly chaste.[3] The erasure of a sexual past—whether implied through omission or, in the case of *Grandison*, explicitly stated—thus becomes a crucial component of the makeup of the gentleman, whom writers of the period, according to Jason Solinger, "defined in relation to both the domestic heroine and the ill-educated man of birth" (*Becoming* 4). It is to the relationship between this sexualized "ill-educated man of birth" and the desexualized gentleman figure that I turn in this essay, as the two work in tandem in Austen's novels to promote a portrait of masculine hypersexuality that would seem contrary to Austen's reputation as a writer of chaste drawing room fictions.[4]

As in so many novels that precede them, the primary sexless courtship plots of Austen's works juxtapose the desirable male hero who notably lacks a sexual past against the morally depraved male suitor with an illicit sexual history. This dichotomy comes through no more clearly than in the two Austen novels featuring adultery plots—*Sense and Sensibility* (1811) and *Mansfield Park* (1814). Readers tend to interpret the insertion of adultery in both of these novels along the same lines as Mary Poovey, who reads Austen's project as "educating her readers to the dangers of uninhibited desire" in order

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[3] For recent studies of *Grandison*'s impact on the domestic novel, see Latimer, *Making Gender, Culture, and the Self in the Fiction of Samuel Richardson*; Clery; and Wendy S. Jones.
[4] My focus on the gentleman thus departs from the work of Jill Heydt-Stevenson, whose examination of sex in Austen's works remains decidedly female-focused.

to preserve "the social order she cherished" (212, 242). In other words, both the "two Elizas" plotline of *Sense and Sensibility* and Maria's affair with Henry Crawford act as warnings to Austen's female reader as much as to Marianne Dashwood and Fanny Price. Paradoxically, however, the biproduct of this warning is that it brings to the surface the particular societal constraints imposed on women. Devoney Looser has categorized the work of those critics who would read Austen as unearthing legal power imbalances in order to offer a critique of them as investing Austen with a "sneaky feminism," one that uses "traditional romances plots to soften her ironic and perhaps more radical feminist messages" (5).[5] Looking specifically at these secondary divorce plots, however, reveals a representation of gender politics that goes a step further in its conservatism, reproducing the gendered biases of divorce laws themselves. These laws, increasingly practiced over the course of the eighteenth century, purported to offer a formal equality between the spouses that in practice was anything but equal. In her representations of divorce, Austen's novels do more than simply unearth this imbalance: they do what legal discourses could not, orienting readerly affect towards a sympathy for patriarchal power and those who abuse it.

Although Austen's divorce plots seem to accentuate the seeming disparity between the actual and would-be heroes of her novels, suggesting that the pleasure-seeking rake and the desexualized gentleman represent two opposing examples of eighteenth-century masculinity, these novels actually reveal them to be two sides of the same coin. Poovey has argued that Austen responds to eighteenth-century notions of

[5] For a more recent overview of this particular feminist approach and its limitations, see Moe.

female sexuality in which "female nature appears to be fated, fixed," where "women's appetites are particularly dangerous and more akin to inexplicable natural forces than to socialized—hence socializable—responses" (189-90). In contrast, Poovey suggests, Austen's male characters are invested with psychological histories that explain the temperamental differences between, say, Robert and Edward Ferrars, providing a rationale for their particular "appetites." It is this socializable quality of Austen's men in which I am interested, as it suggests not (as is the case with Austen's women) the need for propriety to "restrain this natural, amoral force" (Poovey 190), but the implication that—for the "good" men of her novels—it has already done so. By highlighting the role of social education in sexual character reform, Austen's novels provide a crucial hinge between earlier fictions that taxonomized fixed masculine types (rake, molly, gentlemen, fop) and later works that naturalized a specifically masculine hypersexual desire in even the most chaste gentleman.[6] This hinge is nowhere more apparent than in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Mansfield Park*; in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*, Austen does not go out of her way to offer psychological justification for Wickham's scheming or Frank Churchill's careless manipulation. It is only when the sexualized "ill-educated man of birth" trespasses in the context of the law that Austen's novels seek to rationalize his actions, making explicit the conversation between sexual conduct in law and fiction. And if male sexual conduct falls on a spectrum—a spectrum that places at one end the rake who pursues unimpeded his sexual appetites, and, at the other, the socialized chaste

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[6] Claudia Johnson has similarly argued that Austen's works redefine English manhood, pointing specifically to how Mr. Knightley, "humane" rather than "gallant," comes to represent the new ideal. See *Equivocal Beings*, pp. 191-202.

gentleman—then nothing separates the particular appetites of Willoughby from Colonel Brandon or of Henry Crawford from Edmund Bertram but a proper social education, suggesting that perhaps every Austen hero is a rake at heart.

4.1 "Uncommitted Sorts": The Gentlemen of Sense and Sensibility

As Margaret Doody has noted, the title of Austen's first-published novel led generations of critics to base their readings of the text on an assumption that Austen meant "versus" rather than "and,"[7] pitting sense and sensibility against each other and expecting readers to acknowledge a clear winner (sense) by the end of the book.[8] Doody notes that this precludes a reading that explores the downfalls of ascribing too much to either quality, but I argue that it also encourages an interpretation that focuses exclusively on the two heroines who emblematize these attributes, while assuming their suitors to be of secondary interest, perhaps—as so many Austen heroes have been read—acting only as instruments in the heroines' educations. But *Sense and Sensibility* is arguably the one Austen novel in which the primary romance plots are not bound up in female education; neither Edward Ferrars nor Colonel Brandon play essential roles in the increased self-knowledge of the heroines, but rather wait passively at the sidelines as the plot fortuitously resolves itself.[9] Instead, the education that the novel underscores is that which Willoughby has not received, rendering him unsuitable to retain the affections of

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[7] See, for example, Gary Kelly's essay in *Jane Austen and Discourses of Feminism*, "Jane Austen, Romantic Feminism, and Civil Society," p. 26.

[8] See Margaret Doody's Introduction to the Oxford edition of *Sense and Sensibility*, pp. xiii-xx and xxxiii-xxxviii.

[9] See Laura Mooneyham White's essay in *Jane Austen and Discourses of Feminism*, "Jane Austen and the Marriage Plot: Questions of Persistence," for an extended analysis of the intersection between education and romance in Austen's later works.

the heroine. Thus the conspicuous dichotomy between uneducated action and gentlemanly passivity embodied by the three suitors direct the thematic pull of the novel away from the heroine-focused storyline that the title would suggest. Claudia Johnson argues that *Sense and Sensibility* "methodically examines the sexual relations gentlemen pursue, either to strengthen patriarchal interests or to relieve the tedium of their existences" (*Jane Austen* 55). I argue, rather, that while the novel certainly does interrogate male sexual conduct, the effect of this interrogation is not solely, as Johnson argues, to expose how the fictional conventions surrounding wronged women "are true" and "function within a larger ideological framework" of systemic patriarchal oppression (65). Rather, *Sense and Sensibility* simultaneously takes for granted a myth of naturalized male hypersexuality on which these depictions of male sexual conduct depend—a fiction of sexual difference embedded in the novel's evaluation of patriarchal structures. By drawing strict differentiations between cultivated chastity and unrefined rakishness, and particularly in her exploration of the social response towards the latter, *Sense and Sensibility* emphasizes a spectrum of male sexual economy regulated through moral education.

The critical history of *Sense and Sensibility* that has perceived the heroines as the primary focus of the novel has perhaps gained strength from Elinor and Marianne's general inertia and powerlessness throughout the plot. Although the psychological weight of the novel focuses on Elinor—via her alignment with the narrative voice—and, albeit less so, on Marianne, *Sense and Sensibility*'s structure leaves its heroines for most of the novel in what feels like the eye of a storm, with the male characters moving in mysterious ways on the periphery. Following their initial departure from Norland, Elinor and

Marianne remain dependent on the wills of others in determining their own movement, either from Barton or Mrs. Jennings's house in London. Throughout the novel, however, the male characters appear and disappear in surprising and abrupt ways: Willoughby's sudden departure from Barton is clouded in as much mystery as Colonel Brandon's; Edward's visit and departure from the cottage are both unexpected and—as is his unhappy mood—largely unexplained; the heroines' time in London is littered with the abrupt appearances of all three men; and the novel's final chapters include the parallel sudden arrivals of first Willoughby and then Edward. Likewise, as Johnson points out, Elinor and Marianne spend most of the novel not only trying to pin down their suitors' histories, but also realizing that they lack this knowledge to begin with; both heroines, no matter their respective approaches to courtship, must come to terms with the complicated personal histories of all three men that had been assumed to be blissfully blank.[10] Elinor and Marianne retain a frustrated fixed position as heroines, therefore, ignorant of the key aspects of their own stories and unable to enact a mobility that would make this knowledge available to them. Edward, Willoughby, and Colonel Brandon, on the other hand, are secondary characters only in that we, also, know less about them: the mystery surrounding both their movements and their histories supplies the novel with a magnetic pull that works not only on the heroines but also the reader.

Although the novel directs the interest of the reader more towards these enigmatic men than its heroines, Willoughby receives conspicuously more favorable attention from characters and narrator alike. Willoughby's entrance into the narrative of *Sense and*

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[10] See Johnson, *Jane Austen*, pp. 59-60.

Sensibility comes mere pages after Austen's introduction of Edward Ferrars and Colonel Brandon, neither of whom feature so favorably in the narrator's regard. Elinor feels an "evident wonder and a secret admiration which equally sprung from [Willoughby's] appearance," and "his person, which was uncommonly handsome," has a "manly beauty and more than common gracefulness" that receives repeated narrative attention throughout the novel (*SS* 33).[11] Edward, "a gentlemanlike and pleasing young man," does not receive such a warm welcome from the narrator, as "he was not handsome, and his manners required intimacy to make them pleasing" (*SS* 13, 14). Likewise, Colonel Brandon, whose "address was particularly gentlemanlike," is described as "silent and grave. His appearance however was not unpleasing . . . though his face was not handsome" (*SS* 27, 28). Austen's introduction of both of these "gentlemanlike" figures are comprised of contradictions that leave the reader in ambiguous territory as to our heroes; although Edward is "pleasing," it is only through intimacy with him (not yet attained) that he becomes so, and although Colonel Brandon's face is "not handsome," it is not "unpleasing" to look at him. Mary Poovey argues that this juxtaposition, which consistently represents the two moral heroes of the novel as inert, uninspiring, and "attractive only to the most generous observer" (Poovey 185), begs the reader to evaluate Willoughby—as Elinor herself does for much of the novel—not by any objective standard, but by an appeal to subjective passion.[12] Doody's point regarding the title, therefore, holds only insofar as neither heroine exclusively emblematizes sense or

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[11] This chapter cites two different editions of *Sense and Sensibility*—the introduction to the Oxford edition and the text itself of the Norton. All quotations from the novel itself are from the latter, edited by Claudia Johnson, and hereafter cited parenthetically by page number and abbreviated *SS*.
[12] Poovey 187.

sensibility; looking at the men of the novel, however, Austen's heroines consistently assess Willoughby with more sensibility than sense, while the desirability of Colonel Brandon and Edward as the novel's ultimate heroes rests on a thoroughly rational evaluation of both their characters and their pasts. Elinor's inclination towards responding to Willoughby with an emotional rather than her characteristically "sensible" reaction makes visible a subversive dialogue that deals in the double standard of sexual liaisons; her sympathetic reaction to Willoughby creates space for the implication that male abuses of power in sexual relations are a result of an unrefined and miseducated youth, suggesting in turn that the process of "becoming" a gentleman involves an education of restraint that can curb "natural" male tendencies.

4.2 Redeeming the Rake

How, then, does this readerly sympathy towards male sexual licentiousness manifest? Midway through this novel, a curious subnarrative takes over, one that appears to have no direct bearing on the dominant plot. Directing our attention away from Elinor's quiet heartache and Marianne's much louder lovelorn anguish, Colonel Brandon bursts onto the scene to deliver an elaborate two generational history about characters we have never and will never meet, taking the typical eighteenth-century byzantine plot and its web of recycled names to new extremes. As a young man, he announces to Elinor, he was in love with his cousin Eliza, an orphan under the guardianship of his father. Eliza returned his affection, but despite the mutual devotion that had existed between them since childhood, Eliza was forced to marry Brandon's older brother so that her ten thousand pound inheritance could be used to pay the debts of the family estate—a

decision in which her uncle (as both father of the groom and legal guardian of the bride) had more than a common share of influence. But the elder brother's "pleasures were not what they ought to have been, and from the first he treated her unkindly," leading Eliza to seek solace in the comfort of another man (*SS* 146). Discovering her adultery, Brandon's brother divorced her, and Eliza, abandoned shortly thereafter by her coconspirator, fell into prostitution. Brandon himself, returning after several years in the East Indies, only discovered the fallout from Eliza's marriage in time to find her on her deathbed, a little girl of three years old—also Eliza (and hereafter Eliza2)—at her side. Promising to care for Eliza's daughter, Brandon became Eliza2's guardian and has overseen her upbringing these last fourteen years, until, eight months ago, she disappeared from the house of a "very respectable woman" where she, with "four or five other girls," was being privately educated (*SS* 148). Only in the past few weeks has Brandon's frantic search for her finally ended in the discovery that she, like her mother before her, has been impregnated and abandoned by the man who led her astray. And, finally, we come to the relevance of this narrative: Eliza2's seducer was the very Willoughby whose attentions Marianne is grieving upstairs.

Brandon is center-stage throughout this scene, and as we get the entire story filtered through his perspective, his feelings take on an importance that rivals the meaning of the actual narrative. As Poovey argues, this story is far more about Brandon himself than it is about either of the Elizas, and although he insists that his end goal in making public Willoughby's crimes is not to reserve Marianne for himself—"had I not seriously, and from my heart believed it might be of service . . . I would not have suffered myself to trouble you . . . with a recital which may seem to have been intended to raise

myself at the expense of others"—this is, of course, what ultimately happens (*SS* 149).[13] But apart from his personal motivations in telling it, Brandon's story crucially engages not only an emotional response but also, as a pointed afterthought, a great deal of legal detail. Midway through a rushed dramatic telling of the broad strokes of his and Eliza's shared history, Brandon halts his narrative and cries, "how blindly I relate! I have never told you how this was brought on," before continuing with a much more exhaustive account of his past (*SS* 146). The details of his revised narrative include references to the laws around clandestine marriage, primogeniture, married women's property rights, and legal guardianship, all of which the novel weaves together intricately for a readership who needed no explanatory footnotes. But the focal point of Brandon's story becomes conspicuous when he comes to the most dominant legal intrigue of them all—Eliza's divorce: "It was *that* which threw this gloom,—even now the recollection of what I suffered—" (*SS* 146). Unable even to finish his thoughts, it is clear that Eliza's divorce, rather than her marriage to Brandon's brother, causes Brandon the most pain to recount, implying that legal separation carries a weight in the text that does not necessarily translate to modern readers.

Readers of Austen's time, however, would have understood the legal framework behind Eliza's subsequent fall into prostitution. In the latter half of the eighteenth century, especially, the sensational stenographic records of scandalous adultery trials were published in pamphlets intended to act as legal records as well as to dissuade future adulterers through the threat of public embarrassment; to quote Lawrence Stone, "The

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[13] Poovey 191.

whole world could—and did—read all about it."[14] By Austen's time, stories of divorces among the higher ranks were typically recorded in both national and regional newspapers, which Austen herself read regularly for news about her brothers in the Navy, society gossip, and reports of marriages and divorces (she seemed to have taken a particular interest in remarriages that followed death or divorce).[15] Colonel Brandon's despondency regarding Eliza's divorce would likely have resonated with a readership similarly familiar with the publication of matrimonial affairs in the late eighteenth century, when, according to Stone, "the litigation became exclusively concerned with the breaking rather than the making of marriage"—and specifically a readership who would have understood the full implications of divorce trials for women.[16]

The two Elizas storyline stands out, then, not only for its feeble relation to the rest of the plot, but for the attention it draws to the legal system. Claudia Johnson has argued that despite the dissonance between the two Elizas history and the rest of the plot of *Sense and Sensibility*, the "insistent redundancy" of Brandon's story does work to "[i]ndict the license to coercion, corruption, and avarice available to grasping patriarchs and their eldest sons" (*Women, Politics, and the Novel*, 57, 56). More specifically, the level of intricacy in the story of Eliza reveals the perilous double standard of the legal system for adulterous spouses in early nineteenth-century England. Divorce law, which underwent but very few critical changes throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth

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[14] See Stone, *Broken Lives*, 14. See also *Trials for Adultery; or, the History of Divorces*. Catalogued by "a civilian," these divorce trials, which cover the period from 1760-1780, are presented with the explicit purpose of curbing what the writer viewed as a threatening rise in marital unfaithfulness.
[15] See Sales 38-46.
[16] Stone, *Broken Lives*, 5.

centuries, purported to offer a corrective to the medieval canon law model still in use after the Reformation, which rendered England unique among Protestant countries in that it forbade divorce with the permission to remarry.[17] Beginning with the Duke of Norfolk's divorce in 1700, however, Parliament began slowly to open doors in the dissolution of marriages: whereas only 14 divorces occurred in the first half of the eighteenth century, this number rose to 117 between 1750 and 1799, and an additional 193 divorces were granted in the nineteenth century before the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 rendered divorce a judicial procedure.[18] As Susan Staves has pointed out, the evolving laws surrounding marriage and property—including those that involved the dissolution of the former and resulting dispersion of the latter—and a growing discontent with the accuracy of the case reports led to a surge of publication of legal literature in the latter half of the eighteenth century, much of which was "celebratory, explaining how the law was more and more beautifully adapted to the needs of society, more and more perfectly reflective of absolute justice" (Staves 14, 9). As such, eighteenth-century legal literature pertaining to marriage and divorce laws by major legal figures such as Lord Chief Justice Mansfield, Lord Chancellor Hardwicke, and Sir William Blackstone represents the rising divorce rate as—if a social ill—at least one that was equally available to both spouses.[19]

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[17] Wolfram 157.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Blackstone proudly concludes his section "Of Husband and Wife" in the *Commentaries* with: "we may observe, that even the disabilities which the wife lies under are for the most part intended for her protection and benefit: so great a favorite is the female sex of the laws of England." See Blackstone, 159.

This hypothetical equality of legal access to divorce purported to balance the standard of two centuries earlier, when, even though women were commonly considered to be the more lustful and the less faithful sex, adultery was a prerogative of husbands alone.[20] Men were not only excused from but expected to have pre-marital sex, and adultery was also normalized—so long as all of these pre- and extra-marital relations were with lower-class women. The class-based logic behind the normalization of "surplus" sexual relations for husbands went hand-in-hand with the emphasis on chastity in wives: the transfer of property, both between families through marriage and between generations from father to son, was of primary importance in both social and legal evaluations of sexual relations, and women were appointed the sole bearers of this (inherently sexual) responsibility.[21] For eighteenth-century legal figures, the steady increase of divorces from 1700 on symbolized a leveling of this former gendered imbalance of extramarital sex because in the eighteenth century—indeed, until 1937—divorce was all but synonymous with adultery in England. Although Blackstone notes divorce as an option in the case "of intolerable ill temper, or adultery, in either of the parties," Lawrence Stone finds that nearly all cases necessitated the charge of adultery or adultery with an ancillary accusation, and that Blackstone's suggestion of spousal equality in matters of divorce does not play out in legal records. [22]

Continuing to replicate the deep patriarchal structures that this ideology had left behind, the legal system continued to overlook adultery committed by husbands while

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[20] Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800*, 501-2. Stone writes that this was particularly true among the upper classes.
[21] Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800*, 502-504.
[22] See Blackstone, 152, and Stone, *Broken Lives*.

condemning infidelities committed by wives. Among the many ways to disentangle oneself from an undesirable marriage by the late 1700s—desertion, elopement, wife-sale, separation by private deed, judicial separation from bed and board, criminal conversation litigation, and full parliamentary divorce—only the last allowed for remarriage.[23] But the legal hassle and extreme expense of obtaining a full parliamentary divorce made it incredibly rare, making the two appearances of divorce in Austen's novels all the more noticeable. Requiring three separation lawsuits, parliamentary divorce was restricted to the very wealthy—and, given which partner was more likely to control that wealth, we might say that divorce was restricted to very wealthy husbands.[24] Between 1670 and 1857, only 325 divorces were granted in England, only four of which were obtained by women.[25] Beyond the financial challenge of paying for a divorce independent of her husband, the legal requirements for obtaining a divorce differed for men and women. Husbands could obtain divorces from adulterous wives on grounds of infidelity alone, but divorces from adulterous husbands were only granted on the grounds of adultery in conjunction with a second offense, such as life-threatening cruelty, incest, or bigamy.[26]

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[23] As Wolfram notes, Acts of Parliament "did not explicitly legalize remarriage by the guilty party," and from the 1770s through the 1830s numerous attempts were made to legally bar a divorced wife (as the case almost always was, see above) from marrying her lover. Despite these efforts, these remarriages were fairly common. See 161.

[24] Wolfram shows that this was truer in the first half of the eighteenth century than it was from 1750 until the Divorce Act of 1857, by which time divorces obtained by the upper classes made up only two thirds of the total. See 162-166.

[25] All four of these occurred after the turn of the century; divorce was not granted to a woman until 1801, and then on the grounds of incestuous adultery (the husband having committed adultery with his wife's sister). See Wolfram, 162.

[26] See Wolfram, 157. Proving adultery presented the obvious difficulties, and husbands often resorted to the testimony of a witness. Wolfram finds that around forty percent of cases were easily proven, given that the adulterous spouse "had eloped, lived in open adultery, and/or borne or conceived children which could not be the spouse's" (174). The remaining sixty percent required a complex assortment of witnesses, often made up of "servants, landladies, and washerwomen," raising questions of bribery and blackmail.

Additionally, in order to maintain parental rights, a mother would also have to prove cruelty towards her children—and, more often than not, divorced women lost all access to their children.[27] These laws work under contradictory assumptions: that adultery alone was a sufficient complaint for men but not for women suggests that women ought to anticipate and accept their husbands' infidelity as natural, and yet the rate at which husbands versus wives filed for divorce might imply that women exhibited infidelity far more often than men.[28] This redirection within the law, which simultaneously promoted a naturalization of male infidelity while emphasizing the condemnation of unfaithful wives, claimed to be free of political and ideological motivations, and yet continued to uphold a system in which women only existed as a way of transferring property between men.[29] The ideological framework of adultery law, therefore, served the dual purposes of restricting women's role in legal partnerships to vessels of property transfer as well as establishing a norm of male sexual misconduct within those partnerships, promulgating the very gendered assumptions regarding sexual desire that it purported to correct—a dichotomy that the story of the first Eliza exemplifies in detail.

Austen couches the elder Brandon's marital offenses with his brother's cagey assertion that his "pleasures were not what they ought to have been, and from the first he treated her unkindly"—a line perhaps suggestive merely of unkindness or, possibly, a range of more consequential interpretations (adultery, homosexuality, domestic abuse,

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[27] Vickery 73.
[28] The laws that allowed women to file for divorce on the grounds of adultery alone did not come into effect until 1923, although they received much criticism throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Not until 1937 did other causes for divorce supersede adultery as the primary grounds for legal separation in England. See Wolfram, 157-158.
[29] See Staves, 4-6.

rape). Whatever his pleasures were, they may or may not have constituted enough of a case for Eliza herself to obtain a divorce—a point that is overshadowed by the fact that she would not in any case have had the £700 to begin proceedings against him.[30] Instead, Brandon implies, his brother's indeterminate proclivities directly resulted in another man's successful seduction of Eliza ("with such a husband to provoke inconstancy . . . " (*SS* 146)), thereby giving her husband grounds for divorce.

It is unclear whether Eliza's husband obtained a divorce by Act of Parliament or whether he stopped short at a crim. con. litigation, as there is no mention of a second wife, and we know from Brandon having inherited his brother's estate upon the latter's death that he had no heirs.[31] Because the ten thousand pounds Eliza had brought into the marriage became the property of her husband upon their union, she had no property of her own once divorced. Likewise, due to the fact that her family was in every way her husband's family (her husband her cousin, her guardian her uncle), Eliza had no familial support to fall back on, an aspect that Vickery notes was key for divorced women.[32] Although the terms of the divorce did allow her a maintenance—a practice that, as it was seen as morally (as well as financially) supporting wives in their adultery, had become quite rare by the late eighteenth century—we learn from Brandon that it "was not adequate to her fortune, nor sufficient for her comfortable maintenance, and I learnt from

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[30] This is the average total cost of a divorce repeatedly cited in the Parliamentary debates of the Matrimonial Causes Bill. For some context, the Dashwood family in *Sense and Sensibility*—a mother and three daughters—live off of £500 a year. See Wolfram, 166.

[31] Crim. con., or "criminal conversation," was technically a writ of trespass that gave a husband the legal right to sue his wife's lover over theft of property—the property in question being the wife's body. Alienation of Affection, still legal in six states as of writing in June 2019 (Hawaii, North Carolina, Mississippi, New Mexico, South Dakota, and Utah), similarly allows a spouse to sue any third party who has caused the affection in their marriage to dwindle—in almost all cases, their partner's paramour.

[32] Vickery 81.

my brother, that the power of receiving it had been made over some months before [her death] to another person" (*SS* 147).[33] Having sold the rights to her allowance for more immediate financial relief, Eliza cut the only remaining line of support available to her, and she turned to prostitution to support herself and her daughter—Eliza the younger, a child born from her initial act of infidelity.

The "insistent redundancy" of the two Elizas plotline draws not only the obvious parallel between mother and daughter—acting, according to Poovey, as a warning against unbridled female passion—but also, as both Poovey and Johnson note, between the abuse of power exhibited against them by Eliza's husband and Willoughby.[34] Neither an ex-husband with unspeakable pleasures nor an adulterer, Willoughby nevertheless conjures associations with these figures from Eliza's history in the exculpatory manner in which law and society deal with both. Whether Brandon's brother committed adultery himself or some other untoward pleasure, what is certain is that he, like Willoughby, walked away unscathed from events that overturned the respective Elizas' lives. No legal recourse is available to Brandon in either case, but even social ramifications are left vague. Brandon mentions nothing about his relationship with his brother following the latter's divorce from the first Eliza, and his only meeting with Willoughby since discovering his role in the younger Eliza's seduction is equally impotent: "We met by appointment, he to defend, I to punish his conduct. We returned unwounded, and the meeting, therefore, never got abroad" (*SS* 149-50). Even their duel—in theory the most

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[33] Wolfram 161. See also *Thoughts on the Propriety of Preventing Marriages Founded on Adultery* (London, 1800).
[34] Poovey 190.

extreme form of punishment available to Brandon—leaves not only Willoughby's body but also his reputation intact, allowing him to continue courting the wealthy heiress Miss Grey even as Marianne continues to think well of him. That the text turns us away from the younger Eliza's story and towards Brandon's reception of it, therefore, is significant in the question it poses to the reader: with no legal action available against these "grasping patriarchs and their eldest sons," will the novel level any harsher judgment at Willoughby?

This question, which the novel sets aside to the point where one might think it has been dropped entirely, dramatically comes to a head upon Willoughby's reentrance in the final act of the novel. Having heard of the severity of Marianne's illness and hoping to be forgiven before it is too late, Willoughby arrives in the midst of a rainstorm to find a contemplative and apprehensive Elinor alone in the Palmers' drawing room. The inclusion of this scene creates an opening for Willoughby's redemption where one was not decidedly necessary; once Marianne has learned of Willoughby's involvement with the younger Eliza, "the conviction of his guilt *was* carried home to her mind," and this information releases her from the precarious instability into which the previously held contradictory assessments of his character had thrown her. But although "her mind did become settled . . . it was settled in a gloomy dejection," and she "felt the loss of Willoughby's character yet more heavily than she had felt the loss of his heart" (*SS* 150). Willoughby's reentrance into the narrative in Volume III can be read therefore as an implicit attempt by Austen to redeem his character not only for the benefit of Marianne, but also for the reader, who—because we are so closely aligned with Elinor's perspective

throughout the novel—is pulled into a sympathetic reading of Willoughby's actions that the Elizas narrative would not seem to anticipate.[35]

The novel's preoccupation with judgment and its investment in justifying the conduct of its various gentlemen does surface through Austen's diction, however, gesturing towards a legalistic appraisal of Willoughby's wrongdoings where none are actually available. Marianne's question to her sister—"Elinor, can he be **justified**?" (*SS* 135)[36]—dominates the latter half of the novel, even as Austen works simultaneously to construct more satisfactory romantic endings for both sisters. Brandon, Elinor, and Marianne all differ to the affirmative extent of the answer to this question, as well as to their desire to justify him at all. Elinor begrudgingly admits to Mrs. Jennings, "I must do *this* **justice** to Mr. Willoughby[37]—he has broken no positive engagement with my sister" (*SS* 139), shortly before noting to Brandon that "You know her disposition, and may believe how eagerly she would still **justify** him if she could" (*SS* 142). Marianne writes to Willoughby, "I wish to **acquit** you" (*SS* 133),[38] a desire that both Brandon and Elinor view as harmfully destabilizing to Marianne's health. Brandon tells Elinor what he knows of Willoughby in order to offer "**conviction**, lasting **conviction** to your sister's mind" (*SS*

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[35] To quote Rebecca Richardson, "Elinor serves as the audience within the narrative, while the reader occupies an analogous position outside of the narrative." See Richardson 227.
[36] All use of bold text in this paragraph is mine, used in lieu of italics so as not to be confused with Austen's own frequent use of the latter. The OED cites "justified," in the sense of "Supported by reason, evidence, or right; warranted," as dating back to 1586. The term is also cited as having been used in a civil law case in 1793.
[37] See the OED entry for "justice," which cites its legal meaning—"retribution deemed appropriate for a crime"—as going as far back as 1160.
[38] The legalistic definition of "acquit," "to clear of blame or responsibility for, exonerate; to declare of a formal charge or accusation," dates back to 1393 and is shown as having been used in court proceedings in both the mid-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. See OED entry.

144),[39] and Elinor admits she has “been more pained . . . by her endeavours to **acquit** him than by all the rest; for it irritates her mind more than the most perfect **conviction** of his unworthiness can do” (*SS* 149). Compare this to the much clearer verdict, offered in one short, declarative sentence, that Elinor makes regarding her own beau’s dishonesty—“I **acquit** Edward of all essential misconduct” (*SS* 185)—and the extent to which this novel is engaged in determining justice fully emerges. That Elinor is able to assure Marianne of “a very earnest **vindication** of Edward from every charge but of imprudence” throws the significance of Marianne’s struggle to acquit Willoughby into a stronger light (*SS* 184),[40] suggesting a reluctance to condemn a character with Willoughby’s magnetic pull, no matter the wrongs he has committed.

There are three major crimes of which Willoughby has been found “guilty” by the novel up until this point: the question of his faithfulness to Marianne, the insult of the letter he sent her, and his abandonment of Eliza2. In one chapter, the novel attempts to do away with all three of these offenses, paving the way for Willoughby’s redemption. The question of faithfulness is quickly done away with; good men in Austen’s world are not “inconstant,” and thus his constancy towards Marianne must be reestablished in order to win back any measure of the reader’s good graces. Obviously, bodily constancy is out of the question at this point, as Willoughby’s marriage to Miss Grey has already taken place, but he asks Elinor to tell her sister “that my heart was never inconstant to her” (*SS* 234).

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[39] See OED entry for “conviction,” which dates the usage in the context of the law to 1491.

[40] The OED cites “vindication,” meaning “justification by proof or explanation,” as dating back to 1669. Although its usage in Austen’s time is tangential to the law—as it is today—it is not specifically a legal term. Curious, then, that Edward stands exempt from terms that hold this double-meaning.

By so doing, Willoughby eradicates the untruthfulness up to this point assumed to have been inherent in his relationship with Marianne.

Secondly, Willoughby must do away with the major piece of "hard evidence" against his character in his disentangling himself from Marianne: his final letter to her. This letter, however, he reveals to have been dictated by his wife in a fit of jealousy, and as Willoughby himself feels a victim of her malice, he manages to reposition himself as a sentimental victim of this particular crime: "I . . . parted with the last relics of Marianne. Her three notes—unluckily they were all in my pocket-book, or I should have denied their existence, and hoarded them for ever . . . And the lock of hair— . . . the dear lock—all, every memento was torn from me" (*SS* 233). As he recounts how his pocket-book was "searched by Madam with the most ingratiating virulence," the blame of this most incriminating plot point is transferred to a woman—and notably, a woman whose perspective the novel does not give us. Apart from her attractive £50,000, most of what we know of Miss Grey comes from her husband during this scene, in which he paints the worst picture of her in order to redeem himself.[41] Although Willoughby hopes to win Elinor over with this point—a point that is at the expense of a woman about whom neither she nor the reader has any unbiased information—Elinor asserts that "to speak of her slightingly is no atonement to Marianne." And yet, Elinor's reprimand is betrayed by the narrator's interjection: "'You are very wrong, Mr. Willoughby, very blameable,' said Elinor, while her voice, in spite of herself, betrayed her compassionate emotion" (*SS*

[41] Otherwise, the only account we have of her is the Mrs. Jennings's less biased gossip when she tells Elinor, "I never heard any harm of her . . . except that . . . she and Mrs. Ellison [her guardian] could never agree" (*SS* 138). Not knowing any more of Mrs. Ellison than we do of Miss Grey herself, this rumor of the latter's antagonism holds no water.

233). Even as Elinor offers a rebuttal to Willoughby's attempt to justify himself on this point, her "compassionate emotion" responds to Willoughby's villanization of his wife. Austen thus deploys a double move in this conversation, revealing that although Elinor speaks in defense of Miss Grey and Marianne, her sensibility bends to Willoughby.[42]

Third and perhaps most incriminating is his history with Eliza2, a charge that Elinor levels at him shortly into their conversation. Willoughby's defense, however, feigns to be nothing of the kind:

> I acknowledge that her situation and her character ought to have been respected by me. I do not mean to justify myself, but at the same time cannot leave you to suppose that I have nothing to urge—that because she was injured she was irreproachable, and because *I* was a libertine, *she* must be a saint. If the violence of her passions, the weakness of her understanding—I do not mean, however, to defend myself. (*SS* 228)

Couched between two em dashes, Willoughby does, of course, defend himself, admitting his libertinism even as he tries to further disgrace the girl he seduced (now the mother of his child). His application of the word "libertine" to himself is in itself an acknowledgment of his agency and power in the situation; by the word's very definition, he was prioritizing his own pleasure at the expense of social convention, and for a moment, it seems as if he might be suggesting that Eliza was merely making the same decision to put her own sexual gratification first. But apart from the (quite obvious, and here barely acknowledged) fact that the stakes are much higher for a female libertine than for a man operating under the same sexual principles, the insult that follows this remark suggests that Willoughby not only knew he alone had the potential to walk away from

[42] Regarding Miss Grey, Poovey writes, "the moral principle for which [Elinor] otherwise speaks seems dangerously susceptible to circumstances, to the appeal of 'lively manners,' and to the special pleading of aroused female emotion" (187).

their relationship unscathed in the eyes of society, but that he believed there to be a discrepancy in their respective abilities to fully grasp the potential consequences. Despite his acknowledgment that her character deserved his respect, he signals that she also deserves to share the blame with him, not in spite of but *because* he successfully seduced her; if her passion had not outstripped the "weakness of her understanding," she would indeed have been "irreproachable." Willoughby's defense thus draws from the idea that he can exculpate himself by further lowering the women whom his actions have harmed.

This chapter is all talk, and the talk is almost all Willoughby. Offering, in turn, lengthy and passionate justifications for his sudden appearance, his behavior towards Marianne, his relationship with Miss Grey, and his treatment of Eliza2, Willoughby's dialogue dominates this scene with only the rare comment or question from Elinor. The narrator's voice is conspicuously absent as well, only entering to suggest the incremental movements toward pity occurring in Elinor's mind, pointing towards a "softened," "pitying" Elinor, who ultimately assures Willoughby that "she forgave, pitied, wished him well—was even interested in his happiness" (*SS* 230, 231, 235). The culminating justification of Willoughby's character, however, following this extended and largely one-sided exchange in dialogue, occurs not in their conversation but internally to Elinor's mind:

> Elinor made no answer. Her thoughts were silently fixed on the irreparable injury which too early an independence and its consequent habits of idleness, dissipation, and luxury, had made in the mind, the character, the happiness, of a man who, to every advantage of person and talents, united a disposition naturally open and honest, and a feeling, affectionate temper. The world had made him extravagant and vain—Extravagance and vanity had made him coldhearted and selfish. Vanity, while seeking its own guilty triumph at the expense of another, had involved him in a real attachment, which extravagance, or at least its

> offspring, necessity, had required to be sacrificed. Each faulty propensity in leading him to evil, had led him likewise to punishment. (*SS* 235)

Following the pages of dialogue in which Willoughby has been pleading his case, the sudden reversion to free indirect discourse and the implicit silence it leaves in the room evokes the sense of a jury in deliberation, and Elinor's reflections lean decidedly in his favor. Although she deems Willoughby to possess natural advantages of "person," "talents," "disposition," and "temper," these advantages, when left to self-regulation, have gone awry. At the root of all of Willoughby's troubles is his "too early . . . independence" and the "dissipation" it produced; without a check on his inclinations, he has had the freedom to pursue pleasure at will. And yet, having suggested this assessment of Willoughby's character, Austen wrests all agency from him, shifting it instead to "the world," "extravagance," "vanity," and extravagance's offspring, "necessity." Each of these personified "faulty [propensities]" are to blame for Willoughby's conduct, and each of them, in turn, have "led him likewise to punishment," rendering Elinor's verdict needless. Elinor thus finds Willoughby innocent and yet already punished, a victim not of his own actions but of an underregulated upbringing that left him exposed to the insidious teachings of "the world." Despite all of Willoughby's "natural advantages," which together could have been the making of a gentleman in the interior as well as the exterior sense of the word, his independence and idleness have revealed that these advantages were not enough to overcome another natural inclination: that of libertinism. The result of all possible wealth, social capital, and idle time available to a young man, Elinor's musings imply, must be the selfish gratification of pleasure that Willoughby exhibits.

While the legal aspect of the Eliza storyline points to the sexual double standards inherent in cases of infidelity—one that involved a transfer of culpability that normalized male infidelity while condemning the actions of wives—Elinor's judgment of Willoughby fundamentally destabilizes readings of the Elizas plotline as merely revelatory of legal injustices. Because Austen links Willoughby's sexual misconduct to natural inclination and a lack of a proper education and divests him of all agency, the reader, like Elinor, is guided towards a sense of regret and pity that allows Austen to close her novel with no residual feeling of injustice. Indeed, the closest Austen comes to giving us a villain who remains so to the end is in Miss Grey, whose jealous "malice" would seem to be the prime source of Willoughby's future punishment, given that he assures Elinor that "[d]omestic happiness is out of the question" (*SS* 233, 235). And although Austen affirms on the novel's final page that his punishment has not been so severe, that "in his breed of horses and dogs, and in sporting of every kind, he found no inconsiderable degree of domestic felicity," these are read as consolatory pleasures to counteract the punishment of living with his wife, about whom the best that Austen can say is that she "was not always out of humour" (*SS* 268). Willoughby's redemption thus comes both directly and indirectly at his wife's expense: not only does he clear himself of having written the letter to Marianne by attributing the wording to Miss Grey, but the novel implicitly encourages the reader's sympathy for him by characterizing his wife as the primary source of his punishment. Even as Austen points to inequalities in the law, her unearthing of these double standards does not merely serve to highlight patriarchal power structures, but necessarily underscores the question of how the novel will judge its prime offender. By cataloguing Willoughby's libertinism as the byproduct of an

unregimented youth and reorienting the reader's disapproval towards his voiceless wife, Austen reinforces the gendered biases on which the legal system rested.

In so doing, *Sense and Sensibility* garners an affective response towards masculine hypersexuality that these laws could not. Eliza2 and Marianne are not victims of the manifest legal inequality made evident by the elder Eliza's story, but rather of society's miseducation of Willoughby. Likewise, Willoughby does not pose the same shadowy threat of unnamed perversion as does the elder Brandon, nor does his libertinism represent the unambiguous power inherent in the rake of Restoration drama and poetry—a figure who at most plays a secondary role in the novel post-*Clarissa*. Rather, *Sense and Sensibility* recuperates this figure by merging him with the moral gentleman and rendering Eliza2 and Marianne victims of their own affection for him. If the crucial difference between Willoughby and Elinor's "beau," the flawed but decidedly gentlemanly Edward Ferrars, lies only in the latter's willingness to marry the woman he seduces, then gentlemanliness becomes less a matter of birth or wealth than a teachable cultivation of one's sexual desires. Edward psychologizes his youthful passion for Lucy Steele as the product of a sort of Stockholm syndrome, a misplaced but instructive passion for a lower-class woman that ultimately teaches him Elinor's value. Willoughby, on the other hand, at leisure to seduce not just one woman but whomever he pleases, enjoys an unsupervised exposure to "the world" that provides him with no equivalent education. Blurring the line between the would-be rake and his gentlemanly foil, the novel suggests that the desexualized gentleman is not so much a "type" in the eighteenth-century taxonomy of masculinity as he is a rake with a good social education—and Willoughby is merely a man who never learned the practice of restraint.

4.3 Reforming the Novel

Published three years later, *Mansfield Park* would seem to engage more explicitly with the question of restoring the sexually illicit would-be suitor to favor, opening as the final chapter does with the promise of acquittal: "Let other pens dwell on guilt and misery. I quit such odious subjects as soon as I can, impatient to restore every body, not greatly in fault themselves, to tolerable comfort, and to have done with all the rest" (*MP* 312). With her characteristic insertion of the first person in these final pages, the narrator assures us of the comfort of a happy ending—for those characters who, "not greatly in fault themselves," are deemed deserving of one. This opening line begs the question, then, of what constitutes fault and who falls under the categorization of "all the rest," those who will *not* be made tolerably comfortable in the reader's final impression. It also asks what is at stake for this particular happy ending. Marilyn Butler has argued that "*Mansfield Park* is the most visibly ideological of Jane Austen's novels"—with, notably, "the possible exception of *Sense and Sensibility*"—pointing to its deep investment in the various modes of "education" put forth by the novel and its resounding endorsement of its moral heroine's Christian conservatism. If *Mansfield Park*'s ideology is indeed unusually conspicuous, what, then, does Austen's neat resolution with respects to Henry Crawford suggest about this ideology (Butler 219)?

The restoration that Austen promises in this final chapter follows the major blow dealt by the novel: the scandalous "matrimonial *fracas*" (as Fanny reads in the paper) of her cousin Maria (*MP* 298). Very recently wed to the harmless but thoroughly unlovable Mr. Rushworth, Maria deserts her husband and runs off with Henry Crawford, whose attentions towards Fanny up until this point had thoroughly convinced everyone (except

perhaps Fanny herself) that he had turned over a new leaf, was no longer interested in conquest for the sake of conquest, and was seriously looking to settle down. Although the scandal of Maria and Henry's actions resonate most shockingly in how they impact the former's marriage—as evidenced by Maria's infidelity featuring as the central theme of the aforementioned newspaper article—the actions of Henry arguably impact the finale of the novel far more. Although Butler's statement about the transparency of *Mansfield Park*'s ideology refers to education, she—as almost all critics who touch on the subject do—highlights the education (or, as the case may be, the stasis) of Fanny at the expense of the novel's deep investment in the education of Henry Crawford and, most crucially, the link the novel draws between the two.[43] Whereas *Sense and Sensibility*'s treatment of Willoughby begs affection for a seducer who is implicitly tied to the abuses of the legal system, *Mansfield Park* deals explicitly with the moral education of an adulterer and the dependence of this education on female conduct.[44]

Through this link, *Mansfield Park* replicates eighteenth-century theories of education that of necessity promoted the education of women as an ultimate advantage to men. Most notably, in the dedication to *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Mary Wollstonecraft writes,

> I have contended, that to render the human body and mind more perfect, chastity must more universally prevail, and that chastity will never be respected in the male world till the person of a woman is not, as it were, idolized, when little

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[43] See Butler 247-8.

[44] I refer here to the original meaning of "adulterer," still current in religious and legal texts in both the United States and United Kingdom, that defines an adulterer as simply "one who commits adultery"—that is, one who adulterates a marriage, regardless of whether or not the person in question is the married party. See "adulterer, n.". OED Online. March 2019. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.duke.edu/view/Entry/2837 (accessed May 06, 2019).

> virtue or sense embellish it with the grand traces of mental beauty, or the interesting simplicity of affection. (68)

In other words, educating women will lessen the importance of female chastity as the only quality worth attaining, thereby rendering women more rational companions for men. Because "women are made systematically voluptuous" in order to "satisfy [the] genus of men," this "depraves both sexes, because the taste of men is vitiated" (227). Thus, according to Wollstonecraft, the education of women will result in the deprioritization of female chastity that, in turn, will render men more chaste. Wollstonecraft's argument is therefore not only invested in women's education, but in the reform of male sexual conduct; indeed, the two go hand in hand, the latter acting as a direct result of the former.

Wollstonecraft's logic takes as a given within this framework, however, the notion that "[m]en are certainly more under the influence of their appetites than women" (226), that male lust is a natural occurrence, whereas female lust is propagated by the desire to please men. Turning away from "the parental design of nature," women focus too much on "the mere person," leading Wollstonecraft to conclude that "all the causes of female weakness, as well as depravity, which I have already enlarged on, branch out of one grand cause—want of chastity in men" (227). Wollstonecraft's premise that educating women has the additional benefit of reforming male sexual conduct thus hinges on a naturalization of this conduct, linking female rationality to male chastity in a way that *Mansfield Park* would seem to echo.

For Austen, the potential for Henry Crawford's sexual education is very much tied to Fanny's own "improvement," which the novel communicates through the frequent

use of conditional or hypothetical language that creates a dualism between the sexualized man Henry is and the chaste man he could have been.[45] Mourning the respectability of her favorite niece and ever-eager to look towards Fanny with ill will, Mrs. Norris thinks that "Had Fanny accepted Mr. Crawford, [Henry's affair with Maria] could not have happened" (*MP* 304). Mary Crawford echoes this sentiment pages later, exclaiming to Henry, "Why, would not [Fanny] have him? It is all her fault" (*MP* 309). The hypothetical redemption of Henry's ways by his hypothetical marriage to Fanny might be brushed off, coming, as these comments do, from two women whose perspectives the novel has by this point discredited. When the narrator steps in to make a similar claim, however, we find ourselves caught up in a hypothetical musing more difficult to disregard:

> Henry Crawford, ruined by early independence and bad domestic example, indulged in the freaks of a cold-blooded vanity a little too long. Once it had, by an opening undesigned and unmerited, led him into the way of happiness. *Could he have been satisfied* with the conquest of one amiable woman's affections, *could he have found* sufficient exultation in overcoming the reluctance, in working himself into the esteem and tenderness of Fanny Price, *there would have been* every probability of success and felicity for him . . . *Would he have persevered*, and uprightly, Fanny must have been his reward—and a reward very voluntarily bestowed—within a reasonable period from Edmund's marrying Mary. (*MP* 316-7, emphasis added)

The conditional phrases here point to something more complex than what Tony Tanner has summed up as Henry's "reversion to his true self" (*Jane Austen* 156). Rather, this retrospective hypothetical suggests a cause for Henry's actions; it demands that the reader

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[45] William Galperin has referred to this narrative pattern, which he reads across Austen's works, as "missed opportunities" that "figure[s] as an alternative history" (357). With respects to *Mansfield Park*, Galperin writes that how "Austen challenges the didactic ends of narrative—or the didacticism of her plots—is through the missed opportunity, which marks an alterity that has been forsaken but not forgotten" (371).

consider not only the wrong turn taken (Henry's affair with Maria) but also the seed of that wrong turn: independence, vanity, and the bad example of his immoral uncle. What Tanner refers to as Henry's "true self" is the version of Henry present in the novel—the interloper whose "energy has become divorced from any moral guidance or control"—but the narrator asks us here to consider the origin of Henry's disreputableness in order to unearth the possibility of a different ending for him (*Jane Austen* 154). Whereas *Sense and Sensibility* offers a rationale for why Willoughby turned out as he did and redeems him by condemning his absent wife, *Mansfield Park* presents us with a counterfactual narrative that hinges on positive feminine agency. The conservative implications of *Sense and Sensibility* work at the level of plot, insomuch as two paired scenes give new meaning to Austen's inclusion of marital disunion and sexual misconduct. *Mansfield Park*, on the other hand, produces a similar—but less visible—outcome, in that the very linguistic structuring of the novel serves to uphold the narrator's defense of patriarchal abuse of power. In other words, Austen suggests that Willoughby could have been a different man, but *Mansfield Park* could have been a different novel—had only Fanny played her proper role.

By asking us to consider this alternate ending for Henry, the narrator invests her reader with a sympathy for Henry that might otherwise not be present. As readers, we are momentarily asked to lament the failed reform of the rake based on who he could have been, and we do so at the expense of the heroine. Beyond the assertion that Fanny would have voluntarily been Henry's reward—a positive claim that wrests agency from what Fanny herself has stated—the hypotheticals that precede the final line of this section implicitly align themselves with the patriarchal voices of the novel. Although neither Sir

Thomas nor Edmund make the blatant claims of Mrs. Norris and Mary, they both subject Fanny to a similar line of reasoning when trying to persuade her to accept Henry. Sir Thomas, hoping that Henry will persist in his constancy, "fancied the best means of effecting it would be by not trying him too long" (*MP* 243), and Edmund tells his cousin, "I know he will make you happy; but you will make him every thing" (*MP* 238). Both men repeat versions of these sentiments—to Fanny or to themselves—throughout the third volume, all of which point towards the conclusion that Fanny, if she chooses, can reform Henry's ways by accepting his proposal. Although Fanny asserts repeatedly that she "would not engage in such a charge . . . in such an office of high responsibility!" (*MP* 238), this assertion holds no water with her uncle or cousin. By presenting readers with a hypothetical alternative outcome for Henry, the narrator, like Sir Thomas and Edmund, inserts doubt into the sureness of Fanny's refusal. The narrator's undermining of Fanny's own certainty echoes Edmund's disbelief at his cousin: "So very determined and positive! This is not like yourself, your rational self" (*MP* 236). On the novel's terms, Fanny's decision *is* self-interestedly moral rather than objectively rational, and the male voices surrounding her recall Wollstonecraft in their lament that her lack of rationality has failed to reform Henry's sexual conduct. But, ultimately, neither Fanny's morality nor rationality matters, as neither are ever truly acknowledged; instead, men both drive the plot (in the case of Henry) as well as its interpretation (in the case of Edmund and Sir Thomas). The use of hypotheticals when applied to Henry, therefore, not only has the effect of undermining Fanny's voice, but also serve to undermine a reading of the conclusion of the novel that views Fanny as morally triumphant. That the actual conclusion of the novel ends on Fanny's terms and in line with her moral assessment of

Henry has nothing to do with her own steadiness of character. Rather, the outcome of the novel rests on the infidelity of Henry, rendering Fanny's "[un]rational self" a futile response to the whims of her male counterparts.

This conditional tone of the narrator's appraisal of Henry invests the reader with a sympathy for him that we are not called on to give to Maria. Pointing to the discordance in the law's gendered treatment of husbands and wives who divorce—and it is, undoubtedly, a divorce through an Act of Parliament this time—the narrator projects that Mr. Rushworth "was released from the engagement to be mortified and unhappy, till some other pretty girl could attract him into matrimony again . . . while *she* [Maria] must withdraw with infinitely stronger feelings to a retirement and reproach, which could allow no second spring of hope or character."[46] Although Sir Thomas continues to support his daughter's financial well-being, he makes it clear that he views her as a potential pollutant to both his household and his parish, and Maria suffers the ultimate punishment of being made to live out the rest of her days with only her Aunt Norris for company. On this point, the narrator revels in the particular aptness of her poetic justice, concluding that "it may reasonably be supposed that their tempers became their mutual punishment" (*MP* 315). The narrator spends no time tracing the psychological outcome of Maria as she does for Henry; although Sir Thomas learns to lament the way he raised his daughters, the reader does not find himself going down the same path of "what if" and

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[46] As Martha Bailey has pointed out, the narrator's assertion that "Mr. Rushworth had no difficulty in procuring a divorce" takes a particularly relative perspective on the phrase "no difficulty" (315), as a divorce by Act of Parliament was easier for a man to procure than a woman—but was still by no means easy. See Bailey for a thorough explanation of Austen's inclusion of various legal scenarios throughout her novels.

"if only" for Maria. The narrator offers no redeeming characteristics, and we are not asked to undertake any empathetic consideration of the formation of her principles; rather, that empathy is redirected towards her father, whose mistakes in parenting receive narrative empathy in abundance. Maria's actions have driven her to the logical outcome for a woman who strays, and both her father and the narrator wash their hands of her.

The narrator herself draws substantial attention to the fallout of Maria and Henry's affair, leading critics to diverge in their readings of the novel's conclusion.[47] Sales presents one major caveat to conservative interpretations of Austen's treatment of divorce, arguing that she subversively uncovers gender inequalities in the law by directly addressing them in a passage immediately following the seemingly damning description of Maria's fate. Attempting to unearth an equal amount of poetic justice for Henry as she has for Maria, the narrator pointedly states that—despite the law's inability to ostracize him in the same way it has done to Maria—he also has received his just deserts through self-inflicted remorse:

> That punishment, the public punishment of disgrace, should in a just measure attend *his* share of the offence, is, we know, not one of the barriers, which society gives to virtue. In this world, the penalty is less equal than could be wished; but without presuming to look forward to a juster appointment hereafter, we may fairly consider a man of sense like Henry Crawford, to be providing for himself no small portion of vexation and regret—vexation that must rise sometimes to self-reproach, and regret to wretchedness—in having so requited hospitality, so injured family peace, so forfeited his best, most estimable and endeared acquaintance and so lost the woman whom he had rationally, as well as passionately loved. (*MP* 318)

[47] Amy Wolf, for example, has argued that adultery "both ruins the text and plots of *Mansfield Park* at the same time that it resolves them," suggesting that we cannot read Austen's ideology as falling along either feminist or conservative lines.

Contrary to the views of Sales, I read this passage as ultimately undermining an incontrovertibly feminist reading of Austen's novel. Sales has suggested that Austen inserted this paragraph in order to point to the gendered biases of both the legal system and society at large when it came to acts of sexual indiscretion. He argues that Austen's attention here to the imbalance of punishment reflects her sympathies for the estranged wife of the notoriously rakish Prince Regent. By "highlighting the social conventions that victimised women rather than men in most representations of scandal," Sales writes, Austen "offers a response to the operation of such double standards" (115). Perhaps. But even if we are meant to take Henry's supposed self-punishment as an ironic jab at the injustices of the legal system, even if his "no small portion of vexation and regret" are intended to ring as laughably hollow next to Maria's divorce and ostracization as they do to contemporary ears, the narrator's earlier musings on his outcome undermine the punch of this interpretation. By sympathetically suggesting that Henry might have turned out differently, might have chosen a better outcome for himself if only he had had a better instructor in his youth, the narrator alleviates the very need for punishment. Henry receives partial exoneration from the narrator on the basis of who he *could have been*. His hypothetical trajectory not only points to the force of his nature and the reinforcement these natural tendencies receive from his uncle, but also cultivates a sympathy for him that encourages the reader to want this softer outcome for him. Although this concluding paragraph does make us pause at the legal injustice of Maria's banishment from society compared to Henry's mere self-remorse, the narrative has left space for the man's recovery in the reader's affections that it does not permit the woman. This space and its resultant affective response make agreeable what the law could only make evident;

whereas divorce law naturalized male hypersexuality through gendered privileges and rights, the novel treats this sexual conduct with a wistful affection that naturalizes it through the assertion that the right woman has the potential to render men blameless—and that the women who encourage men's passions deserve a life in isolation with Aunt Norris.

To return, then, to the opening line of the concluding chapter: what does it mean for the narrator to exhibit such proud resistance to dwelling on guilt and misery? What does this happy ending sacrifice? If the project is, as the narrator writes, "to restore every body, not greatly in fault themselves, to tolerable comfort, and to have done with all the rest," what do we do, then, with the inequality of the sentences given to Maria and Henry?

The ending of *Mansfield Park* is invested with not only the "tolerable comfort" of those characters who are deemed deserving of it, but also the tolerable comfort of the reader.[48] Our comfort, which hinges on the exculpation of sexualized Henry and the banishment of sexualized Maria, thus implicitly reinforces the very double standard against which Austen's attention towards adultery laws would seem to push back. Although Austen might have been "[offering] a response to the operation of such double standards" apparent in the legal system, the positive response that the narrator cultivates towards Henry undercuts this response and even serves to justify the basis of the legal inequality. As Henry's hypothetical outcome rests on the possibility of a moral education similar to Edmund's, it simultaneously suggests that this education has the capacity to

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[48] There exists a long critical history of dissatisfaction with the ending of *Mansfield Park*. For a recent discussion of why the novel leaves readers feeling disappointed (or even manipulated), see Peter Graham.

teach him the restraint inherent in a true gentleman. Male moral refinement, the novel implies, necessitates the curtailing of one's pleasures—pleasures that are marked as specifically sexual by Henry's affair with Maria—thereby naturalizing the pursuit of those pleasures to such an extent that they *need* curtailing. The novel marks this naturalization of hypersexuality as highly gendered, however, as evidenced not by the legal responses to Henry and Maria but by our readerly affections towards them at the novel's end. Henry deserves our sympathy because he might have been educated out of his natural propensities; Maria, however, acted with a selfishness for which we must only pity her father, whose self-reflective guilt surrounding his parenting puts him in the same camp of regretful men as Henry. The regrets of both men signal a longing for an ending that could have been and a hope that some good might come out of their missteps. If, then, *Mansfield Park* is one of Austen's most ideological novels, the ways in which that ideology ultimately forgives and condones the patriarchal structures that it would seem merely to expose are embedded at the level of language rather than (as is the case with Willoughby) merely at the level of character. By signaling that the novel itself could have borne out a different narrative, *Mansfield Park* renders Henry Crawford less an individual case of a man led astray so much as a hypothesis on the gentlemanly trajectory from social education to sexual restraint.

Just as possessing a good fortune does not an eager husband make, the chasteness that we so often ascribe to Austen's novels does not hold up under scrutiny, although these works do differ in kind from those earlier eighteenth-century novels that hinged on the ever-present threat of sexual assault. Austen's inclusion of adultery subplots in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Mansfield Park* emphasizes the perils for women of giving in to

sexual passion just as it points to the abuses of power available to men within the eighteenth-century legal framework. Crucially, these novels orient the examination of adultery towards wives who have strayed, positioning their coconspirators as men whose actions are tangential to the infidelity and thus, the novels suggest, perhaps more deserving of a sympathetic excavation of their motivations. While Austen's handling of the disjointed two Elizas narrative and the more explicit discussion of the outcome of Henry and Maria's adultery do—as Poovey, Johnson, and Sales suggest—point to the severe gap between the law's treatment of men and women in questions of divorce and property, when read against the novels' approaches toward the education of men, these subplots offer a more conservative reading.

Sense and Sensibility and *Mansfield Park* garner readerly sympathy for male sexual misconduct through these psychological explanations of social education, a sympathy that critically manifests through the lens of legal rather than physical uses of force. Whereas the sexual appetites of Willoughby and Henry's rakish predecessors rendered them hopelessly villainous, the transference of these appetites into a legal context obscures the power imbalance that narratives of physical force obviate, muddying our emotional responses to patriarchal abuses of power. The fiction of eighteenth-century marriage was that it was a contract—based on property, on love, on some combination of the two—agreed upon equitably between husband and wife; the fiction of eighteenth-century divorce was that the dissolution of this contract could also be carried out objectively, giving preference not to man or woman but to a neutrally-determined "wronged" party. Recognizing this fiction for what it is makes visible the gendered biases upon which the law itself acted, but it also requires an interrogation of the naturalized

assumptions that form the backbone of those biases. While the legal power imbalances between husband and wife surface in both *Sense and Sensibility* and *Mansfield Park*, these novels' depictions of divorce replicate an ideology that promoted notions of masculine hypersexuality forwarded by the laws themselves. And while divorce law's affective reach could only go so far, these novels cultivate a response to male sexual misconduct both sympathetic and nostalgic in nature, subtly reformulating the masculine taxonomy of earlier texts and clouding the distinction between chaste hero and promiscuous villain.

5. Endorsing Rakedom: *Jane Eyre* and the Bifurcated Bigamy Plot

"What tale do you like best to hear?"

"Oh, I have not much choice! They generally run on the same theme—courtship; and promise to end in the same catastrophe—marriage" (169).

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"Bigamy is an ugly word!—I meant, however, to be a bigamist" (248-9).

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I began this study by asking how the novel aligned male moral goodness with chastity, effectively erasing the sexual conduct of male heroes and relegating any evidence of sexual prowess to more minor, villainous characters. I would like to conclude by thinking through an instance of when this trope of male chastity breaks down, when a man with a very clear sexual past not only retains a place of good moral standing for the heroine and the reader, but whose sexual history serves to augment his desirability. Edward Fairfax Rochester is such a man. Despite the wealth of critical attention given to Charlotte Brontë's first novel from its time of publication up until the present, criticism of *Jane Eyre* tends to skirt the role that Rochester's many other women play in the development of his standing as a desirable male protagonist, focusing instead on the ways that these women might act as representative of alternative sides of Jane's character. I speak here not only of Bertha Rochester but of the shadows of unknown women with whom Rochester admits to having committed adultery, those women whose narrative role reveals them to be empty—but charged—threats to Jane's claim on Rochester (a group that perplexingly includes both Blanche Ingram as well as Grace Poole). I also speak of

Jane herself, who, as a near-bigamist, comes to the precipice of being the "other woman." How, this chapter seeks to uncover, do the myriad of circumstances that point to Rochester being anything but a Sir Charles Grandison make possible his appeal as hero of the novel? And is this heroism achieved because of or in spite of his sexual past?

Unlike the novels examined in the previous chapters, *Jane Eyre* has neither the threat nor the reality of divorce. Although my study of Jane Austen shows the somber realities of successful divorce cases, Brontë's novel depicts the imprisoning nature of prolonged marriage. For this is a novel of imprisonment—Bertha's, to be sure, but Rochester's as well, as the sympathetic turn towards his hypersexualized character hinges on the limits the law has placed on him. The restraint that he lacks in sexual terms is counterbalanced by the limitations under which the law has confined him; the two, indeed, become implicitly linked, as the novel would seem to justify Rochester's profligacy outside of his marriage by his powerlessness within it. The bigamy plot of *Jane Eyre* indicates the exceptions that have the potential to render even wealthy male heirs victims of the patriarchal legal system.

And while the novel's bigamy plot garners sympathy for Rochester's sexual escapades, his standing as a sexualized hero also derives readerly sympathies from the temporal bifurcation of the Victorian bigamy plot. As Rochester's attempt at bigamy cleaves through the center of the novel, Jane and Rochester both grapple with a multiplicity of temporal trajectories as they consider alternate selves (past and future) than run parallel to the actual plotline of the novel. This temporal bifurcation highlights flaws in the legal system that were very much a subject of conversation in the decades leading up to *Jane Eyre*'s publication, and for Rochester, these flaws generate sympathy

for his marital situation, rendering him desirable in spite of his sexual past. Jane's bifurcated path likewise works to fortify her sense of her own desirability, as she asserts her individualism through temporal comparisons with Rochester's many "other women." Her respective consideration and dismissal of every other potential partner for Rochester creates an atmosphere of comparison and dominance in which the rejection of the sexual competition solidifies Jane's individualism in a way that counterintuitively augments Rochester's sexual appeal. This atmosphere of hypothetical doubled partners haunts the novel and foreshadows the near-legal parallelism between Jane and Bertha, but it also solidifies Rochester as the patriarchal centerfold of the novel, reaffirming his power where the law has deprived him of it. Finally, Jane's bifurcated path also ultimately serves to augment Rochester's appeal through the serious consideration of his sexual opposite: St. John's cold restraint, presented as it is as a direct alternative to Rochester's open desire, bolsters the latter's appeal, rendering Rochester's sexual past less a thing to be forgiven than a wound that needed healing.

Jane Eyre thus grapples with two positions with respects to nonmonogamy, both of which were much in line with conversations of the day. On the one hand, as we shall see, the novel puts forward the possibility that the law is imperfect, that taking a hard line against bigamy holds the potential to make a victim out of a landed gentleman. On the other hand, *Jane Eyre* leans into this hard line, because to effectively reject secondary mates is to augment the meaning—both legally and romantically—of monogamous union. While the novel seriously considers both positions, the rationale behind Rochester's perspective receives serious treatment only insofar as it can ultimately redeem him; the sympathetic eye that the novel turns towards Rochester's legal

predicament elicits merely a sympathetic response towards a rakish man. The logic through which *Jane Eyre* reaches its conclusion, however, transforms that sympathy for Rochester into endorsement, removing restraint as an indicator of desire from the domestic sphere and banishing its appeal to the realm of the law.

5.1 Bigamy and Its Partners

Jane Eyre is a novel that centers on the struggle between passion and restraint. From the earliest scenes to the novel's climax, Jane repeatedly confronts the question of when and under what circumstances one's passionate desire might overcome reasoned restraint in determining a personal sense of justice. As Jane moves through childhood, she continually reexamines the question of what one should do when one's desires do not align with the imposed rules. By the time she reaches Thornfield, the bigamy plot sheds new light on this question, transferring childhood concerns of passion and restraint to the realm of sexual conduct, and raising the stakes of breaking the "imposed rules" by reframing those rules as the rule of law.

While Jane grapples with the adaptability of the law throughout—whether "the law" is embodied by her Aunt Reed, the schoolmaster Mr. Brocklehurst, or Britain's legal system—the scenes from her early childhood suggest that she is sympathetic to bending or breaking rules in order to obtain a subjective sense of justice. In her childhood at her Aunt Reed's house, Jane is bated by the free indulgences of her cousins ("[John] gorged himself habitually at table" (7)), while a moment of unrestrained action on Jane's part renders her subject to accusations of being "a picture of passion!" (9). Jane's early reflections on the rule of law, therefore, show it to be stacked against her—"I was

conscious that a moment's mutiny had already rendered me liable to strange penalties" (9)—and externally-imposed regulation becomes something that she must navigate with distrust, evaluating it against her own sense of justice. At Lowood, Jane's friendship with Helen Burns gives a fresh perspective to her resistance; when Helen preaches that "[i]t is far better to endure patiently a smart which nobody feels but yourself, than to commit a hasty action whose evil consequences will extend to all connected with you" (47), Jane argues, "If people were always kind and obedient to those who are cruel and unjust, the wicked people would have it all their own way . . . I must resist those who punish me unjustly" (48). Jane's early sense of justice is personally determined and reflects an unwillingness to restrain herself for the sake of following the rules, should those rules read to her as unjust.

Although Jane's friendship with Helen teaches her to the rhetorical benefits of moderating her passionate responses to injustice, Jane ultimately finds herself unable to embody Helen's doctrine of patient submission—a stance she makes clear through her decisive assertion, "I was no Helen Burns" (55). But these early responses to injustice find their true test at Thornfield, when Jane herself is no longer the subject of the injustice, and when the rules are, in fact, the law. An early conversation in Jane and Rochester's relationship foreshadows the import that this relationship between restraint, control, and justice will have to the later sections of the novel.

In the moment that Edward Rochester decides to be a bigamist—a moment only clear to the reader in hindsight—he and Jane discuss their respective outlooks on the law as clearly as they possibly can, given Rochester's intentional vagueness. To himself more than to Jane, he asserts:

> ‘I know what my aim is, what my motives are; and at this moment I pass a law, unalterable as that of the Medes and Persians, that both are right.’
> ‘They cannot be, sir, if they require a new statute to legalise them.’
> ’They are, Miss Eyre, though they absolutely require a new statute; unheard-of combinations of circumstances demand unheard-of rules.’
> ’That sounds a dangerous maxim, sir; because one can see at once that it is liable to abuse.’
> ‘Sententious sage! so it is: but I swear by my household gods not to abuse it.’ (118)

At this point in the novel, we know already from Mrs. Fairfax and will later have confirmed by Rochester himself that the “unheard-of circumstances” of which he speaks date back fifteen years to his marriage with Bertha Mason of Spanish Town, Jamaica. Mrs. Fairfax describes what she knows of this narrative as “family troubles” due to the “painful position” into which Rochester had been put by his father and older brother, Rowland. Mrs. Fairfax admits that she “never clearly knew” the “precise nature of that position,” beyond the fact that it was “for the sake of making his fortune” (109).

When it comes time for Rochester to unearth this history, he, of course, has no need for these polite explanations. Rochester’s “capital error” (185), as he terms it, lay in his falling for “the plot against [him]” (261). The younger son of an avaricious father, Edward Rochester was not legally entitled to inherit any of his father’s estate without “Old Mr. Rochester” making notable adjustments to his will. But the senior Rochester had no desire to break up his estate and had determined it must all go to his eldest son, Rowland, upon his death. “Yet as little could he endure that a son of his should be a poor man” (260), and so, to ensure Edward’s wealth and thus the augmented respect of the Rochester family as a whole, Edward’s father and brother embark on a scheme to win Edward the hand of Bertha Mason—“the boast of Spanish Town” and heiress to thirty thousand pounds (260). But Bertha soon descends into madness, and Rochester—despite

his wealth, despite his family name—has for a wife a woman whom he barely recognizes as human. With divorce unavailable to him,[1] Rochester hides his lawful wife and seeks a new woman to present to the world as his legal, monogamous partner.

This plot of Rochester's—which of course proves to be the failed bigamy plot of the novel—echoes Jane's concerns from childhood over the definition and subjectivity of justice. But while Jane the child "must resist those who punish [her] unjustly," Jane the woman finds danger in the prospect of going beyond resistance and creating a new system of law. The refusal to submit to those who mean you ill, in other words, does not go as far for Jane as to refuse to submit to the law itself. But though Jane and the reader are, when Rochester "pass[es] a law," unaware of the "unheard-of combinations of circumstances" of which he speaks, the "unheard-of rules" that he proposes to himself in this moment speak to larger national concerns around bigamy—a crime that lent itself particularly well to the conversations of subjective justice in which the novel engages.

Bigamy stands apart from other crimes against marriage for its inherent capaciousness: bigamy could be intentionally or innocently committed; it might be considered either a crime or a panacea; and, in *Jane Eyre* just as in debates throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the question of the temporality of its criminality fuels numerous disagreements. Rochester, insistent that he ought to have the right to marry Jane given that his first marriage is over in all but the legal sense, views bigamy as a diachronic solution to the irrational strictures of marriage. Jane, on the other hand, takes the hard line of the law itself: being married to two women at the same time

[1] As will be discussed in more detail below, it was not possible to divorce one's spouse on the grounds of insanity in England until 1937.

makes bigamy by definition synchronous. Questions over the synchronicity of partnership—its values and drawbacks as well as the nuances of how one defined synchronous union—have a long history that substantially predates Brontë's novel, however, and which became especially active in the century leading up to *Jane Eyre*'s publication. A brief overview of this history of philosophical and legal debates around polygamy and bigamy will serve to illustrate the important role that the term's fluidity plays in *Jane Eyre*.

Although the crime of legally partnering with a second spouse while the first was still living had been known as bigamy since the fourteenth century, the legal discourses around this term intersected with ongoing philosophical debates that responded to the question of multiple and synchronous sexual partnership in a variety of ways. And as is still the case today for many terms that fall outside the bounds of monogamous union, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there was a great deal of slippage, overlap, and disagreement in the terminology surrounding bigamy. As a legal term, bigamy itself denotes the illegal act of either a man or a woman having multiple spouses, but in the eighteenth century, bigamy was one of many terms—including nonmonogamy and polygamy—that featured in ongoing debates among political and religious philosophers as well as writers of fiction. Indeed, it is in part due to these debates that these terms continuously changed form and ran up against one another.

The mystification of terminology around polygamy and bigamy were originally religious in nature, originating as a casual conflation of language going at least as far

back as the sixteenth century,[2] and continuing on into the eighteenth as linguistic slippages between everything that fell outside of the purview of legalized monogamous union. As Felicity Nussbaum has pointed out, "In the eighteenth century, polygamy was defined variously as a husband's taking more than one wife, marrying after the death of his first wife, or even seducing a woman while married to another and therefore being held responsible for her ruin" (76). In his dictionary, Samuel Johnson's entry for "Bigamy" includes two definitions to illustrate these multiple possibilities: "1. The crime of having two wives at once. 2. [In the canon law.] The marriage of a second wife, or of a widow, or a woman already debauched; which, in the church of Rome, were considered as bringing a man under some incapacities for ecclesiastical offices."[3] Polygamy therefore comes to take on a meaning based not only on quantity but on temporality; even remarrying after the death of a first wife could be considered polygamous (or, as it

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[2] Looking as far back as the Lutheran Reformation, for instance, which John Witte has recently argued "offered new theories and laws of Church and State, marriage and education that have become a permanent legacy of the Western tradition" (Witte 275)—we might take as an example Luther's reading on Genesis, in which he historicizes the story of Abraham and Sarah in order to discuss the drawbacks of polygamy compared to monogamy.[2] In his reading, Luther means to defend Christian teaching over Mosaic Law by pointing to the disadvantages of societies that allow for polygamy—namely, fighting among wives. And yet Luther's use of "polygamy" as a term here holds no stable meaning, instead suggesting a multiplicity of possible interpretations: taking a number of wives in succession, for example, as Henry the VIII did, or the question of whether it was morally obligatory for a man to marry his brother's widow, even if he already had a wife of his own. Luther's discussion of polygamy thus encompasses numerous meanings in the modern sense, from bigamy to adultery to what we would consider today simply to be remarriage after the death of a spouse. Likewise, political philosopher Grotius, also writing in the sixteenth century, ran into similar problems with terminology when it came to nonmonogamous arrangements. Now considered a foundational work in international law, Grotius's *On the Law of War and Peace* discusses polygamy as a way of upholding Christianity, which he views as opposed to the "law of nature"—a law in which, he argues, polygyny (but never polyandry) is a natural occurrence. Like Luther, then, Grotius's interest in synchronous partnership is rooted in a defense of Christianity, in which he contrasts monogamous marriage against polygyny. But Grotius, too, runs into a difficulty with terminology, using polygyny and divorce interchangeably—an argumentative move based in the logic that to divorce one wife implies the addition of another, even if this had not yet come to pass. See Luther and Grotius.
[3] See Johnson, Samuel, "Bigamy."

features in *The Vicar of Wakefield*, “nonmonogamous”). And both of these considerations—number of spouses and temporality of partnership—are defined negatively against monogamous lifelong marriage.[4] The terminology around marriage between one man and one woman was strictly defined in its temporal eternity; all other variations on the marriage contract stood in opposition to it and thus were negatively defined against marriage rather than positively defined in and of themselves.

This process of negatively defining all sexual arrangements outside of lifelong monogamous marriage occurs repeatedly in philosophical, religious, and literary debates throughout the eighteenth century, from Caleb Fleming to Mary Wollstonecraft. Perhaps no eighteenth-century writer took up the question of polygamy and demonstrates this way of thinking about it more thoroughly than David Hume, however. In “Of Polygamy and Divorces” (1742), Hume proposes to consider what he views as three possible arrangements with regard to sexual partnerships as observed in other countries: polygamy, “voluntary divorces” (i.e. amicable separation, rather than a divorce pursued by just one spouse), and monogamy, described as “the confine[ment of] one man to one woman, during the whole course of their lives, as among the modern Europeans” (Hume 183). Hume methodically addresses the pros and cons of each possibility, beginning with polygamy. After a lengthy and careful consideration of polygamy, however, Hume rejects it on three grounds: (1) it threatens to promote jealousy between wives, thereby augmenting the worst parts of love while forfeiting the best, (2) it risks promoting

[4] Caleb Fleming, for example, writing in 1751, defined polygamy as a man having more than one wife at the same time. Fleming ignores the specificity of the terms bigamy and digamy (the second legal remarriage after the death of a first spouse), because “monogamy be transgressed, for the same reason that a man has two wives, he might have twenty.” See Fleming, cited in Nussbaum, 76.

jealousy between men (because any male visitor could, according to Hume, have equal claim to any of a man's wives as he does), and (3) it sets a poor example in home-making for children. After a similarly minute consideration of divorce, Hume ultimately finds this to be an unsatisfactory solution as well, as children suffer and no good can come of separating two people whose "interests and concerns" have been so wholly united.[5]

One might think, following Hume's careful, organized approach to polygamy and divorce, that the reader is in for the same when it comes to monogamous marriage. But no—Hume concludes with one sentence: "The exclusion of polygamy and divorces sufficiently recommends our present European practice with regards to marriage" (Hume 190). Hume chooses monogamy as the most viable form of partnership only through the exclusion of the other two options without considering it in its own right. This abrupt conclusion illustrates the function that discussions of polygamy repeatedly had for forwarding a portrait of monogamous English wedlock; polygamy and the many terms that it was so casually exchanged with came into conversation only to underscore the inevitability of monogamy and its importance to the English identity.

Interest in nonmonogamy in its many forms grew throughout the eighteenth century as a result of England's increased exposure to other cultures as a result of exploration, trade, and colonialism. Those sexual arrangements that fell outside of the purview of monogamous marriage functioned not only to solidify the normalization of

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[5] With respects to man's desire for liberty, Hume writes, "If it be true, on the one hand, that the heart of man naturally delights in liberty, and hates every thing to which it is confined; it is also true, on the other, that the heart of man naturally submits to necessity, and soon loses an inclination, when there appears an absolute impossibility of gratifying it. These principles of human nature, you'll say, are contradictory: But what is man but a heap of contradictions!" (188).

marital union, but were similarly used as a way of defining English womanhood. Just as bigamy-digamy-polygamy-nonmonogamy-divorce entertained blurred lines between their boundaries as a function of defining the line that lay between them and marriage, rumors of various nonmonogamous arrangements from abroad served to clarify everything that the ideal English woman was not. As Nussbaum describes,

> The Englishwoman abroad finds in the Other something that aids her in granting herself an identity and thus contributes to the now suspect liberal feminism—so closely bound up with monogamous marriage and motherhood—of the latter part of the century . . . Monogamy, with the support of feminism, is established as a national imperative; the Englishwoman is contained within the boundaries of marriage and nation, and her superiority is confirmed by her difference from the sexuality of empire's polygamous women. (Nussbaum 93)

Throughout the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth, England's growing colonialist presence abroad spread perceptions of "Othered" femininity distinct for its hypersexuality. A fascination with the polygamous arrangements of foreign peoples made concrete through contrast the idealized image of the monogamous Englishwoman.

As general concepts, then, polygamy, nonmonogamy, and even divorce functioned in English discourse as a way of underscoring the national identity as specifically monogamous as well as idealizing English womanhood over the perceived threat posed by the colonized, polygamous Other. In English law, however, polygamy would appear in theory to take on a less complicated relationship to its monogamous alternative. A new ruling in 1597 called for spouses separated from bed and board (at this time the closest one could come to a full divorce) to give a bond of 100 pounds not to remarry until the death of the first spouse,[6] and the Bigamy Act of 1604 rendered it a

[6] Stone, *Road to Divorce*, 305.

felony to remarry while one's first spouse was still living.[7] To be caught as having two spouses could result in "branding on the thumb"—a relatively lax alternative compared to hanging. In the eighteenth century, once a full Parliamentary divorce became a viable option for the wealthy, bigamy could be grounds for divorce or even, in the unusual case, a sentence of up to seven years of hard labor for offenders.[8]

In light of the progression of these laws, it would appear that polygamy, when prosecuted as an illegal act under the name of bigamy, took on a much more clear-cut meaning in the legal sphere than it had in philosophical and religious debates. But records show the law to have had mixed effectiveness, as well as mixed intentions, when it came to prosecuting bigamy. In the relatively rare case where a bigamous spouse was found out and the wronged spouse pursued legal justice, punishment was often relaxed, and the new marriage was not viewed as adulterous or even invalid[9]—especially for those already judicially separated. Lawrence Stone has suggested that the laxity and ambiguity in bigamy law hints at an opposition, in clerical circles as well as the general public, to strict laws against divorce and remarriage.[10] And in spite of this unofficially sanctioned laxity, bigamy continued to pose problems for lawmakers after the official criminalization of polygamy, particularly in instances of property disputes between spouses of the same person. Not until 1753 did English law respond to these problems and turn its attention again to bigamy.

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[7] Turner 71.
[8] McAleavey 5.
[9] Stone, *Road to Divorce*, 305.
[10] Stone, *Road to Divorce*, 306-7.

Historians and literary scholars principally think of Hardwicke's Marriage Act of 1753 as a response to clandestine, underage marriages and the property disputes that arose from these unions. Requiring parental consent for those under eighteen and formalizing the process for the public reading of the bans allowed for parents to control more effectively when and to whom their wealth passed. Clandestine, underage marriages as a legal problem are therefore, of course, inherently about property, and the combination of courtship, secrecy, and family wealth explains literary scholars' interest in Hardwicke's Marriage Act as a set of laws repurposed by numerous eighteenth-century novels. "Clandestine" marriages included a whole host of unions to which the Marriage Act attempted to respond, however: minors marrying without parental consent, to be sure, but also the unannounced marriages of two adults, and particularly the clandestine nature of bigamous marriages.

Bigamy posed a similar problem with respect to property as underage marriages, as bigamous unions offered no property rights to the new spouse. Stone suggests that a bigamous marriage was far more likely to be seen as invalid than a clandestine marriage between minors, suggesting a tension between the incentives of property and morals in reforming marriage law; although property was a major factor in the enactment of legal procedure, the trespassing of monogamous partnership retained major sway. According to Erica Harth, the question of the immorality of polygamy and the property problems ensuing from polygamous unions came to a head with the Marriage Act. Harth argues that scholars have overlooked bigamy as having played a more direct role than underage marriages in the mid-eighteenth-century overhaul of marriage law, for the case that had the most direct bearing on the passing of Hardwicke's Marriage Act was *Cochrane alias*

Kennedy v. *Campbell*, in which two wives of the same man both sought the right to his property after his death.[11] Hardwicke's Marriage Act—at its core about property as much as about morals—sought to resolve the disagreements and entanglements that arose through bigamy as well as those marriages that took place without parental consent.

After the new law went into effect, bigamists risked greater punishment if found out. Despite this new threat, however, bigamy remained fairly common throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Indeed, it is perhaps because the Marriage Act was so much more effective at curtailing underage marriages than bigamous marriages that it is so much more commonly associated with the former. Bigamy, as numerous scholars have pointed out,[12] was a somewhat unusual crime in that it could as easily be committed accidentally as intentionally, as concrete news of an absent spouse was often difficult to come by and a person of limited means traveled rarely or not at all over the course of their lifetime. This made bigamy a more common crime among the poor, who could never hope to afford a divorce by Act of Parliament, and who likely had some sense of how uncommonly the strictest sentences for bigamists were given to offenders. And, as Ginger Frost has pointed out, bigamy was a rare crime in that it was often condoned by the communities in which it was committed: "The bigamist had to have a good reason to have left his or her spouse, had to have been honest with the second spouse, and had to be able to support multiple families. Within these parameters, neighbors and friends accepted illegal marriages, following in a long tradition of self-marriage and self-divorce" (1). Frost notes that community acceptance of bigamy was so overwhelming by

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[11] See Harth 126.
[12] See Hager 35, McAleavey 2, Turner 70-1.

the end of the nineteenth century that judges often gave only nominal sentences to offenders.

Given that acts of bigamy were minimally prosecuted, the crime plays a curious role in the history of divorce. In one light, bigamy looks like the ultimate act of adultery and thus concrete grounds for divorce. Indeed, numerous divorces before 1857 were obtained on the grounds of adultery in conjunction with another crime, including all four women who obtained divorces between 1801 and 1857, who managed to do so on either the aggravated grounds of bigamy or incest.[13] But its prevalence in the century before the Matrimonial Causes Act shows it to have most often acted as a way around embarking on the complex and financially precarious path of divorce. As A.D. Harvey has recently put it, “For most of the last three hundred years it has been the difficulty of divorce rather than anything more sexually titillating that has been the principal cause of bigamy” (15). Because divorce by Act of Parliament was so rarely granted and, in the rare cases that it was successful, was exclusively available to wealthy men with particular connections, various forms of separation that in a legal light technically fell under the name of bigamy became commonplace—especially among the poor. Bigamy was therefore both a crime that provided justifiable grounds for divorce as well as a solution to the financial difficulties posed by official, government-sanctioned divorce.

Bigamy’s contentious history—derived from convoluted debates that defined it negatively against lifelong monogamous marriage, and transformed into a crime that was

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[13] Hager, 33. Adultery was the only justification for obtaining a divorce prior to 1937, and before 1921, women were only allowed to sue for divorce on the grounds of “aggravated adultery”—that is, adultery plus an additional offense—whereas a man needed only accuse his spouse of adultery.

also a panacea for the unreasonably strict divorce laws—holds particular sway when we consider the bigamy plot of *Jane Eyre*. For Rochester to "pass a law," a "new statute" of "unheard-of rules," echoes the historical instability of the legal application and philosophical reasoning around bigamy that precede Brontë's novel. The inherent hypocrisy in bigamy's history—that, on the one hand, polygamy functioned in debates primarily to promote monogamy, while on the other its criminalization under the name of bigamy typically went unprosecuted among the poor, drawing the authorities' attention only when property came under dispute—shows the theoretical discussions of multiple partnership and criminalization of its practical application to have been at odds with one another. And this contradiction also renders the law itself, the justice of its nuances, liable to reinterpretation and modifications. Rochester's attempt at bigamy tests the limits of how malleable this law actually was, putting forward a "statute" that would seem to define bigamy not against its counterpart monogamy, but in its own right. Putting forward, as Rochester does, an argument for circumstances in which an act of bigamy works alongside monogamous ideals, he draws from the unstable reception of multiple partnership to highlight a circumstance in which the restrictive divorce laws have rendered even a propertied gentleman a victim.

In my attention to bigamy's social and legal history, I hope to reframe our understanding of Brontë's novel, shifting where we understand *Jane Eyre*'s place to be in this historical literary trajectory of bigamy and divorce. Other critics before me have taken up questions of bigamy in *Jane Eyre*, although these studies notably tend to begin—rather than end with—Brontë's novel. As recent nineteenth-century scholarship has turned towards the importance of divorce and marital discord to the Victorian novel,

Jane Eyre has served as the linchpin for a newly identified host of novels dealing in bigamy—despite, of course, the fact that Mr. Rochester's bigamous plans never come to fruition.[14] Most notably, perhaps, Maia McAleavey has recently pointed to the narrative possibilities that the bigamy plot opens up, arguing that "[i]n terms of narrative, the bigamy plot undermines the security of a wedding as the nineteenth-century novel's inescapable ending . . . Because marriage served as a cultural marker of stability and sociality, any disruption to its structure suggested a possible free-fall" (McAleavey 7-8). With Victorian novels famously reverting to some form of "the marriage plot" and traditionally ending in a wedding, bigamy destabilizes the inevitability of these conclusions by wrenching the dual advantages of permanence and exclusivity from the institution of marriage itself.

In the instances that literary scholars, including McAleavey, have turned their attention to bigamy, the discussion tends to be concentrated around sensation novels of the 1860s and '70s. Jeanne Fahnestock has drawn attention to several real-life bigamy scandals that, she argues, provided the basis for an explosion of bigamy novels in the 1860s, noting that "bigamy was not surprisingly an attractive expedient for amateur as well as practiced minor novelists in the early sixties," with the "peak years of the fashion [being] 1862, 1863, 1864, and 1865" (Fahnestock 55). McAleavey's study focuses primarily on the explosion of bigamy plots that she also sees as having occurred in the decades after the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857—a trend that drives her inquiry of why the rise of divorce in Britain would correspond with a rise of bigamy (rather than divorce)

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[14] See McAleavey 54-55.

in British fiction. But whereas both of these critics base the timeline of bigamy plots on legal shifts—McAleavey on the Matrimonial Causes Act and Fahnestock on the "884 cases of bigamy [that] were tried in England between 1853 and 1863" (Fahnestock 58)—both largely ignore the prevalence of bigamy in English culture (unprosecuted though it may have been) as well as in novels that predate the sensation novels of the '60s.

If we are to adopt this line of thinking when it comes to the rise of the bigamy plot, *Jane Eyre* would indeed seem like a likely source. McAleavey treats it as such, as does Fahnestock, who writes that "[b]igamy was no new plot device in the 1860s. Fifteen years earlier, *Jane Eyre* had raised the threat of Rochester's intended bigamy, though significantly Jane is spared the illegitimate marriage" (Fahnestock 48-9). But though Fahnestock and McAleavey both attribute possible other sources to the 1860s surge, these alternatives are either contemporary to Brontë's novel or appear as even "more immediate precursors" than *Jane Eyre* (Fahnestock 49). Shifting our focus well before the latter half of the nineteenth century, however, reveals *Jane Eyre* to be not so much as a source as it does a pivotal point in a narrative that begins long before 1847. For eighteenth-century novels do not lack for stories of bigamy. Both Moll Flanders (1722) and Roxana (1724) commit bigamy—sometimes knowingly, sometimes in ignorance—multiple times. As Felicity Nussbaum has shown, *Pamela II* (1742) centers itself around the ongoing eighteenth-century debates on polygamy and bigamy that arose as a result of colonialism. Frances Sheridan's *The Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* (1761) culminates in the sudden reveal that the heroine and her husband have unwittingly committed bigamy (he commits suicide; she dies of misery shortly thereafter). In *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766), Squire Thornhill turns out to be a serial bigamist, having married

numerous women for financial gain before his crime is revealed and he is sentenced to spend the rest of his days playing the French horn in northern England. The possibility of bigamy haunts *Evelina* (1778), in which the heroine's father openly admits at the end of the novel to refusing to acknowledge marriages with at least two women (and jokes about the possibility of others). *The Woman of Colour* (1808) makes use of an unintentional act of bigamy to resolve the apparent narrative "problem" of a white man married to a Jamaican heiress. Even *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753), certainly one of the century's less sexually titillating novels, features an attempted bigamist in Sir Hargrave. And, as Jocelyn Harris has noted, Grandison himself was almost made a bigamist before Richardson decided instead to bestow on him two competing love interests rather than two competing wives.[15]

The primary difference between eighteenth-century inclusion of bigamy and those nineteenth-century novels of McAleavey's study lies in bigamy's narrative function. In many of these eighteenth-century examples, the bigamists in question are also the villains, and bigamy stands as a marker of their deceitfulness, greed, and arrogance. Although, as is the case with Sir Hargrave, Squire Thornhill, and Evelina's father, the bigamists might receive some form of Christian forgiveness by the end of the novel, this forgiveness functions more to demonstrate the magnanimity of the hero than to offer any real narrative restitution to the villain himself. And—with the exception of Defoe's

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[15] Harris notes that Richardson toyed with several possible avenues for developing Grandison's sexual allure. He "hinted mysteriously to [a correspondent] at a romantic past for Sir Charles to keep Harriet in suspense," and "toyed for a time with the impossible solution of polygamy, falling back at last on the more legal but equally unsatisfactory notion of Sir Charles's divided heart." See the introduction to the first volume, pp. ix-x.

heroines—it is always a “he” in the eighteenth-century novel. Bigamy evidenced the sexual licentiousness and monetary greed of men and the extremes to which this lustfulness could fly in the face of the law. In the rare instances that bigamy does not act as a mark of villainy but a product of bad information and misfortune, it effectively closes the narrative: *Sidney Bidulph* and *The Woman of Colour* both come to a halt mere pages after the bigamous act comes to light, signaling the impossibility of the characters’ prolonged narrative existence after such a shocking revelation. Bigamy in the eighteenth-century novel functions as a flat marker of plot or of character, acting as a quick indicator to the reader of the novel’s tragic ending or else marking a male character as morally corrupt.

Jane Eyre, however, presents at least one early example of a more complicated approach to bigamy—and how this approach had the potential to change the affective response to male sexual conduct. Fahnestock’s analysis of bigamy plots of the 1860s breaks the possible routes that a bigamy novel can take into four possible categories:

> Bigamy, no matter whether in the main plot or subplot, must be either real, involving two technically correct marriage services, or only apparent. To have apparent bigamy, whatever impediment supposedly nullifies the second ceremony must not really exist. Bigamy must also be either accidental, caused by fated circumstance, or intentional, caused by villainy. By, in effect, choosing one from each of these oppositions, the novelist creates one of four basic permutations of the convention: real/accidental, real/intentional, apparent/accidental or apparent/intentional bigamy. (Fahnestock 61)

Taking Fahnestock at her word that these permutations are indeed basic, that need not render them useless ways of categorizing these plots, particularly in the case of *Jane Eyre*. For Rochester’s attempted bigamy falls squarely into the second category of real/intentional, a permutation in which “a character deliberately commits the crime of

bigamy, marrying a second time in full knowledge of a previous legal marriage. The novelist can easily provide villainy as a motive for deliberate bigamy, the convenient sin on which Victorian novelists so readily relied" (Fahnestock 64). Although certain eighteenth-century plots close with the revelation of a real/accidental bigamous act, real/intentional bigamy and its easy association with villainous characters would seem to be the modos operandi in eighteenth-century bigamy plots. Rochester, however, is no villain, and the novel continues long after his attempt at bigamy. Although Fahnestock addresses interesting cases of real/intentional bigamy that receive ambiguous moral treatment from the novel, *Jane Eyre* does not play into her discussion. Indeed, the bulk of bigamy plots that Fahnestock examines in her study of Victorian sensation novels play out along the lines of one of the other three permutations—permutations that lend themselves more easily to moral ambiguity—whereas eighteenth-century novels that employ bigamy as narrative tools do so almost exclusively within this real/intentional permutation. *Jane Eyre* provides, then, not an early example of a bigamy plot, but an early example of a bigamy plot that offers shades of grey to bigamy committed open-eyed and without remorse.

Two other key differences exist between bigamy as it's represented in the eighteenth-century novel and the bigamy plots of the nineteenth. In her examination of late nineteenth-century bigamy plots, McAleavey reveals a striking gender-neutrality, examining a host of novels that focus on female bigamists. To suggest that this gender-neutrality is overwhelmingly a quality of the nineteenth-century novel would, again, find an exception in *Roxana*, but a pivotal difference between Defoe's novel of 1724 and Brontë's of 1847 exists in the function that bigamy has for each. Whereas Roxana's

marriages with the Brewer, the Jeweler, and the Dutch Merchant (as with Roxana's extramarital partners, all are known only by their professions) exist solely as plot devices, allowing the protagonist to accumulate more and more wealth and security, bigamy of course plays a much more nuanced role in *Jane Eyre*. Crucially, the import of the bigamous act is considered not only for the narrator or for the main perpetrator; in a literal sense, Jane, Rochester, and Bertha all come to the precipice of being bigamists—despite Jane's ignorance and Bertha's powerlessness in the situation—as the bigamous subject can be any of the three parties in a bigamous triangle.

It is this true triangulation that sets the nineteenth-century bigamy plot apart from those of the eighteenth. McAleavey argues that the bigamy plot opens up a "split narrative" for each of the three bigamous parties, where each is:

> ushered into a new form of bifurcated subjectivity . . . It is the simultaneous 'bothness' of this situation for all three parties that makes the idea of bigamy so alternately appealing and terrifying. The plot of bigamy creates shades of difference where none seem possible, dissolving the familiar opposition, married or single, into a new question: *how* married are you?[16] (McAleavey 16)

For Squire Thornhill and Roxana, the narrative is not haunted by any question of how their stories might have been different without these multiple marriages, and their respective partners are disappeared by the novels as soon as they have fulfilled their narrative purpose. The disappearance of the protagonists' "extra" spouses might be explained by the novel— as in the case of Roxana's Brewer husband, who deserts her and their children, leaving her in the state of financial destitution that catapults the rest of the

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[16] It is worth noting that although I draw on McAleavey's idea of temporal bifurcation in this chapter, her own study of *Jane Eyre* does not make use of it, focusing instead on readings of the architectural layout of Thornfield.

novel—or they might conveniently be omitted from the narrative, as are Squire Thornhill's many previous wives. The bigamists of eighteenth-century novels do not travel two simultaneous narratives, and it is this "bifurcated subjectivity" of the bigamists, rather than bigamy itself, which is the new component of the Victorian novel. Rather than using bigamy as narrative tool to denote rakishness at its most extreme or to close the novel, *Jane Eyre*'s bigamy plot opens up two narratives—one actualized and one hypothetical—for each of the bigamists. And, crucially, it does so even for Rochester, a man who attempts bigamy without the knowledge of his second-wife-to-be, and whose sexual history is littered with adulterous affairs. The bigamy plot of *Jane Eyre* and the temporal bifurcation it produces works to generate sympathy for this hypersexualized protagonist, positioning him as a victim of an archaic legal system that impedes the very ideal of monogamous love that it would purport to uphold.

5.1 Doubled Selves

A long critical history in search of Jane's double has trailed this novel for the past half century, finding her in Helen Burns, Adèle, Blanche Ingram, Grace Poole—indeed, few women from *Jane Eyre* escape this critical doubling process. Many critics have of course repeatedly found Jane's double in Rochester's first wife, reading Bertha's sexual excesses and subsequent madness as indicative of a warning about female sexual desire that is pointedly read as being directed at Jane.[17] Gilbert and Gubar, for instance, see Bertha as "the most threatening . . . avatar of Jane," indeed her "truest and darkest

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[17] For just a few examples of where this is done, see Showalter 118-22, Gilbert and Gubar 359-60, Rigney, and Macpherson.

double" (Gilbert and Gubar, 359, 360), suggesting that, for Jane, Bertha is a lesson in "how not to act" (361). Elsie Michie, writing on the role of the wealthy heiress in the nineteenth-century novel, notes a "pattern . . . in which a male subject, in being offered two spouses who represent antithetical values, confronts outside himself the division that the selection of a proper love object is supposed to heal" (Michie 5). The monogamous union that resolves the plot hinges in many cases on "the splitting of the sexual object into a rich woman and poor woman" (Deleuze and Guattari, qtd in Michie, 5), suggesting that "the choice between two women becomes a means of articulating nineteenth-century social tensions between the desire for wealth and advancement and the need to regulate one's behavior by another set of values" (Michie 6). That *Jane Eyre* in no way lacks women who might function as the "other" to its heroine is clear from the novel's critical history, but taking a cue from McAleavey's notion of bifurcated paths, Brontë's novel would appear to offer something beyond comparative readings of its heroine against other women. In a narrative in which the climax hinges on an attempted bigamous marriage—quite literally the doubling of women in the legal sense—critical attempts to reproduce this doubling elsewhere draw attention away from how the novel works to temporally double the *self*, separating out possible trajectories for each of the bigamists as a way of exploring bigamy's sexual politics.

The critical practice of locating doubles within the text inhibits readings of the dualisms suggested by the text itself. For the novel explicitly presents us with a number of doubles that are recognized by Jane and Rochester themselves—not, as Michie would suggest, as representative of traits to be rejected, but rather as ways of reading alternate versions of the self. Jane reads herself against a number of other women, and we might

look to her musings on Grace Poole to understand the nuanced function of the novel's temporal bifurcations. Wondering why, after Jane has rescued Rochester from the fire that Grace Poole has supposedly set, Rochester would continue to employ this pyromaniac as if nothing had happened, Jane muses,

> Had Grace been young and handsome, I should have been tempted to think that tenderer feelings than prudence or fear influenced Mr. Rochester on her behalf; **but**, hard-favoured and matronly as she was, the idea could not be admitted. '**Yet**,' I reflected, 'she has been young once; her youth would be contemporary with her master's . . . I don't think she can ever have been pretty; but, for aught I know, she may possess originality and strength of character to compensate for the want of personal advantages . . . **But**, having reached this point of conjecture, Mrs. Poole's square, flat figure, and uncomely, dry, even coarse face, recurred so distinctly to my mind's eye, that I thought, 'No; impossible! . . . **Yet**,' suggested the secret voice which talks to us in our own hearts, '*you* are not beautiful either, and perhaps Mr. Rochester approves you.' (133, bold type added)

The logical question that offsets this prolonged meditation—that is, why Rochester will neither dismiss nor confront the woman who has just tried to murder him—quickly devolves into an evaluation of Grace Poole as a sexual object. This evaluation is pointedly defined by the question of exterior versus interior charms, but unlike Michie's hypothesis—in which one woman represents a particular type of beauty associated with dangerous materialism, while the other represents a pure, wholesome version of femininity—Jane has set herself up in competition with a woman who, she momentarily hopes, can represent a model for how Rochester's desire might translate to herself. The direct comparison that Jane makes between herself and Grace Poole, which she reaches through a vacillating struggle of "but . . . yet"s, therefore situates two women of modest means and appearances in hypothetical competition with each other so that one emerges superior in both categories.

And it is Jane who undoubtedly emerges triumphant in the imaginary competition in which she and Mrs. Poole are engaged—a triumph that crucially occurs less along lines of isolated traits than it does along temporal change. Pulled only momentarily out of her reverie by the demands of her pupil Adèle, Jane returns to her musings with a conclusion both forceful and decisive:

> I hastened to drive from my mind the hateful notion I had been conceiving respecting Grace Poole: it disgusted me. I compared myself with her, and found we were different. Bessie Leaven had said I was quite a lady; and she spoke truth: I was a lady. And now I looked much better than I did when Bessie saw me: I had more colour and more flesh; more life, more vivacity; because I had brighter hopes and keener enjoyments. (133)

Unlike Celine Varens and her German and Italian successors, no real history exists here between Grace Poole and Rochester; instead, Jane fabricates a history in order to reject it, thereby affirming herself as the more desirable woman in terms of both appearance and class. But she crucially does so along temporal lines, rationalizing her own "triumph" over Grace Poole as a product of her situation rather than of her inherent nature. Bessie's assessment of Jane as "quite a lady" is intended as a complimentary revision of how the plain, obstinate child Jane might have turned out, and Jane builds on this compliment by pointing to her recently acquired healthy complexion. Jane, then, does not emerge from this discussion (with herself) the better woman because of an innate dichotomy she and Grace Poole represent between gentry and working class, healthy and rundown, or abstainer and alcoholic, but because her life has taken her down a pathway that allows for "brighter hopes and keener enjoyments," while Mrs. Poole remains in the attic, tending to her ward.

The critical doubling that so often occurs in readings of *Jane Eyre*, and to which Michie's reading of the heiress lends critical and historical weight, might therefore be thought of as synchronic readings: ones that identify in these women stagnant, representative traits through which their functions in the novel can be explained. But the doubling that Jane and Rochester themselves identify explicitly functions diachronically; rather than diluting characters into representative traits, characters are instead multiplied—or, to borrow McAleavey's term, bifurcated—into various temporal possibilities. McAleavey's bifurcation of the bigamous parties, in which each is doubled temporally in order to play out the narrative possibilities available to them, provides an important alternative to this splitting of a sexual object into two representative qualities. The other women of the novel therefore do not function, as Gilbert and Gubar would have it, as parts of a repressed self, but instead as selves that exist along alternative temporal lines, gesturing towards the versions of Jane that could have been or could yet become.

We see this logic most pointedly at work at the climax of the novel, when the secret of the mad wife in the attic has come out, and the question of what this means for Jane and Rochester hangs in the air. The solution that Rochester presents to Jane—"You shall be Mrs. Rochester—both virtually and nominally . . . You shall go to a place I have in the south of France . . . There you shall live a happy, and guarded, and most innocent life" (259)—presents Jane with a clear picture of a possible future available to her. Jane is free to choose libertinism, to flout convention, institution, and country for the sake of personal pleasure. But mere pages later, in recounting his history with former mistresses Céline, Giacinta, and Clara, Rochester reveals to Jane the interior endgame of making

this choice: "Hiring a mistress is the next worst thing to buying a slave: both are often by nature, and always by position, *inferior*" (266, italics mine). Without realizing his misstep, Rochester unintentionally refigures the relationship between circumstance and inferiority, revealing to Jane the element of choice in maintaining her desirability. Jane reasons "that if I were so far to forget myself and all the teaching that had ever been instilled into me . . . to become the successor of these poor girls, he would one day regard me with the same feeling which now in his mind desecrated their memory" (266). Jane sees to the end of this particular bifurcated path, sees how easily she herself could become one of these "poor girls," and recognizes the slippery slope that Rochester has established between "position" and "nature." Were Jane to choose the same "position" as these other women, her "nature"—in Rochester's eyes, and quite possibly her own—would not stand independent of this position; she would risk *becoming* in nature what she had opted to stoop to in position.

Jane Eyre, then, is a novel haunted by the possibility of other selves, a doubling that occurs internally. Jane comes to understand her own individualism along temporal lines, looking at other women not as indicators of "how not to act" in the present, but rather as versions of what she herself might have become—or might become still, depending on her own choices. Unlike the eighteenth-century bigamy plot—in which "other women" tend to act as flat "types" whose characters seem rooted in innate qualities of refinement or vulgarity, good or evil[18]—*Jane Eyre* is a novel in which the

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[18] As examples, we might consider secondary female characters from eighteenth-century bigamy plots such as *The Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* (Miss Burchell, who proves to be pure evil), *The Vicar of*

women around the heroine hold the possibility of other selves, other histories that could have played out or might yet become. And these other selves that haunt that novel, brought forward to the reader's mind through Jane's quiet consideration of these women and their trajectories, augments the sense that Jane, too, risks becoming one of Rochetser's "poor girl[s]", or a "hard-favoured and matronly" woman committed to unfulfilling labor, or even, later in the novel, a wife "formed for labour, not for love" (343).

Jane's is not the only doubled self that haunts the central plot of the novel, of course; indeed, it is Rochester's bifurcated self that sets the second half of the plot in motion. For of course the crisis of the novel, Rochester's attempt at bigamy and the fallout from his plan's failure, both stems from an alternative version of Rochester that could have been as well as gestures hopefully towards a life he might yet live. As Rochester tells Jane the history that has led him to justify his bigamous scheme, he elucidates the narrative possibilities of the bigamy plot's bifurcated path.

Following Jane and Rochester's interrupted wedding, Rochester offers Jane and his accusers a lengthy explanation that, he hopes, will provide the rationale behind his attempted act of bigamy. From the start, Rowland (Edward Rochester's brother) and the elder Rochester (Edward Rochester's father) are very much the villains in this telling, and Edward divests himself of almost all agency in his marriage to Bertha. "All the men in her circle seemed to admire her and envy me," he tells Jane. "I was dazzled, stimulated:

Wakefield (numerous other women who largely go unnamed and undescribed, who are conveniently written out of the novel completely), or *The Woman of Colour* (Angelina, who is "all goodness," full stop).

my senses were excited; and being ignorant, raw, and inexperienced, I thought I loved her . . . Her relatives encouraged me; competitors piqued me; she allured me: a marriage was achieved almost before I knew where I was" (260). Rochester's repeated use of the passive voice and the explicit transference of agency to his competitors, his in-laws, and his wife drive home this sense of victimization; indeed, the only acts of positive agency that he speaks of come in the form of negations—"I never loved, I never esteemed, I did not even know her"—or, in the final case, the sole act that he must indeed own, fit as an aside between two em-dashes: "and, I married her" (260). To the extent that one can disown one's own marriage, Rochester's repeated linguistic turns in these passages does so, reinforcing a sense of exculpation for the action that has led to his attempt at bigamy.

Rochester then posits himself as the victim of his brother and father's greedy scheme, doing all that he can to divest himself of agency in his own backstory. He continues to build on this case for his own innocence through the villainization of Bertha's character—a move that might seem a tall order, particularly for twenty-first-century readers, given Bertha's madness. But, crucially, Rochester makes the case for his wife's villainy as having to do with her sexual licentiousness rather than her madness, allowing himself again to play the role of someone who has been the casualty in another person's gluttonous desire. "[I]t is not because she is mad I hate her," he tells Jane. "If you were mad, do you think I should hate you?" (257). Rather than madness, the difference that Rochester draws between Jane and his wife falls along the lines of sexual appetite rather than sanity. In the four years he lived with her before shutting her up in a room (first in Spanish Town, later at Thornfield), he found "her nature wholly alien to mine; her tastes obnoxious to me; her cast of mind common, low, narrow, and singularly

incapable of being led to anything higher" (261)—the makings of an unhappy marriage, but not enough to make Bertha a villain in Jane's eyes. But over the four years, Bertha's "character ripened and developed with frightful rapidity; her vices sprang up fast and rank" (261). Rochester describes her as having "pigmy intellect" and "giant propensities," the "true daughter of an infamous mother" who, he only discovered after the wedding, has been "shut up in a lunatic asylum" (261).

It is here, in discussing Bertha's mother and the hereditary connection between Bertha's "propensities" and her family's insanity, that Rochester makes his own victimization clearest. Like her mother before her, Bertha reveals herself to be a woman of "infamous conduct" (263). Bertha herself, Rochester asserts, was "a wife at once intemperate and unchaste," and it is this intemperance, these "unchaste" acts, that led to her madness: "her excesses had prematurely developed the germs of insanity" (261). As Jenny Sharpe has pointed out, it is crucially Bertha's "debauchery," rather than her madness, with which Rochester takes issue.[19] Bertha's sexual appetites lead directly to her madness; her lack of sexual restraint has made her the prey of hereditary disease.[20] But because her own sexual agency was culpable in rendering her exposed to this disease, Bertha (imprisoned in Rochester's third story though she may be) becomes an active

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[19] Sharpe 45.

[20] Roy Porter has noted the long history—dating back to the early modern period and carrying into the nineteenth century—of the popular conceptualization of madness as a clash between Reason and animal appetite: "Just as the mob threatened the breakdown of law and order, so madness would shatter the individual when inflamed appetites, fanned by imagination, rebelled, usurped Reason's office, and became ruling passions" (41). These "appetites" were often explicitly aligned with carnal lusts, and "moralists stressed that madness was typically self-destructive, the wages of vice or sin. He who falls passion's slave wilfully, culpably plunges into madness or animality" (43). Rochester therefore echoes popular understandings of madness by viewing Bertha as culpable for her insanity, and the novel's direct correlation between madness and carnal lust explicates this point.

villain in his telling of events—capable, like Rochester's brother and father before her, of exploiting his good faith in others to her own self-indulgent ends.

Bertha's sexual indulgences crucially function to redeem Rochester's own, as he interprets his wife's sexual licentiousness as a warning to himself in his sexual wanderings on the continent. "I tried dissipation—never debauchery: that I hated, and hate," he tells Jane. "That was my Indian Messalina's attribute: rooted disgust at it and her restrained me much, even in pleasure. Any enjoyment that bordered on riot seemed to approach me to her and her vices, and I eschewed it" (265). Rochester morally retains a relative upper hand to his wife by positioning her in his narrative as representative of the level of sexual excess to which he refused to stoop. Thus even in his prolonged retelling of his sexual misdeeds—a story that shows him to have kept three different mistresses over the past ten years and which tonally suggests there were likely shorter-lived affairs as well ("I sought the Continent, and went devious through all its lands")—even in this extended explanation does Rochester manage to orient himself as a wronged man. For unlike his wife, his adultery is rooted not so much in sexual desire as in a longing for monogamous union: "I had determined, and was convinced that I could and ought [to marry]" (264). Rochester's infidelity and sexual licentiousness, when compared to the level of sexual excess that drove his wife to insanity, takes on a tone of rational longing; after all, he "longed only for what suited [him]—for the antipodes of the Creole" (265).

Rochester's villainization of his wife and the sexual passion she embodies offers no room for sympathizing with Bertha's own situation; that she has spent ten years in "a

wild beast's den," in which she has "lucid intervals of days—sometimes weeks,"[21] is offset by the fact that "she fill[s] up [those weeks] with abuse of [Rochester]" (264). Rochester, then, is wholly the victim: of his family's monetary greed, of his wife's lust and insanity, and, finally, of England's legal system. In the midst of his self-justification, Rochester substantiates the reader's suspicions that Bertha's self-indulgences were explicitly sexual in nature when he makes a pointed reference to the law. In an explanation meant to quell any curiosities around the possibility of divorce, Rochester laments, "I could not rid myself of it by any legal proceedings: for the doctors now discovered that *my wife* was mad" (261). Rochester's line of reasoning here, combined with his previous mention of Bertha's "propensities," implies adultery,[22] and this mention of the law also points his listeners clearly towards his rationale for committing bigamy. By pointedly stating that he cannot "rid [him]self of *it* by any legal proceedings" (italics

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[21] Stone notes the relatively common practice of men locking women up on the grounds of insanity before a 1774 Act of Parliament required that madhouses be licensed and keep stricter records of patients. Before 1774, women had been locked up in madhouses for a wide array of reasons, including a case where a widow was locked up so that a man could seize her property; a case of a husband who locked his wife up until she agreed to a legal separation; and multiple cases of husbands sending their wives to madhouses for no discernable reason other than that they had tired of them (167-8). To quote Stone, "One of the most terrible fates that could be inflicted upon a wife by a husband was to be confined, sometimes actually in chains, in a private madhouse far from her friends and unknown to them, where she might linger for months or even years. The mere threat of such confinement, which was frequently used by angry husbands in the eighteenth century, was enough to strike terror" (168). Although this practice declined with the 1774 law, Rochester's removal of Bertha to Thornfield's remote corner of England echoes this antiquated practice, taking her, as he does, away from all previous acquaintances and family.

[22] Not until the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1937 did it become possible to divorce one's spouse on the grounds of incurable insanity. Although lunacy that prevented sexual intercourse between husband and wife was one of the four reasons in the nineteenth century for which a marriage could be nullified, this option doesn't seem to occur to Rochester as a possibility, suggesting that the appearance of Bertha's madness came too long after the wedding itself to make annulment an option. That Rochester feels that legal proceedings are not available to him therefore suggest one of two possibilities. First, we might read Rochester's lament as a moral decision: because his wife was insane, he could not bring himself to divorce her—although, given his tone here, this reading seems improbable. The other, more likely, possibility is that Rochester knows he would not have been able to obtain a divorce, because Bertha (or rather, Bertha's brother) would have been able to argue that her infidelities stemmed from her illness, rather than the other way around. See Stone, *Road to Divorce*, 191.

mine), Rochester draws an important distinction between Bertha's sexualized "nature" and Bertha herself, creating a pointed disjunction between his aversion for his wife and his aversion for his wife's actions. In other words, we are not to view Rochester's "new statute" as the frivolous shifting of his own taste in women or a failure to uphold his vows; rather, Bertha's very nature, by leading her to commit adultery and then into madness, has estranged them from the terms of their marital contract, necessitating a new law for those whose actions are directed by the whims of the body rather than the direction of the mind.

Insofar as the eighteenth-century novel presents legal obstacles to men, those obstacles largely fall within the realm of wealth and patrimony. Tom Jones is banished from Allworthy's estate because their familial—and thus legal—tie is not made clear to Allworthy until the end of the novel; Mr. Delville's relationship with Cecilia is halted because of the mutual conditions tied to their respective inheritances: neither can inherit if they take their spouse's last name; Edward Ferrars's engagement to Lucy Steele and then to Elinor Dashwood stalls in fear of his mother's disapprobation and subsequent rewriting of her will. The question of inheritance in these novels is indeed a question—a hypothetical of "will he or won't he inherit" that is held over a son's head by a parent (or, in the case of *Tom Jones*, by a narrator). But in Brontë's novel, this plot has already played out before the action begins. Rochester was not to inherit—the money was all to go to Rowland—but neither was he to be poor, and it is the question of what ills this nefarious wealth has wrought on his life that hangs over *Jane Eyre*. Relieved from the threat of poverty, Rochester remains entrapped in a network of legalities that reformulate both how the law disrupts the narrative as well as for whom this disruption occurs.

For the law here targets Rochester in a way that, at least according to his telling of it, seems in collusion with his wife. If the legal plots of earlier novels only hang a threat of poverty over male characters, they tend to do much less justice to women: Cecilia, for instance, does ultimately give up her surname; Moll Flanders is sentenced to hard labor in the colonies; and, as we have seen, the elder Eliza of *Sense and Sensibility* never gets the best of her own legal entanglement. But whereas Claudia Johnson argues that this occurrence in Austen's novel points to the abuse of power by "grasping patriarchs and their eldest sons" and the subsequent victimization of powerless women (Johnson 56), *Jane Eyre* turns this power dynamic on its head: Edward Rochester is, quite literally, first the victim of his father's and older brother's greed and pride, and later the victim of his own wife's sexual licentiousness. Johnson's claim about *Sense and Sensibility* suggests that the primary victim of this patriarchal power is the woman used as a vessel of property exchange, but *Jane Eyre* reveals a legal trap that has been deliberately set for the younger son, transferring readerly sympathies to a wealthy landowning gentleman.

The bigamy plot of *Jane Eyre*, then, garners sympathy for its rakish protagonist by constructing a bifurcated understanding of who he is and who he might have been: if Rochester had not been snared by this legal trap, the reader is to understand, then he would have gravitated towards the sort of monogamous satisfaction he has been seeking in spite of his first marriage. *Jane Eyre* thus presents us with two would-be bigamists who recognize their own narrative possibilities—Rochester mourns the self that his marriage has denied him and hopefully plans for the life he might yet have, while Jane internally plays the narrative consequences of becoming his mistress. Indeed, we might consider Bertha's madness to illustrate her own bifurcated path, a bodily statement on the

self-that-could-have-been, the specter of her sanity borne out by her affectionate (albeit meddling) older brother (who, Rochester admits, "will probably be in the same state one day" (261)). The final section of the novel suggests this process of bifurcation more explicitly than any of these previous instances of temporal doubling. Jane's rejection of Rochester's offer to become his mistress puts in motion her clandestine voyage from Thornfield to Moor House—an escape that, on its surface, clearly allows her to contemplate an alternative suitor to Rochester, but that also ultimately works to elucidate Rochester's appeal through the rejection of St. John's sexual restraint.

Jane Eyre is essentially a novel of many women but just two men—the second of whom only enters the narrative in this final section. I have already shown how the bigamy plot allows for Jane to assert her own individualism through a temporal assessment of both the real and imagined sexual partners of Rochester, and how this same temporal bifurcation allows us to see Rochester's own sexual desire within his marital prison as pitiable rather than reprehensible. In both of these instances, the temporal bifurcation of the Victorian bigamy plot allows for readerly sympathies to be navigated through the introduction of hypothetical plotlines that run parallel to the novel's actual narrative. The last third of *Jane Eyre* offers a final example of this bifurcation through Jane's time with the Rivers family—a section that ultimately works to sanction Rochester's rakish past. Perhaps one of the best-known insights of literary criticism, Richard Chase's 1948 Freudian reading of *Jane Eyre*'s ending suggests that Rochester's desire is tamed through a "symbolic castration" that occurs through the (temporary) loss

of his eyesight and the maiming of his hand.[23] I would like to suggest, however, that it is less Rochester's disability that renders him suitably desirable as it is the chastity of his male counterpart, St. John. Jane's time with the Rivers family presents her with an alternative for male sexual conduct that makes explicit the limits of the value of sexual restraint.

Despite Jane's increasing closeness with Diana and Mary Rivers, she feels a persistent "barrier" to closeness with their brother St. John, who "seemed of a reserved, an abstracted, and even of a brooding nature" (299). Through St. John's sermons, Jane reads in him "a strange bitterness; an absence of consolatory gentleness," and she concludes that "the eloquence to which I had been listening had sprung from a depth where lay turbid dregs of disappointment—where moved troubling impulses of insatiate yearnings and disquieting aspirations" (300). This brooding, these yearnings, which have in and of themselves the mark of the Byronic hero, however take on a meaning for Jane that rewrite the value of restraint.

Suspecting a mutual passion between the preacher and the beautiful and wealthy Rosamond Oliver, Jane broaches the conversation with St. John and remarks on the ways his passion reveals itself to an onlooker—how he "tremble[s] and become[s] flushed whenever Miss Oliver enters the school-room" (319). But St. John rejects the implicit

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[23] Chase writes, "Rochester's injuries are, I should think, a symbolic castration. The faculty of vision, the analysts have shown, is often identified in the unconscious with the energy of sex" (108-109). This reading of *Jane Eyre*'s ending went largely unchallenged for the latter half of the twentieth century, with scholars either fully endorsing Chase's reading (see Pickrel) or endorsing the outcome but not the cause (see Gilbert and Gubar, who also read the ending as a type of castration, but who argue that it is a product of Jane's anger towards Rochester). Recent disability studies scholars have rejected the castration interpretation, reading Rochester's blindness instead as evidence of erotic disability (because Rochester must feel Jane to know her). See Bolt, Carpenter, and Chen.

premise of Jane's observation—that this trembling is a sign of his desire for Rosamond, and that this unfulfilled desire ought to elicit pity—insisting that his signs of passion are instead an indication of "weakness," something "ignoble; a mere fever of the flesh: not, I declare, a convulsion of the soul" (319). The divide between bodily and divine desire to which St. John points might read to Jane as a familiar struggle, particularly when he puts this sentiment in the general terms that Jane herself has repeatedly used: "Reason, and not Feeling, is my guide," St. John declares (320). Jane Eyre is a heroine for whom every turn in life has provoked the question of whether reason or feeling ought to direct one's actions; St. John, in his embodiment of one extreme, provides one answer to that question, acting as a model of what happens when one lives only by the precepts of restrained reason. When he proposes marriage to Jane, he does in spite of their mutual knowledge that he is in love with Rosamond, and in spite of Jane's attempts to facilitate a union between them. Jane knows herself to be the choice of St. John's restraint—the woman he rationally chooses rather than she whom he really desires.

It is in the nature of this very choice that St. John demonstrates both his unsuitableness as a husband and the particular role that rationality ultimately plays in his undesirability: "I comprehended all at once that he would hardly make a good husband: that it would be a trying thing to be his wife," Jane realizes. "I saw he was of the material from which nature hews her heroes—Christian and Pagan—her lawgivers, her statesmen, her conquerors; a steadfast bulwark for great interests to rest upon; but, at the fireside, too often a cold cumbrous column, gloomy and out of place" (334-5). St. John's self-imposed restraint recalls the rational self-control necessary for the well-being of a nation, but, Jane finds, it is not suited for the well-being of a household. It is not, then, Rochester's

disability that allows for his union with Jane—rather, it is his competitor's cold restraint. By withholding his desire where the law deems it unnecessary, St. John augments Rochester's desirability, not so much in spite of but *because* of his history of acting on his passions.

Hero St. John may be in the context of Christian morality, but *Jane Eyre* shows this heroism to be one entirely divorced from the literary concept of the hero that dominated the latter half of the eighteenth century. By playing out this arm of Jane's bifurcated path, and by allowing that path to split again on the question of whether or not to marry St. John and accompany him to India, the novel allows us to see a woman desiring two men and rejecting one based on his own restraint. Unlike the domestic novels that dominated the popular literary scene between *Sir Charles Grandison* and Austen's works in the 18-teens, restraint here no longer functions as an indicator of desire. Rather, St. John takes restraint too far, positing it as the very antithesis to desire and using it as a mechanism of self-control that replicates the externally-imposed principles of the legal system.

For the law in *Jane Eyre* represents a mechanism of restraint that the near-bigamy plot with Rochester renders necessary. The novel suggests both an approbation for passion within the confines of the law as well as the condemnation of self-imposed restraint when the law is no factor. Bigamy's nebulous and unstable history lends itself to the Jane-Rochester romance because of its ability to be at once a malady and a remedy to the institution of marriage; its shifting position as one or the other disrupts the reader's sense of moral righteousness as it is traditionally tied to monogamous union. In so doing, the bigamy plot makes space to consider long trajectories—past and present—of the

character's alternate selves as defined by their choices around this institution. While the legal aspects of the novel reveal imperfections in the law in order to render Rochester's sexual history sympathetic, they also make explicit the relationship between desire and restraint in a broader sense, exiling from romance the necessity for restrained reasoning. Concluding, as the final paragraph of the novel does, with Jane's expectation of St. John's imminent death, the novel gestures towards the disappearance of the rationale for self-imposed restraint in the domestic realm, relegating it instead to the realm of the hero who will find no domestic felicity.

6. Conclusion

I began this study by asking what happened to the rake. This was, to my mind, a purely literary project rooted in a longstanding discussion of literary types. I saw a stark difference between explicit references to male sexual conduct in Restoration drama and poetry and the conspicuous absence of any reference to male sexual conduct in the novel, and I located this difference in the dwindling prominence of the rake. This approach was, however, both limited and limiting: the question is not primarily about what happened to a fictional type, but rather when, how, and to what political end literary representations of male sexual conduct shifted—a question that need not be tied to the traditional sexual-literary taxonomies. Indeed, to think solely in terms of these taxonomies obscures the more interesting question of how they came to be: what makes a rake a rake or a gentleman a gentleman, and how the nuanced rhetorical work of characterizing these figures as isolated "types" naturalizes a propensity for sex that renders them similar to each other because distinctly different from woman.

This became, then, a project that at its heart is about sexual difference: how it became cemented in the public imagination, and how the simultaneous development of the novel and English divorce law mutually reinforced this cementation. Although my interrogation of emerging scientific orthodoxy came late in the project and requires further attention, Laqueur's theory continues to provide the backdrop for the preceding chapters. Locating the social construction of sexual difference in the discovery of the non-binding relationship between orgasm and procreation for women, Laqueur historicizes this discovery as one that opened up paths to redefine female sexuality as

inherently passive and thus easier to restrain. This question of restraint as a signifier of sexual difference—that sexual restraint naturally comes easier to women than to men—takes on new meaning in the light of the literary shift that occurred in the early 1750s. This project has aimed to show that the emphasis on male chastity that begins with Richardson and carries through a host of major texts that follow counterintuitively promotes notions of male hypersexuality that ultimately support Laqueur's notion of the formation of sexual difference. It is, in short, the very absence of male sexual conduct, when viewed alongside renderings of secondary characters who evoke memories of those rakes from earlier fictions, that signals an underlying virility common to all men, rake and gentleman alike.

None of the male characters I have referred to in this project, whether it is Sir Charles himself or the Valancourts and Edward Ferrars that I see as his literary offspring (so to speak), exist in a vacuum; rather, the absence of their sexual histories stands in stark contrast to those of their rakish counterparts, whose sexual conduct, past or present, is made explicit in order to draw a distinctive line between the rakes and the moral heroes of these novels. I refer in chapter three to Susan Morgan's argument about Austen heroines—that they are unique among eighteenth-century fictional women for escaping the threat of sexual assault, and that, as a result, they compel readerly interest through emotional rather than physical concerns. But the ubiquitousness of the Grandison-type protagonist anticipates and complicates this argument: although Harriet Byron and other eighteenth-century heroines who follow her *are* threatened with sexual assault, these threats come from secondary characters, whereas the heroes of these novels markedly do not use force. As such, these heroes exemplify a rendering of masculinity in which male

sexual conduct exists on a spectrum—a spectrum that places at one end the rake who pursues unimpeded his sexual appetites, and, at the other, the socialized chaste gentleman.

The novel presents this spectrum as a particularly masculine phenomenon: rakes maintain the possibility of reform to the final page; the character shift from rake to gentleman is merely a repentant scene away. No such spectrum of socialization exists for the fallen woman of eighteenth-century fiction: as *Clarissa* so plainly illustrates, the woman who has pre-marital sex can either stay fallen or, as is much more often the case, die a long, drawn-out death. As Erin Mackie puts it, there is not even a female equivalent to the rake, as the closest analogue—the harlot—embodies a diminishment rather than an augmentation of a woman's femininity. In contrast, male rakishness heightens masculinity, and the possibility that certain gentlemen have been cultivated out of their rakish propensities leaves room for a Grandison or a Valancourt who has merely subsumed a natural inclination in favor of gentlemanly refinement. By figuring desexualization as a component of moral worthiness and setting chaste gentlemen in contrast to rakish counterparts, these novels implicitly naturalize an abundance of male sexual desire—a desire that a proper gentleman has simply been educated out of.

In so doing, *Grandison* and those novels that follow in its tracks widen the gulf between the so-called "naturally" virile male body and its passively female counterpart. The very absence of knowledge of a male protagonist's sexual history carries with it a political weight of its own, one that is bound up in shifting perceptions of sexual difference and major alterations in how the law regulated partnership over the course of the eighteenth century. The mystification of these characters' sexual conduct, either when

it is explicitly stated or simply omitted, undercuts a fuller comprehension of the network of control surrounding the heroine of domestic fiction—one that links a national identity based on conservative domesticity with the image of a “good man” who wields sexual virtue to achieve sexual dominance.

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Biography

Rachel Gevlin received her B.A. in 2010 from Bennington College, where she studied literature, mathematics, and Italian. She began her doctoral studies in 2014 after spending two years as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Burkina Faso, where she taught middle school math and worked with teenagers on life skills and sex education issues. Her first article, "Adulterous Austen: Educating the Rake in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Mansfield Park*," is forthcoming in *ELH*. She is the recipient of numerous fellowships and academic honors. For her teaching, she has been awarded two Anne T. and Robert M. Bass Fellowships for excellence in syllabus and course design (2018 and 2020), a Preparing Future Faculty Fellowship (2019-2020), and a Data Expeditions Award (2020). She received the Ernestine Friedl Research Award in 2019 from the Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies Department at Duke, and for the 2019-2020 academic year she was a fellow with the Kenan Institute for Ethics for her research on significant normative issues. Most recently, she was awarded the Catherine Macauley Prize—awarded for best graduate student paper on a feminist or gender studies subject—from the Women's Caucus of the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (ASECS), and in 2021 she will be a Mayers Fellow at the Huntington Library. She is an active member of ASECS and the Modern Language Association (MLA) as well as the most recent addition to the English faculty at Monmouth College, where she looks forward to continuing this project.