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**QUEER FRIENDSHIP: SAME SEX LOVE IN THE
WORKS OF THOMAS GRAY, ANNA SEWARD, MARY
WOLLSTONECRAFT AND WILLIAM GODWIN**

**REDFERN JON BARRETT
SWANSEA UNIVERSITY**

Submitted to Swansea University in fulfilment of the requirement for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy of English

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INTRODUCTION

In 1785 the poet Anna Seward penned her frustration with mainstream society: “These horrid Men, with their humors, & their pride, are so continually the annihilation of their wives’ former friendships … few women are generous enough to make my stand for the Friend against male-caprice.”¹ The four figures considered in this thesis; Thomas Gray, Anna Seward, Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, all sought to make their ‘stand’ and rebel against social heteronormative values. Each writer was well-known in his/her own time, and their works form a vital part of our understanding of same-sex love three centuries ago: as such all but Godwin have often been anachronistically labelled ‘gay’ or ‘lesbian’ by twentieth-century scholars. Along with ‘straight’ and ‘bisexual’, these form the central categories modern western culture has allocated for personal relationships. Until Foucault and the eventual rise of queer theory as a dominant theoretical framework, the twentieth-century drive to categorise social behaviour based on sexual preference deeply infiltrated literary studies, even those focusing on creative works which existed long before the terms ‘heterosexual’ and ‘homosexual’ were coined. However, none of the poets and writers in this thesis were gay, straight or bisexual; instead of rebelling against sexual norms by creating alternative sexual relationships of their own, I argue that these four prioritised platonic love over sexual bonds and thus sought ‘queer’ relationships which implicitly challenged traditional marriage’s monopoly over the individual. This study will examine the little-explored possibility that entire literary identities were formed around nonsexual love. This desire was expressed through elegy, a form

¹ Yale University, Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, MSS OSBORN C202 (Seward to Weston, March 25th, 1785).

that allowed them to idealise radical platonic love and which expressed homosocial desire in its strongest colours: for these writers, elegy provided an outlet that invigorated radical queer desire and celebrated ‘romantic friendship’.

A Brief History of Romantic Friendship

This idea of friendship finds its roots in ancient Greece. The centrality of the friendship between Achilles and Patroclus in one of the oldest works of Western literature, *The Iliad*, was representative of the importance of friendship throughout the Greek archaic, classical and Hellenistic periods. *The Oxford Companion to Classical Civilization* details the different (and highly ritualised) forms of same-sex love in ancient Greece, which shared the common requirement of equality between both parties involved.²

It was Aristotle in the 4th Century BC who outlined and analysed the social conventions surrounding friendship more explicitly. In the eighth and ninth books of his *Nicomachean Ethics* (350BC) he describes friendship as critical to a happy and healthy life: “... Friendship is not only an indispensable, but also a beautiful or noble thing: for we commend those who love their friends ...”³ In the *Ethics* Aristotle outlines the three different forms of friendship: those based in utility, those based in

² *The Oxford Companion to Classical Civilization*, ed. by Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 290. David Konstan comments further on the focus on equality in friendship in ancient Greece and the manner in which it differentiated sexual and nonsexual love: sexual love would involve one partner being passive, the other active, with the roles being determined by age and social rank – friendship on the other hand was only possible between equals: David Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 27. Subsequent references will be given in parentheses unless further detail is needed.

³ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle*, trans. by F. H. Peters (London: C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1881), p. 252. Aristotle is quick to underline the social and political importance of friendship, as ‘the bond that holds states together: p. 252. Subsequent references will be given in parentheses unless further detail is needed.

pleasure, and those based in mutual regard for one another's virtue.⁴ It is the latter to which he pays the most attention, as the 'truest' form of friendship. True friendship, the *Ethics* maintains, is not available to all, as virtue itself is an inherently rare quality.⁵ If one were capable, the most vital facets to true friendship were equality, trust, cohabitation, physical intimacy and exclusivity.⁶ If friendship, he argues, is not a unique and personal bond, established in openness and both physical and emotional affection, then it is not true friendship. Equality was utterly crucial, and therefore an equal social status had to be maintained.⁷ Of course inter-gendered 'true' friendships were not deemed possible, as women were of a considerably lower social status than men – Aristotle compares the relationship between husband and wife to that of the aristocracy to the masses (Aristotle, p. 273). Friendship in its purest form, therefore, was a purely same-sex phenomenon.⁸

Aristotle goes so far as to describe a true friend as a 'second self', one whose existence is securely tied to another – they should even be prepared to die for one another (Aristotle, p. 306). Crucially the bond requires compatibility of belief and

⁴ Friendships based in utility, notes Aristotle, are of the worst and most impermanent kind, where each party is interested only in material gain gleaned from the other, and are generally formed by 'bad' and 'older' men. Friendships based in pleasure fare a little better, but they are still impermanent and are formed by 'younger' men: *Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 283. Though the different types of friendship are relevant throughout this thesis, friendships based in utility (or 'strategic friendships', as I refer to them) are especially important in the third chapter.

⁵ As we shall see in the first and second chapters, the idea that only a select few are truly capable of friendship was espoused by Gray and later Seward: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 158.

⁶ Regarding equality, the importance of a mutual exchange of affection and regard is emphasised: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 258. A wholehearted mutual trust is stated as the greatest source of security, a feature which is lacking in other forms of friendship: p. 259. Cohabitation and physical intimacy are also deemed crucial: "... when friends are living together, they take pleasure in, and do good to, each other; when they are asleep or at a distance from one another, they're not acting as friends, but they have a disposition which, if manifested, issues in friendly acts; for distance does not destroy friendship simply, but the manifestations of friendship.": p. 261. With respect to cohabitation, he notes that friends' goods are common property: p. 270. Finally, Aristotle comments that it is impossible to hold true friendship with multiple individuals at once – a theme which is explored further in the conclusion to this thesis: p. 263.

⁷ Aristotle notes that though a friend should wish their companion well, they should not do so if it involves their rising to a social rank in a manner which would force an end to equal friendship – friends had to be of the same class: *Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 293.

⁸ This is not to say that Aristotle did not believe marriages were worthwhile, as long as they were, like true friendship, based in virtue: "... for each sex has its own virtue, and both will rejoice in that which is of like nature": *Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 278.

worldview: something Gray, Seward and Wollstonecraft all struggled with, which will be examined further in the first, second and third chapters of this thesis (Aristotle, p. 299). The term *philos* described friendship (separate to *eros*) from the Classical period onward (Konstan, p. 31).

The Greek ideals of friendship were carried on into the Roman Republic – however, it was following the collapse of the Republic, the death of Cicero and the rise of Empire that the love elegy as we know it today came to fruition.⁹ Joan Booth in *Latin Love Elegy* notes that the usual ‘recipient’ of the elegy was of higher social status than the author – the mode itself therefore being based in a fundamental inequality (Booth, p. ix). Though usually written by men to women, the poet Tibullus (54-19BC) wrote love elegies to another man. The equality in same-sex friendship bonds as espoused by Aristotle was on the wane.¹⁰

There are three scholars whose works prove central to the examination of friendship in this thesis: Alan Bray, Valerie Traub and Lillian Faderman. Bray’s work *The Friend* (2003) begins at the end of the Dark Ages – around the year 1000AD.¹¹ As a book *The Friend* has proven significant to the study of same-sex

⁹ Its origins, however, are heavily contested: on the one hand some such as Joan Booth, author of *Latin Love Elegy*, maintain that the elegiac form extends back to the Greek golden age: *Latin Love Elegy* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1995), p. xiii. Subsequent references will be given in parentheses unless further detail is needed. Others, such as Archibald Day, contest that the love elegy was invented in Rome in the first century BC, which is the primary focus of his work: *The Origins of the Latin Love Elegy* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1938), p. 5. The elegies which prevailed during the reign of Caesar Augustus will be explored further in the first chapter of this thesis.

¹⁰ Despite this, Konstan maintains that it was only with the increasing power of Christianity that fundamental changes began to truly occur. Whilst the previous beliefs on human relationships seem to have been little governed by religion or the precedence of the deities (the Greek Gods are well known to have committed acts such as rape and incest which were not acceptable for mortals) this was not the case with Christianity: “Within the church, attitudes towards friendship were conditioned both by theological or ethical principles and by organizational considerations.”: *Friendship in the Classical World*, p. 149. Konstan suggests that friendships thus moved to the monasteries. One-on-one friendship was abandoned in favour of the collective, so as to increase the process of assimilation: Konstan, p. 153. This formation differs immensely to the friendships I am concerned with during the Enlightenment and Romantic periods, suggesting a reversion back to individualised friendship later on.

¹¹ Alan Bray, *The Friend* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 2. Subsequent references will be given in parentheses unless further detail is needed.

friendship.¹² His first and most frequently referenced example of same-sex platonic love comes from Sir William Neville and Sir John Clanvowe, who died in 1391 (Bray, *The Friend*, p. 18). Their tomb in Istanbul depicts them as a married couple – their engraving portrays them as about to kiss and their coats of arms are arranged in marital unity.¹³ To Bray, they represent the practice in Britain of sworn brotherhood: a ceremonial and religious bond that would bind two individuals in the Christian tradition. Despite the public and formal nature of such friendships, Bray does not insinuate that the bind was emotionally stagnant – the chronicle of Westminster Abbey states that Neville died of grief only a few days after the death of his friend (*The Friend*, p. 18). Bray's study strongly emphasises the importance of Christian ritual and the church to sworn friendships.¹⁴

The friendship between Fulke Greville and Sir Philip Sidney in the late sixteenth century is also invoked, again within the context of the tomb, when Greville wrote to a friend that he wished to be buried in St. Paul's Cathedral with Sidney (Bray, *The Friend*, p. 42). They had been childhood friends and lived together for many years, having been educated together (*The Friend*, p. 44). They both attended the court of Queen Elizabeth I, and in the tradition of close friendship shared a bed together. As in Archaic Greece, poetry became a central feature of their friendship when Sidney wrote a pastoral poem dedicated to their relationship (*The Friend*, p. 45). In an unacknowledged throwback to antiquity, Bray highlights Sir Francis Bacon's essays on friendship, which debated the difference between true friendship and scheming acquaintance – in fact: "The comparison of the true friend with the feigned

¹² *The Friend* has proven an influential work on the study of friendship – Valerie Traub examines the book in her tribute to Bray's works following his death: Valerie Traub, 'Friendship's Loss: Alan Bray's Making of History', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 10 (2003), 339-365 (p. 346).

¹³ Though the tomb was in Istanbul, crucially the knights were English: Bray is keen to point out that they were buried in Western tradition: *The Friend*, p. 16.

¹⁴ Especially that of the Eucharist – throughout his work Bray ties friendship ritual to holy communion.

was a staple of the prescriptive literature of friendship.”¹⁵ Aristotle’s *Ethics* thus echoed across the centuries.

This is also the period to which Valerie Traub refers in her work *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England* (2002) as the start of increasing cultural representation of women’s desires for other women: Traub herself states that “... reference to female-female desire in English texts increased dramatically over the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.”¹⁶ Though this would not appear to refer to the same manner of friendship in itself, Traub’s study certainly incorporates friendship. The female equivalent to the type of friendship described by Bray she describes as ‘femme-femme love’ (in reference to the feminine, rather than masculine, nature of both participants and the lack of sexual activity such behaviour implied). Referencing a number of authors from the period, notably Shakespeare (who famously devoted sonnets to a male friend), she argues that these friendships were represented as ‘viable’ and ‘dramatically compelling’ but ultimately ‘untenable’ (Traub, *Renaissance* p. 170). There is some evocation of the marriage ceremony as with men, but the supposed permanence of this imagery usually gave way to a dissolution of the friendship, often giving way to marriage between the opposite sexes, which was presented as more ‘natural’.¹⁷ According to Traub, another method of ‘castrating’ such relationships was the heavy use of elegy in female friendship during the seventeenth century – she argues that the past tense such death writing necessitated disempowered ‘femme-femme’ love, removing any challenge it could present to

¹⁵ I would argue the ‘feigned’ friend bears remarkable similarity to the friend of utility outlined in Aristotle’s *Ethics*: Bray, *The Friend*, p. 48. Maria Edgeworth continues this tradition with her novel *Belinda* (1801), which will be explored further in the third chapter.

¹⁶ Valerie Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 7. Subsequent references will be given in parentheses unless further detail is needed.

¹⁷ The same-sex marriage ceremony is explored notably between Helena and Hermia in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and between Celia and Rosalind in *As You Like It*: Traub, *Renaissance*, p. 171. Traub argues that opposite-sex relationships ultimately triumph a few pages later: *Renaissance*, p. 174.

heterosexual union. Two women could have no future together should one of them be deceased.¹⁸

The increasing presence of women's relationships in literature also made the sixteenth century a starting point for Lillian Faderman's crucial study in the 1980s – *Surpassing the Love of Men*.¹⁹ Faderman confirms the viewpoint that same-sex friendship was socially condoned, as long as both women involved were feminine (sexualised female relationships, especially involving trans women, were punished).²⁰ Faderman's argument stems from the Renaissance – that the re-emergence of Greek and Roman philosophy led to a renewed interest in friendship: "These women learned from Renaissance writers the ideals of Platonism, in which perfect friendship was seen as superior to sexual love." (*Surpassing*, p. 68).

Returning to male friendship, Bray argues that signifiers of affection and devotion represented the gift of the body as a whole, and were comprised of the embrace and kiss, sharing a table, sharing a bed, and even the more passive companion of lesser status clearing the chamber pot of the other.²¹ Despite the similarities with ancient Greek *philos*, these hierarchical friendships do not include the equality of true friendship as described by Aristotle (and the friendships explored in this thesis). Traub's work shows women's friendships to have shown some of the same signifiers – due to what she describes as expectations of chastity upon women

¹⁸ Though the idea that elegies were used to 'bury' unacceptable social sentiments and desires is a compelling and widespread one, throughout this thesis I will instead be exploring the opposite possibility – that queer friendships were immortalised and invigorated through elegy: Traub, *Renaissance*, p. 172.

¹⁹ Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men* (London: The Women's Press Limited, 1985). Subsequent references will be given in parentheses unless further detail is needed.

²⁰ Faderman uses the term 'transvestite', but this does not account for the possibility that the women were what we would now term 'transsexual' or even 'genderqueer' and so in place I am using the umbrella term 'trans'. *Surpassing*, p. 17.

²¹ For the embrace and kiss, see: *The Friend*, p. 148. Table-sharing is dated as originating in the middle ages: p. 150. To share a bed is the origin of the term 'bedfellow': p. 153. We can see the unequal nature of friendship in this period by acts such as clearing bodily waste, as one companion is highly subservient to the other: p. 154.

and the nature of communal living, women of all classes would share a bed.²² Both Bray and Traub emphasise the notion that friendships and kinship would sometimes overlap (a possible remnant of the shift in language towards familial bonds during the Christianisation of Rome).

The Eighteenth Century

Across the centuries various romantic friendships would suffer the accusation of sexual impropriety. Konstan noted that the tale of Achilles and Patroclus aroused such suspicions in Classical Greece and Bray notes that the chronicle of the Cistercian abbey of Meaux in Yorkshire asserted that Edward II partook in sodomy with his friend Gaveston (*The Friend*, p. 38). In both his book *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (1982) and his article ‘Homosexuality and the Signs of Male Friendship in Elizabethan England’ (1990) Bray explores in some detail the crossover between masculine friendship and sodomy across the later centuries.²³

As the sexual historian Randolph Trumbach has asserted in several of his works, social codifications surrounding sex between men changed almost as soon as the Eighteenth Century began.²⁴ Rather than being an act which anyone could commit (such as theft or murder), sodomy became associated with identity, forming the social archetype of the ‘sodomite’ or ‘molly’.²⁵ This figure was heavily associated

²² Traub, *Renaissance*, p. 52. Unlike Bray, however, Traub explores the possible impact this had on erotic and sexual components found within friendship: Traub, *Renaissance*, p. 53.

²³ The book, see: Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (London: Gay Men’s Press, 1982). The article, see: Alan Bray, ‘Homosexuality and the Signs of Male Friendship in Elizabethan England’, *History Workshop Journal*, 29 (1990), 1- 19.

²⁴ The most recent being in *A Gay History of Britain*: Randolph Trumbach, ‘Modern Sodomy: The Origins of Homosexuality, 1700-1800’, *A Gay History of Britain: Love and Sex Between Men Since the Middle Ages*, ed. by Matt Cook and others (Oxford: Greenwood World Publishing, 2007). Subsequent references will be given in parentheses unless further detail is needed.

²⁵ Trumbach asserts that, “These new sodomites were the first European men who might reasonably be called ‘homosexuals’”: ‘Modern Sodomy’ in *A Gay History of Britain*, ed. by Cook and others, p. 77.

with effeminacy, whether he were an active or passive sexual partner. This perceived gender inversion prompted significant social outrage and more than anything else, the sodomite was ‘despised for his effeminacy’.²⁶ This dramatic and sudden social understanding of male intimacy is mysterious and as Trumbach points out, currently unexplained: “No one at the present moment has any satisfactory explanation as to why this transformation occurred. It brings sharply into focus the real limits on the power of historians to account for change. In the 1690s England lived under one sexual system. By the first decade of the eighteenth century, England lived under another sexual system” (Trumbach, ‘Modern Sodomy’, p. 78). This change occurred simultaneously across much of Western Europe.²⁷

The new figure of the sodomite brought with it considerable social panic; the Societies for the Reformation of Manners took it upon themselves to infiltrate and expose groups of mollies and bring them to trial. These trials occurred in waves across the Eighteenth Century, starting in 1707 (‘Modern Sodomy’, p. 79). Trumbach points out that the new effeminate associations to same-sex sexual contact carried a great degree of shame – many of those put on trial committed suicide, something men accused of sodomy had not done in previous decades: “Sodomy was now tied to a deviant gender role” (‘Modern Sodomy’, p. 80). This climate of fear was exacerbated by the wave of blackmailing that came with it (‘Modern Sodomy’, p. 102).

The term ‘molly’ was also a term for a female prostitute, something which he notes is something of a tradition in Britain, alongside the terms ‘queen’, ‘punk’, ‘gay’, ‘faggot’, ‘fairy’ and ‘fruit’: p. 81.

²⁶ ‘Sodomites’ or ‘mollies’ were believed to walk and speak like women, use women’s names and dress as women: Trumbach, ‘Modern Sodomy’ in *A Gay History of Britain*, ed. by Cook and others, p. 77. In groups they would mimic female rites of passage, such as childbirth and marriage: p. 81.

²⁷ France, the Netherlands and England are specifically referenced: Trumbach, ‘Modern Sodomy’ in *A Gay History of Britain*, ed. by Matt Cook and others, p. 78. Arend H. Huussen, Jr.’s study of sodomy in the eighteenth-century Dutch Republic demonstrates that persecution of men suspected of sodomy was worse there than any other Western European nation: ‘Sodomy in the Dutch Republic During the Eighteenth Century’, *Tis Nature’s Fault: Unauthorized Sexuality during the Enlightenment*, Robert Purks Maccubin, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 169.

The change in sexual attitudes had a marked impact on romantic friendship.

The earliest Western example of intimate friendship, Achilles and Patroclus, was heralded in some molly houses as sexual love (not without precedent, as we have seen).²⁸ In *The Friend* Bray argues that by the Eighteenth Century the toleration of intimate same-sex friendship began to die out. Though there had always been a slight overlap between such arrangements and ‘sodomy’ this overlap grew: whilst previously masculine friendship had been largely commended by society, it began to gain unacceptable connotations. Many important signifiers for intimate friendship suffered a severe decline in popularity – sharing a bed in a platonic fashion became less and less common (*The Friend*, p. 195). By the mid-eighteenth century, once-common gestures between men such as kissing were rendered entirely taboo: “When in 1749 an Englishman described the practice of two men kissing each other as a foreign and distasteful practice, he seems to have been unaware that it had ever been thought otherwise.”²⁹ A pamphlet from 1731 entitled ‘Plain Reasons for the Growth of Sodomy’ blames kissing (amongst other concerns) for the apparent increase in same-sex sexual acts (the pamphlet will be a greater focus in the first chapter).³⁰ Bray argues that as close relationships became sexualised, greater importance was placed on opposite-sex arrangements (specifically marriage, which was regulated and codified under the 1753 Marriage Act), and less on same-sex.³¹

²⁸ On Achilles and Patroclus, see: Trumbach, ‘Modern Sodomy’ in *A Gay History of Britain*, ed. by Matt Cook and others, p. 87.

²⁹ Bray, *The Friend*, p. 212. Trumbach also references the changing relevance of the male kiss, stating that its significance changed not only in Britain but the Dutch Republic also: ‘Modern Sodomy’ in *A Gay History of Britain*, ed. by Matt Cook and others, p. 99.

³⁰ Same-sex kissing is described as ‘hateful’ and ‘pernicious’: Rictor Norton ed., ‘Reasons for the Growth of Sodomy, 1731’, *Homosexuality in Eighteenth-Century England: A Sourcebook* (14th April 2000; updated 4th March 2007) <<http://www.rictornorton.co.uk/eighteen/1731grow.htm>> [accessed 15th April 2009].

³¹ Bray, *The Friend*, p. 219. Though an important instigator of the decline of intimate friendship, society’s increasing sexualisation is not the only factor - though it is the most significant. Bray argues that increasing secularisation had a profound effect on the nature of friendship. Bray’s strong emphasis on Christianity’s role in friendship means that *The Friend* notes its decline as reflecting the decline of

Traub argues that this was also the case with women, citing Queen Anne's friendship with Abigail Masham having been slandered as sexual by her former friend Sarah Churchill - though at the time the allegations weren't taken too seriously, it would appear to mark a turning point in the nature of female relationships (*Renaissance*, p. 156). As with Bray's male friendships, Traub argues that the distinction between noble love between women and the sinful began to collapse and women's friendship signifiers were also called into question (*Renaissance*, p. 156). These concerns would appear to have been spurred by fears over male activities: 'Plain Reasons for the Growth of Sodomy' stipulates that women should moderate their kissing, lest 'new vices' arise.³²

This process was not a uniform one, Traub argues, and was caused by a mixture of increasingly private households and a greater emphasis on heterosexual love (*Renaissance*, p. 259). The increasingly private nature of the household coupled with this new focus on marriage presented two of the hallmarks of the nuclear family. Lawrence Stone's extensive investigations into marriage and divorce detail the shift toward companionate marriage:

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the pressure of parents, 'friends', and kin in the highest circles of society was all but irresistible, especially because of the financial pressures which could be, and often were, brought to bear. By the eighteenth century, however, the concept of affectionate individualism was penetrating even these elevated circles, and thanks to the

religious influence with the coming of the Enlightenment. He suggests that the Church kept the brotherhood traditions which 'civil society' was rejecting: p. 234. This was even true of women in sexual relationships – he cites the diary of Anne Lister, who detailed her union with her partner Ann Walker on Easter Sunday in 1834: partaking in a brotherhood ritual based on the Eucharist: p. 246. Though the argument is compelling and will be examined over the course of the thesis, it fails to account for the pro-friendship standpoints offered by secular atheists such as William Godwin. Another influence on what Bray saw as friendship's decline was the restructuring of houses, separating both the servants quarters and any close interaction between different classes: p. 209. Finally, sworn brotherhood ceremonies were impacted by Hardwick's Marriage Act in the mid Eighteenth Century: p. 217.

³² The idea that female same-sex sexual activity is 'new' demonstrates the lack of awareness on the subject in the earlier half of the Eighteenth Century: Rictor Norton ed., 'Reasons for the Growth of Sodomy, 1731', *Homosexuality in Eighteenth-Century England: A Sourcebook* (14th April 2000; updated 4th March 2007) <<http://www.rictornorton.co.uk/eighteen/1731grow.htm>> [accessed 15th April 2009].

romantic movement, the tables had been largely turned by the end of the century.³³

Women were increasingly expected to direct their emotional attention toward men, whilst aspects of both chaste friendships and ‘sinful’ sexual love would converge over the Eighteenth Century to form the social archetype of ‘sapphic love’.³⁴ Julie Peakman’s *Lascivious Bodies* (2004) explains that prior to the Eighteenth Century it was widely believed that a woman who sought sexual relationships with other women must be a hermaphrodite, her engorged clitoris serving as a penis.³⁵ This view would slowly change, and public interest in the subject grew as male same-sex sexual activities were brought to light.³⁶ Though it proved an uncomfortable subject, the intensity of moral outrage provoked by male sodomy did not arise with sapphism: “Anxieties about lesbian activities were being voiced in anonymous pamphlets, diaries and plays. Yet although they made society nervous, tribades were not sufficiently prominent as to be completely ostracised.”³⁷ The harshest penalties came from gender transgression rather than sexual transgression – women who dressed and

³³ Stone’s work gives a great deal of information about the changing legal status of marriage, though it does not detail the brotherhood ceremonies mentioned by Bray: Lawrence Stone, *Uncertain Unions and Broken Lives: Marriage and Divorce in England 1660-1857* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 11. Stone goes into greater detail on the emergence of the nuclear family itself in his earlier work *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England*: Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (New York, Harper & Row, 1977), p. 123.

³⁴ Traub, *Renaissance*, p. 279. In sharp contrast to both Bray and Traub’s chronology, Faderman asserts that romantic male friendships were unpopular even before the Eighteenth Century began, whilst women’s friendships would continue for far longer (three hundred years longer) - Faderman argues that male friendships were taboo by the Reformation, several decades before the molly house raids: Faderman, *Surpassing*, p. 67. Though both Bray and Traub assert that intimate same-sex relationships had unavoidable sexual connotations by the end of the Eighteenth Century for both sexes, Faderman suggests that women were largely oblivious to allegations of sapphism - she cites the fact that Sarah Ponsonby (one of the well-known Ladies of Llangollen) even invokes Eros in a song dedicated to her romantic friend Eleanor Butler, which certainly would not have been possible had they been aware of any sexual implications: p. 81. Faderman’s analysis of eighteenth-century friendship will be examined in greater detail (particularly in the second chapter of this thesis).

³⁵ Though there was little consensus as to the cause or nature of the condition: Julie Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies: A Sexual History of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Atlantic Books, 2004), p. 177.

³⁶ ‘Lesbian’ was used as a term to describe such women, though they were more commonly referred to as ‘tribades’ or ‘sapphists’: Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies*, p. 178.

³⁷ Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies*, p. 180.

acted like men were more likely to be legally and socially penalised.³⁸ Peakman pays some attention to female friendship: despite fears over same-sex sexual behaviour, close friendships were acceptable so long as they were not permanent and so did not interfere with marriage. These temporary friendships amongst women were above reproach.³⁹ Cohabitation between friends was rendered unacceptable as it interfered with a domestic family life.⁴⁰

Despite differences in the nature of public reactions toward sodomy amongst men and sapphism amongst women, their impact on friendship was indisputably significant. If friendship did not give way to marriage there would be severe consequences, be they social, legal, or both. Romantic friendship which demanded permanence, intimacy and cohabitation was rendered threatening to the heteronormative social order – regardless of gender, even though the severity of punishments differed for men and for women.

Methodology

The changing culture and confused discourse on friendship had its own impact on the figures that are the subject of this thesis. The earliest, Thomas Gray, spent his childhood in London at the height of the public hysteria over sodomy. The second, Anna Seward, found herself writing her poetry and longing for female friends as fears of the sapphic tribeade grew to new heights. The radicalism of Wollstonecraft and

³⁸ Though such women were far more likely to be charged with fraud rather than sodomy, as with Mary Hamilton, who married several women: Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies*, p. 185. Women in Germany and the Netherlands were punished more severely: p. 194.

³⁹ “It would have been easy for a woman to carry out, or even to fall into, a sexual relationship with another woman in eighteenth-century England – at least on a temporary basis – under the guise of female friendship, without any queries from others as to its true nature.”: Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies*, p. 186. The social demands towards impermanence for female friendship are especially relevant to the poet Anna Seward and the second chapter of this thesis.

⁴⁰ Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies*, p. 186.

Godwin by the end of the century should be seen in the context of the unsavoury connotations surrounding same-sex love. These figures would reject notions of marriage (though in often rather different ways) in favour of romantic friendship – the opposite of what was socially expected. In poetry and prose all four individuals would come to echo Aristotle in their calls for virtuous and equal platonic, rather than sexual (and hierarchical) love.

The eighteenth-century reaction in confusing same-sex friendship with ‘sodomy’ or ‘sapphism’ has left a legacy that persisted throughout the twentieth century. If two individuals of the same sex form an intense bond it is presumed sexual, and so the twentieth century scholar would usually follow the lead of social commentators three centuries beforehand and themselves label such relationships ‘gay’ or ‘lesbian’. Though the impact of this certainly affects the friendships contained in the thesis, the focus is on nonsexual Aristotelian love and not sexual love. Certainly the possibility for erotic acts remains in the vast majority (if not all) of the intimate relationships discussed in this thesis, but the individuals concerned shun the depiction of sexual bonds as a means of intimacy and expression of love in their written works. The written works in this thesis – especially those written in the mid eighteenth century – refuse to conform to newly-sexualised identities.⁴¹

As such, the work of Michel Foucault is of immense importance to the methodological framework of this thesis. Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality* (1976) pioneered queer theory (though the term ‘queer theory’ itself was not coined until a decade and a half later). *The History of Sexuality* largely concerns itself with the cultural shifts that comprised the Enlightenment, particularly with regard to sexuality.

⁴¹ Historical accounts of romantic friendship are far more relevant than historical accounts of sexual love and so there is a greater focus upon the former. Of course the overlap between the two is significant and unavoidable, and historians of sexuality such as Trumbach will be utilised throughout this thesis, but they are secondary to studies of friendship.

Foucault argues that ‘sexuality’ is not an innate or universal aspect of humanity, but was invented by eighteenth-century discourse. That is, the discourses of the eighteenth century did not ‘uncover’ sexuality but in fact created it:

Sexuality must not be thought of as a kind of natural given which power tries to hold in check, or as an obscure domain which knowledge tries gradually to uncover. It is the name that can be given to a historical construct: not a furtive reality that is difficult to grasp, but a great surface network in which the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of special knowledges, the strengthening of controls and resistances, are linked to one another, in accordance with a few major strategies of knowledge and power.⁴²

This ‘historical construct’ had wide-ranging implications for western society, a process that Foucault refers to as the ‘deployment of sexuality’. The ‘deployment of sexuality’ replaced the previous ‘deployment of alliance’, a far more globally-utilised structure in which marriage was dictated by a system designed to strengthen and improve socio-political bonds between families (Foucault, p. 106).

Foucault argues that rather than creating a more repressive sexual system, the increase in discourse and the resultant creation of sexuality led to a sexual diversification.⁴³ This discourse was an attempt to codify and regulate sexual behaviour in an attempt to improve public health: “... a norm of sexual development was defined and all the possible deviations were carefully described” (Foucault, p. 36). This diversification involved the creation of the homosexual figure (amongst other sexual subgroups). Sexuality involved multiplicity – in attempting to define (and in the process creating) sexual norms, there were also defined (and created) ‘abnormalities’.

⁴² Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. by Robert Hurley (London: Allen Lane, 1978), I, p. 105. Subsequent references will be given in parentheses unless further detail is needed.

⁴³ Foucault refers to a ‘veritable discourse explosion’, which runs contrary to popular ideas of the period as an ‘age of repression’: *The History of Sexuality*, I, p. 17. Desire was displaced into discourse, a discourse which was believed to be founded in reason: p. 24. The reason for this shift he argues to be deeply ingrained in western culture – the culture of confession, stemming from the Catholic religious practice which rendered private deviations public: p. 59.

The creation of sexuality has crucial implications for friendship. The gradual usurpation of the aristocratic ‘deployment of alliance’ would render marriage often a more bourgeois personal bond, one chosen by the individuals entering into the contract themselves. In a dynastic system whereby the emotional ties between spouses are secondary to their status the friend would likely serve as the most important personal bond in an individual’s life. The ‘deployment of sexuality’ would change that.

More importantly, this ‘veritable discourse explosion’ and the creation of sexuality served to sexualise social views on all relationships – including those surrounding the tradition of romantic friendship. Gray, Seward and Wollstonecraft utilised the elegy as a means of escaping this discourse and indeed the very creation of ‘sexuality’ as outlined by Foucault. They sought an ideal in the platonic relationships outlined by Aristotle and as such found themselves both outside the boundaries of sexualised discourse and yet paradoxically in opposition to it – something which, as it could not be directly articulated, they expressed as an opposition to marriage. Gray, Seward, Wollstonecraft and Godwin expressed a queer desire contrary to (relatively new) sexual and gender norms and were simultaneously revolutionary and reactionary.

In utilising queer theory we can recognise these four individuals as ‘queer’ – as being outside of recognised sexual and gender norms and resisting socially-constructed sexual categories. Foucault’s work will provide the main theoretical framework for this thesis, yet there are aspects of queer theory which are irrelevant – specifically those dealing with sexual and gender binaries formed from the Victorian period onward. This includes works central to queer theory, such as Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990). Dealing with the homo/hetero-sexual binary,

Sedgwick challenges fundamental social foundations in our own society, but it holds little relevance to individuals living and literary works created before the last third of the nineteenth century, the period which Sedgwick asserts to be the creation of the binary (though Sedgwick's earlier work, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985) will be examined in the first chapter of this thesis).⁴⁴ Indeed, many queer theoretical works challenging 'fixed' sexual categorisations are part of a sexual discourse which we need to see beyond in order to truly understand these queer elegies. Other queer theoretical works (such of those of David Halperin) will of course be utilised throughout the four chapters, but *The History of Sexuality* will provide the main means of understanding the romantic friendship elegy.

The Role of Elegy

If we were to search for a common theme in the literature depicting intimate friendships stretching across thousands of years we would find one major constant: death. From Achilles' grief to the tomb of Neville and Clanvowe and the female love elegies of the seventeenth century, death has remained romantic friendship's uneasy shadow. Western culture has consistently bound romantic friendship to loss and mourning, a legacy which was inherited by the elegists in this thesis. Same-sex love has been central to the English-language elegiac canon: from Milton to Tennyson and Gray and Byron. For these individuals the act of mourning is bound to a fairly consistent state of melancholia. Roy Porter's writings on the subject highlight the widespread and varied condition of melancholia – in his study *Mind-Forg'd Manacles* (1987) he states: "Georgian melancholies were legion, and they do not fit into a single

⁴⁴ Though she states the cultural associations behind homosexuality to be older: Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 2.

mould.”⁴⁵ Porter does, however, note that it was often tied to graveyard poetry and the language of sensibility (a theme particularly important to the first and second chapters to this thesis).⁴⁶ Though traditionally a male dominion, over the eighteenth century women became increasingly prone to melancholia, with Porter specifically (though briefly) singling out Mary Wollstonecraft as an example of a female sufferer.⁴⁷ Porter also comments on the gradual emergence of female melancholia in *A Social History of Madness* (1987), along with its having traditionally been considered a masculine trait.⁴⁸ In his more recent *Bodies Politic* (2001) he briefly suggests that it has been tied to notions of genius since the time of Aristotle.⁴⁹

According to Freud, melancholia and the process or mourning are similar and often bound together, though the medicalisation of these conditions only peaked in Freud’s own century.⁵⁰ Even from his own time Thomas Gray has been considered a melancholic figure, though he doesn’t fully display the symptoms outlined by Freud: “The distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly painful

⁴⁵ Roy Porter, *Mind-Forg'd Manacles: A History of Madness in England from the Restoration to the Renaissance* (London: The Athlone Press, 1987), p. 242. Porter does note several traditional images associated with the melancholic, however: “On the favourable side, he had paraded an awesome, aristocratic aloofness ... On the debit side, he was typically a malcontent, scoffer, or a solitary misanthrope.”: p. 87. Intellectuals and the downwardly mobile are also cited as culturally-approved examples of the melancholic: p. 242. The Georgians, however, gradually gained a more sympathetic view of the condition: p. 88.

⁴⁶ “Graveyard poetry equated bruised, brooding moodiness with the person of parts, destined to suffer because too delicate for this rude, tragic scene of life”: Porter, *Mind-Forg'd Manacles*, p. 244.

⁴⁷ “... in her yearning, heartache years while a governess in Ireland, the frustrated Mary Wollstonecraft suffered ‘spasms and disordered nerves’, ‘constant nervous fever’, a melancholy misery, accompanied by violent pains in her side, difficulties in breathing, trembling fits, a rising in the throat (*globus hystericus*), and faintness”: Porter, *Mind-Forg'd Manacles*, p. 244.

⁴⁸ Porter suggests this shift to coincide with the ‘age of sensibility’, in which melancholia was ‘feminized’: Roy Porter, *A Social History of Madness: Stories of the Insane* (London: Phoenix, 1987), p. 104.

⁴⁹ Roy Porter, *Bodies Politic: Disease, Death and Doctors in Britain, 1650-1900* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001), p. 61.

⁵⁰ Care must be taken in the utilisation of Freud’s theories – Foucault specifically singles out Freud as part of the sexual discourse which clouds our understanding of human relationships: Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, I, p. 5. Psychoanalytic and queer theories are often incompatible and it must be noted that parts of Freud’s work on melancholia and mourning contain a great degree of sexual bias, specifically those parts referring to spurned love. As queer theory will prove the more useful in the understanding of the elegies discussed in this thesis, the works of Freud are used more sparingly, especially in areas that relate to human relationships.

dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment.”⁵¹ As we shall see in the first chapter, Gray’s capacity to love remains intact. Though the symptoms of melancholia are now considered pathological, this thesis will explore the possibility that for Gray, Seward and even Wollstonecraft, social pressures and restrictions prompted the mental state, a symptom of queer desires not realised.⁵² Though Freud describes the act of mourning to entail a wishful longing for the lost subject or individual, he also states that it can apply to ideals.⁵³ This thesis will explore the notion that these elegies cling to an ideal of friendship outside of and opposed to sexualised social discourse, a dedication to a form of love as well as to the individuals loved themselves.

One point needs to be made with regard to the terminology utilised in this thesis, specifically the terms ‘elegy’ and ‘romantic friendship’. In using the term ‘elegy’ I am not limiting it to the specific form of poetry which has its roots in antiquity, but to any work of literature dedicated to the memory of a deceased loved one: for Gray this involves his more traditional works, but for Seward the sonnet form is used and for Wollstonecraft the novel. In the preface to his collection of works published in 1764, William Shenstone notes that a great number of different styles have been used in the formation of elegies, and follows the lead of the Roman poet Horace when he states that their only constant requirement should be a theme of

⁵¹ Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. by James Strachey, 14 vols (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1957), XIV, p. 244.

⁵² Desires which, as mentioned earlier, are both reactionary and revolutionary, often envisioning the potential utopia of pure friendship yet idealising a prior age.

⁵³ Freud, *Complete Works*, XIV, p. 243.

melancholy.⁵⁴ The elegists discussed in this study are merely following in the elegiac tradition in their use of such a wide variety of literary forms. Despite the confusion amongst modern scholars over the implications of the term ‘romantic friendship’, I shall be using it in reference to the ‘true friendship’ with a one-on-one basis as outlined by Aristotle.⁵⁵ ‘Friendship’ is an extremely wide term, though as this thesis shall demonstrate, romantic friendship was a specific form of love that differed from other forms of friendship, such as the sociable circles that became increasingly prevalent during the Enlightenment.

Though Traub argues that the elegy was a way in which socially unacceptable desire could be safely expressed, buried and thus present no threat to the social order, this thesis will argue that the elegy in fact immortalised romantic friendship, invigorating a queer desire which was beyond any individual love. This is not to render individuals such as Richard West, Honora Sneyd and Fanny Blood (the lost loves of Gray, Seward and Wollstonecraft, respectively) unimportant: in death they served to represent pure and virtuous romantic friendship, friendship which would defy social convention and not be ended by marriage, nor would it be drawn into the social discourse of sexuality. The poetry and prose which will be investigated through all four chapters bears testament to this immortalised love.

⁵⁴ Shenstone deals with the subject only briefly, but makes the tradition clear: “There have been few rules given us by the critics concerning the structure of *elegiac* poetry: and far be it from the author of the following trifles, to dignify his own *opinions* with that *denomination* that would only intimate the great variety of *subjects*, and the different *styles* in which the writers of elegy have hitherto indulged themselves …”: William Shenstone, *The Works in Verse and Prose, of William Shenstone, Esq.*, 2 vols (London: R and J Dodsley, 1764) I, p. 3. Though his use of the term ‘poetry’ neglects prose works such as Wollstonecraft’s *Mary: A Fiction*. Shenstone’s influence on the poet Anna Seward regarding her paraphrasing of the Horatian Odes will be examined in the second chapter, Wollstonecraft’s elegy in the third.

⁵⁵ Though I apply the term ‘romantic friendship’ irrespective of gender, to Aristotle women were not believed capable of true, virtuous friendship.

The first chapter of this thesis will focus upon the written works of the poet Thomas Gray and the social conditions surrounding male-male love in the early eighteenth century. The chapter will examine the previously unexplored notion that the poet's work is influenced by historical forces which manifest in a dual literary identity: one based in the sexualised social discourse along the lines of the sodomite, the other rebelling in favour of romantic friendship against the sexual discourse in the manner described in this introduction. The relevance of Gray's close friends Horace Walpole and Richard West to each of these manifestations will also be examined, as will the poet's misogyny in influencing this desire for same-sex love (a common charge levelled against eighteenth-century sodomites). The place of elegy in the poet's written expressions of friendship – as well as in the wider socio-historical context – will also be explored, in particular with regards to his poetry following West's death in 1742.

The second chapter will mark the beginning of the focus on female friendship, centred on the poems and prose of Anna Seward. This chapter will look at her queer elegiac sonnets from the 1770s as a statement against opposite-sex marriage and examine her unpublished letters, many of which have remained neglected by literary and historical criticism for nearly two and a half centuries. Her odes from Horace and to the Ladies of Llangollen will also be introduced as an example of her transgressions of mainstream social and gender norms. Through both the poet's public and private writings I will explore the possibility of Seward's dedication to nonsexual love as a conscious and deliberate social identity and political stance, typified through a term expressed in an unpublished letter stored at Yale: 'my stand'.

The third chapter will move toward the close of the eighteenth century with the works of the feminist prose writer Mary Wollstonecraft. Her two novels *Mary: A*

Fiction (1788) and *Maria, Or the Wrongs of Woman* (1798) will be examined alongside her political treatise *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) in order to explore her views on human relationships. The strong contrast between the central protagonist's platonic desire for her friend Ann in relation to her aversion to her husband in *Mary: A Fiction* will be of particular focus, with the elegiac novel examined as an unconscious expression of social rebellion against the sexual discourse. The chapter will move past Wollstonecraft's death to Maria Edgeworth's turn-of-the-century novel *Belinda* (1801), a text which subversively deals with Wollstonecraft's themes whilst maintaining a surface-level distance from the (now socially disgraced) woman herself.

The fourth chapter will examine a novel published four years after Edgeworth's: William Godwin's *Fleetwood* (1805). Written in a period in which the decline of romantic friendship had been near-total (particularly with regards to men), this chapter will explore the idea that Godwin's prose fiction calls for a restructuring of human bonds along Aristotelian lines, reworking the form of friendship which the novel indicates has been lost. The novel will be investigated as both a rewrite of his own *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793) and Wollstonecraft's two novels, in particular *Mary: A Fiction*, as a call for a utopian society based in altruism and equality. This final chapter will explore the changing nature of the conflict between friendship and marriage through Godwin's work, and the possibility of the reconciliation of the two forms of love by the early nineteenth century.

The figures outlined in this thesis developed a queer desire for friendship based in Aristotle's *Ethics*. It was a belief that demanded equality, cohabitation,

physical intimacy and even exclusivity.⁵⁶ These writers, however, were confronted by an increasingly wide-ranging discourse of sexuality which threatened romantic friendship by imposing erotic connotations and demanding emotional priority be given to the family. They lived in a society which was now incapable of understanding love outside of sexual expression. The resultant frustrations found their way into their literary works, providing elegies which are rooted in melancholy and mourning. However, the elegies also prove to be works of celebration and determination, refusing to be drawn into any sexual framework and rebelling against the emotional prioritisation of marriage. Through death this queer ideal was immortalised and presented publicly, even at the risk of the author's reputation. Deviant and alternately tolerated and reviled, it was a form of love that would not die quietly.

⁵⁶ A desire which I label 'monoamory', which will be a significant focus in the latter stages of this thesis.

CHAPTER ONE

THOMAS GRAY AND THE CULT OF FRIENDSHIP

It was at the start of the Eighteenth Century that friendship, sodomy and effeminacy became interconnected. Sexuality redefined human relationships and as a result same-sex bonds were increasingly viewed through this new social lens. Even so, there was far from a clean or consistent social consensus regarding male-male and female-female intimacies. As we saw in the introduction, Randolph Trumbach and Alan Bray maintain the viewpoint that the period saw a social shift relating sex to identity. Sodomy thus bred sodomites – as Trumbach puts it: “These new sodomites were the first European men who might reasonably be called ‘homosexuals.’” (‘Modern Sodomy’, p. 77). This chapter will examine how this newly-emerging social reality affected those who sought to dedicate themselves to friendship – in particular the poet Thomas Gray.

FRIENDSHIP, PHILOSOPHY AND SEXUALITY

Aristotelian friendship, based in equality and an admiration of virtue, struggled with the advent of the Enlightenment and the new social discourse of sexuality.⁵⁷ Despite the strength of the tradition of romantic friendship in previous centuries, by the third decade of the eighteenth – when Thomas Gray was in his youth

⁵⁷ On friendship and virtue Aristotle noted: “[Friendship] is a sort of virtue, or at least implies virtue, and is, moreover, most necessary to our life”: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 251. As we established in the introduction such friendship entailed equality, trust, cohabitation, intimacy and exclusivity.

- controversies over friendship were wide-ranging.⁵⁸ In *The Friend* Alan Bray details the furore surrounding the erection of a monument to two intimate male friends, Granville Piper and Richard Wise, though such declarations of love were by then few and far between.⁵⁹ Bray suggests that romantic friendships still took place; they were simply forced into the private sphere, out of the danger of the public eye.⁶⁰ In many ways close relationships between those of the same sex became dangerous with the newfound hysteria over sodomy – blackmailing became rife, legal prosecutions soared and groups were in danger of being infiltrated by spies working for one of the numerous Societies for the Reformation of Manners.⁶¹ Randolph Trumbach has suggested the social shame alone of being branded a ‘molly’ was enough to drive many to suicide.⁶²

Of course it was not merely social minorities which were subject to the social-sexual shifts of the early eighteenth century. Greater formalisation of marriage and the family strongly impacted on society as a whole. Many of the factors vital to romantic friendship (trust, cohabitation, intimacy and exclusivity in particular) were now solely reserved for an individual’s husband or wife. In *The Rise of the Egalitarian Family* (1978) Trumbach marks this period as a gradual turning-point for marriage, notably amongst the aristocracy, a point which saw the declining influence

⁵⁸ Friendship in previous centuries has been outlined by Alan Bray, Julie Peakman and Lillian Faderman and relayed in the introduction to this thesis. Raymond Bentman in his article on Gray, ‘Thomas Gray and the Poetry of “Hopeless Love”’, suggests that the persecution of sodomites would have impacted strongly on an individual of Gray’s class: Raymond Bentman, ‘Thomas Gray and the Poetry of “Hopeless Love”’, *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 3 (1992), 203-222 (p. 212).

⁵⁹ The controversy took place in 1731: Bray, *The Friend*, p. 211.

⁶⁰ Bray goes into greater detail on the decline of friendship signifiers in the sixth chapter of *The Friend*: Bray, *The Friend*, p. 212.

⁶¹ Tim Hitchcock suggests that the Societies often upset Londoners due to their tactic of using informants. He goes into more detail on the Societies and their basis in fundamentalist religion, suggesting their more prominent target to have been prostitutes: Tim Hitchcock, *English Sexualities 1700-1800* (Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 1997), p. 70. Peakman also details the puritanical attempts to cleanse society by the Societies for the Reformation of Manners and the fact that few were safe from their watchful eyes – Charles Hitchen, Under Marshal for the City of London and member of one of the societies was himself convicted of sodomy and pilloried: *Lascivious Bodies*, p. 152.

⁶² This shame was tied to effeminacy, a topic which will be explored in greater detail later in this chapter: Trumbach, ‘Modern Sodomy’ in *A Gay History of Britain*, ed. by Matt Cook and others, p. 80.

of marriage as a tool of political utility in favour of bourgeois marriage as a means of domestic happiness and personal fulfilment (we can compare Aristotle's distinctions between the different modes of friendship with these ideologies applied to sexual bonds).⁶³ Lawrence Stone's *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England* (1977) also hypothesises a shift toward marital affection, occurring between the middling and upper classes. This occurred far more gradually than the shift in sexual codifications, slowly emerging since the sixteenth century and resulted in a nuclear family unit which lessened the importance of communities and professional associates – essentially non-intimate non-sexual bonds.⁶⁴ As the eighteenth century began, the emphasis of sexual relationships rather than friendship was even further increased as the idea of (relative) equality between partners gained popularity, and the affection between partners was even to extend from parents to children. Stone notes that such affection in itself lessened the importance of 'kin and community' – which would certainly impact upon intimate bonds between friends of the same sex.⁶⁵ As a result of these changes, the dynamics between husbands and wives altered fairly drastically: it was in the eighteenth century that it fell out of cultural favour for a husband to beat

⁶³ In particular Trumbach states that marriage for financial gain had become distasteful: "Marriage has become, instead, the cornerstone of domesticity." Trumbach goes on to state: "In marriage and the family settlement, one will ... find the best evidence of the equilibrium that was struck between kindred and patrilineage, domesticity and patriarchy: but one will also find that in the years 1690 and 1780, generation by generation domesticity was winning over patriarchy in the making of a marriage": Randolph Trumbach, *The Rise of the Egalitarian Family: Aristocratic Kinship and Domestic Relations in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York: Academic Press Inc, 1978), p. 71.

⁶⁴ Stone demarcates this shift as occurring between the years 1500 and 1700, with the modern family unit slowly emerging: "First the importance of the nuclear core increased, not as a unit of habitation but as a state of mind: as its boundaries became more clearly defined, so the influence of the kin and clientage correspondingly declined. Secondly the importance of affective bonds to tie the conjugal unit together began to increase." Stone places several cultural factors as the stimulant for this change – the decline of kinship and patronage, and the increasing power of both Protestantism and the state: Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage*, p. 123. Stone notes the decline in hospitality to be most notable amongst the Aristocracy, where patronage was of greatest significance: p. 125. As noted in the introduction, Stone also details the shift in marriage in his later work *Uncertain Unions*: Stone, *Uncertain Unions and Broken Lives*, p. 11.

⁶⁵ "... there developed much warmer affective relations between husband and wife and between parents and children, which was itself a powerful reason for the declining influence of kin and community": Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage*, p. 221.

his wife.⁶⁶ Across the century there were numerous calls for ‘friendship’ within marriage, yet another encroachment on the Aristotelian mode.⁶⁷

By Gray’s lifetime many prominent social philosophers were moralising on the subject of marriage, not least Daniel Defoe, who published *A Treatise Concerning the Use and Abuse of the Marriage Bed* in 1727, when Gray was entering early adolescence. Defoe portrays an idealised vision of marriage, one which presents an idyllic and harmonious union – the one true path for happiness: “... the pleasure of the married state consists wholly in the beauty of the union, the sharing comforts, the doubling all enjoyments; it is the settlement of life; the ship is always in a storm till it finds this safe road, and here it comes to an anchor.”⁶⁸

He also recognised that not all marital unions were successful. In his treatise Defoe suggests that marriages not based in mutual affection could lead to severe unhappiness.⁶⁹ Marriage is a contract which must have been a choice for both parties:

... [marriage must be entered into] with all possible freedom, that they might be able to say to one another, and that with the utmost sincerity, at reciting the office of matrimony, not I take thee, but I choose thee – thou art my choice; that the man may be able to say, not only is she the wife of my youth, but she is the wife of my affection, and the woman the same.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Though the law did not always reflect public opinion: “[The] shift in moral theology did not affect the theoretical position in common law that a husband may administer ‘moderate correction’, a doctrine reasserted in court by the Solicitor-General as late as the 1730s. But in practice and by general consent this had fallen into disfavour and it is hardly surprising that there was a great outcry in 1782 when a pedantic judge tried to revive the ancient doctrine that it was lawful for a husband to beat a wife, provided that the stick were no thicker than his thumb ...”: Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage*, p. 326.

⁶⁷ This especially pertains to the philosophies of Mary Wollstonecraft, as we shall see in the third chapter to this thesis.

⁶⁸ Daniel Defoe, *A Treatise Concerning the Use and Abuse of the Marriage Bed* (London: T. Warner, 1727), p. 30. Subsequent references will be given in parentheses unless further detail is needed. Defoe’s treatise is referenced by Trumbach in his *Sex and the Gender Revolution*: Randolph Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 110-111. Trumbach’s picture is not quite as rosy as Defoe’s, however, as he suggests that the century also gave rise to a new form of adultery, where women would fall into companionate love with a friend or acquaintance of their husband’s: Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution*, p. 396.

⁶⁹ Due to the higher ratio of such unions amongst the upper ranks of society Defoe concludes that the poor have happier marriages, even going so far as to suggest that the unions entered into by the highest in society are not real marriages at all: “Marriages of princes and persons of rank are rather leagues and treaties of alliance and confederacy than weddings ...”: Defoe, *Use and Abuse of the Marriage Bed*, p. 30.

⁷⁰ This quote typifies companionate marriage: Defoe, *Use and Abuse of the Marriage Bed*, p. 30.

Once again Defoe makes it clear that if these conditions are not met, the couple will destine themselves to lifelong unfulfillment, going on to say that: "... marriage without love is the completest misery in life" (Defoe, p. 31). Not a small amount of religious rhetoric is used in Defoe's text and he presents his advice as universal and timeless – failing to acknowledge the historic function of marriage and instead suggesting the nature of marital union to have remained unchanged since the writing of the Old Testament of the Christian Bible.

Finally, Defoe is scathing toward those whom he believes to have ignored the sound advice that marriage must be based in mutual love – particularly with regards to women, comparing them to prostitutes: "What will you do madam? Will you live with a man ... you do not love? As I said before, that such a lady must be a fool. I saw now it is worse; it is but a kind of prostitution, in the plain English of it, too gross and wicked to express."⁷¹ Not only had marriage become the primary emotional concern of the individual, but as Defoe demonstrates, many segments of society would judge those who behave differently with some severity.

Julie Peakman suggests that it was this renewed focus on opposite-sex intimacy which rendered same-sex sexuality so unacceptable, providing us with an idea of the social supremacy of marriage: "Marriage between a man and a woman was considered the one true path, the prime aim of such couplings being propagation of the human race. The fact that sodomy was not procreative was part of the reasoning

⁷¹ Defoe, *Use and Abuse of the Marriage Bed*, p. 32. Despite having referred to the female participant in such a marriage as a 'prostitute' Defoe does not deny that such unions are still 'marriages' – though he differentiates the term from 'matrimony': "To say love is not essential to the form of a marriage is true; but to say it is not essential to the felicity of a married state, and consequently to that which I call matrimony, is not true ...": p. 33. His novel *Roxana* anticipates the later writings of Mary Wollstonecraft, which will be important in the third chapter to this thesis.

for its being perceived as against nature.”⁷² Though Peakman’s focus is not on male-male friendship, her assertion that sodomy was rendered unacceptable as it did not result in childbirth has crucial implications for friendship.⁷³ Those who devote their lives to another of the same sex in a platonic context are also defying the procreative norm and would be considered as ‘unnatural’ as the sodomite.⁷⁴ Rather than becoming taboo due to the possibility of sodomy, here Aristotelian romantic friendship is marked as unnatural in its own right: it is the lack of penile-vaginal intercourse which is abhorrent, rather than the possible presence of penile-anal intercourse. It is little surprise that ‘mollies’ were presented as misogynistic, a viewpoint strongly espoused in the 1707 broadside ballad, ‘The Women-Hater’s Lamentation’.⁷⁵

As we established in the introduction to this thesis, those living in Britain in the Eighteenth Century were expected to marry and engage in male-female procreative sex.⁷⁶ This was even true of those who engaged in same-sex sexual activities: it is important to note that not all those who engaged in sodomy would have been seen as or referred to as ‘mollies’, nor would they have identified with those who frequented the houses in London. Tim Hitchcock suggests that, though they knew

⁷² Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies*, p. 149. This ‘unnatural vice’ was seen as having a corrupting influence on the rest of society and had its own effect of male-female intercourse: sodomites were seen as responsible for the creation of female prostitutes, as women who overheard their supposedly filthy-riden conversations became ‘whores’: p. 149. Crucial to Gray, Peakman describes the scandals which embroiled all-male schools in the 1730s, which we will examine further later in this chapter: p. 156.

⁷³ Tim Hitchcock concurs with Peakman in his work *English Sexualities 1700-1800*, in which he suggests that all sexual activity was newly compared to procreative penetration: “The desire for sex is certainly there, but it is strictly controlled within an ideological framework which saw sex, including both penetrative and non-penetrative varieties, as part and parcel of the broader social process of marriage and procreation, rather than as a discrete activity”: Hitchcock, *English Sexualities 1700-1800*, p. 24. Like Trumbach, Hitchcock suggests there to be no adequate, comprehensive explanation for the shift in social attitudes toward sex and human relationships in the Eighteenth Century: p. 25.

⁷⁴ As we shall see further in the chapter, in his poem ‘Ode on the Spring’ this was something Gray would relish in, sharply criticising the procreative instincts of the social mainstream.

⁷⁵ The ballad concerns itself far more with the lack of attention paid to the ‘beauties’ and ‘charms’ of women (the ‘Chief of Earthly Joys’) by the mollies rather than the sexual acts between the men themselves: Anon., *The Women-Hater’s Lamentation* (London: J. Robinson, 1707).

⁷⁶ Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies*, p. 186.

sodomy was extremely unacceptable, they wouldn't have considered themselves anything other than ordinary citizens.⁷⁷ For many, sodomy was still an act, rather than an identity. Opposite-sex sex was still essential behaviour. Theoretically, it is plausible that a man who covertly engaged in intercourse with other men whilst marrying and creating children would have been more socially acceptable than a man who devoted himself to a platonic life with another man.

By Gray's own time, effeminate men were often even denied the protection of the law when victims of crime which had little to do with their masculinity (or perceived lack thereof): Hitchcock relates a case from 1732 (when Gray would have been sixteen) in which a man was robbed but was neither adequately assisted by passers-by nor the courts, due to his effeminacy.⁷⁸ Taken alone effeminacy was hazardous enough: coupled with a desire to build attachments only with other men it would have been outright dangerous.

Aristotle Revisited: the Earl of Shaftesbury

Despite the social preference for affectionate marriage, Aristotle's ideals survived into Gray's lifetime. Friendship was certainly in question by the Eighteenth Century, but debates concerning the subject were by no means suppressed as a result of the molly house raids. Anthony Ashley-Cooper, the third Earl of Shaftesbury and noted philosopher chiefly responsible for the 'man of feeling', commented on intimate same-sex friendship in his work *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*

⁷⁷ "The vast majority of eighteenth-century men who committed sodomy did not think of themselves other than as ordinary, everyday members of society. They did not belong to a subculture, nor did they have a distinctive self-identity.": Hitchcock, *English Sexualities 1700-1800*, p. 63.

⁷⁸ The case related to John Cooper and Thomas Gorden, the former having been robbed by the latter: "... rather than discussing the merits of the case, much of the court record is taken up in describing Cooper's effeminate ways ... [the trial] resulted only in an acquittal": Hitchcock, *English Sexualities 1700-1800*, p. 73.

(revised continually toward the end of his life though originally published in 1711).⁷⁹

Shaftesbury comments on the rarity of such relationships by the time of his writing, suggesting that Christian society is far less used to such bonds than the Jewish and polytheist-classical cultures preceding it, in fact stating: "Private friendship and zeal for the public and our country are virtues purely voluntary in a Christian."⁸⁰ In the footnotes following this statement he references the seventeenth-century clergyman Jeremy Taylor when he defines friendship in a similar manner to the outlines posited by Aristotle: "By private friendship no fair reader can here suppose is meant that *common* benevolence and charity which every Christian is obliged to show towards all men ... but that *peculiar* relation, which is formed by a consent and harmony of minds by mutual esteem and reciprocal tenderness and affection which we emphatically call a friendship."⁸¹ Rather enigmatically he then goes on to comment: "And such there may have lately been and are still perhaps in our own age, though envy suffers not the few examples of this kind to be remarked in public. The author's meaning is indeed so plain of itself that it needs no explanatory apology to satisfy an impartial reader" (Ashley-Cooper, p. 46). The underlying hint that such intimacies are taboo certainly calls to mind the public furore over sodomy.

⁷⁹ Anthony Ashley-Cooper, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. by Lawrence E. Klein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Subsequent references will be given in parentheses unless further detail is needed.

⁸⁰ He references the friendship of David and Jonathan in the Old Testament (and thus the Torah) before listing several famous relationships from Greece and Rome: Ashley-Cooper, *Characteristics*, p. 46. Ashley-Cooper then notes that whilst such friendships are present in the Old Testament, they are absent in the New: p. 47. Shaftesbury's argument that Christianity was foreign to friendship is not one which has been readily accepted: aside from contradicting Alan Bray's *The Friend* his assertion was attacked directly by Thomas Fowler in his 1882 summation of his works (Fowler suggesting that Jesus Christ's relationship with his disciples as portrayed in the New Testament is an example of intimate friendship): Thomas Fowler, *Shaftesbury and Hutcheson* (London: Samson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1882), p. 53.

⁸¹ Ashley-Cooper, *Characteristics*, p. 46. Shaftesbury references Jeremy Taylor's discourse on friendship which suggests that Christianity has no time for the ideal of friendship: Jeremy Taylor, *The Whole Works of the Right Rev. Jeremy Taylor*, ed. by Charles Page Eden and others, 10 vols (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1856), I, p. 93.

A more overt explanation for the decline of intimate friendship presented in Shaftesbury's *Characteristics* is somewhat Aristotelian in nature: a lack of altruism and virtue. Virtue, he suggests, has been commodified by a society which is mercenary in its nature – when a man gives he wholeheartedly expects to receive, rather than appreciating the notion of doing good for good's sake.⁸² Once again the Greek philosopher is echoed as the Earl states that without a real notion of virtue true friendship is not possible. He does, however, believe self-interest to play its part: desire and passion –a need to *receive* affection as well as surrender it – is also vital for such a bond:

... a life without natural affection, friendship or sociableness would be found a wretched one, were it to be tried. It is as these feelings and affections are intrinsically valuable and worthy that self-interest is to be rated and esteemed. A man is nothing so much himself as by his temper and the character of his passions and affections.⁸³

True friendship then, is found through finding a correct balance of virtue and desire. Though he recognises friendship to be uncommon and taboo in the Christian world Shaftesbury suggests it to be a positive expression of desire (though many of Aristotle's arguments are repeated in *Characteristics*, some are conspicuously absent: such as those surrounding cohabitation and exclusivity). A contemporary of Shaftesbury's, the philosopher Francis Hutcheson, made a similar point in his work *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections*, citing the

⁸² He goes on to state that the notion of virtue has been 'corrupted':

If the love of doing good be not of itself a good and right inclination, I know not how there can possibly be such a thing as goodness or virtue. If the inclination be right, it is a perverting of it to apply it solely to the reward and make us conceive such wonder of the grace and favour which is to attend virtue, when there is so little shown of the intrinsic worth or value of the thing itself"

Ashley-Cooper, *Characteristics*, p. 46.

⁸³ The use of the term 'natural' strongly contrasts the stress on the 'unnatural' nature of sodomy at the time: Ashley-Cooper, *Characteristics*, p. 56.

necessity of a strong moral code to discerning virtue and vice, and thus to both 'friendship' and 'benevolence'.⁸⁴

For both Shaftesbury and Hutcheson friendship was important to both the individual and the social whole (a philosophy which contrasted the less co-operative view of philosophers such as Hobbes, but shared by William Godwin some decades later, as we shall see in the fourth chapter). Friendship in its totality was not socially unfamiliar in the eighteenth century. Friendship circles centred around clubs and societies were found in abundance, and, as Jürgen Habermas makes clear in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, such groups were vital to the development of modern democracy, moving power away from influential families.⁸⁵ In *Passions and Affections* Hutcheson also ties friendship to wider society, suggesting that the individual must form strong ties with his neighbours and associates in order to gain the greatest degree of personal fulfilment: "If we restrain our *public Affection* from growing strong, we abate our Pleasures from the good Success of others, as much as we lessen our Compassion for their Misfortunes ...".⁸⁶ The importance of the type of associative friendship central to democratic reform and moral philosophy, however, is of a different strain to the romantic friendships that form the bulk of those examined in this thesis, which are formed on a one-to-one basis and provide a sense of marginalised queer identity. Such friendship found itself outside the cultural mainstream.

As we have seen, changing social attitudes to personal relationships drove the hostility toward one-on-one romantic friendship. However, whether such friendship

⁸⁴ Francis Hutcheson, *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, With Illustrations on the Moral Sense* (London: W. Innys and others, 1756), p. 6.

⁸⁵ *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* goes into a great deal of depth on this topic throughout: Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. by Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997).

⁸⁶ Hutcheson, *Passions and Affections*, p. 104.

became an uncomfortable subject due to the possibility of sodomy or the lack of procreative activity (or both) is not the issue: in either circumstance the discourse on - and creation of - sexuality as outlined by Foucault presented the central obstacle.

The argument laid out in Foucault's *History of Sexuality* accounts for the changes in attitude toward both opposite-sex and same-sex relationships: this was not a change in attitudes that resulted in a greater degree of repression (in fact Foucault challenges the ways in which we interpret such a term), but the result of a discourse that created 'sexuality' itself and thus altered social understanding of human interaction.⁸⁷ Western society shifted from a model of 'ars erotica' to 'scietia sexualis' – that is, from a system in which truth was divined from pleasure to a system in which 'truths' about humanity could be 'objectively' monitored (Foucault, p. p. 17). The 'scietia sexualis' led to the sexual categorisation of individuals as we would understand it today.

Another influential queer theorist - Eve Sedgwick - concurs with Foucault's view on sexuality – that it is a cultural creation and not a historical constant.⁸⁸ Though in her text *Between Men* (1985) Sedgewick's work focuses on a different form of male-male relationship to the type sought by Gray (more akin to the 'friendships of utility' outlined by Aristotle than romantic friendship) she states the creation of the 'homosexual' identity as a sexual minority impacted upon all areas of

⁸⁷ Foucault rejects the 'repression hypothesis' as a means of understanding the social shifts apparent in the eighteenth century: "... when one looks back over these last three centuries with their continual transformations things appear in a very different light: around an apropos of sex, one sees a veritable discursive explosion.": Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, I, p. 17.

⁸⁸ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 6. Sedgwick resolves that, as well as changing somewhat dramatically over time, male-male bonding cannot be understood without relating it to gender and class. "I will be arguing that concomitant changes in the structure of male 'homosocial desire' were tightly, often casually bound up with the other more visible changes; that the emerging pattern of male friendship, mentorship, entitlement, rivalry, and hetero- and homosexuality was in an intimate and shifting relation to class; and that no element of that pattern can be understood outside of its relation to women and the gender system as a whole": p. 1. The model of homosocial bonding examined by Sedgwick contrasts with some of the work by those studying Renaissance friendship – for example Sedgwick marks Shakespeare's Sonnets as an example of this type of (unequal, utilitarian) friendship, rather than a romantic attachment: p. 33.

European society – that is, the fates of those branded ‘sodomites’ and those individuals perceived as part of the sexual mainstream were both impacted upon by the creation of this new subculture: “... a new and immensely potent tool had become available for the manipulation of every form of power that was refracted through the gender system – that is, in European society, of virtually every form of power.”⁸⁹ Of course being inextricably tied to social perceptions of gender, romantic friendship falls into this restructuring.

Having provided the foundation for queer theory through questioning the idea of sexuality as a universal constant, *The History of Sexuality* has proven pivotal to the study of same-sex relationships in the eighteenth century. In *Making Sexual History* (2000) another prominent queer theorist - Jeffrey Weeks - underlines the importance of Foucault’s methodology whilst echoing Sedgwick’s assertion that every element of society was impacted by the ‘discursive explosion’ surrounding sexuality:

Foucault helps us to move away from any unthinking reliance on a supposed universalizing capitalist strategy, frees us from an abstract determinism and from an equally deterministic functionalism, and returns us to the probing of the actual relationship between one form and another, the actual mechanics of power. So the rise of an apparatus of sexuality ... is located not in any single social necessity but in a host of strategies dealing with relations between parents and pedagogic institutions and children, the relationship of medicine and science to the female body, controversies over birth control and population policies, and the categorization of perverse sexualities.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Sedgwick, *Between Men*, p. 87.

⁹⁰ Jeffrey Weeks, *Making Sexual History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), p. 114. Indeed, Weeks also recognises the importance of queer theory to current liberation movements:

Foucault’s questioning of what are generally seen as pre-eminently natural phenomena, like individuality and so on has been helpful to modern feminism and sexual politics. If gender and sexual categories are historically constructed, and if the mechanisms of their emergence and reproduction can be understood, they are open to transformation.

Weeks, *Making Sexual History*, p. 114. The opposite view is actually taken by Adam Isaiah Green, who argues that the identities provided by sexual orientations are vital to the current social-political landscape and are often undermined by the deconstructive elements to queer theory: Adam Isaiah Green, ‘Gay but Not Queer: Toward a Post-Queer Study of Sexuality’, *Theory and Society*, 34 (2002), 521-545. Regardless of the merits of or problems with his argument such criticisms bear little relevance to sexual identities (or lack of) in the early eighteenth century, where queer theory proves crucial to our social and historical understanding of human bonds.

Weeks' assertion that there was no single body responsible for this shift or in any way in control of it also highlights its disorganised nature and uneven influence, which would explain why for so many in the eighteenth century sodomy was still an act and had yet to become an identity, and why romantic friendship, though increasingly regarded with suspicion, was not universally castigated.⁹¹ Weeks, however, like many queer theorists, is concerned with the utilisation of queer theory as a means of understanding sexual acts and sexual relations, as opposed to non-sexual and even anti-sexual ideals.⁹²

Lisa M. Diamond challenges our perceptions of sexual orientation based on this very issue, approaching the issue from a scientific standpoint. In her article 'What Does Sexual Orientation Orient?' (2003) Diamond suggests that sexual desire and 'affective bonding' are 'functionally independent'.⁹³ Diamond argues for a model for love and desire which recognises three facets: firstly that sex and affection are evolutionarily independent, secondly that there is no intrinsic orientation for affection

⁹¹ Weeks does, however, criticise Foucault's ambiguities in reference to the specific dynamics of power and the relationship of discourse to social bodies: Weeks, *Making Sexual History*, p. 116. Regardless of its relative merits, this argument is of little relevance to this study. None of the individuals discussed in this thesis faced any serious threat from any body involved in social policing as they never sought sexual relationships with strangers – even though they risked alienation from their contemporaries (the severity of social castigation must not, of course, be undermined).

⁹² There are many theorists dedicated to exploring and challenging our current notions of sexuality as they came to be in the eighteenth century – Richard C. Sha examines the increasingly 'public' nature of sex due to its new associations with health. In particular the anti-onanist literature in the 1750s helped spur this shift: Richard C. Sha, 'Medicalizing the Romantic Libido: Sexual Pleasure, Luxury, and the Public Sphere', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 27 (2005), 31-52 (p. 34). Of course once again public concern with such acts cannot help but interfere with intimate friendships. Alan Bray agrees with the assertion that sexual behaviour generally shifted from act to identity, but argues this to be an oversimplification and that such behaviour has taken 'a bewildering variety of forms': Alan Bray, 'Historians and Sexuality', *The Journal of British Studies*, 32 (1993), 189-194 (p. 192). David Halperin takes a similar view in his article 'Forgetting Foucault: Acts, Identities, and the History of Sexuality' (1998) largely agreeing with the viewpoint that the eighteenth century saw the creation of firm identities based in sex acts but suggesting that elements of identity have existed around deviant sexual practices since classical Greece – with the figure of the 'Kinaidos': David M. Halperin, 'Forgetting Foucault: Acts, Identities, and the History of Sexuality', *Representations*, 63 (1998), 93-120 (p. 100). The Middle Ages, however, does not appear to have utilised sexual categories or had any forms of identity based in sexual acts: Bill Burgwinkle, 'Queer theory and the Middle Ages', *French Studies*, 60 (2006), 79-88.

⁹³ Lisa M. Diamond, 'What Does Sexual Orientation Orient? A Behavioural Model Distinguishing Romantic Love and Sexual Desire', *Psychological Review*, 110 (2003), 173-192 (p. 174).

based on gender and thirdly that “... the behavioural links between love and desire are bidirectional.”⁹⁴ From a biological standpoint humans are entirely capable of falling in love without any sexual component – confirming what we have already witnessed culturally.

Queer theory proves crucial to the understanding of Gray’s personal relationships as expressed through his writings (both poetry and prose). Without recognising how new ‘sexuality’ was to Gray’s own time and the conflicts this discourse provoked within the poet we would miss crucial insights into the nature of his elegies. Thomas Gray was to develop a conflicted relationship with the social expectations placed upon him and in many of his written works he would rebel against society’s newfound endorsement of companionate marriage – now the new orthodoxy - and the (negative) sexual codification of those men and women who failed to devote themselves to penetrative intercourse and child-rearing.

Thomas Gray and the Society of Sexuality

Thomas Gray responded to the social transformations outlined above by devoting his life and poetic works to friendship whilst shunning the prospect of marital vows. This queer rejection of marriage and sexuality is not a subject which has attracted a great deal of attention from scholars, nor was it a constant and

⁹⁴ That is, both sexual attraction and desire for affection can influence one another. “As a result, individuals can develop novel sexual desires – even desires that contradict their sexual orientations – as a result of falling in love.” Diamond goes on to cite Tennov’s 1979 study which found that 61% of women and 35% of men have experienced infatuation without sexual desire: ‘What Does Sexual Orientation Orient?’, p. 173.

unwavering belief (as we shall see later in the chapter).⁹⁵ It was also one he was not to keep to himself.

Gray never married (nor even seems to have formed any meaningful attachments to women) and he also expressed distaste, though jocularly, in his letters when one of his friends was to be joined in matrimony and devote their lives to sexual love.⁹⁶ When his friend Thomas Wharton considered such a course of action in 1746 Gray wrote to him: "for your Ears, don't let 'em think of marrying you! for I know if you marry at all you will *be married*. I mean, passively. & then (besides repenting of that what you were not guilty of) you will never go abroad, never read any thing more, but Farriery-Books, and Justice-Books, & so either die of a Consumption; or live on, & grow fat, wch is worse."⁹⁷ Though merely an uncommon joke, it marks the first of numerous instances where Gray criticises marriage and the family. A few months later he comments on another proposed marriage: "Morley is going to be married to a grave & stayed Maiden of 30 Years old with much Pelf, & his own Relation. poor Soul!"⁹⁸ He writes again the following month, carefully (though again humorously) suggesting: "I HIGHLY approve of your travelling Nuptials, & only

⁹⁵ Gray's attitudes to marriage are revealed to friends other than Richard West and Horace Walpole, his two closest attachments, on whom scholars have focused almost exclusively. This has been the case even from the nineteenth century, where an article on Gray in 1833 in the *Saturday Magazine* references his ties to West and Walpole but no-one else: *The Saturday Magazine*, 1 (1833), 95-96 (p. 96). This changed little in the twentieth century - Morris Golden's 1964 writings on Gray labels his later friends merely 'admirers': Morris Golden, *Thomas Gray* (New York: Twayne Publishers, inc., 1964) p. 27.

⁹⁶ The letters of Gray utilised in this thesis are exclusively from the three volumes of the Toynbee collection, which, upon examination of different library manuscript archives, appears to contain Gray's letters in their entirety: *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, ed. by Paget Toynbee and Leonard Whibley, 3 vols (Gray to Ashton, Rheims, August 25th, 1739).

⁹⁷ *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, I, p. 259 (Gray to Wharton, December 27th, 1746). Thomas Wharton, whilst somewhat neglected by scholars examining Gray's life, was suggested by William Ruddick to have been a literary replacement of Gray's deceased friend Richard West - though only in terms of correspondence: William Ruddick, 'Thomas Gray's Travel Writing', *Thomas Gray Contemporary Essays*, ed. by W. B Hutchings and William Ruddick (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1993), p. 130. Edmund Gosse's nineteenth-century biography of Gray underlines the importance of Wharton to Gray's life: "... one of Gray's staunchest and most sympathetic friends. To the biographer of the poet, moreover, the name of Wharton must be ever dear, since it was to him that the least reserved and most personal of all Gray's early letters were indited": Edmund Gosse, *Gray* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1889), p. 37.

⁹⁸ *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, I, p. 279 (Gray to Wharton, Cambridge, March 17th 1747).

wonder you don't set forth on Easter-Day, rather than stay to be dish'd up therem & put to bed by a whole Heap of prurient Relations. I don't conceive of what one can do with such people but run away from them.”⁹⁹ Despite Gray's sniggered warnings the marriage went ahead, and on the 30th of November Gray mocked:

My Dear Wharton,

I REJOICE to hear you are safe arrived, tho' drawn by *four wild Horses*, like People one reads in the Book of Martyrs. yet I can not chuse [sic] but lament your Condition, so coop'd up in the Elvet-House with Spirits & Hobgoblins about you, & Pleasure at one Entrance quite shut out ...¹⁰⁰

Gray portrays marriage as damaging to a man's prospects of achievements, instead trapping him in the domestic sphere. Gray's anxiety is the loss of friendship as described by Aristotle, which improves an individual and promotes virtue and accomplishment – he presents a picture of laziness and inactivity as a result of marital vows.¹⁰¹ Gray again expresses negative sentiment when Wharton was to become a father, predicting premature ageing as the result of relapsing into eating, drinking and sloth: he places friendship and fatherhood in opposition to one another.¹⁰²

The poet's subversive critique of marriage was not limited to Wharton. Later in his life he was to urge his friend Bonstetten to avoid women whilst residing in

⁹⁹ *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, I, p. 280 (Gray to Wharton, Stoke, May 13th, 1747).

¹⁰⁰ *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, I, p. 290 (Gray to Wharton, Cambridge, November 30th, 1747).

¹⁰¹ Despite his subversive disapproval, Gray is not mean spirited and in most of his letters continues to wish Wharton's wife well.

¹⁰² Though again filled with hyperbole and a great degree of mischief, the central opposition to Wharton's devotion to the nuclear family unit remains: “You may well suppose me no longer here, as I have neglected thus long to answer two very kind letters, & (wch is more) to congratulate you on what most of your friends regard as a very happy event: but to me, I own, it has another face, as I have a much greater regard for you than for the young Gentleman, whom I never saw; & foresee, that from this time you will never part with your bottle, wch is properly the father of this boy. all my rhetorick [sic] will be thrown away, the Gout may groan at you, & brandish its crutches, the Stone rattle, & the Palsy shake its head unheeded.”: *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, I, p. 376 (Gray to Wharton, Cambridge, June 28th, 1753). Gray's attacks on Wharton's family life end, however, upon the death of Wharton's son in 1758, where he is immediately and unreservedly supportive: “My Dear Sr / I am equally sensible of your affliction, & of your kindness, that made you think of me at such a moment. would to God I could lessen the one, or requite the other with that consolation, wch I have often received from you, when I most wanted it!” The rest of the letter is appropriately melancholic: *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, II, p. 569 (Gray to Wharton, April 9th, 1758). Upon the birth of Wharton's second son some two years later Gray passes no judgement: *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, II, p. 677 (Gray to Wharton, June 20th, 1760). It was not, of course, the end of his assaults on married life.

France.¹⁰³ The sly criticism of marriage is also found in Gray's letters to Mason, starting in July 1763 when he sends Mason news of those around him, concluding "... all the rest (but Dr May and the Master) are dead, or married."¹⁰⁴ The implication that they are not worth comment if they have become wed (even equating matrimony with death) was to become especially relevant, as later that same year Mason made noises towards his own possible intentions toward marriage. Unsurprisingly Gray rains down a cheerful disapproval:

Dear Mason,

I REJOICE. but has she common sense, is she a Gentlewoman? has she money? has she a nose? I know, she sings a little & twiddles on the harpsichord, hammers at sentiment, & puts herself in an attitude. but these are only the qualities of a Maid. do, let her have some wifelike qualities, & a double portion of prudence, as she will have not only herself to govern, but you also, & that with an absolute sway. your Friends, I doubt not, will suffer for it, however we are very happy, & have no other wish than to see you settled in the world.¹⁰⁵

Gray's suggestion that Mason's friendships will 'suffer' once again places friendship and marriage in opposition to one another – the two are certainly not implied to be perfectly compatible. References to the 'absolute sway' with which his wife shall 'govern' him echo Gray's warnings to Wharton, again implying domesticity and devotion to sexuality to be limiting. Gray continues his objections in further letters.¹⁰⁶

This determined bachelor stance was not without risk to Gray's reputation. As we shall see later in this chapter, he was more than willing to express such sentiments

¹⁰³ *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, III, p. 1128 (Gray to Bonstetten, April 19th, 1770).

¹⁰⁴ *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, II, p. 803 (Gray to Mason, July, 1763).

¹⁰⁵ *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, II, p. 821 (Gray to Mason, Pembroke College, October 8th, 1763). The letter commenting on Mason's marriage has not gone unnoticed by A. L. Lytton Sells, who comments that it was 'perhaps the unkindest letter he ever wrote' and 'grossly indecent': A. L. Lytton Sells, *Thomas Gray: His Life and Works* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1980), p. 18.

¹⁰⁶ It is likely Gray had an effect on Mason, as he makes his intentions unknown from that point, and Gray further displays his opposition in a letter to Wharton, where he comments on Mason's possible wife to be: "the best I can tell you of her is, that she is no fine Lady, & the worst, that her fortune is not large": *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, II, p. 831 (Gray to Wharton, February 21st, 1764). When Mason silences himself on the matter, Gray happily speculates to Wharton that he does not believe Mason will marry at all: *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, II, p. 872 (Gray to Wharton, Cambridge, April 29th, 1765). Mason does marry, however, and as with Wharton, when tragedy strikes (in this instance Mason's becoming a widower) Gray halts his criticism. The two were to grow far closer following the bereavement.

in his poetry. Yet his critique of marriage was not the only danger: Thomas Gray was well known for his effeminate manner. It was in the eighteenth century that effeminacy became associated with the new social archetype of the sodomite – as Trumbach puts it: “Sodomy was now tied to a deviant gender role.”¹⁰⁷ Thomas Gray’s own reputation for effeminacy could not help but complicate his relationships with other men.¹⁰⁸ Though it is in relation to the aristocracy rather than sodomy, in Shaftesbury’s *Characteristics* effeminacy is a fairly consistent theme, which the Earl blames on a fear of death or ‘over-great concern for self-preservation’ (Ashley-Cooper, p. 140). Another (not altogether unusual) argument for the cause of effeminacy is given to be a lack of hard work and exercise (once again being tied to class) (Ashley-Cooper, p. 224). This antipathy toward effeminate men was – and is – far from new to Western culture. Even Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* denounces male effeminacy, suggesting such men (like women) to be weak and overly-melancholic: an image which was to stick with Gray.¹⁰⁹ Gray was particularly unafraid to share in melancholic sentiments with his friends, further provoking a reputation for effeminacy (though later in his life he was to write more overtly masculine poetry such as ‘The Bard’).¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Trumbach, ‘Modern Sodomy’ in *A Gay History of Britain*, ed. by Cook and others, p. 80. Robert J. Corber details the deliberate ties made by the left between sodomy and the aristocracy as a result (focusing in particular on William Godwin, whose novel *Fleetwood* will be the focus of the fourth chapter to this study): Robert J. Corber, ‘Representing the ‘Unspeakable’: William Godwin and the Politics of Homophobia’, *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 1 (1990), 85-101 (p.97).

¹⁰⁸ Interestingly, in spite of – or perhaps because of – Gray’s effeminacy he was sometimes quick to judge other men whose less than masculine nature implied deviancy. In November of 1734 he describes an acquaintance, contemptuously commenting: “... he’s a little too *foppish* and talks like a London-Rake ...”: *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, I, p. 8 (Gray to Walpole, Cambridge, November 17th, 1734).

¹⁰⁹ Aristotle states: “... he who is of a manly nature takes care not to impart his grief to his friends, shrinking from the pain that would give them, unless this is quite outweighed by the relief it would give him ... but weak women and effeminate men delight in those who lament with them, and love them as friends and sympathisers”: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 314. This could certainly be argued to be the type of relationship in which Gray indulged with West, which will be examined in this chapter.

¹¹⁰ Upon the death of his friend Mason’s wife Gray is unreserved in his display of affectionate sentiment and melancholy: “I BREAK in upon you at a moment, when we least of all are permitted to disturb our Friends, only to say, that you are daily and hourly present in my thoughts. if the *worst* be

Gray's 'sexual' identity has been a point of some interest for late twentieth and early twenty-first century scholars. The late Robert F. Gleckner, whose work *Gray Agonistes: Thomas Gray and Masculine Friendship* (1997) is the text most central to this particular chapter, noted that due to his effeminate nature Gray was nicknamed 'Miss Gray' by his contemporaries.¹¹¹ Gleckner's main focus is on Gray's friendship with Richard West which he suggests to have been socially transgressive.¹¹² Another important text regarding Gray's love of men, Matthew Curr's *The Consolation of Otherness* (2002), also suggests the love between the two to have been socially unacceptable – and both scholars suggest Gray retreated into a Miltonic space in which he was free from the restrictions of society: a topic which will be examined further into this chapter.¹¹³ The third central scholar on Gray's male relationships, George Haggerty, also argues that the poet retreated into his own work – in particular the elegy – as a means of expressing otherwise troublesome desire: a

not yet past: you will neglect & pardon me. but if the last struggle be over: if the poor object of your long anxieties be no longer sensible to yours kindness, or to her own sufferings: allow me (at least in idea, for what could I do, were I present, more than this?) to sit by you in silence, & pity from my heart not her, who is at rest; but you, who lose her": *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, III, p. 953 (Gray to Mason, March 28th, 1767). There are numerous other examples of such sentiment throughout Gray's life, which will become evident throughout the chapter.

¹¹¹ Robert F. Gleckner, *Gray Agonistes: Thomas Gray and Masculine Friendship* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997) p. 15. Subsequent references will be given in parentheses unless further detail is needed.

¹¹² Gleckner posits that Gray's allusions to Milton prove the most telling aspect of his life and works, especially in the context of the increasingly Sodom-obsessed society. He explains:

... To love another man in an age when ostracism and possibly severe legal punishment could result from public discovery and exposure, and to *write* of that relationship would be to court personal infamy, not merely, poetic or personal failure. Only in the 'blooming Eden' that Milton dared to imagine and explore could Gray's transgressive love for West be both possible and guiltless.

Gleckner, *Gray Agonistes*, p. 6. Gleckner is of course not alone in viewing the relationship as transgressive.

¹¹³ Matthew Curr, *The Consolation of Otherness: The Male Love Elegy in Milton, Gray and Tennyson* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2002), p. 45. The allusions to Milton were not discovered by either Curr or Gleckner, however, and were noted back in 1960 by Joseph Foladare in his article 'Gray's "Frail Memorial" to West': Joseph Foladare, "Gray's "Frail Memorial to West", *PMLA*, 75 (1960), 61-65 (p. 62).

‘melancholic framework’ for the fringes.¹¹⁴ This thesis, however, is focused on the possibility that the elegy formed a public declaration of queer rebellion (elements of which we have briefly witnessed with his opposition to the marriages of his more peripheral friends) and the part played by concepts of friendship in Gray’s literary work requires examination.

The perceived social transgression between Gray and West, coupled with the poet’s effeminate manner, has prompted many scholars to label the poet ‘homosexual’. McCarthy’s work on Thomas Gray, published the same year as Gleckner’s, generally takes this view: not only that he fell in love with those of the same sex, but also that those relationships contained a sexual dimension, mirroring their heterosexual counterparts (which would place Gray within the new sphere of sexuality). To McCarthy, Gray’s identity was formed in the denial of women (rather than in the denial of ‘sexuality’).¹¹⁵ Robert Mack’s biography of Gray also attempts to establish Gray’s sexuality, lamenting that: “... the sustained absence of any genuine consideration of Gray’s sexuality to the narrative of his life and writing has tended to render even the most thoughtful and perceptive of later analyses primitive, evasive, and ultimately dishonest.”¹¹⁶ Mack suggests that the term ‘gay’ is not suitable due to the lack of a gay culture, preferring the term ‘homosexual’. Mack even admits that Gray’s life is largely outside the bounds of sexuality, yet still utilises the term: “Admittedly, we possess no evidence – no proof of overt behaviours – to suggest that Gray ever (either as a child or as an adult) engaged in intimate, sexual

¹¹⁴ George E. Haggerty, *Men in Love: Masculinity and Sexuality in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 114

¹¹⁵ On the subject McCarthy states: “The deprecation of his sexual self seems a deliberate denial of his interest in women”: B. Eugene McCarthy, *Thomas Gray: The Progress of a Poet* (London: Associated University Press, 1997), p. 156.

¹¹⁶ Robert L. Mack, *Thomas Gray: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000) p. 32.

relationships of any kind.”¹¹⁷ Yet to presume a sexual preference for men on the basis of an aversion to women harkens back to ‘The Women-Hater’s Lamentation’ (a tradition now three centuries old).

As queer theorist George E. Haggerty notes: “Late twentieth-century assumptions about ‘sexuality’ – that it defines an individual, that it can or should be hidden, that its repression breeds anger, that it creates a subculture – hinder the clarity of many attempts [to understand eighteenth-century] figures and their emotions and desires.”¹¹⁸ Though the new sexual codifications will have impacted upon Gray, the poet frequently rejects the notion of sexual acts providing identity and therefore his generally-accepted status as ‘homosexual’ is called into question. In fact as a result of the changes in society and the influence of those around him we see a conflict in Gray which will be examined throughout this chapter: that between West and his desire for Aristotelian romantic love and Walpole, with his deviant erotic affections. The shift toward a concept of homosexuality happened over the poet’s own lifetime, and as such mourning and philos overlapped comedy and eros in his written works. In Gray we see a conflict between a queer desire for romantic friendship, and for sexual love. I suggest that his aversion to marriage and his homosociality – common to all of Gray’s works – are more important than his sexual activities. They formed an essential part of his public literary persona.

¹¹⁷ Mack, *Thomas Gray: A Life*, p. 25. Mack explicitly refuses to use the term 'queer', but does not give a reason why: Mack, *Thomas Gray: A Life*, p. 38. Considering the contentions around the word in our own era there are numerous plausible motivations for this.

¹¹⁸ Haggerty also takes a queer perspective to Horace Walpole, which will be examined in greater detail: George E. Haggerty, ‘Queering Horace Walpole’, *SEL*, 46 (2006), 543-562 (p. 544). In stark contrast, Robert L. Mack’s modern presumptions about Gray extend even to Gray’s melancholic nature: “But let’s not beat about the bush: Gray’s chronic depression – his so-called ‘melancholia’ – was itself surely an incidental symptom of his response to the perception of his own sexual impulse.” This implies that melancholia is a somehow invalid or imaginary mindset covering ‘chronic depression’ brought about by sexual denial, and ignores eighteenth-century culture and ideologies almost entirely: Mack, *Thomas Gray: A Life*, p. 34.

Gray spent his life during a period of great social change. As a child Gray witnessed the newfound public hysteria over sodomy, the triumph of affectionate marriage and the severe decline of intimate same-sex relationships. The impact of sexuality was to come even closer to home as Gray experienced adolescence, when scandals involving sodomy hit boarding schools as Gray was attending - and residing at - Eton. As Hitchcock describes, even the year before the poet was born same-sex colleges and schools had a reputation for sodomy, as Dudley Ryder wrote in 1715: “... it is dangerous sending a young man that is beautiful to Oxford.”¹¹⁹ Peakman details a number of these scandals, many of which involved teachers indulging in pederastic behaviour with pre-pubescent schoolchildren (the distinction we have now between homosexuality and paedophilia was absent, as were the categories themselves).¹²⁰ Later in his life an associate of Gray's was involved in one such scandal.¹²¹

The anti-sodomite tract ‘Plain Reasons for the Growth of Sodomy’ (1731) likewise blamed the manner in which boys were educated for the deviant behaviour of

¹¹⁹ Hitchcock references the reputation of schools amongst a number of same-sex institutions which had garnered a similar reputation, such as the Navy – another example of the new associations which surrounded homosocial bonding: Hitchcock, *English Sexualities*, p. 64. Mary Wollstonecraft also blamed single-sex education for the growth of deviant sexual practices, as we shall see in the third chapter to this thesis.

¹²⁰ In May of 1730 a teacher, Isaac Broderick was accused of attempting sodomy on two of his young pupils at St. Dunstan's School in Stepney. One of the students described Broderick's advances: “He presently followed and locked me into the room, and took a bit of Rod and bid me down with my Breeches”: Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies*, p. 159. Though the school was not of the calibre of Eton and was established as a charitable institution to help the poor, the social impact on the perception of schools was widespread. Closer to Gray's class, Peakman also details an instance in 1739 (by which time Gray was a young man) in which a teacher in Wadham College, Oxford, named Robert Thistlethwayte, spurred ‘one of the most notorious cases of sodomy of the period’. Thistlethwayte attempted sexual relations with numerous young students and staff and even inspired a poem: p. 160. Peakman goes on to describe further instances in schools in later decades. Hitchcock also references the famous instance at Wadham college: *English Sexualties*, p.64.

¹²¹ Ketton-Cremer states that the scandalised figure (Tuthill) lived on ‘in exile and disgrace’, though Gray financially supported him: R. W. Ketton-Cremer, *Thomas Gray: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), p.148.

grown men. The tract indulges in the conservative tendency to glorify and mythologize the past, presenting the hypothetical student of yesteryear:

I would not from this have my little Hero esteem'd a Bully; no, his Learning temper'd his Passions; [he was] familiarized to Temperance and Exercise, he was no Valetudinarian in his Constitution, but a Stranger to Debauch; and as he grew to riper Years, where the virtuous Object of his first Wishes crown'd his virtuous Love, there, in the Flower of his Health, and Vigour of his Youth, stamp'd he his Maker's Image: Behold our School-Boy now become a Father, blest with an endearing Wife, and a dutiful, beautiful Off-spring; his Love and Care for them, now makes him ready to pursue whatever State of Life Heaven has allotted him, his Abilities of Mind and Body, render him capable of serving his King, his Country, and his Family: His Application to Business keeps him from Debauch, and his Success so spurs him on, that he soon sees a fine Provision made for himself and Family; and his (perhaps small) Patrimony amply augmented: this shews the Advantages of a proper Education; I am sorry to say an old fashioned One.¹²²

This single paragraph demonstrates a number of social concerns of the time: the author emphasises the importance of a robust constitution (and thereby a lack of effeminacy) immediately before stating that the hypothetical student was therefore 'a stranger to debauch' – effeminacy being tied to deviancy (another covert critique of aristocracy). The second reference to 'debauchery' is bound to the application of business: middle-class activities are suggested to limit deviancy. Finally, the repeated references to 'virtuous Love', 'family', 'wives' and 'offspring' present an opposite scenario to the single-sex environment. At no point is friendship listed amongst these virtues.

'Plain Reasons for the Growth of Sodomy' then details the opposite figure, one of sin and vice, one born of a modern education. He is ruined by feminine influence, lack of Latin and tea-drinking. He is entirely effeminate, playing with dolls and possessing a weak constitution. Most importantly, his effeminacy renders him entirely unsuitable for marriage: "When our young Gentleman arrives to Marriage; I

¹²² Rictor Norton ed., 'Reasons for the Growth of Sodomy, 1731', *Homosexuality in Eighteenth-Century England: A Sourcebook* (14th April 2000; updated 4th March 2007) <<http://www.rictornorton.co.uk/eighteen/1731grow.htm>> [accessed 15th April 2009].

wish I could say fit for it, what can be expected from such an enervated effeminate Animal? What Satisfaction can a Woman have in the Embraces of this Figure of a Man?"¹²³ It is worth noting that even this 'Animal' is expected to marry. However, the tract specifically singles out Eton as still possessing a "manly spirit", stating: "A Milksop there, is like an Owl among the Birds". Perhaps this explains the poet's being singled out for the nickname: "Miss Gray".

Yet despite the widespread social concerns surrounding male relationships in same-sex schooling environments, it was whilst attending Eton College that Gray was to establish his firmest friendships: a group self-styled as the 'Quadruple Alliance' (a name which implies a defensive grouping against attack), which consisted of Thomas Ashton, Horace Walpole and Richard West. Though Ashton was never to achieve any real emotional significance in Gray's life, in these next two sections we shall be examining the survival and significance of two friendships: one directed toward Horace Walpole, the other Richard West.¹²⁴

Robert F. Gleckner's *Gray Agonistes* is the most authoritative source on Gray's emotional ties to West and the literary output those ties spurred. From the very outset of *Gray Agonistes* Gleckner underlines the importance of West and in inspiring Gray to become a poet in the first place, with much of his poetical style being borrowed from his friend (Gleckner, p. 5). Gleckner makes clear the controversies which could take place were the two too open in their expressions of love, and suggests that Gray escaped into a Miltonic space in which to express

¹²³ 'Reasons for the Growth of Sodomy, 1731'. Reasons beyond education the author gives for the spread of sodomy are: dress and effeminate manners, the influence of Italian culture (particularly Opera) and a lack of social prudery.

¹²⁴ Ashton is not entirely irrelevant, however, and as we shall see Gray at times sends him rather important letters in which he expresses himself with intense emotion, even if it is not directed at the recipient of the letters himself. Gleckner posits that this may not have been due to a lack of affection from Ashton, who often ended his letters with short declarations of love: Gleckner, *Gray Agonistes*, p. 51. The relationship would appear somewhat one-sided.

himself: "... to love another man in an age when ostracism and possibly severe legal punishment could result from public discover and exposure, and to *write* of that relationship would be to court personal infamy, not merely poetic or personal failure. Only in the 'blooming Eden' that Milton dared to imagine and explore could Gray's transgressive love be both possible and guiltless" (Gleckner, p. 6). Matthew Curr concurs: "The sense of otherness, of literature and writing as an escape from a world that seemed so alien and hostile in its gender prescriptions and expectations, is common to Milton and Gray."¹²⁵

In this study I suggest a different motivation on the part of the poet: rather than using poetry as an escape, in using elegy Gray mourns the passing of the ideal of male friendship as the highest form of emotion, one untainted by materialism and procreation. It is also important to note that Gleckner, contrary to the queer perspective taken in this thesis, presumes the relationship between Gray and West to have contained a sexual component (and is one of the scholars who asserts Gray to have been fully 'homosexual'). In this chapter we will examine both Gray's poetry and his letters, exploring how for his friend West, he devoted himself to the ideal of romantic friendship – to a type of love the Greeks identified as 'philos'.¹²⁶

Letters between Gray and West

Very little still exists which was written by Gray during his time at Eton, but as an adult Gray sent several letters to West, proclaiming his affection for the friend

¹²⁵ Curr, *The Consolation of Otherness*, p. 47. He suggests there to have been several personal similarities between Milton and Gray: "Not surprisingly, Milton and Gray sought out particularly treasured friendships with men who were cheerful, kind, confident and more securely mature than themselves.": p. 49. Curr goes into more detail on Gray's escape into his own Miltonic allusions further into the text: p. 58.

¹²⁶ As explained in the introduction to this thesis.

of his youth, as well as demonstrating his attachment to romantic friendship itself.¹²⁷

Matthew Curr stresses the importance of friendship to Gray's emotional state: "All through his life Gray longed for the secure amity that is founded in love and unquestioning intimacy. He longed for the fraternal union he once, so briefly, enjoyed as a boy and a young man."¹²⁸ The first correspondence we see between the two men is in November of 1735, when West writes to Gray expressing his displeasure at Gray's neglect, suggesting 'you use me very cruelly'.¹²⁹ Gleckner references the letter as an example of the intensity of feeling that existed in the relationship, revealing a 'moving woundedness' (Gleckner, p. 44). Though he says little more on this particular letter, the fact that Gray has the capacity to use West 'cruelly' suggests a certain degree of emotional power on his part. This is the first of many letters in which West demands an equal response from Gray, both in frequency of contact and the intimacy displayed.¹³⁰

Gray's response was designed to placate the anxieties which were articulated by his friend:

PERMIT me again to write to you, though I have so long neglected my duty, and forgive my brevity, when I tell you it is occasioned wholly by the hurry I am in to get to a place where I expect to meet with no other pleasure than the sight of you; for I am preparing for London in a few days at furthest. I do not wonder in the least at your frequent blaming my indolence, it ought rather to be called ingratitude, and I am obliged to your goodness for softening so harsh

¹²⁷ Gleckner notes that only a single letter from Gray's schooldays still remains from his days at Eton: Gleckner, *Gray Agonistes*, p. 11. In the extensive Toynbee collection the letters begin in the year 1734, when Gray was seventeen, Gleckner asserts the affection between Gray and West was largely encoded, yet as I hope to demonstrate, the two conveyed a wealth of affection which was expressed openly. Gleckner notes the importance of these letters: "Often as artfully crafted as his poetry, Gray's letters to West, and often West's letters to Gray, bespeak a friendship that in its passionate intensity went beyond the epistolary language of male friendship common in eighteenth-century England": p. 42.

¹²⁸ Curr, *The Consolation of Otherness*, p. 53.

¹²⁹ West states: "You use me very cruelly: You have sent me but one letter since I have been at Oxford, and that too agreeable not to make me sensible of how great my loss is in not having more ... Next to seeing you is the pleasure of seeing your handwriting; next to hearing you is the pleasure of hearing from you. Really and sincerely I wonder at you, that you thought it not worth while to answer my last letter": *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, I, p. 33 (West to Gray, Christ Church, November 14th, 1735).

¹³⁰ Equality, of course, being one of the central features of Aristotelian friendship: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 293.

an appellation ... However, as the most undeserving people in the world must sure have the vanity to wish somebody had a regard for them, so I need not wonder at my own, in being pleased that you care about me. You need not doubt, therefore, of having a first row in the front box of my little heart, and I believe you are not in danger of being crowded [sic] there; it is asking you to an old play, indeed, but you will be candid enough to excuse the whole piece for the sake of a few tolerable lines.¹³¹

Gleckner suggests Gray's response to be a 'studied evasion' of West's open concern, utilising far more guarded language than West himself has been prepared to adopt.¹³² However, there are several areas of this letter which require a closer reading, and this correspondence needs to be analysed as a work in its own right. Firstly, Gray's use of the word 'duty' in writing which perpetuates the friendship suggests a moral imperative. 'Duty' is deliberately contrasted by 'pleasure', however, created by his friend's physical presence. Already within the first two lines we see the poet present both a sober dedication to friendship and the pleasure which results from such a bond. A few lines later and the language shifts to become more self-effacing – use of the terms 'indolence', 'ingratitude' and 'appellation' regarding the author set a hyperbolic moralising tone which is distanced and perhaps ironic. Whereas earlier the term 'pleasure' was applied to the recipient of the letter, now the poet uses the terms 'goodness' and 'softening', terms far more flattering than the ones he applied to himself. Gray plays on the anticipation of his seeing West and the prospect of intimacy: here the written word ('a few tolerable lines') substitutes physical presence.

In the final section of the letter the humble tone shifts to one far more grandiose, and Gray uses the language of the theatre as an allusion to his own life and emotional bearings. It is in this context that Gray makes his most open declaration of affection, suggesting West to have a primary (though not necessarily exclusive) place in his heart. Despite the use of metaphor the statement is undisguised and rendered

¹³¹ *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, I, p. 34 (Gray to West, December 20th, 1735).

¹³² Gleckner, *Gray Agonistes*, p. 45. Gleckner briefly posits that these lines could amount to parody or double-entendre, but suggests that it is not possible to say from this single instance.

yet more powerful by the phrase immediately following, that there are few who have attained such a position. The humbled sentiment returns by the end as Gray chastises his 'old play', yet Gray suggests their attachment to be emotionally worthwhile for those brief moments of affection: 'a few tolerable lines'. The theatrical metaphor suggests an intention to set a public stage for his emotions which would later manifest in his poetry – yet with West as its true audience. We can see his dedication to the form of love they share, his own benefits from the relationship, his passion toward the attachment and the relative rarity of such a bond in his life. The poet himself barely seems to compare to the subject of his adoration, and the language – though somewhat hyperbolic – is used earnestly and without sarcasm.¹³³

This is not to say the two always communicated openly, and Gleckner makes a careful note of instances in which the two communicate with one another in Latin, though their exclamations are usually either similar to the sentiments expressed in English or somewhat enigmatic.¹³⁴ The two also shared a considerable interest in Roman poetry during the reign of Caesar Augustus, especially genres such as elegies and verse epistles, used to express male friendship.¹³⁵ Crucially, one poem from West

¹³³ Again as we shall see, this is in contrast to the letters between Gray and Horace Walpole, where sarcasm is used to a significant extent.

¹³⁴ One such statement is noted by Gleckner in a letter between the two dated 22nd December 1736, in which West closes with 'Speak it forth, hide it not in thy mind, that we both may know it'. Though Gleckner uses such statements to suggest the possibility of a sexual dimension to their relationship the very fact that same-sex devotion was taboo whether it was platonic or otherwise means we cannot know either way: Gray would be likely to be reticent in either circumstance. Gleckner suggests many of the letters to be 'homoerotic', though none of the language utilised between Gray and West steps outside the boundaries of intimate friendship, nor does Gray at any point compare his friendship with West to the (sexual) love between men and women – unlike his letters to Walpole, which we shall examine in the next section of this chapter.

¹³⁵ Gleckner goes into some detail on the Latin poetry passed between West and Gray. The two were fascinated with the poet Tibillus, who famously wrote elegies to another man, yet Gleckner posits that there was more to their fascination: "For Tibillus set his elegies in the context of his dreams of an idealized past without conflicts of ills, and equally often in the context of the threatening imminence of death.": *Gray Agonistes*, p. 58. Like the poet Anna Seward (in the second chapter to this thesis) West translated the Odes of the Roman poet Horace, though Gleckner notes that they were destroyed by Mason in his brutal editing process: p. 47. Though Aristotelian friendship as we know it was in decline by the reign of Caesar Augustus, the time period on which both West and Gray fixate, friendship was talked of highly and with some frequency. Caesar Augustus himself made a great deal of his friendships with those around him, most notably Agrippa and Mycaenas: Anthony Everitt, *The First*

to Gray, a translation of Catallus, laments the influence of a hostile society – obviously of some relevance to the two living so many centuries later (Gleckner, p. 110).

Despite their Latin effusions, in a letter from September 1740 Gray expresses himself openly once more, again toward the end of the communication:

... be assured, that your future state is to me entirely indifferent. Do not be angry, but hear me; I mean with respect to myself. For whether you be at the top of Fame, or entirely unknown to mankind; at the Council-table, or at Dick's coffee-house; sick and simple, or well and wise; whatever alteration mere accident works in you, (supposing it utterly impossible for it to make any change in your sincerity and honesty, since these are conditions *sine quâ non*) I do not see the likelihood of my not being yours ever.¹³⁶

Here we see Aristotelian 'philos' expressed clearly. Gray (again openly) remarks that he loves West for his virtue (which he explicitly states to be 'sincerity' and 'honesty') – without a regard for which their relationship could not function (Aristotle, p. 283). He goes to great pains to emphasise the lack of importance to West's condition beyond virtue – even his intellectual merits are unimportant compared to them. The extensive use of repetition is a rhetorical exercise designed to demonstrate the depth of his affection, and his reversal in the third part of the pattern (which goes good-bad; good-bad; bad-good) further suggests any condition to be arbitrary in the fact of virtue. Gray then goes on to make a powerful and overt declaration of eternal love,

Emperor: Caesar Augustus and the Triumph of Rome (London: John Murray, 2006), p. 219. Despite providing the most detail on the subject, Gleckner was obviously not the first to comment on the use of Latin by Gray and West, and Foladare makes some note of their expressions in the ancient language in his 1960 article: Foladare, 'Gray's "Frail Memorial" to West', p. 64. The non-Christian (or rather pre-Christian) elements of Gray's work have been noted by both Raymond Bentman: Bentman, 'Thomas Gray and the Poetry of "Hopeless Love"', p. 216, and McCarthy: McCarthy, *Thomas Gray*, p. 57. Suvir Kaul also examines the use of classical themes: Suvir Kaul, *Thomas Gray and Literary Authority: Ideology and Poetics in Eighteenth-Century England* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992) p. 56. In a manuscript from the British Library archives we also bear witness to Gray's intimate knowledge of ancient Greek culture: religion, drama and even cookery: Department of Manuscripts, The British Library, MS. 36817. The imagery of Mediterranean polytheism, however, was far from uncommon in eighteenth-century poetry (as we shall see with the poet Anna Seward).

¹³⁶ *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, I, p. 178 (Gray to West, Florence, September 25th, 1740).

suggesting that he will be West's forever – a bold and open statement which is not confined to what Curr suggests to be the idealised pages of elegiac poetry.

Few letters between Gray and West survive (which Gleckner firmly blames Mason for, as editor of Gray's letters following his death).¹³⁷ Yet the two continued in (sometimes wavering) affection to one another until West's premature death on June 1st 1742. Gray remained unaware, having not been notified, and wrote a letter on the 3rd, which is unfortunately missing – though the Tonybee collection notes that it 'almost certainly' contained 'Ode on the Spring', which finds its way into Mason's collection.¹³⁸ West was never to receive Gray's work. In one of the most emotionally brutal moments of his life, Gray learned of West's death via his obituary. Gray was furious and in a great deal of pain, which is evident in a letter to Ashton on the 17th:

This melancholy day is the first that I have had any notice of my Loss in poor West, and that only by so unexpected a Means as some Verses publishd in a Newspaper (they are fine & true & I believe may be your own). I had indeed some reason to suspect it some days since from receiving a letter of my own to him sent back unopen'd. The stupid People had put it no Cover, nor thought it worth while to write one Line to inform me of the reason, tho' by knowing how to direct, they must imagine I was his friend. I am a fool indeed to be surprizd at meeting with Brutishness or want of Thought among Mankind ...

¹³⁷ Regarding the destruction of Gray's letters by Mason, Gleckner presents the latter as a villain guilty of a 'holocaust': "Even more devastating ... are the countless instances of Mason's seeing to it that original letters sent to him were destroyed, urging others (like Walpole) to join him in the holocaust, and levying righteous indignation on those (like Thomas Wharton) who did not burn Gray's letters to them as Mason had instructed.": *Gray Agonistes*, p. 46. Examples of similar sentiments pertaining to other letters, Gray again emphasises the importance of honesty as a virtue in a letter to West in April of 1741: *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, I, p. 181 (Gray to West, Florence, April 21st, 1741). In relation to Mason's editing practices, whilst Gleckner posits the motivation to have been the preservation of Gray's reputation, I would suggest a desire to present himself as Gray's closest (or one of his closest) friend to have been the cause. His editing was not limited to correspondence between Gray and West; the Toynbee collection notes that many of the original letters to his friend Bedingfield have been marked as 'printed' by Mason – despite the fact that they were actually omitted: *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, II, p. 490. It would appear that Mason hereby avoided their publication, marking them incorrectly in an apparent attempt to mislead anyone else from publishing them themselves. Mason also did his best to purge any records of Gray's friendship with Chute, p. 482. He did not, however, hide letters which demonstrated intimacy between Gray and himself. Finding an opportunity to edit the past and forge new interpretations of Gray's life, he leapt at the chance to downplay the role of other important friends in Gray's world, thereby elevating his own status. No letters of feeling which addressed him appear to have found themselves on the editing floor (or more accurately, in his fireplace). Whether his motivation was personal or professional (or both) is ultimately unclear.

¹³⁸ 'Ode on the Spring', which forms a poetical response an to ode sent to Gray by West, will be analysed in greater detail later in this chapter.

neither my Misfortune, nor my joy shall detain you longer at a time, when doubtless you are a good deal employed; only believe me sincerely yours.¹³⁹

Though the letter opens with melancholic sentiment, it quickly shifts into anger and the language alters accordingly. This loss is one both of West as an individual and the frustrated loss of an ideal – both circumstances Freud suggests prompt the act of mourning.¹⁴⁰ This unhappy condition grants the letter a far darker sentiment than those sent by him previously, and in a fit of misanthropy he issues sweeping statements that cover the bulk of 'mankind', presenting the masses as thoughtless and brutish. Gray's status is one which is frustrated and marginalised and in this letter he responds with outrage. Despite their closeness and the fact that West devoted himself so completely to Gray, his death forced the poet to humiliatingly beg for details, having found out about it two weeks after the event itself. Interestingly he chooses not to overburden Ashton with his own melancholy, perhaps obeying Aristotle's rules concerning grief and friendship.¹⁴¹ Despite the death of his friend, Gray's devotion to romantic friendship would live on in the poetry where he preserved his memory of it.

Gray's Queer Poetry on West

It was through his poetry – up to and following the death of West – that Gray's clearest statements against sexuality emerge and it is through his poetry that Gray makes a queer stand for friendship. 'Ode on the Spring', the poem included in Gray's final letter to West, presents us with a firm dedication to platonic love. As Gleckner points out, it was a response to a poem West had sent Gray some years earlier ('Ad

¹³⁹ *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, I, p. 213 (Gray to Ashton, Stoke, June 17th, 1742).

¹⁴⁰ Examined in the introduction to this thesis and described by Freud in the fourteenth volume to his works: Freud, *Complete Works*, XIV, p. 243.

¹⁴¹ Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, p. 314. Despite Gray's reputation for effeminacy he fails to succumb to a vice Aristotle perceived befell effeminate men.

Amicos') and uses much of the same language.¹⁴² Gleckner suggests Gray's poetic voice to be formed by West's: "... Gray's ode almost pointedly plays off of West's prophetic *Ad Amicos*, written almost five years earlier, by means of a cluster of allusions that clothe his own ode with the aura of West's depressingly self-elegiac thrust."¹⁴³ Here I wish to examine how, despite the insecurities toward his own poetic abilities which caused him to imitate West, Gray's own voice comes through clearly, calling for a form of love which had become unpopular in his own time.

As his letters and Gleckner's account maintain, Gray was disdainful toward his own abilities as a poet when he penned 'Ode on the Spring' and it is highly likely it was intended for West's eyes only. The work itself is made up of four sections, each containing the same unusual rhyming pattern. The poem (originally titled 'Noon-tide', suggesting youth) begins with a description:

LO! where the rosy-bloom'd Hours,
Fair VENUS' train appear,
Disclose the long-expecting flowers,
And wake the purple year!
The Attic warbler pours her throat,
Responsive to the cuckoo's note,
The untaught harmony of spring:
While whisp'ring pleasure as they fly,
Cool Zephys thro' the clear blue sky
Their gather'd fragrance fling.¹⁴⁴

The romanticised imagery of spring is evoked to its fullest potential, setting the scene for the rest of the poem as an idealistic portrayal. As well as the direct reference to

¹⁴² Gleckner analyses 'Ad Amicos' in full: Gleckner, *Gray Agonistes*, pp. 61-68.

¹⁴³ Gleckner, *Gray Agonistes*, p. 115. In the collection of letters Toynbee suggests 'Ode on the Spring' to also be a response to an Ode West sent Gray in May of 1742: *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, I, p. 201. This is also suggested by Wallace Jackson: Wallace Jackson, 'Thomas Gray and the Dedicatory Muse', *ELH*, 54 (1987), 277-298 (p. 279). McCarthy also comments on the utilisation of West's poetical language by Gray in his own works (as well as making the common suggestion that Gray retreated into an imaginary or literary place of safety): "Though obviously the better poet Gray took West seriously enough to borrow themes and phrases from his poems. Thus West had an important influence on Gray's actual verse, as well as his sense of himself as a poet. Out of this artistic congruity, there also grew a psychological relationship, which ran Gray into unhealthy impulses to flee reality, which required strenuous efforts to overcome.": McCarthy, *Thomas Gray*, p. 156.

¹⁴⁴ Thomas Gray, *The Works of Thomas Gray Containing the Poems with Critical Notes; A Life of the Author; and an Essay on his Poetry*, ed. by John Milford (London: J. Mawman, 1816) I, p. 1.

'harmony', such peaceful ideals are portrayed through the cooperation of the attic warbler and the cuckoo – an entirely natural friendship. The nightingale and the cuckoo form a self-effacing allusion by Gray to both he and West as poets. In only the second line Venus, Roman goddess of love and friendship, is evoked, another indication of the theme of the rest of the ode.

Though the poem begins with traditional and optimistic images of springtime, it quickly moves onwards to the pastoral separation of the poet from society:

Where'er the oak's thick branches stretch
A broader browner shade;
Where'er the rude and moss-grown beech
O'er-canopies the glade,
Besides some water's rushy brink
With me the Muse shall sit, and think
(At ease reclin'd in rustic state)
How vain the ardour of the Crowd,
How low, how little are the Proud,
How indigent the Great!¹⁴⁵

The rhyming pattern of this section varies considerably, with the simple yet loose structure of the first four lines moving into the couplet of 'brink' and 'think', before entering the different pattern of the final four. Due to the repetition of this formula the structure feels varied yet consistent rather than wild or unpredictable, giving a sense of dependability. Firstly Gray introduces natural elements, invoking the images of rivers and forests, before shifting to the internal thought processes of the narrator, who, with his 'Muse', ruminates on the state of humanity. Nature here is tied to philosophy, and it is only by the rush-fringed river that the poet can articulate his own viewpoints. This is not any particular natural area but an area separated from the heat and light of society, with the shade representing the poet's contemplative mind. The rural and pastoral ideal of friendship is also utilised, a stark contrast to the vain

¹⁴⁵ *The Works of Thomas Gray*, I, p. 1.

‘crowd’ which would be largely confined to urban areas and represent the masses and society at large.

The ode continues:

Still is the toiling hand of Care:
 The panting herds repose:
 Yet hark, how thro’ the peopled air
 The busy murmur glows!
 The insect youth are on the wing,
 Eager to use the honied spring,
 And float amid the languid noon:
 Some lightly o’er the current skim,
 Some shew their gaily-gilded trim
 Quick-glancing to the sun.

To Contemplation’s sober eye
 Such is the race of Man:
 And they that creep, and they that fly,
 Shall end where they began.
 Alike the Busy and the Gay
 But flutter thro’ life’s little day,
 In fortune’s varying colours drest:
 Brush’d by the hand of rough mischance,
 Or chill’d by Age, their airy dance
 They leave, in dust to rest.¹⁴⁶

Once again the toiling masses are invoked through reference to ‘the peopled air’, with the dual references to mass activity and the calm of solitude in competition with one another. Humanity is once again compared to elements of nature, with the fertility of young insects being quietly compared to the expectations of fertility on young men. Youth is associated with lightness, as the poet introduces words such as ‘float’, ‘languid’ and ‘lightly’ to convey the animalistic simplicity of life for the majority, who find themselves able to indulge in mainstream milestones such as marriage and procreation. Once again this lies in sharp contrast to the lonely philosopher, and in this section a gentle sense of envy is hinted (this interpretation is shared by Wallace

¹⁴⁶ *The Works of Thomas Gray*, I, p. 2.

Jackson).¹⁴⁷ The visual and superficial aspects of physical attraction are compared to mindless creatures displaying their ‘gaily-gilded trims’. In this stanza we see Gray’s quiet yet firm criticism of sexuality, reducing the majority to the level of insects.¹⁴⁸

In the next section Gray confirms that the insects were an allegory for mankind, as is visible to those who are able to take the time to contemplate such things (again a reference to the lonely philosopher). The futility of mass reproduction cries out, when such thoughtless and languid lifestyles ‘shall end where they began’. Sobriety is compared to gaiety, with the poet clearly identifying more greatly with the former, though he does not indicate that it is any more successful a method of cheating death. A morbid tone prevails here, as whether dying young through disease or accident (‘brush’d by the hand of rough mischance’) or by simple old age the outcome is exactly the same. All hurried activity, the poet suggests, is ultimately in vain: still contemplation is all the poet has to offer (which, by implication rejects Christian notions of the afterlife).

The ruminations of the poem are completed by:

Methinks I hear in accents low
 The sportive kind reply:
 Poor moralist! and what art thou?
 A solitary fly!
 Thy joys no glittering female meets,
 No hive hast thou of hoarded sweets,
 No painted plumage to display:
 On hasty wings thy youth is flown;
 Thy sun is set, thy spring is gone –
 We frolic, while ‘tis May.¹⁴⁹

Dr. Samuel Johnson’s late eighteenth-century account of Gray’s life and works is disdainful toward ‘Ode on the Spring’, particularly toward the ending: “The morality

¹⁴⁷ Jackson, however, only alludes to it briefly and not as a wider aspect of Gray’s identity: Jackson, ‘Thomas Gray and the Dedicatory Muse’, p. 281.

¹⁴⁸ Raymond Bentman briefly references the allusions to Gray’s refusal to form attachments with women as presented in this poem, yet goes no further with regards to the ode than suggesting ‘difficulties’: Bentman, ‘Thomas Gray ad the Poetry of “Hopeless Love”’, p. 208.

¹⁴⁹ *The Works of Thomas Gray*, I, p. 3.

is natural, but too stale; the conclusion is pretty".¹⁵⁰ Johnson's (unsurprisingly conservative) account appears to negate the poem's central non-conformist stance and his assertion that the final few lines are 'pretty' would seem to miss the darker message behind the natural imagery.

The poem provides further critique toward the masses: again the attitude of the youthful majority is imagined by Gray, 'the sportive kind reply', this time in direct relation to his own circumstances as philosopher ('moralist'). Gray places the voice of the majority into the ode, who see him as alone as he has no spouse ('glittering female' once again brings to mind the imagery of mindless insects). Gray laments the loss of his youth but the usual rituals for young men of finding a mate are to him morally pointless. The reference to May at the very end directly echoes West's ode from May of 1742.¹⁵¹ Wallace Jackson, writing in 1987, noted that the poem is in an elegiac form, suggesting that Gray felt it appropriate to write his friend elegies, even before his death.¹⁵² His rebellion against social norms was not a joyous or life-affirming choice for Gray, but something more akin to an affliction – one which certainly merited elegy. The poet presents a sorrowful voice at the loss of a youth he never truly experienced nor even wanted, and devotes an elegy to his loss at being on the outside of sexuality. The poem directly contradicts the assertion made in a sermon on marriage by Jeremy Taylor (the same Jeremy Taylor referenced by Shaftesbury) which was compared to this ode in a letter to Gray from Mason.¹⁵³ Taylor compared the *unmarried* to insects: Gray's reversal of such a theme being a queer subversion of this imagery. He relates thinkers to the stance of being a poet-detached, in the shade and at the margins of society.

¹⁵⁰ Samuel Johnson, *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets with Critical Observations on Their Works*, 3 vols. (London: Nichols and Son, 1801), III, p. 372.

¹⁵¹ *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, I, p. 201.

¹⁵² Jackson, 'Thomas Gray and the Dedicatory Muse', p. 279.

¹⁵³ *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, II, p. 717 (Mason to Gray, January 8th 1761).

Another work written that same summer was ‘Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College’ (1742). As Gleckner points out, this poem is as well-studied as the ‘Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard’ (Gleckner, p. 134). He notes that the poem shows Gray’s obsession with the past and lack of hope for the future: “... *Eton College* elegiacally rather than merely nostalgically, remarkably conflates place, time, and love as, in its rapidly receding distance, emblematic of an empty, dark present solaced, if at all, only by memory.”¹⁵⁴ Bentman concurs, interpreting the poem as sketching out Gray’s own ‘emotional prison’, whilst Jackson once again points to the elegiac nature of the work, stating that it conflates ‘desire’ and ‘loss’.¹⁵⁵ In the poem Gray once more laments the loss of youth, but here he is referring to his specifically biographical experiences, those of the friendships he formed whilst at Eton College, and the relative protection that the educational establishment offered to close male relationships, in spite of the controversies surrounding them and the climate of disapproval they would encounter in adulthood. The melancholic and decidedly negative tone once more demonstrates Gray’s discomforts surrounding friendship and his difficulties and regrets toward his own social orientation. Once more the theory that Gray retreats into his poetry is evoked, this time by Haggerty, who suggests that any deviant love is neutralised by the elegiac form – a dead lover poses no social threat.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Gleckner, *Gray Agonistes*, p. 135. Gleckner also points out the fact that the ode is inspired by another of West’s poems, titled ‘Ode to Mary Magdalene’, as well as echoing West’s ‘Ad Amicos’: “... Gray in effect made the Eton College Ode his *Ad Amicos*, a canny and moving transformation of West’s self-elegy on his imagined death into a ‘real’ elegy on its devastating realization”: p. 139.

¹⁵⁵ Bentman suggests that this ‘emotional prison’ is a result of a loss of freedom: “It is the expression of the bitter agony felt by a man who is still young – twenty-six – but who can only look at the place where he once felt free, and who now is condemned to an emotional prison.”: ‘Thomas Gray and the Poetry of “Hopeless Love”’, p. 215. Jackson suggests that ‘absence is elegiac presence’ ‘Thomas Gray and the Dedicatory Muse’, p. 282. Jackson, as with most scholars, suggests the love between West and Gray to have contained a sexual dimension which the poet ‘castrates’ via elegy, a viewpoint I hope to challenge in this thesis: p. 285.

¹⁵⁶ Haggerty does not interpret the poem to be wholly negative, however, suggesting that it represents both fulfilled and frustrated desire: Haggerty, *Men in Love*, p. 120.

The last stanza of the poem, however, shifts away from youth and moves into the present:

To each his sufferings: all are men,
 Condemn'd alike to groan—
 The tender for another's pain,
 Th' unfeeling for his own.
 Yet, ah! why should they know their fate,
 Since sorrow never comes too late,
 And happiness too swiftly flies?
 Thought would destroy their Paradise.
 No more;—where ignorance is bliss,
 'Tis folly to be wise.¹⁵⁷

Reference to death is unsurprising considering the current circumstances in Gray's life. The poet's famous melancholy hits the poem with some force, and the first half of the stanza is devoted to suffering, with the first four end rhymes forming the most brutal associations: 'men', 'groan', 'pain' and 'own'. The 'paradise' of the past is only possible whilst experiencing a youth sequestered in education, before one is expected to eye the 'glittering females' referenced in 'Ode on the Spring'. The 'Paradise' of Eton to which the poem is dedicated perhaps refers to a childhood before close friendship was viewed with suspicion and the poet himself was expected to devote himself to sexuality. The very fact that the memories of this idealised past cause such pain, however, suggest that the poet has not given up on such a prospect of platonic happiness – the poem is not limited to reflection, but is brought into the present by the sting of ever-present emotion. Friendship is far from consigned to the past, whatever difficulties the present may bring. Aside from presenting a personal reflection, however, here Gray's moralising is also universal: 'To each his sufferings: all are men'.

That same month Gray penned 'Sonnet on the Death of Mr Richard West', the sonnet a cry to 'him that cannot hear'. Bentman notes that Gray did not publish the

¹⁵⁷ *The Works of Thomas Gray*, I, p. 11.

poem in his own lifetime and did not show it to anyone – it is therefore one of the most private of his works:¹⁵⁸

In vain to me the smiling mornings shine,
 And redd'ning Phoebus lifts his golden fire:
 The birds in vain their amorous descant join;
 Or cheerful fields resume their green attire:
 These ears, alas! for other notes repine,
 A different object do these eyes require:
 My lonely anguish melts no heart but mine;
 And in my breast the imperfect joys expire.
 Yet morning smiles the busy race to cheer,
 And new-born pleasure brings to happier men:
 The fields to all their wonted tribute bear;
 To warm their little loves the birds complain:
 I fruitless mourn to him that cannot hear,
 And weep the more, because I weep in vain.¹⁵⁹

The poem conveys the warmth and fertility of life ('amorous' and 'fire') which was in contrast lacking in the existence of the poet. It begins and ends with 'in vain', giving the sonnet a circularity, trapping the authorial voice within his own grief. Yet in 1960 Joseph Foladare noted the considerable dislike of the poem by critics, from Wordsworth through to the twentieth century.¹⁶⁰ In his 1992 work, *Thomas Gray and Literary Authority*, Kuvir Saul notes the perishability of friendship in the sonnet.¹⁶¹ Saul finds the same dark nihilism as Gleckner, with West's death proving to be an end in Gray's life, upon which the poet can only ever look backwards, never forwards. Curr notices Gray's lament at being unable to marry, a condition which contrasts with

¹⁵⁸ Bentman suggests that Gray could trust his grief with no-one but the deceased West: "He mourns *to* the deceased (rather than *for* the deceased) because the distant, dead West 'that cannot hear' is the only one with whom he dare express his lament": Bentman, 'Thomas Gray and the Poetry of "Hopeless Love"', p. 216.

¹⁵⁹ *The Works of Thomas Gray*, I, p. 100.

¹⁶⁰ Specifically Foladare suggests that many have found the poem to be 'stilted' emotionally: 'Gray's "Frail Memorial" to West', p. 61. Kuvir Saul suggests that the poem has been widely regarded as very conventional: *Thomas Gray and Literary Authority*, p. 86.

¹⁶¹ Saul, *Thomas Gray and Literary Authority*, p. 94.

the imagery of nature.¹⁶² Haggerty takes a similar view of Gray's poetry from this period, suggesting that "Grief becomes the substitute for the friend ..." ¹⁶³

Haggerty argues that Gray's elegiac poetry was far from controversial, his stance actually protecting him: "Gray does not fear a system of cultural oppression that might expose him because he exposes himself as the melancholy figure of male-male desire. He does not have to create this position for himself, for culture is all too happy to provide it for him."¹⁶⁴ He reiterates the point in the touching 'Love and Loss: An Elegy'.¹⁶⁵ Put another way, Haggerty argues that these elegies function both as a dedication to West as well as a public promise never to transgress with the living.

I would disagree: if Gray did make such a promise, it was not one he intended to keep, as we saw from the very beginning of this chapter with Gray's opposition to marriage. Where Haggerty argues Gray found a retreat in the impotent figure of a lonely elegist Gleckner argues the poet retreated into the world of Milton. Though I make little argument regarding Gray's allusions to Milton, his elegiac poetry did not mark a retreat into a safe location: instead, Gray issued unashamed pronouncements on his beliefs, beliefs which were fundamentally incompatible with sexual marriage. Elegy itself may be an inherently paradoxical genre, but Gray utilises it to make a social stance which was part of his public persona as a poet. His place at the social margins is idealised and presented as morally superior.

¹⁶² Curr, *The Consolation of Otherness*, p. 60.

¹⁶³ Haggerty, *Men in Love*, p. 122.

¹⁶⁴ Haggerty, *Men in Love*, p. 126.

¹⁶⁵ The essay is devoted to Haggerty's own loss. On Gray and West he states: "The tears that Gray pours out as the tomb of his friend are the tears of sensibility that identify love and loss in modern culture. They are also the tears of unrealized and unrealizable desire, the tears of an accommodation that culture provides to those who feel.": George E. Haggerty, 'Love and Loss: An Elegy', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gray Studies*, 10 (2004), 385-405 (p. 397).

WALPOLE AND EROS

Through West Gray devoted himself to romantic friendship, to a form of love identified by the Greeks as 'philos'. In the main this love was open though with little in the way of an erotic component, as well as extremely infrequent use of sarcasm or double-entendre. Very little of this was true of his writings concerning Walpole. Through Walpole a different side of Gray emerged, one which, rather than being devoted to a queer form of friendship, expressed itself through sexuality: through his writings to Walpole we see Gray perform the sodomite. Considering his effeminacy, it is a role which will have almost been expected of him. Whilst the relationship between Gray and West was based in an Aristotelian equality, this was not true of the bond between himself and Walpole (this inequality is not missed by Dr. Johnson in his account of Gray).¹⁶⁶ The eros between the two was bound by different rules.

This is certainly not to suggest that Walpole himself was easily identifiable as a 'sodomite', as Haggerty's article 'Queering Horace Walpole' makes clear. Haggerty in fact suggests Gray to be the more erotically charged of the two men. The article, however, queers Walpole in a different manner to which this thesis queers Gray: he does not suggest Walpole to have been (mostly) outside the boundaries of sexuality; rather that as an individual his complexities are more readily made available without any preconceived notions as to his sexuality.¹⁶⁷ Haggerty focuses on Walpole again in *Queer Gothic* (2006), where he examines Walpole's gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), which boldly reveals the perverse nature of the family unit and

¹⁶⁶ Johnson even remarks that the inequality between the two was the reason for their eventual parting, stating: "... unequal friendships are easily dissolved ...": Johnson, *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets*, III, p. 364.

¹⁶⁷ Haggerty theorises that all aspects of Walpole's life are clearer using queer theory: "I think that if we approach these questions without a preconception that Walpole was identifiable by his sexuality, the complexity of the man will emerge more clearly.": Haggerty, 'Queering Horace Walpole', p. 544.

traditional marriage.¹⁶⁸ It is an irony that it was with an individual himself labelled 'queer' by Haggerty that Gray dropped his own queer role, adopting a newer and more easily identified social role. This is not altogether unsurprising, however, as Haggerty goes into some detail regarding Walpole's affected eroticism toward other men, which, though he provides little focus on the love between Walpole and Gray, will have provided a space in which Gray could express himself in an erotic fashion.¹⁶⁹

Gray's Erotic Letters

The letters between Gray and Walpole have been commented on for their erotic components by Raymond Bentman in his 1992 article 'Thomas Gray and the Poetry of "Hopeless Love"', where he suggests them to be 'love letters' which are indicative of Gray's 'sexual orientation'.¹⁷⁰ Mack notes the declarations present in their correspondence: 'His long letters to Walpole express not so much the delicate

¹⁶⁸ Lineage is central to the plot of the novel, where Conrad's death causes Manfred to attempt to fulfil his son's sexual obligations to his fiancée: 'In a simple and practical way, the loss of Conrad as a sexual agent leads Manfred on a sexual rampage that results in his brutal rejection of his wife Hippolita, the near-rape of his son's fiancée Isabella, and the grisly murder of his daughter Matilda, his one other hope for legitimacy': George E. Haggerty, *Queer Gothic* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), p. 22.

¹⁶⁹ Rather than focusing on the friendship with Gray, Haggerty examines Walpole's love for Henry Conway, Horace Mann and others: Haggerty, 'Queering Horace Walpole', p. 548. Walpole used exaggerated mannerisms and often commented on the beauty of the masculine form, and was part of the 'sodomitical circle' denounced by Hester Lynch Piozzi: p. 553. These desires, however, were expressed only through his personal affectations and Walpole in fact dedicated himself to friendship (though I would argue not in Aristotelian terms) – Haggerty states:

Walpole is a rich, complex eighteenth-century figure. He does not fit into the neatly structured categories we have for defining sexual identity. Neither a sodomite nor a pederast, he does not fit into eighteenth-century categories either ... what the letters reveal is a bitchy, playful, arrogant, self-satisfied, intriguing, acquisitive, loving and devoted friend who loves deeply and long and devotes himself to his house and his collections with the same kind of energy he puts into friends and (sometimes) politics ... If we try to pin Walpole down with one identity or another, something else in the letters will always emerge to make us feel we are limiting or distorting him in some way.

p. 560. Despite Walpole's queer subversions he is not himself the focus in this chapter – instead the influence of his friendship on Gray's written works is.

¹⁷⁰ Bentman, 'Thomas Gray and the Poetry of "Hopeless Love"', p. 204. Bentman's use of the term 'sexual orientation' demonstrates a view of Gray as part of the system of sexuality, though with regards to Walpole this is not entirely an inaccurate judgement.

shades of feelings of a heart-felt passion slowly recognizing the boundaries of its own, appropriate limitation, but are painted – and continue to be painted – rather in bold and unapologetic colours.”¹⁷¹ Of Walpole, Bentman states that, despite being effeminate like Gray, he was not a sodomite, though he was strongly influenced by modern sexuality: “Walpole’s life and literary output were, in many ways, given form and substance by this new kind of sexual identity.”¹⁷² It is generally critically accepted that a certain degree of homoeroticism existed between him and his friends – as with Gray, this featured a denial of intimate relationships with women.¹⁷³

The first letter to Walpole examined in this chapter is from December of 1734 and though not overtly sexual, through it we see the emergence of the non-queer side of Gray, the side of Gray who was to stray into the bounds of sexuality. Here the weeping elegist leaves the stage, and we hear the self-parodic language of the Gothic used almost blasphemously, figuring Walpole as a sort of Christ at the last judgement. Gray uses the imagery of death, first imagining his own demise and decomposition in a graveyard before hearing from Walpole:

... when in comes your Letter, which (as I told you before) made me stretch my Skeleton-jaws in such a horse-laugh, that all the dead pop'd up their heads & stared: but to see the frowzy Countenances of the Creatures especially one Lady-Carcase, that made most hideous Grimaces, & would needs tell me, that I was a very uncivil Person to disturb a Woman of her Quality, that did me the honour to lie so near me ... in her hurry she had lost her Wedding Ring, which she was buried in; nay, she said, she believed she should fall in fits, & certainly that should be her Death: but I gave her a Rowland for her Oliver, 'I'gad: I told her Ladyship the more she stirred, the more she'd stink ... now

¹⁷¹ Mack also suggests that Gray was the more submissive of the two: Mack, *Thomas Gray: A Life*, p. 161.

¹⁷² Bentman details the inevitable ambiguities that arise from analysing Walpole’s sexuality: “We may debate what to call these men and we will never know what they did in bed. But when we survey all the information, the explanation that makes the most sense of the material is that these men were strongly interested in other males for sexual and emotional gratification and that they formed some kind of a group around this common intent.”: Raymond Bentman, ‘Horace’s Walpole’s Forbidden Passion’ in *Queer Representations: Reading Lives, Reading Cultures*, ed. by Martin Duberman (New York: New York University Press, 1997), p. 278.

¹⁷³ Bentman points out that neither Walpole nor any of his friends married, nor showed any real inclinations toward women: Bentman, ‘Horace Walpole’s Forbidden Passion’ in *Queer Representations*, ed. by Duberman, p. 276.

your arrival only can deliver me from such a state of Separation; for, as your Soul is large enough for the both of us, it will be ill-natured of you, if you don't reanimate my Corps: at least I hope for a place in your heart ...¹⁷⁴

Toward the end of the letter we see similar affectionate language to that assuring to West of a front row seat in the theatre box of his heart, yet first we see Gray's fears: largely centred around a married woman.¹⁷⁵ Despite the humour of the skit, it is telling both that Gray is so appalled by the 'Lady-Carcase' and by his using sexual language in her doing him 'the honour to lie so near'. Opposite-sex sexuality is tied to death, and to make love to a woman is to make love to a corpse. Her main concern is her wedding ring, and this foetid result of marital vows arouses little but disgust in the poet. The fact that the woman is so concerned for a material object is a misogyny of Gray's which is echoed in his later poetry.¹⁷⁶ Walpole is the only one who can save him from this rancid allegory for marriage, and from thereon, away from the death that is to lie with women, he utilises romantic language - hoping for a place in Walpole's heart. The gothic tone of the letter coupled with the anti-marriage sentiment is reminiscent of Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (though written some three decades before).¹⁷⁷

The grave is not the only theme exploited by Gray in his private exuberant correspondence with Walpole. The next letter examined here is from the following month and wrapped in Oriental imagery (and based on 'The Turkish Spy'). Though light-hearted, it carries a large degree of somewhat homoerotic sentiment, though the

¹⁷⁴ *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, I, p. 11 (Gray to Walpole, St. Peter's Charnel-House, December, 1734).

¹⁷⁵ Mack briefly references this letter and mentions the romantic tone: "Without the company of his friend to motivate and breath life into him – without Walpole to complete him, that is – Gray suggests that he might just as well be dead": *Thomas Gray: A Life*, p. 157.

¹⁷⁶ Specifically 'Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat', which will be analysed in the next section of this chapter.

¹⁷⁷ The weakness of male-female bonds is characterised in the novel by Isabella's lack of concern on the demise of her husband-to-be, as noted by Haggerty: *Queer Gothic*, p. 22.

writer's personal responsibility for such homoeroticism is lightened through his adaption of an already published work:

When the Dew of the morning is upon me, thy Image is before mine eyes; nor, when the night overshadoweth me, doest thou depart from me. shall I ne'er behold thine eyes, until our eternal meeting in ye immortal Choises of Paradise; and sure at that hour, thy soul will have little need of Ablution in the sight of Israphiel, the Angel of examination: surely, it is pure as the Snow on Mount Ararat, & beautiful as the cheeks of the Houries ... before, we were at two Palm-trees in the Vale of Medina, I flourish'd in thy friendship, & bore my head aloft: but now I wander in solitariness, as a traveller in the sandy desarts [sic] of Barca, & pine in vain to taste of the living fountain of thy conversation: I have beheld thee in my Slumbers, I have attempted to seize on thee, I sought for thee and behold! thou wert not there!¹⁷⁸

This letter is not missed by Haggerty, who comments on the weight of emotion expressed: "If this is not a love letter to Walpole, it is difficult to imagine what is."¹⁷⁹

Desire for Walpole's company is wrapped in the exotic, mournful sentiment delegated to the other-worldliness (even for the well-travelled Walpole) of the Middle East – a location which was well-known for its tolerance of same-sex love. Gray twice demonstrates a nocturnal longing and moves the reader's mind toward the bed (which, as Bray has established, was not shared in a platonic manner by the 1730s).¹⁸⁰

The elevated language of the Qu'ran increases the exotic nature of the text while also allowing Gray to comment on physical beauty, carefully comparing the attractive cheeks of the Houries (mythical and sexually attractive female virgins) to Walpole's 'soul'. In addressing the safe subject of the soul Gray is free to utilise borderline-erotic adjectives such as 'beautiful', whilst the connection between snow and cheeks suggests a subversive statement on the beauty of Walpole's complexion. Yet such sentiment is not obscured: though by no means as complex or covert as the 'epistolary encoding' between Gray and West which Gleckner describes, potentially

¹⁷⁸ *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, I, p. 15 (Gray to Walpole, January 6th, 1735).

¹⁷⁹ Haggerty also points out the overt nature of the desire presented in this particular correspondence: *Men in Love*, p. 118.

¹⁸⁰ Nocturnal desire is also expressed in March of 1735, when Gray talks of dreaming of Walpole: *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, I, p. 26 (Gray to Walpole, Cambridge, March 5th, 1735).

dangerous feeling is conveyed yet masked. Death once again dominates: the entire setting is one of Islamic heavenly paradise. Love for Walpole is continually presented beyond mundane life.

Further homoerotic comments are made throughout the letters between the two, such as in June of 1735 when Gray suggests he is 'starving' for Walpole.¹⁸¹ Yet it is not until 1738 that we hear of any male-female sexual attachments. Upon hearing of Walpole's sexual escapades with an actress named 'Mrs Porter' Gray writes of his astonishment:

My best Horace

I CONFESS, I am amazed; of all the things this is the last I should have believed would come to pass: however I congratulate you upon being able at this time to talk of Clytemnæstra, & Mrs Porter:¹⁸² I wish, you have not admired this last-mention'd Gentlewoman long enough to catch a little of her art from her, for if I'm not mistaken, you are a very different person behind the Scenes, & whatever face you set upon the matter, I guess – but perhaps I guess wrong; I wish I may for your sake; perhaps you are as cool as you would seem: either way I wish you joy; of your Dissimulation, or Philosophy: I long extremely to see you, but till I have that pleasure, methinks you might be a little more open in your writing; have pity a little upon my curiosity: if you distrust my faith (I won't say Honour; that's for Gentlefolks) and imagine I would shew your letters to any one; yet rely upon my vanity, which won't suffer me to do an ill thing; if you fear for the common fate of loose papers, I give you my word to sacrifice to the fire immediately (no small sacrifice, I assure you) all I shall receive, if you desire it.¹⁸³

This first half of the letter is set in open terms: Gray wittily uses language associated with acting (the actress' 'art', 'Scenes' and the implication of masks) to imply Walpole's dishonesty, yet he also demands that Walpole drop his act and speak openly to him. Gray's offer to destroy their correspondence suggests something of the taboo,

¹⁸¹ The letter itself states: "DON'T believe, that I would refuse to do anything for your sake, since at present I am starving for you, & losing my dinner, that I may have the better opportunity of writing.": *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, I, p. 21 (Gray to Walpole, Cambridge, January 27th, 1735). Announcing that he is 'starving' for Walpole presents a possible double meaning: the more innocent that he is starving himself by writing at dinnertime, as well as the more covert possibility that he is starving for Walpole himself – a hunger which could be read as homoerotic. We see an interesting contrast in a letter to West when he wrote the exact opposite, that he would never hunger for him: *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, I, p. 101 (Gray to West, Paris, April 12th, 1739).

¹⁸² As Toynbee asserts, the former is a character played by the latter: *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, I, p. 79.

¹⁸³ *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, I, p. 80 (Gray to Walpole, Cambridge, February 23rd, 1738).

yet his repetition of the word 'sacrifice' - twice in one sentence – shows his dedication to Walpole and fits in with the near-religious linguistic terms centred around personal strife, all of which are alliteratively tied to one another: 'suffer', use of 'fire', 'fear', 'faith', and 'fate'. Honesty is implied through the terms Gray uses to mean struggle. Dishonesty is associated with sexual relationships involving women.

Gray drops his openness in the second half of the letter and returns to a world of metaphor, this time centred around science:

I don't wonder at the new study you have taken a likeing to ... because I believe it to be the most excellent of all sciences, to which in proportion as the rest are subservient, so great a degree of estimation they ought to gain: would you believe it, 'tis the very thing I would wish to apply to, myself? ay! as simple as I stand here: but then the Apparatus necessary to it costs so much; nay, part of it is wholly out of one's power to procure; and then who should pare one, & burnish one? for they would have more trouble and fuss with me, than Cinderaxa's sisters had with their feet, to make 'em fit the little glass slipper: oh yes! to be sure one must be lick'd; now to lick oneself I take to be altogether impracticable, & to ask another to lick one, would not be quite so civil; Bear I was born, & bear, I believe, I'm likely to remain: consequently a little ungainly in my fondnesses, but I'll be bold to say, you shan't in a hurry meet with a more loving poor animal ...¹⁸⁴

This second half of the letter, mixing so many styles and metaphors, is astonishing for its content (and for the fact that it has been critically overlooked). Even Toynbee's footnotes acknowledge that 'study' refers to [opposite-sex] 'love'.¹⁸⁵ Firstly Gray uses the language of academic study to pay homage to the prevailing philosophy of the time: that marriage and procreative sex are 'the most excellent of all sciences', but euphemistically states that the 'apparatus' is beyond him. He then suggests a magical transformation would be necessary, like that of Cinderella, before descending further into sexual euphemism ('lick'd'), in which he implies he is to remain unsatisfied. Finally Gray brings in his last theme (of bears), suggesting his position to be

¹⁸⁴ *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, I, p. 80 (Gray to Walpole, Cambridge, February 23rd, 1738).

¹⁸⁵ Though Toynbee only states 'love', implying that Gray is ill-suited to all forms of love, rather than specifically love involving women: *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, I, p. 79.

unchangeable, however much he may lament the fact: it is his identity ('Bear I was born, & bear, I believe, I'm likely to remain').

The witty linking of so many metaphors (drama, science, fairy tales, animals) as well as his rapid switching to and from open dialogue suggests an enjoyment of playing with allusion and suggestion which he knows will be understood by his recipient. The consistent emphasis on his own difficulties involving sex with women and his suggestion that he cannot change suggest 'sexuality' as Foucault establishes it to have taken hold of him. This letter is a revealing acknowledgement of a sexual identity (however unhappy he may be with the notion), the very idea of which was shunned in his writings involving West.

In the letters we see both homoerotic and anti-marriage sentiment conveyed through a series of thinly-disguised metaphors and euphemisms. Though the distaste for procreative sex and bonds with women are present in both the sides of Gray presented to West and to Walpole, erotic connotations are found only in writings to the latter, just as love of virtue is only found in the former. In one we bear witness to philos and romantic friendship, in the other Eros and sodomy. As is clear from the letters examined here, Gray wavered in his opposition to giving intimate attachments a sexual grounding. There is a performativity in Gray's writing: whether as elegist or using exaggerated Gothic rhetoric. His identity is not fixed: it is theatrical.

Gray's Ode to Walpole

Almost a decade following these letters Gray dedicated an Ode to Walpole.¹⁸⁶

Prompted by Walpole's modest upset at having lost his favourite feline, Gray sent him a rather different type of elegy, one more suited to their bond: 'Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat, Drowned in a Tub of Gold Fishes'.¹⁸⁷ Despite the overtly humorous nature of the poem (like their friendship itself), the reality of their relationship impacts heavily upon the piece, and Gray's views on women are revealed halfway through:

The hapless Nymph with wonder saw:
 A whisker first and then a claw,
 With many an ardent wish,
 She stretch'd in vain to reach the prize.
 What female heart can gold despise?
 What Cat's averse to fish?¹⁸⁸

Both cats (a symbol of selfish sensuality) and women are presented as feeble and helpless in the face of their own desires, be it for gold or for fish, Gray's stance drawing on traditional enlightenment critiques of effeminacy / femininity and luxury. The misogyny present in this poem is clear and his graveyard letter to Walpole is echoed in this poem: women are simple, base, and materialistic.

The poem goes on:

¹⁸⁶ In the meantime the two had toured mainland Europe together, but fell out in mysterious circumstances. Gleckner posits that financial pressures may have caused their separation: Gleckner, *Gray Agonistes*, p. 77. Edmund Gosse's 1889 account of Gray's life suggests that Walpole was caught opening a private letter of Gray's: *Gray*, p. 42. This particular incident is also recalled by C. E. Harris in 1971: *Thomas Gray: Poet 1716-1771: A Guide to His Life and Works* (St. Ives: Photo Precision, 1971). Another nineteenth-century account of Gray's life in *The Saturday Magazine* simply states that the two had 'differences': *The Saturday Magazine*, 1 (1833) 95-96 (p. 95). As evidenced by the disparities amongst different accounts, the true cause of the split is speculative. Ketton-Cremer details their reunification, prompted by a mutual friend: *Thomas Gray: A Biography*, p. 73.

¹⁸⁷ Gleckner, of course, suggests that the poem must be viewed within the context of Milton, and that the poem invokes *Paradise Lost*, another example of the poem perhaps meaning more than it initially would suggest: he states the ode is 'Gray's first attempt to put Milton in his place', and gain greater control of his own poetical style: *Gray Agonistes*, p. 153. *Paradise Lost*, Gleckner suggests, is invoked at the very first stanza, though this ode is the start of Gray's escaping the Miltonic space: p. 155. Though the influence of Milton is undeniable, I would disagree with the assertion that Gray retreated to any space, instead powerfully asserting his own beliefs, however much they would waver.

¹⁸⁸ *The Works of Thomas Gray*, I, p. 4.

Presumptuous Maid! with looks intent
 Again she stretch'd, again she bent,
 Nor knew the gulf between.
 (Malignant fate sat by, and smil'd)
 The slipp'ry verge her feet beguil'd,
 She tumbled headlong in.

Eight times emerging from the flood
 She mew'd to evr'y wat'ry God,
 Some speedy aid to send.
 No Dolphin came, no Nereid stirr'd:
 Nor cruel *Tom*, nor *Susan* heard.
 A Fav'rite has no friend!¹⁸⁹

Gray's love of antiquity is once again invoked with his poetic pagan personification of fate and his polytheistic reference to the divine ('evr'y wat'ry God'). In stating 'A Fav'rite has no friend' the poet hints both pets and women to be incapable of real friendship. The ode ends:

From hence, yes Beauties undeciev'd,
 Know, one false step is ne'er retriev'd,
 And be with caution bold.
 Not all that tempts your wand'ring eyes
 And heedless hearts, is lawful prize;
 Nor all that glitters, gold.¹⁹⁰

This final stanza returns to Gray's view of women, somewhat patronising and traditionally misogynistic. Returning to the human the rhyme is tighter, though it could certainly be argued that his comparison of human females to female felines calls into question his view of women as fully human at all. To Suvir Kaul, in his article 'Why Selima Drowns: Thomas Gray and the Domestication of the Imperial Ideal' the poem is primarily about women and the position of the female in society. Kaul argues that it is a warning to women against 'excess' and consumerism, which can only ever lead to decline: "... an inevitable moral downfall [that is] normative and

¹⁸⁹ *The Works of Thomas Gray*, I, p. 5.

¹⁹⁰ *The Works of Thomas Gray*, I, p. 5.

paradigmatic.”¹⁹¹ Kaul softens the misogyny of the piece, suggesting that in fact Gray was writing from a position that was attempting to help women. Though Gray’s misogyny is unmistakable in this Ode, it is not unique to it, yet forms a part of Gray’s wider beliefs and desires: as we have seen in his letters, these beliefs and desires are based around attachments to men, rather than women.

Gray’s elegiac love for West is contrasted to the menacing, thoughtless crowds which comprise the social majority, yet paradoxically his love for Walpole is expressed in a medium likely to lightly please and amuse the same group. To West he wrote a mostly private poem which could eventually be made public due to the demise of its original recipient, yet his work for Walpole is more intentionally public – not intended as a great work of art, yet a piece with a potential for a popular audience (his poetry by now having gained popularity). Yet both ‘Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat’ and ‘Ode on the Spring’, despite their more overt and perhaps superficial differences, both reveal Gray’s subversive desires towards other men. In both pieces Gray reveals his desire to shun mainstream, normative lifestyles, which are compared to the activities of mindless animals. Yet despite the similarities in his works involving West and Walpole, two very different aspects of Gray emerge – the romantic friend, and the sodomite.

Though Gray devoted himself utterly to romantic friendship in his poetry of 1742 and indeed throughout much of his life, it was not an unwavering devotion, and Gray felt the tug of ‘sexuality’, which provided a space for him as an effeminate sodomite. Though both paths – that of the virtuous friend and that of the sodomite – were ones which involved the rejection of women, to Walpole Gray demonstrates an erotic component which is not present in his elegies to West, nor is their relationship

¹⁹¹ Suvir Kaul, ‘Why Selima Drowns: Thomas Gray and the Domestication of the Imperial Ideal’, *PMLA*, 105 (1990), 223-232 (p. 224).

based in equality or virtue – as we see though his writing, inequality reigns and the gratification of pleasure is lauded: both the hallmarks of sexualised love. In his biography of Gray, Ketton-Cremer suggests: “There was, of course, no conscious rivalry between West and Walpole for Gray’s allegiance.”¹⁹² There never needed to be – both received entirely different sides of the poet. His position as a deviant outsider (and the resultant melancholy) was common to both.

GRAY’S ELEGIES AND THE CULT OF FRIENDSHIP

Gray’s utilisation of elegy as a means of demonstrating his love for his platonic friends is not a traditional one. As Joan Booth notes in *Latin Love Elegy* (1995), the Latin poems from which the elegy originates were written to sexual lovers rather than friends: in particular the lovers of Propertius, Tibillus and Ovid (Tibillus writing elegies dedicated to another man).¹⁹³ The elegy contained devotions to men and to women in equal measure, though generally in the context of eros. That Gray uses elegy to demonstrate both eros and philos presents some confusion.

There are a few different possible explanations for Gray’s use of elegy as a means of expressing his subversive desire. Firstly, as we saw in the writings of the Earl of Shaftesbury, eighteenth-century writers were aware of a connection between pre-Christian works and virtuous friendship. It is also the case that, due to hostile Christian attitudes to erotic relationships between men, the exact division between

¹⁹² Ketton-Cremer, *Thomas Gray: A Biography*, p. 16.

¹⁹³ Little is known about the poet Tibillus himself, however – not even his full name is evident: Booth, *Latin Love Elegy*, p. xxix. Some aspects of the elegiac form can actually be traced further back to ancient Greece, though it is in Rome that the genre as we know it came into fruition: p. xii. The origin of the elegy is an issue of some contention, though Archibald Day’s work on the subject concurs with Booth: Day, *Origins*, p. 37. Jeri Blair Debrohun makes clear the very personal nature of the Latin love elegy, a depoliticised mode of expression (considering the political turmoil in Rome during the period, this is little surprising): Jeri Blair Debrohun, *Roman Propertius and the Reinvention of Elegy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), p. 2.

philos and eros in the ancient world will not have been clear to those in the early modern period.¹⁹⁴ Of course the themes of anguish, and of loss, are ones which remained fully relevant to the poet, regardless of his expression of desire: Gray's melancholic stance was typical of the graveyard poets (as noted by Roy Porter and evidenced in poetic works such as Robert Blair's 'The Grave') and perfectly suited to the medium.¹⁹⁵

Chris Mounsey's article 'Persona, Elegy, and Desire' (2006) can give us another insight into the usefulness of the elegy to Gray's mindset. Mounsey suggests that writers in the eighteenth century believed they could maintain more than one (literary) persona at one time, even if those personae were in contrast with one another: this phenomenon being most clearly demonstrated through the medium of elegy.¹⁹⁶ Though he doesn't examine the differences between Gray's expressions of love for West and for Walpole, Mounsey does maintain that Gray adopted multiple personae in his different literary works. The elegy proved the perfect format with which to mask oneself, a mask which could be changed frequently and without contradiction.¹⁹⁷ Considering the conflicting ideals heralded in Gray's writing, Mounsey's theory certainly helps explain the poet's choice, being culturally provided with a format which would allow both sides of himself a form of expression.

¹⁹⁴ As we have seen with Trumbach's description of the attitudes held toward Achilles and Patroclus in the early eighteenth century: Trumbach, 'Modern Sodomy' in *A Gay History of Britain*, ed. by Cook and others, p. 87.

¹⁹⁵ This does not mean that it has always been understood by modern scholars – Lytton Sells suggests it to be something of an indulgence, a 'neurosis' spurred by 'ennui': Sells, *Thomas Gray: His Life and Works*, p. 18. Mack issues forth an even more judgemental statement when he declares: "But let's not beat about the bush: Gray's chronic depression – his so-called 'melancholia' – was itself surely an incidental symptom of his response to the perception of his own sexual impulse.": Mack, *Thomas Gray: A Life*, p. 34. Mack offers little in the way of support for this assertion.

¹⁹⁶ Chris Mounsey, 'Persona, Elegy, and Desire', *SEL Studies in English Literature*, 46 (2006), 601-618 (p. 601).

¹⁹⁷ Mounsey suggests that Mason and Gray were far less subtle about masking the erotic nature of their works than Gray was with West: Mounsey, 'Persona, Elegy, and Desire', p. 613. Of course this thesis examines the possibility that the works between Gray and West were non- or anti-sexual.

The Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard

Gray's most famous elegy does not clearly come from either Gray as the friend or Gray as the sodomite, yet it does come from Gray as an outcast. The vast majority of Gray's poetry has of course been analysed with respect to Gray's sexuality, yet according to Raymond Bentman, his most critically evaluated piece, the 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard', refers less to biographical factors and is generally read as providing a more universal theme (the conclusion refers obliquely to West's death).¹⁹⁸ The speaker emphasises his remoteness and isolation. His separation from the villagers around him echoes his distance from the mainstream articulated in the poetry devoted to West.¹⁹⁹

Of course due to the less-than-overt nature of his reflections many critics have failed to find any commentary on friendship in the work at all: John Young in 1783 commented on the piece, which he saw as a 'common' statement on death:

Of this Elegy I find little in the 'General Design', either to praise or to blame. It differs in nothing material from the general design of all Meditations on Death, from Boyle to Hervey inclusive. The subject has the advantage of being interesting, but the disadvantage of being common.²⁰⁰

The very fact that Young saw nothing unusual in the piece shows the extent to which Gray kept his own turmoils hidden in his most popular work. The more overt declarations present in his other elegies are far from present here.

¹⁹⁸ "The poem is more philosophical, less explicitly personal than the earlier poems." Bentman goes on to suggest that the secrecy which is necessary around Gray's life necessitates the melancholic tone of the piece: 'Thomas Gray and the Poetry of "Hopeless Love"', p. 218. Foladare also suggests that the elegy soothed Gray's sense of loss: 'Gray's "Frail Memorial" to West', p. 65. The viewpoint that the elegy was a 'final reconciliation' with West's death is shared by McCarthy: *Thomas Gray*, p. 124. Interestingly, Gosse suggests the elegy to have been spurred by the death of his aunt: *Gray*, p. 96.

¹⁹⁹ The poet's distance from the activities of the villagers is mirrored by his identification with the dead: Bentman, 'Thomas Gray and the Poetry of "Hopeless Love"', p. 218.

²⁰⁰ John Young, *A Criticism on the Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* (London: G. Wilkie, 1783), p. 4.

Modern critics, however, have found alternative readings of the poem. Haggerty comments that Gray's own sentiments are hidden amongst the conventional imagery of the piece, suggesting that the poet's sexuality is conflated with Death.²⁰¹ Matthew Curr goes further, suggesting that the otherness of the poet to be represented through the solitary labourer, and that Gray envisages a form of utopia:

The very deprivation of these men's emotional lives caused by their otherness and resultant exclusion, their sensitivity in an insensitive environment, prompts them to perceive the need for a radically new community, one not of social coercion but of emotional liberty, not to sink into hopeless cynicism, but to rise above the narrow means of a greedy society and imaginatively conceive of a better place, another country, with a finer set of emotional values in which the memorial of the heart is the true gauge of human achievement. The central stanza of the Elegy encapsulates these criteria of friendship, the heart's devotion to love, generosity and identity.²⁰²

Once again Curr suggests that Gray envisaged such a world only in his writings, rather than ever being attempted in reality (though I would suggest that his often vocal opposition to marriage placed such desires beyond mere fantasy). Even so, Curr emphasises Gray's devotion to romantic friendship, an altruistic form of love formed in a love of virtue.

Alternative readings of Gray's poetry have existed since the poet's own time. John Duncombe, a contemporary of Gray's, penned his parody of the piece, 'An Evening Contemplation in a College: Being a Parody on Gray's Elegy in a Country Church Yard'. The satire begins by mimicking and mocking the overly traditional style and tone of the original, contrasting the flowery nature of the language with the lazy incompetence of the students. By the sixth stanza, however, a different attack is launched:

²⁰¹ "Death has been hovering in the poem as a shadowy Other, but as he attains a physical presence here, it might seem that he is really the lover that the poet has been courting all along. The poet chooses Death as the only expression of a sexuality that terrifies him.": Haggerty, *Men in Love*, p. 126. His comments in *Men in Love* are a repetition of his 1992 essay on the elegy: Haggerty, "The Voice of Nature" in Gray's *Elegy*, *Homosexuality in Renaissance and Enlightenment England* (New York: Hogarth Press, 1992), p. 199.

²⁰² Curr, *The Consolation of Otherness*, p. 51.

No chattering Females crowd their social fire
 No dread have they of Discord or of Strife
 Unknown the names of Husband or of Sire
 Unfelt the plagues of matrimonial Life²⁰³

The homoerotic environment of the education system is invoked, and the students are said to find the concept of family life and domesticity alien, yet the satirical tone contrasts with the pamphlet 'Plain Reasons for the Growth of Sodomy'. Married life is mocked using similarly negative language and misogyny to that of Gray's own writing, with women being presented as shallow ('chattering females'). However, two stanzas later a more judgemental stance is adopted: "Nor let the Fair with contemplations Sneer / On these unmarried Men reflections cast!" The satirical ode then echoes the 'Women-Hater's Lamentation' when it states: "And bid them shun all Females – but the Muse."²⁰⁴ Despite the more light-hearted one earlier, the socially-perceived link between education and 'unnatural' lifestyles is in full force in this ode – and this link is in turn tied to Gray, whose elegy it was Duncombe chose to parody.

The later stanzas of the 'Evening Contemplation' describe the reformation of just such an individual. He attends church, realises the error of his ways, and instantly finds a bride.²⁰⁵ The very end of the piece is comprised of a letter by the reformed scholar, who now dwells in a marital, rural idyll:

'In rural innocence secure I dwell
 'Alike to Fortune & to Fame unknown
 'Approving Conscience chears [sic] my humble cell
 'And social Quiet marks me for her own
 'Next to the Blessings of Religious Truth
 'Two Gifts my endless Gratitude engage

²⁰³ BL, MS 37683.

²⁰⁴ BL., MS 37683.

²⁰⁵ Traditional imagery of marriage is invoked in full, a stark contrast to the dark halls of academia:

The next we heard that in a neighb'ring Shrine
 That day to Church he led the Blushing Bride
 A Nymph whose snowy vest & Maiden Fear
 Improved her Beauty while the knot was tied.

‘A Wife the Joy and Transport of my youth
 ‘Now with a Son the comfort of my Age
 ‘Seek not to draw me from this kind retreat
 ‘In loftier Spheres unfit untaught to move
 ‘Content with calm domestic Life; where meet
 ‘The smiles of Friendship & the sweets of Love.²⁰⁶

Domesticity is placed in direct contrast with ambition, which is the hallmark of homosocial interaction (a scenario which brings to mind friendships of utility and Sedgewick’s focus on same-sex relationships of power).²⁰⁷ In direct contrast to Gray’s works, youth is associated with heterosexual love, rather than the ‘paradise’ of same-sex love found at Eton; whereas age brings a son, rather than melancholy. Friendship is no longer to be found in same-sex relationships, but with a marital partner and the new-found affection for the family. Even more importantly, this letter at the end of the parody, separate from the bulk of the poem, mirrors the ‘epitaph’ at the end of the ‘Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard’, usually read as a melancholic allusion to West. Here West has been replaced with a wife, and romantic friendship replaced with marriage. Gray’s transgression has been undone.

Gray’s Literary Friendships

Gray’s friendships of course, were not limited to West and Walpole and the poet formed attachments to a whole host of men over the course of his life. Aside from Wharton and Mason, Gray’s other friendships included Bedingfield, Nicholls and Chute.²⁰⁸ His last intimate attachment was with a young man named Bonstetten,

²⁰⁶ BL, MS 37683.

²⁰⁷ This is, of course, very different to the types of love Gray sought to attain: Sedgewick, *Between Men*, p. 6.

²⁰⁸ To Bedingfield Gray sent one of his longest and most open letters: *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, II, p. 461 (Gray to Bedingfield, Pembroke-Hall, April 29th, 1756). Nicholls and Gray sent many intimate letters to one another, and after Gray’s death he wrote a touching tribute: Matthew Arnold, *The English Poets*, 3 vols. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1880), III, p. 308. Gray and Chute passed some

though it did not last: Robert Mack reveals that the youth's father removed him from the poet's company, distinctly unimpressed by the attachment.²⁰⁹ These relationships bore elements of virtuous friendship and homoeroticism to different extents, though they failed to match the dedication the poet demonstrated toward West and Walpole.

I hope to have challenged the popular idea espoused by Gleckner and Curr, that Gray retreated into a place of literary safety – Miltonic or otherwise – by demonstrating his stated aversion to heteronormative values in his published poetry as well as his private correspondence.²¹⁰ The speakers in Gray's elegiac works are sufficiently distanced to present moralistic yet subversive attacks on the norms of society; norms which were centred near-exclusively around marriage and the family, norms created by a culture of sexuality. His queer elegies, however, did not represent

rather intimate and excited exchanges, such as when Gray exclaimed: "I will venture to say, there is no body in England however nearly connected with you, that has seen you with more real Joy & Affection than I shall.": *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, I, p. 246 (Gray to Chute, London, October 6th, 1746). The relationship between Chute and Gray was at time rocky and the poet did much to hurt Chute's feelings in their correspondence: *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, I, p. 203 (Gray to Chute, May 24th, 1742). The two eventually fell out in unknown circumstances: *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, II, p. 482. Haggerty points out that Chute was an extremely close friend to Horace Walpole, and that his death spurred a mourning similar to that felt by Gray upon the death of West: Haggerty, 'Queering Horace Walpole', p. 556.

²⁰⁹ Mack, *Thomas Gray: A Life*, p. 640. A similar incident occurred with the poet Anna Seward, as we shall see in the next chapter. Bentman suggests that at first Bonstetten was flattered by the attention granted him by the poet, but was eventually overwhelmed by it and withdrew: 'Thomas Gray and the Poetry of "Hopeless Love"', p. 216. The relationship may have brought out a side of Gray shared more with Walpole – Wallace Jackson suggests that their relationship was problematised by Gray's 'physical desire' (though he also states that it was unfulfilled): 'Thomas Gray and the Dedicatory Muse', p. 278. Matthew Arnold's account suggests that Gray found himself incapable of opening himself up to his younger friend: *The English Poets*, III, p. 312. A. L. Lytton Sells suggests the exact opposite: "Bonstetten had attracted him from the outset, but, as the weeks went by, he found himself more and more obsessed with this handsome youth, and feeling for him an affection that alarmed him he realised his infatuation without being able to overcome it. Bonstetten, however, had an inkling of the truth and decided to leave Cambridge and cross the channel.": *Thomas Gray*, p. 134. Morris Golden takes a somewhat harsh view on the poet's infatuation, even going so far as to refer to it as 'startling' and 'pathetic': *Thomas Gray*, p. 27. It is described as 'obsessive' and 'overwhelming' by Ketton-Cremer: *Thomas Gray: A Biography*, p. 251.

²¹⁰ In *Men in Love* Haggerty equates this 'inward-looking' retreat with sensibility:

The melancholy cast to friendship, familiar in a range of mid-century examples but most apparent in the writings of Gray, was a crucial restraint on the freedom of earlier codifications of masculinity and masculine prerogative. Gray and other men of feeling reject the libertine model of masculine license in favour of a more inward-looking expression of sexual sensibility.

Haggerty, *Men in Love*, p. 115.

a clear and consistent mindset. The dual-faceted nature of the poet's literary identity - virtuous friend on the one hand, licentious sodomite on the other - has been a matter paid little attention by scholars - who in the main see little but stylistic and personal differences between Gray's writings to West and Walpole, rather than their representing different forms of desire.²¹¹ The complexities of his relationships and the differences apparent in his written works show that Gray was not immune to the social forces which had driven the tracts and treatises so common in his youth, which, were he devoting himself to Aristotelian friendship or same-sex eros, rendered him an outcast. Gray cannot be simply labelled a sodomite, yet neither can he simply be labelled queer: his works reveal both.

Yet in all Gray's writings we find one vital consistency: a cheerful abhorrence of marital vows. This opposition to marriage was often expressed through humour or parody, the poet necessarily aware of the dire penalties society was prepared to measure for those suspected of social and sexual subversion. Any perceived opposition to the institution of marriage and the nuclear family could have proven lethal – particularly for a somewhat sensitive bachelor like Gray. This consistent opposition to marriage, coupled with both his occasional status as controversial and his own life-long 'bachelorhood', dedicating himself to friendship and the memory of his deceased friend West, suggest a figure who – whether tragically or hyperbolically – sought to place himself outside of the boundaries of heteronormativity.²¹² He was a figure modestly queer. Though he never actively sought any radical change in society

²¹¹ Haggerty takes up this viewpoint when he notes little fundamental difference in Gray's desires between the two men: "To Walpole, he is zany and irresistible; to West he is thoughtful and sublime; but to both he can be an amazingly attentive and loving friend.": *Men in Love*, p. 116. Similarly Mack notes that his ties to West were stronger, but fails to acknowledge any fundamental difference: *Thomas Gray: A Life*, p. 175. Finally, Curr notices a difference in tone in the letters between the two men, but not any real difference in desire: *The Consolation of Otherness*, p. 90.

²¹² Gray hated most aspects of domestic life: he asserted to Walpole that he hates children: *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, I, p. 288 (Gray to Walpole, Cambridge, November 1747). His controversies also led to him being accused of atheism by Mr Turner: *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, I, p. 302 (Gray to Walpole, January/February 1748).

he did in fact create it, providing the image of the elegiac poet as a socially marginalised outsider. Though in later years his works would go on to influence poets such as Byron and Tennyson, shortly after his death he was to find a disciple - albeit a female one - in the poet Anna Seward.

CHAPTER TWO

'MY STAND': ANNA SEWARD'S QUEER IDEAL

Of the four figures central to this thesis, Anna Seward held the greatest dedication to friendship.²¹³ By the latter half of the eighteenth-century female friendship would undergo a similar transformation to that which male friendship experienced: by the time Anna Seward reached her own adolescence female friendship was increasingly seen as detrimental to those maternal duties increasingly demanded of women following marriage and procreation. With companionate marriage, the spouse was now expected to be the emotional hub of an individual's life and a child to be personally cared for by his/her mother. Seward was yet to be born when Defoe penned his thesis on marriage, and by the time she came into the world affectionate opposite-sex unions had been established as the dominant social norm. This was something which Seward failed to accept and her written works are dedicated to promoting the ideal of friendship and denigrating marriage. This chapter will seek to demonstrate this 'stand' as a conscious and deliberate position, a political goal which is carried throughout her poetry from her youth until her death. Despite a

²¹³ The pronunciation of her name, however, is less clear-cut (I shall briefly mention it here as an important biographical point to a poet whose relevance to English literature is increasing in our own time). The biographer E. V. Lucas states that her name was pronounced 'Se-ward' rather than 'Su-ward': E. V. Lucas, *A Swan and Her Friends* (London: Methuen & Co., 1907), p. 1. However, it is difficult to tell how exactly 'Se-ward' should sound. Teresa Barnard's study on Seward suggests it is spelt 'Seeward' but with no explanation given: Teresa Barnard, *Anna Seward: A Constructed Life: A Critical Biography* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2009). Many of her letters to her blind friend Dowdeswell stored in the archives as the University of Birmingham, though, have her write her own name as 'Seeward', presumably so anyone reading him the correspondence will pronounce her name correctly: Special Collections Department, University of Birmingham Library, MSS 10/iii/9 (Seward to Dowdeswell, Lichfield, November 30th, 1797). I would therefore posit 'See-ward' as the correct pronunciation.

recent drive to place Seward within a ‘heterosexual’ framework, this chapter will demonstrate the poet to be deliberately and robustly queer.²¹⁴

The century saw an increased interest in female sexuality, and as Lilian Faderman points out, it was during Seward’s lifetime that erotic literature describing female-female sex started being printed.²¹⁵ Even though companionate marriage was all but mandatory, and public interest in female sexual vices was on the increase, Faderman believes female romantic friendship to have been relatively unproblematic and socially condoned not only in the eighteenth century but into the nineteenth as well. Emma Donoghue suggests that marriage and domesticity actually spurred friendship: “... as middle-class women were pushed out of the trades and professions one by one and relegated to a life of feminine idleness, romantic friendship grew into a cult”.²¹⁶ Such tolerance only extended to a point, however, for the male view of female friendship as an emotional ‘trial-run’ for opposite-sex marriage implies an expiry date on such relationships.²¹⁷ As we shall see from her written works, Anna Seward was to experience this first hand.

It should be noted at this point that the friendships of Anna Seward which are of concern here are romantic: though she was part of celebrated literary circles in

²¹⁴ This heterosexual reading of Seward is typified by the recently-published biography of Seward by Teresa Barnard, which will be investigated later in this chapter.

²¹⁵ The first detailed account of female-female sex was Mathieu Mariobert’s *L’Espion Anglois* (1777-78) – his imaginative and fictional account was read as factual by contemporaries and spurred an interest in female sexual practices: Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men*, p. 38. The tale involves several pagan ritual orgies and the Greek poet Sappho is worshipped as a goddess. Prior to Mariobert’s work it was commonly believed that one woman would penetrate the other with her engorged (and extended) clitoris: p. 31. On this increasing interest in female sexual deviance, see also: Susan Elizabeth Wahl, *Invisible Relations: Representations of Female Intimacy in the Age of Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 36.

²¹⁶ Emma Donoghue, *Poems Between Women: Four Centuries of Love, Romantic Friendship and Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. xxvii.

²¹⁷ See Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men*, p. 75; Traub, *Renaissance of Lesbianism*, p. 174. The placement of intimate friendship within the context of marriage is further underlined by the fact that in novels they often came into play as a source of comfort and support for women enduring bad unions, such as in *The History of Lady Barnton* (1771): Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men*, p. 76. These novels would often feature an emotionally lax friendship as well (similar to the friendships of utility detailed by Aristotle): p. 82.

Lichfield and frequently compliments intellectual groupings of women in her letters, as with Gray it is her one-to-one romantic attachments which form the basis of her marginalised literary identity. Stuart Curran establishes this point in reference to Seward's friendship to Sneyd (which will be the focus later in this chapter):

[The] public representation of women's friendships as a model for community, of even, with the Blue-Stocking movement, for advancing the interests of civilization, is highly significant for the history of an emerging feminism. Yet, it somehow pales before the remarkable interiority of Seward's exploration of female friendship.²¹⁸

Curran is one of the few scholars to refer to Anna Seward as 'queer' and the approach in his two articles on the poet is similar to the one utilised in this thesis.

The sexualisation of female intimacy has been noted by Traub, who argues that despite its erratic progress the process was absolute: "The convergence of the tribade and the friend was gradual and uneven, but it was nonetheless decisive."²¹⁹ Despite its having taken hold in the latter decades of the eighteenth century this process was one which had strong roots in the decades beforehand: the tract 'Plain Reasons for the Growth of Sodomy' (detailed in the first chapter) ends with a separate focus on female vice, which is referred to as 'The Game of Flatts':

A Turke hates bodily Filthiness and Nastiness, worse than Soul-Defilement; and, therefore, they wash very often, and they never ease themselves, by going to Stool, but they carry Water with them for their Posteriors. But ordinarily the Women bathe by themselves, bond and free together; so that you shall many Times see young Maids, exceeding beautiful, gathered from all Parts of the World, exposed naked to the View of other Women, who thereupon fall in Love with them, as young Men do with us, at the Sight of Virgins.²²⁰

²¹⁸ Stuart Curran, 'Anna Seward and the Dynamics of Female Friendship', *DQR Studies in Literature*, 39 (2007), 11-21 (p. 21).

²¹⁹ Traub, *Renaissance of Lesbianism*, p. 278. Traub agrees that the period saw an increasing interest in female sexual practices, whereas in the earlier half of the century they had been ignored in favour of a focus on male sodomy. In 1729 John Disney published a tract denouncing such vices in men but remaining silent on the subject of women: Traub, *Renaissance of Lesbianism*, p. 165.

²²⁰ Rictor Norton ed., 'The Game of Flats, 1749', *Homosexuality in Eighteenth-Century England: A Sourcebook* (14th April 2000; updated 30th March 2003) <<http://rictornorton.co.uk/eighteen/1749flat.htm>> [accessed 24th July 2009].

Though earlier in the text male vice was attributed to the rise of such deviancy in women, the author now attributes female-female sexual activity to Turkish Bathhouse culture, echoing the popular argument for male sodomy having foreign origins: the tract suggests that fashionable urbane women are responsible for the perceived trend, a similar social strata to which sodomy was attributed amongst men.²²¹ Social discourses and paranoia which had been largely reserved for men in the first half of the eighteenth century slowly spread toward women.

Susan Elizabeth Wahl notes homophobic elements in misogynistic Augustan satire: "... representations of female homoeroticism seemed to be imbued with a relative tolerance before the rise of satire in the early eighteenth century seemed to engulf female-female desire (along with other feminine 'transgressions') as the object of extreme moral and social opprobrium."²²² The discourse of sexuality had taken a firm hold, and self-appointed moralists were on the look-out for possible transgressive behaviour which may have gone unnoticed beforehand. This discourse even (largely) overcame the traditional apprehension toward discussing female sexuality. In this hostile climate, Seward firmly believed and affirmed friendship to be pure, based in disinterested virtue: her views mirroring those of Aristotle.

Publicly-circulated tracts may have strenuously warned of the dangers of love between women, but female friendship continued to be celebrated and sustained by poetry, as it had since the days of Katherine Philips, with occasional lyrics exchanged to mark special events in life.²²³ It was through such verse that Anna Seward found

²²¹ Of course as we saw with Gray's Turkish letter, the Middle East was culturally associated with same-sex sexuality, for both men and women. The tract quotes an anecdote in which an older woman seduces a younger women, cross-dressing as part of her deviant plan: 'The Game of Flats, 1749.

²²² Wahl, *Invisible Relations*, p. 53. It was this discourse which created a space in which a female-female sexual identity developed: p. 70.

²²³ Janet Todd's *Women's Friendship in Literature* will be of particular importance to the following chapter, where the focus will primarily be on the novel (in particular Mary Wollstonecraft's *Mary: A Fiction* and Maria and Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda*). Todd goes into even greater detail on the different

her special role as an elegist dedicated to friendship, a vocation which followed from Gray. The much-admired Gray frequently appears in Seward's letters: she even paraphrased a poem which he had dedicated in memory to Richard West.²²⁴ Seward was to continue his tradition and take it further, making an overt stand for friendship which far exceeded anything managed by Gray in the decades beforehand. This stand was conscious, deliberate and formed a social identity for the poet.

Queer discourse on female friendship

As with their male counterparts, finding the correct terminology and theoretical approaches to apply to female-female relationships in the Georgian period is fraught with difficulty. As Paula Backscheider states in her *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and their Poetry* (2005), categorisation of eighteenth-century female love is extremely problematic: "The lines between various kinds and levels of

forms of friendship than Aristotle, suggesting the novel to have had five categories rather than three: Janet Todd, *Women's Friendship in Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 3.

²²⁴ The poem was a 'Translation of Gray's Apostrophe, to the Memory of His Young Friend, West':

Friend of my youth, O! with what pangs I found
 The gloomy mists of sickness gathering round!
 Saw thy heart struggling with convulsive throes,
 That heart, so quick to feel for others' woes!
 Saw, in dire progress, fell disease prevail,
 Dim thy clear eye, thy vivid colour pale;
 Saw numbing languor steal each youthful grace,
 From those light limbs, from that expressive face,
 Where piety sublime, affections mild,
 And all the soul of truth ingenuous smiled.

Poetical Works, III, p. 42.

The theme of lovers being lost in their youth and thus youth being lost altogether are common to both poets. While Gray lost Richard West, Seward lost Honora Sneyd – both succumbing to tuberculosis in their twenties. Despite male romantic friendship being linked to sodomy by the latter half of the eighteenth century, to Seward gender could prove no obstacle to platonic love, and the bond between men excited and inspired her as much as that between women. Seward also delights in finding more mundane similarities between herself and Gray, such as their shared disdain for science: A. Constable, ed., *Letters of Anna Seward: Written Between the Years 1784 and 1807*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: A. Constable, 1811), II, p. 272 (Seward to Darwin, Lichfield, May 22nd, 1789). Seward also paraphrased Gray's 'Alcaick Ode': Walter Scott, ed., *The Poetical Works of Anna Seward: With Extracts from Her Literary Correspondence*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: J. Balantyne, 1810), III, p. 76. Subsequent references will be given in parentheses unless further detail is needed.

intimacy are infinitely permeable and confused ... Sisters and women friends held hands, kissed, and caressed each other, and from childhood on these signs were taken to be of feminine gentleness, nurturing, caring, and the soft affectionate heart that made for good wives and mothers.”²²⁵ Also noting the same difficulty, Elizabeth Wahl utilises a queer theoretical approach, citing Foucault and describing the anachronisms inherent in terms such as ‘lesbian’.²²⁶ As is the case with this thesis, Wahl does not doubt the possibility of erotic connections between those of the same sex, just the supposition that eighteenth-century individuals would have been identified by them.²²⁷

Wahl’s critique of certain terminology used, however, also extends to a term used frequently throughout this thesis: ‘romantic friendship’. She argues that the term has the opposite problem to that of the word ‘lesbian’: it suggests a complete lack of sexual acitivity. She sees it as an anachronism:

In my own case, I have deliberately chosen not to follow the convention of using ‘romantic friendship’ as an alternative descriptor to ‘lesbian’ for relations of intimacy between women whose genital aspect is indeterminable, precisely because this term remains so rooted in the context of nineteenth-century sociosexual relations.²²⁸

However, in her 1788 novel *Mary: A Fiction* (which is the subject of the third chapter) Mary Wollstonecraft uses those exact words when the protagonist’s husband seeks to define the love between her and her intimate friend Ann. The term may be patriarchal and patronizing as used here (though as we shall see in the next chapter,

²²⁵ Paula R. Backscheider, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and their Poetry: Inventing Agency, Inventing Genre* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), p. 299.

²²⁶ Wahl recognises the social differences relating to social and sexual relationships between the eighteenth century and the twenty-first: “... I chose not to focus on representations of the ‘lesbian’ per se, with all the evidentiary and anachronistic problems that the term implies, but rather to reframe these issues in broader terms that would not exclude questions of female homosexuality but would try to recast those questions as much as possible in terms of the models of sexuality and gender that predominated during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries”: Wahl, *Invisible Relations*, p. 2.

²²⁷ Wahl, *Invisible Relations*, p. 5. Wahl then criticises Faderman’s work for underplaying the possibility of sexual activity between women.

²²⁸ Wahl, *Invisible Relations*, p. 6.

there is no hint that the author disagrees with it) but it is far from anachronistic.²²⁹

Difficulties in finding correct terminology are further highlighted in *Invisible Relations*, when Wahl goes on to suggest that terms used by eighteenth-century women themselves are not appropriate as they found themselves in an environment in which they struggled to find suitable language to describe their love. However, in a literary analysis the language used by the authors central to this thesis to express their desires is vital and the terms they themselves utilise form part of their literary expression. ‘Romantic friendship’ is a term recognisable to both men and women in the Georgian period and will therefore continue to be used to describe the various relationships of Anna Seward.²³⁰

In 1992 Liz Stanley wrote on the difficulties in applying theoretical frameworks to historical female relationships, citing a critical lack of primary evidence in many of the individual bonds analysed.²³¹ This has certainly been the case with Anna Seward, whose personal life has received a great deal of speculation

²²⁹ Though considering the fact that the tradition of romantic friendship had a greater (at least in literary terms) precedent between men than between women masculine definitions are unavoidable. Interestingly, Elizabeth Mavor suggests the term to have been insulting, and by the end of the eighteenth century ‘romantic’ was only just moving away from ‘anything that was fanciful, whimsical, impractical, absurd’: Elizabeth Mavor, *The Ladies of Llangollen: A Study in Romantic Friendship* (London: Michael Joseph., 1971), p. 88. The term ‘romantic’ then gains a greater relevancy, bearing similarity to the word ‘queer’.

²³⁰ Despite the focus of *Invisible Relations* the types of same-sex bond described bear little relation to Anna Seward. Wahl describes two cultural types of female-female love: one ‘sexualised’ (such as sappism), the other ‘idealised’ (recognised as friendship): Wahl, *Invisible Relations*, p. 9. ‘Idealised’ love is described in greater detail later: p. 77. Idealised love, however, is described as being compatible with marriage, something which would be problematic as a permanent, intense same-sex bond which involved the hallmarks of Aristotelian philos (such as cohabitation) would be fundamentally incompatible with traditional domesticity. Such a bond would be as transgressive as sapphic love: social consternation lay with the lack of procreative activity. The loves of Anna Seward were entirely incompatible with marriage as they required total devotion to the poet – they are thus neither ‘sexualised’ nor ‘idealised’. Friendships which are compatible with marriage, however, will be given a focus in the third and fourth chapters to this thesis.

²³¹ In particular Stanley offers a critique of Faderman’s approach to female relationships and utilises a queer theoretical model: “... there are problems with Faderman’s approach. It proceeds from the assumption that ‘sexual’ means the same things now it means in the late eighteenth, and early, mid and late nineteenth centuries.”: Liz Stanley, ‘Romantic Friendship? Some Issues in Researching Lesbian History and Biography’, *Women’s History Review*, 1 (1992), 193-216 (p. 196). Aside from questioning the definition of ‘sexual’ Stanley questions Faderman’s assertion that female romantic friendship was above reproach and socially accepted in the late eighteenth century, a similar perspective to the one adopted in this chapter.

from biographers and literary critics, particularly regarding her sonnets involving Honora Sneyd and her well-known *Llangollen Vale*. A great deal of primary evidence – from Seward's own hand – exists however, much of it in library archives, which has received little attention. This thesis examines unpublished letters from three manuscript archives: those at the University of Birmingham, those in the British Library, and those stored at Beinecke Library at Yale University.

Like Thomas Gray before her, Anna Seward devoted herself to a queer ideal. She shunned the prospect of sexual love and marriage in favour of an Aristotelian mode of friendship, one grounded in equality, esteem for virtue and cohabitation. Unlike Gray, Seward had friends of both sexes, though she only pursued true romantic friendships with women.²³² Like Gray, this has prompted a great number of biographers and literary critics to label Seward homosexual or 'lesbian'. Lilian Faderman was the first to use the term 'lesbian' in relation to Seward in *Surpassing the Love of Men*, and though she neither confirms nor denies the possibility of an erotic connection in female romantic friendships, she utilises a term which connects her to twentieth-century sexual identities and in an eighteenth-century context implies transgression (though she states that intense love between women was socially condoned).²³³ *Surpassing the Love of Men* explicitly defines 'lesbian' as a 'relationship' (not an individual or an identity) in which the closest affections are reserved for another woman (Faderman, p. 17). Even this definition is problematic, however, as Seward was dedicated to a mode of friendship she also recognised as possible between men and which had its roots in male same-sex bonds: as we have

²³² Seward's relationships with women will form the basis of this chapter, whereas her relationships with men will be explored in the latter stages to this thesis.

²³³ Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men*, p. 16. Faderman also comments on Seward in her earlier article 'Who Hid Lesbian History', though she expands upon the subject greatly in *Surpassing the Love of Men*: Lilian Faderman, 'Who Hid Lesbian History', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 4 (1979), 74-76 (p. 75).

seen from the first chapter, it was not an exclusively female domain. Seward has since been included in 'lesbian' anthologies, both in print and online.²³⁴ Whilst for Gray there was at least some truth in any label which implied same-sex erotic behaviour forming an identity (even if it missed the wider picture), with Anna Seward there is none – at no point does she imply her relationships with women either had erotic potential or that any of her sexual behaviour formed an identity or sociopolitical position.

Prior to the 1980s and Lilian Faderman's account of the poet, biographers adopted a conventionally heterocentric viewpoint toward the life of Anna Seward. The earliest complete biography, by E. V. Lucas in 1907, took the lack of male love interests in Seward's life to indicate a love of solitude.²³⁵ Margaret Ashmun's account of Seward's life (first published in 1931) chooses to focus on her attachments to men, often at the expense of the intense relationships she developed with women.²³⁶ Hesketh Pearson's 1936 text on Seward *The Swan of Lichfield* also focuses on male attachments, only briefly deviating to focus on the unavoidable figure of Honora Sneyd, one of Seward's more intimate friends.²³⁷ Even so, Pearson's focus remains on the male figures in Seward's life, suggesting her friend John Saville to be Seward's 'sole interest' aside from her father.²³⁸

The focus on Seward's 'heterosexual' relationships, though weakened by Faderman's work in the 1980s, has been reinvigorated by two scholars: Jennifer Kelly

²³⁴ In print: Alison Hennegan ed., *The Lesbian Pillow Book* (Michigan: Fourth Estate, 2000); Terry Castle, ed., *The Literature of Lesbianism: A Historical Anthology from Ariosto to Stonewall* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005). Online: Alix North ed., *Isle of Lesbos* (2007) <http://www.sappho.com/poetry/a_seward.html> [accessed 15th September 2009].

²³⁵ Lucas, *A Swan and Her Friends*, p. 38.

²³⁶ Margaret Ashmun suggests that Seward's most important relationship toward the middle of her life was her friend Giovanni: *The Singing Swan: An Account of Anna Seward and her Acquaintance with Dr. Johnson Boswell, & Others of Their Time* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), p. xi.

²³⁷ Hesketh Pearson is less than enthusiastic about this bond, as we shall see in greater detail in the next section of this chapter: *The Swan of Lichfield: a Selection from the Correspondence of Anna Seward* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1936), p. 14.

²³⁸ Pearson, *The Swan of Lichfield*, p. 18.

and Teresa Barnard. Kelly's short 1999 biography of Seward chose to focus heavily on the poet's relations with men, in particular John Saville.²³⁹ Teresa Barnard's recently-published extensive study into the life of the poet (the longest in over half a century) also focuses on John Saville.

Barnard's account directly challenges the viewpoint that Seward's emotional motivations were toward women rather than men. Her work suggests that such an interpretation is the result of 'misreading' Seward's poetry and ignoring her unpublished letters (though this stance softens a little between her doctoral thesis and her published biography on Seward).²⁴⁰ Barnard uses letters stored at the Johnson Birthplace Museum to support her assertion that the letters suggest Seward to have in fact been in favour of marriage, even the union of her friend Honora Sneyd to Richard Edgeworth (which will be the focus of the next section of this chapter).²⁴¹ Though this chapter is largely concerned with her poetry, it shall also utilise archival research (conducted in London and Birmingham, as well as New Haven, Connecticut) to demonstrate the exact opposite: that Seward intensely opposed the institution of marriage, as well as fervently supporting same-sex friendship in her unpublished correspondence.²⁴²

²³⁹ Though Kelly does pay some attention to Seward's relationship with Honora Sneyd, her short account of Seward's life presents Saville as the main focus of her affections: Jennifer Kelly, ed., *Bluestocking Feminism: Writings of the Bluestocking Circle 1738-1785*, 8 vols. (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999), IV, p. xii.

²⁴⁰ Barnard suggests that it was Saville rather than Sneyd whom Seward dedicated herself to: "Her private life was constantly under scrutiny and subject to disapproval because of her companionate relationship with John Saville, who was married with two daughters. Representations of her love for her foster sister Honora Sneyd have become, over time, pejorative expressions of a sick obsession at worst, or at least an overwhelming fixation which soured her life. These representations are established on a misreading of the contents of some of her poetry, rather than on the letters.": Teresa Barnard, 'Anna Seward: A Constructed Life' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Birmingham University, 2007) p. 5. The wording is changed slightly in her published biography, in which Barnard adds it would be wrong to identify Seward by twenty-first century standards, whilst still maintaining men and sexuality to be the predominant interest in Seward's life: Barnard, *A Constructed Life*, p. 5.

²⁴¹ Barnard utilises the unpublished Powys and Sykes letters: Barnard, 'Anna Seward: A Constructed Life', p. 15.

²⁴² Seward's opposition to marriage will be the focus later in this chapter.

To suggest Seward's poetry was largely motivated by opposite-sex sexual relations would be a mistake: Anna Seward made herself an enemy of marital vows and shunned the notion of sexuality.²⁴³ Through her pastoral idylls, through her ancient odes, through her letters and through her elegiac works she violently rejects social norms on relationships and seeks to establish an alternative, idealising friendship and nonsexual love. Even more than Gray, the poet seeks to distance herself from mainstream institutions with a vigour she consciously recognised – it was a social and political position she referred to as her 'stand'. Some critics, such as Johns-Putra, Backscheider, Fay and Clarke, have avoided implicating the identity of the poet herself when considering verse on the theme of friendship – yet in order to fully understand Seward's written works we must understand the coherence of the creation and refinement of her queer beliefs and desires.²⁴⁴ Though some such as

²⁴³ Seward would often reject potential male suitors: as Donna Heiland explains with regards to James Boswell's attachment to the poet: 'Swan Songs: The Correspondence of Anna Seward and James Boswell', *Modern Philology*. 90 (1993), 381-391. Heiland suggests that Seward transformed what Boswell intended as an erotic connection into one based in 'domestic affection': Heiland, 'Swan Songs', p. 384.

²⁴⁴ Johns-Putra's analysis of Seward's works is in relation to her Horatian Odes, which will be the focus later in this chapter: Adeline Johns-Putra, 'Anna Seward's translations of Horace: poetic dress, poetic manner and lavish paraphrase' in *Translators, Interpreters, Mediators: Women Writers 1700-1799*, ed. by Gillian E. Dow (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), p. 112. Backscheider will be referenced in the next section, as she comments upon Seward's elegiac works: *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets*, p. 301. Elizabeth Fay's study on Seward's *Louisa* also focuses on friendship whilst avoiding the identity or socio-political viewpoints on Seward's part, even though she notes that Seward 'outmanoeuvred' marriage offers: Elizabeth Fay, 'Anna Seward, the Swan of Lichfield: Reading *Louisa*', in *Approaches to Teaching British Women Poets of the Romantic Period*, ed. by Stephen C. Behrendt (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1997), p. 129. She also suggests friendship in *Louisa* to take priority over 'heterosexual' love: Elizabeth Fay, 'Anna Seward, the Swan of Lichfield' in *Approaches*, ed. by Stephen C. Behrendt, p. 132. Though as Fay has demonstrated friendship is a central focus in *Louisa*, this chapter will be examining Seward's other works which more clearly focus around her stand. Norma Clarke's 2005 article on Seward focuses fairly equally on her male and female relationships but without any focus onto her views on love, which Clarke portrays as unconscious and ill-directed: "... her own passionate love tended to be directed, ugly duckling-like, toward unattainable objects; married men, especially the love of her life, John Saville; or her quasi-sister, Honora Sneyd ...": Norma Clarke, 'Anna Seward: Swan, Duckling or Goose?' in *British Women's Writing in the Long Eighteenth Century: Authorship, Politics and History*, ed. by Jennie Batchelor and Cora Kaplan (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) p. 39. Seward is briefly referenced by Mark Raymond in his writings on the literary canon of the sonnet (which shall be focused upon in the next section of this chapter): Mark Raymond, 'The Romantic Sonnet Revival: Opening the Sonnet's Crypt', *Literature Compass*, 4 (2007), 721-736 (p. 726). Gioia Angeletti examines Seward's position as a female poet within a traditionally male genre: Gioia Angeletti, 'Women Re-writing Men: The Examples of Anna Seward and Lady Caroline Lamb', *DQR Studies in*

Stuart Curran have adopted a queer perspective with regards to Anna Seward, the full extent of her queer beliefs and their impact on her written works has yet to be realised.²⁴⁵

In this chapter I hope to demonstrate that Seward was neither a lesbian, nor was she straight. Whereas one of Gray's personae could be termed a sodomite and delighted in eroticism, no such equivalent can be found with Seward. As we shall see, although she may have been suspected of such activities by contemporaries, rarely do we see any real literary evidence of sexual inclinations: Seward devoted herself to platonic love. It was an overt and wilful social stand.

THE SONNETS

It is Seward's published collection of sonnets which shall be examined first, the works themselves perhaps ambitiously following Shakespeare's lead by elegising same-sex love. The pioneering use of the form itself drew attention to them. As Mark Raymond notes in his article 'The Romantic Sonnet Revival', the Sonnet form had become deeply unpopular by the early eighteenth century, a medium used by few

Literature, 39 (2007), 241-258. James Clifford focuses on Seward's published correspondence: James L. Clifford, 'The Authenticity of Anna Seward's Published Correspondence', *Modern Philology*, 39 (1941), 113-122 (p. 115). Seward is mentioned in reference to the Ladies of Llangollen by Fiona Brideoake, Mary Gordon and Elizabeth Mavor, the works of all of whom will be important to the final section of this chapter: .": Fiona Brideoake, "Extraordinary Female Affection": The Ladies of Llangollen and the Endurance of Queer Community", *Romanticism on the Net*, 36-37 (2004) <<http://www.erudit.org/revue/RON/2004/v/n36-37/011141ar.html>> [accessed 1st July 2010] (23 paragraphs); Mary Gordon, *The Llangollen Ladies* (Ruthin, North Wales: John Jones Publishing, 1999), p. 45; Mavor, *The Ladies of Llangollen*,: p. 81.. A different focus is taken by Timothy Webb, who examines the representation of urban environments in Seward's work: Timothy Webb, 'Listing the Busy Sounds: Anna Seward, Mary Robinson and the Poetic Challenge of the City', *DQR Studies in Literature*, 39 (2007), 79-111. Finally, there are the editors of Seward's published works: Constable and Scott.

²⁴⁵ Curran's focus is largely concerned with Seward and the 'Ladies of Llangollen', which will be examined in greater detail later in this chapter: Stuart Curran, 'Dynamics of Female Friendship in the Later Eighteenth Century', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 23 (2001), 221-239 (p. 230). His article 'Anna Seward and the Dynamics of Female Friendship' focuses more on Honora Sneyd and the sonnets: Curran, *DQR Studies in Literature*, pp. 11-21.

poets until the rise of Romanticism.²⁴⁶ Crucially, however, one poet Raymond acknowledges as having incubated the medium was Thomas Gray, specifically via his 'Sonnet on the Death of Mr Richard West' (1742). The 'lost' poetic form of the sonnet then became a vital mode of elegiac expression: "The sonnet becomes the perfect literary vehicle for an age of sensibility burdened by the past."²⁴⁷ Gray established the sonnet as useful for 'immortalizing' and 'crystallizing' events, which led to a 'cultural synergy' between the sonnet and the Romantic 'Cult of Mourning'.²⁴⁸

Though the Romantic sonnet is normally associated with the 'big six' male Romantic poets, it was women poets Charlotte Smith, Mary Robinson and Anna Seward who rehabilitated and re-established the mode.²⁴⁹ Seward and then Smith associated the elegy with a specifically female poetic persona in the public mind. Their use of both the sonnet and the elegy implicitly challenged class and gender

²⁴⁶ Raymond challenges the commonly-held view of the sonnet as having been a consistently popular mode: "The sonnet, it turns out, has in English literature not always found 'consistent favor' – in fact, before the rise of Romanticism, the sonnet had languished as a neglected and decidedly unfashionable form: Raymond, 'The Romantic Sonnet Revival', p. 726. Originally a love lyric, "By the seventeenth century ... the possible uses of the sonnet had been extended and codified. Tasso's division of his sonnets into Love Sonnets, Heroical Sonnets and Sacred Sonnets and Moral Sonnets ...": John Fuller, *The Sonnet* (London: Methuen., 1972), p.7.

²⁴⁷ Raymond, 'The Romantic Sonnet Revival', p. 731. The influence of Gray's 1742 sonnet on the later Romantic canon is also investigated by Peter J. Manning, though in his case in relation to Wordsworth: Peter J. Manning, 'Wordsworth and Gray's Sonnet on the Death of West', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 22 (1982), 505-518.

²⁴⁸ Raymond, 'The Romantic Sonnet Revival', p. 729. This focus on the past echoes Traub's arguments on the nature of elegy (contained in the introduction to this thesis). Both the sonnet and elegy itself have been regarded as tools for burying people, places and desires. Backscheider makes clear that there were numerous types of elegy: "The elegy, rather than exclusively a poem lamenting an individual's death as we think of it today, had several distinct forms, including the lament, the memorial, the pastoral, the classical (which included love elegies) and the English contemplative.": Backscheider, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets*, p. 271. As we can see in James Holstun's 1987 article on lesbian elegy, such representations were generally written by men prior to the century: James Holstun, "'Will You Rent Our Ancient Love Asunder?': Lesbian Elegy in Donne, Marvell and Milton, *ELH*, 54 (1987), 835-867 (p. 836).

²⁴⁹ Raymond suggests that the male-dominated canon fails to acknowledge the central contribution of the earlier female poets: Raymond, 'The Romantic Sonnet Revival', p. 727. It should be noted, however, that Raymond does not specifically detail any of Seward's poetry.

barriers appertaining to certain poetic genres.²⁵⁰ In the mid-eighteenth century William Shenstone penned an essay on the use of the elegy to express social commentary. He makes clear that, from the time of Horace and Ovid, the elegy had been used for a variety of subjects and ideas: "It is probable that elegies were written at first upon the death of *intimate friends* and *near relations*; *celebrated beauties*, or *favorite mistresses* ..."²⁵¹ Although they can find a variety of subjects, elegies should always promote virtue (and thus entail a certain degree of personal moralising).²⁵² Paula Backscheider also notes how elegy channelled the poet's emotions at times of psychological threat or abrupt social change: a tradition she also cites as dating back to antiquity, in this instance the poetry of Tibullus (who, of course, inspired both Gray and West).²⁵³

The sonnet had been established as a tool for conveying both elegiac and revolutionary sentiment, both of which would prove of use to Anna Seward. A great admirer of Gray (as we saw earlier in this chapter) Seward was to adopt the sonnet form to express her love for and grief toward Honora Sneyd, echoing Gray's 'Sonnet on the Death of Mr Richard West' some four decades later. She would also use the form to convey a love which was knowingly socially transgressive, producing sonnets which were hostile to marriage and the culture of sexuality.

²⁵⁰ Angeletti's article focuses on the relation between gender and the genre in the works of both Seward and Lamb. Angeletti surmises that Seward used her works to subvert masculine values (which will be examined further in the section on Seward's paraphrasing of Horace); 'Women Re-writing Men', p. 250.

²⁵¹ Shenstone, *The Works*, I, p. 16.

²⁵² Shenstone, *The Works*, I, p. 18.

²⁵³ Backscheider notes: "Historically, the elegy has had special appeal during times when poets have felt the need to address loss and mourning and to respond to feelings of psychological and social threat.": *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets*, p. 279. Backscheider comments that Seward particularly demonstrates that elegies were as much about other concerns (such as love) as they were about death: *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets*, p. 301.

Honora Sneyd had joined the Seward household when Seward was sixteen, and though nine years younger, she was to have a profound impact upon her emotional life and her later writings as devoted companion and a reflection of her own younger self, a passive pupil morphing into adult friend.²⁵⁴ Seward wrote of the depth of her feeling toward Sneyd to third parties, often unable to contain her enthusiasm toward her the younger girl.²⁵⁵ The poet's love for her was all-encompassing.

The attachment Seward developed to Honora Sneyd could not go unnoticed by even the most heterocentric twentieth-century biographers. When acknowledged, however, the relationship is not presented as either natural or healthy. Margaret Ashmun suggests that Sneyd provided an outlet for Seward's 'too-romantic temperament', as well as providing a distraction when her parents forbade her to write.²⁵⁶ Similarly, Hesketh Pearson wrote in the same decade that Seward's attachment to her friend (which she describes as a 'romantic devotion') was unfortunate and would have been better directed toward a male companion.²⁵⁷ Jennifer Kelly refers to the bond as a 'satisfying diversion', rather than an end in itself, whilst E. V. Lucas, alludes to Sneyd simply as a 'sister' to Seward, making the relationship fit a heteronormative worldview – a strategy repeated by several

²⁵⁴ Scott, *Poetical Works*, I, p. 70.

²⁵⁵ Scott's collection of letters contain those between Seward and her friend 'Emma', to whom she delights in describing the bond between her and Sneyd, describing her virtues: *Poetical Works*, I, p. cxvii. In these letters Seward acknowledges her own contentment: "Ah! what halcyon days have this dear girl and I passed with our little Honora, beneath the fair spires of tranquil Lichfield!": *Poetical Works*, I, p. cxxii.

²⁵⁶ Ashmun, *The Singing Swan*, p. 10. For Honora Sneyd as a distraction, see p. 15.

²⁵⁷ Pearson makes clear her view that the bond between the two was unusual and ill-advised: "Anna grew strangely attached to this child, taught her the classics, and eventually made her the object of a romantic devotion which, in happier circumstances, might have been bestowed upon a member of the sex more likely to profit from it": Pearson, *The Swan of Lichfield*, p. 14.

biographers.²⁵⁸ Susan S. Lancer suggests that using the language of siblings to refer to friendship bonds was to contain them within a heteronormative discourse, a protective method utilised from the eighteenth century: “Both hegemonic and potentially suspect writers participated in a ... strategy for rendering the befriended body innocent both sexually and politically: a rewriting of women’s love in the tropes of sisterhood.”²⁵⁹ Even Faderman (whose focus on Sneyd and the sonnets makes her *Surpassing the Love of Men* extremely relevant to this section) makes her own assumptions on the bond when she suggests that their relationship was likely not ‘genital’, due to Seward’s conservative upbringing.²⁶⁰ Of course any erotic bonds can neither be proven nor discounted, and it is the impact of her identity and beliefs on her writing which is of relevance here.

Seward’s poetry to Sneyd articulates one singular emotional state above all others: grief. Whether tinted with jealousy, anger or regret, grief remains the central focus of these works, and, like Gray, Seward would not wait until the death of her friend to begin composing elegies.²⁶¹ Consequently, there are three main ‘stages’ of elegy demonstrated in the sonnets: the first when Sneyd leaves the Seward household; the second when she becomes engaged and then married; the third upon her death. All represented loss for Seward in a bond which, as Faderman attests, was expected to be permanent:

²⁵⁸ “Honora was a constant and satisfying diversion as she progressed under Seward’s tutelage and there was always music in the Palace” in Kelly, ed., *Bluestocking Feminism*, IV, p. xii. Lucas refers to Sneyd as Seward’s ‘new sister’: *A Swan and Her Friends*, p. 37. Clarke refers to her as her ‘quasi-sister’: Clarke, ‘Anna Seward: Swan, Duckling or Goose?’ in *British Women’s Writing*, ed. by Jennie Batchelor and others, p. 39. Even Stuart Curran’s queer perspective utilises the term: Curran, ‘Dynamics of Female Friendship’, p. 227. It is repeated in his later article: Curran, ‘Anna Seward and the Dynamics of Female Friendship’, p. 15.

²⁵⁹ Susan S. Lancer, ‘Befriending the Body: Female Intimacies as Class Acts’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 32 (1998), 179-198 (p. 193). Lancer suggests that these tactics were seen as necessary in a society which sought to regulate female friendships ever more stringently.

²⁶⁰ Faderman states: “... it is difficult to believe that a woman reared in her conservative environment and continuing to be comfortable in it, would have been open about any nonmarital relationship that was sexual.”: Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men*, p. 135.

²⁶¹ A point which is not missed by Backscheider: Backscheider, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets*, p. 296.

Despite the nine years' difference between them, the relationship is apparently one of complete equality and totally shared sentiments, such as few eighteenth-century women hoped to find with men. Theirs was a marriage, and Anna believed she had good reason to expect permanency.²⁶²

Stuart Curran suggests the series of sonnets served to recreate the story of their relationship (and parting) within a space which was within the poet's control.²⁶³ Even so, Curran notes an anxiety present within all of Seward's works to Sneyd.²⁶⁴ The sonnet is certainly a strict metrical form usually adapted for the disciplining of extreme emotions of love and grief. Seward may consciously have emulated Shakespeare's sonnet sequence dramatizing an 'eternal triangle' in which platonic same-sex love is favourably contrasted with heterosexuality which corrupts the poet's beloved.

The first stage of elegy was prompted by the end of the cohabitation of the two women, when Sneyd's father withdrew her from Seward's home. Though she dedicated more than one type of poetry to her loss (including pieces Seward wrote earlier on occasions when Honora was only away on short visits, such as 'Honora: An Elegy', 'The Anniversary' and 'Epistle to Miss Honora Sneyd') it was through her sonnets that she found a form in which she could express herself most strongly.²⁶⁵ It was the sonnet form Seward turned to when her losses became more permanent.

²⁶² I would, of course, object to the heteronormative use of the term 'marriage': Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men*, p. 135.

²⁶³ "Seward, who finally published her sonnets as a totality in 1799 to stake a claim to her command of the sonnet form, here recreates her relationship with Honora Sneyd within an enclosed, interiorized, condensed space. It is a counterpart to and an enactment of the relationship two women may hold outside the normative social structures defined by patriarchy.": Curran, *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, p. 230. This point is repeated in his later article: Curran, 'Anna Seward and the Dynamics of Female Friendship', p. 21.

²⁶⁴ Curran, 'Anna Seward and the Dynamics of Female Friendship', p. 16.

²⁶⁵ 'Honora: An Elegy' (1769) was composed upon the day in which they were separated and is comprised of twelve four-line stanzas. In contrast to Seward's later works, the rhyming pattern is regular and though it utilises Seward's usual 'flowery' language, it does not contain a great deal of emotional phrasing (probably due to the highly temporary nature of the separation): Scott, *Poetical Works*, I, p. 65. Even so, the poem was briefly referenced by Faderman as an example of Seward's obsessive love for Sneyd: *Surpassing the Love of Men*, p. 134. The same lack of extreme passion is found in her longer poem, 'The Anniversary' (1769), in which Seward applauds friendship and ties her memories of Sneyd to Lichfield, though again without the emotional intensity we see in her later

Their separation prompted a further spurt of writing ('Elegy Written at the Sea-Side', 'To Time Past' and 'Epistle to Miss Honora Sneyd'), but the tenth sonnet in her published collection bears particular witness to her fears and insecurities:

HONORA, shou'd that cruel time arrive
 When 'gainst my truth thou should'st my errors poise,
 Scorning remembrance of our vanish'd joys;
 When for the love-warm looks, in which I live,
 But cold respect must greet me, that shall give
 No tender glance, no kind regretful sighs;
 When thou shalt pass me with averted eyes,
 Feigning thou see'st me not, to sting, and grieve
 And sicken my sad heart, I cou'd not bear
 Such dire eclipse of thy soul-cheering rays;
 I cou'd not learn my struggling heart to tear
 From thy lov'd form, that thro' my memory strays;
 Nor in the pale horizon of Despair
 Endure the wintry and the darken'd days.²⁶⁶

Seward's loss represents a failure to adhere to the Aristotelian ideal of sharing a home and therefore a life with one's intimate friend. The sonnet is addressed to Honora, though whether she actually read it is difficult to ascertain. The sonnets were not published until sixteen years after 'Sonnet X' was written and it is probably originally composed as a means of private self-expression. Seward utilises strong imagery to signify the cooling of the her own emotional landscape with the departure of the warmth of her friend's presence: the poet's comparison of her subject to the sun grants her a centricity which lights all aspects of her life – physical, emotional and spiritual. The poet both conveys a fear of loss and the sense that she has had something worth holding on to. The positive language relating to Sneyd is both

works: Scott, *Poetical Works*, I, p. 68. This poem is briefly referenced by Curran to demonstrate Seward's obsession with Sneyd: Curran, 'The Dynamics of Female Friendship', p. 227. 'Epistle to Miss Honora Sneyd' (1770) has a slightly elevated emotional tone, shifting the language toward the pained declarations which would become more common in her sonnets: Scott, *Poetical Works*, I, p. 76. Seward's elegies to male subjects predate these poems, and her celebrated *Monody on Major André* is focused on in some detail in Backscheider's work: *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets*, p. 300.

²⁶⁶ Anna Seward, *Original Sonnets on Various Subjects and Odes Paraphrased from Horace* (London: G. Sael, 1799), p. 12. Subsequent references will be given in parentheses unless further detail is needed.



romantic and above bodily desire (with reference to their souls having connected).²⁶⁷

From this sonnet we see the emergence of a state of separation far more grievous to the poet – one which was not only physical, but also emotional. It wasn’t to be long before Seward was to enter her next stage of mourning, and by the twelfth sonnet in the collection a rather different circumstance has arisen and a rather different tone used.

The Elegy's Second Stage

After she left the Seward household, Honora Sneyd was to betray Anna Seward, as the latter saw it, by marrying and becoming Honora Edgeworth.²⁶⁸ Teresa Barnard’s archival research reveals that Seward did not shun the wedding, as has commonly been believed, but was in fact in attendance as a bridesmaid – a fact which Barnard uses as evidence of Seward’s support of marriage.²⁶⁹ Barnard’s account notes that Sneyd’s father and many neighbours rigorously opposed the wedding (likely due to Edgeworth’s previous marital state). I would argue that it is unlikely Seward would have abandoned Honora and denied her support at such a time, regardless of her own views. To have done so would likely have caused her to regard herself as a poor friend. It is also highly plausible that Seward simply showed initial

²⁶⁷ Religious expression and friendship will be examined later in this chapter.

²⁶⁸ Margaret Ashmun goes into the greatest amount of detail on the courtship between Sneyd and Edgeworth, detailing how they met at a dinner party with no hostility from Seward: Ashmun, *The Singing Swan*, p. 33. However, when Seward began to be romantically pursued by both Richard Edgeworth (who was married at the time) and his friend Thomas Day, Ashmun reveals the poet’s anguish: “Anna Seward, watching her beloved Honora with the jealous eyes of long possession, felt a coldness at her heart when she beheld the motives, but ill conceived, in the souls of the three men. Honora was her darling (sister, husband, and child combined), and it was torture to think of what her loss might mean.”: Ashmun, *The Singing Swan*, p. 48. Ashmun also details the death of Richard Edgeworth’s wife and his marriage to Sneyd on July 17th 1773: Ashmun, *The Singing Swan*, p. 59.

²⁶⁹ Barnard points out that Seward described the wedding in positive terms: ‘we were a smart cavalcade’: Barnard, ‘Anna Seward: A Constructed Life’, p. 220 and Barnard, *A Constructed Life*, p. 80.

support from a fear of losing Sneyd – a prediction which ultimately proved accurate.²⁷⁰ Seward compares the engagement in her letters unfavourably in comparison with her friendship, as well as mentioning the grief endured by Major André (a friend of the two and another suitor of Sneyd's):

In May 1773 she married. Ah! How deeply was I a fellow-sufferer with Major André on this marriage! – but her attachment to him had never the tenderness of her friendship for me; it was a mere compound of gratitude and esteem, of which his letters shew [sic] that he was always aware. We both lost her forever. That form, the light of my eyes, was divided from me for life by the Irish sea; and that heart, whose affection I prized more than life, to me became indurated.²⁷¹

There is a marked discrepancy between her letters where she adopts a comparatively resigned elegiac tone in comparison with her sonnets, which are wild and dramatic, untempered in their use of highly emotive language. Two pieces in particular stand out (which must be read in conjunction with one another): the twelfth and the fourteenth in the published collection. Unlike the tenth sonnet, the twelfth is addressed to the speaker's own heart:

Chill'd by unkind HONORA's alter'd eye,
 "Why droops my heart with pining woe forlorn,"
 Thankless for much of good? What thousands, born
 To ceaseless toil beneath this wintry sky,
 Or to brave deathful oceans surging high,
 Or fell Disease's fever'd rage to mourn,
 How blest to them would seem my destiny!
 How dear the comforts my rash sorrows scorn!
 Affection is repaid by causeless hate!
 A plighted love is changed to cold disdain!
 Yet suffer not thy wrongs to shroud thy fate,
 But turn, my soul, to blessings which remain;
 And let this truth the wise resolve create,
 THE HEART ESTRANGED NO ANGUISH CAN REGAIN.²⁷²

The establishment of blame on Honora for changeableness ('alter'd' in line 1, 'chang'd' in line 10) presents a simmering anger: the speaker is 'chill'd' by her

²⁷⁰ Barnard, 'Anna Seward: A Constructed Life', p. 220.

²⁷¹ *Letters of Anna Seward*, IV, p. 217 (Seward to 'Mrs T', Lichfield, June 19th, 1796).

²⁷² *Original Sonnets*, p. 14.

beloved's 'cold disdain', but the emotive language used is far from cool. Allusions to winter again predominate, and terms such as 'wintry' and 'cold' thread their way throughout the sonnet. The poet suggests her own grief to be mild compared to others in the octet, but the necessity of drawing on extreme causes of suffering such as disease and perpetual serfdom as points of comparison actually enhance the melodrama. The sestet resumes the theme of Honora's betrayal of their 'plighted troth'. This grief mixed with anger may be compared with the nineteenth sonnet in the collection, where Seward refers to Sneyd as a 'false friend' and again states that she has broken a vow to her.²⁷³ Friendship is thus represented as sworn by an oath, one which the poet takes as sacred.

Seward's use of four end-stopped lines with exclamation points (ll.7-10) mid-point in the twelfth sonnet draws attention to four dramatic statements evenly balanced between compassion for others and anger for self, which breaks the sonnet's flow, giving a disjointed pace to match the heightened emotive state of its author. The 'turn' or volta of the sonnet is signalled by the word 'turn' in line 12, drawing the reader's attention to the resumption of order. The Stoicism the speaker counsels herself is at last bolstered by the universality of the concluding statement, highlighted in upper-case lettering: 'THE HEART ESTRANGED NO ANGUISH CAN REGAIN'. In fact this final line sums up the entire theme of the poem, and the poetic devices used by Seward here all serve to highlight her own anguish.

Ashmum is puzzled by the poet's emotional intensity: "In more than sisterly fashion, she has centred her hopes and ambitions upon the growing Honora. That she should have felt the pangs of separation upon the marriage of the younger girl is not unnatural. But her poems and letters reveal a degree of grief and misery which is

²⁷³ *Original Sonnets*, p. 21. The sonnet is referenced by Faderman, though she makes no comment on its content: Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men*, p. 133.

accounted for only by a sense of total estrangement and loss.”²⁷⁴ Ashmun does not imply marriage to be intrinsically antithetical to the ‘troth’ or bond Seward wished to honour and continue, but it is possible that Sneyd felt it was. Seward’s elegies to Sneyd were inspired by this breakdown of friendship and we can see that the poet needed only loss, rather than death, in order to write elegiacally. As noted by Pearson: “It is no exaggeration to say that Anna went into mourning for Honora from the moment she became engaged to Edgeworth.”²⁷⁵

As Freud makes clear, the act of mourning does not require an actual death, rather a ‘loss’ of some kind.²⁷⁶ He argues that mourning and melancholia are intrinsically tied to one another, both spurred by the same environmental cause - loss. Though we can clearly see that Seward has entered a period of mourning, whether her loss resulted in full-blown melancholia (and whether such melancholia influenced the sonnets) is less certain. Freud lists the symptoms as follows:

The distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment.²⁷⁷

Though Seward did indeed withdraw from social activities during this period, her sonnets go on the offensive: instead of ‘self-revilings’, Seward aims her grief at her subject. Certainly, the narrative voice of the sonnets presents itself as the injured

²⁷⁴ Ashmun, *The Singing Swan*, p. 60. Ashmun goes on to suggest a certain degree of pride to have provoked Seward: “Honora Sneyd was, after all, no real sister” and even if she had been, giving her up to a promising marriage need cause no such ecstasies of pain. But the mere losing of Honora was not all. There was the added pain of counsels neglected, of love discarded, seemingly without regret, of ingratitude flaunted after years of unswerving devotion.”: p. 62. On the subject Kelly suggests the estrangement to have been down to a number of reasons, from jealousy (toward both Sneyd and Edgeworth) to a concern over Edgeworth’s treatment of women: Kelly, ed, *Bluestocking Feminism*, IV, p. xiv.

²⁷⁵ Pearson, *The Swan of Lichfield*, p. 20.

²⁷⁶ Though this of course would often include death: Freud, *Complete Works*, XIV, p. 243.

²⁷⁷ Freud, *Complete Works*, XIV, p. 244. When going into more detail on the symptoms of melancholia we can see how they differ to the authorial voice of the sonnets: “The melancholic displays something else besides which is lacking in mourning – an extraordinary diminution in his self-regard, an impoverishment of the ego on a grand scale”: Freud, *Complete Works*, XIV, p. 246.

party, one which is above reproach. The sonnets may be melancholic, but they do not display this crucial symptom of melancholia: her poems do not demonstrate a loss of ego.²⁷⁸ However, Freud makes clear that attacks on the ego in some instances are applied to another, displacing criticism on an object, "... whom the patient loves or has loved or should love."²⁷⁹ The attacks on Sneyd should therefore be read as a symptom of melancholia, and the outbursts contained within the sonnets as a direct result of this.²⁸⁰ Interestingly the subject of the sonnets is both the lost subject/object and the target of ego-loss.

Seward's grief is expressed in another sonnet written that same month, in which she reveals that she cannot sleep with her 'Enchantress gone' and implores the spirits of slumber to 'Shed thy soft poppies on my aching brow' (*Original Sonnets*, p. 15). Yet this calm point in the tale told by the sonnets is temporary, and again the same month she furiously wrote verbally assaulting her former friend. The fourteenth sonnet was to be her most violent:

INGRATITUDE ,--how deadly is thy smart,
Proceeding from the Form we fondly love!
How light, compar'd, all other sorrows prove!
Thou shed'st a night of woe, from whence depart
The gentle beams of patience, that the heart
Mid lesser ills illume.--Thy Victims rove
Unquiet as the Ghost that haunts the grove
Where MURDER spilt the life-blood.--O! thy dart
Kills more than life, e'en all that makes it dear;
Till we the "sensible of pain" wou'd change
For Phrenzy, that defies the bitter tear,
Or wish, in kindred callousness, to range

²⁷⁸ Freud makes clear that mourning is a result of the loss of an object/subject, whereas melancholia the loss of ego: Freud, *Complete Works*, XIV, p. 247.

²⁷⁹ Freud, *Complete Works*, XIV, p. 248.

²⁸⁰ Freud describes the process by which 'ego-loss' occurs as a result of melancholia: "An object-choice, an attachment of the libido to a particular person, had at one time existed; then owing to a real slight or disappointment coming from this loved person, the object-relationship was shattered. The result was not the normal one of a withdrawal of the libido from this object and a displacement of it on to a new one, but something different ...". When the libido was 'freed' it withdrew onto the ego and identified the ego with the abandoned object: Freud, *Complete Works*, XIV, p. 249. This will have required the bond between Seward and Sneyd to have been formed on a narcissistic basis, the ego wanting to 'devour' the object: Freud, *Complete Works*, XIV, p. 249.

Where moon-ey'd IDIOCY , with fallen lip,
Drags the loose knee, and intermitting step.²⁸¹

This Gothic sonnet personifies ‘INGRATITUDE’ as a murderer, suggesting rejection to be the most life-draining of experiences: “How light, compared, all *other* sorrows prove!” This contrasts with her twelfth sonnet, in which she stoically thinks of suffering greater than her own. From the outset a dramatic lack of perspective is established: the fragmented yet chilly brooding of the twelfth sonnet has morphed into rage. Earlier the suffering wrought by disease and serfdom were invoked as worse scenarios, whereas here murder is presented as being on a par with poet’s grief. Taken in context, Seward is presenting the betrayal of friendship in favour of marriage as one of the worst crimes which can be committed. Seward literally presents herself as a victim (line 6) condemned to a ghostly nocturnal existence (though the subject’s materiality is called into question with her being referred to as a ‘form’).

Whereas the previous two sonnets presented a much more spiritual bond, ‘Sonnet XIV’ is rooted in the body. Seward changes the conventional Petrarchan imagery of Cupid’s dart into reference to blood in the eighth line, and ‘murder’ (which, taking place in a grove, has connotations of human sacrifice): a violence introduced by Seward herself. Though death is a common theme to Seward’s poetry (especially, of course, her elegiac works) the quiet melancholy common to such an invocation is transformed into physical aggression. Shockingly, the speaker concludes by stating she would prefer the frenzy or idiocy of madness than to endure the mental pain of melancholia.

²⁸¹ *Original Sonnets*, p. 16.

The Elegy's Third Stage

The third stage of mourning enters more traditional elegiac territory, and is brought about by the untimely death of Sneyd in 1780 (having been married to Edgeworth for seven years). The tone of the sonnets toward their subject softens considerably at this point, as Faderman grants: "From the point when she learned Honora was dying of consumption, however, she again idealized her, and Edgeworth became the villain" (Faderman, p. 135). As with her other sonnets, a theatrical scenario is imagined in 'Sonnet XXXI':

O, ever dear! thy precious, vital powers
 Sink rapidly!—the long and dreary night
 Brings scarce an hope that morn's returning light
 Shall dawn for thee!—In such terrific hours,
 When yearning fondness eagerly devours
 Each moment of protracted life, his flight
 The rashly-chosen of thy heart has ta'en
 Where dances, songs, and theatres invite.
 Expiring Sweetness! with indignant pain
 I see him in the scenes where laughing glide
 Pleasure's light forms;—see his eyes gaily glow,
 Regardless of thy life's fast ebbing tide;
 I hear him, who should droop in silent woe,
 Declaim on actors, and on taste decide!²⁸²

'Sonnet XXXI' imagines two subjects, the fragile and 'precious' figure whose expiration draws near, and her husband, whose wilful neglect of the invalid embitters the authorial voice. Despite the quiet melancholy of the opening this sonnet concludes with contemptuous anger. The language depicting the two subjects contrasts heavily: where one sinks the other flies; where one descends into night the other glows. At the opening of each quatrain (marked by the lack of indentation in the published version) the poet's voice enters, remarking on her own emotional

²⁸² *Original Sonnets*, p. 33.

turmoil, in sharp contrast to the invalid's 'rashly-chosen' husband who spends his time frivolously enjoying 'dances', 'songs' and 'theatres'.

'Sonnet XXXII' continues the theme of hostility, directed at the male rival but also at the faithless friend herself:

Behold him now his genuine colours wear,
 That specious false-one, by whose cruel wiles
 I lost thy amity; saw thy dear smiles
 Eclips'd; those smiles, that used my heart to cheer,
 Wak'd by the grateful sense of many a year
 When rose thy youth, by Friendship's pleasing toils
 Cultured; - but Dying! - O! for ever fade
 The angry fires. - Each thought, that might upbraid
 Thy broken faith, which yet my soul deplores,
 Now as eternally is past and gone
 As are the interesting, the happy hours,
 Days, years, we shared together. They are flown!
 Yet long must I lament thy hapless doom,
 Thy lavish'd life and early hasten'd tomb.²⁸³

Faderman uses the poem as an example of Seward's intense hatred toward Edgeworth, asserting that she blamed him for Sneyd's death.²⁸⁴ In these sonnets, however, he as a subject is responsible not only for Sneyd's death, but also her betrayal of female friendship. Sonnet XXXII opens with an invitation to Sneyd and the reader to join in the author's judgement of the subject: 'Behold him now', for the poet refers to her in the second person when she states 'I lost thy amity'. The author appears to be referring to a fictional and idealised version of the subject, as imagined in her own mind after her friend's early death. Once again the language points the melodramatic contrast between the female victim Sneyd and the false villain Edgeworth, one being 'dear', the other 'cruel'.

'Sonnet XXXII' has another contrast, one which extends beyond the two individuals: that of friendship and of marriage. As Freud stated that mourning does

²⁸³ *Original Sonnets*, p. 34.

²⁸⁴ Faderman, *Surpassing*, p. 136.

not require a death, nor does it require an individual, and the act of mourning can be applied to abstract concepts as well as physical beings.²⁸⁵ Seward would not only mourn Sneyd, but the prior destruction of their friendship, which is referred to directly as ‘cultured’ by the years and a source of great pleasure in the past. Even after Honora’s death, the speaker has to quell her rising resentment at her beloved’s ‘broken faith’, presumably as a result of prioritizing her marital vows. Here Seward presents friendship as a higher form of love, one which also entails vows and fidelity.

This elegy ends on a bleak note, with the final rhyming couplet of ‘doom’ and ‘tomb’, terms which cannot spare her however ‘cultured’ and ‘lavish’d’ the subject may have been. For the time being, both Friendship and Sneyd are in the grave. Lucas ties the poet’s veneration of the dead to an idealisation of the past:

After making every allowance for her tendency in her poetry and letters to idealise the dead and exaggerate the tender ecstasies of the past – a kind of sentimental fidelity which in those days almost amounted to poetry, or at any rate by the exercise of which quite a decent reputation as a poet could be won – we must believe that Miss Seward’s feelings for her [deceased] sister and Honora, both of whom died young, remained deep and true to the end: in the case of Honora almost passionately so.²⁸⁶

This veneration of the dead and idealisation of the past, however, does not invalidate the poet’s belief in such friendship. As with Gray, I would disagree with the idea that the therapeutic function of the elegy is to ‘bury’ unseemly sentiment and forbidden desires. In these sonnets Seward immortalises her desires and beliefs through her elegies, enshrining them and granting them greater power. Her departed friend was never to leave the mind of Anna Seward, and over the years the poet would go to extraordinary lengths to keep some form of Honora Sneyd present: be it in the form of a paper profile by her bed, contact with Honora’s stepchildren, or even (successfully)

²⁸⁵ Freud states: “Mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one’s country, liberty, an ideal, and so on.”: Freud, *Complete Works*, XIV, p. 243. For Seward, this would apply to the concept of Friendship.

²⁸⁶ Lucas, *A Swan and Her Friends*, p. 37.

imploring friends to name their children after her, Seward remained as devoted to Sneyd in death as she had in life.²⁸⁷ Indeed, the fetishization of Sneyd's memory and its link to all other relationships can be demonstrated by the fact that she uses the name generically for a special friend: for example, in a letter she terms the close friend of another woman, 'her Honora'.²⁸⁸ Freudian theory would suggest that Seward never overcame her mourning or melancholia: 'the existence of the love object [was] psychically prolonged'.²⁸⁹ Having been elegised, the idealised relationship between Seward and Sneyd would form the blueprint for Sneyd's socio-political stand for friendship and against marriage, a rejection of sexualised discourse and the subsequent creation of 'sexuality' as outlined by Foucault.

The friendship explored in the *Original Sonnets* was not censured by contemporary reviewers. Upon its publication in 1799 the liberal *Analytical Review* wrote sympathetically: "The heart of the author seems to have been wrung by the sympathetic pangs of alienated friendship. Her attachment to Honora seems to have

²⁸⁷ In a letter to Mrs Powys in September of 1792 Seward even reveals that she slept with a 'paper-profile' of Honora by her bed (a fact missed by those studying the relationship between the two friends) which had been there for decades: "It is there, that it may be the last object I behold ere I sleep; and it is the companion of all my excursions": *Letters of Anna Seward*, III, p. 175 (Seward to Powys, September 22nd, 1792). Seward was also to connect Sneyd to sleep in two poems: 'Invocation to the Genius of Slumber' and 'Sonnet XXXIII' (Curran cites the former as an example of 'queer' poetry: Curran, 'Anna Seward and the Dynamics of Female Friendshio', p. 20.) She also placed a picture which reminded her of her friend very prominently in her home, so that "... whenever I lift my eyes from my pen, my book, or the faces of my companions, they anchor on the countenance, which was the sun of my youthful horizon": *Letters of Anna Seward*, V, p. 110 (Seward to Butler, Lichfield, June 4th, 1798). Seward was also interested in Sneyd's stepchildren, despite them only having blood ties to her enemy Richard Edgeworth. When Seward visited Bristol in 1804 "Maria and Emmeline, of Edgeworths-Town, both settled in that city, sought me with much kindness, and spoke with apparent delight of my attentions to them in their infancy, and of the hours they called happily spent beneath my father's roof": *Letters of Anna Seward*, VI, p. 205 (Seward to Powys, Winterbourn, October 18th, 1804). Maria Edgeworth will be important to the third chapter of this thesis. On Seward's appeal, Mrs Smith named her daughter (to whom Seward was godparent) Honora - This is incorrectly referred to as 'Mrs Stokes' daughter where it is mentioned in her letters: "... little Honora, named at my request, after the dear angel I doubly lost": *Letters of Anna Seward*, III, p. 156 (Seward to Jackson, August 3rd, 1792), though in her unpublished letters and poetry it is revealed to actually be the child of Mrs Smith. Finally, Faderman details how four years following Sneyd's death Seward saw a woman who resembled her and broke down in uncontrollable tears: Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men*, p. 136.

²⁸⁸ *Letters of Anna Seward*, VI, p. 286 (Seward to Powys, Lichfield, June 28th, 1806).

²⁸⁹ Unable to free itself from the lost love object, Seward's ego was subsequently bound in memories and unable to overcome the loss: Freud, *Complete Works*, XIV, p. 245. Seward did overcome some symptoms of mourning, however – she was able to love again.

been unchilled by neglect, and unextinguished by the grave!”²⁹⁰ A similar sentiment was even expressed by the conservative journal the *British Critic*: “The Sonnets, of which Miss Honora Sneyd is the subject, have great pathos and beauty ...”²⁹¹ Their sympathy is perhaps underlined by the fact that they refer to Honora by the name ‘Sneyd’, as Seward always knew and referred to her, rather than ‘Edgeworth’ as was her name at her death (the reviewer would have known the married name as it is mentioned in the sonnets). Such a focus is not, however, universal. In the *Critical Review* of May 1799, Sneyd is not even mentioned once.²⁹² The same is true of the *European Magazine*, also that same month, who suggest her muse instead to be ‘elegance and vigour’.²⁹³ This is also the case in the brief but positive review in the *Monthly Magazine* in July.²⁹⁴

Even where it was mentioned, little more than brief references were made of the friendship. It is likely the absence of hostility was due to the failure of Seward to disrupt Sneyd’s marriage or otherwise corrupt traditional matrimony for others. Seward’s failure to retain Sneyd meant her passions and desire were fundamentally unthreatening: despite the powerful anger expressed in the sonnets, their elegiac nature safely neutered them in the eyes of contemporaries.

SEWARD’S QUEER CORRESPONDENCE

The anger and grief presented in the sonnets were caused by what the poet perceived as a grievous treachery – one not only aimed at herself, but as the institution of friendship. In order to contextualise Seward’s views on both friendship and

²⁹⁰ *Analytical Review*, 1 (May-June 1799), 517-22.

²⁹¹ *British Critic*, 14 (August 1799), 166-71.

²⁹² *Critical Review*, 26 (May 1799), 33-38.

²⁹³ *European Magazine*, 35 (May 1799), 323-325.

²⁹⁴ *Monthly Magazine*, 7 (July 20, 1799), p. 536.

marriage (as well as the controversy surrounding them) and their impact on her poetry we must now turn to her letters. Textuality was vital to the poet's conception of friendship, and the importance Seward places on correspondence derives from the moral obligation to maintain friendships through practising conversation. In 1789 she writes of Miss Williams: "In one respect this dear glowing daughter of Apollo is an uncomfortable correspondent. She writes to me in turn, but she does not answer my letters. I could not do thus to a friend, unless I felt a pretty sovereign contempt for their abilities and opinions."²⁹⁵

These letters were an important part of the poet's literary devotion to friendship, and to the public a careful censorship took place. Though a great number of Anna Seward's letters have found their way into published editions of her correspondence, a great many more have failed to do so. Three archives containing a host of such letters have been consulted for this investigation into Seward's friendships: the Department of Manuscripts at the British library, the Special Collections Department of the University of Birmingham, and Beinecke Library at Yale University.

Anna Seward and Epistolary Difficulties

The differences between Seward's published and unpublished letters present us with a significant obstacle: the question of biographical and autobiographical authenticity. Two collections comprise the bulk of Seward's published correspondence (and all following collections use these two as a source): Sir Walter

²⁹⁵ Seward, *Letters of Anna Seward*, II, p. 286 (Seward to Swift, Lichfield, July 9th, 1789). Similarly she complains of the same crime on the part of Miss Weston in September of 1789, unhappy she did not acknowledge her letter from February: Seward, *Letters of Anna Seward*, II, p. 320 (Seward to Weston, September 3rd, 1789).

Scott gathered and edited the earlier letters of Seward's life (1762-1768) in the first volume of *The Poetical Works of Anna Seward: With Extracts from Her Literary Correspondence* (1810).²⁹⁶ Constable edited her later letters in the six volumes comprising *Letters of Anna Seward: Written Between the Years 1784 and 1807* (1811). Though the two collections have been referenced by biographers, neither seem to have been thoroughly investigated in the context of Seward's various friendships.

For Seward there is no counterpart to the faithful and exact replications of the Toynbee edition of Gray's letters and the disparity between Seward's written and published letters has not gone unnoticed – in the early twentieth century E.V Lucas commented on the inconsistency between the single original letter of hers he had viewed and its equivalent letter in Constable's collection:

It was from her copies that the six-volume edition was prepared in 1811 ... but whether the differences between their text as it appears in print and their text as Miss Seward originally wrote it to her friends, were her work in transcribing, or her editor's, I cannot say, having had no opportunity of comparing them. But I understand such differences do exist, and the only original letter I have seen proves it. The matter is unimportant.²⁹⁷

To James L. Clifford, however, the issue is certainly important. In his 1941 article *The Authenticity of Anna Seward's Published Correspondence*, he examines the matter in further detail. His inspiration was to be found in the work of Hill Wickham, who noticed in 1863 when publishing the letters of Thomas Sedgewick Whalley that there were disparities with the letters found in Constable's edition.²⁹⁸ Clifford's inspection reveals changes in the language used, opinions and ideas contained and even dates given. The language he doesn't hold to be of much importance,

²⁹⁶ These letters do not appear to be currently available as manuscripts, and their whereabouts seem to be unknown.

²⁹⁷ Lucas, *A Swan and Her Friends* (London: Methuen & Co., 1907), p. 212.

²⁹⁸ The Reverend Hill Wickham, Clifford notes, did not go into any further detail: Clifford, 'Seward's Published Correspondence', p. 115.

commenting: "The changes of wording can almost all be explained as efforts to better the literary style, to suite the taste of the ageing bluestocking."²⁹⁹ Such changes even if relatively superficial toned down and censored the lively originals.³⁰⁰ The short article concludes that Seward herself was guilty of the editing and that the dates were inaccurate due to her own failings of memory.³⁰¹ In terms of overall content, the fact that her original letters are scattered and many appear to have been destroyed seems to have rendered comprehensive investigation by scholars difficult.

In 2005 Norma Clarke briefly referred to the rigorous editing process the collections underwent, stating: "The manuscript copies were edited, rewritten, often more than once, and towards the end of her life she prepared them for the press, leaving meticulous instructions to her publisher, Constable, as to how they were to be presented."³⁰² Clarke makes the interesting point that this careful process of rendering the private public constituted a creative work in its own right: "The finished product with its eye on the future was no less of a formal invention than her epic elegy or poetical novel."³⁰³ Seward sought to present her personal life to the world through letters as well as her poetry and was unusual in retaining control over the process instead of leaving it to her descendants. The differences between the private and published correspondence is also referenced by Teresa Barnard at the very opening of her biography on Seward.³⁰⁴

²⁹⁹ Clifford, 'Seward's Published Correspondence', p. 118. Clifford notes that these include changes to dates, use of language and the 'amplification' of opinions.

³⁰⁰ An unpublished letter in the University of Birmingham's Special Collections Department, by the Dowager Lady Jerningham to Charlotte Bedingfield in 1811 reveals her contempt for the 'turgid inelegant style' of the newly-published collection by Constable: U. Birm. L., MSS JER/599 (Jerningham to Bedingfield, London, October 23rd, 1811).

³⁰¹ Clifford, 'Seward's Published Correspondence', p. 122.

³⁰² Clarke, 'Anna Seward: Swan, Duckling or Goose?' in *British Women's Writing*, ed. by Batchelor and others, p. 36.

³⁰³ Clarke, 'Anna Seward: Swan, Duckling or Goose?' in *British Women's Writing*, ed. by Batchelor and others, p. 37.

³⁰⁴ Barnard, *A Constructed Life*, p. 1.

The Special Collections Department in the main library of the University of Birmingham contains nineteen original letters of Anna Seward, one epitaph of hers (dedicated to her friend John Saville), and two letters to her from each of her parents. Of the nineteen, only three appear to have made it into the Constable collection (one of which is a draft). Similarly, of the numerous letters to Anne Parry Price stored in the Department of Manuscripts at the British Library, only one can actually be found in the collection.³⁰⁵ Likewise, few of the letters stored in the archives of the Beinecke Library at Yale find their way into the published works. Should this be typical of the overall editing process, the number of omitted, unpublished letters may number in the thousands. The majority of her letters did not make it to print, but were hand-picked by individuals who were concerned with the public perception of Seward herself, as admitted by Constable in his preface to the first volume.³⁰⁶ It would therefore also be safe to assume that Seward's same-sex relationships are likely to have been sanitised by editors, for fear of public perception.

Regarding the content of the letters themselves, the first complete letter in the archive to be published in the 1811 collection (to Thomas Dowdeswell) contains small differences from the outset. The original begins:

I thank you very much for this always wakeful remembrance of your annual kindness. Myself, & a few friends, drank your health over the welcome treat, wh. came to my table in taintless presentation. It arrived the day of my return from Birmingham.³⁰⁷

Seward is recalling the reception of Dowdeswell's usual gift of woodcocks, which is consumed unaccompanied by alcoholic beverages in the published version:

³⁰⁵ BL, MSS Add. 46400 ff. 280-310b. From the unpublished letters we can ascertain that Price was a good friend of Seward's, and her omission from the published collections undermines the poet's apparent devotion to female friendship.

³⁰⁶ *Letters of Anna Seward*, I, p. viii.

³⁰⁷ U. Birm. L., MSS 10/iii/9 (Seward to Dowdeswell, Lichfield, November 20th, 1797).

I THANK you for the always wakeful remembrance of your annual present. It arrived in taintless preservation the day of my return from Birmingham ...³⁰⁸

Both versions go on to recall a concert attended by Seward, but the published version adds "... for the benefit of the women and children, widowed and orphanized, [sic] alas! by the obstinacy of Dutch resistance."³⁰⁹ This is not a political statement Seward originally made. The published version eventually goes into far more detail on the current war, which, though mentioned in the original letter, is done so far more briefly. Personal information is replaced with wider political commentary: a circumstance which seems representative of the entire editing process.

This is certainly not to say that friendship has been ignored entirely (given Seward's overt devotion to Sneyd, this would be nigh-on impossible). Constable recognised the importance of the themes of friendship and death to Seward's letters in the editor's notes to the first volume of the first edition.³¹⁰ In his preface Scott comments: "In friendship, indeed, she was an enthusiast, of which she gave, in 1778, an example too remarkable to be passed over, even in these brief biographical notices" (*Poetical Works*, I, p. xiv). He gives an anecdote, recalled with real surprise, in which Seward grew attached to the ailing Countess of Northesk and even offered her own blood to help cure her.³¹¹ Despite such examples cited by Constable and Scott, however, the vast majority of her remarkably bold writings on friendship and marriage remained unpublished in letters which the author herself may never have intended for more than a single reader.

³⁰⁸ *Letters of Anna Seward*, V, p. 17 (Seward to Dowdeswell, Lichfield, November 20th, 1797).

³⁰⁹ *Letters of Anna Seward*, V, p. 17 (Seward to Dowdeswell, Lichfield, November 20th, 1797).

³¹⁰ *Letters of Anna Seward*, I, p. vii.

³¹¹ Though Seward's blood was never actually used, Scott notes that the countess was extremely grateful and the two remained good friends until her death: *Poetical Works*, I, p. xvii.

To Seward friendship was a faith, and having witnessed her love for Sneyd, it should come as no surprise that Seward's poetry to other women deems friendship 'the Heart's high prize' (*Original Sonnets*, p. 28). There exists a division between types of Seward's poetry: that written for others, for the good of society or of literature itself; and that written for emotional release (such as the verse to Honora Sneyd). The first group, more ornate and usually longer, obviously carries a certain degree of emotional distance and literary ceremony, with the second weighted with personal sentiment. Elegiac sentiment spans both types, with works spoken in a public voice usually focusing on the pain of the spouse left behind (as is the case with 'Monody on Mrs Richard Vyse'), whereas the lyrical elegies convey the poet's personal pain and loss (*Poetical Works*, I, p. 104).

Both publicly and privately Seward constantly revered same-sex love, emphasising its social importance: "At best, society without friendship is but a barter of ceremony ...".³¹² Friendship has a special status, different from more casual connections – in the final year of her life Seward still felt the need to state 'acquaintance is not friendship'.³¹³ The importance of equal partnership amongst friends is highlighted numerous times, not least when she writes in 1785 that "Affection, we all know, is the only coin in which we can be allowed to repay our debts to that affection which is demonstrated for us."³¹⁴ Friendship to Seward was an

³¹² *Letters of Anna Seward*, III, p. 276 (Seward to Newton, Scarborough, July 21st, 1793).

³¹³ *Letters of Anna Seward*, VI, p. 342 (Seward to Hussey, Lichfield, July 28th, 1807).

³¹⁴ *Letters of Anna Seward*, I, p. 80 (Seward to 'Mrs G', Lichfield, August 27th, 1785). A similar sentiment is displayed in her attempts to comfort her distraught friend Sophia Weston, when her friendship with another woman appeared one-sided:

Ah! Sophia, it will be in vain that you expect trust in friendship, against appearances, from her to whose devoted affection, of twenty years' duration, as ---- could be ungrateful. Friendship is a serious sentiment; and, however the imagination may be charmed, the heart sighs when it

important commitment – and not one to be treated either lightly or superficially.³¹⁵

She held these views at least since she was sixteen, when she wrote: “Too glowing are my friendships for my heart to stand in need of nourishing the dull lamp of fruitless love, lest its mansion should grow chill and dreary from the frost of indifference.”³¹⁶

Not only did she view true friendship to be crucial to the wellbeing of the self, but also of crucial religious significance, in being pleasing to God: “Shall not he lend a gracious observance of such a liberal and unenvying testimony of fraternal love from one created being to another?”³¹⁷ In a very real sense, friendship is not only a joy, but also a profound duty. She was aware of the danger posed by ‘superficial attraction’ at the age of fifteen and echoes Aristotle when she writes of the need for altruism and stability:

Friendship, less influenced than love by the intoxication of the eye, is less apt to lead the soul out of her bonds; yet sometimes, in the choice of friends, even thinking minds are dazzled by the glitter of superficial attractions, and caught by the fascination of a smile; and oftener still, as I before observed, circumstances of convenience, consciousness of obligation, or reverence for imputed virtues, shall over-rule the want of native sympathy in the formation of friendship.³¹⁸

If friendship choices are not altruistic, she goes on to say, then the relationship shall wither and die, and all respect be diminished. Though Seward utilises language of the soul, there was little consensus regarding friendship’s role within Christianity. As we saw in the previous chapter, the Earl of Shaftesbury considered the bond alien to the religion – though Mary Deverell’s published sermons from 1774 claim Jesus to have

perceives its affectionate enthusiasms repaid only by the light flourishings of gallantry, and the sparkling explosion of wit.

³¹⁵ *Letters of Anna Seward*, I, p. 138 (Seward to Weston, Lichfield, March 28th, 1786).

³¹⁵ Seward, does, however, acknowledge that she herself has been accused of superficial flattery, though she insists that she was expressing genuine sentiment, and that truth is an important cornerstone of true friendship: *Letters of Anna Seward*, I, p. 147 (Seward to Dewes, Lichfield, March 28th, 1786).

³¹⁶ *Poetical Works*, I, p. cxi (Seward to ‘Emma’, Lichfield, February 1764).

³¹⁷ *Letters of Anna Seward*, I, p. 184 (Seward to Warner, Lichfield, October 13th, 1786).

³¹⁸ *Poetical Works*, I, p. xlvi (Seward to ‘Emma’, Lichfield, October, 1762).

died in the name of friendship.³¹⁹ Regardless of the different religious perspectives on the matter, for Seward virtue alone is not enough to keep friendship healthy, however, and for those friends further afield, regular correspondence is crucial.

As we saw in the sonnets, for Seward to lose a friend's affection through indifference or rupture is worse in many ways than suffering their loss through their death:

We mourn the death of those who are dear to us; but, if not so grieving, it is more mortifying when friendship, voluntary and ardently offered, long maintained with the most gratifying attention, and not forfeited by any fault of our own, finds a living tomb in the inconstancy of the human heart.³²⁰

Death here is extremely relevant, for the loss of many of her friends over the years gave Seward a rather darkened attitude to friendship: she writes in September of 1789: "... the vitality of friendship drops off, branch after branch, as we stay upon the earth."³²¹ Less than two months later she notes: "So many of my acquaintances have, of late, died suddenly, that I often feel my spirits tinged with an apprehensive gloom, which tells me health itself, and middle life, form a tenure scarce less frail than disease and old age, by which to hold the lives of those we love."³²² Hesketh Pearson noted her adoption in verse and life of the role of elegist and comforter of the grieving, claiming that she was 'especially welcomed by friends who craved tearful sympathy'.³²³

³¹⁹ The sermon states that a sense of divinity is present in friendship due to this early link with Christianity: Liz Carmichael, *Friendship: Interpreting Christian Love* (London: T&T Clark International, 2004), p. 149.

³²⁰ *Letters of Anna Seward*, III, p. 54 (Seward to Warner, March 2nd 1791).

³²¹ *Letters of Anna Seward*, II, p. 326 (Seward to Hayley, September 25th, 1789).

³²² *Letters of Anna Seward*, II, p. 332 (Seward to Warner, November 5th, 1789).

³²³ Pearson, p. 33. Some friendships we only receive a chance to view in the context of death – Seward is rather silent on her friend Lady Gresley in her correspondence, up to the point when her life is in danger through illness. Seeing her dying friend had quite an effect on her, as she confesses to Mrs Mompessan – "O! it cut me to the heart to see that pleasing face emaciated to scarce half its proportion; - those intelligent eyes sunk and shadowed over by the mists of death; - that clear melodious voice inward, broken, and inarticulate.": *Letters of Anna Seward*, III, p. 231 (Seward to Mompessan, May 11th, 1793). Seward was yet further affected by Gresley's touching words thanking her for her friendship, before adding, "The image of the dying saint will be long before my eyes, and long must be the regret I feel for her loss. Scarcely less tender than your own was the friendship she expressed for

Seward's fascination with women was not exclusively spiritual: she idolised female beauty and would describe in detail the physical form of others. Four years after the death of Sneyd she wrote what for her was the highest praise of the beauty of Lady Cunliffe: "Her complexion is of a glowing bloom, with a superior degree of fairness; the contour of the face; the form of the mouth; the nose ... the *ethereal smile* on the lip, and the bright glance of intelligence and joy, [which] are *all* HONORA."³²⁴ This is certainly not to say that she does not celebrate women's beauty independently of Sneyd's example. On becoming infatuated with Miss Delabere she writes of "The paleness of her cheek, the languor of her step, are rendered pleasing by that pensive sweetness of smile, that touching softness of voice, which are often more conciliating than even the warm glow of independent health, and render even defect lovely."³²⁵

The female form was something the poet delighted in, and in her correspondence she demonstrates the centrality of platonic physical desire to friendship. One of her oldest and closest friends, Mrs Mompessan, granted a degree of physical intimacy with Seward, and in 1791 Seward remarks that she will never forget the warmth of her embraces.³²⁶ Indeed physical proximity was quite necessary

me ... I am ill with the grief I feel, with the tears I have shed!": *Letters of Anna Seward*, III, p. 232 (Seward to Mompessan, May 11th, 1793). One may speculate that Seward gains a new appreciation for her friends when their lives are in danger, or they have already passed away. In a similar manner, Seward writes to many of her closer correspondences, referring to Mrs Sedley, who had recently died:

Never knew I what it was to love a person so tenderly, on so short an acquaintance; indeed, never were manners more calculated to conciliate affection. Fine sense, sweetness of temper, ingenuousness, elegance of form, melody of voice, and the most benevolent desire of pleasing, combined to form their magic ... she assured me at our parting of her true regard, and that, expecting to *like*, she found she *loved* me ...

Letters of Anna Seward, III, p. 293 (Seward to Saville, Scarborough, July 29th, 1793).

Whether through her death Seward came to realise the importance of Mrs Sedley to her, or whether her death gave the friendship some new meaning is unclear, but Seward certainly speaks of her here in a far more affectionate manner than in her previous extant letters. Seward was apparently so touched by these words that she repeats the same tale in other letters.

³²⁴ *Letters of Anna Seward*, I, p. 6 (Seward to Powys, Lichfield, October 23rd, 1784). As we saw in the previous section, Seward used 'Honora' as a term for a romantic friend.

³²⁵ *Letters of Anna Seward*, III, p. 256 (Seward to Adey, Buxton, June 14th, 1793).

³²⁶ *Letters of Anna Seward*, III, p. 66 (Seward to Mompessan, Lichfield, June 14th, 1791).

for many of her relationships, as we see in an unpublished letter to Mrs Collins – one of the originals in the University of Birmingham archives and one sadly overlooked. Though the letter itself is unfortunately damaged (rendering much of it unintelligible), the parts which remain show Seward lamenting the distance between them upon Collins' departure for Lisbon: she begins by referring to their “soothing tenderness and sincere friend[ship?]”³²⁷ She mourns for the physical distance between them, imploring “... let me live in your partial remembrance. A long tract of Land & Water is now between us, yet I see you still – still hear your voice – which pity, & shall I be vain to say affection, modulated to the softness of maternal love.”³²⁸

The Enemy of Marriage

Seward's negative reactions to opposite sex unions did not end with Sneyd. ‘Emma’ is the mysterious recipient of the letters featured in Scott's collection, though we are never given many details as to her identity (the collection doesn't even give this elusive forename, it is only through Seward's own exclamations to her that we are given this clue). Teresa Barnard suggests Emma to have in fact been imaginary: a means of practising and constructing correspondence and to demonstrate her sentiments when younger.³²⁹ This theory is certainly plausible, and should Emma have been fictional she serves as a testament to Seward's ideal of friendship, one she was willing to publicly construct. To Emma Seward seems extremely devoted, even in the earlier stages of their ‘relationship’: “I have been called romantic. It is my wish

³²⁷ U. Birm. L., MSS 10/iii/9 (Seward to Collins, Gotham, December 9th, Year Unknown).

³²⁸ U. Birm. L., MSS 10/iii/9 (Seward to Collins, Gotham, December 9th, Year Unknown). As with so many of her friendships, it is unclear as to what became of it; whether Mrs Collins was to remember Seward or not.

³²⁹ ‘Anna Seward: A Constructed Life’, p. 13. This is mentioned in the very outset to the published biography, where Emma is referred to as ‘imaginary’: Barnard, *A Constructed Life*, p. 1.

that you should better know the heart in which you possess so lively an interest.”³³⁰

When Emma began expressing an interest in the opposite sex, Seward attempted to separate her friend from her male love interest, exclaiming: “Return to Lichfield to me for the remainder of the winter! We will banish all mention of Mr L ...”³³¹. Unusually, Emma does appear to actually follow this advice, greatly pleasing her friend.³³² This event is repeated four years later.³³³

It is unclear as to what exactly becomes of Emma, or of her friendship with Seward. Towards the end of the collection their friendship keeps growing ever stronger and Seward, writing from Gotham in 1767 makes the startling declaration that Emma alone is enough for her and could replace any male love interest in her life:

It is true, the chances are extremely against a woman ever marrying, who resolves not to approach the altar of Hymen without she is led thither by a man she prefers to all the rest of his sex. But, to a female mind, that can employ itself ingeniously, that is capable of friendship, that is blessed with affluence, where are the evils of celibacy?

Seward suggests shunning men in favour of emotional and financial independence whilst still in her youth. It is a philosophy to which she is to devote herself for the rest of her life. In neglecting Seward and Emma’s relationship her biographers have missed a crucial declaration. The last exclamation made to Emma is in a letter the following month, where Seward resolves to love her to her dying day, in the manner of husband and wife: “... this honest couple do certainly possess thee. She will laugh, and give and eat good dinners, and he will read newspapers, and chew tobacco in pease, to their last hour. Shall I promise to love you to mine? – You must alter extremely before I can be in danger of breaking my word. Adieu!”³³⁴

³³⁰ *Poetical Works*, I, p. xlvi (Seward to ‘Emma’, Lichfield, October 1762).

³³¹ *Poetical Works*, I, p. lxi (Seward to ‘Emma’, Lichfield, November 1762).

³³² *Poetical Works*, I, p. lxvii (Seward to ‘Emma’, Lichfield, February 1763).

³³³ *Poetical Works*, I, p. cxciii (Seward to ‘Emma’, Gotham, September 1767).

³³⁴ *Poetical Works*, I, p. cxcviii (Seward to ‘Emma’, Gotham, October 1767).

Seward clearly demonstrates a desire for intimacy which is free from sexual interaction, contradicting social mores both in her time and our own. To Seward such behaviour is demonstrated as both a choice and as natural, a view which is backed by Lisa Diamond's article on the 'evolutionary independence' of sexual desire and affection which we saw in the previous chapter. In promoting celibacy (invoking 'Hymen') Seward is directly placing herself in opposition to the dominant sexual discourse, deliberately placing herself outside the social-sexual system. Seward's near-worship of celibacy is not replacing sexual desire toward men with sexual desire toward women – she is far from being 'lesbian'.

Not everyone responded to Seward's advocacy of celibacy with the same grace as Emma. Firstly there was Honora Sneyd, then history was to repeat itself with friend Mrs Smith, daughter of her friend Saville and the eponymous subject of her poem 'To Mrs Smith'.³³⁵ Things, however, were to sour for Seward once more. Later, in an unpublished letter Seward details a familiar rift: "Since I opposed Mrs. Smith's wish a year ago to marry with ruinous imprudence, she has never deigned to come near me - & resisted all her father's requests that she wd. accept the offers of reconciliation wh. I made ..." ³³⁶ This newly-discovered detail is a rare instance of Seward directly and clearly detailing such a dispute, and proves that in this instance she did not withhold her friendship from a woman on account of her marriage: rather

³³⁵ In the poem Seward praises her friends abilities, the bulk of it devoted to her singing. Towards the end, however, she makes a request:

Come to the wild wood, and the glen with me,
When leafy June has curtain'd every tree;
There, in the still noon of the lunar night,
Shall sounds congenial thrill thee with delight,
When, hid beneath long grass, a liquid tune
The bubbling runnel warbles to the moon

Poetical Works, II, p. 351.

The romantic language is combined with the image of the pastoral (a common theme for poetical works devoted to platonic friendship). Seward was also to write a poem praising the musical ability of Mrs Smith's daughter, Honora Smith (named at Seward's behest): *Poetical Works*, III, p. 338.

³³⁶ BL., MSS Add. 46400 f. 305 (Lichfield, August 16th, 1803).

that it was the friend who had resented her earlier outspoken opposition to the match. We may speculate that if, as Barnard maintains, Seward had also wished her and Sneyd's friendship to continue after Sneyd's marriage, she may nevertheless have alienated the couple by her strenuous opposition.

Seward's personal stance on sexualised love and marriage was adopted from a young age, as we can see from an uncatalogued letter in the Beinecke library at Yale University. An unpublished letter written whilst she was only fourteen reveals her budding graveyard nature ('[I] reclin'd on a Grave-stone ... ruminating on the uncertainty of life') and her distaste for male suitors: "I have a strong temptation to tell you a little piece of secret history, & convince you how much occasion my Sister & I have, to guard our hearts ... how necessary it is, for Sally to fortify her little Citadel with all the coldness & indifference she is mistress of ..." ³³⁷ Not only does Seward make her own views clear, but even in her youth she was ready to impress them upon the women around her.

The Case of Sophia Weston

When examining her published writings, Seward's declarations toward other women and her anti-marriage sentiments appear only in scattered fragments and amorous hints: direct, overt and sustained demands and declarations regarding marriage and friendship are practically nonexistent. As we have seen when examining the epistolary difficulties in dealing with her letters, however, the difference between her published and her private writings can be profound. Hidden amongst the unpublished letters in the archives of Yale University is startling

³³⁷ Yale U., Uncatalogued MSS Vault, 19581103-a (Seward to Darwin, Eyam, August 7th, 1751).

evidence of Seward's social viewpoints, proving her to be more radical and daring than could ever have been supposed: all contained in letters to an individual overlooked by scholars in favour of Honora Sneyd and the Ladies of Llangollen.³³⁸

Sophia Weston is a regular feature in Seward's earlier letters. In her published collections we find her to be one of Seward's most enduring companions, "With plenteous resources of wit and imagination [whose] form is graceful, and her countenance interesting."³³⁹ It is a friendship which for a long period seems entirely reciprocated, as in September 1783 (when the two were living in entirely different towns) Seward writes expressing her relief that Weston missed her as much as she missed Weston.³⁴⁰ This sentiment clearly warms her to her friend yet further, as she goes on to write:

Virtuous friendship, how pure, how sacred are they delights! – Sophia, thy mind is capable of tasting them in all their poignance, against how many of life's painful incidence may that capacity be considered a counterpoise!³⁴¹

Her correspondence here seems to indicate that she truly recognises Sophia Weston as a friend – whilst in referring to her as 'capable' of experiencing 'virtuous friendship', she conveys the idea that it is somehow special and rare, and certainly not accessible to all.

Such attractions, however, do not seem destined to last. After a fourteen year break in any interaction between the two, Seward wrote to Mrs Powys in 1804:

After a twelve year estrangement from Sophie Weston that was, Mrs Pennington that is, Mr Whalley undertook to reconcile us, divided as we had been by an ingenuousness on my part, which I thought necessary to her welfare, but which her spirit was too high to brook. She lives at the Hot

³³⁸ Seward's literary works dedicated to the ladies shall be the subject of the final section of this chapter.

³³⁹ *Letters of Anna Seward*, I, p. 256 (Seward to Warner, Lichfield, March 7th, 1786). Few details on Weston are given by the editors of the published correspondence, however, and the manuscript collection at Yale gives no further information.

³⁴⁰ *Letters of Anna Seward*, II, p. 67 (Seward to Weston, Lichfield, September 6th, 1783).

³⁴¹ *Letters of Anna Seward*, II, p. 77 (Seward to Weston, Lichfield, September 6th, 1783).

Wells, Bristol, and is a woman of admirable talents and graceful manners. She received me with tears of returning love, and our reconciliation was perfect.³⁴²

Little has since been made of the disagreement - though Ashmun does briefly mention the estrangement, no reasoning is given other than 'hard feelings' and she clearly does not feel the need to develop the point further.³⁴³ Weston is never mentioned again in the 1811 volumes of Seward's letters.

With the published volumes that is the end to the matter. Though the details seem similar to the situations with Sneyd and Smith, there is no reliable proof that Seward had once urged this friend toward a life of celibacy. Some two-dozen unpublished letters to Weston at Yale seemed set to provide the answer to the exact circumstances surrounding their estrangement. They did not. What they did provide, however, proved far more astonishing. In them the poet firmly and unapologetically announces her opposition to marriage, her expectations on her female friends and even her previously unacknowledged reputation as a dangerous hazard for young women.

In an unpublished letter from the Beinecke Library's Osborn collection dated March 13th 1786 Seward reveals the difficulties and heartache she has endured in her relationships with other women:

But O Sophia can you wonder if I wish to steel my heart against its native tenderness, when never [sic] friendship seeks to engage it? – Consider how bitter have been my disappointments – that soreness and jealousy are their natural consequences – You must not wonder that I say to myself – Why shou'd I follow the [illegible word] fire of professed amity, which have so often led my peace into whirl-pools, & quicksands?³⁴⁴

It was six years after Honora Sneyd's death. The damaging effects of her previous demands on Sneyd were not limited to her own personal turmoils, however, but had left a distinctive scar on her social reputation. The letter goes on:

³⁴² *Letters of Anna Seward*, VI, p. 205 (Seward to Powys, Winterbourn, October 18th, 1804).

³⁴³ Ashmun, *The Singing Swan*, p. 247.

³⁴⁴ Yale U., MSS OSBORN C202 (Seward to Weston, March 13th, 1786).

From the time that the world began to say ill-natured things of me, & to judge harshly of a conduct, whose motives they cou'd not adequately know, I never sought the Friendship of any body ... my very soul revolted from the idea that others shou'd suffer the most [illegible word] species of mortification on my account ... You say, Sophia, that you have purchas'd my amity by sacrifices. There is extreme pain for me in this idea.³⁴⁵

The world, it would appear, was not as uncensorious as the biographies have assumed and all of Seward's future friendships were marred by malicious gossip. Now Seward had made her decision to live her life by platonic ideals there was no going back, a rigour which is reflected in her poetry. The next letter in the collection includes some quotations, the first of which is in the same melancholy vein as her own: "At length I have escap'd each human eye, / Escaped from ev'ry duty, ev'ry fore / ... Or force my tears their flowing stream to dry ..."³⁴⁶ This poem encapsulates the sentiments expressed in the previous letter, of Seward's desire to escape the accusatory eye of the public and her own grief.

The Yale letters also have their happier sentiments.³⁴⁷ Their mutual compliments are instigated by a declaration from Weston herself, in which she suggests that she is unlikely to ever marry. Seward in her reply makes a remarkably dramatic statement:

How I am charm'd to find the same, yes I will call it generous delicacy of Spirit, has govern'd your destiny thro Life, which has influenced and determined mine. Early, indeed from the first dawn of Womanhood, I determin'd never to go to the Altar, unless a Being whom I passionately preferred to his whole sex cou'd lead me thither. You, dear Sophia, have set the same high price on your freedom. Was it too high? away from us ye cold Spirits that think so! – It is telling us nothing, of which we have not been constantly aware, to say that such a resolve made it more than probably that we shou'd never marry. Nice & hazardous state!³⁴⁸

³⁴⁵ Yale U., MSS OSBORN C202 (Seward to Weston, March 13th, 1786).

³⁴⁶ Yale U., MSS OSBORN C202 (Seward to Weston, March 16th, 1787).

³⁴⁷ One again Seward comments on the form of a friend as she notes that a local woman's body is so similar to Weston's that she delights in looking at her: Yale U., MSS OSBORN C202 (Seward to Weston, July 23rd, 1786). The most joyful declarations appear in a letter in which she stresses the mutuality of their bond, founded in an equality of intellect: Yale U., MSS OSBORN C202 (Seward to Weston, February 4th, 1783).

³⁴⁸ Yale U., MSS OSBORN C202 (Seward to Weston, February 4th, 1783).

This passage very clearly encapsulates Seward's immense pleasure at having found someone who understood her high-mindedness and independence. No less remarkable is her assertion that she decided 'from the first dawn of Womanhood' to set herself standards which would lead to a life of celibacy. Seward not only set the condition that a man superior to all others must find her, but also that he must 'lead' her to the altar, an unlikely scenario considering her dominance over others: she herself knew she was not passive enough to be led. This would suggest, contrary to Barnard's assertion, that Seward had always been opposed to marital vows, and would have been even as she watched Honora Sneyd be joined to Richard Edgeworth.

In Weston Seward believed she had found her new Honora. In fact, Seward found herself close enough to Weston to detail the former friendship which had caused so much heartache: "... My Honora was enlighten'd ... her tenderness for me passed the love of women; neither did it ever know one moment's intermissin [sic] till the hellish [illegible word] of Edgeworth estranged from he[r] an heart, whose affection was above all price."³⁴⁹ That the tenderness between the two surpassed 'the love of women' suggests that Seward desired an intimacy contained abnormally strong passions.

Writing the following year Seward complains that marriage and male possessiveness actively discourage the sacred commitment necessary for true women's friendship. This was to be the clearest and more dramatic statement on friendship she ever made:

These horrid Men, with their humors, & their pride, are so continually the annihilation of their wives' former friendships, that when first Miss Rogers sought mine, I confess'd to her an unwillingness to pledge my amity from that

³⁴⁹ 'All price' is actually underlined twice, an emphasis she does not use in her other letters: Yale U., MSS OSBORN C202 (Seward to Weston, July 2nd 1784).

unpleasant consciousness. Few women are generous enough to make my stand for the Friend against male-caprice.³⁵⁰

This statement directly reveals Seward's belief that marriage was 'continually' an impediment to friendship and that she was unwilling to befriend those who were likely to betray her or put her second on account of the priority of their marital vows: all of which she acknowledges as 'my stand'. In using the term 'stand' Seward presents her views on and desires for friendship as a political position and social identity. As a 'stand' Seward's position was conscious and formalised: it also suggests a position under attack.

The words 'pledge my amity' also imply a formal declaration of fidelity similar to that referred to in the sonnets concerning Sneyd. This declaration politicises her beliefs in a fashion previously unseen, albeit in the context of witty pleasantries. For example, Seward decries Weston's near-betrayal in considering engagement to a 'Mr W.': "I cannot therefore allow that you exceed me in the stock of affection that is between us."³⁵¹ She implores Weston to reconsider a life of celibacy: "I am sorry that my reasonings upon the serene exemptions & independent comforts of Celibacy, are unable to disperse your cold glooms, which your strong imagination has thrown upon that state."³⁵²

Arguments between the two were to follow. Seward revealed that she could no longer trust Weston, and expressed jealousy at Weston's using a man as a confidante.³⁵³ The correspondence continues for some more years, though the relationship continues to deteriorate and the correspondence eventually ends without

³⁵⁰ Yale U., MSS OSBORN C202 (Seward to Weston, March 25th, 1785).

³⁵¹ Yale U., MSS OSBORN C202 (Seward to Weston, March 25th, 1785).

³⁵² Yale U., MSS OSBORN C202 (Seward to Weston, March 25th, 1785).

³⁵³ On trusting Weston: Yale U., MSS OSBORN C202 (Seward to Weston, May 3rd, 1786). On Weston's confiding in a man: Yale U., MSS OSBORN C202 (Seward to Weston, December 13th, 1787).

explanation.³⁵⁴ Though the ‘final straw’ is not extant, we can certainly see the catalyst. For Seward, any close relationship required a queer commitment – a vow to friendship. Though the motivations for Seward’s ‘break-up’ with Sneyd are speculative and thus much disagreed upon (as we can see in the differences between the accounts of Faderman and Barnard) in the Yale letters Seward’s views are clearly and unapologetically laid out. The differences between Seward’s published and unpublished correspondence are far from merely cosmetic in nature and through these letters we can see a deliberate and politically-aware social stand.

THE ODES FROM HORACE

Seward, as we have seen, did not avoid violent personal outbursts, yet some of the ideas and expressions she wished to convey in her poetry required a safety net which could not be provided by works attributed solely to her hand – if they were published. As with Gray, West and their translations and paraphrases of Tibillus and Propertius, Seward sought a more indirect mode of expression through the poets of Greco-Roman antiquity: in particular through Quintus Horatius Flaccus.

The nature of Seward’s Horatian Odes varies, bearing the marks not only of imitations as the title of the collection suggests, yet also those closer to translation. Some, such as her imitation of the third ode from the second book, titled ‘To Thomas Erskine’, written in October 1796, lean more toward the former, having been freely adapted to function as a poem on her own life and acquaintances rather than those of

³⁵⁴ One letter in the archives is labelled ‘the break’, but it is a frivolous fight over the use of lavender water – a matter so trite that even the passionate Seward would be unlikely to end a long friendship over it. Sure enough an uncatalogued letter to Weston mentions the death of Lady Gresly, placing it at least in 1793, after the date of their supposed separation: Yale U., Uncatalogued MSS Vault, 20050324 (Seward to Weston, January 30th, [after 1793]).

Horace, in this case relating to Erskine himself.³⁵⁵ Other odes, such as the thirty-first ode from the second book, *To Apollo*, are closer to Horace's originals. These varying shifts in perspective both allow Seward an opportunity to experiment with a male classical point of view which grants her a degree of freedom in sentiment: with bolder statements and outbursts which sometimes flow contrary to contemporary Christian morality - shielded by the perspective of the ancient poet.³⁵⁶ The distance afforded by 'paraphrasing' classical works allowed Seward to subvert social norms once more, playing with gender in a manner which would not have been possible even in her sonnets.

Adeline Johns-Putra's 2007 analysis of Seward's Horatian Odes focuses mainly on the difference between the classical and modern poets in terms of language. Noting Seward's inability to read and write Latin, Johns-Putra points out that Seward's works are firmly grounded in eighteenth-century sensibility, suggesting this was a particularly female mode, despite precursors such as Gray. She also comments that: "... in paying equal attention to the (female) translator's additions to the (male) poets' original, Seward was implicitly gendering this paraphrastic approach to translation."³⁵⁷ Seward's 'ornamental' additions were not, as Johns-Putra points out,

³⁵⁵ 'To Thomas Erskine': *Original Sonnets*, p. 127. The other translation dedicated to a friend is to William Hayley, of Book 4 Ode 7; p. 158. The fact that both a dedicated to men suggests that Seward saw these Odes as more masculine in nature than her sonnets. Her preface also details the masculine mentors who advised her.

³⁵⁶ D. S. Carne-Ross goes into greater detail on the Christianisation of Horace's works themselves, which he suggests were twisted in order to appease the contemporary moral temperaments of the Catholic cultures which revived them: D. S Carne-Ross and others, *Horace in English* (London: Penguin., 1996), p. 6. They became popularised in England later, the first 'successful' translation being by Ben Jonson in 1601: p. 7.

³⁵⁷ Johns-Putra, 'Anna Seward's translations of Horace' in *Translators, Interpreters, Mediators*, ed. by Dow, p. 112. Seward's inability to read the originals required her to read the various translations and creations of other poets in order to comprehend the original works. At best, this means that Seward's works are an interpretation of an interpretation – though this would only be a problem if our focus was on Horace rather than Seward herself. At any rate, her use of alternate rhyme rather than the Augustan rhythmic mode firmly places the poetry as a work of the Eighteenth Century, rather than that of the first century BC, as had been the case with every paraphrase and imitation written in English. Strict translations were usually written in standard prose. Though she refers to Pope in her preface to the odes, he was only to work on two of the odes, and Seward specifically distances herself from his

purely decorative – they served vital purpose and meaning for the poems themselves, being necessary to re-hydrate poetry dried through age and literal translation.³⁵⁸ This is all explained by Johns-Putra as gendered due to the increased ‘feminine’ priority Seward places on emotion to the odes. Angeletti also comments on Seward’s ‘feminizing’ of masculine works as a means of subverting masculine values (though the Horatian Odes are not mentioned).³⁵⁹ Though gender does indeed play a role in Seward’s paraphrases, this section will explore the notion that this goes deeper than transforming them into the style of sensibility. For the poet, homosocial love was key.

At this point it becomes necessary to question why exactly Seward chose to translate the Odes of Horace. There is the obvious answer that translations and paraphrases of Horace were fashionable in the eighteenth century, but Gray’s work would suggest a focus on the earlier poets of antiquity to be equally appropriate.³⁶⁰ Of course there is the fact that Horace openly professed desire for both sexes, and Seward would delight in subverting social boundaries, using a medium that was already common. As Wahl suggests, the invocation of friendship using classical poetry was by no means new: “For those women who were seeking to reformulate social relations on a more equitable social footing, the revival of the classical ideal of *amicitia*, particularly in the context of the pastoral ideal of retreat, offered an

versions: *Original Sonnets*, p. 105. Though it is impossible to truly know which versions Seward read, Carne-Ross suggests the versions of Christopher Smart and William Cowper to be amongst the most influential of the Eighteenth-Century, Smart directly translating and Cowper paraphrasing: *Horace in English*, p. 26. Though it is highly likely Seward was inspired by Cowper (as we have seen she quoted his works in the unpublished letters to Weston), it is more likely that Seward was influenced by Smart than any Poet paraphrasing, both as it would be closer to the original text and because he translated every sonnet, rather than just working on a few. Smart’s version will also give us insight into the general understanding of the Horatian Odes in the Eighteenth Century.

³⁵⁸ Johns-Putra, ‘Anna Seward’s translations of Horace’ in *Translators, Interpreters, Mediators*, ed. by Dow, p. 118. Johns-Putra also makes clear that Seward believed her paraphrases to be an improvement on the originals.

³⁵⁹ Angeletti, ‘Women Re-writing Men’, p. 250.

³⁶⁰ British culture and national sentiment at the time was keen to compare itself to ancient Rome.

alternative model of intimacy that women could appropriate for their own sex.”³⁶¹

Another important point is made by Carne-Ross, when he states that during the eighteenth century the Horatian odes were used to convey rather different political sentiments.³⁶² As with the sonnets, Seward was to utilise a poetic form with a tradition of carrying strong viewpoints. Johns-Putra notes Seward’s focus on friendship in the odes, pointing out instances in which she transforms erotic sentiment into platonic love – however, as we shall see, Seward used her position as a woman paraphrasing a man’s poetry to exploit erotic boundaries.³⁶³

Book II Ode XII (to Maecenas)

Gender first becomes a real issue in the odes in ‘To Maecenas’, Seward’s reworking of the twelfth ode from the second book. It is this ode in particular which gives us yet another insight into Seward’s choice of the Horatian Odes as a subject,

³⁶¹ Wahl, *Invisible Relations*, p. 77. Edward Fraenkel’s work on Horace reveals the ancient poet’s own attachment to his friends, and his unwillingness to hurt them emotionally, even when such a course risks his own reputation: Edward Fraenkel, *Horace* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 12. Horace had powerful friends, and Fraenkel details the amicitia between the poet and Augustus, the emperor of Rome: Fraenkel, *Horace*, p. 20. This friendship is curious considering the fact that he had earlier fought against Augustus’ Triumvirate – though he was later pardoned, as noted by Philip Hills: Philip Hills, *Ancients in Action: Horace* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2005), p. 12.

³⁶² The odes were used to both support and oppose Jacobinism in general, as well as the French Revolution: Carne-Ross, *Horace in English*, p. 21. J. F Dalton makes clear that Horace’s written works reflected political opinion in his own time, such as the veneration of Caesar Augustus following his defeat of Mark Anthony: “It can hardly be doubted that the poets, though desiring to compliment Augustus, are in some measure reflecting popular enthusiasm in the rapturous outbursts with which they commemorate [his] victory. This seems to me especially true of Horace.”: J. F. Dalton, *Horace and His Age: A Study in Historical Background* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1977), p. 8. Whereas in Britain Horace was used to invoke nationalist sentiment this was actually his aim in Rome, where he made clear his favour for Roman culture over Greek: p. 11. Despite the overt social commentary in his works, Dalton stresses that Horace himself held no deep or abiding convictions, and that it is more important to catch his mood: p. 76. Though earlier in his life his love of life and pleasure drew him to Epicureanism, by the time he wrote the odes Augustus had had his influence and he had drifted toward Stoicism: p. 101.

³⁶³ Johns-Putra specifically references the second ode of book two, ‘To Leuconoe’ as having been transformed in favour of friendship: “Furthermore, while the male poet of the original, in sharing both wine and conversation with a woman, is no doubt addressing a lover, Seward makes clear that this poem is more generally about friendship.”: Johns-Putra, ‘Anna Seward’s translations of Horace’ in *Translators, Interpreters, Mediators*, ed. by Dow, p. 120.

allowing her to examine the subversive themes of friendship, pagan ritual and female eroticism. The sheer amount of Seward's own created content is apparent from the length of the original ode (at seven stanzas) compared to Seward's paraphrastic creation (at fourteen): clearly doubling its length.

Friendship is apparent from the very title, being dedicated to Horace's influential friend and patron Mæcenas, who himself brought Horace a direct connection to the emperor Augustus.³⁶⁴ The ode opens with the poet imploring his subject:

Mæcenas, I conjure thee cease
To wake my heart's enamoured strings
To tones, that fright recumbent Peace,
That Pleasure flies on rapid wings!³⁶⁵

As with the rest of the Odes, Seward's paraphrasing (as opposed to directly translating) is highlighted by the use of the more modern rhyming system, different to the original Latin. The subject of the ode (ostensibly Mæcenas though Seward would certainly be recalling her own friendships past and present) is introduced in the first word of the first stanza, placing the same-sex relationship between him and Horace at the very heart of the work. This was not the case with the original, where Mæcenas is not actually referenced by name until the third stanza. Indeed, any declaration of affection or even any mention of their friendship is absent in any overt form in the original Latin:

Nolis longa ferae bella Numantiae,
nec durum Hannibalem nec Siculum mare
Poeno purpureum sanguine mollibus
aptari citharae modis.³⁶⁶

³⁶⁴ Johns-Putra notes Seward's focus on friendship with the odes, stating that the poet often transformed erotic sentiment into the platonic: Johns-Putra, 'Anna Seward's translations of Horace' in *Translators, Interpreters, Mediators*, ed. by Dow, p. 121.

³⁶⁵ *Original Sonnets*, p. 139.

³⁶⁶ Horace, 'Horacati Flacci Carminum Liber Secundus', *The Latin Library*, <<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/horace/carm2.shtml>> [accessed 14th September 2009].

The first stanza in the original is based in history and politics, rather than personal affection. The original ode, in fact, does not contain any declaration of the kind Seward opens with (quoted above). As we can see, from the very first stanza we bear witness to Seward's personally motivated additions. This is not the case universally: other 'extra' stanzas fall more into the category of elaboration, presenting no new themes, merely stretching the language of the original, adding detail and enhanced sensibility (as was suggested by Johns-Putra).

Of course the subject of the ode is Horace's commentary on his friend's affection for Licymnia (renamed by Seward 'Licinia') and the final stanza of the original makes the sexualised references to her clear:

cum flagrantia detorquet ad oscula
ceruicem aut facili saeuitia negat
quae poscente magis gaudeat eripi,
interdum rapere occupet?

Horace simply refers to Licymnia's teasing of Mæcenas, sometimes bending her neck so he can kiss it, sometimes refusing, over the course over four lines. Seward devotes to this section her greatest elaboration, stretching those original four lines over three stanzas:

Relenting turns her snowy neck,
To meet thy kisses half their way,
Or when her feign'd resentments check
The ardors thy warm lips convey?

While in her eyes the languid light
Betrays a yielding wish to prove,
Amid her coy, yet playful flight,
The pleasing force of fervent Love;

Or when, in gaily-frolic guise,
She snatches her fair self the kiss,
E'en at the instant she denies
Her Lover the requested bliss.³⁶⁷

³⁶⁷ *Original Sonnets*, p. 142.

Also of interest is the fact that Seward invents many of Licymnia's physical attributes: Horace does not mention her complexion in the ode. In the female Seward's reinterpretation of the male Horace's erotic poetry, Seward provides herself an acceptable frame through which to relish the female form, and exploit the new erotic possibilities with which she has been presented. It is perhaps then no surprise that it is the final stanza, on Licymnia's neck and lips, which is the most greatly inflated. Erotic adjectives also play a significant role, from 'languid' to 'playful' – the second clearly being an attribute of the poet herself in this instance.

Seward's additions are deliberate and not a product of other translations in her own time. Smart's version (written in prose) reads:

... especially when she turns her neck to meet the ardent kisses, or with a gentle cruelty denies, what she would more delight to have ravished by the petitioner, — or sometimes eagerly anticipates to snatch them herself.³⁶⁸

Curiously, Seward also plays with a multiplicity of sexual roles, not only eroticising the female but also the male, adding the reference to Mæcenas' 'warm lips', which was obviously not included by Horace. Here a bisexuality prevails: both Seward as the male Horace and Seward as the female interpreter demonstrate same-sex desire through the ode.

Book III Ode XIX (to Telephus)

The nineteenth ode of the third book (titled by the poet 'To Telephus') is one of the most expanded upon by Seward, who took the original six stanzas to create twenty. As with the twelfth ode of the second book, the language and demeanour toward the subject of the poem is changed. The addressee is Telephus, one of the sons

³⁶⁸ Christopher Smart, *The Works of Horace, Literally Translated into English Prose*, 2 vols., (Edinburgh: Stirling & Slade, 1819), I, p. 95.

of Hercules in Greco-Roman mythology. As with Mæcenas, Seward writes an eroticised commentary on the physical form of another man, thus homoeroticising Horace, yet unlike the ode to Mæcenas, it is based on the original work: a reference to his 'dark luxuriant hair' (*Original Sonnets*, p. 154). This would be one reason this ode was chosen by Seward.

Another is apparent at the end of the ode, which is as follows in the original Latin:

Spissa te nitidum coma,
puro te similem, Telephe, Vespero
tempestiu petit Rhode:
me lensus Glycerae torret amor meae.³⁶⁹

These last four lines contain the reference to Telephus' attractive form which Seward moved to an earlier point, as well as a reference to Glycera's rejection of Horace's love in the final line. Seward's experiences of rejection with Honora Sneyd and Sophia Weston perhaps influenced her decision to draw on this particular ode, and to write:

They shall disarm my Lyce's frown,
The frolic jest, the lively strain,
In flowing bowls, shall gaily drown
The memory of her cold disdain.³⁷⁰

Seward's tone is a little more positive than the original, insinuating that the memory of betrayal can be overcome. The difference in perspective here is unique to Seward: Christopher Smart's translation ends "... the love of my Glyceria slowly consumes me."³⁷¹ Seward's choice in the final two words ties her Horatian odes to her sonnets, where she used the phrase 'cold disdain' in reference to Sneyd, evidence, if any was needed, of the presence of her female loves in her mind at the time of writing the

³⁶⁹ Horace, 'Horacati Flacci Carminum Liber Tertius', *The Latin Library*, <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/horace/carm3.shtml> [accessed 14th September 2009].

³⁷⁰ *Original Sonnets*, p. 155.

³⁷¹ Smart, *The Works of Horace*, I, p. 163.

odes.³⁷² In this ode style and language embellish the original, though little new actual content is added. However, due to the content Seward clearly feels little need to add any new subjects or themes, despite the increase in length.

The intertwined themes explored in Seward's reworking of the odes – friendship, paganism and eroticism – enable a personal exploration of identity for the poet, in a manner far less limiting than the options available to Gray. Seward's gender inversion pushes the boundaries beyond those suggested by Johns-Putra, and it is unlikely Gray could have added any sexual elements beyond those that were already present: which explains the focus on Tibullus by himself and West, making him the only prominent Augustan poet to write love poetry to another man. By donning the mask of the opposite gender Seward is granted a leave of absence from conventional feminine moral responsibility – should her additions be questioned she could even suggest them to be the result of her life experience as the passive female recipient of male affection, adding aspects 'from a woman's point of view', as opposed to the active position she has actually assumed. Seward's eroticism as expressed in the odes would seem at odds with her belief in friendship – however, she revels in the freedom in demonstrating affection automatically granted male-female pairings and, though such bonds are based in a sexualised attachment, willingly plays her role as a man if it means a greater literary intimacy with women.

In these odes Seward plays with sexuality – both male and female, both heterosexual and homosexual – the multiplicity of such desire is not representative of any single set of desires (let alone the poet's own) but plays with and subverts gender and sexual boundaries: another protest against the rigid social discourse of sexuality itself. This eroticism may be reminiscent of that of Gray in his literary devotions to

³⁷² 'Cold disdain' is used again in reference to Lyce, or Clycera, in Seward's version of ode ten of the third book: *Original Sonnets*, p. 146.

Walpole, but they do not form a part of Seward's literary identity: Gray's sexualised pieces were voiced by Gray himself, whereas here Seward adopts the voice of Horace in order to play with social norms she decried in her letters. The Horatian odes show Seward's willingness to exploit loopholes in the literary role she has been given rather than formalising sexual desire on the part of the poet herself.

In the unpublished letters to Weston, Seward details the fact that her Horatian Odes were well-received by the public: "I received very high and flattering compliments from several of the Literati, when I was in Town, upon my Horatian paraphrases; & the sweet Enthusiast, Helen Williams, calls them the most interesting & charming little Poems she ever read."³⁷³ In this instance at least, Seward's gender radicalism would appear to have been politely avoided as a topic of discussion for critics and a blind eye was turned to the subversive beliefs which so shaped her poetry.

LLANGOLLEN: THE RADICAL CELEBRATION OF AN IDEAL

Anti-marriage themes permeate a great deal of Seward's poetry.³⁷⁴ Indeed, the presence of a spouse dampens Seward's passionate sentiments in her poetry, with her

³⁷³ Yale U., MSS OSBORN C202 (Seward to Weston, July 23rd 1786).

³⁷⁴ In her 'A Warning Exhortation' a young woman, 'Celia', is advised to shun the advances of her suitor: *Poetical Works*, III, p. 62. The man she writes of seeks 'triumphant harm' over Celia, circumstances reminiscent of Seward's views towards Mr. Edgeworth and Mr. Smith. The poem suggests that to spurn this man is to be 'bravely free', whereas to accept leads to a future only of woe. There is even an acknowledgement of the danger faced by women with such proposals, where men operate from a position of relative safety: "The dart will not be barb'd for him, / Which surely shall be barbed for thee." Those who spurn Seward's suggestion of a life with one another, as we have seen, fall victim to the poet's fury. 'Sonnet XIX' is probably written in reference to Honora Sneyd (though the subject is not named): *Original Sonnets*, p. 21. Again Seward refers to the 'vow', again reminiscent of marital vows, indicating her seriousness toward friendship. That the other woman rescinded the offer demonstrates her to be a 'false friend'. Should this have been written with Sneyd in mind, it is strange that she chose to remove her name here and not in the other sonnets – raising the possibility that 'Sonnet XIX' could well have been written to another of her friends. Her text *Louisa* is not focused upon in this study as it contains few references to friendship which are not present in her other poetical works.

most affirming work dedicated to those either young and therefore unmarried or those whose partners were fortuitously absent. Often these sentiments appear to have been missed by contemporaries, and the *European Magazine* even goes so far to suggest Seward to be one of the great female demonstrators of 'moral piety'.³⁷⁵

It was toward the end of her life in the 1790s that Seward dedicated *Llangollen Vale* to two friends of hers: Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby, who had set up a home together in Wales. *Llangollen Vale* provides the celebration and culmination of Seward's religious devotion to Friendship. Faderman ends her account of Anna Seward by referring to her friendship with the Ladies of Llangollen, suggesting that Seward greatly envied their bond and wished she had managed to find her own 'Llangollen Vale' with Honora Sneyd.³⁷⁶ Paula Backscheider also ends her account of Seward with her friendship with the Ladies, stating that they provided the poet with an idealised love, one which she failed to find for herself.³⁷⁷ Seward's fascination with the Ladies of Llangollen likewise did not escape the attention of Margaret Ashmun, who suggested that it proved extremely beneficial: "Of all the new friendships with [Seward] made, no one was to give her greater satisfaction than the intimacy which she formed with the celebrated Ladies of Llangollen, in Wales."³⁷⁸ However, Ashmun does not, of course, suggest that Seward was fascinated by their

³⁷⁵ *European Magazine*, 58 (August – October 1810), 119-24. Reviews at the time often seem to overlook Seward's more rebellious sentiments, even the overt focus on the theme of friendship itself. Again though positive, the British Critic's posthumous review of Seward's *Poetical Works* (1810) largely ignores the theme, even suggesting that few of Seward's social or political views are revealed: *British Critic*, 37 (May 1811), 493-500. Fascinatingly, a review later that year by the British Review asserts the need for greater probing into her personal life and the figures contained therein, suggesting: "To an intelligent curiosity few things are so interesting as the history of an intelligent mind." The review chastises Scott for going into too little detail on her life, yet its own investigations are limited entirely to male figures, highlighting the declining influence of female friendship, even in contrast to the reviews of the *Original Sonnets* only a dozen years before: *British Review*, 2 (September 1811), 171-81.

³⁷⁶ Faderman suggests that to witness the love between Ponsonby and Butler was both 'painful and fascinating' for Seward: Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men*, p. 137.

³⁷⁷ Backscheider, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets*, p. 304.

³⁷⁸ Ashmun, *The Singing Swan*, p. 209. She also suggests the friendship to have been 'one of the happiest circumstances' of Seward's life: p. 212.

model of friendship, instead treating it as an immensely satisfying personal bond, devoid of any social ideal.

The Ladies themselves have received a great deal of speculation over the years, and when Anna Seward has been referenced, it is usually with reference to Butler and Ponsonby: this is certainly the case with Fiona Brideoake, whose 2004 article on the Ladies and 'queer community' sets out the same argument as Faderman and Backsheider – that Seward saw in the pair a love which she had been unable to attain for herself.³⁷⁹ This portrayal of friendship is suggested by Brideoake in a

³⁷⁹ Brideoake highlights the similarities between the Butler-Ponsonby Seward-Sneyd pairings, such as the fact that both included an age difference and as such an aspect of 'tutoring' in the ways of friendship: "Just as Seward had acted as Sneyd's tutor, Butler had taught Ponsonby, sixteen years her junior, in the years following their retirement.": Brideoake, 'Extraordinary Female Affection' (para. 14 of 23). Mary Gordon's 1936 story on the ladies marks a clear insistence against marriage on the part of Eleanor Butler: Gordon, *The Llangollen Ladies*, p. 45. Seward is briefly introduced as a great admirer of the ladies: p. 191. The ladies have of course been speculated upon separately to Anna Seward, and are featured in Julie Peakman's work on eighteenth-century sexual history: Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies*, p. 186. Elizabeth Mavor also focuses on the pair separately to Seward: Mavor, *The Ladies of Llangollen*. They are briefly referenced as an ideal for romantic friendship by Emma Donoghue: Donoghue, *Poems Between Women*, p. xxix. Martha Vicinus opens her study on romantic friendship in the year 1778, marking the year in which the ladies ran away together: Martha Vicinus, *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loves Women, 1778-1928* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. xv. The pair have undergone the same labelling processes through the twentieth century as Seward, and in Elaine Marks' article 'Lesbian Intertextuality' they are merged with others as 'lesbians': Elaine Marks, 'Lesbian Intertextuality' in *Homosexualities and French Literature*, ed. by George Stambolian and Elaine Marks (Ithica, New York: Cornell University Press, 1979), p. 368. They are also presented as part of a sexualised discourse in Paula C. Rust's text on bisexuality and lesbian politics: Paula C. Rust, *Bisexuality and the Challenge to Lesbian Politics: Sex, Loyalty, and Revolution* (New York: New York University Press, 1995). The same is true of Vicinus' article on the roots of modern lesbianism: Martha Vicinus, "They wonder to which sex I belong": the Historical Roots of Modern Lesbian Identity', *Feminist Studies*, 18 (1992), 467-497. Stuart Curran recognises the role the ladies have played in the canon of 'lesbian history' but presents a queer perspective, one which recognises the nonsexual aspects of friendship: "... moreover, that part of the attraction of the cult of female friendship was exactly its freedom from such a sense of physical obligation to a demanding spouse.": Curran, 'Dynamics of Female Friendship', p. 222. A queer perspective is also adopted by Susan S. Lanser when she briefly references Ponsonby and Butler in her 2002 article on the bluestockings: "Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby, the 'Ladies of Llangollen' ... would never have declared themselves sexual partners and indeed may not have been, but their acknowledged lifetime of intimacy in a shared bed also reminds us that what counts as sex and what counts as sapphism are questions that scholars need to continue pondering.": Susan S. Lanser, 'Bluestocking Sapphism and the Economies of Desire', *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, 65 (2002), 257-275 (p. 261). The same is true of her investigation into the ladies and class boundaries in her earlier article: Lanser, 'Befriendship the Body', p. 183. Ellen Crowell's article, though largely concerned with Irish nationalist sentiment and the pair, notes Llangollen Vale as a tourist destination for 'queer travel': Ellen Crowell, 'Ghosting the Llangollen Ladies: Female Intimacies, Ascendancy Exiles, and the Anglo-Irish Novel', *Eire-Ireland*, 39 (2004), 203-227 (p. 203). Crowell suggests that the ladies were lambasted in Irish culture as traitors, a status which influenced many literary works, including the novel *Belinda*, which will be examined in the third chapter to this thesis. Finally, Liz Stanley details the difficulties in using the term 'lesbian' to refer to women such as the ladies:

separate article to be both celebratory and somewhat masochistic, “... protecting and melancholically enacting the romantic community she was unable to bring to fruition.”³⁸⁰ Brideoake sets out to ‘queer’ the Ladies of Llangollen, suggesting that their aversion to social norms ‘constitutes a commensurately queer resistance to definition’.³⁸¹ Their home, Plâs Newydd, Brideoake states was a cultural construction in much the way Walpole’s Strawberry Hill was: it was a queer romanticist haven heavily associated with its Welsh landscape.³⁸² It was this setting, ideals and individuals who would so inspire Seward’s later poetical works.

Brideoake suggests that Seward was enamoured by the Ladies due to her own failures with Sneyd (whom she incorrectly asserts died at the age of forty-nine), before using a Freudian analysis to suggest her infatuation to be displaced desire: “Seward’s poetic celebration of the Ladies may thus be seen as both protecting and melancholically enacting the romantic community she was unable to bring to fruition.”³⁸³ Though this argument is suggestive, I argue that Seward’s idolisation of

I am *not* arguing that these women were ‘really lesbian’ and constituted a lesbian subculture: claims concerning the synonymity of their behaviour and relationships and present-day lesbianism are not intended, but neither am I arguing that ‘the lesbian’ did not exist then. My view is that drawing *either* conclusion from the historical record is problematic, these women were seen as lesbian by various of their friends and acquaintances, and they may have seen themselves in these terms too, *but* ‘lesbian’ meant something very different then, and something to which we now have no access.

Liz Stanley, ‘Epistemological Issues in Researching Lesbian History: The Case of ‘Romantic Friendship’’ in *Working Out: New Directions for Women’s Studies*, ed. by Hilary Hinds and others (London: The Falmer Press, 1992), p. 163.

³⁸⁰ Brideoake, ‘Extraordinary Female Affection’ (para. 15 of 23).

³⁸¹ Brideoake, ‘Extraordinary Female Affection’ (abstract). Peakman notes that the ladies did not ‘project any overt sexual images’ and were thus ‘purely female friends’: *Lascivious Bodies*, p. 186. She goes on to state: “Although neither of them mentioned sexual activities in their writings, it is obvious that these two women shared a strong emotional and physical bond.”: p. 189. This would place them within a similar form of queer relationship to the one Seward desired for herself. This distinction is presented less clearly in Mavor’s work, blurring the boundaries between Sapphism and romantic friendship: “English social history had hitherto been reticent upon the intriguing subject [sapphism] ... The English, happily less given to close definition than the French, merely recognised the existence of what was a more diffuse relationship altogether, that of ‘romantic friendship’.”: Mavor, *The Ladies of Llangollen*, p. 87.

³⁸² Brideoake, ‘Extraordinary Female Affection’ (para. 6 of 23).

³⁸³ Brideoake, ‘Extraordinary Female Affection’ (para. 15 of 23).

the ladies of Llangollen was less about mourning the loss of Sneyd in an impotent outburst of regret and more about celebrating seeing her religiously-held ideals at last being realised by the Ladies. As with Gray, Seward never abandons the philosophy and moral ethics of friendship and her poetry serves as the blueprint for a belief system she wishes to be spread to wider society via public writing. In this brief examination of Seward's Llangollen poetry I argue that, as with her elegies, her book does not represent a burial of repressed desire, but a declaration – one which she fully intended to be public.³⁸⁴

Seward features regularly in Elizabeth Mavor's *Life with the Ladies of Llangollen*, though no significant commentary or extra detail on the relationship is given.³⁸⁵ Mavor's other work, *The Ladies of Llangollen: A Study in Romantic Friendship* does, however, mention that the ladies were 'agog' to meet Seward.³⁸⁶ On Seward's side, the Ladies were preceded by their own reputation, as prior to their meeting Seward excitedly writes of "... the two celebrated ladies, to whom I hope for the honour and happiness of paying my respects ere I leave this country [Wales]."
She was soon to receive her wish and, in September of 1795, she had tea and then dinner with the bluestocking 'minervas'.³⁸⁷ Though they didn't have the usual beauty she loved to admire in her fellow women, to the reverend Henry White she details "[Lady Butler] has not fine features, but they are agreeable; - enthusiasm in her eye, hilarity and benevolence in her smile ... [on Miss Ponsonby] Easy, elegant, yet pensive, is her address and manner ... If her features are not beautiful, they are very

³⁸⁴ Unlike so many of her other works 'Llangollen Vale' was published almost immediately after it was written, during Seward's own lifetime: Anna Seward, *Llangollen Vale, with Other Poems* (London: G. Sael, 1796). Subsequent references will be given in parentheses unless further detail is needed.

³⁸⁵ Elizabeth Mavor, *Life with the Ladies of Llangollen* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984).

³⁸⁶ Mavor, *The Ladies of Llangollen*, p. 87.

³⁸⁷ *Letters of Anna Seward*, IV, p. 100 (Seward to White, Barmouth, September 7th, 1795).

sweet and feminine.”³⁸⁸ Seward excitedly writes of her new friends to numerous individuals – to Mrs Mary Powys she revels in the vision of their idealised retreat: their “... little temple, consecrate to Friendship and the Muses, and adorned by the hands of all the Graces ... [also noting that though they are] Devoted to each other, their expanding hearts have yet more room for other warm attachments.”³⁸⁹ Seward delights in being one such attachment, and is thrilled to receive a gift of fruit trees from Lady Butler.³⁹⁰ The trees were the first of numerous gifts sent back and forth, with Seward being sent a drawing of a harp owned by the two and later her sending the Ladies a picture of Romney’s *Serena*, as she said it resembled her lost friend Honora Sneyd.³⁹¹

The bond between the Ladies of Llangollen was described by Faderman as: “not only socially permissible but even desirable.”³⁹² Like Seward herself they were political conservatives, upper-class Anglicans and royalists. They had even dismissed a maid for having fallen pregnant out of wedlock.³⁹³ Susan S. Lanser’s 1998 article on the ladies argues that their class roles were cultivated to protect their unconventional way of life: a phenomenon she refers to as ‘compensatory

³⁸⁸ *Letters of Anna Seward*, IV, p. 104 (Seward to White, Barmouth, September 7th, 1795).

³⁸⁹ *Letters of Anna Seward*, IV, p. 120 (Seward to Powys, Lichfield, November 17th, 1793) – later on Seward seethes at the Ladies being labelled recluses, noting that they have many friends, but, due to their fame, were obviously unable to entertain strangers very often: *Letters of Anna Seward*, V, p. 251 (Seward to Whalley, Lichfield, October 7th, 1799).

³⁹⁰ *Letters of Anna Seward*, IV, p. 131 (Seward to Butler, Lichfield, December 9th, 1795).

³⁹¹ It is extremely interesting to note that some versions of Romney’s *Serena* are named ‘Honora Edgeworth’ or ‘Honora Sneyd’, which presents us with one of two possibilities. The less interesting (and also less likely) answer is that the Ladies identified the picture as such and thus the name stuck. The second possibility is that the picture actually is of Honora Sneyd (by no means impossible considering that she was both of some status and a contemporary of Romney) and Seward thought the resemblance uncanny without realising exactly of whom it was a portrait. Seward herself in fact sat for a portrait by Romney in 1780: *Letters of Anna Seward*, VI, p. 322 (Seward to Seward, Lichfield, December 9th, 1806). She writes of the striking resemblance that ‘no pencil could do justice’ in 1797: *Letters of Anna Seward*, V, p. 16 (Seward to Ponsonby, Lichfield, October 30th, 1797).

³⁹² Faderman, *Surpassing*, p. 122. Faderman does however give an example of an exception: on the 24th of July 1790 the ‘General Evening Post’ hinted at transgression, a libel which extreme angered Ponsonby and Butler: p. 124.

³⁹³ Faderman then uses the socially conservative views the Ladies publicly espoused to suggest that their relationship is non-erotic: Faderman, p. 123.

conservatism',³⁹⁴ shielding them from criticism for their gender transgression.³⁹⁵

This begs the question as to why the Ladies of Llangollen were more socially accepted than Anna Seward, whose damaged reputation we saw made clear in her unpublished letters. Seward herself held a far less conservative outlook, sometimes providing support or assistance to the socially unacceptable.³⁹⁶ However, another reason for Seward's deviant reputation remains: she, unlike the Ladies, had yet to find a female 'partner'.³⁹⁷ Whereas the Ladies were settled, Seward presented a threat to any daughters, sisters or would-be wives who strayed into her confidence.

The friendship with the Ladies is different to those she enjoys with others, in that she befriends them as a couple, rather than individuals.³⁹⁸ She sends letters to them both separately and as a pair (something she rarely does even with married couples) and does not appear to see one in person without the other being present. Despite the possessiveness Seward demonstrates towards friends such as Sneyd, this does not seem to bother her in the least – perhaps due at least in part to the fact that she seems to be as much in love with the ideal of two women living together as with the individual ladies themselves. Indeed, she devotes far more of her energies to writing about their 'palace' or 'temple' to friendship than of the charms of the

³⁹⁴ Lanser, 'Befriending the Body', p. 189.

³⁹⁵ Lanser, 'Befriending the Body', p. 190.

³⁹⁶ These included French prisoners of war, whom Seward helped care for when few others would: in an unpublished letter she describes to Dowdeswell that only herself and 'one family' attended to them: U. Birm. L., MSS 10/iii/9 (Seward to Dowdeswell, Lichfield, November 30th, 1797), though in the published version she names them to be the Simpson family: *Letters of Anna Seward*, V, p. 18 (Seward to Dowdeswell, Lichfield, November 30th, 1797). She was also a great admirer of both Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, despite being aware of their revolutionary politics and Wollstonecraft's scandalous sexual history: *Letters of Anna Seward*, V, p. 47 (Seward to Jackson, Lichfield, February 13th, 1798). Likewise she admired the somewhat outrageous Mademoiselle le Chevalier D'Eon, who passed as a man for most of her life: *Letters of Anna Seward*, IV, p. 76 (Seward to Sykes, Lichfield, June 30th, 1795).

³⁹⁷ I use the term 'partner' despite its monogamous connotations as Seward desired exclusivity in her female friendships – a phenomenon I term 'monoamory' and which will be examined in the latter stages to this thesis.

³⁹⁸ Though there are some interests she shares with just one of them – for instance, it is with Lady Butler she shares her interest in desert animals: *Letters of Anna Seward*, IV, p. 346 (Seward to Butler, Lichfield, May 22nd, 1797).

individuals contained therein. Furthermore, the language used when Seward alludes to friendship both to and regarding the Ladies is semi-religious, as she uses phrases such as ‘the shrine of friendship’³⁹⁹ and considers Llangollen Vale her ‘little Elysium’⁴⁰⁰ and an ‘Arcadian Retreat’.⁴⁰¹ Even this language does not fully convey Seward’s full esteem for the pair, as she signs one letter ‘with sentiment more affectionate than language knows how to paint’⁴⁰² – later still, she states that it is their society to which her ‘whole mind is wedded’.⁴⁰³

The theme of religious devotion to friendship reaches an apex in *Llangollen Vale*. It is fairly short, yet Seward fills it with her strong sentiments towards the Ladies and their friendship. Wales itself was seen by the poet as a refuge, and the first section of *Llangollen Vale* is focused upon Welsh history: in particular defence against the English (Seward’s admiration for Wales once again mirrors Gray). This defiance is carried to Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby, with the land they dwell upon ‘consecrate to Love’:

Thus consecrate to Love, in ages flown, -
 Long ages fled Din’s-Branna’s ruins show,
 Bleak as they stand upon their steepy cone,
 The crown and contrast of the VALE below,
 That screen’d by mural rocks, with pride displays
 Beauty’s romantic pomp in every sylvan maze.⁴⁰⁴

The very land here is passed on to the Ladies of Llangollen, providing a space already dedicated to sacred love. The regal language which pervades this stanza refers to the past before English rule, and the poet is keen to underline the sublime beauty afforded by the Welsh location. The ties between the Ladies and their location are noted by Brideoake, who comments that *Llangollen Vale*: “... identified them with the

³⁹⁹ *Letters of Anna Seward*, IV, p. 190 (Seward to Ponsonby, Lichfield, March 23rd, 1796).

⁴⁰⁰ *Letters of Anna Seward*, V, p. 10 (Seward to Ponsonby, Lichfield, October 30th, 1797).

⁴⁰¹ BL., Add. MS 46400 f. 286 (Bournemouth, September 15th, 1795).

⁴⁰² *Letters of Anna Seward*, IV, p. 384 (Seward to Butler and Ponsonby, Lichfield, October 2nd, 1797).

⁴⁰³ *Letters of Anna Seward*, V, p. 142 (Seward to Ponsonby, Buxton, August 9th, 1798).

⁴⁰⁴ *Llangollen Vale*, p. 6.

romantic celebration of the Welsh landscape and emphasized their geographically fixed provincial gentility, distinguishing them from the public censure experienced by rumored metropolitan sapphists.”⁴⁰⁵

Apparently contrasting those who opposed their relationship with the English, the next verse declares:

Now with a Vestral lustre glows the VALE,
Thine, sacred FRIENDSHIP, permanent as pure;
In vain the stern Authorities assail,
In vain Persuasion spreads her silken lure,
High-born, and high-endow'd, the peerless Twain,
Pant for coy Nature's charms 'mid silent dale, and plain.⁴⁰⁶

Though Faderman suggests that the relationship between the Ladies of Llangollen was largely free from social castigation, Backsheider more convincingly argues that these two lines (“In vain the stern authorities assail, / In vain persuasion spreads her silken loves”) allude to at the ‘mixed reputation’ of Butler and Ponsonby.⁴⁰⁷ This passage betrays Seward’s awareness of the controversy surrounding the Ladies of Llangollen and she applauds them for their rebelliousness. The end-stopped lines and alternating rhyming structure mirrors the stability and security of the pair to whom the poem is dedicated, in sharp contrast to the tortured turmoil of the sonnets. *Llangollen Vale* goes on to praise the minds of Butler and Ponsonby, perfectly suited in ‘genius, taste, and fancy’ (*Llangollen Vale*, p. 7). Seward thus rose to the challenge of evolving from elegist of lost desire to proclaiming a queer epiphalamium.

As well as the land on which they live being sacred, the house in which they reside has abundant ethereal qualities also:

Then rose the Fairy Palace of the Vale,
Then bloom'd around it the Arcadian bowers;

⁴⁰⁵ Brideoake, ‘Extraordinary Female Affection’ (para. 11 of 23).

⁴⁰⁶ *Llangollen Vale*, p. 6.

⁴⁰⁷ Backsheider, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets*, p. 306. Peakman also comments on the libel directed toward the ladies by the press, who hinted at ‘Sapphist leanings’: Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies*, p. 188.

Screen'd from the storms of Winter, cold and pale,
 Screen'd from the fervors of the sultry hours,
 Circling the lawny crescent, soon they rose,
 To letter'd ease devote, and Friendship's blest repose.⁴⁰⁸

The house in which the pair dwell becomes a magical monastery dedicated to the faith which has appeared so consistently in all of Seward's poetry. This domestic pastoral retreat is 'screened' from the harsh constraints of mainstream society. The seasons, which emerge time and again in sonnets to Sneyd in imagery symbolising the passions, threaten the scene, with the mansion protecting its occupants against the harsher climates. The consistency of their love is mirrored in the poem's structure, where all twenty-nine stanzas are identical in form.

By night the Ladies' retreat is veiled, curtained and shadowed from our prurient gaze:

Then the coy Scene, by deep'ning veils o'erdrawn,
 In shadowy elegance seems lovelier still;
 Tall shrubs, that skirt the semi-lunar lawn,
 Dark woods, that curtain the opposing hill;
 While o'er their brows the bare cliff faintly gleams,
 And, from its paly edge, the evening-diamond streams.⁴⁰⁹

Here the lawned elegance of the grounds represents the civilising process taming nature but retains the religious beauty of the setting. The protective nature of the retreat is once again evoked, this time through the emphasis of the tall plants which stand guard at the perimeter.

The poet moves back towards a spiritual celebration in the twenty-second stanza, where Seward clearly espouses her belief of the positive influence such a lifestyle could have on society as a whole, with the first four lines quoting from Thomson's *Castle of Indolence*:

"But ah! what hand can touch the strings so fine,

⁴⁰⁸ *Llangollen Vale*, p. 7.

⁴⁰⁹ *Llangollen Vale*, p. 8.

“Who up the lofty diapason roll
 “Such sweet, such sad, such solemn airs divine,
 “Then let them down again into the soul!”
 The prouder sex as soon, with virtue calm,
 Might win from this bright Pair pure Friendship’s spotless palm.⁴¹⁰

This work is one of the most radical pieces of Seward’s poetry, as it is clear that Seward does not just believe in the superiority of a cult of friendship over marriage for her own sake, but sees it as a true ethical alternative for leading a good life. It is also clear that she believes women to be far more conditioned toward friendship than men, perhaps unsurprisingly considering the difficulties faced by Gray. Her choice of quote continues the religious dialogue in a rather dramatic fashion, and the final two lines are the only point in *Llangollen Vale* where the rhyme scheme deviates at all, rendering the presence of the four lines preceding them all the more visible.

Nearing the end of the poem, Seward foregrounds the opposition the two women have faced, referring to it as ‘bigotry’:

This gentle pair no glooms of thought infest,
 Nor Bigotry, nor Envy’s sullen gleam
 Shed withering influence on the effort blest,
 Which most shou’d win the other’s dear esteem,
 By added knowledge, by endowment high,
 By Charity’s warm boon, and Pity’s soothing sigh.⁴¹¹

They are not misanthropic: indeed they participate in society by charitable work and scholarship. Their ‘charity’ and ‘pity’ are firm indicators of benevolence and sensibility. The piece serves as a public defence of the Ladies, whose lifestyle so opposed the norm. *Llangollen Vale* is a manifesto: celebrating the cult of friendship whilst providing a formal, public announcement of her beliefs.⁴¹²

⁴¹⁰ *Llangollen Vale*, p. 9.

⁴¹¹ *Llangollen Vale*, p. 11.

⁴¹² They were received relatively well: as Backscheider makes clear, any criticisms around the poetry were around its flowery nature, a reflection of attacks on sensibility itself, whereas the reviews were ‘respectful’ toward the three women: Backscheider, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets*, p. 309.

Seward's poetical dedication toward Ladies of Llangollen can be found elsewhere, as the encomium dedicated to their vale is echoed by letters exchanged between them and Seward. Amongst the letters there is a poem, 'To the Right Honourable Lady Eleanor Butler' in the third volume of Scott's collection. It begins by detailing the founding of their friendship almost as a mythic quest:

Thou, who with firm, free step, as life arose,
Led thy loved friend where sacred Deva flows,
On Wisdom's cloudless sun with thee to gaze,
And build your eyrie on that rocky maze ...⁴¹³

Again sacred and religious language is used, referring to the 'shrine' they founded together, 'tributes' and referring to the biblical bond between David and Jonathan by referring to their 'Davidean friendship', all under a quasi-heroic strain (*Poetical Works*, III, p. 108). This particular poem closes by dwelling on the security they found together, and the 'Eden' they found in both one another and their house in Llangollen Vale. A sonnet Seward left at Plâs Newydd in 1799 follows a similar theme, referring to 'Friendship and Fancy's consecrated shrine':

STRANGER, when o'er yon slant, warm field no cloud
Steals, - at its foot, the verge of a wild brook,
In tangled dell, where sun-beams never look,
Press this screen'd seat, and mark the waters crowd
Close to the cliff down their steep channel rude;
Leaping o'er rugged stones, that aye provoke
Foam and hoarse murmur; while the pendant oak
Frowns o'er the little, clamorous, lonely flood-
Impetuous Deva's honours yield to thine,
Dear brooks, for O! thy scanty billows lave
Friendship and Fancy's consecrated shrine;
And thou may'st tell the stream of mightier wave,
Here oft they muse the noontide hours away,
Who gild thy vale with intellectual ray.⁴¹⁴

This poem, having been found in a drawer, was clearly not intended by the poet for publishing, rather as a personal gift to Ponsonby and Butler, though their consenting

⁴¹³ *Poetical Works*, III, p. 107.

⁴¹⁴ *Poetical Works*, III, p. 314.

to having it published suggests their belief that Seward would not feel affronted. It is directed to a stranger, which poses the possibility that, despite its private nature, the poem is addressed to a wider audience, and that the values contained both in the written work and in the lives of the Ladies should be spread to wider society.⁴¹⁵ The sonnet contains all the themes of *Llangollen Vale*, from the religious imagery to the prominence of nature, though the addition of 'intellectual ray' includes a virtue which was missing in the larger work. As before the positive imagery of the pair is contrasted by their negative counterparts, such as loneliness.

Some three years later Seward penned 'A Farewell', upon leaving Llangollen Vale. Seward paints the extent of her feelings towards women, as being beyond words and incomprehensible:

...Yet, even then,
In Friendship's primal hours, my soul perceived
Feelings, that more defied expression's power
To speak them truly, than to paint the charms
Of those distinguished bowers ...⁴¹⁶

These feelings, akin to religious epiphany, are preceded by a great deal of ritualistic language:

O Cambrian Tempe! oft with transport hail'd,
I leave thee now, as I did ever leave
Thee, and thy peerless mistresses, with heart
Where lively gratitude and fond regret
For mastery strive, and still the mastery gain
Alternate. Oft renew'd must be the strife
When, far from this loved region, and from all
That now its ancient witchery revives;

⁴¹⁵ Seward's was of course not the only work to espouse the idea of living to the ideals of female friendship: As Faderman points out, the ideal of 'ghettos' of female friendship was most fully explored in Sarah Scott's 1762 novel 'A Description of Millenium Hall'. Faderman also notes that Scott lived those ideals herself, setting up home with Barbara Montagu after the breakdown of her marriage: Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men*, p. 104. Faderman suggests the two to have been inseparable: "During the early 1760s, when their attachment was at its most intense, they long ... for each other's presence.": Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men*, p. 131. Betty Rizzo details Scott's ideals and suggests her attempts to live up to them were met with failure: Betty Rizzo, *Companions Without Vows: Relationships Among Eighteenth-Century British Women* (Athens; London: University of Georgia Press, 1994), p. 39.

⁴¹⁶ *Poetical Works*, III, p. 347

Revives, with spells more potent erst than knew
 Your white-rob'd Druids on their Deva's bank
 Aweful to frame; when the loud mystic song,
 And louder clang of their unnumber'd harps,
 Drown'd e'en the river's thunder, where she throws
 All, all her waters in one rocky chasm,
 Narrow, but fathomless, and goads them on
 Roaring and foaming, while Llangollen's steeps
 Rebellow to the noise. Ye, who now frame
 Your talismans resistless, O! receive,
 Ye mild Enchantresses, my warm adieu!⁴¹⁷

The religious imagery in this piece remains, though it has switched from the Christian, with all its references to 'Eden' and 'David', to the Pagan: "That now its ancient witchery revives; / Revives, with spells more potent erst than knew ..." Once again she references the 'Deva' in relation to Llangollen, making clear the polytheistic overtones of the location. Echoing Gray's works, the Pagan imagery permeates a great deal of the poem, referring to 'white-rob'd Druids', 'loud mystic song', and 'talismans' (*Poetical Works*, III, p. 346). Though it is clear that Seward is playing with the imagery of pre-Christian Welsh folklore, she is no less sincere in its application to the women she praises than she is regarding biblical language: "Ye mild Enchantresses, my warm adieu!" (*Poetical Works*, III, p. 346). Though Seward possessed firm Christian beliefs (and this poem again refers to 'Eden' by its end), her attention to poetical Paganism is also noticeable throughout her writing in the form of ancient Greek deities and religious concepts (such as the "Pagan machinery of Homer"),⁴¹⁸ and it could certainly be argued that the same-sex devotion present in classical pre-Christian societies drew her towards their imagery and some of their ideals (often, like Gray, referencing philosophers such as Aristotle).⁴¹⁹ Once again

⁴¹⁷ *Poetical Works*, III, p. 345 The near-religious language used has even spread to Seward's biographers – in 1931 Ashmun suggested that Seward loved Sneyd 'to the point of idolatry': Ashmun, *The Singing Swan*, p. 15.

⁴¹⁸ *Letters of Anna Seward*, I, p. 241 (Seward to Weston, Lichfield, December 22nd, 1786).

⁴¹⁹ *Letters of Anna Seward*, II, p. 344 (Seward to the editor of the General Evening Post, December 24th 1789).

like Gray, Seward had a good deal of knowledge of the various deities of Europe, having written in a letter in 1790: "Perhaps you are not enough an heathen to understand ... Lucina is the Goddess of child-bearing, whose protection it was usual to invoke in the days of Paganism."⁴²⁰

A Christian she remains, however, recognising a difference between polytheistic and monotheistic poetry, where, though recognising the value of both, she personally identifies more with the latter.⁴²¹ Pagan entities are real to her to an extent, as in a letter she comments that a tombstone should not include a reference to the Muses as they are not Christian.⁴²² Like Gray, however, her invocations of classical religion are an important part of her ideal of friendship, which in itself was of considerable religious significance – with Llangollen Vale its most important shrine.

Seward's Cult

Friendship, in its various forms, was to Seward an important commitment, and when entered properly could easily rival marriage in passion and affection. Yet she also recognised the dangers of fair-weather friends, quipping to 'Emma': "We swear eternal truth – but say, my friend / What day, next week, th' eternity shall end?"⁴²³ Regarding marriage, though she was never to write a Godwinian tract declaring her opinion (it is even possible she never overtly recognised it herself) we see through her letters a frequent criticism of the institution and often aggressive pleas against her friends' marriages, not only to her sister and Honora Sneyd, but also Emma, Sophia

⁴²⁰ *Letters of Anna Seward*, III, p. 36 (Seward to Martin, October 27th 1790).

⁴²¹ *Letters of Anna Seward*, I, p. 373 (Seward to Dewes, Lichfield, December 3rd, 1787).

⁴²² *Letters of Anna Seward*, V, p. 56 (Seward to Cary, Lichfield, March 4th, 1798).

⁴²³ *Poetical Works*, I, p. xlvi.

Weston and Mrs Smith. These betray her opposition to sexual union. The rationale this is revealed by a letter to Mrs Hayley where she ruminates: "Men are rarely capable of pure unmixed tenderness to any fellow-creature except their children. In general, even the best of them, give their friendship to their male acquaintance, and their fondness for their offspring."⁴²⁴ To Seward, men are better designed for friendship than sexual love, so it comes as no surprise when she goes on to state the Aristotelian view that male affection towards women is more fleeting than towards those of their own sex (even platonically) and that perhaps being a spinster is not unideal.⁴²⁵ Her statements in the letters stored at Yale most directly express this considered philosophy and viewpoint.

The use of religious rhetoric in Seward's poetic works gives friendship a spiritual dimension, one which is actually at the centre of the poet's own Christian faith. Though as we saw in the introduction to this thesis Bray suggests friendship to have been a Christian institution, this was certainly not clear-cut at the time and there were those, such as the Earl of Shaftesbury, who believed otherwise.⁴²⁶ Seward believed friendship to be pleasing to her (Christian) god, yet her poetry makes use of a magical, polytheistic pre-Christian imagery, referencing both Hellenistic and Welsh pagan religious systems. Such themes were only to grow stronger over the course of her life, culminating in the encomium of 'Llangollen Vale'. Through the religious language utilised in her written works we can see Seward's own recognition as to the social status of friendship – she may have believed it to be virtuous, noble and healthy

⁴²⁴ *Letters of Anna Seward*, III, p. 30 (Seward to Hayley, July 27th, 1790).

⁴²⁵ This is a later repetition of her views expressed in the Beinecke letters: *Letters of Anna Seward*, III, p. 30 (Seward to Hayley, July 27th, 1790).

⁴²⁶ Bray even suggests friendship to have been crucial to both sides of the Christian divide during the reformation: *The Friend*, p. 71. Through Bray's study we can see the sermons of Mary Deverell to have had some precedent, as he gives examples of the relationship between Jesus and St. John's relationship being likened to contemporary friendship: p. 119. Of course Anthony Ashley-Cooper (the Earl of Shaftesbury) presented friendship as a pre-Christian ideal belonging to Judaic and Hellenic religious systems, one which was 'peculiar' to Christianity in eighteenth-century Britain: *Characteristics*, p. 46.

(expressed through her Christian language), yet she also recognised it as subversive, playful and belonging to ancient cultures. For Seward, at least, there need be no contradiction regarding religion and same-sex platonic love.

Seward's rejection of marriage, her 'stand', has less religious grounding, and is perhaps responsible for her often murky reputation, which she referenced in her unpublished letters to Weston and which is also mentioned in her published collection: in 1797 she writes of a young woman of nineteen she had formed an attachment to and whom 'loves me with fervour', but "Her mother is absurd enough to oppose the attachment, as if it were criminal, and to ridicule, as meanly romantic, her averseness to annihilate time in vapid ceremony."⁴²⁷ For Seward the themes of friendship and marriage could not be separated – each would threaten the other. Her poetry presents the inevitable conflict between the two, and whether expressing herself through elegiac sonnets, paraphrases of Horace or the spiritual devotions to Plâs Newydd, the veneration of the former and the denigration of the latter is always clear. Seward's poetical works present a strong idealism for a queer desire that, though often thwarted, she would never abandon.

⁴²⁷ *Letters of Anna Seward*, V, p. 6 (Seward to Childers, October 17th, 1797).

CHAPTER THREE

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT AND THE LEGACY OF *MARY: A FICTION*

Over the next two chapters we shall see how in the latter stages of the century romantic friendship was celebrated in rebellious elegiac prose - literary devotions to friendship were not limited to pages of poetry. Mary Wollstonecraft provided a dedication to friendship through her novel *Mary: A Fiction*, a semi-autobiographical elegiac work published in 1788.⁴²⁸ Later an infamous radical whose political treatise *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) would earn her notoriety, she here applied her revolutionary ideals to personal relationships, with her views on love being inseparable from her belief in gender equality. A devotee of friendship, Wollstonecraft would nevertheless alter its definition slightly to reposition it within the framework of both same-sex and opposite-sex love: a process which continued even following her death in 1797. Through her novels Wollstonecraft attempts to reconfigure male-female relations in order to find equality: for this friendship proves the perfect basis. *Mary: A Fiction* was central to this process, and, as we shall see over the final two chapters, would influence writings on romantic friendship for the next decade.

Though dedicated to a personal companion of Wollstonecraft's – Fanny Blood – *Mary: A Fiction*, as with all of Wollstonecraft's works, contains a universal, moralising tone which extended beyond the scope of her own experience. As Anna Seward and Thomas Gray transformed and reconfigured personal experience into literary constructions which were at times idealised, so Mary Wollstonecraft's elegy

⁴²⁸ Mary Wollstonecraft, *Mary: A Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). Subsequent references will be given in parentheses unless further detail is needed.

presents an ideal of friendship which serves as a model through which to better society as a whole.⁴²⁹ This was not, however, yet theorised in terms of various groupings and societies which were active in forming the public sphere and increasing the prominence of democracy (as mentioned in the previous two chapters and detailed by Jürgen Habermas).⁴³⁰ Groups such as the Bluestockings featured many prominent friendships, but did not contain either the seclusion nor the marginalisation of queer romantic friendship: for the author of *Mary: A Fiction*, the friendship which could better mankind – diminishing the barriers of gender and class - was of the intimate, one-to-one variety expounded by Gray and Seward. Such friendship was better suited to a radical albeit moral life, containing none of the dynastic self-interest associated with the family unit. In her first novel Wollstonecraft follows the lead of the poets in presenting such friendship as marginalised, and only available to those who have sufficient courage and intellect to challenge and confront social norms.

Both romantic friendship and Wollstonecraft herself were later viewed – at least in part – as aberrations, lambasted by an increasingly conservative society.⁴³¹ Ideally friendship was to be limited to respectable preferably married individuals meeting in large salons such as the Bluestockings, rather than marginalised radical bonds which were at odds with traditional marriage. As shall be explored in this chapter, Wollstonecraft certainly praised Bluestocking-style sociability in her political writings, but it is romantic friendship which is immortalised in her novels.

⁴²⁹ As we saw in the first chapter, Gray's works presented two literary identities which often contradicted one another. Seward's Horatian Odes, detailed in the second chapter, presented a sexual multiplicity which is not demonstrated in her other work but is a creation which disrupts popular gendered and sexual norms.

⁴³⁰ See the first chapter to this thesis.

⁴³¹ The lasting effects of Wollstonecraft's controversial reputation are detailed by Caroline Franklin in her biography on Wollstonecraft: Caroline Franklin, *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Literary Life* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 199-211.

Mary: A Fiction is a novel which presents friendship as egalitarian and elevating and marriage as suffocating. As we shall see in this chapter, however, in *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* Wollstonecraft would envisage the transformation of marriage and opposite-sex love, arguing for companionate contractual unions which were based in friendship along Aristotelian lines: a principle which would influence her final (and unfinished) work, *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman* (1798). However, her final novel presents an even firmer critique of the patriarchal nature of the contemporary marriage laws than her first.

Wollstonecraft's works would challenge the next generation and influence the young Maria Edgeworth (stepdaughter of Honora Sneyd), whose 1801 novel *Belinda* would likewise champion romantic friendship.⁴³² Yet in the post-revolutionary conservative climate of the new century, Edgeworth would be unable to openly focus upon same-sex intimacy – or even publicly identify with Wollstonecraft – and still retain her reputation. The traditional reading of the text as a conservative and traditional novel requires a queer re-reading: though presented as a courtship novel, *Belinda* actually subverts the genre, positioning same-sex romantic friendship as the emotional focus of the narrative. Edgeworth covertly identifies with the friendship presented by the (by now disgraced) Mary Wollstonecraft, 'rehabilitating' them and bringing them into a new era. Over the course of this chapter we will examine the legacy of Wollstonecraft's elegy and the shifting literary representations of friendship toward the close of the eighteenth century.

⁴³² Edgeworth, *Belinda* (London: Pandora Press, 1986), III (1810). Subsequent references will be given in parentheses unless further detail is needed. The novel shall be explored further into this chapter.

Like Gray and Seward before her, Wollstonecraft was strongly influenced by the social forces which inevitably politicised human relationships (Wollstonecraft was identified with Seward and referenced alongside her in a poem by John Henry Collins).⁴³³ As we examined in the previous chapter, the expectations placed upon young women and men to abandon youthful friendships and enter into companionate marriage gained in strength over the course of the eighteenth century. Despite the rhetoric presented by those such as Defoe, Wollstonecraft expressed great concern at the inequalities present within marriage – inequalities which formed a stark contrast to the Aristotelian mores of romantic friendship. As has been the case with the figures of the two previous chapters to this thesis, this rebellion has led critics in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries anachronistically to place more recent sexual identities upon her.

Susan Gubar examines Wollstonecraft's views on human relationships from a contemporary feminist standpoint, accusing her of misogyny. Yet even as Gubar criticises other scholars of over-sexualising Wollstonecraft she presents a sexual bias:

Why does Wollstonecraft's [*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*] so eerily echo those composed by masculine satirists? A number of critics have noted problems, tensions, and repressions in the *oeuvre* produced by Wollstonecraft. In particular, these scholars claim that by appropriating an Enlightenment rhetoric of reason, Wollstonecraft alienated herself and other women from sexual desire. Throughout *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* Wollstonecraft elevates friendship between the sexes over romantic and erotic entanglements (which she condemns as ephemeral or destructive). Yet I would view this motif not merely as a repression of sexuality but more

⁴³³ At the close of the Eighteenth Century John Henry Collins wrote a poetical epistle in which he puts forth his regard for Anna Seward of Lichfield, despite her refusal to associate with him. The piece is actually devoted to Wollstonecraft, and both are praised as examples of exemplary womanhood and 'genius': John Henry Collins, *A Poetical Epistle Addressed to Miss Wollstonecraft, Occasioned by Reading Her Celebrated Essay on the Rights of Woman and Her Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution* (London: Vernor and Hood, 1795), p. 20.

inclusively as a symptom of the paradoxical feminist misogyny that pervades her work ...⁴³⁴

Gubar states misogyny on Wollstonecraft's part and an overemphasis on the importance of reason cause Wollstonecraft to 'elevate friendship' at the expense of 'erotic entanglements' (a term she conflates with 'romantic'). Gubar's account, however, does not take into consideration the tradition of romantic friendship, nor does it recognise Foucault's assertion that sexuality is not an innate or fixed aspect of humanity. Gubar – alongside many other scholars – pathologises Wollstonecraft's writings as she fails to give proper emphasis to heterosexual love.⁴³⁵

Other interpretations of Wollstonecraft's writings have been less heterocentric but still retain a sexual bias.⁴³⁶ Ashley Tauchert's articles 'Escaping Discussion: Liminality and the Female-Embodied Couple' (2000) and 'Mary Wollstonecraft: Feminist, Lesbian or Transgendered?' (2002) read same-sex friendship as a covert representation of erotic desire, rather than an exploration of nonsexual love in its own right (as we have seen in the previous two chapters, such an interpretation is common and represents a fundamentally different reading to the one I am utilising in this thesis).⁴³⁷ As our culture infrequently distinguishes the difference between the two,

⁴³⁴ Susan Gubar, 'Feminist Misogyny: Mary Wollstonecraft and the Paradox of "It Takes One to Know One"', *Feminist Studies*, 20 (1994), 457-473 (p. 459). Six years later this same article was printed in her book: Susan Gubar, *Critical Condition: Feminism at the Turn of the Century* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), p. 138.

⁴³⁵ Presenting the focus on same-sex love as a pathology is a tactic which has been used as a method of homophobic repression since the Victorian medicalisation of human desire. It is interesting to note that misogyny was claimed to be one of the defining traits of sodomites in the eighteenth century, and Gubar's views almost parallel those expressed in 'The Women-Hater's Lamentation' (examined in the first chapter to this thesis). Wollstonecraft's misogyny is also mentioned by Barbara Taylor, though not in the context of same-sex desire – in fact, Taylor's suggestion that Wollstonecraft wanted to see a blurring of the sexes indicates a queer reading of her work: Barbara Taylor, 'Mary Wollstonecraft and the Wild Wish of Early Feminism', *History Workshop*, 33 (1992), 197-219 (p. 197).

⁴³⁶ Even Martha Vicinus, whose studies are integral to much of this thesis, hints at friendship being a surrogacy for a heteronormative relationship: "The early feminist writer Mary Wollstonecraft never forgave her mother for preferring her brother and sought affection in a series of alternative mothers.": *Intimate Friends*, p. 110.

⁴³⁷ Ashley Tauchert, 'Mary Wollstonecraft: Feminist, Lesbian or Transgendered?' in *Exclusions in Feminist Thought: Challenging the Boundaries of Womanhood* ed. by Mary F. Brewer (Sussex: Sussex Academic Press, 2002), p. 236.

physical desire is conflated with sexual desire. Though Faderman uses the term 'lesbian', she uses it more inclusively than is usual with the terms 'gay' or 'homosexual', more in line with the modern term 'queer' (a term which was not in common academic usage in the 1980s). As she puts it in *Surpassing the Love of Men* (1985): "... surely, there is little to distinguish romantic friendship from lesbianism."⁴³⁸ Claudia L. Johnson uses the term 'protolesbian'.⁴³⁹ In this thesis, as romantic friendship is analysed with regards to both men and women, the more recent term 'queer' is more appropriate than '(proto)lesbian'.

Despite being a pioneer, Faderman was not the only scholar to comment on Wollstonecraft's views on romantic friendship.⁴⁴⁰ Same-sex bonds are also recognised by Diane Jacobs, who describes romantic friendship as 'tempestuous' but (largely) nonsexual.⁴⁴¹ Friendship is examined as a plausible alternative to sexual marriage in Wollstonecraft's work by Janet Todd, whose focus on nonsexual love is crucial to this chapter.⁴⁴² Though Todd's analysis of Wollstonecraft's works will be introduced in greater detail in relation to the novels, she makes it clear that in her political writings Wollstonecraft emphatically separates friendship from sexual love, whilst venerating the former.⁴⁴³ Todd labels the bonds Wollstonecraft idealises as

⁴³⁸ Faderman, *Surpassing*, p. 142. Faderman argues that there has been an overemphasis on sexuality in examining female-female bonds: p.142.

⁴³⁹ "... her novels not only resist the heterosexual plot, but displace it within protolesbian narratives wrested from sentimentality itself.": Claudia L. Johnson, *Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender and Sentimentality in the 1790s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 48.

⁴⁴⁰ She is even briefly quoted twice in Janice G. Raymond's text on modern female friendship (though the quotes are not elaborated upon: *A Passion for Friends: Toward a Philosophy of Female Affection* (Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 2001), pp. 1 – 71.

⁴⁴¹ "... Mary [Wollstonecraft] had a goal: to forge what the eighteenth century called a 'romantic friendship' – a relationship which could be as tempestuous as any love affair, but only rarely involved sex.": Diane Jacobs, *Her Own Woman: The Life of Mary Wollstonecraft* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), p. 27.

⁴⁴² Some norms of marriage are shared with Aristotelian friendship, such as a desire for exclusivity – Todd comments on this, relating it both to Wollstonecraft's homosocial and heterosexual relationships: "In reality, nothing in Wollstonecraft's private or public writings suggested she believed in anything less than monogamy and lifelong commitment": Janet Todd, *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Revolutionary Life* (London: Wiedenfeld & Nicolson, 2000), p. 200.

⁴⁴³ Janet Todd, *Women's Friendship in Literature*, p. 191.

‘political friendship’.⁴⁴⁴ The analysis presented in this chapter, however, diverges from Todd’s viewpoint on the matter of opposite-sex friendship, which, as we shall see, Todd suggests to be secondary in *Mary: A Fiction* and villainous in *Maria*.

Wollstonecraft’s views on friendship are the subject of Elizabeth Frazer’s recent article ‘Mary Wollstonecraft on Politics and Friendship’ (2007). Frazer suggests Wollstonecraft believed friendship to be the ideal model for the egalitarian transformation of human relationships – the political as well as the personal.⁴⁴⁵ Ruth Abbey’s article ‘Back to the Future: Marriage as Friendship in the Thought of Mary Wollstonecraft’ (1999) is also important in understanding Wollstonecraft’s views on human relationships. The focus in Abbey’s article is on opposite-sex relationships, and Wollstonecraft’s reworking of the male-female dynamic to allow for gender equality.⁴⁴⁶ Though she does not mention *Mary: A Fiction*, she analyses Wollstonecraft’s non-fiction, stating that she believed marriage should be based in the equal friendship which has its roots in the ancient world: “... she envisages a form of marriage that incorporates the major features of the classical notions of higher friendship such as equality, free choice, reason, mutual esteem and profound concern for one another’s moral character.”⁴⁴⁷ This form of ‘sexual friendship’ (which is not extended, it must be noted, to same-sex companions) is important to Wollstonecraft’s later novel *Maria* and will be focused upon further into this chapter. Joyce Senders Pedersen’s 2008 article on Wollstonecraft’s beliefs on friendship takes a similar stance to Abbey, suggesting Wollstonecraft wished to unify ‘love’ and ‘friendship’

⁴⁴⁴ Wollstonecraft’s works come into the section of Todd’s book with this heading: Todd, *Women’s Friendship*, pp. 191-226.

⁴⁴⁵ Elizabeth Frazer, ‘Mary Wollstonecraft on Politics and Friendship’, *Political Studies*, 56 (2007), 237-256.

⁴⁴⁶ Abbey maintains that any distinction between public and private spheres in Wollstonecraft’s political works would be an artificial and arbitrary one, and that ‘she promotes the extension of liberal values in both’: Ruth Abbey, ‘Back to the Future: Marriage as Friendship in the Thought of Mary Wollstonecraft’, *Hypatia*, 14 (1999), 78-95 (p. 80).

⁴⁴⁷ Abbey, ‘Back to the Future’, p. 79.

and was eventually successful via her marriage to William Godwin.⁴⁴⁸ Pedersen suggests that with the increasing distinction between the public and the private, friendships could be formed which were free of public obligation, and so be based more firmly in reason and free agency.⁴⁴⁹ I would argue this would allow for an altruism necessary to the ‘true friendship’ envisioned by Aristotle.

Kaplan notes a rejection of physical desire in Wollstonecraft’s political writings, which ‘launch a negative and prescriptive assault on female sexuality’.⁴⁵⁰ Andrew Elfenbein was the first critic to take an overtly queer perspective on Wollstonecraft, stating that she problematises the heterosexual/homosexual binary (as do all the individuals in this thesis) and suggests she rejects sexuality in order to address the power imbalance between men and women:

If relations between the sexes presupposed the belief in their mutual sexual desirability, the possibility of a woman who was either not interested in sex or was not interested in men was threatening because she forced relations between men and women to ensure an entirely new footing.⁴⁵¹

I shall follow Elfenbein’s lead in my own argument that Wollstonecraft’s first novel seeks to realign human bonds along nonsexual lines. This perspective is also supported by Mervyn Nicholson, who suggests that, for Wollstonecraft, sexual interaction symbolised male dominion: “Love became the exercise of male power, the

⁴⁴⁸ “Viewing both friendship and politics as ultimately turning on individual mental and moral improvement, Wollstonecraft and Godwin saw themselves as promoting the ‘moral interests of mankind’. Their partnership mapped out the general paradigm within which later feminist-inflected friendships between liberal-minded men and women could unfold, informing both their self-understanding and their political commitments”: Joyce Senders Pedersen, ‘Friendship in the Life and Work of Mary Wollstonecraft: The Making of a Liberal Feminist Tradition’, *Literature and History*, 17 (2008) 19-35 (p. 28). Pedersen makes clear that Wollstonecraft believed friendship to be essential to a ‘meritocratic social order’: p. 19.

⁴⁴⁹ Pedersen, ‘Friendship in the Life and Work of Mary Wollstonecraft’, p. 20.

⁴⁵⁰ “*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* offers the reader a puritan sexual ethic with such passionate conviction that self-denial seems a libidinized activity”: Cora Kaplan, ‘Wild Nights: Pleasure, sexuality, feminism’, in *Feminism: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*, 2 vols. (London: Routledge, 2000), I, p. 354.

⁴⁵¹ Andrew Elfenbein, ‘Mary Wollstonecraft and the Sexuality of Genius’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. by Claudia L. Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 230. Subsequent references will be given in parentheses unless further detail is needed.

cradle so to speak, of tyranny: the training-medium, and occasion for male force, male greed.”⁴⁵²

Barbara Taylor suggests the bond between Wollstonecraft and her friend Fanny Blood contained such ‘fervency’ that the two must have had sex.⁴⁵³ As is the case between Anna Seward and Honora Sneyd, I do not discount this possibility. Its existence, however, is irrelevant: the literary ideal and identity presented in *Mary: A Fiction* is opposed to sexualised social norms. Mary – a fictionalised persona of Wollstonecraft herself – is neither homosexual nor heterosexual for she is not *sexual*.

It must be noted, however, that unlike Seward and Gray, Wollstonecraft talks openly of same-sex sexual encounters. In *Vindication* her presentation of such acts is overwhelmingly negative, and she echoes the anti-sodomy/sapphism tracts examined in the first and second chapters when she refers to them as moral ‘vices’.⁴⁵⁴ As we have examined throughout the previous chapters, such a perspective was not uncommon, but it does serve to distinguish Wollstonecraft’s perspective from those of the poets – especially Thomas Gray, who formed literary identities around both the romantic friend and the licentious sodomite (see first chapter). Of course it would be naïve to suppose this public stance eliminated the possibility of private sapphic acts on Wollstonecraft’s part, but her literary persona was hostile to such relations.

Despite her sexual desires being focused on men, Wollstonecraft’s literary works require a queer reading. For the protagonists of both her novels (Mary and

⁴⁵² Mervyn Nicholson, ‘The Eleventh Commandment: Sex and Spirit in Wollstonecraft and Malthus’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 51 (1990), 401-421 (p. 414). Nicholson notes that Wollstonecraft compared husbands and wives to aristocrats and peasants (the exact same comparison was made by Aristotle): p. 415.

⁴⁵³ Barbara Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 8.

⁴⁵⁴ Specifically Wollstonecraft states that female single-sex education is responsible for such behaviour, and she echoes many of the criticisms directed toward male single-sex education earlier in the century and described in the first chapter to this thesis: Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, (New York: Dover Publications, inc., 1996), p. 170. Subsequent references will be given in parentheses unless further detail is needed. Claudia L. Johnson also notes Wollstonecraft’s homophobic attitudes toward men: Johnson, *Equivocal Beings*, p. 47.

Maria) are noticeably depicted outside the boundaries of mainstream society – the former travelling abroad, the latter even incarcerated within an insane asylum. Via her novels Wollstonecraft writes a queer identity which places equality and friendship at its core.

FRIENDSHIP AND *MARY: A FICTION*

Mary: A Fiction presents us with a familiar message: that romantic friendship is benevolent and betters the individual, whereas marriage is destructive and something which young women should rightly fear. Though Wollstonecraft's viewpoint would shift a little over the following decades, her first novel presents a critique for marriage which is as strong as that present in friendship poetry. *Mary: A Fiction* champions non-sexual love and forms a rebellion against the sexual discourse which had so strongly taken root. Yet the novel does not limit romantic friendship to a single sex, but presents Aristotelian love as possible between opposite sex companions as well. Reflecting the social shift toward sexualised intimacy which has been detailed throughout this thesis, those who engage in such intimacy are presented as marginalised and outside of mainstream society.⁴⁵⁵ The novel is a moral tale in which the authorial and narrative voices are intertwined, with the fourth wall being broken throughout and the reader being addressed directly.⁴⁵⁶

Wollstonecraft's real-life friendship forms the basis for the central bond of the novel's first half: Mary and Ann serving as a literary representation of Mary Wollstonecraft and Fanny Blood. After Wollstonecraft's death William Godwin created his own elegiac literary representation of the bond in *Memoirs of the Author of*

⁴⁵⁵ This viewpoint is shared in her political tract *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and shall be explored further into this chapter.

⁴⁵⁶ This is evident from the first page onwards: Wollstonecraft, *Mary: A Fiction*, p. 31.

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1798). He describes their first meeting in a highly idealised manner:

She was conducted to the door of a small house, but furnished with peculiar neatness and propriety. The first object that caught her sight, was a young woman of a slender and elegant form, and eighteen years of age, busily employed in feeding and managing some children, born of the same parents, but considerably inferior to her in age. The impression Mary received from this spectacle was indelible; and, before the interview was concluded, she had taken, in her heart, the vows of an eternal friendship.⁴⁵⁷

Here Godwin deliberately follows the language of *Mary: A Fiction*, with a ‘love at first sight’ scenario resulting in Wollstonecraft’s internal declaration of ‘eternal friendship’. This fictionalised semi-biographical account is in much the same style as the elegiac novel we shall focus upon now. Even before she began work on her novel Wollstonecraft was presenting an idealised bond in her writing: in a letter to her friend Jane Arden she uses dramatic and evocative language, whilst making clear her principles are grounded in reason:

... a friend, whom I love better than all the world beside, a friend to whom I am bound by every tie of gratitude and inclination: to live with this friend is the height of my ambition, and indeed it is the most rational wish I could make, as her conversation is not more agreeable than improving.⁴⁵⁸

Aristotle’s dictum that true friendship involves cohabitation is presented as a crucial goal by Wollstonecraft, a sentiment that she would carry into her novel.⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵⁷ William Godwin, *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (London: J. Johnson, 1798), p. 20. He also described the relationship as: “...a friendship so fervent, as for years to have constituted the ruling passion of her mind”: p. 19.

⁴⁵⁸ Mary Wollstonecraft, *The Collected Letters*, ed. by Janet Todd (London: Penguin Books, 2004), p. 24 (Wollstonecraft to Arden, Bath, early 1780).

⁴⁵⁹ Godwin goes on to describe the path of the relationship between Wollstonecraft and Blood: they eventually did live together as Wollstonecraft had desired, which Godwin implies to be a crucial stage in the development of their relationship: “Thus situated, their intimacy ripened; they approached more nearly to a footing of equality; and their attachment became more rooted and active”: Godwin, *Memoirs*, p. 28. Faderman stresses the importance of cohabitation to romantic friendship in her commentary on Wollstonecraft: “Correspondence and memoirs of the period indicate that it was the ambition of many romantic friends to set up households together: those households would differ from ordinary heterosexual arrangements in that the two women would always be inseparable, always devoted: their relationship would be truly intimate, based on no other consideration than their love for each other”: Faderman, *Surpassing*, p. 138. Specifically on the bond between Wollstonecraft and Blood, Faderman suggests that Wollstonecraft was more active, Blood more passive: p. 139. The autobiographical elements to the novel have been noted by Todd: Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An*

Wollstonecraft's insistence upon reason differentiates her work from that of Seward, and is shared by Godwin. However, in this letter – as with her novels – she is keen to marry reason and sensibility, presenting emotional declarations of love alongside rational justifications based in benevolence.

The theme of friendship in *Mary: A Fiction* has been noted by critics.⁴⁶⁰ Elizabeth Frazer also takes a pejorative view of friendship when she suggests Mary's judgement to be 'clouded' due to her sensibility, with the result being an over-reliance on 'imperfect friendships'.⁴⁶¹ Other critics suggest the novel is not critical of friendship *per se*, but demonstrates the difficulties it faces: Haggerty suggests the novel presents the impossibility of friendship in a patriarchal society, whilst Frazer argues that the central character's ideals are unrealistic: "[The novel] focuses on the 'earthly infirmities' that makes friendship impossible. These include depression and poverty, hypocritical manners and social norms and repressed or unrequited erotic passion."⁴⁶² Whilst I would agree with Frazer's assertion that these aspects present difficulties in friendship (though also, it must be added, with all human bonds) in this chapter I read the novel differently. As we shall see, Wollstonecraft is careful to

Introduction (London; New York: Methuen, 1986), p. 117. Todd comments on Wollstonecraft's aversion to cohabitation within marriage: Todd, *A Revolutionary Life*, p. 417.

⁴⁶⁰ Though other themes have also prevailed: Gary Kelly refers to the novel as a commentary on gender, albeit one which offers no real solutions to gender inequality (a different interpretation to the one I propose in this chapter): "[The novel] claims mimetic truth and authority in creating a more authentic picture of 'things as they are' for women, but it seems unable to imagine how things might be better, in this life at least.": Gary Kelly, *Revolutionary Feminism: The Mind and Career of Mary Wollstonecraft* (London: Macmillan Press, 1996), p. 45. He suggests it to be largely concerned with sensibility: p. 206. Diane Jacobs comments on the basis in the friendship of Wollstonecraft and Blood, whilst commenting on the idealised power and equality of the bond: "Mary hoped for a friendship as consuming as any heterosexual relationship and with the advantage that, unlike married couples, she and Fanny held equal power under the law.": Jacobs, *Her Own Woman*, p. 28. Christopher Lasch briefly suggests the novels were focused on sexual love rather than friendship, a position I shall seek to refute throughout this chapter: Christopher Lasch, *Women and the Common Life: Love, Marriage and Feminism* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1997), p. 74.

⁴⁶¹ Frazer, 'Mary Wollstonecraft on Politics and Friendship', p. 241.

⁴⁶² Frazer, 'Mary Wollstonecraft on Politics and Friendship', p. 242. Haggerty suggests female friendship cannot be 'relied on' in a world shaped by male desire: George E. Haggerty, *Unnatural Affections: Women and Fiction in the Later 18th Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), p. 107. He also suggests Wollstonecraft to have been attacking the novel genre with *Mary: A Fiction*: "Wollstonecraft's struggle with the novel form is a way of resisting its ideological power.": p. 105.

portray Mary as maintaining a balance between sensibility and reason, a balance that is only disturbed when Mary is placed under extreme duress. Regarding her unrealistic expectations, it is Mary's mother, so fond of reading romantic novels and who longs for a perfect sexual relationship, whose expectations are presented as false.⁴⁶³ Mary's friendships are not utopian, nor are they idealised by the novel: yet amongst the pessimistic and generally negative portrayal of human relationships in Wollstonecraft's fiction, they are the most positive portrayals.

Johnson suggests that Mary feels 'frustrated' sexual desire in her friendship with Ann and questions the narrative's presentation of the bond: "The narrator frequently and explicitly denies that Mary's love for Ann is the sort of passions a woman might feel for a man. But denial often implies the presence of something to be denied ..."⁴⁶⁴ As we have seen throughout this thesis, however, the increasing prioritisation of companionate marriage and the corresponding denigration of sappism rendered romantic friendship less and less acceptable to the reader: in such a climate Wollstonecraft has to be emphatic to differentiate the bond as platonic (it is also in keeping with her direct style of writing).

Tauchert also comments that the relationship between Mary and Ann is covertly erotic: "Wollstonecraft's writings ... demonstrate evidence of a fragmented, often displaced, narrative of same-sex desire – figured in her fiction in encodings of 'Romantic Friendship' ..."⁴⁶⁵ Whilst it is certainly true that many same-sex

⁴⁶³ The depiction of Mary's mother will be examined further into this chapter.

⁴⁶⁴ Claudia L. Johnson, 'Mary Wollstonecraft's Novels' in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. by Claudia L. Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 194.

⁴⁶⁵ Tauchert, 'Mary Wollstonecraft: Feminist, Lesbian or Transgendered?' in *Exclusions in Feminist Thought*, ed. by Mary F. Brewer, p. 238. Tauchert goes on to refer to Mary and Ann as 'sexually intimate'. A sexual bias is also present in her 2000 article, in which she refers to a 'sexual desire' between Mary and Ann: Ashley Tauchert, 'Escaping Discussion: Liminality and the Female-Embodied Couple in Mary Wollstonecraft's *Mary, A Fiction*', *Romanticism on the Net*, 18 (2000) <<http://www.erudit.org/revue/ron/2000/v/n18/005923ar.html>> [accessed 1st June 2010] (para. 7 of 20). Such desire is stated to have been an 'open secret': "... Wollstonecraft's *fiction* suggests that female-

arrangements referred to as 'romantic friendships' in the eighteenth century will have provided a cover for those engaging in sexual relationships (though as intimate friendship became less acceptable this will have occurred less and less frequently) Wollstonecraft's novels do not appear to provide any direct hints at same-sex sexual desire. It is important to take care not to discard the possibility of same-sex sexual interaction, though the intimate acts which – as we shall see – take place between Ann and Mary (such as sharing a bed) were considered acceptable signifiers of romantic friendship and are not necessarily inherently sexual.⁴⁶⁶

Alongside Wollstonecraft's other works, a heterosexist bias is evident in much of the scholarly attention *Mary: A Fiction* has received: Diane Long Hoeveler, deeply unsympathetic to Wollstonecraft's views on gender relations, details the friendship between Mary and Ann in two articles.⁴⁶⁷ In them the friendship between the women is portrayed as pathological on Mary's part, with Ann being referred to as a replacement for a mother or husband: "Poor Ann. She has played stand-in for Mary's mother and husband most of her adult life."⁴⁶⁸ Though this interpretation of same-sex friendship as a substitute for a heteronormative relationship is common (as we have seen in the previous chapter with regards to Seward's works), Hoeveler goes further, referring to Mary's desire for female companionship as 'adolescent' before diminishing her capacity to function as reasoned individual:

embodied same-sex desire in the 1780s circulates as an 'open secret'; acknowledged, but dismissed as an impossibility (culturally disavowed).": Tauchert, *Romanticism on the Net*, [Electronic].

⁴⁶⁶ As detailed by Alan Bray and explored in the introduction and first chapter to this thesis.

⁴⁶⁷ Hoeveler refers to Wollstonecraft's writings firstly as 'victim feminism', then a year later as 'gothic feminism', to which she attaches the same meaning: "Gothic feminism is not about being equal to men; it is about being morally superior to men. It is about being a victim.": Diane Long Hoeveler, 'The Construction of the Female Gothic Posture : Wollstonecraft's *Mary* and Gothic Feminism', *Gothic Studies*, 6 (2004), 30-46. She describes 'victim feminism' in the same light in her earlier article: Diane Long Hoeveler, 'The Tyranny of Sentimental Form: Wollstonecraft's *Mary* and the Gendering of Anxiety', *Eighteenth Century Novel*, 3 (2003), 217-241 (p. 218).

⁴⁶⁸ Hoeveler, 'The Tyranny of Sentimental Form', p. 227. This same statement is made in her other article on the novel: Hoeveler, 'The Construction of the Female Gothic Posture', pp. 30-46.

... Mary is unable to move out of her childish identifications with parental figures, and so she keeps constructing one parent-substitute after another, never being able to accept the demands and realities required for marriage.⁴⁶⁹

This depiction of companionate marriage as the only adult reality is one which ignores models of human relationships prior to the eighteenth century – further compounded by Hoeveler referring to a ‘displaced sexual dynamic’ between Mary and Ann.⁴⁷⁰ Such a reading portrays the central protagonist not as a rational, free-thinking individual but as damaged and abnormal, something which, as we shall see, contradicts both the narrative and authorial voices which are insistent upon Mary’s balance between both reason and sensibility. This interpretation also ignores the possibility of the Mary-Ann relationship as a bond in its own right: Hoeveler’s suggestion that it is a desperate substitute for a standard sexual relationship is a heterosexist reading which undermines the novel’s central terms of debate. Despite the narrative’s insistence on the legitimacy of the bond, Mary’s attachment to another woman is described here as a pathology, a mental and sexual dysfunction to which the individual is responsible for her own unhappiness, rather than society. Of the heterosexist critical responses detailed in this thesis, Hoeveler’s is the one most strongly opposed to a reading based in the presentation of Aristotelian friendship as a viable and healthy alternative to marriage, and I hope to provide a conclusively different reading in this chapter: that Wollstonecraft’s novel, though undoubtedly pessimistic, demonstrates romantic friendship to be the only truly moral form of social relationship.

Todd’s model of intimacy is the one which corresponds most closely to the type of love examined in this thesis. Referencing Wollstonecraft’s literary portrayal of same-sex intimacy in her fiction, Todd suggests that that she presents friendship so

⁴⁶⁹ Hoeveler, ‘The Tyranny of Sentimental Form’, p. 226.

⁴⁷⁰ Hoeveler, ‘The Tyranny of Sentimental Form’, p. 226..

strongly that it usurps familial roles (as opposed to being a lesser substitute for them, as indicated by Gubar and Hoeveler).⁴⁷¹ In *The Sign of Angellica* (1989) she suggests the novel to be 'asexual'.⁴⁷² In *Women's Friendship in Literature* (1980) Todd states that friendship is attacked at every opportunity by the forces of social normalisation (which shall be evident throughout this study).⁴⁷³ Todd's investigation, however, does not recognise the importance of male-female friendship in establishing Wollstonecraft's egalitarian ideal of friendship.⁴⁷⁴ The contrast between friendship and marriage in the novel is noted both by Todd and Caroline Franklin's biography of Wollstonecraft: "Indeed, *Mary: A Fiction* is structured to unfavourably contrast the disgusting physicality of marriage with the purity of romantic friendship."⁴⁷⁵ The novel would go even further, influencing literary works beyond Wollstonecraft's death.

Romantic Friendship and Sensibility

The eponymous character of Mary is one suitably prepared for Wollstonecraft's ideal of romantic friendship: she is altruistic and intelligent. The novel psychologizes her sensibility as a result of a neglectful upbringing. She also has a puritan (yet non-denominational) mystical bent, spending her nights talking to

⁴⁷¹ "In both her novels ... Mary portrayed powerful female ties that improved on the unsatisfactory one of mother and daughter. They were so intense they transformed friendship into family": Todd, *A Revolutionary Life*, p. 18.

⁴⁷² Janet Todd, *The Sign of Angellica: Women, Writing and Fiction 1660-1800* (London: Virago Press, 1989), p. 240.

⁴⁷³ "The relationship of Mary and Ann is made in spite of the world. Conventional people scoff at it, while the parents, by marrying Mary off, do their best to destroy it": Todd, *Women's Friendship*, p. 197.

⁴⁷⁴ The Mary-Henry friendship, which shall be discussed in greater detail shortly, is described by Todd as the 'epilogue' to the same-sex friendship: Todd, *Women's Friendship*, p.202. Henry is also referred to as Ann's 'extension': p. 205.

⁴⁷⁵ Franklin, *A Literary Life*, p. 29. Todd suggests that the novel focuses more on the contrast with marriage even than on friendship itself: Todd, *Women's Friendship*, p. 192.

her perceived creator and often being so consumed by devotion she forgets to eat (*Mary: A Fiction*, p. 12). She is no ordinary fanatic, however, and believes animals to have souls (her compassionate nature extending even beyond her own species) (*Mary: A Fiction*, p. 6). Mary is a heroine of sensibility (but differentiated from the false sentimentalism of her mother) and this enhances her capacity and need for friendship. Mary has 'genius' and a poetic soul, she reads Thomson's *Seasons*, Young's *Night-Thoughts*, and *Paradise Lost*.⁴⁷⁶ Her character demonstrates the interrelationship between sensibility and reason.⁴⁷⁷

Unsurprisingly given the elegiac nature of the text, it is only upon her friend's death that we are witness to the full extent of Mary's emotions toward Ann. She finds herself unable to enjoy nature (her solace during her early years of neglect) and is unwilling to face the world alone: "I cannot live without her! – I have no other friend; if I lose her, what a desart [sic] will the world be to me." (*Mary: A Fiction*, p. 32). Wollstonecraft is keen to emphasise the dramatically disturbed state of Mary's mind following the death of her friend:

Ann! – this dear friend was soon torn from her – she died suddenly as Mary was assisting her across the room. – The first string was severed from her heart – and this 'slow, sudden death' disturbed her reasoning faculties; she seemed stunned by it; unable to reflect, or even to feel misery.⁴⁷⁸

The language used in this scene is swift and deadly, with the author's addition of terms such as 'torn' and 'severed' adding a visceral level of violence to the sudden nature of her demise (the term 'sudden' is utilised twice here). The perspective of the narrator matches that of the character here: Ann does not merely perish, she is taken from her rightful place at Mary's side. We can see Wollstonecraft's emphasis on the

⁴⁷⁶ Mary's masculine education is not mentioned by Gubar, who suggests both Mary and the character of Maria in Wollstonecraft's later work to be feminine: Gubar, *Feminist Studies*, p. 460.

⁴⁷⁷ Todd suggests that a balance between the two was what Wollstonecraft believed women should strive toward, having been socialised too heavily toward sensibility: Todd, 'Reason and Sensibility', p. 17.

⁴⁷⁸ Wollstonecraft, *Mary: A Fiction*, p. 32.

destructive nature of the event in the interruption of Mary's reasoning faculties (the importance of which we shall examine shortly). The narrator concludes that she is both unable to reason and to feel (rationality and sensibility being entwined) and Mary's presence is momentarily spectral: Ann dies and so Mary dies with her.

Yet such a state does not last for long and she is then engulfed by misery: "She called herself a 'poor disconsolate creature!' – 'Mine is a selfish grief,' she exclaimed – 'Yet, Heaven is my witness, I do not wish her back now she has reached those peaceful mansions, where the weary rest. Her pure spirit is happy; but what a wretch am I!' (*Mary: A Fiction*, p. 33). She reflects on the departure of her friend's soul: "'My poor Ann!' thought Mary, 'along this road we came, and near this spot you called me your guardian angel – and now I leave thee here! ah! no, I do not – thy spirit is not confined to its mouldering tenement! Tell me, thou soul of her I love, tell me, ah! whither thou art fled?'" (*Mary: A Fiction*, p. 43). Wollstonecraft's inclusion of Mary's exclamations of pain highlight her torment, and Mary makes no attempt to hide her passions.

The literary depiction of sensibility in friendship is not limited to language: physical gestures dominate Ann and Mary's friendship. These gestures, however, are not expressed as openly as verbal intimacy. Increasing social awareness and fear toward sapphism meant that physical signifiers of romantic friendship had to have a motivation beyond simple desire. As such Ann's illness serves as the catalyst for these gestures and they are continually justified by the presence of death:

... [Mary] forgot all, listening to Ann's cough, and supporting her languid frame. She would then catch her to her bosom with compulsive eagerness, as if to save her from sinking into an open grave.⁴⁷⁹

⁴⁷⁹ Wollstonecraft, *Mary: A Fiction*, p. 17.

Here emphasis is placed on Mary's role in supporting an invalid, rather than as the companion of her beloved friend (it should be noted that Mary's continual role in caring for Ann contradicts Hoeveler's assertion that Ann is a substitute for a mother-figure).⁴⁸⁰ Terms such as 'languid', 'cough' and 'sinking' place the gesture within a more socially acceptable space, with the only clue as to Mary's own desires being that she embraces Ann with 'compulsive eagerness'. Mary's embrace is presented as a necessity: her actions are not simply derived from pleasure or affection; they serve to ward off death. Caroline Franklin comments on this masculine role performed by Mary: "Only when she is nursing her dying friend does Mary achieve the power and authority over her she desires, albeit disguised as a feminine role of self-abrogation."⁴⁸¹ Ann's ill health grants Mary a position she would have found difficult to attain otherwise. When in Lisbon together they even share a bed: one of the central signifiers of pre-Enlightenment friendship as noted by Bray.⁴⁸²

The elegiac nature of both Mary's friendships in the novel (toward Ann and, later, her male friend Henry) place them within relatively safe social confines: due to their limited lifespan, at first glance they pose little threat to the social norm. Yet Mary's deviance is best expressed internally rather than externally: Mary's queer nature is not represented merely by the relationships she manages to attain, but by her beliefs and desires. Mary's friends may perish, but her beliefs never waver – as we shall see, right until the final page of the novel she desires friendship and is repulsed by marriage. The elegy, however, allows for these internalised desires to be safely expressed externally: death allows for sensibility.

⁴⁸⁰ Hoeveler, 'The Construction of the Female Gothic Posture', pp. 30–46.

⁴⁸¹ Franklin, *A Literary Life*, p. 30.

⁴⁸² Which, as Bray notes, was one an important signifier of intimate friendship prior to the eighteenth century: Bray, *The Friend*, p. 153. This bed-sharing is necessitated by Ann's nightmares, another weakness on her part.

In Mary and the novel's portrayal of romantic friendship, emotional passion is tempered by reason: reason which is exerted primarily through altruism.⁴⁸³ Mary's benevolence weighs heavily upon her friendship with Ann, who is of considerably lower status in terms of class and wealth. When Ann and her mother face financial ruin, Mary is prompted to perform a masculine chivalrous role and rescue Ann and her family from their financial difficulties:

She loved Ann better than any one in the world – to snatch her from the very jaws of destruction – she would have encountered a lion. To have this friend constantly with her; to make her mind easy with respect to her family, would it not be superlative bliss?⁴⁸⁴

Mary would risk all for her friendship and keenly desires cohabitation (which is, as we have seen, one of the hallmarks of romantic friendship).⁴⁸⁵ The language utilised in this passage is that of masculine heroism, and we see a blurring between the voices of character, narrator and author with the fantasy of rescuing Ann from a wild beast: it is not clear which voice is expressing this vision. The narrative also uses the first person throughout the novel, though not projected as a specific authorial persona, suggesting it to be the voice of Wollstonecraft herself and allowing the reader to infer the *bildungsroman* or *künstlerroman* to be a fictionalised autobiography.⁴⁸⁶ Here benevolence and bravery are entwined. Mary's devotion to someone over a lower

⁴⁸³ The centrality of benevolence to friendship in the novel is noted by Todd, though she suggests it to largely be a narcissism on Mary's part: Todd, *Women's Friendship*, p. 197. The centrality of benevolence to Wollstonecraft's belief system is noted by Evan Radcliffe, who states that universal benevolence was key to her arguments on gender: Evan Radcliffe, 'Revolutionary Writing, Moral Philosophy, and Universal Benevolence in the Eighteenth Century', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 54 (1993), 221-240 (p. 231).

⁴⁸⁴ Wollstonecraft, *Mary: A Fiction*, p. 15.

⁴⁸⁵ This is mirrored by Wollstonecraft herself, when she wrote in 1785: 'No, I am not a fair-weather friend – on the contrary I think, I love most people best when they are in adversity – for pity is one of my prevailing passions': Wollstonecraft, *Collected Letters*, p. 54 (Wollstonecraft to George Blood, Newington Green, July 20th, 1785).

⁴⁸⁶ In the opening to the eighth chapter we see an example of this, as the narrator states 'I mentioned before': Wollstonecraft, *Mary: A Fiction*, p. 19.

social status to herself presents the importance of equality to romantic friendship and provides the novel's first hint of its egalitarian potential.

Romantic friendship allows a level of social equality which is not possible with traditional marriage. When alone with one another the differences between the women in terms of class and wealth are ignored. Once Mary has solved the financial woes of Ann and her mother, the issue of their differing social statuses is only raised when confronted by wider society. This incursion on the part of the world at large is represented by 'three fashionable ladies', characters whose primary purpose is to demonstrate the prejudices of the mainstream and who as a result initially favour the wealthier Mary to her impoverished companion. The women are puzzled by this class-crossing bond and condemn Mary as 'foolish' for her association: "She is a foolish creature, and this friend that she pays so much attention to as if she is a lady of quality, is a beggar" (*Mary: A Fiction*, p. 25). These women do not possess the sensibility or intellect of Mary, and the narrative makes clear that 'their minds had received very little cultivation' and, as part of the 'fashionable world' they are 'ignorant' (*Mary: A Fiction*, p. 25).

The ladies in turn negatively describe Mary as a 'romantic creature': a judgement which misses her capacity for original thought or 'genius'. Her emotional outbursts in regard to her friend are tempered by reason: she is well-read and well-educated, and her desire to benevolently improve the lot of others is carefully considered throughout the novel. Romantic friendship, both logical yet also possessing emotional depth, is inevitably marginalised as its egalitarian nature cannot be grasped by fashionable society: the ladies believe that Mary would be better off with her husband (*Mary: A Fiction*, p. 32).

The capacity of romantic friendship to eradicate social boundaries is also related to issues of gender. Though the bond between Mary and Ann dominates the first half of the novel, following Ann's death she forms a new romantic friendship: this time with a man named Henry (possibly based in Wollstonecraft's real-life friend Henry Fuseli, with whom she desired an unconventional queer friendship).⁴⁸⁷ In Wollstonecraft's narrative male-female romantic friendship is no more acceptable to society than the female-female variety. The author in fact directly replays the course of the previous friendship: Mary befriends a weakened individual on whom she can exercise benevolence, the bond gains emotional depth, it is condemned by representatives of wider society, and finally the individual perishes leaving Mary alone.

Henry's inclusion complicates both heterosexual and homosexual readings of the text as his relationship with Mary so closely mirrors that between Mary and Ann. Tauchert's interpretation that the text is an expression of homosexual desire is thus difficult to reconcile with this heterosocial bond.⁴⁸⁸ As such scholars seeking to interpret the novel in a sexual context have regarded the heterosocial bond here as sexual: Johnson argues that the 'sexual' nature of the Mary-Henry relationship serves to articulate the secretly erotic bond between Mary and Ann.⁴⁸⁹ I would read the novel quite differently: as there is no evidence toward either sexual behaviour or desire at any point in the text. The role of sexual partner is played only by Mary's husband, towards whom she unambiguously feels disgust even though he is not

⁴⁸⁷ Wollstonecraft wished to be engaged in a polyamorous trio with he and his wife: Wollstonecraft as his intellectual companion, Mrs. Fuseli his sexual. His wife did not take kindly to the suggestion: Franklin, *A Literary Life*, p. 110.

⁴⁸⁸ Tauchert does, however, recognise the similarities between the two relationships: "The narrative is careful to indicate the degree to which Mary loves *both* Ann and Henry in very similar ways and is structured around a narrative parallelism drawing attention to the bi-conditional desire located in its heroine": Tauchert, *Romanticism on the Net*, (para. 2 of 20).

⁴⁸⁹ Johnson, *Equivocal Beings*, p. 56.

portrayed as an evil person. The two non-sexual relationships however allow Mary to express and receive love and intimacy.⁴⁹⁰ Unlike the other housemates in Lisbon, Henry immediately understands the bond of friendship between Mary and Ann, stating: "I would give the world for your picture, with the expression I have seen on your face, when you have been supporting your friend."⁴⁹¹ It is the role he willingly adopts following Ann's death, and between Mary and Henry we see a queer love between a man and a woman.

Henry's inclusion serves three functions: firstly he demonstrates the inclusivity of romantic friendship - without his presence the only male-female interaction in the novel would be that of Mary and her husband, and the novel would erroneously give the impression of being opposed to all male-female affection. Secondly the bond with Henry shows Mary's capacity for romantic friendship continuing after the death of Ann – it is not an aberration but a rational and consistent position. Finally Henry's inclusion renders the novel more generally about friendship than specifically sapphic. This isn't merely a matter of heterosexuality constituting a nod towards conformity. In fact the idea of a married woman having a platonic romantic friendship with another man is equally controversial. Of course Henry serves all three functions to some extent, and his inclusion delineates romantic friendship more clearly than had it been represented by a single relationship. The novel thus demonstrates how the exclusivity of marriage restricts to an extent the

⁴⁹⁰ Hoeveler, *Eighteenth Century Novel*, p. 231. As has been stated through this thesis, such presumptions reflect both a heterosexist and sexually-prioritising bias in our own culture. Lasch makes the same presumption of heterosexuality when he suggests Mary and Henry are committing adultery: Lasch, *Women and the Common Life*, p. 74. Pedersen does the same, suggesting 'love' (of a sexual nature) and 'friendship' to both coexist in Mary's bond with Henry: Pedersen, 'Friendship in the Life and Work of Mary Wollstonecraft', p. 24. This bias is noted by Faderman, who briefly comments on the heterosexist nature of such assumptions: Faderman, *Surpassing*, p. 141.

⁴⁹¹ Wollstonecraft, *Mary: A Fiction*, p. 28. Todd comments on Henry's feminised nature: "In him the feminised man of feminine romantic fiction is both taken to its extreme and taken apart: her is powerless to serve the heroine and instead co-opts the moment of death: it is he not she who dies surrounded by tearful onlookers.": Todd, *Sign of Angellica*, p. 239.

possibilities for the individual, especially the wife, to enjoy a range of intense friendships with both men and women. *Mary: A Fiction* thus anticipates William Godwin's condemnation of marriage as a monopoly in *Political Justice* (1793). No wonder he praised it so highly in *Memoirs*.

Wollstonecraft undoubtedly portrays altruistic romantic friendship as morally superior. The attitude of the author/ narrator to the dictums of society is summed up in the description of the judgemental and socially conservative ladies in Portugal: "Their minds were shackled with a set of notions concerning propriety, the fitness of things for the world's eye, trammels which always hamper weak people" (*Mary: A Fiction*, p. 24). Egalitarian romantic friendship is once again only attainable by a minority of individuals: those who are not only altruistic and intelligent, but who are also brave enough to disregard social condemnation and form bonds independent of class, wealth and gender.

Cohabitation and Social Isolation

Mary desires an isolated cohabitation with Ann, away from the petty judgements of wider society with regards to class and gender norms. This is not, however, the case with Ann, who is delighted at the prospect of interacting with 'agreeable society' upon arrival in Portugal. These conflicting desires on the parts of Mary and Ann are the cause of the vague dissatisfaction Mary has when she does – temporarily – secure an isolated home with her friend:

During the year of mourning they lived in retirement; music, drawing, and reading, filled up the time; and Mary's taste and judgement were both improved by contracting a habit of observation, and permitting the simple beauties of Nature to occupy her thoughts.

She had a wonderful quickness in discerning distinctions and combining ideas, that at the first glance did not appear to be similar. But these

various pursuits did not banish all her cares, or carry off all her constitutional black bile. Before she enjoyed Ann's society, she imagined it would have made her completely happy: she was disappointed, and yet knew not what to complain of ... She had not yet found the companion she looked for. Ann and she were not congenial minds, nor did she contribute to her comfort in the degree she expected.⁴⁹²

Despite the overall negative theme of the passage, it opens with a suggestion that the time spent together is worthwhile: both involve themselves in various intellectual and cultural pursuits and it is a testament to the temperance of Mary's emotional state that she is able to enjoy the beauties of nature (as we saw earlier, when in distress – such as following Ann's death – Mary is unable to appreciate the beauties of the natural world). The tempered tone of the piece is also demonstrated via the use of language: whereas she is 'a poor, disconsolate creature' and 'a wretch' following Ann's death, here the tone is muted: rather than miserable she is not 'completely happy'. The most negative word utilised here is 'disappointed'. Mary's achievement of the ideal of romantic friendship is not perfect, though it is certainly the point in the novel at which she is at her happiest (or put more accurately, least miserable and the closest to content).

This vague dissatisfaction with Ann has been the point of contention for critics. Todd relates to the autobiographical nature of the novel, suggesting it to represent Wollstonecraft's frustration at Fanny Blood's marriage and death.⁴⁹³ She also argues friendship in the novel to be tainted by the patriarchal society that surrounds it.⁴⁹⁴ In a similar vein, Frazer suggests this to be the author's

⁴⁹² Wollstonecraft, *Mary: A Fiction*, p. 16.

⁴⁹³ Todd, *A Revolutionary Life*, p. 113. Faderman mentions the disappointment Wollstonecraft had with Blood in reality once they cohabited together: "Mary now realized that Fanny had none of the moral or physical strength needed for a life pledged to romantic friendship": Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men*, p. 139. Pedersen refers to this same disappointment, with Wollstonecraft finding her friends intellectually inferior to herself: Pedersen, 'Friendship in the Life and Work of Mary Wollstonecraft', pp. 22-23.

⁴⁹⁴ Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction*, p. 117.

demonstration of the impractical nature of friendship.⁴⁹⁵ The same argument made by Todd is made by Haggerty: "... female friendship fails to offer the cohesive force of resistance, however vividly it might promise something other than the status quo."⁴⁹⁶ I would argue that, despite (or even because of) her lower social status, it is Ann's attachment to traditional social norms that provokes difficulty.⁴⁹⁷ As a result Ann is less capable of romantic friendship than her companion. This passage does not suggest the type of bond itself to be the issue – simply that she had not found the *right* companion. It would be tempting to suggest her true companion to be Henry, but at no point in the novel is she as settled than at the point she lives with Ann.

Even with the narrative pessimism, Wollstonecraft provides a radical, rational alternative to marriage. Despite the critical response to the friendship as a form of parental replacement, Ann serves as an alternative to Mary's husband – a position which would not be undertaken by a mother. Even so, in providing an alternative she does not mirror the traditional role, and Mary's actions toward her friend are based in virtue and benevolence rather than emotional self-interest. Friendship in the novel is presented as a distinct form of love, one far more virtuous than marriage.

SEXUALITY IN WOLLSTONECRAFT'S FICTION

Wollstonecraft's views on marriage are relatively unambiguous in works such as her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), in which she states that mainstream

⁴⁹⁵ Frazer refers to friendship in the novel as 'elusive': Frazer, 'Mary Wollstonecraft on Politics and Friendship', p. 242.

⁴⁹⁶ Haggerty, *Unnatural Affections*, p. 107. Haggerty goes on to suggest this is the cause of Ann's death in the narrative: "... Ann must die and female affection be overcome, Wollstonecraft seems to say, because heteronormative narrative, like heteronormative culture, simply cannot tolerate such bonds.": p. 109.

⁴⁹⁷ There is a comparison to their actual counterparts, when Blood was reluctant to live with Wollstonecraft as she didn't want to leave her family: Godwin, *Memoirs*, p. 25.

marriage keeps women in a permanent state of mental infancy and compares them to kept animals.⁴⁹⁸ In her political work Wollstonecraft makes frequent negative comparisons between marriage and egalitarian friendship: friendship being based in reason and respect (echoing Aristotle's coda that friendship be based in respect for virtue), sexual love in 'blind admiration'.⁴⁹⁹ She goes on to make a similar literary argument to those made by Gray and Seward when she suggests friendship and sexual love to be fundamentally incompatible:

Friendship is a serious affection; the most sublime of all affections, because it is founded on principle and cemented by time. The very reverse can be said of love. In a great degree, love and friendship cannot subsist in the same bosom; even when inspired by different objects they weaken or destroy each other, and for the same object can only be felt in succession. The vain fears and fine jealousies, the winds which fan the flames of love, when judiciously or artfully tempered, are both incompatible with the tender confidence and sincere respect of friendship.⁵⁰⁰

Wollstonecraft makes liberal use of ennobling terms with regards to friendship in this passage, a stark contrast to the description of sexual love which is indicated to promote petty emotions. This statement is clearly in favour of friendship, though it must be noted that sexual love is considered positive when associated negative feeling

⁴⁹⁸ Marriage, contests Wollstonecraft, is the only means for social progression for most women, which proves severely damaging to their persona development: "And this desire making mere animals of them, when they marry they act as such children are expected to act.": Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, p. 9. As we saw earlier, Wollstonecraft took an even more negative perspective regarding same-sex sexuality.

⁴⁹⁹ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, p. 29. This difference between the two forms of love is largely due to a fundamental inequality in traditional marriage which sees women demean themselves in order to garner affection from their husbands, something Wollstonecraft strongly opposes: "Fondness is a poor substitute for friendship!": p. 28. She goes on to suggest friendship to be rare, a marginality which is also expressed in *Mary: A Fiction*.

Love, from its very nature, must be transitory. To seek for a secret that would render it constant, would be as wild a search as for the philosopher's stone, or the grand panacea; and the discovery would be equally useless, or rather pernicious to mankind. The most holy band of society is friendship. It has been well said, by a shrewd satirist, 'that rare as true love is, true friendship is still rarer.'

Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, p. 29. Friendship is frequently regarded positively in *Rights of Woman*, a point not missed by Elizabeth Frazer, who states that it presents friendship as the model for all human interactions: "... it is a rational affection which does not include lies cheating or manipulation. The context of friendship is the context from which individuals can perform their public duties.": Frazer, 'Mary Wollstonecraft on Politics and Friendship', p. 246.

⁵⁰⁰ Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman*, p. 74.

is ‘judiciously or artfully tempered’. Marriage can be positive, as long as possession (indicated via possessive emotions such as fear and jealousy) does not dominate. Even so, the two are mutually exclusive.

It is important to stress that unlike the two poets previously examined in this thesis Wollstonecraft did not believe marriage *per se* to be detrimental or impossible, but that a stable marriage should be based in friendship rather than sexual attraction. Her views on the topic are best explored by Ruth Abbey in her article, ‘Back to the Future: Marriage as Friendship in the Thought of Mary Wollstonecraft’.⁵⁰¹ Abbey suggests that Wollstonecraft advocated an Aristotelian mode of friendship amongst married couples, the subsequent equality between the sexes serving to reform society as a whole.⁵⁰² Elizabeth Frazer, who states, “The context of friendship is the context from which individuals can perform their public duties”, shares this viewpoint.⁵⁰³ Aristotle is directly mentioned by Natalie Fuehrer Taylor’s 2007 work on the political philosophy of Wollstonecraft, where Taylor states that his writings influenced not only Wollstonecraft’s views on human relationships, but her ideology as a whole.⁵⁰⁴ As we shall examine in this section, Wollstonecraft’s *Mary: A Fiction* presents a wholly negative view of sexual love, whereas *Maria*, though heavily critical of present-day marriage, does represent the heroine experimenting with the utopian alternative of an (almost Aristotelian) sexual friendship.

Eileen M. Hunt notes the hostility to the nuclear family present in *Mary: A Fiction*: “The traditional patriarchal family, with its warped power struggles ...

⁵⁰¹ Abbey, ‘Back to the Future’, pp. 78-95.

⁵⁰² Abbey, ‘Back to the Future’, p. 79. In *The Sign of Angellica* Todd also (briefly) states sexuality to be more worthwhile than in the previous novel: Todd, *Sign of Angellica*, p. 250.

⁵⁰³ Frazer, ‘Mary Wollstonecraft on Politics and Friendship’, p. 246.

⁵⁰⁴ “... when reading [*Rights of woman*], one may notice an affinity between Wollstonecraft, ensconced in the radical liberal intellectual circles of eighteenth-century Britain, and the ancient Athenian.”: Natalie Fuehrer Taylor, *The Rights of Woman as Chimera: The Political Philosophy of Mary Wollstonecraft* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 117. She goes on to state: “Friendship, as Aristotle articulates it, creates a union of the good for oneself and the good for one’s friend. Neither must be sacrificed for the other.”: p. 150. This benevolence is strongly evident in her novels.

perverts the growth of natural affections and prevents them from developing into the virtues that maintain a stable and humane society.”⁵⁰⁵ Todd notes the presence of the husband as a representation of sexuality: “Through marrying Mary forfeits the chance of an equal relationship with man or woman, and condemns herself to the social system her mother has long suffered under and supported.”⁵⁰⁶ The specific form of marriage in which Mary finds herself a part is described by Frazer as one of the difficulties the heroine must overcome: “Systems of social rank and the accompanying manners, and of sexually segregated upper-class marriage are the evils out of which the eponymous heroine emerges and against which she continually struggles.”⁵⁰⁷ Frazer does not specifically reference the text as a struggle between friendship and marriage itself (though she does take this interpretation regarding Wollstonecraft’s political writings) nor does she recognise the text as critical of marriage in general. As we shall see, however, there are numerous negative instances of marriage in the text which present a strong criticism of the institution’s damaging effects on personal wellbeing – particularly for women.

From the very outset of the novel we are presented with the corrupting influence of marriage on the female psyche, via Mary’s parents - Mary’s mother is shallow and painfully conventional. The narrative presents her as the very model of a woman raised without any real form of education, who unthinkingly accepts the dictums of society: “She carefully attended to the *shews* of things, and her opinions, I should have said prejudices, were such as the generality approved of.” (*Mary: A Fiction*, p. 1). Her marriage is no better, and from the very first page we bear witness to the author’s opinions on the subject of sexual union:

⁵⁰⁵ Eileen M. Hunt, ‘The Family as Cave, Platoon and Prison: The Three Stages of Wollstonecraft’s Philosophy of the Family’, *The Review of Politics*, 64 (2002), 81-119 (p. 96).

⁵⁰⁶ Todd, *Women’s Friendship*, p. 199.

⁵⁰⁷ Frazer, *Mary Wollstonecraft on Politics and Friendship*, p. 241.

When she was first introduced into the public circle, she danced with an officer, whom she faintly wished to be united to; but her father soon after recommending another in a more distinguished rank of life, she readily submitted to his will, and promised to love, honour, and obey (a vicious fool), as in duty bound.”⁵⁰⁸

The judgement of the narrator is apparent: the action of this woman in agreeing to marriage renders her foolish. The language Wollstonecraft uses as author is that of submission, and Mary’s mother unthinkingly bows to male authority – first that of her own father, then that of her husband. A weak character before the marriage, Mary’s mother effectively collapses under her own lack of presence and fortitude, brought about by her slavish devotion to the feminine ideal. Marriage and social attitudes to gender render her near invisible: “Her voice was but the shadow of a sound, and she had, to complete her delicacy, so relaxed her nerves, that she became a mere nothing. Many such noughts are there in the female world!” (*Mary: A Fiction*, p. 2). This pathetic shrine to the feminine ideal is incapable of any real connection to other humans, even her own children (establishing the heroine of the novel as having been neglected in her early years) and cares only for her spoilt dogs. By the sixth page Mary witnesses the suicide of another mother, further cementing the broken nature of the family unit (*Mary: A Fiction*, p. 6). The beginning of the novel establishes the institution of marriage and the arbitrary bonds presented by the nuclear family as a meaningless hindrance to the human condition.

Mary’s masculine reading (detailed earlier in this chapter) is interrupted by her mother, who decides to attempt to educate Mary in a feminine manner, teaching her how to dance. From the novel so far it is clear that her mother is leading her on a path to ruin via convention, and it is at this point that Wollstonecraft introduces a suitor for Mary to marry, further compounding the danger to her happiness and wellbeing. As

⁵⁰⁸ Wollstonecraft, *Mary: A Fiction*, p. 1.

with her education, her feminine mother attempts to override her emotional life, and Mary's pursuit of Ann is interrupted.

The rapidly-approaching death of her mother hastens Mary's marriage. This convergence of plot points allows for marriage to be directly (and negatively) tied to death:

The clergyman came in to read the service for the sick, and afterwards the marriage ceremony was performed. Mary stood like a statue of Despair, and pronounced the awful vow without thinking of it; and then ran to support her mother, who expired the same night in her arms.⁵⁰⁹

These two events – marriage and death – are both portrayed as extremely negative. The narrative voice makes no attempt to disguise the fact and is entirely in line with the mindset of the character, with words such as 'despair' and 'awful' being tied to her vows. Wollstonecraft represents marriage not as prompted by free choice or sexual desire, but an unpleasant family obligation into which women are coerced. Thankfully for Mary her husband has to leave for the European mainland that same day - presumably leaving the marriage unconsummated. Here death is not something ennobling and no attempt to immortalise Mary's mother takes place: once she expires, she is absent from the rest of the novel (a stark contrast to Ann, whose presence haunts Mary following her demise). Mary's mother simply provides a warning, giving both Mary and the reader an impression of her future should she settle with her husband.

The theme of marriage is secondary to the theme of friendship, and as result we are given a greater impression of the bond between Mary and Ann than we are of that between Mary and her husband. Even so, the husband presents a continual threat to Mary's pursuit of friendship, and shows none of the affection we have seen between the two women – or between Mary and Henry. The husband's presence in

⁵⁰⁹ Wollstonecraft, *Mary: A Fiction*, p. 15.

the novel is limited simply to his potential to destroy Mary's happiness and interfere with her friendship with Ann (even the death of her father is presented in this context).⁵¹⁰ When Ann falls ill and Mary wishes to take her to Portugal, she must first implore her husband's permission:

‘This dear friend’, she exclaimed, ‘I love for her agreeable qualities, and substantial virtues. Continual attention to her health, and the tender office of a nurse, have created an affection very like a maternal one – I am her only support, she leans on me – could I forsake the forsaken, and break the bruised need – No – I would die first! I must – I will go.’⁵¹¹

Her husband's gestures of consent are interpreted by Johnson as an indication that to him friendship is not regarded as a threat to marriage – she states: “[He] tolerates Mary's ‘romantic friendship’ because he regards it as noncompetitive.”⁵¹² However, the prospect of friendship being in competition with marriage is actually raised by two points: firstly, Mary feels the need to play down the transgressive attributes and emotional importance of her bond with Ann when describing the relationship to her husband (misleadingly describing the bond as maternal). Secondly, her husband only consents as the trip was advised by a physician – it is only on a wider masculine authority's advice that he can feel comfortable with his wife being in such a circumstance. Interestingly, and despite Mary's explanation, it is her husband that defines the bond between the women as a ‘romantic friendship’.

The conflict between romantic friendship and marriage in the novel is a literary representation of the same conflict in Wollstonecraft's life. Wollstonecraft would give up anything to be with her friend, which she reveals in a later letter alongside her contempt for marriage:

⁵¹⁰ “She feared this event might hasten the return of her husband, and prevent her putting into execution a plan she had determined on. It was to accompany Ann to a more salubrious climate.”: Wollstonecraft, *Mary: A Fiction*, p. 19.

⁵¹¹ Wollstonecraft: *Mary, A Fiction*, p. 19.

⁵¹² Johnson, *Equivocal Beings*, p. 53.

The next time [we] meet, it will be for a longer contrivance, and to that period I look, as to the most important one of my life: - this connexion must give colour to my future days, for I have now given up every expectation and dependence that wod. [sic] interfere with my determination of spending time with [Blood]. - I know this resolution may appear a little extraordinary, but in forming it I follow the dictates of reason as well as the bend of my inclination; for tho' I am willing to do what I can in my generation, yet on many accounts I am averse to any matrimonial tie ...⁵¹³

Once again this literary representation underlines the importance of reason to Wollstonecraft's beliefs and desires: words such as 'reason', 'resolution' and 'determination' imply a firm yet considered sense of agency. Wollstonecraft did indeed sacrifice a great deal for Blood, and when Blood left for Portugal in an attempt to recuperate, Wollstonecraft gave up her school and borrowed money so she would be able to join her.⁵¹⁴ Wollstonecraft's dislike of marriage can again be seen when, again writing to Arden (on the subject of the nuptials of Arden's sister) she states that most marriages end with both spouses feeling nothing but disgust for one another - she then states that she will never marry, a vow very similar to those issued by Seward.⁵¹⁵ Blood was also engaged to be married, a fact that Wollstonecraft lamented as it would mean their separation.⁵¹⁶

In forming a literary representation of the friendship, Wollstonecraft used the elegiac work to provide an idealised scenario which differed from depictions in her letters and the account of her later husband William Godwin. Wollstonecraft's disdain for marriage can perhaps be best seen through what *Mary: A Fiction* fails to include rather than what it does. Fear of the husband seems to have originated in Wollstonecraft's real-life contempt of her Blood's male companion Hugh Skeys. Her anger toward her friend's husband, unlike that of Seward's, is not well publicised, and

⁵¹³ Wollstonecraft, *Collected Letters*, p. 30 (Wollstonecraft to Arden, Windsor, April, 1781).

⁵¹⁴ Wollstonecraft, *Collected Letters*, p.63 (Wollstonecraft to Eliza Bishop, Lisbon, November 1785).

⁵¹⁵ Wollstonecraft, *Collected Letters*, p. 38 (Wollstonecraft to Arden, Walham Green, late 1782).

⁵¹⁶ We see this in a letter to Jane Arden: Wollstonecraft, *Collected Letters*, p. 24 (Wollstonecraft to Arden, Bath, early 1780).

only really evident through a private letter with Fanny Blood's brother George.⁵¹⁷

The letter directly echoes Seward's sonnets in blaming the actions of the husband for the (eventual) death of the friend.⁵¹⁸ To Wollstonecraft, Skeys did not exhibit enough desire or need for Blood – he did not love her as much as she did and – in her perception – his neglect eventually cost Fanny Blood her life.

This belief impacted heavily upon the literary representation of the triangular relationships between a man and two women which Wollstonecraft produced. Whereas Seward loudly and repeatedly lambasts Edgeworth, Wollstonecraft uses a rather different method. In the elegy a fictional Skeys is absolutely nowhere to be seen. Fanny Blood's alter-ego 'Ann' is single, the only possible reference to Skeys being a male love interest of hers who died before the two women even met. In the elegy the eventual emigration of Blood and Skeys to Portugal becomes the elopement of Mary and Ann. In the story it is Mary alone who is with her friend when she dies. The elegy serves to immortalise the friendship by romanticising it, granting it a priority it did not receive in reality.

Right to the very end of *Mary: A Fiction* the husband inspires feelings of horror and disgust in the novel's protagonist: "... when her husband would take her hand, or mention any thing like love, she would instantly feel a sickness, a faintness at her heart, and wish, involuntarily, that the earth would open and swallow her" (*Mary*:

⁵¹⁷ Wollstonecraft wrote the following:

Skeys has received congratulatory letters from most of his friends and relations in Ireland and he now regrets that he did not marry sooner – all his mighty fears had no foundation – so that if he had had courage to have braved the world's dread laugh and ventured to have acted for himself he might have spared Fanny many griefs the *scars* of which will *never* be obliterated – nay more, if she had gone a year or two ago her health might have been *perfectly* restored which I do not now think will ever be the case ... How Hugh could let Fanny languish in England while he was throwing money away at Lisbon is to me inexplicable.

Wollstonecraft, *Collected Letters*, p. 58 (Mary Wollstonecraft to George Blood, Newington Green, July 25th, 1785).

⁵¹⁸ Explored in the second chapter to this thesis.

A Fiction, p. 67). Mary's revulsion at the prospect of sexual love – and being bound by unequal marriage in which she can never be the dominant partner – is clearly detailed via language which denotes physical illness: 'sickness' and 'faintness' (such terms are used throughout the novel, with even the sound of her husband's name making Mary ill).⁵¹⁹ The close of the novel portrays traditional marriage – a very different type of relationship to friendship – in considerably negative terms.

Beyond Mary: A Fiction: Marriage and Maria

Wollstonecraft's final (and unfinished) work *Maria, Or The Wrongs of Woman* (1798) rewrites her earlier narrative.⁵²⁰ Both Mary and Maria are in fact remarkably similar: due to parental neglect of her education Maria is forced to educate herself and maintains a heart 'open to affection', despite being told by her uncle that there is no such thing as love or friendship.⁵²¹ Maria, like Mary, also delights in helping others, and makes it her mission to improve the lot of her nurse's sister (*Maria*, p. 130). Once again Wollstonecraft uses the novel to suggest that true friendship can only be experienced by those who are capable of true altruism.

However, *Maria* has a different focus to Wollstonecraft's earlier novel. In her later work the relative prominence of friendship and marriage to the plot is reversed: whereas friendship dominated in *Mary: A Fiction* with marriage largely kept to the sidelines, in *Maria* marriage takes the centre stage. In it the fears held by Mary in

⁵¹⁹ "An extreme dislike took root in her mind; the sound of his name made her turn sick ...": Wollstonecraft, *Mary: A Fiction*, p. 17.

⁵²⁰ It is interesting to note that, amongst critics, those interested in *Maria, Or The Wrongs of Woman* in relation to *Vindication* will refer to it as 'Wrongs of Woman', whereas those interested in it in relation to *Mary: A Fiction* shorten it to 'Maria'. As Wollstonecraft's title relates to both works it can be read as a literary response to each.

⁵²¹ Mary Wollstonecraft, *Maria, Or The Wrongs of Woman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 125. Subsequent references will be given in parentheses unless further detail is needed.

Mary: A Fiction have been realised, and the similarly-named Maria has been tyrannically abused by her husband. The novel does not condemn sexual love entirely, however, but reconfigures opposite-sex sexual love in the manner of Aristotelian friendship. Though Wollstonecraft was never to finish the text one message is clear: in order to achieve equality of the sexes and become egalitarian, marriage must be a form of friendship.

Maria has proven a far more frequent subject for criticism than *Mary: A Fiction*.⁵²² Hunt and Haggerty both compare the two novels, finding a strong and direct criticism of matrimony.⁵²³ Abbey does not believe the novel to be opposed to

⁵²² Scholarly texts on the novel tend to focus upon friendship or marriage, with some notable exceptions. Janet Todd's short article 'Reason and Sensibility in Mary Wollstonecraft's *The Wrongs of Woman*' (1980) focuses on the imbalance of the two women in the text with regards to rationality and sentimentality, with Jemima leaning more toward the former, Maria toward the latter: "While declaring these sentiments, she knew full well she was opposing a long-established tradition: that reason belonged to the dominant men and sensibility to the irrational and subordinate women.": Janet Todd, 'Reason and Sensibility in Mary Wollstonecraft's "The Wrongs of Woman"', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 5 (1980), 17-20 (p. 17). Affection between the two women is briefly referenced with regards to this theme: "By the end of the fragment of the novel, Jemima has been won by Maria's kindness and sympathy to the point that she can follow her feelings, provided they are sanctioned by reason. Her affection for Maria is genuine and based on reason.": p. 19. Todd comments that the novel criticises sensibility in her book *Sensibility: An Introduction*: p. 135. Lucinda Cole refers to the statuses of class and gender in the novel: "Wollstonecraft increasingly represents women as a class, who, given their status as wives or barely employable persons within a market economy are always already dependent upon the arbitrary powers of others, upon their charity, institutions, values and norms.": '(Anti)Feminist Sympathies: The Politics of Relationship in Smith, Wollstonecraft and More', *ELH*, 58 (1991), 107-140 (p. 126). Cole sees a near transcendence of class between Maria and Jemima: "Given that Maria and Jemima are represented in warm relation to one another, Wollstonecraft seems to have accomplished what More and Smith would not - she seems, that is, to have pressed the discourse of sympathy into the service of anti-hierarchical politics that transcend and resolve social and cultural differences.": p. 130. Barbara Caine and Glenda Sluga also comment on the theme of wealth and class in the novel: *Gendering European History, 1780-1920* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2002), p. 49. Laurie Langbauer comments on the theme of motherhood in the text: *Women and Romance: The Consolation of Gender in the English Novel* (London: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 95-99. Candace Ward is concerned with the novel's portrayal of medical establishments: *Desire and Disorder: Fevers, Fictions and Feeling in English Georgian Culture* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2007), pp. 54-100. Roy Porter also briefly references the work as an example of the importance of asylums to the eighteenth-century novel: *Mind-Forg'd Manacles*, p. 92. Daniel O'Quinn suggests the text to criticise literature: 'Trembling: Wollstonecraft, Godwin and the Resistance to Literature', *ELH*, 64 (1997) 761-788 (p. 761). Daniella Mallinick analyses the text in relation to Burke (and other political writers/philosophers): 'Sublime Heroism and *The Wrongs of Woman*: Passion, Reason, Agency', *European Romantic Review*, 18 (2007) 1-27.

⁵²³ Hunt suggests Wollstonecraft' portrays marriage as the antithesis of liberty: "The asylum is an obvious metaphor for the prison of Maria's marriage, and the prison that the later Wollstonecraft cynically believes the traditional family, and the society it spawns, is for all women, in all classes, in all stages of life." p. 115. Haggerty suggests the novel presents marriage as 'victimizing': Haggerty, *Unnatural Affections*, p. 113. A similar point is made by Jacobs: *Her Own Woman*, p. 265. Ruth

all marriage, but is part of Wollstonecraft's proposal for a new form of marital union: one based in classical friendship. Such a bond would elevate the importance of the role of mother to society.⁵²⁴ Abbey does argue, however, that Wollstonecraft's belief in friendship as a substitute for marriage wavers in the novel: something not seen in her earlier political writings (written before her ideals were tested in revolutionary France). Frazer in fact reads the novel as a criticism of friendship rather than marriage, albeit only under the present social circumstances: "The fragility of friendship in a vicious and unjust society, though, serves only to emphasise its value."⁵²⁵ Franklin also notes the socially-egalitarian nature of the sequestered friendships within the novel.⁵²⁶ I would argue that Jemima's friendship with Maria (which shall be examined shortly) is the only unproblematic source of comfort for the heroine in the entire text – most relationships in the novel being complicated by marriage and sexuality.

Janet Todd reads the novel in a similar manner to *Mary: A Fiction*, commenting that the portrayal of (same-sex) friendship is similar in both (though is not fully realised in *Maria*).⁵²⁷ Todd (as well as Daniel O'Quinn and Barbara Caine)

Abbey concludes that the novel is less an indication of her views on the subject than *Rights of Woman* as it was unfinished: Abbey, 'Back to the Future', p. 89.

⁵²⁴ Abbey links Wollstonecraft's view that the manner in which women are socialised harms their ability to perform domestic roles to that of Rousseau: Abbey, 'Back to the Future', p. 80. According to Abbey, Wollstonecraft believed the current system only led to women attempting to superficially please men and that 'feminine women make poor mothers':, p. 81. Though Abbey does not refer to *Mary: A Fiction*, we can see such a viewpoint portrayed in Mary's mother. Under a marriage based in friendship, jealousy would be replaced by 'calm satisfaction':, p. 84. Abbey also notes that Wollstonecraft did not believe marriage should be compulsory: p. 84.

⁵²⁵ Frazer, 'Mary Wollstonecraft on Politics and Friendship', p. 248.

⁵²⁶ "[Maria's] new relationship with Darnford as well as with Jemima has an aura of Utopian egalitarianism within the prison because – just for the time being – these bonds of friendship are uncontaminated by the economic power structures of society": Franklin, *A Literary Life*, p. 180.

⁵²⁷ Todd, *A Revolutionary Life*, p. 18. Todd suggests that the 'roots' of true friendship are present in the text, though we never see its true actualisation: *Women's Friendship*, p. 208.

suggests that sexuality is presented in a similarly negative light to *Mary: A Fiction*, (differing from my own interpretation).⁵²⁸

Though it is less prominent than marriage in the novel overall, nonsexual friendship is introduced early on with Maria establishing a bond with Jemima. It is distinctly unromantic in comparison with the friendships experienced by Mary with Ann and with Henry and that between Maria and Darnford, but provides a crucial kernel of female solidarity in a devastatingly patriarchal world. The text opens with Maria having been imprisoned in a lunatic asylum by her husband so he can enjoy her fortune undisturbed. We also learn she has recently become a mother but that she cannot breastfeed her child as the husband has custody.⁵²⁹ The oppression of women is thus Gothicized in the novel, and Maria laments the fact that she's given birth to a daughter and forced another living being to endure the cruelty to which the world subjects women. In this context Jemima provides comfort and support: Maria resolves to prove her sanity to her and gain her trust as a friend.⁵³⁰

As Janet Todd notes, their relationship is firmly established in reason.⁵³¹ As with the bond between Mary and Ann, their bond crosses class boundaries, though roles here the altruism in the bond belongs entirely to Jemima: "... Jemima determined to alleviate all in her power, without hazarding the loss of her place, the

⁵²⁸ Todd suggests Maria's relationship to be a repetition of that of her husband George Venebles: *Women's Friendship*, p. 213. This same point is made by O'Quinn: 'Trembling', p. 775. O'Quinn states that the novel centres on the connection 'between men's acts of seduction and women's confinement' – even in the sexualised friendship between Maria and Henry (though O'Quinn does not recognise it as friendship): p. 761. I would disagree, as – like Maria but unlike George – Henry is of marginalised status, being present within the lunatic asylum. Barbara Caine states that the novel demonstrates female enslavement to male desire: *English Feminism, 1780-1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 65.

⁵²⁹ Mary Wollstonecraft, *Maria, Or the Wrongs of Woman*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 75.

⁵³⁰ Wollstonecraft, *Maria*, p. 78. Maria in fact makes a concerted effort to win the friendship: "... Maria did not allow any opportunity to slip of winning in the affections of Jemima; for she discovered in her a strength of mind, that excited her esteem, clouded as it was by the misanthropy of despair.": p. 82.

⁵³¹ Todd, 'Reason and Sensibility', p. 20.

sufferings of a wretched mother, apparently injured, and certainly unhappy.”⁵³² This altruism is reciprocated later on and we see sensibility through their solidarity when Jemima cries with pleasure on Maria’s behalf (*Maria*, p. 101). The women are able to provide a kindness to one another which has been entirely absent in their sexual bonds with men.⁵³³

It is sexual relationships, of course, which take the novel’s centre stage, and there are innumerable instances of the tyrannical abuse of marital laws and sexuality.⁵³⁴ Jemima’s mother starves herself to death upon being deserted by her male lover, and traditional social views on marriage are further challenged in the narrative, which sympathetically follows the ostracism of Jemima due to her illegitimate birth.⁵³⁵ Sexual relations are then presented in their darkest form through Jemima’s rape by her employer:

My master had once or twice caught hold of me in the passage; but I instinctively avoided his disgusting caresses. One day however, when the family were at a methodist meeting, he contrived to be alone in the house with me, and by blows – yes; blows and menaces, compelled me to submit to his ferocious desire; and, to avoid my mistress’s fury, I was obliged in future to comply ...⁵³⁶

As one of the few scenes in the novel which deal with the sexual act directly, it is utterly negative. The hypocrisy of wider society is revealed in the contrast here between the violent rape committed by Jemima’s master and the puritanical religious

⁵³² Wollstonecraft, *Maria*, p. 80. The two women read the same books as one another, and Jemima attempts to educate herself: Wollstonecraft, *Maria*, p. 111.

⁵³³ The kindness initially comes as a shock to Jemima: “Maria took her hand, and Jemima, more overcome by kindness than she had ever been by cruelty, hastened out of the room to conceal her emotions.”: Wollstonecraft, *Maria*, p. 119. Despite the comfort Jemima and Maria find together, Haggerty reads the text with friendship ultimately failing the heroine: Haggerty, *Unnatural Affections*, p. 113.

⁵³⁴ Which frequently mirror the relationship between Wollstonecraft’s parents, described in negative terms by Wollstonecraft herself in a letter to her friend Jane Arden: “It is almost needless to tell you that my father’s violent temper and extravagant turn of mind, was the principle cause of my unhappiness and that of the rest of my family.”: Wollstonecraft, *Collected Letters*, p. 22 (Wollstonecraft to Arden, Bath, early 1780).

⁵³⁵ A situation which again is rooted in Wollstonecraft’s personal experiences, having given birth to her daughter Fanny via her lover Gilbert Imlay: Jemima is abused and referred to as a ‘bastard’: Wollstonecraft, *Maria*, p. 105.

⁵³⁶ Wollstonecraft, *Maria*, p. 106.

views of the family, whose absence allows a grievous sin to occur in their own home. This is far more than a conspiracy of male aggression against women, however. The family itself is complicit in the rape, and it is the potential 'fury' of her master's wife – a misdirection of anger toward the victim – which condemns her to subsequent assaults. The rape here is not only committed by the master, but by his spouse and his family. This negative portrayal of sexuality - this 'ferocious desire' - is enabled and enforced by a traditional family unit.

Other corrupted sexual unions are littered throughout the entire novel: Henry Darnford's parents resented one another and the young Henry experienced an unhappy home life (*Maria*, p. 98). Maria meets one woman whose husband steals from her, then another whose husband has spent all her money on a mistress (*Maria*, p. 177). At this point in the narrative the reader is bombarded by male tyranny having been enabled by marriage.

Maria's own tale also contains numerous negative examples of marriage. Maria's family life was a deeply unhappy one, and her father's having married for love was constantly reminded to her as an obligation. Her father then takes on a mistress - an act which further undermines the family unit (*Maria*, p. 125). Both Maria herself and another woman in the asylum have been placed there by their tyrannical husbands, with the other unfortunate woman having been driven mad: "... she had been married, against her inclination, to a rich old man, extremely jealous (no wonder, or she was a charming creature); and that, in consequence of his treatment, or something which hung on her mind, she has, during her first lying-in, lost her senses." (*Maria*, p. 88). The passive term used here - 'been married' - is one which underlies the various depictions of marriage in the text, where it is something actively inflicted upon women, who can offer little by way of resistance. Her true story can never be

known due to her lack of lucidity, but the narrator here strongly indicates that there is more to the situation than just that of her husband's description. Sexuality is once more presented in a negative light, as her madness unfolds 'during her first lying-in'.

Despite the atrocities committed against the various women in the novel, it is Maria's narrative through which the most scathing summary of marital vows is provided. Maria at first believes her marriage to be based in friendship, though is disillusioned quickly by her husband's greed (*Maria*, p. 139). Maria finds herself trapped, and her language echoes that of Seward when the marriage is described as a 'cage': a description which becomes increasingly literal as Maria is imprisoned by her husband. His pursuit of her is a more immediate rendering of the threatening presence of the husband in *Mary: A Fiction*. Wollstonecraft provides a dramatic yet possible result of unequal property law as, in order to gain access to the estate of Maria's family, her husband drugs her, robs her of her newborn daughter and places her in a lunatic asylum.⁵³⁷ As with Jemima's rape, the atrocity here is not simply committed by one man, but can only occur with the assistance of others – and such assistance is female: it was Maria's maid who slipped her the drug. The rot produced by marriage not only allows for individual men to gain dominion over women, but pits women against one another, destroying any form of real resistance to patriarchal power structures.

A positive alternative for sexual love is found in the bond between Maria and Henry Darnford. As the focus of Wollstonecraft's work has shifted from the previous novel, this Henry does not serve to represent male-female romantic friendship, but male-female sexual friendship. In both *Mary: A Fiction* and *Maria* Wollstonecraft presents her relationships unambiguously, and whereas before the love was plainly

⁵³⁷ Wollstonecraft, *Maria*, p. 184. Some of these events again have basis in reality, as Wollstonecraft's letters reveal own sister had to leave her child in order to escape her husband: Wollstonecraft, *Collected Letters*, p. 49 (Wollstonecraft to Everina Wollstonecraft, Hackney, January 1784).

platonic, here it is clearly sexual: we bear witness to their sexual desires when the two share a kiss that is 'reluctant only from modesty' (*Maria*, p. 100).

The sexual friendship the two share is as socially marginalised as romantic friendship, and Maria and Henry subvert traditional social morality by first meeting in an asylum then by committing adultery. At first it seems that the ending will be a positive one - Jemima and Maria make plans to leave for the European mainland with Jemima exclaiming: "... on you it depends to reconcile me with the human race." (*Maria*, p. 189). Maria writes to Darnford referring to him as 'husband' (demonstrating that there is hope for marriage if it is based in the equality of friendship) (*Maria*, p. 189). She even considers marrying him, despite the negative unions she has been witness to:

Marriage, as at present constituted, [Maria] considered as leading to immorality – yet, as the odium of society impedes usefulness, she wished to avow her affection to Darnford, by becoming his wife according to established rules; not to be confounded with women who act from very different motives, though her conduct would be just the same without the ceremony as with it, and her expectations from him not less firm.⁵³⁸

Wollstonecraft's emphasis on social morality is consistent with her previous works, and she makes clear its incompatibility with the present state of marriage (she is careful to add 'as at present constituted' to convey the message that Henry's presence in the text affirms – that there is hope for marriage, as long as it is based in sexual friendship). Maria decides to compromise in this scene, pacifying her doubts by distinguishing herself from those other women she believes less moral (again we see a lack of female solidarity). It is the final sentiment here which proves most interesting, however: Maria does not believe the marriage ceremony to be necessary for either herself or Henry – without the pressures inflicted by a conservative society, they would be perfectly happy without the institution.

⁵³⁸ Wollstonecraft, *Maria*, p. 194.

Though the novel was left incomplete, the potential finales complicate *Maria's* moral message. Of the much-discussed possible endings to the novel two are revealing, considering the novel's perspective on friendship: firstly we have the more positive possibility that Jemima saves Maria from an attempted suicide – with female-female friendship ultimately proving the central protagonist's saving grace. The more negative possibility was that Henry was to be 'unfaithful', provoking a successful suicide from Maria. Wollstonecraft's consideration of such an ending – which simply reads 'Divorced by her husband – Her lover unfaithful – Pregnancy – Miscarriage – Suicide' suggests that she had some doubts regarding the practicalities of sexual friendship, particularly with regards to exclusivity and possession (with Henry's being 'unfaithful' presumably being sexual).⁵³⁹ This point is noted by Abbey, who reflects upon Wollstonecraft's difficulties in unifying sexuality and friendship when sex itself has not traditionally been a function of friendship.⁵⁴⁰ Todd goes further, stating that Maria has shunned friendship, instead turning toward the 'oppressor': a reading I find in conflict with Henry's marginalised status and Wollstonecraft's ideal of gender parity.⁵⁴¹ Abbey suggests that the novel is unclear on the subject and that the bond between Maria and Henry is far from equal.⁵⁴² Whilst this is certainly the case, I would argue that it is important to allow for Wollstonecraft's consistently pessimistic portrayal of *all* human relationships in her fiction: as I stated earlier in this chapter, even the happiest bond – that between Mary and Ann in *Mary: A Fiction* – proves at times unsatisfying. In the same light, Maria's relationship with Henry offers her hope and an interlude of pleasure in a hopeless situation. Though it had the potential to fall apart, it does not mean that the sexual friendship Wollstonecraft proposes is

⁵³⁹ Wollstonecraft, *Maria*, p. 202. Godwin was to elaborate on the theme of jealousy, monogamy and sexual friendship, as we shall see in the next chapter.

⁵⁴⁰ Abbey, 'Back to the Future', p. 87.

⁵⁴¹ Todd, *Women's Friendship*, p 217.

⁵⁴² Abbey, 'Back to the Future', p. 89.

fundamentally flawed: it is still far more positive than the numerous traditional marriages of the text.⁵⁴³

Wollstonecraft and Sexual Love

Aside from via the plot and through the interactions of the characters there are several points in the novel in which the author's voice is directly applied, such as early in the fourth chapter, when the narrator comments on the individual pursuit of love and friendship: "The youths who are satisfied with the ordinary pleasures of life, and do not sigh after ideal phantoms of love and friendship, will never arrive at great maturity of understanding" (*Maria*, p. 99). Here Wollstonecraft echoes Aristotle in ascertaining that virtue and friendship are tied to one another. When Maria's father takes on a mistress Wollstonecraft issues a declaration remarkably similar to one in *Rights of Woman*: "By allowing women but one way of rising in the world, the fostering of libertinism of men, society makes monsters of them, and then their ignoble vices are brought forward as a proof of inferiority of intellect" (*Maria*, p. 157).

Yet Wollstonecraft doesn't need to bring in her own voice to provide her opinions: six 'legitimate' marriages find their way into the novel, without a single one producing happiness for the wife. As with *Mary: A Fiction*, we can see that for Wollstonecraft praise of friendship and distrust of traditional marriage go hand-in-hand. Despite the opinions of some critics, Wollstonecraft's views on the subject remain relatively constant from her teenage years to her death. Her stance on

⁵⁴³ It is possible that Wollstonecraft's own confusion over her relationship with Gilbert Imlay may have inspired her indecision – in her letters she hints that she and he have a sexual friendship of sorts and she is keen to underscore the importance of friendship: *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (London: J. Johnson, 1796), pp. 143-146.

marriage was recognised by her contemporaries, and an anonymous work by a figure titling himself a ‘Friend to Social Order’: *Thoughts on Marriage* (1799), scornfully derided her for it: “The gigantic foe, which this female warrior came forward to oppose, was ‘the Tyranny of Man over the Weaker Sex;’ and the point in which she chose to make her assault, was ‘the unjust and partial power conferred by the laws of matrimony on a Husband.’”⁵⁴⁴ His sarcastic assault on the ‘female warrior’ continues into a commentary on *Maria*. He recognises the strong anti-marriage themes present in the novel, stating:

Every misfortune which her heroine undergoes, is traced to matrimony as its source, and even the slightest irregularities and excesses are said to owe their rise to that disgraceful state of thraldom, which is to her supposed to incapacitate its unfortunate subjects from either tasting or deserving happiness.⁵⁴⁵

Despite the somewhat disturbing labelling of rape, exploitation and child-theft as ‘irregularities and excesses’, the novel is recognised (however negatively) as a subversive commentary on marriage. The ‘Friend to Social Order’ expresses concern that her views could endanger others, before erroneously suggesting that Wollstonecraft reformed at the end of her life in marrying Godwin – apparently not realising that the novel itself was written during the marriage.⁵⁴⁶

Though Wollstonecraft’s infamous reputation following her death caused many to disassociate themselves from her, *Mary: A Fiction* was to influence novels dealing with romantic friendship. The presentation of friendship as possessing the potential for true egalitarianism, negating class and gender, as well as being both

⁵⁴⁴ ‘A Friend to Social Order’, *Thoughts on Marriage, and Criminal Conversation with Some Hints of Appropriate Means to Check the Progress of the Latter; Comprising Remarks on the Life, Opinions and Example of the Late Mrs. Wollstonecraft Godwin* (London: Rivington et al., 1799), p. 8. He chastises her assaults on ‘sacred establishments’: ‘A Friend to Social Order’, *Thoughts on Marriage*, p. 4.

⁵⁴⁵ ‘A Friend to Social Order’, *Thoughts on Marriage*, p. 20.

⁵⁴⁶ ‘A Friend to Social Order’, *Thoughts on Marriage*, p. 38. Wollstonecraft was also attacked by Polwhele, who poem ‘The Unsex’d Females’ famously derided her: Richard Polwhele, *Poems*, 5 vols. (Truro: Michell, 1810), II, pp. 38-39. Interestingly, his poem praises Seward: p. 44.

virtuous and elevating would be engaged with by William Godwin (see the final chapter to this thesis) and also by Maria Edgeworth, stepdaughter to Honora Sneyd and daughter of Richard Edgeworth (see previous chapter). Edgeworth's 1801 novel *Belinda* would attempt to 'rehabilitate' the romantic friendship of *Mary: A Fiction* (she would almost certainly have read Godwin's infamous *Memoirs*) and try to engage with Wollstonecraft's ideals, even whilst castigating and parodying the woman herself. Romantic friendship would need to be further adapted to remain acceptable within an increasingly conservative society.

MARIA EDGEWORTH'S *BELINDA*

Upon learning of the betrayal of her closest friend for a decade, a distraught Lady Delacour cries, "... you that I thought would receive my last breath – you to desert me! – Now I am alone in the world ..."⁵⁴⁷ Without her close friend Harriot Freke, we see a figure who is mournful, lost, and utterly devoid of hope – and with this we are presented with arguably the most interesting character of Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* and the 1800 novel's most important theme.⁵⁴⁸ This heightened language subverts the comedy of the two women's escapades and prepares us for the emotional depth and seriousness of Lady Delacour's new relationship with Belinda herself. Edgeworth's text, written at the time of the vilification of Mary Wollstonecraft, is a covert commentary on women's romantic friendship at the dawn

⁵⁴⁷ Edgeworth, *Belinda* (London: Pandora Press, 1986), III (1810), p. 24. Subsequent references will be given in parentheses unless further detail is needed.

⁵⁴⁸ Edgeworth sought – for over a decade – to continually amend her novel, developing the focus as time went on. Three different editions were published, though the one which proves of greatest use for this essay is her final 1810 edition, placing an even greater emphasis on friendship than her previous versions (published in 1801 and 1802, respectively).

of the new century – one which, though radical in its own way, engages with yet distances romantic friendship from works such as *Mary: A Fiction*.

The lengths to which the characters are prepared to go to both attack and save their same-sex companions are at times extraordinary – the ‘damsels in distress’ of *Belinda* are not rescued by dashing figures of the opposite sex, but by steadfast and trustworthy friends (and in turn, placed in danger by scheming ex-friends). It is these dramatic friendships which will prove the main focus here, challenging the widely accepted reading of the text merely as a ‘courtship novel’ and the almost total silence covering Lady Delacour’s fierce declarations of love for Belinda Portman (interrupted only by the occasional remark upon the dominance of their friendship). Here we will examine the possibility of a new reading: that under the guise of writing a courtship novel Edgeworth subversively suggests friendships should be our primary emotional concern and that without such relationships we have no hope in succeeding in family life. Here marriage and friendship are inseparable. Lady Delacour and Belinda Portman form the emotional heart of the text, as same-sex relationships drive the plot and characters towards their inevitable conclusions.

The (Courtship) Novel

The extent to which *Belinda* can be read as a courtship ‘novel’ is a subject which has certainly received wide attention from critics over the two centuries in which the text has been in publication. An interesting example concerning the genre can be found in *Notes and Queries* magazine in the 1970s, where the complex literary allusions cited by Lady Delacour are interpreted in entirely different ways by Maxwell, who believed that Edgeworth was demonstrating a solidarity with ‘the

novel' and by Lock two years later, 'correcting' him by stating the exact opposite.⁵⁴⁹

In two hundred years no real consensus has been reached, a matter which has been little helped by Edgeworth's playful ambiguities: though many have noted her refusal to use the word 'novel' in original versions of the text, describing it instead as a 'moral tale' – in the text itself different characters demonstrate different attitudes to novels – the conservative yet generous Mr. Percival greatly disapproves of them, whilst the innocent and naïve Virginia has many of her ideas shaped by them.⁵⁵⁰ This is further complicated by Virginia's own father stating that they were the ruin of her mother, reaching a confounding climax at the end of the text, where Lady Delacour demolishes the fourth wall and asks how the 'novel' should be ended.⁵⁵¹ In this section I will explore the currently unmentioned possibility that not only was Edgeworth playing with the concept of the novel, but that she was subverting the courtship genre in particular.

Belinda has been traditionally read as being primarily about the wooing of Belinda Portman (once again an eponymous heroine) by the well-intentioned Clarence Harvey: Katherine Sobba Green in *The Courtship Novel 1740-1820: A Feminized Genre* (1991), highlights its centrality when she states that "... the issue of courtship choices occupies no small part of Edgeworth's attention."⁵⁵² Yet under this conventional guise Edgeworth challenges the self-sufficiency of the heterosexual couple, demonstrating its reliance on friendships and even suggesting it took

⁵⁴⁹ J. C. Maxwell, 'Jane Austen and "Belinda"', *Notes and Queries*, 21 (1974), 175-76 (p. 175); F. P. Lock, "Camilla", "Belinda", and Jane Austen's "Only A Novel", *Notes and Queries*, 23 (1976), 105-06 (p. 106).

⁵⁵⁰ For Mr. Percival's disapproval see: Edgeworth, *Belinda*, III, p. 233. For Virginia see: Edgeworth, *Belinda*, III, p. 346.

⁵⁵¹ For the warning by Virginia's father see: Edgeworth, *Belinda*, III, p. 371. For the end of the 'novel' see: Edgeworth, *Belinda*, III, p. 432.

⁵⁵² Katherine Sobba Green, *The Courtship Novel 1740-1820: A Feminized Genre* (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1991).

emotional 'second place' in the hearts of both women and men to relationships with those of their own sex.

The number of readings of Edgeworth's novel expanded dramatically over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.⁵⁵³ This is especially regarding the examination of the novel's ideological debates as expressed through the characters – perhaps nowhere more so than the Percival family.⁵⁵⁴ Aside from being the instigators of an important friendship, that between Clarence and Dr. X, they represent to many the 'ideal' family to Maria Edgeworth.⁵⁵⁵ Douthwaite's 2002 work argues that they are

⁵⁵³ There have been further explorations on the theme of courtship by Marilyn Butler: *Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Bibliography* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1972), p. 66. Another traditional reading which often goes hand in hand with the first is that it is a novel on manners: O. Elizabeth McWhorter Harden, *Maria Edgeworth's Art of Prose Fiction* (The Hague; Paris: Moulton, 1971); James Newcomer, *Maria Edgeworth* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1973) p. 51, and Patricia Comitini, *Vocational Philanthropy and British Women's Writing* (Aldershot; Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), the latter greatly expanding upon the theme. For others there is the third, somewhat newer view of it as a novel on women's social and academic education, particularly focusing on the novel as a critique of Rousseau: Julia Douthwaite, *The Wild Girl, Natural Men and the Monster: Dangerous Experiments in the Age of Enlightenment* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 182; Heather MacFayden, 'Lady Delacour's Library: Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* and Fashionable Reading', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 48 (1994) 423-439 (p. 423); Mary Ann Tobin, 'Ignorance and Marital Bliss: Women's Education in the English Novel, 1796-1895' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Duquesne University, 2006). Other focuses have been maternity, gambling, art, feminist colonialism, slavery, interracial relationships and even mental health: Julie Kipp, *Romanticism, Maternity, and the Body Politic*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 42; Jessica Richard, 'Games of Chance': *Belinda*, Education and Empire', in *An Uncomfortable Authority: Maria Edgeworth and Her Contexts*, ed. by Heidi Kaufman and Chris Fauske (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), p. 23; Jeffrey Cass, 'Fuseli's Milton Gallery: Satan's First Address to Eve as a Source for Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda*', *ANQ*, 14 (2001) 15-23 (p. 15); Alison Harvey, 'West Indian Obeah and English 'Obee': Race, Femininity, and Questions of Colonial Consolidation in Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda*', in *New Essays on Maria Edgeworth*, ed. by Julie Nash (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006), p. 1; Andrew McCann, 'Conjugal Love and the Enlightenment Subject: The Colonial Context of Non-identity in Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda*', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 30 (1996) 56-77 (p.56); Kathryn Kirkpatrick, "'Gentlemen Have Horrors Upon This Subject": West Indian Suitors in Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda*', *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 5 (1993) 331-348 (p. 331); and David Thame, 'Madness and Therapy in Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda*: Deceived by Appearances', *British Journal For Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 26 (2003) 271-288 (p. 272), respectively. Finally Theresa Michals examines politics and morality in the context of middle-class economics – "Lady Delacour is acquitted of every violation of domestic principles but the wickedness of wildly overspending her income, the sin of refusing to live like an economically rational being", 'Commerce and Character in Maria Edgeworth', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 49 (1994) 1-20 (p. 18).

⁵⁵⁴ The central figures of the tale have not always been admired as Doubleday demonstrates – though he acknowledges the tale was popular in its time, he believes the characters to be too unbelievable to be likeable or interesting: Neal Frank Doubleday, *Variety of Attempt: British and American Fiction in the Early Nineteenth Century* (Lincoln; London: University of Nebraska Press, 1976), p. 7. The finished work is also viewed with distaste by Newby, who would have preferred Lady Delacour perish: P. H. Newby, *Maria Edgeworth* (Orlando: Folcroft Library Editions, 1973), p. 53.

⁵⁵⁵ As explored by: Caroline Gonda, *Reading Daughters' Fictions 1709-1834: Novels and Society From Manley to Edgeworth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 211; Alison Harvey,

the 'control model against which Lady Delacour and Clarence Hervey are compared and condemned'.⁵⁵⁶ Colin and Jo Atkinson suggest the common viewpoint that the family is representative of rational morality.⁵⁵⁷ What the Percivals themselves represent is open to considerable interpretation, however. Comitini maintains that they represent Mary Wollstonecraft's view of maternity, as laid out in *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.⁵⁵⁸

There are numerous problems, however, with the arguments that the Percivals represent the ideal family in the eyes of Maria Edgeworth – many of which Kathryn Kirkpatrick levels against Lady Anne Percival. Firstly, there is the simple fact that she gives Belinda Portman the wrong advice in persuading her to wed Mr. Vincent over Clarence Hervey.⁵⁵⁹ Secondly, there is the fact that she admits she gave this advice out of personal self-interest.⁵⁶⁰ Thirdly, she cites their unsavoury links to the slave trade.⁵⁶¹ To Kirkpatrick, Maria Edgeworth uses the Percivals to illustrate negative paths to female empowerment: "... [exposing] the contradictions inherent in a feminism built upon the patriarchal and capitalistic foundations of liberal ideology."⁵⁶²

Unnoticed by critics, however, is the fact that Edgeworth as narrator highlights the fanciful vision of the Percival family by linking them to tales of fantasy – Lady

⁵⁵⁶ West Indian Obeah and English 'Obee' in *New Essays on Maria Edgeworth*, ed. by Julie Nash, p. 1; and Julia Douthwaite, 'Experimental Child-rearing After Rousseau: Maria Edgeworth, Practical Education and *Belinda*', *Irish Journal of Feminist Studies*, 2 (1997) 35-56 (p. 37).

⁵⁵⁷ Douthwaite, *The Wild Girl*, p. 185.

⁵⁵⁸ Colin B. Atkinson and Jo Atkinson, 'Maria Edgeworth, *Belinda*, and Women's Rights, *Eire-Ireland*, 19 (1984) 94-118.

⁵⁵⁹ Comitini, *Vocational Philanthropy*, p. 115.

⁵⁶⁰ Kathryn Kirkpatrick, 'The Limits of Female Liberalism in Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda*', in *Jane Austen and Mary Shelley and Their Sisters*, ed. by Laura Dabundo (Lanham; Oxford: University Press of America, Inc.: 2000) p. 74.

⁵⁶¹ Kirkpatrick, 'Limits of Female Liberalism' in *Jane Austen and Mary Shelley and Their Sisters*, ed. by Dabundo, p. 80.

⁵⁶² Kirkpatrick, 'Limits of Female Liberalism' in *Jane Austen and Mary Shelley and Their Sisters*, ed. by Dabundo, p 78.

⁵⁶³ Kirkpatrick, 'Limits of Female Liberalism' in *Jane Austen and Mary Shelley and Their Sisters*, ed. by Dabundo, p p. 74.

Anne's supposedly sage advice being compared to fairy tales: "[She] contented herself with requesting that Belinda would take three days (the usual time for deliberation in fairy tales) before she should decide against Mr Vincent." (*Belinda*, p. 222). With this Edgeworth has provided to us a clue of how illusory the Percivals' world is, even before we learn of how wrong their advice is for Belinda Portman. This is not to say the Percivals are in some way villainous, but they are misguided and serve to distract Belinda from her close friend Lady Delacour.

Wollstonecraft the Freke

With the exception of Rousseau, Wollstonecraft appears to be the philosophical figure most commonly associated with the text by critics, though her beliefs are usually seen as at odds with Edgeworth's.⁵⁶³ It is also commonly assumed that Wollstonecraft is compared to the villainous Harriot Freke: she is directly referenced through the title of chapter 17, 'Rights of Woman' and perhaps through Freke's lack of emotional sentiment, as both Wollstonecraft (in *Vindication*) and Freke decry sensibility.⁵⁶⁴

Freke is a villain beyond redemption. Her actions – which even result in the untimely death of a largely innocent man – are never looked back upon with guilt or regret – she attempts no reform, showing zero remorse for Lawless' death (*Belinda*, p. 42). Her complete lack of sentiment here is underscored by Lady Delacour's considerable torment over the consequences of their actions (which Edgeworth seeks

⁵⁶³ Susan Johnston, *Women and Domestic Experience in Victorian Political Fiction* (London: Greenwood Press, 2001) p. 64.

⁵⁶⁴ Darryl Jones compares Wollstonecraft to Freke in his article: 'Radical Ambivalence: Frances Burney, Jacobinism, and the politics of Romantic fiction', *Women's Writing*, 10 (2003) 3-25 (p. 14). Freke decries sensibility: Edgeworth, *Belinda*, III, p. 54. This comparison between the two is noted by Elfenbein: Elfenbein, 'Mary Wollstonecraft and the Sexuality of Genius', in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. by Claudia L. Johnson, p. 231.

to render even more terrible by the fact that Lawless' mother, a kind individual, never recovers from the death of her son) (*Belinda*, p. 42). Even when having indirectly murdered someone, she cares little for the consequences of her actions, bringing us the image of a woman rotten to the core. Patricia Juliana Smith, in her article 'And I Wondered If She Might Kiss Me' (1995) wrote of Freke's representation of the wayward lesbian, amoral yet seductive to other women – the reaction to such a figure by both the author and the character Belinda Portman being excessive – "Belinda resists Mrs. Freke's attempt to 'carry [her] off in triumph', but subsequently, upon seeing Mrs. Freke and her latest conquest Miss Moreton cavorting in public, she exhibits what the post-Freudian reader would identify as hysteria, clinging to her male companion ..."⁵⁶⁵

She may be a villain, but Freke is not entirely foolish. Though Jansen sees Freke and the Percivals as diametrically opposed, the Percivals representing delicacy and Freke an antiquated masculinity, she is not always presumed to be in the wrong, as her arguments contain some truth against them.⁵⁶⁶ She is backed by Audrey Bilger, who argues in *Laughing Feminism* (1998) that many of the accusations Freke levels against women are actually true of Belinda Portman herself (such as her affected modesty in front of men), proving that they must indeed contain some truth as a whole.⁵⁶⁷ Eleanor Ty sees Freke as the lynchpin to the plot – she is viewed as an extremely powerful character, one on a par only with the narrator herself: she is the only one able to actually make things happen, rather than merely have events happen

⁵⁶⁵ Patricia Juliana Smith, "'And I Wondered if She Might Kiss Me': Lesbian Panic as Narrative Strategy in British Women's Fictions', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 41 (1995) 567-607 (p. 574).

⁵⁶⁶ Jansen's assertion that Freke represents masculinity: Leslie J. Jansen, 'When Clothes Do Not Make the Man: Female Masculinity and Nationalism in Eighteenth-Century British Literature' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Maryland, 2006), p. 264. Jansen suggests Freke to be correct sometimes: Jansen, 'When Clothes Do Not Make the Man', p. 270.

⁵⁶⁷ Audrey Bilger, *Laughing Feminism: Subversive Comedy in Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth, and Jane Austen* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), p. 103.

to her.⁵⁶⁸ Her proactivity is an example of her being a highly apt and intelligent individual, whose talents are wasted on petty gossip and social strategy – demonstrating the arguments of Wollstonecraft and Hays that highly capable women's talents are wasted due to society's expectations of them.⁵⁶⁹

Crucially, Edgeworth penned her 'moral tale' when controversy over the recently-deceased Wollstonecraft's personal life was at its height. Her husband William Godwin had made a significant error of judgement in publishing her documents and revealing her private life to the world (including details of her unmarried sexual affair, resultant child and attempted suicide) - as Caroline Franklin points out in *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Literary Life*, "... his tribute to Wollstonecraft's genius, was perceived not as a vindication but a denigration by its contemporary readers."⁵⁷⁰ Wollstonecraft was hardly a figure a female author could comfortably align herself with, but rather an author she would have to actively ridicule in order to avoid association. Harriet Freke, being ludicrous, allows Edgeworth to easily achieve political distance from Wollstonecraft's views without having enough similarity to Wollstonecraft to be genuinely satiric.

Indeed, there are those who believe *Belinda* gives a sympathetic impression of the beleaguered Wollstonecraft. Anne K. Mellor in 1993 convincingly argued that both Edgeworth and Wollstonecraft shared the same views and vision of the new 'rational woman'.⁵⁷¹ The perceived conflict between female passion and female self-control are at the heart of both *Belinda* and Wollstonecraft's *Vindication*.⁵⁷² This

⁵⁶⁸ Eleanor Ty, 'Freke in Men's Clothes: Transgression and the Carnivalesque in Edgeworth's *Belinda*', in *The Clothes That Wear Us: Essays on Dressing and Transgressing in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, ed. by Jessica Mums and Penny Richards (London: Associated University Press, 1999), p. 168.

⁵⁶⁹ Ty, 'Freke in Men's Clothes', in *The Clothes That Wear Us*, ed. by Mums and Richards, p. 169.

⁵⁷⁰ Franklin, *A Literary Life*, p. 199.

⁵⁷¹ Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* (New York; London: Routledge, 1993), p. 41.

⁵⁷² Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, p. 44.

argument is echoed by Kathryn Kirkpatrick, stating that these women moralists shared a condemnation of rakish society whilst maintaining a belief in rehabilitation.⁵⁷³ Mitzi Myers also compares *Belinda* and *Vindication*, suggesting them both to be radical, the former through numerous gender deviations and prominent ‘female intellectuality’ –bringing our attention to the fact that they shared the same (Jacobin) publisher, Joseph Johnson.⁵⁷⁴

Certainly positive allusions to Wollstonecraft are made in the text: despite her overt comparison with Freke through her titling of chapter seventeen, Edgeworth subversively aligns Wollstonecraft with the sympathetic portrayal of Lady Delacour via her sensibility and capacity for romantic friendship with women.⁵⁷⁵ Godwin’s publication three years prior to *Belinda* demonstrated Wollstonecraft’s personal sensibility in telling the story of her passionate attachment to her former companion Fanny Blood. Belinda, in her apparently entirely rational attitude to heterosexual love seems however to echo the puritan Wollstonecraft of the *Rights of Woman* (Belinda’s cold reason can be witnessed in her rejection of Vincent, her greatest lamentation being “‘What a pity,’ thought Belinda, ‘that with so many good and great qualities, I should be forced to bid him adieu for ever!’”’) (*Belinda*, p. 407). Edgeworth also deliberately made Freke an enemy of emotion and passionate sentiment (wilfully abandoning friends and causing murder), noticeably different to the well-publicised attitudes of Wollstonecraft.

⁵⁷³ Kirkpatrick, ‘Limits of Female Liberalism’ in *Jane Austen and Mary Shelley and Their Sisters*, ed. by Dabundo, p. 77.

⁵⁷⁴ Mitzi Myers, ‘My Art Belongs to Daddy? Thomas Day, Maria Edgeworth, and the Pre-Texts of *Belinda*: Women Writers and Patriarchal Authority’, in *Revising Women: Eighteenth-Century “Women’s Fiction” and Social Engagement*, ed. by Paula Backscheider (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), p. 106.

⁵⁷⁵ Katherine Montwieler claims that the very character of Lady Delacour is based on Wollstonecraft, though this is unlikely considering that she was the type of woman Wollstonecraft despised: Katherine Montwieler, ‘Reading Disease: the corrupting performance of Edgeworth’s *Belinda*.’, *Women’s Writing*, 12 (2005): 347-68 (p. 349).

As is obvious by this point, there is a conflicting socio-political narrative apparent in Edgeworth's work. Some, such as Susan C. Greenfield, argue that this is deliberate, representing the conflicted beliefs inherent in the Edgeworth family themselves, as Protestant colonialists sympathising with the Catholic cause.⁵⁷⁶ In 1993 Eleanor Ty supported this viewpoint, stating that the author "... deliberately confuses the readers' allegiances between the conservative and radical sides."⁵⁷⁷ In 1999 she repeated that *Belinda* is neither straightforward nor moralistic.⁵⁷⁸ Douthwaite applies the confused political narrative to the role of the women, stating that "Maria Edgeworth's treatment of women's rights is sometimes disparaging, indifferent at best. In the name of female happiness, she locates women in a narrow sphere or activity; and yet she speaks untiringly of women's intellectual development and promotes wide-ranging readings for girls."⁵⁷⁹ It is a moral tale with a blurred morality, one which allows for both sympathetic characters (such as Clarence Hervey) and villains (Harriot Freke) to cross-dress and otherwise warp gender norms, yet portrays upstanding citizens such as the Percivals as foolhardy and selfish – even deluded.

With *Belinda* Edgeworth does her utmost to marry the revolutionary with the traditional, the queer with the heteronormative. Wollstonecraft is both defended and chastised and her social attitudes receive a sympathetic response, hidden beneath a veneer of hostility. I argue Edgeworth was sympathetic to Wollstonecraft's ideals on friendship, but sought a more pragmatic approach in order to maintain social acceptability: an approach which did not rely on a renunciation of marriage.

⁵⁷⁶ Susan C Greenfield, "'Abroad and at Home': Sexual Ambiguity, and Colonial Boundaries in Edgeworth's *Belinda*,' *PMLA*, 112 (1997), 214-28.

⁵⁷⁷ Eleanor Ty, *Unsex'd Revolutionaries: Five Women Novelists of the 1790s* (London; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993) p. 20.

⁵⁷⁸ Ty, 'Freke in Men's Clothes', in *The Clothes That Wear Us*, ed. by Mums and Richards, p. 158.

⁵⁷⁹ Douthwaite, *Experimental Child-rearing After Rousseau*, p. 37.

The characters of *Belinda* illustrate the theme of friendship, in many different guises – from the strange power relations of subservience (Lady Delacour and Marriott; Lord Delacour and Champfort; Mr Vincent and Juba) to the more equal (Lady Delacour and Belinda; Belinda and Lady Anne Percival; Clarence and Sir Philip; Clarence and Dr X) to the quasi-parental (Virginia and Clarence; Virginia and Mrs Ormond; Mr Percival and Belinda). Certainly there is no shortage of such relationships to draw upon, each with their own blessings and hazards. One interesting interpretation involving in-depth analysis into the same-sex relationships of *Belinda* is found in the unpublished doctoral thesis of Elizabeth Johnston of 2005, which provides an account of the female rivalries in the text (though she reaches substantially different conclusions to my own argument, as will be examined later).⁵⁸⁰

Very little has been published specifically on female friendship, the most relevant being Lisa Moore's *Something More Tender Still Than Friendship* (1992), though, like Johnston, she arrives at entirely opposite conclusions to my own, endorsing the usual view that Maria Edgeworth represents passionate friendship as entirely at odds with rational domesticity: "... although Harriot Freke is figured as a joke here, she also poses a danger to Belinda, the danger of inappropriate female friendship. Clearly to associate with such a woman would compromise Belinda in the eyes of her host and of her suitor ..." ⁵⁸¹ Here she tells us that Edgeworth is using *Belinda* to warn us of the dangers of intimate female relations, and the effects they

⁵⁸⁰ Elizabeth Johnston, 'Competing Fictions: Eighteenth-Century Domestic Novels, Women Writers, and the Trope of Female Rivalry.' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Morgantown, West Virginia, 2005).

⁵⁸¹ Lisa Moore, "'Something More Tender Still than Friendship": Romantic Friendship in Early-Nineteenth-Century England', *Feminist Studies*, 18 (1992), 499-520 (p. 505).

can have both on the individual and society as a whole. To Moore, this is presented to us via Harriot Freke, whose "... several reappearances work to expose the political and moral ruin threatening young ladies who trust too much intimacy with other women and the grave consequences for society of such relationships."⁵⁸² According to Moore, Edgeworth believes such relationships are incompatible with family life and rational domesticity – and she is certainly not alone in this interpretation. Though she reads Freke's relationships in a more sexual way, Leslie Jansen concurs, stating that 'female homoeroticism disrupts heterosexual norms' (this 'homoeroticism' is suggested to be hinted at through Freke's description as a 'rake' and her wish to try on Lady Anne Percival's underwear).⁵⁸³ Emma Donoghue, in her *Passions Between Women* (1993), also examines the friendships of Freke, concluding that - "Desire between the women can only be expressed negatively ..." ⁵⁸⁴

From this I posit that there are two important points of agreement regarding the readings of intense female friendships in *Belinda* – that they are always represented by Harriot Freke, and that they are in some way incompatible with traditional marriage. Here I wish to challenge both these perceptions – demonstrating firstly that there are numerous intense relationships far exceeding that between Freke and Lady Delacour. Secondly not only are they compatible with domesticity, they are *entirely necessary* for it; and thirdly (and most importantly) same-sex friendships – both good and bad – are either the making – or ruin – of the central characters in the text. Edgeworth displays two forms of same-sex friendship – one healthy, the other distinctly unhealthy. Firstly we have romantic friendships, the best example being between Belinda and Lady Delacour, which are characterised by their intensity of

⁵⁸² Moore, 'Something More Tender Still Than Friendship', p. 503.

⁵⁸³ Jansen on disrupting heterosocial norms: 'When Clothes Do Not Make the Man', p. 265.. On homoeroticism: p. 275.

⁵⁸⁴ Emma Donoghue, *Passions Between Women: British Lesbian Culture 1668-1801* (London: Scarlett Press, 1993), p. 101.

feeling and the desire of each party to improve the life and circumstances of the other.

Secondly we have what I shall refer to as ‘strategic’ (or ‘social’) friendships, represented mainly by Harriot Freke, which are characterised by a lack of respect and sentiment for the other party, and are only in place in order to gain some sort of social footing or to play strategic games against others (these have long been misread by critics as in fact representing romantic friendship). It is these two forms of friendship which are of interest to us now.

As we learned at the beginning of this study, when we are first introduced to Lady Delacour she is heartbroken at the betrayal of her long-term companion Harriot Freke. Lady Delacour had initially mistaken Freke’s strategic friendship for a true, romantic one: “I have not one *real* friend in the world except Harriot Freke” (*Belinda*, p. 21). Before long, however, she learns that Freke has betrayed her in favour of her husband (*Belinda*, p. 55). The fact that it is the villain who chooses her husband over her close female companion suggests a lot about the author’s priorities. Here I believe we find another obvious disparity between Freke and Wollstonecraft, as Edgeworth would have likely been aware of the passionate feelings the latter had for her dear friend Fanny Blood, which were famously highlighted in *Memoirs of the Author of The Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.⁵⁸⁵ Edgeworth has once again subversively aligned herself with Wollstonecraft’s radical thinking. On Freke’s part, she places no emotional value on the concept of friendship. Her attitude (which sums up her idea of female relationships rather succinctly) is “We are the declared enemies of her enemy, so we must be her friends” (*Belinda*, p. 203). This mentality is again demonstrated when she asks Belinda “Why didn’t you make me your friend when you could?” (*Belinda*, p. 283). Lady Delacour confesses to Belinda her past, which is filled with

⁵⁸⁵ Franklin, *A Literary Life*, p. 202.

scandal, injury, and even death, which she committed herself to all at the bequest of Harriet Freke (*Belinda*, p. 54).

Lady Delacour's early confession also signals the beginning of her moving away from strategic relationships towards romantic friendship (though, as with all romance plots, her journey is to be filled with peril). Here she has placed a certain degree of trust in Belinda, gifting her secrets to her. Over the course of the tale Belinda attempts to place her friend into the arms of domesticity, healing her familial strife by talking to Lord Delacour (*Belinda*, p. 138). She even goes so far as to risk her own reputation to save the marriage, by pretending a strange man in the house (a doctor) was with her and not Lady Delacour, proving she would risk all for the domesticity of her romantic friend (*Belinda*, p. 116). We also witness her reunite Lady Delacour with her daughter Helena: upon being asked by Belinda to see her daughter, Delacour exclaims "... I *can* refuse you nothing, my dear" (*Belinda*, p. 261). Helena represents the ultimate goal of domestic ideology: the mothering of the child. The link between romantic friendship and domesticity is proven further still by the fact that when Belinda is separated from Lady Delacour, so is Helena ("... after you left me, I could not have her at home") (*Belinda*, p. 261).

The relationship is certainly not one-sided, however. As well as Belinda fixing Lady Delacour's domestic life, the favour is repaid, as Lady Delacour rescues the seemingly hopeless situation between Belinda Portman and Clarence Hervey by removing all the obstacles which remain between them by the end of the text, ultimately returning support for her companion: "Belinda put her arm within Lady Delacour's, trembling so that she could scarcely stand. Lady Delacour pressed her hand, and was perfectly silent" (*Belinda*, p. 427). Without her intervention, the novel would have ended with Belinda having remained single and all would have been

lost.⁵⁸⁶ Clarence himself - though he does try - is unable to rescue the situation, and so the 'happy ending' is entirely due to the actions of the friend. Their friendship is thus shown to be indispensable to the institution of marriage as well as a source of emotional fulfilment.

The theme of friendship permeates the detail as well as the main plot of the novel. Even essentially 'good' characters behaving poorly towards friends and indulging in petty aggression towards those of the same sex are dealt with harshly. Whenever Lady Delacour is engaged in a form of serious and unhealthy competition with other women, she is physically punished by the author: she is injured by attempting to duel with another woman ("Why, 'tis clear that I was not shot through the head; but it would have been better, a hundred times better for me, if I had; I should have been spared, in this life at least, the torments of the damned.") (*Belinda*, p. 47). She is harmed further still by the young horses she got to pull her carriage in an attempt to out-do Mrs Luttridge, her denial being unearthed by Clarence Hervey: "She is hurt – I am sure she is hurt, though she will not acknowledge it" (*Belinda*, p. 112). Her wrongdoing is compounded by the fact that she obtained the money for them by deceiving Belinda.⁵⁸⁷ Lady Delacour's greatest punishment, however, is of such emotional intensity that it holds physical sway over her. When her jealous accusations force Belinda Portman to leave her company she is initially mocking – yet when Belinda's departure causes the seriousness of the situation to be impacted upon her, she says goodbye "... with a look and tone which struck her ladyship to the

⁵⁸⁶ This point is interpreted somewhat differently by critics such as Katherine Sobba Green, who believes Belinda to find love through 'her own integrity': Katherine Sobba Green, 'The Herione's Blazon and Hardwick's Marriage Act: Commodification for a Novel Market', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 9 (1990) 273-290 (p. 281).

⁵⁸⁷ Greenfield, *PMLA*, p. 216; Ruth Perry, 'Colonizing the Breast: Sexuality and Maternity in Eighteenth-Century England', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 2 (1991) 204-234 (p. 231); Ty, 'Freke in Men's Clothes', in *The Clothes That Wear Us*, ed. by Jessica Mums and Penny Richards, p. 164, all see the breast injury in a different light – the first two see it as a punishment for neglecting her family, the last for deviating from gender norms, though none of these account for the injuries she sustains from the carriage incident.

heart. All her suspicions, all her pride, all her affected gaiety vanished; her presence of mind forsook her, and for some moments she stood motionless and powerless." (*Belinda*, p. 191). We see a similar physical effect upon Belinda's return – "At the sight of Belinda she stopped short; and, totally overpowered, she would have sunk to the floor, had not Miss Portman caught her in her arms ..." (*Belinda*, p. 242).

The climax for romantic friendship – the scene in which it has its ultimate victory – is the scene in which Lady Delacour is reformed. Found at the very heart of the novel, it is where she faces the prospect of her own untimely death and is able to leave damaging strategic friendships behind and concentrate on her love for Belinda, as well as dedicating herself to domesticity. It is this section in which Harriot Freke makes her final appearance, when she arrives to play one last trick on Lady Delacour (by making her believe that she is a ghost) and is caught, being maimed by a trap in the process (*Belinda*, p. 281). Harriot Freke – and the troublesome brand of strategic friendship she represents – is removed from the tale, leaving Lady Delacour and Belinda free to be together untroubled. In this scene we also see a great degree of solidarity between the two women: despite their recent estrangement, we learn that Lady Delacour has made provisions for Belinda when she dies (*Belinda*, p. 273). It is Belinda she chooses to be with her for her surgery – choosing her even above her own husband (reversing Freke's choice of marriage over friendship earlier) (*Belinda*, p. 276). Greatest of all, however, are her declarations towards her dear friend when confronting her own mortality.

Romantic friendship is presented in its finest form when Lady Delacour declares to Belinda – "Your promise was to be with me in my dying moments, and to let me breathe my last in your arms" (*Belinda*, p. 276). This statement exceeds all other sentiment expressed in *Belinda*, certainly none even come close between

members of the opposite sex. It has also been almost universally overlooked by critics.⁵⁸⁸ I find that the emotional intensity is far greater than anything ever expressed to another woman by Freke (whose declarations of love towards other women are almost nonexistent) and cements this central relationship as the most important one to be found in the text. When Lady Delacour is ‘cured’ (or learns of her own good health, whichever way one chooses to interpret it) her passion remains as strong, crying ‘I love you better than anything upon earth’ – again prioritising Belinda Portman above all other individuals (*Belinda*, p. 303). As if more evidence of her feelings were needed, she then pronounces that “[Belinda] has made an impression upon my soul, which never whilst I have life and reason, can be effaced.” (*Belinda*, p. 306).

This scene certainly does not suggest that Edgeworth considered friendship a burden should it be invested in too heavily, as suggested by Moore *et al.* Passion between women is presented in both the mentally and physically healthiest possible context – the reformation of Lady Delacour. Despite this, the influence of romantic friendship on Lady Delacour’s transformation likewise has been long ignored.⁵⁸⁹ The text itself underlines Belinda Portman’s role, however – “Nothing could be more delightful to Miss Portman than thus to feel herself the object at once of esteem, affection, and respect; to see that she had not only been the means of saving her friend’s life, but that the influence she had obtained over her mind was likely to be so permanently beneficial both to her and to her family” (*Belinda*, p. 292). Romantic

⁵⁸⁸ With the sole exception of Rosenberg, who uses it to demonstrate the gravity of Lady Delacour’s situation regarding her health, rather than her love for Belinda: Jordana Rosenberg, ‘The Bosom of the Bourgeoisie: Edgeworth’s *Belinda*’, *ELH*, 70 (2003) 575-596 (p. 581).

⁵⁸⁹ Kirkpatrick believes it is purely down to Lady Delacour’s retiring from the public scene: ‘Limits of Female Liberalism’ in *Jane Austen and Mary Shelley and Their Sisters*, ed. by Dabundo, p. 77; Douthwaite to Belinda’s sage advice rather than emotional sentiment: Douthwaite, *The Wild Girl*, p. 184; whilst Gonda and the Atkinsons do acknowledge that friendship contributes to her rehabilitation: Gonda, *Reading Daughter’s Fictions*, p. 215; Colin and Jo Atkinson, ‘Women’s Rights’, p. 99 - but that’s it – it merely contributes, rather than instigating it or indeed being the emotional centre of the scene and *Belinda* as a whole.

friendship is inextricably tied here to domestic tranquillity and Lady Delacour's reformation.

Montwieler questions the role of these friendships, arguing Lady Delacour's reformation to be either down to the women around her or patriarchal authority – "... either the doctor brings Lady Delacour back into the fold of conventional femininity (as the surface reading of the text would allow, and as Lady Delacour herself suggests), or, Lady Delacour realizes with the help of Freke and some of the other female characters that conventional femininity is another act, and one that she, too, can perform."⁵⁹⁰ Neither of these alternatives suggests the notion that the pure and honest friendship with her beloved Belinda contributed to her reform – quite the opposite, as if women were to be involved, then she would be merely (and consciously) acting a part. Montwieler even suggests the friendship itself can be assumed – "... we might ask whether Lady Delacour actually comes to realize that her friend's affection simply does not matter – that she can adopt such a mask as well, and that if she does, she, too, will be thought virtuous."⁵⁹¹

Kavanagh in 1863 assumed a lack of passion in this text. Of Edgeworth, she believed that "In its mysterious, involuntary nature she refused to believe. Feeling and passion she shunned as dangerous to the moral equilibrium."⁵⁹² Failing to find enough examples of passionate love between men and women in the text, Kavanagh overlooked the love between the same-sex. Lacking strong heterosexual passion, the characters appeared dull and lifeless to her, to the extent that even their quirks and follies became invisible – "The just man, we are told, sins seven times a day, but Miss

⁵⁹⁰ Montwieler, 'Reading Disease', p. 358.

⁵⁹¹ Montwieler, 'Reading Disease', p. 359.

⁵⁹² Julia Kavanagh, *English Women of Letters: Biographical Sketches*, 2 vols., (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1863), II, p. 118.

Edgeworth's just heroes and villains never fall."⁵⁹³ Actually, the mistakes and often naked greed of the characters are numerous – indeed, this charge can only be levied at Belinda Portman herself. Kavanagh's strongest accusation against the novel however, came in her assertion that "The absence of all strong feeling or emotion contributes to our sense of unreality."⁵⁹⁴ In failing to find any 'strong feeling or emotion', Kavanagh must have overlooked Lady Delacour's expressions towards Belinda entirely. Greenfield doesn't mention Lady Delacour's central declaration either, when she too suggests that her relationship with Harriet Freke contained the greatest degree of passion - "Lady Delacour, who received a breast injury while engaging in ambiguous relations with another woman, turns to colonial concerns only after her homoerotic inclinations are dampened."⁵⁹⁵

Elle Crowell's reading in 2004 sets itself up to be an insight into healthy female friendship in the novel by evoking the Ladies of Llangollen.⁵⁹⁶ Like Moore, however, Crowell considers the relationships shared with Harriet Freke to be the representatives of romantic friendship, rather than the stable and loving relationship Belinda and Lady Delacour have successfully established by the end of the novel.⁵⁹⁷ Freke represents the classic desire of such close friends to cohabit as she "... attempts to elope with no fewer than three separate upper-class ladies."⁵⁹⁸ The suggestion that Freke represents such relationships is let down, of course, by the fact that she ultimately chooses her marital relationship above all others, betraying Lady Delacour. It would be hard to imagine either Eleanor Butler or Sarah Ponsonby committing such an act, whilst Freke's intrinsic link to fashionable society also contrasts with the

⁵⁹³ Kavanagh, *English Women of Letters*, II, p. 135.

⁵⁹⁴ Kavanagh, *English Women of Letters*, II, p. 135.

⁵⁹⁵ Greenfield, 'Abroad and at Home', p. 216.

⁵⁹⁶ Crowell, 'Ghosting the Llangollen Ladies', p. 204.

⁵⁹⁷ Crowell, 'Ghosting the Llangollen Ladies', p. 214.

⁵⁹⁸ Crowell, 'Ghosting the Llangollen Ladies', p. 214.

seclusion sought by the Ladies of Llangollen. Even so, Freke has been believed to represent romantic friendship, rather than Lady Delacour and Belinda.

As was referred to earlier, Elizabeth Johnston wrote on female rivalry, stating it to be the main focus of the text, as a disruptive and negative force to both society and female friendship.⁵⁹⁹ Though Johnston does not share Moore and Jansen's perspective that Edgeworth believed intense female friendship to be detrimental, she does share their viewpoint that it is incompatible with heteronormativity.⁶⁰⁰ Her argument centres around the belief that the society of the text encourages women to turn against one another, then using this as a basis for friendship – "The relationships, based on a shared hatred of another woman, testify to the oppressive and frustrating conditions of female friendship within a masculine economy."⁶⁰¹ However, Johnston's argument that women's friendships are based on hatred for another women is contradicted by both Lady Delacour's reluctance to speak ill of Freke even after her betrayal – "Of her character and history you shall hear nothing but what is necessary for my own justification", and Belinda Portman's refusal to speak ill of Lady Delacour upon their separation.⁶⁰² Her argument that *Belinda*'s female friendships are oppressed by masculinity is also called into question by the support of friendship by many men in the text.

Clarence, Dr. X, and Male Friendship

Critics have always focused on the novel's portrayal of female friendships, whilst in fact Edgeworth demonstrates male friendships to be of almost equal

⁵⁹⁹ Johnston, 'Competing Fictions', p. 212.

⁶⁰⁰ Johnston, 'Competing Fictions', p. 213.

⁶⁰¹ Johnston, 'Competing Fictions', p. 216.

⁶⁰² On Freke see: Edgeworth, *Belinda*, III, p. 35. On Belinda's loyalty to Delacour see: p. 215.

importance. Though the men of the text underestimate the relationships between the women (Clarence Hervey and his friends assume they can insult Belinda Portman to Lady Delacour's face), they too have their own counterparts representing different examples of friendship.⁶⁰³ Like Lady Delacour, Clarence is betrayed by his 'strategic friends' - his old friends are shown to be useless as they leave him to drown, which greatly upsets him - "Clarence Hervey, who had very quick feelings, was extremely hurt by the indifference which his dear friends had shown when his life was in danger ..." (*Belinda*, p. 83). It is through being rescued by Mr Percival that Clarence discovers true friendship – not only with him, but, more importantly, with Dr X, who administers to him after his accident. Dr X, with Belinda, is one of the two characters in the text who are never shown to be foolish and who always have impeccable moral credentials. When Sir Philip attempts to force Clarence to choose between his old, superficial friendships and his new, meaningful one the choice is clear – "I can never give up Dr X____'s friendship – I would sooner be black-balled by every club in London ... I have felt the difference between real friends and fashionable acquaintance. Give up Dr X____ ! Never! Never!" (*Belinda*, p. 104). As with Lady Delacour in addressing her friend, there is no opposite-sex relationship which is defended with such conviction.

Clarence, like Delacour, has had to endure his physical punishment for making poor friendship choices. Both the breast injury of the latter and the damage to the lungs of the former place their injuries within the bosom, from which their passions are seen to emanate.⁶⁰⁴ Though Dr X gets relatively little attention in the text (indeed,

⁶⁰³ On the insults to Lady Delacour see: Edgeworth, *Belinda*, III, p. 17.

⁶⁰⁴ Regarding Clarence, Ty sees him as far more balanced and secure than the women – "... unlike Lady Delacour or Harriet Freke, his use of costume and disguise does not mask a deep-seated problem or mean spirit.": Ty, 'Freke in Men's Clothes', in *The Clothes That Wear Us*, ed. by Mums and Richards, p. 162. Here I would disagree – it is true that Clarence does not hide a 'mean spirit', but he

he leaves town for a while though even this is as a result of him being a good friend) his friendship with Clarence strongly mirrors that of Lady Delacour and Belinda. Firstly both Clarence and Lady Delacour learn a very painful lesson about poor friendship choices.⁶⁰⁵ Secondly, aside from both Clarence and Lady Delacour very forcefully espousing their feelings for their companions, Dr X, like both women, wishes to improve the life of his friend, urging him to do more with his life (*Belinda*, p. 96). The very fact that, though Clarence takes his wisdom seriously, little becomes of it, means that this conversation is not a plot device, but rather serves to demonstrate that – for both men and women – affectionate, unselfish friendship can help us elevate our moral life.

Romantic Friendship; the Readings and the Misreadings of 'Belinda'

Though those such as Johnston do view the relationships between women to be the primary focus of the novel (whilst overlooking those between men), they tend to assume heteronormativity. Johnston maintains that Lady Delacour only reveals her feelings for Belinda when she is seen as a rival, yet fails to mention Lady Delacour's desires towards Belinda at the time of her 'healing'.⁶⁰⁶ However, whilst heterosexual and homosocial relationships are assumed to be mutually exclusive in both Moore and Johnston's pieces, Moore argues that the former impinges upon the latter, whereas Johnston's position is the reverse. I hope to have called into question this perceived incompatibility either way, as from the perspective of Lady Delacour, with Belinda

is highly comparable to Lady Delacour by the misery caused by his choice in strategic friends – certainly a problem.

⁶⁰⁵ G. J. Barker-Benfield however, believes Clarence's unhappy situation was due to the all-male environment, rather than the friendships themselves: *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) p. 244.

⁶⁰⁶ Johnston, 'Competing Fictions', p. 222.

Portman comes a happy husband and a child – without Belinda Portman she is left childless and wedded to a drunk.⁶⁰⁷

Though it has always been recognised that Edgeworth was experimenting with the genre of the novel, none seem to have seriously focused on her subversion of the courtship framework, transforming it into a de-facto ‘friendship novel’, which views friendship as stable and healthy, utterly conducive to a happy domestic life. Green doesn’t consider the possibility that the heterosexual lovers in the novel may not be the central focus when she states, “Edgeworth’s apparent point … in *Belinda*, is to illustrate the kind of courtship that leads to domestic happiness. She admits that from her audience’s perspective her lovers may be dull”.⁶⁰⁸ Green’s assumption that heterosexual pairings are of primary importance is based largely on her expectations of the genre. In fact, though overtly she has written a tale on courtship, it was not Edgeworth’s intention to make heterosexual love the emotional centre of *Belinda*. Her real interest and passion lay with her two female stars – especially Lady Delacour, whose passionate love for her friend starkly contrasts the coldness Belinda shows her suitors.

As we have seen, it is a common argument that Lady Delacour’s problems arise from her being a poor wife and mother.⁶⁰⁹ Again this is not entirely wrong, but

⁶⁰⁷ Alan Richardson’s 1994 analysis of the text certainly does not recognise romantic friendship – in its absence, his work attempts to understand the prominent female relationships through the structure of the traditional family: as Belinda is younger than the rest of the women (even if the age difference doesn’t even amount to a generation) then they must be serving as ‘maternal substitutes’ which Belinda needs having been removed from the care of her aunt: *Literature, Education, and Romanticism: Reading as Social Practice, 1780-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) p. 190. Whilst this does certainly posit an interesting reading (and it should be noted that many romantic friendships were sometimes compared to familial relations, even by the women themselves) this removes a considerable degree of agency from the character of Belinda Portman in favour of the other characters. The relationships between the women are far more equal than this ‘maternal’ reading accounts for – both Belinda and Lady Delacour act as givers of sage advice to one another at different points in the text – and it would be unusual for a daughter to rescue her own mother’s marriage.

⁶⁰⁸ Green, *The Courtship Novel*, p. 152.

⁶⁰⁹ This point is well demonstrated by Kowaleski-Wallace’s reading of *Belinda* as a novel on patriarchal domesticity: Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Their Fathers’ Daughters: Hannah More, Maria Edgeworth, and Patriarchal Complicity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 110.

her domestic troubles are a symptom of her turmoil, not a cause. The cause itself is underlined by Edgeworth herself yet again, this time through the continually wise (and critically overlooked) Margaret Delacour – “‘I wish’, said the old lady, ‘for her own sake, for the sake of her family, and for the sake of her reputation, that my Lady Delacour had fewer admirers and more friends’” (*Belinda*, p. 90). Here we see the distinction made between the different forms of friendship in a statement little regarded by readers over the years.⁶¹⁰ There is certainly little indication that the individuals of *Belinda* use friendships as a substitute for the traditional family: although Lady Delacour briefly indicates so in the earlier stages of the text, this is likely a response to her rejection and her later actions more than contradict it. Harriet Freke herself leaves a void which is only filled by Belinda, to whom Lady Delacour dedicates herself upon losing Freke as a friend (her maid Marriot, being of unequal social status, could never quite equal either of the ladies as a companion). Should close female friendships have been a substitute for domesticity, Lady Delacour would not have bound herself to Belinda after she has been united with her daughter, as we saw earlier. Right to the very end of the novel Lady Delacour is inseparable from Belinda – in fact, their relationship is at its most strained when the former’s family life is in danger.

I would assert that in the nineteenth century a fundamental misreading of the text as a manners/ courtship novel alone by Edgeworth’s contemporaries disregarded the most important aspect of the tale, and contributed to the lukewarm critical reaction upon its publication. The novel’s ambiguities of genre were noticed immediately following its release: the *Critical Review* in February of 1802 asserted it was for the reader rather than the author to decide whether a work was a novel or a ‘moral tale’ –

⁶¹⁰ Kowleski-Wallace also argues that “Engagement with Harriet Freke is … a desperate attempt to fill the void left by Lady Delacour’s failed attempt at maternity.”: *Their Fathers’ Daughters*, p. 123.

“Let a novelist publish his work under the title that best befits it; and the public will determine where is its proper classification.”⁶¹¹ The *Critical Review* seemingly overlooked Lady Delacour’s direct reference to the genre at the end of the text. The text itself they considered somewhat immoral and containing much ‘folly’, even criticising the use of different dialects, which was deemed ‘impertinent’.⁶¹² The paper assumed that such indefensible writing was a result of the poor influence of those around her, stating, “In a word, we are sorry to see Miss Edgeworth wasting so much of her time, as she must have done, in the company of those from whom she learned it.”⁶¹³ The review harshly concluded that Maria Edgeworth was not meant for novel writing.⁶¹⁴ *Monthly Magazine* in July 1802 concurred, though they relented a little and suggested that perhaps their disappointment was due to the high expectations the author commanded.⁶¹⁵ The *British Critic* had also found it disappointing, even ‘ridiculous’.⁶¹⁶

Edgeworth need not have completely despaired, however, as contemporary reviews were not wholly negative. *Flowers of Literature* gave a short but positive response – “This novel, though deficient perhaps in the contrivance, with respect to the plot, and in the ingenuity with respect to catastrophe, is remarkable for its faithful delineation of living manners.”⁶¹⁷ The *Monthly Review* in 1802 considered the central character of Belinda Portman to be bland and uninspiring, spoiling both the courtship and moral elements to the novel by being able to choose so freely between suitors (allowing us the possibility that perhaps these two elements were not her real

⁶¹¹ *Critical Review*, 34 (February 1802), 235-37.

⁶¹² *Critical Review*, 235-37.

⁶¹³ *Critical Review*, 235-37.

⁶¹⁴ *Critical Review*, 235-37.

⁶¹⁵ *Monthly Magazine*, 13 (20th July 1802), p. 659.

⁶¹⁶ *British Critic*, 18 (July 1801), p. 85.

⁶¹⁷ *Flowers of Literature*, 1 (1801-02), p. 85.

focus).⁶¹⁸ Both Lady Delacour and Clarence are suggested to be appealing characters, however, as is the admirable Dr. X.⁶¹⁹

Four years after the release of the third edition of *Belinda, Analectic Magazine* (in 1814) gave a more positive response, granting Edgeworth a ‘manly understanding’ of the world around her.⁶²⁰ They recognised the novel as anti-sentimental and its author greatly rational as the central characters are apparently always rather calm.⁶²¹ *The Knickerbocker* in 1833 chose to focus on the marriage of Lady Delacour, once again relegating Belinda Portman.⁶²² In 1863, now firmly in the Victorian Period, Julia Kavanagh reopened the ‘novel’ debate, suggesting it to actually be somewhere in between a novel and a ‘moral tale’: “[Edgeworth] wrote to improve [her] readers, not by actual scientific knowledge, but by advice, by lessons kind, delicate, and persuasive.”⁶²³ By 1871, the events of the text had truly become scandalous to some, the reaction of a highly moralistic society to the more lax Regency period being apparent in William Forsyth’s criticism. He was horrified by the female duel which takes place and the foul language present: “... studded with oaths – and as such would be thought grossly improbable, if not impossible, now.”⁶²⁴ Though of course the Victorians had not succeeded in eradicating swearing, he concluded that “... morality and good manners were at a very low ebb in fashionable life.”⁶²⁵

The less favourable reviews are in some sense understandable: as a moral tale it is confusing and muddied, as a courtship novel it is limp, yet as a story on romantic friendship it is powerful and affirming, giving exceptionally clear guideline as to what

⁶¹⁸ *Monthly Review*, 37 (April 1802), 368-74.

⁶¹⁹ *Monthly Review*, 368-74.

⁶²⁰ *Analectic Magazine: Comprising Original Reviews*, 1814, 1-19 (p. 2).

⁶²¹ *Analectic Magazine*, p. 15.

⁶²² *The Knickerbocker: Or, New-York Monthly Magazine* (1833) 230-31.

⁶²³ On the text as a ‘moral tale’: Kavanagh, *English Women of Letters*, p. 138. On the quote: p. 115.

⁶²⁴ William Forsyth, *The Novels and Novelists of the Eighteenth Century*, (London: John Murray, 1871), p. 328.

⁶²⁵ Forsyth, *Novels and Novelists*, p. 328.

constitutes positive and negative same-sex relationships. Even in its own time the fiery declarations of Lady Delacour to Belinda Portman were overlooked, *Analectic Magazine*'s proclamation that the characters were always 'calm' seems almost ludicrously inappropriate in the context of such passionate love. Yet there is the possibility that her subversion in fact was recognised. Her publisher was known to be controversial and her novel may have directed an unease in the sentiments of her reviewers, fearful of sedition and female rebellion. The most polite recourse would be to ignore such elements, gently rebuking *Belinda* as a whole. In this light, perhaps it should come as no surprise that we are incorrectly informed in *English Women of Letters* that the text "... ends happily with the marriage of Miss Portman and Clarence Hervey ..." when in fact it does not, instead ending merely upon their reunification and as a result bucking the trend of the courtship genre.⁶²⁶ There is no grand wedding to reaffirm the central plot of male-female romance here – instead we find the hearty self-congratulations of Lady Delacour who has successfully rescued the friend she loves so dearly.

Despite her positive viewpoints on marriage, Edgeworth drew on the tradition of romantic friendship and proclaimed it as the most morally important type of relationship; she showed that passion and pleasure must be intrinsic to it. Without these it is not a true friendship, but a Frekeish arrangement based on selfish gain. Belinda's only desires are towards her female companion: whilst she can freely choose between either of her two suitors, she can never replace Lady Delacour – not even with Lady Anne Percival. When one of her suitors makes a mistake she instantly rebuffs him, yet even when Lady Delacour risks her reputation and attacks her in a jealous rage Belinda is instantly forgiving. Miss Portman is far from

⁶²⁶ Kavanagh, *English Women of Letters*, p. 149.

passionless, despite what critics have suggested – her sentiments are merely directed in a different direction from where *Belinda*'s genre would traditionally point us to look. Not daring to follow the path of *Mary: A Fiction*, Edgeworth instead entered the courtship genre and once inside managed to present us her own view of romantic friendship in its strongest colours. Behind every successful person is a loving friend, which both men and women must put above even their own lovers and children – as Lady Delacour states: “I hope friendship, though akin to love, is of a more robust constitution, else what would become of me?” (*Belinda*, p. 284).

Queer Friendship and the Novel

Mary Wollstonecraft was to carry the Cult of Friendship over to the new century and *Mary: A Fiction* presents a strong, idealistic argument for friendship over traditional marriage. Her untimely death, however, did more than cut short her next fiction-based treatise on marriage and friendship, *Maria*. Godwin's publishing the details of her personal life in *Memoirs*, however well-intentioned, destroyed Wollstonecraft's reputation, leaving it tarnished for over a century.⁶²⁷ At the same time the catastrophic consequences of the French Revolution, and the new conservatism brought out in British society as a result, put paid to any serious regard for her social and political viewpoints - her vindication of friendship included.

This left those wishing to express the positive fulfilment of friendship with little choice – they had to distance themselves from social radicals, in particular Wollstonecraft herself. Though it often presented a pessimistic perspective on individual relationships, Wollstonecraft's first novel suggested friendship to be the

⁶²⁷ Though as we have seen some leapt to her defence – notably Anna Seward.

basis for social egalitarianism, albeit through a queer and marginalised form of love.

A short work, *Mary: A Fiction* nevertheless challenged social convention and prompted literary response. *Belinda* does continue the friendship tradition, but not the queer style of friendship outlined in this thesis – Edgeworth abandoned any anti-marriage principles associated with platonic love, instead seeking to legitimise same-sex relationships by wedging them to the ideal of the nuclear family. Even in doing so it had to be under the guise of writing a ‘courtship novel’: despite sharing a publisher, the days of *Mary: A Fiction*, published only a dozen years beforehand, were long over. The ideal expressed by Gray, Seward and Wollstonecraft had seriously waned and was not about to be expressed by as timid a figure as Edgeworth. That would require an individual unafraid of expressing revolutionary sentiment – perhaps he who had done so much to damage Wollstonecraft’s reputation in the first place: William Godwin. Godwin would undertake a complete rewrite of *Mary: A Fiction*, building upon the portrayal of friendship as an egalitarian method of eradicating social boundaries such as those of gender, class and income. This time, however, such friendships would be presented from a marginalised masculine perspective.

CHAPTER FOUR

REWRITING WOLLSTONECRAFT: WILLIAM GODWIN'S *FLEETWOOD*

*We are convinced, that Mr. Godwin entertains as little respect for marriage, as ever he did, at any time of his life.*⁶²⁸

The Anti-Jacobin Review's verdict on William Godwin's 1805 novel *Fleetwood* denied he had softened his anarchist views of 1793 comparing friendship favourably with marriage even after twice entering the bonds of matrimony. This chapter will argue that – for the most part – they were right. Despite the failure of the French Revolution and ever-increasing social stigmatisation of same-sex bonds, *Fleetwood* presents us with a radical social commentary on love. Though the novel has received relatively little attention since its publication, it provides us with a valuable insight into early-nineteenth century friendship and marriage.⁶²⁹

Fleetwood was a deliberate social commentary by Godwin, a fictionalised – yet updated – version of his *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793). Like his late wife Mary Wollstonecraft, Godwin was unafraid to adapt his political theories to

⁶²⁸ *The Anti-Jacobin Review*, 21 (August 1805), 337-358.

⁶²⁹ William Godwin, *Fleetwood, Or the New Man of Feeling* (Whitefish: Kessinger, 2004). Subsequent references will be given in parentheses unless further detail is needed. Many of those referencing the novel note the lack of attention it has received, suggesting its reputation as a poor novel to have been the cause: B. Sprague Allen's short commentary on sentimentalism in *Fleetwood* suggests that when it has not been ignored entirely it has been treated with 'rather flippant indifference': 'William Godwin as a Sentimentalist', *PMLA*, 33 (1918) pp. 1 – 29 (p.16). Don Locke, in his 1980 text, also criticises the novel: suggesting that the book 'is surely one of Godwin's worst': *A Fantasy of Reason: The Life and Thought of William Godwin* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), p. 211. More recently Adam Rounce expresses a similar sentiment in 'William Godwin: The Novel, Philosophy, and History', *History of European Ideas*, 33 (2007), 1-8 (p. 2). Gary Handwerk suggests that conservative political attitudes are relevant: "... because literary history has often relied upon evaluative criteria that fit Godwin's fictional practice poorly, it has tended to reinforce the marginalizing of his work accomplished by the anti-Jacobin reaction in England.": 'Of Caleb's Guilt and Godwin's Truth: Ideology and Ethics in *Caleb Williams*', *ELH*, 60 (1993), 939-960 (p. 939). Dean Hughes also implies that this precedent was established by the Victorians: *Romance and Psychological Realism in Godwin's Novels* (Manchester: Ayer Publishing, 1980), p. 44.

works of prose fiction.⁶³⁰ As a political polemic it maintains the criticism of traditional family lineage and social patronage present in his non-fiction, yet it reverses his former attitudes regarding sensibility and one-to-one relationships. Whereas twelve years beforehand Godwin had chastised individualised love, condemning it in favour of communal solidarity, through *Fleetwood* personal bonds are now idealised. Though this may initially appear to be symptomatic of a growing Romanticism and conservatism in the author (and was likely a result of a post-revolutionary retreat from mainstream society), his novel was to prove no less revolutionary than his treatise: when Godwin champions intimate love, he does so

⁶³⁰ This has been recognised by some scholars: *Fleetwood* is briefly referenced by Isaac Kamnick's article on Godwin's anarchism, pointing out the anti-capitalist commentary of the mill scenes: 'On Anarchism and the Real World: William Godwin and Radical England', *The American Political Science Review*, 66 (1972), 114-128 (p. 120). The same point was later made with a brief reference by Ivanka Kovačević: Ivanka Kovačević, *Fact In Fiction: English Literature and the Industrial Scene* (Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1975), p. 101. The exploitation of child labour is referenced by Allene Gregory: *The French Revolution and the English novel* (London: Read Books, 2009), p. 106. It is also referenced (again briefly) by P. A. Clemit, in her article on the influence of Godwin on Shelley's *Frankenstein*, suggesting both works to be a commentary on Rousseau: '*Frankenstein, Matilda*, and the legacies of Godwin and Wollstonecraft', in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley*, ed. by Esther Schor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p 33. This theme is similarly picked up by that same year in Ian Ward, 'A Man of Feelings: William Godwin's Romantic Embrace', *Law and Literature*, 17 (2003) 21-46. Margaret Fearn also examines Rousseau's influence on Godwin's works (though *Fleetwood* is not mentioned): 'William Godwin and the "Wilds of Literature"', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 29 (1981), 247-257. Gary Handwerk does likewise: 'Mapping Misogyny: Godwin's *Fleetwood* and the Staging of Rousseauian Education', *Studies in Romanticism*, 41 (2002) 375-398. P. N. Furbank examines the novel (amongst Godwin's others) as an examples of psychological obsession: 'Godwin's Novels', *Essays in Criticism*, (1955), 214-228 (p. 220). Grace Pollock's review of the 2000 reprint of the novel suggests it to be a critique of overemphasised masculinity: 'Review of: William Godwin, *Fleetwood*', *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 15 (2003) 212-214. Mona Scheuermann also focuses on Fleetwood's mental state in her study of Godwin's later novels in 'The Study of Mind: The Later Novels of William Godwin', *Forums for Modern Language Studies Edinburgh*, 19 (1983), 16-30 and *Social Protest in the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (Columbus: Ohio States University Press, 1985), p. 121. Scheuermann also briefly references the novel in her book on female economies: *Her Bread to Earn: Women, Money and Society from Defoe to Austen* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1993), p. 271. Carol J. Adams briefly quotes on the novel in her feminist-vegetarian text: *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (New York: Continuum International, 2006), p. 110. *Fleetwood* is also examined in Burton Ralph Pollin's *Education and Enlightenment in the Works of William Godwin* (New York: Los Americas Publishing Company, 1962). Steven Bruhm has written one of the few articles dedicated exclusively to *Fleetwood*, investigating the portrayal of torture in the text: 'William Godwin's *Fleetwood*: The Epistemology of the Tortured Body', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 16 (1992), 25-43. Peter H. Marshall makes a short summary of the novel in his biography of Godwin, suggesting elements of it to in fact to be autobiographical: *William Godwin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 261. Smith's biography also makes a quick reference to *Fleetwood*: Edward Smith and others, *William Godwin* (New York: Twayne Publishers Inc., 1965), p. 96.

regardless of gender, with both same-sex romantic friendship and opposite-sex marriage being presented as equally viable forms of love.

Yet Fleetwood is not simply an updated version of *Political Justice*. It is also an attempt to rewrite a particular work of his late wife's (which was explored in the third chapter to this thesis): *Mary: A Fiction*. This chapter argues that the first half of *Fleetwood* is devoted to this reworking of Wollstonecraft's early novel, forming a commentary on the virtue – and decline – of same-sex romantic friendship.⁶³¹ As with the earlier tale, altruism is utterly essential to individual happiness, with virtue a necessity to love. Despite being written from a masculine perspective, Godwin sets no distinction on gender in same-sex bonds and, as we shall see, the plot carefully and deliberately mirrors that of *Mary: A Fiction*. The second half of Godwin's novel forms a commentary on the second of Wollstonecraft's novels: the unfinished *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman* which he had edited and published after her death. This novel itself had constituted a rewriting of *Mary, A Fiction*. Like *Maria*, this section of *Fleetwood* depicts the potential dangers of marriage, as well as its more utopian manifestations.⁶³² Like Wollstonecraft, Godwin is keen to emphasise the importance

⁶³¹ No other critic has made this point although A. A. Markley has written on homosocial desire within the novel, which we shall examine further later in the chapter: “The Success of Gentleness”: Homosocial Desire and the Homosexual Personality in the Novels of William Godwin’, *Queer Romanticism*, 36-37 (2004) <<http://www.erudit.org/revue/ron/2004/v/n36-37/011139ar.html>> [accessed 23rd March 2010] (39 paragraphs). William D. Brewer also focuses on same-sex relationships in the novel, and his position will be examined more fully: ‘Male Rivalry and Friendship in the Novels of William Godwin’, in *Mapping Male Sexuality: Nineteenth Century England*, Jay Losey and William D. Brewer, eds. (London: Associated University Presses, 2000), p. 49.

⁶³² On the theme of marriage, Rodway's introduction to a collection of Godwin's works briefly references Godwin's changing views as evident in the novel, a subject which will be important in the latter half of this chapter: A. E. Rodway, ed., *Godwin and the Age of Transition* (London: George E. Harrap, 1952). John P. Clark does the same in his book on Godwin's anarchism: *The Philosophical Anarchism of William Godwin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 119. David Fleisher also uses the novel to suggest the same point in *William Godwin: A Study in Liberalism* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1951), p. 104. J. Tysdahl devotes a chapter to the text, in which he investigates the novel's commentary of sensibility (which will be examined throughout this chapter) and suggests it to be a Jacobin novel: *William Godwin as Novelist* (London: The Athlone Press, 1981). Julie A. Carlson's commentary on *Fleetwood* and marriage will be focused upon in the second half of this chapter: *England's First Family of Writers: Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin, Mary Shelley* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007).

of equality in love, with the consequences of the dominance of either party proving severe. Whereas Maria fell victim to the socially-condoned abuse of a tyrannical husband, so Fleetwood's wife Mary must suffer the consequences of her overbearing and potentially violent spouse. Ultimately, it is same-sex friendship which provides the potential 'happy ending' to both texts, as we shall examine further in this chapter.⁶³³

As *The Anti-Jacobin Review* suggested, Godwin's novel attempts to queer traditional notions of social bonds, presenting altruism and affection as being of greater importance than familial loyalty. Unlike the previous works examined in this thesis, *Fleetwood* ties love to wider issues of social justice: under a system of virtue in which blood ties are largely irrelevant, corruption, poverty and exploitation can be eradicated. Godwin incorporates friendship into a utopic social model.

FLEETWOOD PART ONE: THE SEQUEL TO MARY: A FICTION

Fleetwood, Mary and Youth

Fleetwood may not have been based directly on Godwin's own life, yet in his preface he roots the tale in reality, suggesting it to be a unique amalgamation of real, lived experiences: "Multitudes of readers have themselves passed through the very incidents I relate; but, for the most part, no work has hitherto recorded them."⁶³⁴ However, Godwin's introduction does not present the whole truth – his novel follows an account which did in fact make it into print: Mary Wollstonecraft's fictionalised

⁶³³ I use the qualifier 'potential' due to the unfinished status of Wollstonecraft's novel.

⁶³⁴ Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 4. Handwerk compares Godwin's preface to Wollstonecraft's *Maria*: 'Of Caleb's Guilt', p. 955. Furbank comments on Godwin's aim as stated in the preface, suggesting that he succeeds in his aim: 'Godwin's Novels', p. 223.

autobiography, *Mary: A Fiction*. The first half of *Fleetwood* sees Godwin's attempt to marry Wollstonecraft's work with his own *Political Justice*, giving us wider social insights which are missing from *Mary: A Fiction*: for Godwin the debate is inextricably tied to class and social hierarchies – blood ties, and even paternity, are only of crucial importance for aristocratic and property-owning social models.⁶³⁵

Fleetwood opens in a very similar manner to Wollstonecraft's *Mary: A Fiction*, and Casimir Fleetwood's upbringing is suspiciously similar to that of the earlier protagonist: he grows up in a pastoral Welsh environment in which parental neglect and a profound love of isolation and veneration for nature dominate.⁶³⁶ Where Mary becomes a de-facto pantheist through her experiences, Fleetwood is introduced to the notions of pantheism and religious universalism through his tutor.⁶³⁷ Through the narratives of both texts we learn that, crucially, both Mary and Fleetwood have developed an inborn tendency to altruism, and where Mary sought to

⁶³⁵ Godwin opens the second volume of *Political Justice* with arguments against hereditary distinction, setting the tone for the entire work: William Godwin, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, and its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness*, 2 vols (Dublin: Luke White, 1793) II, p. 19. Subsequent references will be given in parentheses unless further detail is needed. Godwin strongly states the needs for individuals to succeed on their own merits rather than their status at birth: "Of all the principles of justice there is none so material to the moral rectitude of mankind as this, that no man can be distinguished but by his personal merit.": p. 27. This could also be read as an egalitarian statement against forms of religious and racial discrimination. Such a system would lead to an increase in personal virtue (which will be explored in greater detail later in this chapter): "Mankind will never be in an eminent degree virtuous and happy, till each man shall possess that portion of distinction and no more, to which he is entitled by his personal merits.": p. 31. These views are analysed in further detail by Isaac Kamnick, who suggests that Godwin founded the modern anarchist movement: 'On Anarchism', p. 114. Kamnick suggests Godwin to have been staunchly anti-technology and the current economic model: "The inequality and injustice of this economic system would disappear in Godwin's simple anarchist society. The factory, taxation of the poor ... all these would be replaced simply and magically in the transition to a frugal agrarian economy.": p. 120.

⁶³⁶ For both Mary and Fleetwood, it is the rural setting which gives them a love of nature, and being free from social norms are able to avoid being educated amongst their peers and attending church on a regular basis. Fleetwood continually idealises the divinity of nature in the opening scenes to the text: Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 6. Fleetwood, like Mary, forms a strong love of animals, and detests hunting: "I could not with patience regard torture, anguish, and death, as the sources of my amusement.": p. 14. Both characters have a strong sense of compassion, which is first demonstrated toward animals, and later toward people.

⁶³⁷ Despite the narrator's not taking the tutor too seriously, he is presented as a kind and intelligent individual, one whose ideals are sympathetic: Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 9. The narrator's dislike of religion, however, is demonstrated later in the novel, when he states: "If I could be worthless enough to pray.": p. 56. The religious attitudes in this stage of the novel are briefly characterised by Pollin, with little comment: *Education and Enlightenment*, p. 227.

offer assistance to her impoverished friend's family, Fleetwood saves the life of an impoverished (and idealised) peasant. Like Mary he also helps with his family's financial circumstances, and it is his first emotional bond in the novel.⁶³⁸

It is through Fleetwood's love of the peasant family that we find the first instance of Godwin's radical agenda, for which altruism forms a strong basis.⁶³⁹ In saving the life of the peasant he is accepted into his family unit, which not only forms an important emotional tie but which by the end of the novel saves his own life in return. The act also mirrors Mary's saving of Ann's family (though whilst Mary's act resulted in romantic friendship, it takes longer for Fleetwood to develop the same). It is through the opening scenes of the novel that we can see a shared philosophy between Godwin and Wollstonecraft – that the key element to friendship and healthy emotional bonds is altruism. From the very outset of both novels the central characters seek bonds which are strongly reminiscent of those described in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.⁶⁴⁰ Both authors sought to establish the virtuous natures of their eponymous protagonists early on, in order to render them capable of experiencing true friendship (which we shall focus on further into this chapter).⁶⁴¹

Despite their altruistic natures, both Fleetwood and Mary's early isolation results in a fear and disdain for wider society, each spending a great deal of time alone amongst nature. It was in such a state that Mary developed her unconventional religious beliefs:

Neglected in every respect, and left to the operations of her own mind, she considered every thing that came under her inspection, and learned to think.

⁶³⁸ Fleetwood as narrator states: "I saw them often; I loved them much.": Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 14.

⁶³⁹ Godwin's views on altruism will be explored later in this chapter.

⁶⁴⁰ Detailed in the introduction to this thesis.

⁶⁴¹ As such both Godwin and Wollstonecraft echo Anna Seward. As we have seen in the second chapter to this thesis, Anna Seward made very clear her views that friendship was not something anybody could experience, but required a certain type of character.

She had heard of a separate state, and that angels sometimes visited this earth. She would sit in a thick wood in the park, and talk to them ...⁶⁴²

Wollstonecraft's wording is crucial in this scene – it is through Mary's distance from others and her lack of socialisation that she 'learns to think', strongly implying that those raised in the company of others remain in some state of ignorance and are more susceptible to indoctrination. Mary is not presented as flawed so much as unusual, and her experiences are not going to be shared by the majority of individuals. As narrator, Fleetwood presents us with a view of the social majority similar to that of Thomas Gray:

My earliest years were spent among mountains and precipices, amidst the roaring of the ocean and the dashing of waterfalls. A constant familiarity with these objects gave a wildness to my ideas, and an uncommon seriousness to my temper. My curiosity was ardent, and my disposition persevering. Often have I climbed the misty mountain's top, to hail the first beams of the orb of day, or to watch his resplendent glories as he sunk beneath the western ocean. There was no neighbouring summit that I did not ascend, anxious to see what mountains, vallies, rivers and cities were placed beyond ... I had a presentiment that the crowded streets and the noisy mart contained larger materials for constituting my pain than pleasure. The jarring passions of men, their loud contentions, their gross pursuits, their crafty delusions, their boisterous mirth, were objects which, even in idea, my mind shrank from with horror.⁶⁴³

Like Mary, the young Fleetwood develops a creative mind, one capable of summoning 'wild ideas', especially when alone in natural areas. Godwin takes advantage of the first-person narration, however, to give the landscape a grand presence, utilising near-hyperbolic language in order to give it a spiritual sentiment. The strong language is also used to give an extremely negative impression of urban, social life – exaggeratedly noisy and complex in contrast with the peaceful serenity of nature. There are further similarities in the upbringings of the two protagonists: neither is educated by a parent - Fleetwood is educated by a tutor, Mary by a house-

⁶⁴² Wollstonecraft, *Mary: A Fiction*, p. 4.

⁶⁴³ Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 6.

keeper, and both rely on dogs for the majority of their companionship. Fleetwood may be a little more forceful, active and perhaps masculine than Mary (evidenced by his strenuous hiking and desire to mentally document his surroundings), but Godwin essentially provides us with the same premise as that given by his late wife: we are to witness the personal and social adventures of a young, perhaps eccentric yet largely kind-hearted individual.

Though we may read both the young Mary and Fleetwood as misanthropic in their love of their enforced isolation and their disdain for fashionable and common society, the narratives of both novels go on to demonstrate their beliefs and fears to be entirely justified. Mary's experience of society comes from the fellow guests in Lisbon, and Mary immediately ascertains the type of people she has encountered:

They were people of rank ... Their minds were shackled with a set of notions concerning propriety, the fitness of things for the world's eye, trammels which always hamper weak people. What will the world say? was the first thing that was thought of, when they intended doing any thing they had not done before.⁶⁴⁴

Wollstonecraft's novel makes it clear that fashionable society is worthless with regards to personal development. Twice the narrator repeats the word 'world', emphasising the conservative function of wider society, an imprisoning influence emphasised by the term 'shackled' (and foreshadowing the situation of the protagonist in her later novel *Maria*). The women fail to understand the friendship between Mary and Ann, and their limited understanding renders them incapable of experiencing romantic friendship.

Society in *Fleetwood* may not be conservative, but it still harms the moral and personal development of the individual. Both Paris and London (as we shall see further into this chapter) are corrupting influences, but the first social environment

⁶⁴⁴ Wollstonecraft, *Mary: A Fiction*, p. 24.

Fleetwood finds himself exposed to – the university of Oxford – is perhaps the most toxic. Though in the novel Godwin venerated same-sex friendship along similar lines to those of the other writers in this thesis, the environs producing such bonds are quite different. Unlike Thomas Gray, Godwin does not see the merits of all-male educational environments. Whilst for the Augustan scholar-poet schools and universities are the gardens in which sheltering friendships are sown, in *Fleetwood* the nineteenth-century reformer-novelist presents them as fetid and stagnant. Fleetwood leaves his home in Wales in order to attend Oxford University, and – like Mary – intends forming an intimate friendship with a worthy companion. However, he is unable to find one amidst the debaucheries and cruelties of same-sex university life. The university has a corrupting influence on Fleetwood himself, and the simple virtues afforded to him by his upbringing in rural Wales are dissolved.⁶⁴⁵

The scenes set in Oxford represent a lack of altruism and compassion, the very virtues necessary for an idealised friendship. Homosocial environments are presented as extremely cruel and competitive, and the bullying of one student leads to his drowning himself in a river. A statement by the narrator in this scene presents another contrast with Gray, as he states that ‘youth is the minister of cruelty’ – a direct contrast to Gray’s consistent veneration of youth as a time of edenic homosocial affection (Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 35). Godwin’s motivations for decrying the

⁶⁴⁵ Wales is referenced throughout the text, and the narrator venerated the country at several points – as with Anna Seward in *Llangollen Vale*, Godwin equates Wales with liberty: “Wales was nature in the vigour and animation of youth: she sported in a thousand wild and admirable freaks; she displayed a master-hand, every stroke of her majestic pencil was clear, and cold, and free.”: Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 19. Both Seward and Godwin suggest Wales to be perfectly suited to virtuous love, aided by the very landscape itself (though unlike Seward Godwin makes little reference to English oppression and presents the setting as unspoiled).

Grace Pollock’s review of the 2000 reprint of the novel comments upon the environs at Oxford, suggesting they set the stage for Fleetwood’s misogynistic actions later in the novel, an example of the dangers of overplaying masculinity and allowing sensibility to take precedence over reason: ‘Review’, p. 213. The negative view of the university is also briefly noted by Scheuermann: *Social Protest*, p. 121. William D. Brewer suggests the poisonous environment to be the cause of Fleetwood’s misanthropy: ‘Male Rivalry and Friendship’, in *Mapping Male Sexuality*, ed. by Losey and Brewer, p. 57. *The Anti-Jacobin Review* took some offence to this portrayal of Oxford, referring to Godwin as ‘ignorant’ of the institution: *The Anti-Jacobin Review*, p. 345.

university environment are undoubtedly based in class criticism, yet in challenging the notion of same-sex love belonging to homosocial group environments he is distancing friendship from institutions which, as we saw in the second chapter to this thesis, had long since developed a firm reputation for sodomy. Before the author can truly establish the groundwork for male romantic friendship, he must first make clear that he does not associate it with the infamous culture which found itself the subject of the parody to Gray's Ode.⁶⁴⁶ Fleetwood forms no 'Quadruple Alliance', and leaves the university without having made a single real friend.⁶⁴⁷

The striking similarities between the openings to both novels would suggest a deliberate creative rewriting on Godwin's part. In reading *Fleetwood* we cannot escape the possibility that, seventeen years on, Godwin is retelling Wollstonecraft's story, both to re-establish his own views on friendship and to present the debate from a masculine perspective, entering into the dialogue alongside Maria Edgeworth. As we learned in both the introduction and first chapter to this thesis, male same-sex relationships were a great deal more dangerous to maintain than their female counterparts, and Godwin modifies his arguments accordingly. He is also writing in a post-revolutionary reactionary climate so not granted the freedom Wollstonecraft has in her 1788 novel, yet he is not prepared to abandon his own revolutionary views.

⁶⁴⁶ Detailed in the first chapter to this thesis.

⁶⁴⁷ The university environment is commented upon by Markley, who notes its portrayal as destructive: "Prior to his formal education, Fleetwood has nobly devoted himself to the care of the peasants on his father's estate and had even bravely rescued one man from drowning. At school, however, Fleetwood's incipient cruelty is brought to the fore by a horrible practical joke in which he and his friends humiliate a fellow student with catastrophic results.": Markley, 'The Success of Gentleness' (para. 21 of 39). Markley suggests that it is this environment which causes Fleetwood's social pathologies.

The turn of the century saw a great shift in Godwin's view of human relationships – though his views on friendship have received little attention. In the first volume to *Political Justice* Godwin wrote that no preference should be given to an individual dependent on affection – be they a friend, neighbour or acquaintance – to do so, he ascertains, is socially destructive (though he moderated such points a little in subsequent editions) (*Political Justice*, I, p. 268). For the greater part of Godwin's earlier work, society takes precedence over the individual. He continues this sentiment in the second volume of the 1793 edition, where he indicates that the attachments should be measured by merit alone, rather than by shared experience or any other motivators of personal affection: "All attachments to individuals, except in proportion to their merits, are plainly unjust. It is therefore desirable, that we should be the friends of men rather than particular men, and that we should pursue the chain of our own reflexions, with no other interruption than information or philanthropy requires" (*Political Justice*, II, p. 379). The social whole takes considerable precedence over individual love, and Godwin indicates the pursuit of one-on-one relationships to be a moral evil. His views on the subject were to soften, however. By *Fleetwood* a considerable shift has taken place, and through the same-sex bonds we can see Godwin's shift from a utilitarian rationalist model of relationships to one more individualised and sentimental.⁶⁴⁸ The theme of Wollstonecraft's earlier novel is therefore particularly suited to this newer worldview, whilst still allowing for a radical perspective.

⁶⁴⁸ Of affection in general this shift has been noted by Bruhm, who states: "The novel squarely sets affections and emotions against a rationalist program to demonstrate that affections and rationality are always intertwined, mutually defining, and mutually problematic.": Bruhm, *Eighteenth-Century Life*, p. 31.

Unlike Mary, Fleetwood leaves his youth still seeking a romantic friendship. Echoing Seward and Gray, Godwin cites classical precedent through the narrative, with Fleetwood aspiring to be as Horace in the court of the Emperor Augustus.: “I aspired to resemble … Horace, the graceful and accomplished ornament of the court of Augustus.”⁶⁴⁹ After university Fleetwood meets another graduate of Oxford in Paris, Sir Charles Gleed, who is distanced from the institution by his own failure to excel either academically or socially (*Fleetwood*, p. 38). Though the bond between the two does not last long and is of no real emotional importance, Gleed saves him from a potentially ruinous encounter with a libertine woman.⁶⁵⁰ The friendship between the two seems to gradually wane, largely because, having been corrupted by both homosocial and fashionable society, Fleetwood is not yet capable of experiencing true friendship.⁶⁵¹ In Paris he is corrupted by society, just as he was at Oxford, and once again Godwin departs from the sentiments originally expressed in the 1793 edition of *Political Justice*, presenting the social world of both countries as immoral and corrupt.

It is upon leaving the trappings of urban society and re-entering the rural landscape that Fleetwood’s circumstances change. He travels to Switzerland (like Wales a Rousseauistic peaceful pastoral landscape) and there we see the beginning of Fleetwood’s reformation.⁶⁵² He meets his father’s friend Ruffigny, and reveals how

⁶⁴⁹ As we have seen in the second chapter, Seward adapted the poetry of Horace to suit her own themes on same-sex love. In the first chapter we saw how the period was an important theme in the friendship between Thomas Gray and Richard West. Godwin’s invocation of the period suggests its important to the cultural mindset surrounding romantic friendship: Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 38.

⁶⁵⁰ Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 49. The relationship between the women of Paris and Fleetwood will be examined later in this chapter.

⁶⁵¹ This section has been neglected since the novel’s publication.

⁶⁵² Switzerland is idealised in the novel in a similar manner to Wales, and Godwin sets a precedent followed by his daughter in the novel *Frankenstein*, in which Switzerland is presented as egalitarian: “The republican institutions of our country have produced simpler and happier manners than those which prevail in the great monarchies that surround it.”: Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein: Or, The Modern Prometheus* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), p. 66. Tysdahl notes the portrayal of Switzerland as a positive (but subdued) portrayal of republicanism: “His praise of republicanism is carefully linked with

highly his father had spoken of him in the past: “Never did I hear the eulogium of one man pronounced by another with that energy and enthusiasm with which my father spoke of the venerable Swiss.”⁶⁵³ The narrator’s assertion that his father’s praise of his friend exceeded any he had ever heard between men suggests a special bond from the very outset.⁶⁵⁴ Ruffigny returns the compliment and announces the affection he held in return: “It does my old heart good, to receive under my roof the last representative of the friends I have loved and honoured more than any others I ever had” (*Fleetwood*, p. 58). The bond is presented in the plot as mysterious and providential. The flashback technique explains how a relationship akin to that of (grand)father and son may be deliberately adopted as well as inherited – even in a mercantile, competitive society – where it may even ameliorate the worst effects of capitalism. Godwin deliberately and methodically sets out to usurp the supremacy of blood ties in favour of altruistic and adoptive bonds.

This bond between the two old men is elaborated upon by Ruffigny himself. Ruffigny has the duty of telling Fleetwood his father has died and makes the startling declaration that he is *also* his father:

Fleetwood, I also am your father. And I will not be less indulgent, scarcely less anxious, than your natural parent. You know in gross, though you do not know in detail, the peculiar attachment I feel for every thing that bears the name of Fleetwood. Am I not your father?⁶⁵⁵

This mysterious and patriarchal bond between the two older men is so intimate and all-encompassing that the elder Fleetwood’s son also belongs to his romantic friend. Though Ruffigny’s grasp of the English language is far from perfect, the character’s

Swiss history so as not to make it obnoxious in England.”: *William Godwin as Novelist*, p. 111. The reformation itself is briefly alluded to by Marshall, with no further comment: Marshall, *William Godwin*, p. 262.

⁶⁵³ Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 57. Other preconceptions on the bond held by Fleetwood are that it involves ‘important obligations’ and is of a ‘confidential nature’: p. 62.

⁶⁵⁴ There is a similarity with Seward’s declaration in her letters at Yale that her bond with Honora Sneyd ‘passed the love of women’: Yale U., MSS OSBORN C202 (Seward to Weston, July 2nd 1784).

⁶⁵⁵ Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 64.

choice of words is particularly significant in this scene. Ruffigny makes clear that he is as much Fleetwood's father as his biological parent and highlights the intensity of such a bond with the words 'anxious' and 'indulgent'. In this light friendship itself is represented as equally sacred as marriage, with Ruffigny sharing the emotional responsibilities of a parent or grandparent in transmitting cultural wisdom and protective care down the generations. Godwin is using the novel to blur the boundaries between different types of bond, marital, familial and fraternal. Most interestingly, Ruffigny uses the word 'peculiar' in describing his attachments: such bonds are evidently unusual. It is fitting that the word 'peculiar' should so closely align to the word 'queer'.

It is here that the plot diverges somewhat from that of *Mary: A Fiction*, and the intervening years – as well as the different social atmosphere for men – become evident. Fleetwood and Ruffigny do not experience a romantic friendship in the same direct manner as Mary and Ann. Godwin follows the example of others in this thesis by using the term 'romantic' friendship but makes it clear that Fleetwood never finds it: late in the novel Fleetwood writes: "... a friend (a friend, in the perhaps romantic sense of the word) I never found" (*Fleetwood*, p. 155). However, the love held between Fleetwood senior and Ruffigny is so strong that it is immediately transferred to Fleetwood junior and Ruffigny, who states: "The short time I had passed with Ruffigny was yet long enough to make me feel no sort of constraint in his presence" (*Fleetwood*, p. 65). We learn more of the bond between the older men, and Ruffigny echoes Aristotle's theories on friendship as he lists the elder Fleetwood's virtues

Fleetwood, p. 67). At several points the bond between the two is described as 'love'.⁶⁵⁶

Mourning is once again an important signifier of friendship – even to the paternalised 'echo' of a romantic friendship encountered here. There are several intense displays of physical affection between the two men, and on numerous occasions the two hold one another as they cry: on one instance Fleetwood exclaiming 'I even sobbed upon his bosom'.⁶⁵⁷ Echoing the bonds we have seen already in this thesis, the two mourn together: "We mingled our tears." (*Fleetwood*, p. 68). Mourning sanctions masculine sensibility in displays of weeping for lost friends (despite the scorning of such a practice by Aristotle), with Ruffigny himself commenting upon the importance of mourning to same-sex love:

And here I beg leave to protest against the doctrine too commonly promulgated in the world, that we ought to call off our thoughts, as speedily as possible, from the recollection of our deceased friends, and not waste our spirits in lamentation for irremediable losses. The persons from whom I have oftenest heard this lesson, have been of the class of the hard-hearted, who have sought in such "counsels of prudence" an apology for their own unfeeling serenity. He was a wiser man than they, who said, "It is good to dwell in the house of mourning; for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better." ... Woe to the man who is always busy, — hurried in a turmoil of engagements, from occupation to occupation, and with no seasons interposed, of recollection, contemplation, and repose! Such a man must inevitably be gross and vulgar, and hard and indelicate, — the sort of man with whom no generous spirit would desire to hold intercourse.⁶⁵⁸

⁶⁵⁶ Fleetwood comments: "... Ruffigny loved my father only less than I loved him": Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 67.

⁶⁵⁷ The first instance of this is Ruffigny's embracing Fleetwood as he weeps upon hearing of his father's death: Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 64. Fleetwood accompanies this physical intimacy by suggesting that his father lives on through his romantic friend: "I threw myself into his arms; I burst into tears; I even sobbed upon his bosom. - My father is not wholly dead! What must be my obligation to the friend, who at such a moment is willing to supply his place!"

⁶⁵⁸ Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 124. In stating that the man who would hide his feelings and not mourn is not worthy of intercourse Ruffigny suggests that those who repress their sensibility are not worthy of true friendship. Fleetwood and Ruffigny are therefore unafraid to display their grief to one another at the death of Fleetwood senior, and Fleetwood even states "In the one, and over the other, we united our tears.": p. 124. As we have seen in the second chapter, the poet Anna Seward uses similar imagery when she speaks of 'mingling tears' with female companions. Even in the nineteenth century, male friendship is furthered or reconfirmed by the act of mourning.

In this section the virtuous Ruffigny directly attacks the stoic attitude toward friendship and mourning established by ‘heard-hearted’ individuals such as Aristotle in a direct defence of sensibility. Extremely negative language is used in connection to those who would direct themselves toward such ‘unfeeling serenity’, as Ruffigny asserts them to be ‘gross and vulgar’ and well as ‘hard and indelicate’. Interestingly, Ruffigny’s tying in Fleetwood’s father to ‘our deceased friends’ further confuses the boundaries between blood relations and friendships. Furthermore, in establishing the bond between the two men via death Godwin is continuing the elegiac tradition initiated by Gray, Seward and Wollstonecraft.⁶⁵⁹

It is with regards to the friendship itself that *Fleetwood* diverges somewhat from *Mary: A Fiction*, and the differences in perspective between a male author writing in 1805 and a woman in 1788 become apparent. Though Mary’s friendship is far from easy, with a disapproving society and the continual threat of the absent husband, Fleetwood is only able to catch an echo of the bond held between the two men of an older generation. The decline of romantic friendship over the past several decades has had its impact on the novel. Even so, the paternal relationship between the two men is far from conventional, and the situation between the two Fleetwoods and Ruffigny transcends traditional notions of the family.

⁶⁵⁹ There are numerous points in which the men express grief before one another in a manner which Aristotle referred to as effeminate and unworthy of the masculine man toward whom true friendship is aimed: This appears to be the most consistently ignored area of Aristotle’s ideals amongst Gray, Seward, Wollstonecraft and Godwin though in *Political Justice* Godwin takes part in the liberal tradition of criticising the ‘effeminate indulgence’ of the aristocracy: Godwin, *Political Justice*, II, p. 25. Robert J. Corber comments on this issue further with regard to Godwin’s earlier novel *Caleb Williams*, where he claims Godwin utilises populist homophobia to denounce aristocratic chivalry. In strong contrast to the events of *Fleetwood*, Corber suggests that male-male bonding in *Caleb Williams* leads to effeminacy – even male-male bonding which has been ‘mediated’: ‘William Godwin and the Politics of Homophobia’, p. 97. Corber makes it clear Godwin is taking part in a tradition: “Godwin’s novel, then, legitimates middle-class notions of appropriate male behaviour by invoking certain popular myths that, although they never refer to sodomy by name, nevertheless specify it as their referent”: p. 99.

Of the scholarly attention *Fleetwood* has received, an extremely small amount has been devoted to male friendship, despite its centrality. Don Locke's biography of Godwin briefly mentions the novel and states that the central theme of the novel is 'the necessity of friendship', but goes into no further detail.⁶⁶⁰ Similarly Elton Edward Smith's biography also suggests friendship to be important, but it only does so in passing.⁶⁶¹ Few studies focus on the first half of the novel, though it is mentioned by Mona Scheuermann, who suggests it focuses on the neuroses of the central protagonist, and makes no mention of same-sex intimacy.⁶⁶² Burton Ralph Pollin suggests the mourning between the two to be an example of inborn feelings toward family – evidence of the paternal bond between Fleetwood and his father. Pollin cites it as an example of the strength of blood ties in the novel: a theory which may explain Fleetwood junior's grief, but certainly does not account for Ruffigny's, and provides another example of the heterosexist denial of same-sex devotion.⁶⁶³ Bruhm echoes the heterosexist views of many investigating the novel when he suggests Fleetwood's marriage to be the 'central plot' of the novel, once again ignoring same-sex bonds.⁶⁶⁴

Where critics have given an overview of the plot, Ruffigny is often omitted entirely. Grace Pollock's assertion that the novel is a critique of sensibility contradicts the message behind these emotional scenes, as well as Ruffigny's speech.⁶⁶⁵ Tysdahl refers to Ruffigny as a 'second father' to Fleetwood, but makes no

⁶⁶⁰ Locke, *Fantasy of Reason*, p. 211.

⁶⁶¹ Smith gives an overview of the novel, stating that Fleetwood 'seeks friendship': Smith and others, *William Godwin*, p. 97. He later states that Fleetwood's emotional problems are caused by his failure to do so, but no detail is given: Smith and others, *William Godwin*, p. 101.

⁶⁶² Scheuermann, 'The Study of Mind', p. 17.

⁶⁶³ Pollin, *Education and Enlightenment*, p. 223. It is not surprising that Pollin does, in fact, note the strength of feeling between Fleetwood and his wife (which shall be examined further into this chapter).

⁶⁶⁴ Bruhm, *Eighteenth-Century Life*, p. 32.

⁶⁶⁵ Despite focusing on the theme of sentimentalism. B. Sprague Allen's 1918 analysis likewise ignores the bond entirely: Allen, *PMLA*, pp. 1 – 29. Ruffigny is referenced very briefly by Adam Rounce, though the expressions between the two men are not referenced: "... the eponymous character is given

further comment on the bond or the theme of same-sex friendship. The assertion he shares with Pollock – that Fleetwood's sensibility inhibits his relationships - again requires these scenes to be overlooked.⁶⁶⁶ Ian Ward makes a brief reference to the bond between the two, comparing it to that of the mentoring friendship at the heart of Rousseau's *Emile*, though such a comparison once again negates the emotional sentiments expressed between the men.⁶⁶⁷

There have been, however, two examinations of friendship in *Fleetwood*: William D. Brewer's short account notes the centrality of platonic same-sex love in the text, whilst A. A. Markley focuses on homosocial desire within the novel: though he uses Eve Sedgwick's model of analysing same-sex desire as it is routed through women (as we explored in the first chapter to this thesis), rather than examining the direct examples of intimate male friendship which are given.

Godwin's use of fiction to reclaim friendship, presenting it as compatible with domesticity, has not been missed by A. A. Markley's brief account of same-sex relationship in the novel: "Godwin wrote his novels in a political atmosphere characterized by an excessively virulent homophobia ... While his contemporaries were perhaps not ready to rethink their stereotypical conception of the sodomite, Godwin nevertheless regularly focused his attention on the question of same-sex bonds between men."⁶⁶⁸ Markley even correctly suggests that Godwin held queer

two mentors, shows himself unable to learn their lessons, and is only saved from madness and death by a *dues ex machina*."': 'The Novel, Philosophy and History', p. 2. Furbank gives an overview of the novel, yet makes no mention of Ruffigny: :'Godwin's Novels', p. 221. Grace Pollock suggests that the novel is typical of Godwin's utilitarian viewpoint: 'Review', p. 213. Dean Hughes makes a short reference to this section of the novel, though he only states that Ruffigny's story has an effect upon Fleetwood, going into no further detail: Hughes, *Romance and Psychological Realism*, p. 56.

⁶⁶⁶ Tysdahl, *William Godwin as Novelist*, p.117. Tysdahl does use Ruffigny as a positive example of sensibility in the text: "The novel does not flatly deny the possibility of an alliance between feeling and goodness. Two elderly gentlemen, Mr Macneil and M. Ruffigny, illustrate this beautiful union.": p. 104. The bond between the two men, however, is skipped over in his summary of the plot, in favour of a focus on the marriage.

⁶⁶⁷ Ward, 'A Man of Feelings', p. 38.

⁶⁶⁸ Markley, 'The Success of Gentleness' (para. 2 of 39).

socio-political views: “Godwin dedicated himself to a social project that distantly anticipated the queer politics of later periods.”⁶⁶⁹ Yet it is through the intense scenes between Fleetwood and Ruffigny – in many ways echoing those between Mary and Ann – which form the queer focus of the text. However, even A. A. Markley’s account of homoerotic bonds in the text makes no mention of the relationship between the two, his account even suggesting that there are no positive examples of same-sex love in *Fleetwood*:

Godwin’s pre-1830 novels all explore the catastrophes that ensue when the traditional conception of manhood and masculinity lead to unmeasured antipathy and competition between men, competition that often impacts upon and even destroys women and the family. The potential destructiveness of misplaced affection and desire between men thus becomes one means by which Godwin illustrates the fact that contemporary definitions of masculinity must be transformed.⁶⁷⁰

Markley’s account focuses little on Godwin’s 1805 novel, and therefore fails to take into account the centrality of the homoerotic bonds we are presented with in *Fleetwood*. The first half of the novel deals with masculine friendship directly rather than routed through desire for women, and there is no competition between Fleetwood and Ruffigny – Godwin seeks to emphasise the importance and prevalence of co-operation to friendship bonds.

William D. Brewer’s account is the only one to recognise that, “... Fleetwood, one of Godwin’s most misanthropic characters, idealizes masculine friendship,”⁶⁷¹ and to note the importance of exclusivity to the romantic friendships of the novel.⁶⁷² However, Brewer does not argue friendship is important in its own right – he suggests that Fleetwood’s longing for male love is simply the result of his misogyny (which we shall focus on in the second section of this chapter):

⁶⁶⁹ Markley, ‘The Success of Gentleness’ (para. 5 of 39).

⁶⁷⁰ Markley ‘The Success of Gentleness’ (para. 38 of 39).

⁶⁷¹ Brewer, ‘Male Rivalry and Friendship’, in *Mapping Male Sexuality*, ed. Losey and Brewer, p. 51.

⁶⁷² Brewer refers to romantic friendship as ‘exclusive and almost obsessional’ Brewer, ‘Male Rivalry and Friendship’, in *Mapping Male Sexuality*, ed. by Losey and Brewer, p. 53.

... Fleetwood dwells on homosocial love. His early experiences with two Parisian coquettes and his tempestuous relationship with his flirtatious young wife have rendered him incapable of imagining a positive, open, and healthy relationship with a woman.⁶⁷³

Such a reading is problematic, and requires the bonds between men to be read as a *substitute* for opposite-sex love, when, as we shall see, the novel presents both as equally valid – as had Mary Wollstonecraft's *Mary, A Fiction*. Brewer's reading undermines the importance of same-sex love in its own right, suggesting it to be the result of pathology rather than the healthy and viable form of love Godwin seeks to establish. Fundamentally this argument is undermined by the erstwhile Ruffigny himself: he is the moral touchstone of the book and has devoted his life to romantic friendship and the ideals of fraternity, yet there is no evidence of misogyny or ill-feeling towards women. He has made his choice, one which is both rational and sentimental.

Godwin has taken many of the signifiers of romantic friendship to present them in a new context, one which fits in with his radical social views. *Fleetwood* acknowledges the 'peculiar' bond of the previous generation and is unafraid to show same-sex emotional displays, but the adoption of Fleetwood by Ruffigny – referred to as 'the last tribute of friendship' – is one spurred not only by the emotional intimacy which existed between the two elder men but also by altruism.⁶⁷⁴ Godwin idealises a worldview which moves away from the prioritisation of blood ties and the hierarchical model of the traditional family, toward one freely-chosen relationships between equals more beneficial to the social whole. Yet the novel does not quite replicate *Political Justice* in its denial of individual love: *Fleetwood* may exemplify a

⁶⁷³ Brewer, 'Male Rivalry and Friendship', in *Mapping Male Sexuality*, ed. by Losey and Brewer, p. 53. Unwittingly the arguments presented in 'The Women-Hater's Lamentation' (examined in the first chapter to this thesis) are once again parroted.

⁶⁷⁴ The importance of altruism and benevolence to Godwin's philosophy are noted by Evan Radcliffe, who notes his views are similar to those of Wollstonecraft: 'Revolutionary Writing', p. 230.

collectivistic vision, but via Ruffigny we can see the author acknowledging the personal intimacies of friendship present in *Mary: A Fiction*.

Ultimately, true friendship is presented as both virtuous and somewhat unusual: after Ruffigny's death Fleetwood comments: "The relation which existed between his family and mine was of the most interesting sort. Never in any age or country, were two parties bound together by ties so noble" (*Fleetwood*, p. 132). Their friendship exceeds that of the norm, with Fleetwood referring to it as 'unexampled', whilst giving reference to their names being bound together in a manner reminiscent of a marriage: "What an unexampled friendship was that which bound together the names of Fleetwood and Ruffigny."⁶⁷⁵ In this one sentence we see the bond between the men presented as an ideal, whilst at the same time influencing both personal, emotional, private ties and social, familial public ones. Friendship is favourably compared to marital bonds.

The comparison to marriage is certainly not a passing one; it shapes the structure of the novel. Fleetwood makes clear the shared heritage between the two, in a passage referencing his reformation:

By degrees – let me venture to say – I became assimilated, however imperfectly, to my admirable mentor. I whispered to my swelling heart, "Never, no, never, will I belong to such men as these, and not make it to first object of my solicitude to become like them. Let other men talk of their heroic blood, and swear they will not blot a long line of princes from whom they may be descended! Here is my patent of nobility, than which I shall defy all the monarchs of the earth to show a brighter; not sealed by the ruin of provinces and empires, but by the purest and most godlike contempt of all selfish views that ever was exhibited. In me the race of Fleetwoods shall survive; I will become heir to the integrity and personal honour of the virtuous Ruffigny."⁶⁷⁶

The language used in this passage is dramatic and romantic, both on a personal level ('swelling heart') and on a larger scale. Friendship is compared to grand historical

⁶⁷⁵ Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 133. Fleetwood goes on to refer to the friendship as 'heroic': p. 134.

⁶⁷⁶ Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 134.

bloodlines and is presented on an epic scale, alongside ‘monarchs’ and ‘empires’. Fleetwood, in fact, is to inherit something yet greater. In one passage Godwin ties together virtuous redemption, the arbitrary nature of blood lines and male romantic friendship. In bringing together two surnames through an intimate romantic friendship (that of Fleetwood sr. and Ruffigny) the status of both parties is enhanced, both by reputation and even rewarded monetarily. Godwin rebelliously bucks traditional concepts of bloodlines and genetic familial heritage for a system based on individual emotional priority. As with Seward, Godwin refers to ‘vows’ of friendship (*Fleetwood*, p. 134).

Altruism and Society

One of the prevailing themes in Godwin’s *Political Justice* is that of altruism. To Godwin, altruism is necessary to social reform by seeking to improve the condition of others beyond familial bonds. Friendship is the vehicle for altruism, totally necessary for reforming a system based on patronage and blood ties. Being the result of virtue and reason, we see friendship in Godwin’s political treatise echoing the arguments of Aristotle. Godwin suggests that virtue is necessary to a healthy and fulfilling life, and that in principle any individual is capable of it: “We bring into the world with us no innate principles: consequently we are neither virtuous nor vicious as we first come into existence.”⁶⁷⁷ Like Aristotle, however, Godwin suggests virtue to be the domain of the intelligent and reasoned: “Virtue may perhaps be defined, that species of operation of an intelligent being, which conduces to the benefit of

⁶⁷⁷ Godwin, *Political Justice*, I, p. 12. This quote strongly contradicts the Christian idea of original sin, suggesting that each person is born fundamentally neutral. This idea also carries a certain egalitarianism, as each individual is capable of virtue, regardless of factors such as sex or race. This sentiment is carried into the second volume, in which Godwin states that all humans are the same when they are within the womb: Godwin, *Political Justice*, II, p. 20.

intelligent beings in general, and is produced by a desire of that benefit.”⁶⁷⁸ The common theme surrounding both virtue and friendship (being necessary to one another) throughout this thesis has been that they are not accessible to all. As well as possessing sufficient intellect, Godwin also suggests a true comprehension of the beauty of virtue itself to be vital to leading a virtuous (and thus altruistic) life.⁶⁷⁹

Godwin relies on classical Greek philosophy to back his own philosophical arguments, siding with the Stoic perspective that virtue is the only true source of happiness, and that, despite possessing merit, the Epicurean view of happiness through pleasure is more fleeting:

The happiness of a man who pursues licentious pleasure is momentary, and his intervals of weariness and disgust perpetual. He speedily wears himself out on his specious career; and, every time he employs the means of delight which his corporeal existence affords him, takes so much from his capacity of enjoyment. If he be wise enough like Epicurus to perceive a part of these disadvantages, and to find in fresh herbs and the water of the spring the truest gratification of his appetite, he will be obliged to seek some addition to his stock of enjoyment, and like Epicurus to become benevolent out of pure sensuality. But the virtuous man has a perpetual source of enjoyment.⁶⁸⁰

Godwin’s disdain for sensuality and in particular ‘licentious pleasure’ presents the same prudish disdain for sexual love in favour of virtue which is present in the writings of Seward. To Godwin virtue leads to love: “... virtue not only leads to the happiness of him who practices it, but to the esteem and affection of others.”⁶⁸¹

⁶⁷⁸ Godwin, *Political Justice*, I, p. 12. Godwin makes clear that, despite the potential for virtue from birth, it is not accessible to all adults: p. 22. For those capable, virtue is a duty: “Every voluntary benefit ... entitles the bestower to some kindness and retribution. But why so? Because a voluntary benefit is an evidence of benevolent intention, that is, of virtue. It is the disposition of mind, not the external action, that entitles to respect.”: p. 83. Godwin makes it clear that an individual’s actions should benefit society as a whole rather than the individual – it being better to assist twenty others than to benefit oneself: p. 122.

⁶⁷⁹ “No man can love virtue sufficiently. Who has not an accurate and lively perception of its beauty, and its tendency to produce the only solid and permanent happiness.”: Godwin, *Political Justice*, I, p. 233.

⁶⁸⁰ Godwin, *Political Justice*, I, p. 233. Godwin echoes the permanency of virtue and its superiority to other joys later on: “Poverty, obloquy and disgrace will be judged by [a virtuous man] to be very trivial misfortunes.”: p. 364.

⁶⁸¹ Godwin, *Political Justice*, I, p. 365. Godwin goes on to suggest that popularity rests with virtue: “... he whose virtues flow from philanthropy alone, whose heart expands with benevolence and good will,

Toward the end of the first volume of *Political Justice*, Godwin states that the virtuous will always know true friendship, even if they are loathed by most:

He who merits the esteem of the neighbours and fellow citizens, will at least be understood by a few. Instances might be adduced in which persons instigated by the purest motives have been eminently unpopular. But there is perhaps no instance in which such men have not had a few friends of tried and zealous attachment. There is no friendship but this.⁶⁸²

Godwin unambiguously states that true friendship involves 'zealous attachment' - a bond which contradicts his other sentiments regarding human relationships in *Political Justice*. As with Aristotle, Anna Seward and Maria Edgeworth, Godwin warns against false forms of friendship when he suggests that virtue is the only foundation for love, and that flattery does not lead to esteem – referring to flattery itself as 'depraved' (*Political Justice*, I, p. 366). Yet despite the many obstacles present, an individual's capacity or virtue and altruism, Godwin suggests, can be improved through literature: something strongly evident in his 1805 novel (*Political Justice*, I, p. 19).

Fleetwood carries on the tradition explored in this thesis of the friend striving to improve the life and circumstances of the other: as Belinda strove to improve the situation of Lady Delcour, and as Mary strove to help Ann, so numerous characters in *Fleetwood* promote altruism as integral to friendship. The first real instance we see of such behaviour is in the story of Ruffigny's past. After being orphaned he is cheated out of his inheritance by his uncle (a criticism of the inherent trust placed in familial blood ties which will be examined later).⁶⁸³ He is taken to live and work in a

and who has no desire to make his superiority felt, will at all times have many friends and few enemies.": p. 369.

⁶⁸² Godwin, *Political Justice*, I, p. 370.

⁶⁸³ A great deal of the novel is devoted to the story of Ruffigny's past, and serves as another commentary on the corrupting influences of class and wealth. Being taken to pre-revolutionary France, we are presented with a marked difference between egalitarian Switzerland and the ancient regime, with child labour rampant, and oppression of the worker which damages the individual: "There was a kind of stupid and hopeless vacancy on ever face ...": Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 83. The narrator suggests that anarchy is preferable to such a system, and that children would be better off as 'gipsies

mill in France, yet even at such a young age and in such terrible conditions, he is able to reason that he needs a friend: “I concluded that I must find or make a friend, by whose assistance to support life, and, if possible, attain to something beyond bare subsistence” (*Fleetwood*, p. 89). Friendship is thus presented as elevating, even when he has been so let down by his blood relatives.

Eventually, and by chance, the child Ruffigny is offered help by Fleetwood’s grandfather. This is the second instance in the novel of the altruism of a stranger saving the life of an individual (the first being that of the young peasant earlier). Fleetwood’s grandfather takes him to England, adopting him as his own (*Fleetwood*, p. 112.). This is the third adoption referenced in the novel (after that of Ruffigny toward Fleetwood and Ruffigny’s uncle toward Ruffigny) and noticeably, it is the two adoptions based in the non-familial bonds of friendship which have a positive effect: “Kindness, the perpetual attention and interest of a real friend, in no time brought me back to myself.”⁶⁸⁴ It is via this adoption that Ruffigny forms the all-important attachment to Fleetwood’s father, the two being raised together as equals: “I saw in him the image of the man who had rescued me from utter destruction, and loved him accordingly” (*Fleetwood*, p. 115).

Selfish self-preservation has no place in the idealised friendship between Fleetwood senior and Ruffigny. Economic wealth, one of the primary measures of

and savages’: “The children of gipsies and savages have ruddy cheeks and a sturdy form, can run like lapwings, and climb trees with the squirrel.”: p. 84. This section of the novel forms a harsh critique of patriarchy in nation and family alike, and the young Ruffigny labours under the illusion that the King of France would love him and help him out of his situation: p. 90. Of course the status of the King is as arbitrary as that of his uncle, and the plan is doomed to failure, upon which one of the more radical statements of class is presented: “I understood very imperfectly the distinctions of rank in artificial society. I was wholly ignorant of the forms and fences which are set up to separate man from his brethren.”: Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 108. Once again the Swiss are idealised, as, having been cheated of his belongings by various French individuals, he is assisted by the royal Swiss guards at Versailles: p. 106.

⁶⁸⁴ Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 113. Echoing Ruffigny’s statement toward Fleetwood earlier in the text, Fleetwood’s grandfather states that he shall love Ruffigny like a father. Religious language is utilised to some extent at this point, and we hear the echoes of Seward’s poetical works, as were explored in the second chapter.

wellbeing in the text, is shared without hesitation, and an Aristotelian devotion to virtue and altruism reigns. Fleetwood senior is happy to share his inheritance with Ruffigny, and the cohabitation between the two is another friendship ideal outlined in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. It is at this point in the narrative that a utopian vision is laid out, in which altruism, rather than hierarchy and blood bonds, reigns supreme:

This is the great distribution of human society; every one who stands in need of assistance appertains to some one individual, upon whom he has a stronger claim than upon any other of his fellow creatures.⁶⁸⁵

The narrative is calling for friendship and altruism to replace arbitrary social hierarchies and to eliminate social suffering: the central argument of *Political Justice* laid out in novel form. When Fleetwood senior is later left destitute, Ruffigny helps him in return.⁶⁸⁶ Julie A. Carlson is alone in noting this ‘thematic focus on surrogate families’, suggesting that: “Such passages acquire special significance in the light of the text’s quite sceptical treatment of heterosexual love ...”⁶⁸⁷

On a personal level, Godwin echoes the arguments presented in Maria Edgeworth’s *Belinda*, presenting friendship as utterly compatible with a happy domestic life. It is at this point one of the Aristotelian ideal of cohabitation falls through: though Fleetwood senior and Ruffigny lived with one another throughout their youth, Ruffigny was compelled to deal with his own past by returning to Switzerland, the land of his birth. Ruffigny leaves their shared home, and this allows Fleetwood senior to pursue a marriage and have a child. Ruffigny states that he had not seen his friend in a decade, though this appears to have had little impact on their affection and regard for one another – Ruffigny himself states: “Your father had also

⁶⁸⁵ Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 117.

⁶⁸⁶ It is important to note that his destitution is through no fault of his own, an important indicator of competence and virtue: corrupt individuals in the novel tend to impoverish themselves, whereas the virtuous are economically able. Ruffigny transfers property to his friend without hesitation: Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 122.

⁶⁸⁷ Carlson, *England’s First Family*, p. 47.

married since I was in England, and yourself was born. I think I never saw so affectionate a husband and a father. In domestic life it was impossible to be more fortunate than I found my beloved friend" (*Fleetwood*, p. 120).

There are two important points regarding the ending of their cohabitation, however. Firstly, there was no compulsory terminating of the friendship nor any emotional or contractual limitations placed upon it – this is not the same as the conflict spurred by Honora Sneyd's marrying Richard Edgeworth and this terminating an exclusive one-to-one friendship. It is Ruffigny, rather than the one who wishes to marry, who ends their living with one another. The second point is that Ruffigny himself never sees the need to marry – he dies with the Fleetwood men having been the most important individuals in his life.

Ruffigny himself provides the firmest example of Godwin's queer radicalism in the novel. This virtuous man bucks social norms by devoting himself to friendship, and does not have a single emotional tie to a spouse or a blood relative. He is not presented as corrupt, nor is he suggested to have sexual feelings toward other men. He is a morally upright character whose relationships are outside the social norm and do not conform to traditional ideals. Ruffigny is presented as the one of the more virtuous characters in the novel, and certainly the one who is proven the wisest. The novel again follows *Belinda*, in the capacity for true friendship to reform wayward individuals and to improve society by moderating selfish individualist material drives, and Ruffigny makes it his duty to ensure that Fleetwood avoids the corruption he strayed into both at Oxford and Paris. Altruism and affection applied on an individual basis can, the narrative suggests, reform society as a whole.

Through the representation of ‘strategic friendships’ we see another point of diversion from Wollstonecraft’s *Mary: A Fiction*. Whilst Wollstonecraft’s short novel only portrayed virtuous friendship, *Fleetwood* explores false forms of friendship in a similar manner to Edgeworth’s *Belinda*. Like *Belinda*, Godwin explores friendship from the perspectives of both genders (though unlike Edgeworth’s text, a greater focus is placed on male friendship rather than female). Both novels treat both male-male and female-female friendship bonds as identical.

At first Ruffigny’s attempts at reformation are a failure: in London Fleetwood begins an affair with a married woman. It is not Fleetwood’s sexual misconduct which is presented as the greatest moral crime committed, however, but his treatment of other men. Though Ruffigny derides Fleetwood’s sexual libertinism, he reserves particular scorn for his disdainful treatment of a man he calls his friend, but whom he is secretly using and for whom has no real respect. When Fleetwood casually states that he would abandon his friend were he to move elsewhere, Ruffigny issues a furious reprisal:

You said, you felt no such partiality to sir George Bradshaw [Fleetwood’s friend], as a mere change of place would no immediately break off – Do you think, that there is no vice in the conduct, which led you thus pitifully to juggle with your friend? Do you think, that such a juggler, I worthy the name of Fleetwood, or worthy the name of man?⁶⁸⁸

Ruffigny suggests that to use another individual in the name of friendship is a crime which renders one subhuman. In speaking through Ruffigny, so often the voice of reason in the text, Godwin is echoing the moral concerns outlined by other writers in this thesis, from Aristotle to Maria Edgeworth. What Aristotle referred to as a

⁶⁸⁸ Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 131.

‘friendship of utility’ and the ‘strategic friendships’ represented by Edgeworth through Freke, Godwin refers to as ‘juggling’. Here we see Aristotelian arguments on friendship demonstrated once again – friendship is to be formed from a deep respect of the virtue of the other: it is not to be formed in casual dependencies. As with *Belinda*, *Fleetwood* presents urban society as the corrupting influence which generates such types of ‘friendship’.⁶⁸⁹

Ruffigny is left with no choice but to present an ultimatum, echoing the actions of Belinda in her attempts to reform Lady Delacour in Edgeworth’s novel (*Fleetwood*, p. 132). If Fleetwood refuses to change his ways, then Ruffigny will leave his life forever. Friendship is presented as entirely incompatible with corruption and immorality. This ultimatum is not taken lightly by either party: the friendship between the two men means so much to Ruffigny that he suggests Fleetwood’s refusal would mean his own death, and he refers to himself in third person when he states: “When I return, I shall know, whether Ruffigny is to live or die” (*Fleetwood*, p. 132). The deliberately dramatic, romantic language has an instant effect on Fleetwood, and once more he shares an emotional and physically intimate moment with his friend, again crying in his arms: “I rushed into his arms; I could not utter a word; I sobbed in his bosom.” (*Fleetwood*, p. 132). The affection Fleetwood holds toward his friend is beyond words, and he is left speechless. The reformation is complete, and Fleetwood is never again tempted by either wayward sexuality or ‘juggling’ his friendships.

As with *Belinda*, *Fleetwood* explores both male and female friendship, presenting them in much the same light. Mary, who later becomes Fleetwood’s wife (and who shall be examined further in this chapter) has her own strategic friendship, and finds herself ‘juggled’ in the manner that so appalled Ruffigny. Mary has had a

⁶⁸⁹ In *Fleetwood* it is amongst the fashionable districts of London and Paris that such friendships are presented as the norm, whereas it is Freke’s cross-dressing fashionable urbanity in Edgeworth’s novel which spreads ‘strategic friendship’ in *Belinda*.

bond in which extremely romantic language has been utilised, and the two women had sworn an 'everlasting friendship' to one another (*Fleetwood*, p. 174). Yet she is referred to as a 'fair-weather friend' and a 'fashionable friend' (two more terms for friendships of utility).⁶⁹⁰ She is shallow and utterly unwilling to support Mary when personal tragedy throws her into melancholy. Friends, the narrative makes clear, should be prepared to share in one another's grief – strategic friends will be unwilling to do so: there is no 'mingling of tears'.

On Blood Relations

As part of his model for social reorganisation Godwin contrasts traditional ideas of trust with his own revolutionary (queer) ideology. One of the most radical elements of the novel is its inherent criticism of arbitrary blood ties, following the assertion in *Political Justice* that paternity is irrelevant (*Political Justice*, II, p. 383). The first instance in which we see any criticism of family lineage is from Ruffigny, who is himself from noble ancestry, but warns against the dangers of relying on the prestige of bloodlines, suggesting it corrupts the individual (*Fleetwood*, p. 61). As we have seen throughout this chapter, Ruffigny's sentiments echo Godwin's own in *Political Justice*. Hierarchies based in family lineage are incompatible with the author's political worldview, and this has a considerable impact on the novel's portrayal of the family unit.

The first instance we see in which altruism is lacking in relationships based on blood ties is in the betrayal of Ruffigny by his uncle whilst still a child. Ruffigny's

⁶⁹⁰ In the term 'fashionable' we can see both the progressive and regressive nature of the author's beliefs and of queer friendship bonds. Godwin condemns current trends and thus harkens to the past, an idealised period when friendship was seen to be a greater commitment, yet is also arguing for a radical queer alternative to human relationships, even if it is more friendly toward domesticity than the arguments of Gray and Seward: Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 174.

father's dying wish being for his brother to raise his son, they reach an agreement in which he will raise the orphan as one of his own (*Fleetwood*, p. 70). However, selfishly entirely concerned with the welfare of his own children, he ensures that his young nephew is sent to a workhouse in France, cut off from his rightful inheritance (*Fleetwood*, p. 86). We are presented with an immediate contrast between two adoptions: that of Ruffigny toward Fleetwood in the present, and that of Ruffigny's uncle toward him as a child some decades beforehand. Though Ruffigny is under no legal or familial obligation toward Fleetwood, he cares for him as he would his own son, and we see an altruism and trust via romantic friendship. Ruffigny's uncle, however, under both legal and familial obligation, does his nephew an extreme wrong, leaving him to a life of deprivation and extreme poverty. The description of child labour in the silk mill also extends the point to the way society allows other people's children to be treated. The family unit is self-serving and treats other children as rivals; only relationships founded in trust, reason and empathy are truly virtuous rather than arbitrary bonds based on genetic ties. Both authorial and narrative voices undermine traditional notions of the family in favour of a queer ideal.

The second half of the novel also contains a criticism of the inherent trust and esteem placed upon blood ties. Fleetwood's distant relation Gifford, attempts to deceive him and eventually kill him in order to get at his money.⁶⁹¹ Gifford manipulates Fleetwood into trusting no-one but himself: "I owned (and then a burst of tears gushed into my eyes) that I had no friend in the world but him, and intreated that

⁶⁹¹ Interestingly considering his departure from conventional social mores, the author suggests Gifford to be sinister and manipulative due to his illegitimacy, following a long-held convention in Western literature – he even suggests that his 'dark complexion' was 'no agreeable portent', a somewhat racist statement considering the enlightened comments of Macneil earlier in the novel: Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 229. Having had no strong father figure, Gifford resorts to feminine modes of deception: Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 231.

he would never desert me. He readily promised that he would stick to me for life.”⁶⁹²

This friendship is similar to Ruffigny, but it is a dangerously false one. In one, Gifford represents the dangers of a reliance on the automatic altruism of blood relatives and of false friendship.⁶⁹³

The End of Fleetwood: Part One

It is with the eleventh chapter of the second volume of *Fleetwood* that Godwin’s rewrite of *Mary: A Fiction* ends. As such, the chapter itself forms a conclusion on friendship (though the theme appears now and then throughout the rest of the novel). Here Godwin takes Wollstonecraft’s theme and places it within the new social context, a social context much less open to the ideals she expressed in 1788. Chapter eleven, found at the very centre of *Fleetwood*, centres fully on the theme of friendship [See Appendix].

The first paragraph of the chapter opens with a distinction between common friendship and intimate, romantic friendship. Fleetwood himself found a great deal of more casual friendships and makes clear that he does not view such relationships negatively. However, Fleetwood is interested in finding a bond which makes him feel that he does not ‘stand alone in the world’. Godwin’s choice of phrasing here is important: the narrator does not automatically feel part of a social whole, despite his inclusion in society, without an intimate one-on-one bond. Immediately afterward Godwin uses the language of Aristotle when he suggests that a friend should be a second self: ‘this must be a friend, who is to me as another self’. Godwin has opened

⁶⁹² This firm vow to friendship is twisted by the fact that Gifford intends for Fleetwood’s life to be very short: Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 271.

⁶⁹³ The fact that Gifford also sought to destroy his brother again reinforces the idea that blood-bonds are not automatically trustworthy.

his summary on friendship by aligning his views on human relationships more closely with *Mary: A Fiction* than his own *Political Justice*.

It is at this point that the distinction between Fleetwood as character, Fleetwood as narrator, and Godwin as author reaches its greatest importance. The desire for an intimate one-on-one bond from the *character* of Fleetwood could easily be construed as misguided or foolish, even though he has learned such desires from the virtuous Ruffigny. However, Fleetwood as character and Fleetwood as narrator are in fact intertwined in this chapter: the language switches without hesitation from past to present tense: when Fleetwood says 'I do not condemn the man, upon whom a wound through my vitals acts but as a scratch', he does so as narrator (*Fleetwood*, p. 146). To understand Godwin's beliefs and motives we have to look to the novel's plot and character formation. As we shall see in this second section of this chapter, Godwin's views as expressed in the 1793 edition of *Political Justice* seem to have shifted a little, as it is individual relationships which present the possibility of reformation, be it via friendship or marriage. Here character, narrator and author share a single voice, and are united in their support for individual love and romantic friendship.

In this first paragraph another distinction is made: between a productive member of society and a sincere, intimate friend. The passage makes it clear that an individual who does not fully empathise with a friend and feel their emotions just as keenly as their own can still be 'a valuable member of society', but not 'the brother of my heart' (*Fleetwood*, p. 146). Godwin goes beyond the central theme of *Political Justice*; in what makes an individual productive to the social whole – here he utilises the romantic terminology present in Wollstonecraft's fiction to emphasise the importance of being valued on an individual level as well as living a life conducive to

the overall wellbeing of society. Here the narrator states that such a bond must be passionate and long-term, and two friends should share in their grief (as we saw between Ruffigny and Fleetwood, as well as with the other figures central to this thesis).⁶⁹⁴

So far Fleetwood's desires are akin to those of Mary's in Wollestonecraft's novel – he desires an intimate romantic friendship between equals, one demonstrating a high level of emotional intimacy. However, we can see the influences of both the character/narrator/author's gender and the time period in which *Fleetwood* was written via the difficulty Fleetwood has in finding such a bond. The unfashionable and suspect nature of male romantic friendship is evident in this plot point: he states that he could find no man willing to devote himself to such a bond with him. Highly romantic language is used here, and Fleetwood echoes the sentiments expressed by Gray, Seward and Wollstonecraft when he states that he desires 'an eternal partnership of the soul'. He then specifically states men were unwilling to 'love' him in return (*Fleetwood*, p. 147). Fears over male intimacy and sodomy by 1805 had of course been long established. Though Gray, Seward and Wollstonecraft all had their difficulties in securing same-sex romantic friendship it always remained possible. In *Fleetwood* the impossibility of male romantic friendship is affirmed. The third paragraph repeats the form of love Fleetwood desires, making clear that love between men is, to all intents and purposes, extinct.

The narrative then goes on to present a philosophical justification behind the need for 'a second self'. Godwin seeks to present a rational cause behind such desires

⁶⁹⁴ Such an ideal conforms to the portrayal of romantic friendship in this thesis, though it is the one point in which eighteenth-century friendship differs to that established by Aristotle. Here we do see a slight divergence between narrator, character and author: the narrator echoes Aristotle when he suggests that such friendship 'can grasp but one individual in its embrace', but the events of the plot (through which we can see Godwin's own voice) contradict this somewhat: Fleetwood's father had an intimate relationship both with Ruffigny and his own wife, whilst Fleetwood's future wife Mary has a romantic friend of her own. The voices converge once more, however, by the next paragraph.

and twice describes the process as 'mechanical'. If sensations are not shared, then one is alone. The seeming shift to a more sentimental stance between the years 1788 and 1805 on the part of the author is given a rational, methodical basis. Once more the novel criticises the unfeeling nature of society. However, the novel does not focus exclusively on the individual in the manner of *Mary: A Fiction*: Godwin adapts the theme of Wollstonecraft's novel to present a utopian vision of friendship, one which relies on altruism and equality between individuals to better the state of humanity. The themes of both *Mary: A Fiction* and *Political Justice* are combined in order to present both microcosmic and macrocosmic perspectives.

The fifth paragraph moves outward, and the narrative considers thousands at once. The language is grand, hinting at the elapse of vast amounts of time and space: 'martyrs' and 'champions' are evoked, suggesting a wide historical perspective. Godwin once more follows the *Nicomachean Ethics* when the novel states that to be intimately bound to 'a few' or 'one' is better than a thousand more casual ties. Once more the impossibility of such a bond is affirmed (by the end of the paragraph), this time more heavily emphasised by the wider context it is presented alongside.

Godwin's dedicating a whole chapter to directly deal with the theme of romantic friendship has not been mentioned in any critical analyses of the text, yet it is a vital part of the author's presentation of alternative social and individual relationship models. Godwin's open expression of his beliefs on love through the narrator is different to A. A. Markley's focus on covert and subversive desire, which deals more with hidden homoerotic elements in the text and not the author's left-field utopian suggestions. However, Brewer likewise leaves this chapter unmentioned, as he also focuses on male bonding as relative to women: in this case as a result of Fleetwood's misogyny. However, despite the centrality of misogyny to the events of

the second half of the novel, there is no evidence of ill-feeling toward women in this chapter whatsoever, nor is there any hint at the narrator/ character's desires being unhealthy or problematic.

The end of *Mary: A Fiction*'s 'sequel' recalls its own beginning, and in the sixth paragraph nature is referenced. Grand and evocative language is once again utilised with regard to nature: 'mountains and rivers', 'verdant planes' and 'immense precipices', but this time it fails to lift the spirits of the central protagonist. This time such experiences are rendered invalid by solitude: 'nature had no beauties'. Though Fleetwood has established the importance of sharing grief, here the importance of sharing positive experiences is highlighted. Fleetwood in fact echoes the language of Mary when she has *lost* friendship: "... all nature was to her a universal blank; she could neither enjoy it, nor weep that she could not" (*Mary: A Fiction*, p. 37). Without friendship, both individuals find themselves unable to appreciate the wonders of the natural world around them.

The final paragraph is dedicated to glossing over the twenty-year period in which Fleetwood fruitlessly searches for friendship. He is satisfied on an intellectual and public level, but these factors are irrelevant. Another mention is made of 'pretended friendship', with the narrator once more referring to false/ strategic friendship. Here Godwin ends his re-write of *Mary: A Fiction* on a somewhat pessimistic note (matching Wollstonecraft's own pessimism in her fiction), almost exactly mid-way through the novel. By chapter twelve we rejoin Fleetwood in his forties, and we witness the second of Godwin's commentaries: this time on marriage and Wollstonecraft's unfinished novel *Maria*.

FLEETWOOD PART TWO: MARRIAGE AND THE NEW MARIA

Following Godwin's male-centred conclusion to Wollstonecraft's first novel he begins his commentary on marriage, in which the difficulty of reconciling marital unity and cohabitation with individualism is recognised. The two halves of the novel are tied together, yet the focus on heterosexual relationships would appear to be the motivation for the near-exclusive focus upon the second half of the novel by critics. Furbank even describes the first half as 'dull', only being interested in the commentary on marriage, where the novel 'takes fire'.⁶⁹⁵ Godwin takes the convention of ending novels with marriage and subverts it: the narrative follows the example of Wollstonecraft's final novel *Maria* and seeks to demonstrate the potential male tyranny of marriage. Here, rather than Fleetwood playing the role of the hero of Wollstonecraft's novel, he plays the role of the villainous George, whose actions leave his wife destitute and with a ruined reputation. Godwin is keen to present the dangers a lack of altruism and equality in love, with the marriage central to *Fleetwood's* second half being characterised by jealousy and secrecy.

Many have noted the shift in Godwin's views toward marriage and cohabitation between the original publication of *Political Justice* and *Fleetwood* (and when *Fleetwood* has been referenced by scholars it is usually to support this point). However, in fact this chapter argues that the novel actually presents a warning about the potential tyranny of marriage. In the second volume to *Political Justice* Godwin warns against the dangers of cohabitation:

Cohabitation is not only an evil as it checks the independent progress of mind; it is also inconsistent with the imperfections and propensities of man. It is absurd

⁶⁹⁵ Furbank, 'Godwin's Novels', p. 220.

to expect that the inclination and wishes of two human beings should coincide through any long period of time ... The supposition that I must have a companion for life, is the result of a complication of vices. It is the dictates of cowardice, and not of fortitude. It flows from the desire of being loved and esteemed for something that is not desert.⁶⁹⁶

Godwin goes on to suggest the complete abolition of marriage.⁶⁹⁷ The first edition of *Political Justice* strongly decries the principles of monogamy and matrimony, presenting one of the earliest instances of modern polyamorous writing:

Marriage is law, and the worst of all laws ... Marriage is an affair of property, and the worst of all properties. So long as two human beings are forbidden by positive institutions to follow the dictates of their own mind, prejudice is alive and vigorous. So long as I seek to engross one woman to myself, and to prohibit

⁶⁹⁶ Though Godwin makes numerous references to cohabitation, this is one of his most direct statements on the subject: Godwin, *Political Justice*, II, p. 380.

⁶⁹⁷ Despite the importance of the evils of marriage to the text, it is not mentioned in Kamnick's analysis of Godwin's anarchist beliefs: 'On Anarchism', pp. 114-128. It is commented upon by David Collings in his study of Godwin's various writings (which does not include *Fleetwood*): "... Godwin carries out a systematic critique of every kind of institution, arguing that people should live under the immediate authority of reason itself, carrying out an almost total violence against the complex fabric of social life.": 'The Romance of the Impossible: William Godwin in the Empty Place of Reason', *ELH*, 70 (2003), 847-874 (p. 847). Clemit suggests that Godwin's writings on marriage in *Political Justice* influenced the life of his daughter: "... Percy Bysshe Shelley's elopement with Mary Shelley, despite his marriage to Harriet Westbrook, was planned in the light of Godwin's early arguments against marriage ...": Clemit, *The Cambridge Companion to Shelley*, p. 29. William Godwin's entry in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* also makes note of Godwin's utopic ideals regarding human bonds (though a somewhat brief one considering Godwin's assertion that marriage is the worst of all laws):

In the final book Godwin sketches his positive vision of the egalitarian society of the future, one which, having dispensed with all forms of organised co-operation, including orchestras and marriage, so as to ensure the fullest independence to each person's individual judgment, will gradually witness the development of the powers of the mind to the point that they gain ascendancy over physiological process allowing life to be prolonged indefinitely.

Mark Philip, 'William Godwin', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (16th January 2000; updated 8th April 2009) <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/godwin/>> [accessed 4th December 2009].

A. E. Rodway's introduction to a collection of Godwin's nonfiction recognises the centrality of Godwin's views on marriage to his earlier writings: "The moral imperative inherent in Godwin's conception of justice disposes also of promises, oaths, and contracts, including the contract of marriage.": *Age of Transition*, p. 33. Rodway notes Godwin's changing attitude toward marriage over time, as evident in subsequent editions of *Political Justice*, suggesting that his marriage to Wollstonecraft changed his outlook. He cites *Fleetwood* and *St. Leon* as examples of Godwin's softened views: p. 37. John P. Clark states the same, after detailing the incompatibility of marriage with Godwin's social vision: *Philosophical Anarchism*, p. 119. Clark suggests that Godwin's later, more conservative views, betrayed his anarchist beliefs: p. 120.

Without reference to *Fleetwood*, Godwin's views on marriage have been scrutinised in several texts. Mark Philip suggests that Godwin did not betray his principles on marriage in his union with Wollstonecraft: Mark P. Philip, *Godwin's Political Justice* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1986), p. 175. Finally, Mike Game comments on Godwin's views on marriage (again without reference to his fiction), noting his critique of marriage and praise of friendship: Mike Game, *Harmless Lovers? Gender Theory & Personal Relationships* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 109.

my neighbour from proving his superior desert and reaping the fruits of it, I am guilty of the most odious of all monopolies.⁶⁹⁸

This striking assertion that possession and exclusivity are the worst kind of law, property and monopoly clearly demonstrates Godwin's earlier views on bonds between men and women. As with *Fleetwood*, the personal and the political are tightly bound together, and private bonds are intricately connected to the public sphere: marriage is a form of ownership in much the same manner as a private monopoly. Godwin sought to subvert social relationship norms in a manner which was overtly queer.

Godwin may have moderated his views by 1805 (as the subsequent revisions of *Political Justice* themselves attest), but it is far from a profound shift and in *Fleetwood* all the 'vices' Godwin lists in *Political Justice* are still present.⁶⁹⁹ The novel's tragic-comic illustration of the possessiveness, pettiness, selfishness and jealousy engendered by cohabitation and marriage once again results in a combination of *Political Justice* with the novels of Wollstonecraft. As with friendship, Godwin demonstrates the potential for good and for wrongdoing in marriage, the presentation of both aspects being necessary in order to suggest the 'correct' modes of love which will do most to benefit the social whole.

⁶⁹⁸ Godwin, *Political Justice*, II, p. 381.

⁶⁹⁹ Marriage is, however, presented as a social necessity to prevent libertinism. Early on in the novel there are two settings in which young men live outside its regulation: the homosocial setting of the educational institutions at Oxford, and the fashionable circles of Paris. As we saw earlier in this chapter, the same-sex environment which usually precedes marriage is presented as unnatural, cruel and unhealthy in *Fleetwood*. Unlike the philosophies of Gray and Seward, which likened marital bonds to the activity of insects and saw such vows as a betrayal of friendship, Godwin suggests that environments in which it is lacking are toxic and immoral: "It were superfluous for me here to describe, what the reader may find in so many volumes amply and ambitiously detailed, the contempt for the marriage-bond, and the universal toleration then extended to adultery and debauchery ...": Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 41. In referring to the 'many volumes' dealing with the subject Godwin is relating to British cultural assumptions on the French capital.

The first instance of marriage the novel presents us with is a positive one. Though the first idealised family unit are the peasants early on in the novel, the Macneils give a clear example of the bourgeois nuclear family where education and development of the self takes place in the home shared by both sexes. They are cultured, artistic and open-minded, and Mr. Macneil is even sympathetic to the search for friendship Fleetwood had engaged upon.⁷⁰⁰ The family live in secluded domesticity together (crucially apart from fashionable urban life), to the benefit of all its members: mother (who has been chivalrously rescued from an exploitative brutal relationship and reclaimed from social ostracism as a fallen woman), father and three daughters. They are kind and hospitable, welcoming Fleetwood into their home. Macneil specifically presents friendship as being on a par with marriage and fatherhood as a field for the exercise of virtue when he states: "Every man has in him the seeds of a good husband, a good father, and a sincere friend."⁷⁰¹ Crucially, as with Ruffigny, these virtuous people are deliberately apart from the social whole, which has served to chastise and vilify them. Here we gain another hint at the author's increasing detachment from a conservative post-revolutionary society.

It is through the wise Macneil that the author voices the central message of the novel and the one which relates most closely with this thesis: Macneil suggests that every man needs 'a heart that shall beat in unison with its own' (*Fleetwood*, p. 163). Consciously non-gendered language is used at this point, and the 'heart' could be that of a man or a woman – Macneil suggests that every individual needs someone to love,

⁷⁰⁰ The family are all learned, and Fleetwood discusses Rousseau with them: Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 156.

⁷⁰¹ Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 160. Macneil suggests that Fleetwood has it in him to love and find virtue in even a stupid man, and eventually they would defend one another to the death: p. 162.

be it same or opposite-sex. Even Jesus Christ is stated as having needed such a bond – referring to John, a male disciple.⁷⁰² Having been unable to find such a bond amongst one of his own sex, Macneil suggests he marry a woman: one who is young and happy. That is not to say that friendships and marriages are presented as being the same: they are fundamentally different contracts, and Macneil explicitly states that women marry for protection (*Fleetwood*, p. 165).

The narrative's idealisation of the Macneil family is carried to its logical extreme in death. Their ship having been hit by a storm the family find there isn't enough space in the lifeboat for them all – they then reach the (somewhat absurd) conclusion that as they cannot all be saved together, they must all die together. This 'perfect family' is altruistic to the point of its own destruction.⁷⁰³ This event serves two functions: it establishes the grand, idealised nature of the family, yet is also serves a purpose crucial to the plot: it renders Fleetwood's future wife an orphan, without the protection of family or money, in much the same manner as Maria in Wollstonecraft's novel, as we shall see.

Fleetwood's Sexual Love

It is in Paris that the central protagonist first gains his tendencies toward the misogyny which will establish him as the villainous counterpart to George in Wollstonecraft's *Maria*. Having had little experience of women (his mother dying in

⁷⁰² Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 163. The novel here deliberately relates friendship to religious themes, though no other comment relating to Christianity and friendship is evident – it is presumably used here to suggest the inherent virtue in friendship to a largely Christian audience. Even so, it suggests that the Earl of Shaftesbury's view that friendship was somehow incompatible with Christianity was, once again, far from universally held.

⁷⁰³ It is puzzling as to why they failed to consider the daughter left on shore who is left utterly bereft of any family members as a result of this decision, and the unlikeliness of the scenario seems largely for the convenience of the plot.

his youth) Fleetwood gains his perspective on the female sex from his encounters with two women in France: the first was a sexual libertine who used men in order to excite her own egotistical desires: “To vex the temper and alarm the fears of her admirer was her delight.”⁷⁰⁴ This is Fleetwood’s first opposite-sex relationship, and he falls in love, though it ends badly. The second corrupting feminine influence on Fleetwood is the ‘Countess de B’. She is less intelligent and manipulative than his first encounter, and is sexually undiscerning, and once again an opposite-sex sexual relationship of Fleetwood’s ends badly.⁷⁰⁵ She is later negatively described as a ‘sensualist’ (*Fleetwood*, p. 56).

There are two key influences on Fleetwood’s growing misogyny: the homosocial environment of Oxford and the encounters with women in Paris. These experiences give the narrator’s younger self a distrust of women and a reluctance to be around them.⁷⁰⁶ The narrator, however, now recognises the misogyny in his own character at that time, commenting that he believed women to be ‘heartless, artificial and perfidious’ (*Fleetwood*, p. 156). It is this view of women which put him off marriage, and which he uses as a justification for extramarital sexual intercourse.⁷⁰⁷

⁷⁰⁴ Fleetwood goes on to say: “She desired no sympathy and love, that were not ushered in by a prelude of something like hate.”: Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 43. The chastisement of such sexually provocative women in the narrative hints at Puritanism.

⁷⁰⁵ Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 51. It would seem that the author’s own misogyny comes into play with these two negative female stereotypes – firstly the intelligent, manipulative, schemer, and secondly the simple, stupid, uncontrolled woman. The very fact that Fleetwood learns his misogyny from his encounters with women would suggest a basis in reality and thus a misogynistic worldview of the author as well as narrator. ‘Positive’ portrayals of women in the novel are based around women who are relatively meek and compliant to men, such as Fleetwood’s mother, who is even moved by her husband to rural Wales without an utterance of complaint, or indeed giving an opinion of her own on the matter: p. 120. Though the book is concerned with class equality, Godwin seems far less concerned with equality between the sexes.

⁷⁰⁶ There is perhaps at least a little basis in truth, as we saw with Thomas Gray’s misogynistic tendencies in the first chapter.

⁷⁰⁷ The narrator clearly states the influence his experiences have had on his views: “Unfortunately my adventures in Paris had led me to form such an idea of the sex, that I could never be reconciled to the thoughts of marriage: must I on the account remain as solitary and continent as a priest?”: Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 128.

This is certainly not to suggest that Godwin presents marriage as a necessity. As we noted earlier, Ruffigny, the voice of reason in the text, never marries or indeed seems to have any ties to a single woman. However, it is the recurring theme of Fleetwood's unhealthy distrust of women that forms the central difficulty in the latter sections of the novel. Though Brewer suggests misogyny to be the cause of Fleetwood's desire for friendship the two belong to different discourses in what almost amounts to two separate novels. Godwin largely closes the discourse on friendship with Chapter 11 (as we saw earlier), whereas Fleetwood's misogyny plays no part in the first half of the novel, coming into play in the second and his commentary on marriage.

In *Fleetwood* we see the other negative side of marriage, illustrating Godwin's views in *Political Justice*. Though the Macneils themselves are an idealised family unit, Mrs. Macneil's first sexual relationship echoes Wollstonecraft's unfinished novel *Maria* in its capacity for patriarchal tyranny and brutality. Having met the man she is to cohabit with whilst young, the Macneil matriarch had been taken prisoner by her partner, only being freed upon being rescued by Macneil.⁷⁰⁸ As the first presented in the novel, Godwin is demonstrating the potential for tyranny in a dishonest and unequal bond, serving as an echo of the second volume of *Political Justice*, in which he asserts that "The institution of marriage is a system of fraud ..." (*Political Justice*, II, p. 381). What seems like a melodramatic incident, however, actually foreshadows Fleetwood's own psychology and even some of his later actions.

Having been unable to find a friend, Fleetwood explores the only option left available to him in order to find companionship: marriage. He settles upon the only

⁷⁰⁸ A wife having been held prisoner is a theme shared by both novels, though the prison in *Maria* is the lunatic asylum, whereas here it is the marital home: Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 150. Godwin tacitly criticises society in its harsh judgement on the blameless Mrs. Macneil and her daughters following the events, with them being socially excluded: p. 152.

surviving daughter of the Macneil family, Mary Macneil.⁷⁰⁹ Having been orphaned, the narrator suggests that he was to her 'father, mother, sisters in one' (*Fleetwood*, p. 184). Once again the author presents a fluidity amongst different emotional categories which suggests that the boundaries between the family, spouse and friend is arbitrary. Despite this egalitarian viewpoint toward human bonding, the marriage is both unequal and extremely unstable. Godwin utilises this section to present the possible tyranny of marriage in much the same manner as Wollstonecraft's novel *Maria*.

At first the relationship between Fleetwood and Mary appears to be a happy one and shares many of the same signifiers as the virtuous friendship between Fleetwood and Ruffigny (such as shared grief) (*Fleetwood*, p. 185). Crucially they begin their married life as independent individuals, a point directly stated by Mary: "Mistake me not, my dear Fleetwood, I am not idle and thoughtless enough, to promise to sink my being and individuality in yours."⁷¹⁰ The author's belief in the necessity of freedom, equality and a lack of co-dependency is clearly articulated through Mary, an individual emblematic of the perfect wife.

It is at this point that the narrator expresses the belief that marriage should be as an idealised form of friendship, in one of the most crucial statements in the novel:

My soul panted for a friend, and I had never found such a friend as it demanded,—a friend "who should be to me as another self, who should joy in all my joys, and grieve in all my sorrows, and whose sympathy should be incapable of being changed by absence into smiles, while my head continued bent to the earth with anguish." I had not been aware that nature has provided a substitute in the marriage-tie, for this romantic, if not impossible friendship. The

⁷⁰⁹ Godwin's choice of name could be down to one of two possibilities: firstly he has named 'Mary' after his deceased wife Mary Wollstonecraft, though the allegory is far from clear. The second, more likely, possibility is that he has named her 'Mary' as yet another nod toward Wollstonecraft's novel *Mary: A Fiction*. As we shall see, the Marys in both novels have ample reason to fear marital bonds.

⁷¹⁰ She even states that she is not thoughtless or automatically subservient when she goes on to say: "In me you will have a wife, and not a passive machine.": Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 187. She does, however, consent to treating him with deference.

love which Pythias is said to have borne for Damon, or Theseus for Pirithous, many a married pair have borne for each other.⁷¹¹

In this passage Godwin directly conflates same-sex and opposite sex love, whilst acknowledging the impossibility of same-sex male friendship by 1805. Once more such bonds are referred to as 'romantic' (following the example of the previous works in this thesis). *Fleetwood* directly and unambiguously states that marriage is a natural 'substitute' for friendship, strongly indicating the two to be of equal value.⁷¹² The need for altruism, the sharing of heritage and of fates echoes the views on friendship presented by Ruffigny earlier in the novel, as does the love of parents filtering down to offspring (as the love between Ruffigny and Fleetwood senior was transferred to Ruffigny and Fleetwood junior). Real friendship and ideal marriage are thus demonstrated to be virtually identical.⁷¹³

Of perhaps even greater interest, Godwin follows the examples of Gray and Seward here by citing classical precedent, yet extends their influence to an idealised form of marriage. Crucially, both male-female and male-male bonds are referenced in this passage (Damon with Pythias, Thesius with Pirithous), again presenting gender as irrelevant in matters of love. Godwin's use of language in this sentence is so ambiguous with regards to gender that those reading the novel without any knowledge of Greek history would be unaware as to whether he were referring to male or female lovers. These particular examples are also of historical relevance: in referencing Pythia Godwin makes a direct link to Aristotle, whilst via Thesius, legendary founder of Athens, he ties such love to the very core of classical Greek thought. Once again

⁷¹¹ As with the friendships explored throughout this thesis, Godwin relates marriage to death in the latter stages of this quote: Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 190.

⁷¹² It could, in fact, be argued that in using the term 'substitute' Godwin is actually relegating marriage to second-place.

⁷¹³ With the exception of the gendered language utilised mid-way through the passage, in which Godwin suggests that masculinity and femininity (described as 'defenceless') balance one another. It is crucial to note, however, that he does not indicate same-sex friendships to be inherently unbalanced in any way, despite this statement.

the references to the ancient world are bound to queer ideals, though such references are unique to *Fleetwood*, and are not commonplace in either *Political Justice* or *Maria*.

The presentation of love in *Fleetwood* does not correspond to the view set out by Andrew Elfenbein in his article on the poetry of Anne Bannerman, in which he suggests that Godwin viewed friendship as a temporary, pre-marital state, especially with regards to his late wife:

Godwin's answer was that a female genius initially desired a female partner, then moved later in life to male ones. Following Wollstonecraft's lead in *Mary, A Fiction*, he showed Wollstonecraft contracting for Fanny Blood "a friendship so fervent, as for years to have constituted the ruling passion of her mind" and then turning later to Henry Fuseli, Gilbert Imlay, and finally himself.⁷¹⁴

Fleetwood does follow the model of Wollstonecraft's earlier novel, in which same-sex friendship is later replaced by opposite-sex love, yet the narrative, as we have just seen, does not present either as superior or as a natural successor as one gets older. It is unfashionable and perhaps impractical, but it is not presented as immature.

Godwin establishes both friendship and marriage to have positive and negative variants, and in the second half of the novel he is keen to highlight the potential tyranny of opposite-sex union. Fleetwood's views cause him to continually enter periods of fear, distrust and even loathing toward his wife.⁷¹⁵ He also demonstrates several instances of irrational jealousy brought about by a strong desire for possession, contradicting his wife's needs for independence and trust.⁷¹⁶ Fleetwood's

⁷¹⁴ Andrew Elfenbein, 'Lesbianism and Romantic Genius: The Poetry of Anna Bannerman', *ELH*, 63 (1996) 929-957 (p. 934).

⁷¹⁵ This is first noticed when she disagrees with him and he thinks of her as an 'artful hussy': Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 197.

⁷¹⁶ He is firstly jealous of the son of the peasant family coming to visit and spending time with his wife: Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 199. He is then jealous when his wife dances with someone else, despite his having told her too in a display of passive-aggression – he harshly tells her 'I wish you were married to [him]': p. 204. He then insinuates that she is a prostitute: p. 206. He does not want her forming any type of bond with anyone else: "Surely no wife ought to endeavour to make herself amiable and engaging in the eyes of any other man than her husband!": p. 208. Following this event, Fleetwood

insecurities and tyrannical desires for control over Mary cause her a considerable degree of distress. He even wishes she were dead at several points, despite her blameless actions.⁷¹⁷ We see another comparison with his late wife's works when Godwin presents Mary as a prisoner within the marriage – she becomes ill due to his behaviour toward her (Fleetwood apparently enjoying her incapacity and subsequent dependence) and keeps trying to flee the house to, in the words of the narrator, 'escape'.⁷¹⁸ The language used here is similar to that used in describing Maria's situation in Wollstonecraft's novel: "Now she endeavoured to brace her mind to fortitude, and to ask herself what was to be her employment in her dreary cell? Was it not to effect her escape, to fly to the succour of the child, and to baffle the selfish schemes of her tyrant – her husband?" (*Maria*, p. 76). Both Mary and Maria find themselves imprisoned within a tyrannical marriage.

Fleetwood's relationship toward his wife at points directly mirrors that found in Maria's marriage:

With all my attention and affectionate interest, I perceived that I could not become the friend or confidant of my husband. Every thing I learned relative to his affairs I gathered up by accident; and I vainly endeavoured to establish, at our fire-side, that social converse, which often renders people of different characters dear to each other. Returning from the theatre, or any amusing party, I frequently began to relate what I had seen and highly relished; but with sullen taciturnity he soon silenced me. I seemed therefore gradually to lose, in his society, the soul, the energies of which had just been in action. To such a degree, in fact, did his cold, reserved manner affect me, that, after spending some days with him alone, I have imagined myself the most stupid

demonstrates more of his misogyny: "... all women were in the main alike, selfish, frivolous, inconstant and deceitful.": p. 214.

⁷¹⁷ The first instance is following her dancing with another man, when he wishes she had died along with the rest of her family: Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 212. Godwin's motivations for his actions are interpreted somewhat differently within the context of gendered actions: where Pollock argues that his possessiveness is caused by overactive masculinity, Tysdahl argues that Fleetwood is not masculine *enough*: "Traditional male assertiveness could have offered him a way out, but his sensibility is much too delicate even for mild outbreaks of straightforward aggressiveness.": *William Godwin as Novelist*, p. 106.

⁷¹⁸ This is the strongest suggestion that the marriage is tyrannical, though Fleetwood himself feels as though it is her who has trapped him, suggesting it to be 'a slavery which some devilish witchcraft had fastened on my heart': Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 214. Mary's escape attempts occur two pages later: Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 218.

creature in the world ... The very countenance of my husband changed; his complexion became sallow, and all the charms of youth were vanishing with its vivacity.⁷¹⁹

This passage relating to the souring of an unhealthy marital state in *Maria* directly summarises the decline of Fleetwood and Mary's union. In each, the bright and socially-engaging wife is regarded by her husband with suspicion and cold disdain. In each the husband's manner drains the wife of happiness and energy. Finally, both novels see the husband's physical countenance alter as a result of the marriage, gradually gaining an elderly, sickly appearance. Yet Godwin expands upon the events of Wollstonecraft's novel, providing the perspective of the villainous husband (yet also the capacity for redemption and rehabilitation). What Wollstonecraft summarises in a paragraph, Godwin lays out over sixty pages. In providing a male perspective, however, Godwin changes the husband's motivations: rather than being a cruel and cunning individual, Fleetwood has good intentions coupled with an unhealthy distrust of women. In both, though, the institution of marriage allows for the destructive tendencies of the husband to ruin the life of the wife. To possess another individual in an unequal bond paves the way for horrific abuse.

Tysdahl argues that an abundance of sensibility within Fleetwood results in his possessiveness: "His sensibility is, in fact, his prison. He cannot escape from it into a more liberal and better-balanced appreciation of the moral demands of his surroundings; and the oppressiveness of his situation – in the weakness he feels that he must have a complete hold on his wife – makes him a neurotic despot."⁷²⁰ Carlson likewise suggests that it is Fleetwood's sensibility which undermines his marriage.⁷²¹ However, to suggest that the novel criticises abundant sensibility is once again to read the novel from a heterocentric viewpoint: the wealth of emotional displays between

⁷¹⁹ Wollstonecraft, *Maria*, p. 145.

⁷²⁰ Tysdahl, *William Godwin as Novelist*, p. 106.

⁷²¹ Carlson, *England's First Family*, p 48.

Fleetwood and Ruffigny earlier in the novel are presented with an entirely positive context (that of the reformation of Fleetwood himself) and do not suggest sensibility itself to be at fault for Fleetwood's marital difficulties. Fleetwood's sense of superiority over his wife render him unable to share in emotional intimacy and deny him the ability to express unhappiness as he does with Ruffigny, but it does not appear to be sensibility itself which is presented as destructive.

It is because of this jealousy that Markley asserts that homosocial rivalry underlies the erotic desires in the novel: it is competitive relationships between men that really drive them in capitalist society.⁷²² Having ignored Fleetwood and Ruffigny, Markley suggests that Fleetwood's desire for male companionship is due to his fundamental misogyny and resultant inability to relate to women. The same sentiment is shared by William Brewer's account of male friendship in the novel.⁷²³ However, though Fleetwood's misogyny does indeed render him incapable of marital affection, Godwin does not suggest friendship to be second to marriage – indeed, as we have seen, the author suggests marriage to be another form of friendship but difficult to achieve equality when it is usual for husbands to be older, better educated and more socially wealthy and powerful than their wives and that this is traditionally central to sexual eroticism too. The novel makes fun of this as well as having it turn to tragedy. Though I do not question Markley's assertion that male homoerotic desire is routed through rivalry, regarding friendship and same-sex love there are far stronger, more overt examples in the text.

⁷²² Markley suggests that this is also the case for Godwin's later novel *Mandeville* (1817): "Both Fleetwood and Mandeville manifest social pathologies characterized by a deep distrust of their fellow man. Moreover, in both cases profound emotional insecurity results in their passionate jealousy of another man – a jealousy that is signified by an obsession even with the rival's physical attractiveness.": 'The Success of Gentleness' (para. 4 of 39). Oddly enough, though Markley neglects to comment upon Fleetwood and Ruffigny, he does remark upon same-sex attachments in *Cloudesley*.

⁷²³ This fundamentally destroys his marriage, which Brewer suggests Fleetwood finds 'emasculating and enslaving' and that: 'Far from enhancing the masculine self, marriage prevents its full realization.': Brewer, 'Male Rivalry and Friendship', in *Mapping Male Sexuality*, ed. by Losey and Brewer, p. 51.

Carlson shares the perspective of this chapter and reads the text as a negative commentary on companionate marriage, recognising Godwin's work possessing a radical social agenda (as was started earlier, Carlson's work is distinct in recognising the alternatives to blood ties in the novel).⁷²⁴ Carlson also notes the ties to Wollstonecraft's *Maria* evident in *Fleetwood* as a criticism of the heterosexual cultural norm.⁷²⁵

In sharp contrast, David Fleisher suggests that *Fleetwood* presents a relatively unproblematic and positive view of marriage:

It is clear from the novel *Fleetwood* (1805) that, although he remained conscious of the forces of some of his earlier objections to marriage, he had come to have a strong sense of its advantages and to value it above all as the harbour of those domestic affections in which he now took every occasion to lavish praise.⁷²⁶

Peter H. Marshall's short analysis of the novel shares Fleisher's view, suggesting marriage is being portrayed as a sanctuary from society: "... he presents marriage and the family as a haven in a crass and brutal world."⁷²⁷ However, Godwin is keen to present the possible abuses of marriage and the resultant tyranny over both men and women. As he clearly demonstrates negative examples of friendship (strategic friendships or 'juggling') he likewise seeks to present the dangers inherent in marriage.

Here Godwin is making a statement on the correct forms of human bonding. Just as he gives examples of 'good' and 'bad' friendships, so too does he demonstrate positive and negative marriages. Rather than being based in mutual esteem or virtue, Fleetwood has entered the union with a desire for possession and, perhaps more

⁷²⁴ "Fleetwood depicts bourgeois companionate marriages as even less likely than feudal alliances to result in marital harmony.": Carlson, *England's First Family*, p 48.

⁷²⁵ Carlson, *England's First Family*, p 48.

⁷²⁶ Fleisher, *Study in Liberalism*, p. 104.

⁷²⁷ Marshall, *William Godwin*, p. 262.

importantly, validation. Rather than admiring the virtues of his wife (as should occur in a noble friendship) his primary motivation is based in his own egotistical needs.⁷²⁸

His attitude toward jealousy is another view of Godwin's which appears to have changed little between the publications of *Political Justice* and *Fleetwood*. In the former Godwin suggests that relationships founded in virtue will not descend into jealousy. His utopian vision for a virtuous and egalitarian mankind with no need for laws would, in fact, see the annihilation of the emotion altogether:

Man would be fearless, because they would know that there were no legal snares lying in wait for their lives. They would be courageous, because no man would be pressed to the earth that another might enjoy immoderate luxury, because everyone would be secure of the just reward of his industry and prize of his exertions. Jealousy and hatred would cease, for they are the offspring of injustice. Every man would speak with his neighbour, for there would be no temptation to falsehood [sic] and deceit.⁷²⁹

Fleetwood presents the opposite scenario: the novel is rife with deceit and injustice, and it is Fleetwood's self-centredness which bred his own jealous and tyrannical attitude: though the situation between he and his wife is far worsened by the actions of the villainous Garrick (who seems to delight in causing havoc between couples in a manner similar to that of Harriot Freke in *Belinda*) Fleetwood's attitude toward the bond – selfishly lacking in virtue and altruism - had already perverted it. His inner resentment crosses the boundary into violence and his desires toward her grow sadistic: "How I should like to see her torn with red-hot pincers." (*Fleetwood*, p. 267). He also forcefully grabs her by the arms whilst accusing her of infidelity (*Fleetwood*, p. 267). When he leaves her (whilst she is pregnant) he takes pleasure in the thought

⁷²⁸ Fleetwood's younger self issues the following miscomprehension on love: "[Love is] a selfish sentiment, the pampering of a weakness, a delicious scheme for beguiling the hours and weeks of our existence. Certainly man, particularly the man whom heaven has endowed with inventive faculties and a comprehensive intellect, was made for something better than this.": Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 222.

⁷²⁹ This passage is one of the earlier statements in the second volume of the works: Godwin, *Political Justice*, II, p. 29.

of her suffering, once again wishing for her death, and therefore that of the child, this time from poverty and starvation:

I gave the most peremptory orders, that she should not remain another night under my roof, that she should be suffered to take away with her nothing but what strictly belonged to her person, and that she should, on no pretext whatever, receive a farthing out of the produce of my estate. – I delighted myself with the hope, that she would perish in abject misery.⁷³⁰

This cold and calculated destruction of his own wife and child is comparable to that of Maria's husband, and once again *Fleetwood* follows the course of Wollstonecraft's unfinished novel. Despite Fleetwood's emotional turmoil, the language here is that of the legal profession, allowing the complicity of the legal system in the hazardous situation for women. Both *Fleetwood* and *Maria* provide criticism of the current system.

Though Fleetwood eventually succumbs to a mental breakdown (involving a psychotic ritual in which he displays deeply misogynistic sexualised violence) and nearly loses his life, he is rescued and restored to domesticity by altruistic friendship.⁷³¹ Thanks to the actions of a man named Scarborough (who tyrannically abused his own family before his reformation), his daughter (a romantic friend of Mary) and the peasant family he brought together at the start of the novel, Gifford is apprehended.⁷³² More importantly, Fleetwood is reconciled with Mary, who is physically supported by her female friend, and he finally recognises her virtues (*Fleetwood*, p. 306). As with *Belinda*, friendship saves endangered marital bonds. As

⁷³⁰ Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 270.

⁷³¹ Fleetwood's mental breakdown involved his creating waxwork figures of his wife and suspected lover, having a sinister meal with them, tearing their clothes from the waxwork of Mary (in what is ostensibly a display of sexualised violence) and beats them with furniture: Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 275. He is almost killed by Gifford's hired men before he is rescued: p. 278. Bruhm comments on the waxworks scene as part of his wider examination of the representation of torture in the novel: Bruhm, *Eighteenth-Century Life*, p. 32.

⁷³² Scarborough made impossible demands upon his wife and children which destroyed his family: Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 289. Scarborough was suspicious of his daughter's friendship with Mary, which will be examined further in the fifth chapter to this thesis. He refers to marriages which are not formed in true love as a form of prostitution: p. 293. Scarborough also had violent thoughts toward women, wanting to kill his daughter for not obeying him: p. 295.

such Godwin writes an ending for Wollstonecraft's *Maria*, in which the husband is rehabilitated and reformed by same-sex altruism. The villain of *Fleetwood*'s second half, Fleetwood himself, is not intrinsically evil, but has been scarred and corrupted by social influences, exacerbated by the power and control he was able to hold over his wife. The novel may end with the potential for a happy and fulfilling union, but only after exploring the depths of the possible negative consequences of marriage.

GODWIN AND THE REFORMATION OF FRIENDSHIP

Through *Fleetwood* Godwin presents us with a radical vision, one in which personally-chosen bonds which recognize the selfhood of others are superior to traditionally defined hierarchical bonds. Scholarly attention to the novel, however, has often overlooked the novel's first half, and as a result the author's rewriting of *Mary: A Fiction* has been missed.⁷³³ This imbalanced focus has been present since 1805, with friendship little mentioned by contemporary reviewers. *The Monthly Review* and *The Critical Review* responded lukewarmly to the novel, and make no mention of the bond between Fleetwood and Ruffigny.⁷³⁴ Altruism and friendship were briefly alluded to by *The British Critic*: “[Fleetwood] delighted in performing acts of benevolence to individuals, and hoped for the solace of friendship.”⁷³⁵ However, the significance of the friendship theme in comparison with the second half exploring marriage was not brought out. We can see a clear bias toward the marriage storyline in *The Annual Review*, which suggested that the elements of the plot which

⁷³³ Burton Ralph Pollin even states that: “... it is only after forty, as with Godwin himself, that [Fleetwood] experiences the emotion of profound love which, alone, ripens his personality”: *Education and Enlightenment*, p. 245. Pollin states that the novel is a great example of ‘feeling’, neglected in Godwin’s earlier works, but only remarks upon it in relation to marriage: p. 45.

⁷³⁴ *The Monthly Review*, 49 (1806), p. 102. *The Critical Review; Or, Annals of Literature*, 4 (1805), 383-391.

⁷³⁵ *The British Critic*, 26 (1805), 189-194 (p. 191).

did not pertain to marriage should be cut (for the sake of narrative rather than any overt moral objection).⁷³⁶ *The Anti-Jacobin Review* as we have seen did realize the significance of the dual structure and unsurprisingly articulated a strong moral objection to Godwin's ideas: "His real opinion seems to be, that marriage is necessarily destructive of happiness; and to increase this notion seems to be the direct design of the strange catastrophe which concludes his performance."⁷³⁷ It suggests the first sections of the novel to be 'of no interest whatever' and as being too 'gloomy'.⁷³⁸ The review suggests that *Fleetwood* contradicts the morality of 'civilized society' and even that Godwin is 'completely deranged'.⁷³⁹ Significantly, this is the only contemporary review to mention male friendship, though it proves Godwin's point and shows the homophobic nature of early nineteenth-century society when it refers to Ruffigny's connection to the Fleetwoods as "... more romantic than probable."⁷⁴⁰

The focus on *Fleetwood's* second half has usually been to demonstrate the changes in Godwin's views on marriage between 1793 and 1805, but though Godwin may have acknowledged the power of sensibility by the time he penned *Fleetwood*, the novel does not deviate as much from his *Political Justice* as has so often been supposed. Godwin presents revolutionary alternatives to both marriage and the nuclear family unit, and goes out of his way to demonstrate the potential dangers in trusting those simply because they share blood ties. Godwin also demonstrates the potential ruin facing women in a literary response to Wollstonecraft's *Maria* (even

⁷³⁶ *The Annual Review, and History of Literature; For 1805*, 4 (1806), 645-650 (p. 650).

⁷³⁷ *The Anti-Jacobin Review*, p. 343. It is clear the magazine has a strong bias against Godwin himself, and spends a good deal of the review insulting his character and that of the late Mary Wollstonecraft, referring to her as an 'abandoned libertine'.

⁷³⁸ *The Anti-Jacobin Review*, p. 337.

⁷³⁹ *The Anti-Jacobin Review*, p. 341. This distaste was not shared by other reviewers: *The Critical Review* stated that their fears over any immorality in the novel were allayed: *The Critical Review*, p. 383. *The British Critic* recognise the political intent of the novel, and suggest that "... it is a work which we dare not wholly recommend, nor can we feverely censure.": *The British Critic*, p. 194.

⁷⁴⁰ *The Anti-Jacobin Review*, p. 330.

humanising the face of Maria's husband). Godwin presents the radical idea that bonds between humans should be established on rational affection alone, and that blood ties are irrelevant. Ruffigny is no less Fleetwood's father than his own biological parent, and the adoption of Fleetwood by Ruffigny suggests the radical nature of romantic friendship: in Godwin's world, friends may not share a roof, or even a country, but they do share their children. The very fact that friendship brings together strangers of different generations and creates a shared heritage radically reconstructs traditional social structures. Via the novel we can see that Godwin maintains his views on human bonds in the twelve years after 1793 – his assertion in *Political Justice* that biological paternity is irrelevant is continued into the novel.⁷⁴¹

In this sense Godwin marries his views on personal bonds and wider social hierarchies. Godwin's queer vision for human relationships is one tied to abolishing class distinctions – in presenting blood bonds and social hierarchies as arbitrary, and calling for an altruism based on social and economic need, the philosopher seeks to break down traditional social structures and divisions. Friendship is thus a tool for eradicating class and even monarchical forms of government. At the same time, in eradicating the necessity of male blood lines, *Fleetwood* is even challenging patriarchal power dynamics within wider society.⁷⁴² Godwin takes Aristotelian love to suggest a direction for a utopic society. He also takes his wife's first novel and extends it, presenting it not only from a new perspective but applying it to wider social themes. Yet perhaps as a result of the increasing social conservatism in Britain the author idealises one-on-one friendship (romantic, paternal or marital) over

⁷⁴¹ In *Political Justice* Godwin suggests that paternity is only important in an aristocratic social model – in a democratic model it is rendered irrelevant: Godwin, *Political Justice*, II, p. 383.

⁷⁴² The novel even challenges racial and national divisions: the wise Macneil suggests that strangers, even those of other races and nationalities, should be loved as one's own family: Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 161. True altruism is presented as transcendent of all social and cultural boundaries.

urban social environments. Fleetwood as narrator and character inherits Mary's distaste for the masses and for fashionable society.

Godwin's message also overcomes practical difficulties facing friendship by 1805 and the open option presented in the novel for either friendship or marriage circumvents one of the major difficulties surrounding same-sex love. How did Godwin manage to write a passion between two men, which frequently involves their holding one another in emotional embraces, in a society in which quick kisses between men were considered a sure sign of sodomy? The answer seems to lie in Fleetwood's later choices. Unlike the morally upright Ruffigny, Fleetwood forms relationships with women: his sexual desires are apparent early on, and his sexual exploits with women in the earlier stages of the novel confirm 'normal' sexual appetites. He also chooses to get married. Though he could just as easily have spent his life in platonic love with another man, his circumstances render him wedded to a woman. The happy marital ending to the novel would certainly help assuage fears of sodomy in the reader, whilst at the same time allowing Godwin to present friendship as an equally viable, equally moral choice.

CONCLUSION

The social factors that relegated romantic friendship to the queer margins of British literary culture proved overwhelming. Of course, as has been clear, the increasingly unacceptability of same-sex romantic friendship did not apply to all friendship bonds, and over the course of the eighteenth century the increasing prevalence of clubs and societies (such as the bluestockings) served to spur public discourse in a manner which would shape the modern political landscape.⁷⁴³ Friendship in its general sense was never threatened by a decreasing prominence in British culture, but the intimate one-on-one variety which had its roots in the ancient world and on which Thomas Gray, Anna Seward, Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin write certainly was. Despite their prominence in the literary canon of the period (Seward being crucial to the development of the sonnet and Gray the elegy) each presented a literary ideal which was becoming increasingly alien to the cultural mainstream.

The tradition of friendship outlined in this thesis differs from that detailed by Alan Bray in *The Friend*. The Aristotelian romantic friendships in this study were rooted in an equality which was unknown to so many of the master-servant-style relationships outlined in Bray's work.⁷⁴⁴ Rather than a same-sex bond in the style of marriage rooted in Christian tradition we have a same-sex bond which was – at least for the poets – hostile to the idea of marriage and sexuality, rooted in classical tradition yet with no common religious affinity. As is evidenced by the writings of

⁷⁴³ See Habermas, detailed in the first chapter to this thesis.

⁷⁴⁴ The friendships Bray outlines have numerous signifiers which demonstrate inequality: the cleaning of the master's chamber-pot became a gesture both of intimacy and of subservience: Bray, *The Friend*, p. 154.

the Earl of Shaftesbury, romantic friendship was not strongly associated with Christian cultural signifiers (Ashley-Cooper, p. 47). Nor was it limited to individuals of a specific religious denomination: the Anglican Anna Seward, the pantheist Mary Wollstonecraft and the atheist William Godwin all praise romantic friendship in their written works.

This thesis has examined the impact on literature of the phenomenon outlined by Michel Foucault in *The History of Sexuality* (1976): the eighteenth century-shift in social discourse and the creation of the concept of ‘sexuality’ (Foucault, p. 105). Historians such as Trumbach and Traub have also noted the new social focus on sodomy and sapphism accompanying the social shift toward companionate marriage and the nuclear family unit.⁷⁴⁵ Same-sex bonds became taboo; with the change in social discourse romantic friendship became archaic; and over the course of the eighteenth century same-sex nonsexual relationships waned considerably. Love became concomitant with sexuality, and the hetero/homo binary which is the norm today gradually began to solidify as a social reality.

As we have seen throughout the four chapters of this thesis, it was these two main factors that contributed to a fading away of romantic friendship, both on the literary and wider cultural scenes. The creation of ‘sexuality’ in social discourse resulted in our modern conceptions of human sexual behaviour as well as changing our perceptions of individual bonds.⁷⁴⁶ Intimacy became sexualised, and so wider depictions of intimate same-sex bonds altered. This did not affect groupings in the same way, hence the increasing prominence of friendship circles and societies.

⁷⁴⁵ Detailed throughout the introduction, first and second chapters to this thesis.

⁷⁴⁶ Described in the introduction to and first chapter of this thesis.

The new western sexual discourse resulted in a variety of sweeping social changes, including the creation of the sodomite and the lesbian.⁷⁴⁷ Whereas prior to the eighteenth century same-sex sexual acts were, though sinful, considered to be a potential part of anyone's experience (though this should not suggest a legal or social levity on the subject), at the turn of the century they became associated with specific, marginalised social archetypes: for men the sodomite (or 'molly'), for women the sapphist.⁷⁴⁸ As Trumbach notes, male-male and female-female sex was now tied to a deviation in gender boundaries and carried a far greater degree of social shame.⁷⁴⁹

The increasing cultural prominence of the nuclear family and companionate marriage also did a great deal to relegate the tradition of intimate friendship. Whereas prior to the eighteenth century those in control of the literary discourse (the upper and what existed of the middle class) reserved the majority of the affections for same-sex friends, companionate marriage demanded the spouse to perform the central emotional role in an individual's life.⁷⁵⁰ Daniel Defoe's *A Treatise Concerning the Use and Abuse of the Marriage Bed* (1727) is typical of this emerging tendency, and his depiction of companionate marriage as a safe harbour from the world was part of the new literary ideal.⁷⁵¹ This development was expressed by the rise of the novel, with the increasing prevalence of courtship fiction (which, as we saw in the third chapter, Maria Edgeworth did her best to subvert with her own novel *Belinda*).

Such changes meant that romantic friendship left the mainstream for the margins: no longer 'normal' it became queer. The new lens of sexuality meant that

⁷⁴⁷ Though 'sodomite' was a term which over the eighteenth century became exclusively associated with men who had sexual contact with men, there was no singularly popular term for women: as we have seen throughout this thesis, terms ranging from 'tribade' to 'sapphist' were used – and the term lesbian, though uncommon, came into usage in the same century.

⁷⁴⁸ This process has a particular focus in the first and second chapters to this thesis.

⁷⁴⁹ Trumbach, 'Modern Sodomy' in *A Gay History of Britain*, ed. by Matt Cook and others, p. 80.

⁷⁵⁰ Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage*, p. 123.

⁷⁵¹ Defoe, *Use and Abuse of the Marriage Bed*, p. 30.

friendship signifiers – particularly physical signifiers – were sexually suspect. Friends (especially male friends) could no longer share a bed or kiss one another as they had done in previous century (Bray, p. 210). To desire a life devoted to romantic friendship, then, was to take a social and political stance and identity, particularly in the earlier decades of the century. The newly-hysterical social panic over sapphism and sodomy had made life-long intimate friendships unfashionable and suspect. As a result the friendship writings examined in this thesis have a defensive tone: from Gray's comparing sexual activity to that of insects, to Seward's attacks on her beloved's spouse, to Mary's disgust toward her husband in Wollstonecraft's early novel *Mary: A Fiction*, we can see an overt queer hostility to sexuality routed through a criticism of marriage.

It was social hostility toward romantic friendship that caused the only split with Aristotelian ideals. Whereas Aristotle made clear that mourning and grief had no place within friendship (referring to shared mourning as 'effeminate') for all four figures detailed in this thesis mourning and grief were central to friendship writing.⁷⁵² This does not seem to have been, as has commonly been supposed, due to a desire to 'bury' friendship and thus find a safe place within the social discourse.⁷⁵³ For Seward, Gray, Wollstonecraft and Godwin mourning is used as a means of immortalising and idealising friendship, placing such relationships – and crucially, their signifiers – beyond criticism in a culture which sought to vilify same-sex bonds. Elegy was central to personal writings on romantic friendship.

As has been stated throughout the thesis, this investigation does not rule out the possibility of erotic intimacy between same-sex friends: just the supposition that either their written works or their personal identities will have been defined by them

⁷⁵² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 314.

⁷⁵³ A viewpoint posited by scholars such as Traub: *The Renaissance of Lesbianism*, p. 172.

(excluding Gray with regards to Walpole). Instead, the language of friendship has been utilised to form an opposition to the social dominance of sexualised love and the resultant restrictions on same-sex bonds. It is relevant to neither the written works nor the socio-political ideologies contained within them whether their authors engaged in sexual activity. At first glance this will appear to be a similar stance to that taken by Lilian Faderman and Martha Vicinus, who suggest the potential erotic components of eighteenth-century same-sex relationships to be irrelevant. However, the conclusion reached by these critics - that there is no distinction between romantic friendship and lesbianism – is considerably different to the one I hope to have demonstrated. Eighteenth-century romantic friendship literature was fundamentally opposed to the culture of sexuality, with this opposition only crumbling by the turn of the nineteenth.

This shift can be seen in works following Wollstonecraft's *Mary: A Fiction*. Wollstonecraft's own *Maria*, Edgeworth's *Belinda* and Godwin's *Fleetwood* all sought to reconcile (in some form) friendship and sexuality. For Wollstonecraft this meant sexualised friendships, for Edgeworth same-sex friendships which saved heterosexual marriage, and for Godwin it meant equal companionate marriage as a form of friendship itself. This was quite a shift from the all-out hostility to sexuality present in many of Gray's works, much of Seward's poetry and the early writings of Wollstonecraft. Each presented a distinct literary response to their marginalised positions.

In this climate the positive portrayal of romantic friendship became ever more critical. As Martha Vicinus notes, "... once established as 'romantic friends', many couples chose a path of self-advertised commitment and happiness ... Criticism, disagreements, and the normal tensions in life were rarely made visible even to close friends."⁷⁵⁴ It was necessary that the ideal was lived up to – "... especially long-term fidelity ... friendships might be fraught with jealousies, impossible demands and self-doubt, but even more than heterosexual marriage, their outward face was one of devoted faithfulness."⁷⁵⁵ This sums up the literary ideal of female romantic friendship: the affirming public projection of a private bond.

The works of Thomas Gray, Anna Seward, Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin all presented individual representations of romantic friendship, yet throughout the poems, letters and novels we find several common themes. Eighteenth-century romantic friendship was characterised by the six qualities detailed by Aristotle: equality, trust, cohabitation, exclusivity and physical intimacy. As such friendship was rooted in the ideology and cultural signifiers of the classical world. The conscious and overt references by Thomas Gray, Anna Seward and William Godwin not only to Aristotle but also to Achilles and Patroclus, the founding of Athens, Sappho, to the later Augustan poets and to the elegy itself all demonstrate the centrality of Hellenic and Latin texts to the poetry, novels and political writings of the Georgian period.

⁷⁵⁴ Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, p. 11.

⁷⁵⁵ Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, p. 11.

The cultural shift to companionate marriage began to challenge friendship in terms of equality. To Aristotle, complete equality was only possible between those of the same sex, and was an absolute necessity for true friendship:

This kind of friendship, then, is complete in respect of duration and in all other points, and that which each gets from the other is in all respects identical or similar, as should be the case with friends.⁷⁵⁶

Aristotle suggested that friendship could only exist between two individuals of similar social standing, as inequality made true friendship impossible. Due to the low status of women in classical Greek culture male-female friendship was presented as impossible: “The association of man and wife seems to be aristocratic ...” (Aristotle, p. 273). However, as the eighteenth century progressed we can see an evolution over time regarding women and friendship in literature: from the misogyny of Thomas Gray to the increasing egalitarianism present in the works of Seward, Wollstonecraft, Edgeworth and Godwin.

As we saw in the first chapter, Gray’s poetical devotion to men seems to have been matched by a disdain for women. However, as the poet presents two identities in his works – the sexualised, sodomitical and sophisticated persona amusing Walpole (‘Gray and Eros’) and the nonsexual, romantic friendship-favouring persona writing for West (‘Gray and Philos’), so too can we find two viewpoints on women. Gray’s writings to and for Walpole: from his prose to ‘Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat’ generally contain a derogatory view of women.⁷⁵⁷ However, his writings involving West do not contain much comment at all on the female sex, though his poetry does criticise opposite-sex sexual love.⁷⁵⁸ The sexualised Gray seems to play to the

⁷⁵⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 258.

⁷⁵⁷ As was seen in the first chapter, particularly through one particular line which implies a vacuous materialism on the part of all women: “What female heart can gold despise?”: Gray, *The Works of Thomas Gray*, I, p. 5.

⁷⁵⁸ As seen via his comparison of sexual courtship to the activity of ‘insects’ in ‘Ode on the Spring’: Gray, *The Works of Thomas Gray*, I, p. 2.

popular social stereotype of the misogynistic sodomite, as caricatured in the homophobic broadside ballad 'The Women-Hater's Lamentation'.⁷⁵⁹ The fact that it is Gray's sexualised persona rather than his non-sexual 'romantic friendship' side which demonstrates the greater misogyny in his written works suggests the latter to have been more platonic and less gendered.

Egalitarianism is strongly evident in the other texts examined in this thesis. Gender was no barrier to Anna Seward's presentation of same-sex relationships – friendships between two men she treats as equal to those between women. In March of 1785 Reverend Whalley, a consistent correspondent of Seward, lost a male friend of his, 'in the flower of his youth'.⁷⁶⁰ Seward instantly acknowledges the gravity of the situation, recommending that he devote a portion of each and every day to remembering his companion and feel no shame in revealing his grief to others.⁷⁶¹ Seward uses the same reverent language she uses for female-female romantic friendship here in reference to love between men. Her correspondence provides comfort for bereaved male friends at other instances.⁷⁶² In a letter to Dr. Warner she writes: "I AM more grieved that I can express for Mr. Hayley. His love of the gallant unfortunate, like that of Jonathan to David, passed the love of women."⁷⁶³ Overall

⁷⁵⁹ Examined throughout this thesis: Anonymous, *The Women-Hater's Lamentation*.

⁷⁶⁰ *Letters of Anna Seward*, I, p. 21 (Anna Seward to Rev. Whalley, Lichfield, March 1st, 1785)

⁷⁶¹ "By making them habitually out theme, a lost friend seems not lost; he mingles in our conversation; we see him; we hear his voice; we make our friends see and listen to him; and we imagine his beautified spirit hovers over us; and that it is not among the least of its delights to contemplate the affection, which thus consecrates his idea in the breast of those who we dearest to him upon earth, and to whom he will soon be reunited in that state, the happiness of which will find its perfection in the consciousness of its perpetuity.": *Letters of Anna Seward*, I, p. 21 (Anna Seward to Rev. Whalley, Lichfield, March 1st, 1785).

⁷⁶² Such as in a letter to William Hayley in June of 1788, where she laments, "O! my dear Mr H. that I could have been with you at Earham, to have softened your griefs, by sharing them! – the only possible consolation in so deep a sorrow.": *Letters of Anna Seward*, II, p. 125 (Seward to William Hayley, Lichfield, June 1st, 1788).

⁷⁶³ *Letters of Anna Seward*, II, p. 127 (Anna Seward to Dr. Warner, Lichfield, June 3rd, 1788).

Seward presents men as just as capable of romantic friendship, though such love appears to have remained same-sex oriented.⁷⁶⁴

Wollstonecraft's 1783 elegy to her companion Fanny Blood, *Mary: A Fiction*, challenges gendered differences in romantic friendship, having the central protagonist develop a romantic friendship with both a man and a woman (though, it should be noted, not simultaneously). Both bonds are presented as platonic and the fulfilment Mary finds with them contrasts the ever-present threat of her marriage. Here friendship transcends traditional social divisions of gender and class, proving an egalitarianism that the radical Wollstonecraft was keen to see realised. Wollstonecraft's novel would not only form a basis for her later novel *Maria*, it would influence other turn-of-the-century texts also. Godwin's reinterpretation of *Mary: A Fiction* follows the same theme and takes it one step further: not only can men and women be friends, but they can do so within the context of marriage. *Fleetwood* undermines the eighteenth-century conflict between romantic friendship and marriage, seeking to merge the two institutions and present a literary depiction of marriage along Aristotelian lines. Such friendship likewise has egalitarian potential in

⁷⁶⁴ Seward had friendships with men, though these were never romantic friendships in the same manner as those she had with women: she referred to Joseph Sykes as her 'paternal friend' (a similar attachment to that between Ruffigny and Casimir Fleetwood in Godwin's novel): *Letters of Anna Seward*, V, p. 235 (Anna Seward to Joseph Sykes, Lichfield, May 28th, 1799). An undated, unaddressed letter found in the British Library's archives also details her attachment to a Captain Hastings: She gains a new-found sentiment towards him after he is severely wounded in battle, losing a limb, when: "... brains mixed with my dear friend's own blood ...", before having to walk a quarter of a mile 'with his arm hanging near his feet': BL., Add. 70949 f. 220 (undated). The man who receives the greatest degree of private literary sentiment, however, is Mr. Saville, of whom Seward wrote 'esteem and friendship have never known abatement': *Letters of Anna Seward*, VI, p. 30 (Anna Seward to John Saville, Lichfield, June 14th, 1802). Once again the friendship was paternal, however, rather than romantic, and though his role in her life is of interest to biographers, it plays little part in her queer discourse. His death greatly affected her, and she financially provided for Saville's family following his death, as well as writing his epitaph, to be displayed in Lichfield cathedral, all detailed in an unpublished letter to Dowdeswell: U. Birm. L., MSS 10/iii/9 (Anna Seward to Dowdeswell, Lichfield, December 9th, 1803). Hesketh Pearson refers to him as Seward's 'most important love-affair', and Teresa Barnard likewise presents him a central figure to Seward's life: Pearson, *The Swan of Lichfield*, p. 18. Teresa Barnard's work is examined in the second chapter: Barnard, 'Anna Seward: A Constructed Life', p. 5.

terms of class and gender (though only if both parties act out of reason and virtue, a topic to which we shall return shortly).

Equality between both parties was essential to friendship from a philosophical standpoint, whether it were limited to the private realm (such as with Gray) or serving to demonstrate the potential for reform on a wider social scale (as seen in *Mary: A Fiction* and its re-writings). However, other dictums from Aristotle were rooted in more practical considerations. To Aristotle, day-to-day proximity was vital to friendship:

... when friends are living together, they take pleasure in, and do good to, each other; when they are asleep or at a distance from one another, they are not acting as friends, but they have a disposition which, if manifested, issues in friendly acts; for distance does not destroy friendship simply, but the manifestations of friendship.⁷⁶⁵

In *The Friend* Bray makes clear the importance of intimate domesticity to friends prior to the eighteenth century. Sharing a purse, a bed, and a roof was an aspect of friendship common to both the master-servant bonds and those on a more equal footing (Bray, p. 153). With the social changes brought about at the turn of the eighteenth century, however, cohabitation became one of the central difficulties facing friendship. At a time when individuals were increasingly expected to create their own nuclear family, the ideal of living with a same-sex companion became impractical. With the advent of companionate marriage, permanency in romantic friendship became taboo. Women may have been granted a little more freedom than men to pursue romantic friendship, but as Julie Peakman makes clear, female-female bonds were fully expected to be temporary so as not to interfere with a woman's marital prospects.⁷⁶⁶

⁷⁶⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 261.

⁷⁶⁶ Peakman, *Lascivious Bodies*, p. 186.

As is evident in the first and fourth chapters to this thesis, due to the increasing taboos against living with another man at any age (at least outside of single-sex educational establishments) both the poetry of Thomas Gray and the fiction of William Godwin focus little on the idea of cohabitation: though Gray does idealise his days living with his friends at Eton in ‘Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College’.⁷⁶⁷ *Fleetwood* does not comment on the theme, and when Ruffigny relates his moving away from England and away from the roof of his companion there is no implied conflict or emotional distress (*Fleetwood*, p. 120). The same could certainly not be said for the works of Anna Seward nor Mary Wollstonecraft. Female romantic friendship in literature places an emphasis on cohabitation which would have been impossible for men, and, having been granted the freedom of female intimacy in youth, women found it difficult to sacrifice this upon reaching adulthood. Wollstonecraft’s protagonist Mary overtly dreams of permanently settling with her companion Ann and fears the interruption of such a goal by her husband. The goal is interrupted by death and though it is questionable whether Ann is truly capable of experiencing intimate romantic friendship the scenes in which the two share a roof are amongst the most tranquil in the novel. We can see Mary’s satisfaction in the fact that she can truly appreciate nature and cultural works whilst living with Ann (*Mary: A Fiction*, p. 16).

Though Mary’s husband never interrupts this scene of same-sex domestic tranquillity, marriage impacts strongly on idealised same-sex love in poetry by Anna Seward about Honora Sneyd. Seward’s literary depiction of the anguish at losing the domestic lifestyle of romantic friendship does not directly include a wider social commentary (unlike her letters), but demonstrates the personal impact of social

⁷⁶⁷ ‘Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College’ is examined in the first chapter.

change. Despite the pressure on both men and women to marry, furious statements declaring Honora's 'ingratitude' abound throughout Seward's poetical works in the early 1770s and the poet shows no hint that her friend's marriage is anything other than a savage betrayal. When Seward wrote of Honora's 'Moon-eye'd IDIOCY' she clearly intended every word: her private verses were deliberately published decades later (the fact that contemporary reviewers failed to comment upon such outbursts is indicative of the comparative freedom granted women regarding same-sex love) (*Original Sonnets*, p. 16). Her later literary worship of the Ladies of Llangollen was as much a devotion to female-only cohabitation as it was to the women themselves.⁷⁶⁸ This sanctuary, however, is different to the communal ideal depicted in Sarah Scott's *Millennium Hall* (1762) for though Seward was a member of a number of women's circles it was one-on-one private, domestic friendship which is idealised in her poetry (and is comparable to the 'safe harbour' analogy given by Defoe in relation to marriage).⁷⁶⁹

Due to the close ties with cohabitation, exclusivity follows a similar gendered pattern in eighteenth-century queer friendship writing. Aristotle claimed that it is impossible to hold a bond of true friendship with more than one other individual at once

⁷⁶⁸ Seward devotes a great deal of 'Llangollen Vale' to the place itself – both the natural areas and to the manor house in which the ladies resided:

Then rose the Fairy Palace of the Vale,
Then bloom'd around it the Arcadian bowers;
Screen'd from the storms of Winter, cold and pale,
Screen'd from the fervors [sic] of the sultry hours,
Circling the lawny crescent, soon they rose,
To letter'd ease devote, and Friendship's blest repose.

Seward, *Llangollen Vale*, p. 7. Seward grants the surroundings of female-only cohabitation magical properties.

⁷⁶⁹ Sarah Scott, *A Description of Millennium Hall and the Country Adjacent: Together with the Characters of the Inhabitants, and Such Historical Anecdotes and Reflections, as May Excite in the Reader Proper Sentiments of Humanity, and Lead the Mind to the Love of Virtue* (London: T. Carnan and F. Newbury, 1778).

It is impossible to have friendship, in the full sense of the word, for many people at the same time, just as it is impossible to be in love with many persons at once; for it seems to be something intense, which may naturally be felt for one person, while it is not easy for one man to find at one time many very agreeable persons, perhaps not many good ones.⁷⁷⁰

Aristotle's ideals contrast with the social trends noted by Habermas in eighteenth-century Britain toward intellectual circles and salons, but they matched the literary ideal of seclusion common in the poetry and prose examined in this thesis. Yet despite the focus on male friendship by Aristotle, the goal of romantic friendship to live with and devote one's life to a single other friend was one which was more positively attempted by women rather than men by the eighteenth century. Anthony Ashley-Cooper's writings on male-male friendship echo those of Aristotle in general, yet it is telling that they omit both notions of cohabitation and exclusivity.⁷⁷¹ His contemporary Thomas Gray likewise focuses little on the theme of exclusivity, though as we saw in the first chapter he alternated his literary devotions between both Walpole and West. Godwin's villain-hero Fleetwood also dwells little on the idea, though for a time he passionately desires an exclusive friendship with a kindred spirit: "... Friendship, in the sense in which I felt the want of it, has been truly said to be a sentiment that can grasp but one individual in its embrace." (*Fleetwood*, p. 147). The phrasing here is interesting, as 'has been said' implies a wider common viewpoint (even a possible reference to Aristotle), though Fleetwood's own father enjoyed friendship with both his male companion and his wife simultaneously.

For Sigmund Freud, the issue of exclusivity is essentially a sexual one. Writing in *Civilization and its Discontents*, he argues that exclusivity arises historically from the apparent need for western society to dictate the sexual behaviour

⁷⁷⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 263.

⁷⁷¹ Ashley-Cooper, p. 56. The Earl of Shaftesbury's writings were examined more fully in the first chapter to this thesis.

of its residents.⁷⁷² By this definition exclusivity in friendship should not exist, as there is no sexual element to be suppressed. As such, the issue is generally only considered from a sexual perspective.⁷⁷³ Yet, as has been clear throughout this thesis, desire for exclusivity in friendship is represented throughout eighteenth-century literature, though the growing emphasis on companionate marriage forced it to the queer margins of society.

As we have seen in the second and third chapters to this thesis, exclusivity in friendship was more commonly desired by women: perhaps because the private, domestic sphere occupied by women offered fewer opportunities for non-familial acquaintances but more intimacy than the public sphere more accessible to men. Of course, the early twenty-first-century reader will associate exclusivity with sexual relationships, and utilise the term 'monogamy'. Indeed, the word refers to sexual bonds, and therefore the desire for exclusivity within friendship might more accurately be termed 'monoamorous'.⁷⁷⁴ The lack of terminology to refer to such a desire is strongly indicative of cultural unfamiliarity with platonic exclusivity. Yet according to Lilian Faderman, platonic monoamorous desire was commonly expressed in the eighteenth century:

⁷⁷² 'Present-day civilization [sic] makes it plain that it will only permit sexual relationships on the basis of a solitary, indissoluble bond between one man and one woman, and that it does not like sexuality as a source of pleasure in its own right and it is only prepared to tolerate it because there is so far no substitute for it as a means of propagating the human race.': Freud, *The Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, XXI, p. 105.

⁷⁷³ John Money analyses the driving forces behind exclusivity, but in a similar manner to Freud only sexual explanations are given: *Love and Love Sickness*, (Baltimore; London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1980) p. 70. There are exceptions: The issue of platonic monoamory has been examined in relation to friendship by Marilyn Charles in her article 'Monogamy and its Discontents: On Winning the Oedipal War'. According to Charles, the desire for monogamy is a part of the desire for unity with another – the desire to consume, and in turn be consumed by, another being: the desire being driven by a need for the ego to find qualities in others it perceives are lacking in itself. The other person becomes an embodiment of such qualities: Marilyn Charles, 'Monogamy and its Discontents: On Winning the Oedipal War', *American Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 62 (2002), 119-143 (p.120).

⁷⁷⁴ 'Amorous' as a term is not specific to either sexual or platonic love – the modern 'polyamorous' movement accordingly referring to free love of any variety. Both 'polyamorous' and 'monoamorous' may mix Latin and Greek linguistic roots (unlike 'monogamy'), though this is hardly unprecedented in the English language and even somewhat fitting in this instance due to the Greco-Roman heritage claimed by eighteenth-century literary romantic friendship.

These romantic friendships were love relationships in every sense except perhaps the genital, since women in centuries other than ours [the twentieth] often internalized the view of females as having little sexual passion. Thus they might kiss, fondle each other, sleep together, utter expressions of overwhelming love and promises of eternal faithfulness, and yet see their passions as nothing more than effusions of the spirit ... But whether or not these relationships had a genital component, the novels and diaries and correspondence of these periods consistently showed romantic friends opening their souls to each other and speaking a language that was in no way different from the language of heterosexual love: They pledged to remain "faithful" forever, to be in "each other's thoughts constantly," to live together and even to die together.⁷⁷⁵

Faderman perceived a similarity between the language used about heterosexual partnerships and the homosocial partnerships of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Her reference in particular to the idea of remaining 'faithful' conjures up strong images of traditional sexual monogamy (though in our own era same-sex and opposite sex relationships have strongly different norms in relation to mono/polyamory, with male-male bonds generally rejecting exclusivity).⁷⁷⁶

Wollstonecraft held a desire for exclusivity in friendship from a young age and projected this into her first novel.⁷⁷⁷ The character Mary desires exclusive

⁷⁷⁵ Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men*, page 16.

⁷⁷⁶ A study conducted by Sondra E. Solomon, Esther D. Rothblum and Kimberly F. Balsam in Vermont in 2005, examined (amongst other things) the instances of monogamy amongst married heterosexual women, civil partnered homosexual women and homosexual women in non-civil partnered relationships. The study found men to initiate sexual intercourse more frequently than women and, as a result, sexual contact between female same-sex partners was less frequent than between a male-female pairing: Sondra E. Solomon and others, 'Money, Housework, Sex, and Conflict: Same-Sex Couples in Civil Unions, Those Not in Civil Unions, and Heterosexual Married Siblings', *Sex Roles*, 52 (2005), 561-575 (p. 573). The study also found men to be far more likely to have agreements which contradicted monogamous tendencies in their relationships - women would be far less likely to agree to finding sexual gratification elsewhere, with over 80% of women, both lesbian and straight, having discussed such an agreement and deciding that 'it is not ok under any circumstances': Solomon *et al.*, 'Money, Housework, Sex, and Conflict', p. 566. Marilyn Charles argues "... it is unrealistic to *expect* to love only one person or to be loved exclusively by any other.": 'Monogamy and its Discontents', pp. 119-143.

Martha Vicinus suggests that homosocial pairings mimic the heterosexual culture in which they find themselves: therefore exclusivity, a facet of heterosexual love, will be present in same-sex pairs: the social codes from heterosexual society are too strong for a vastly different subculture to form – in a sense, according to the text, same-sex pairings 'mimic' the social customs of the heterosexual counterparts: *Intimate Friends*, p. 7. However, the fact that the tradition of romantic friendship is older than companionate marriage – and that such signifiers are detailed in the classical world by Aristotle – would suggest Vicinus' viewpoint to be anachronistic.

⁷⁷⁷ In her youth, a decade before she penned *Mary: A Fiction*, Wollstonecraft developed a friendship with a young woman named Jane Arden. The two had developed a correspondence which had been

cohabitation with her companion Ann, fearing intrusion on this monoamorous circumstance by her husband: an echo of Seward's sonnets.⁷⁷⁸ In the literary works examined in the second and third chapters marriage poses the greatest threat to the same-sex monoamorous idyll.

Yet the desire for exclusivity has not been a constant throughout all the female friendship literature in this thesis. Maria Edgeworth's portrayal rebels against the notion of same-sex monoamory. As Lisa Moore points out, *Belinda* portrays such desires through Harriot Freke. Moore suggests that the novel demonstrates the capacity for female friendship to override opposite-sex romantic love, to the detriment of the individual and society. Though not all female friendships in the novel are monopolistic or destructive (the relationship between Belinda herself and Lady Delacour is seen as healthy), the character Harriot Freke lures unsuspecting women into a relationship with her – where she will simultaneously both play and usurp the role of man.⁷⁷⁹ The lines between a romantic sexual relationship and a romantic friendship are deliberately blurred in relation to Freke, to warn against the dangers of women becoming too close, particularly to masculine women. Harriot Freke 'possesses' the women she becomes involved with – monoamory at the expense of a

going some time and, whilst the friendship had begun on an intellectual, literary footing the two had grown closer, even to the point of Wollstonecraft revealing her dark secrets about her father's abusive relationship toward her and her mother. On the friendship's establishment: Franklin, *A Literary Life*, p. 6. On Wollstonecraft's revelations: *Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. by Ralph M. Wardle (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1979) p. 28. The relationship, however, was to rapidly sour. In her letter Wollstonecraft stated "I am a little singular in my thoughts of love and friendship: I must have the first place or none.": *Collected Letters*, p. 13 (Mary Wollstonecraft to Jane Arden, Beverley, 1773-1774). Wollstonecraft was feeling betrayed – "When I have been at your house with Miss J _____ the greatest respect has been paid to her; every thing handed to her first; in short, as if she were a superior being.": p. 15 (Mary Wollstonecraft to Jane Arden, Beverley, 1773-1774). Her viewpoints are surmised in a third letter: "I have formed romantic notions of friendship ... I must have first place or none.": p. 13 (Mary Wollstonecraft to Jane Arden, Beverley, 1773-1774).

⁷⁷⁸ It should be noted that another of Seward's literary works, the *Monody on Major André*, (written after Honora Sneyd's death) briefly posits that Sneyd should have married him instead - going so far as to refer to her as André's 'bride': Anna Seward, *Monody on Major André*, (Lichfield: J. Jackson, 1781), p. 3. However, this was as likely another dig at the widowed Richard Edgeworth as it is genuine sentiment, and it is clear from Seward's personal writings (especially those stored in the archives at Yale) that she would have opposed any marriage.

⁷⁷⁹ Moore, *Feminist Studies*, p. 503.

heterosexual relationship. Exclusivity could present a radical departure from the heterosexual norm, and would only be praised in written works by the more radical queer perspectives of those such as Wollstonecraft and Seward.

Exclusivity alone is not enough to sustain romantic friendship in eighteenth-century literature. As has been clear throughout this investigation, the notion of virtue is central to both classical and eighteenth-century literary expressions of romantic friendship and formed an important part of the wider social discourse over the century.⁷⁸⁰ Aristotle stressed the importance of virtue in avoiding false forms of friendship (which will be explored in further detail shortly) (Aristotle, p. 283). The Earl of Shaftesbury's theories on friendship likewise stressed the centrality of virtue to friendship, suggesting the rarity of romantic friendship in his own time to be due to a lack of esteem for virtue in modern Christian society.⁷⁸¹

Of course, as has been clear throughout all four chapters, ideals of virtue were critical to the idealisation of romantic friendship in eighteenth-century literature. With regard to the late eighteenth / early nineteenth-century novel virtue is most keenly expressed through altruism. As such we are presented with protagonists for whom altruism is a way of life: *Belinda*'s Belinda Portman, *Mary: A Fiction*'s Mary and *Fleetwood*'s Casimir Fleetwood (though his altruism is only evident in the first half of the novel which constitutes a rewriting of *Mary: A Fiction*). All three characters risk either their lives or reputations for the sake of their friend. Belinda Portman risks the social castigation of having been caught having sexual intercourse outside of wedlock to save the reputation and marriage of her romantic friend Lady

Both Wollstonecraft and Godwin would engage with the discourse on virtue, as is detailed in the third and fourth chapters.

⁷⁸⁰ "If the love of doing good be not of itself a good and right inclination, I know not how there can possibly be such a thing as goodness or virtue. If the inclination be right, it is a perverting of it to apply it solely to the reward and make us conceive such wonder of the grace and favour which is to attend virtue, when there is so little shown of the intrinsic worth or value of the thing itself.": Ashley-Cooper, *Characteristics*, p. 46.

Delacour (*Belinda*, p. 116). Mary defies social convention by travelling across a continent for the sake of her friend, sticking by her even as fashionable society condemns her for doing so (*Mary: A Fiction*, p. 33). She also helps several individuals from financial hardship throughout the course of the novel. Fleetwood risks his life in order to save a drowning peasant – an act which brings him (a non-romantic) friendship with him and his family (*Fleetwood*, p. 14).

Indeed, altruistic benevolence is central to the moral philosophy of both Wollstonecraft and Godwin in which the role of friendship is crucial. Wollstonecraft is keen to portray her central protagonist as an individual grounded in both sensibility and reason, which makes her the perfect candidate for benevolence as well as for romantic friendship itself.⁷⁸² Mary's relentless affection and assistance toward Ann provides her terminally ill friend with both moral and material support.⁷⁸³ As a literary adaptation of the ideas expressed in Godwin's *Political Justice*, the main events in *Fleetwood* are driven by alternating instances of socially-minded altruism and dynastic selfishness. Ruffigny's long tale of his adoption by Fleetwood's grandfather is one in which both these themes play a key role, and serves to demonstrate Godwin's point that benevolence cannot be limited toward those with whom one shares blood or marital ties (*Fleetwood*, p. 112). Though the protagonist Fleetwood himself demonstrates little in the way of altruistic benevolence in the second half of the novel, at its end his life is saved by the efforts of complete strangers, who even help save his marriage (*Fleetwood*, p. 295). Altruism – which is tied to friendship throughout the novel – is used to present the blueprints for a meritocratic utopia.

⁷⁸² Mary's benevolence is explored in the third chapter to this thesis.

⁷⁸³ Scenes in which Mary supports Ann are scattered throughout the entire first half of the novel.

Belinda may focus less on wider social themes and more on the individual, yet it contains a similar message. Only via the benevolence which is inherent in romantic friendship can either Belinda Portman or Lady Delacour secure their marriages and attain a happy domestic life. Lady Delacour's moral reformation (which would later be echoed by Fleetwood, whose reformation is instigated by Ruffigny) serves as one of the major crisis points of the text, and is the instance in which the most emotive language is found: Lady Delacour begging to die in the arms of her romantic friend (*Belinda*, p. 276). Like Mary, Belinda does not give up on her friend even when she feels that her efforts are underappreciated.

Utilising a different form of literary expression, the poetry which is the focus of the first and second chapters to this thesis emphasises virtue in a different way. Without a narrative arc in which to present the positive outcomes of virtue in romantic friendship, the poetical works of Thomas Gray and Anna Seward directly extol the virtues they see in their subjects. It is of great relevance that Gray only writes of West's virtues and not of Walpole's: virtue being tied to *philos* rather than to *eros*.⁷⁸⁴ Not only is romantic friendship tied to the concept of virtue, however, but the genre of elegy itself. William Shenstone stated in a contemporary essay that elegiac verse should always promote the notion of virtue.⁷⁸⁵ Though we shall review the role of elegiac writing in more detail shortly, in immortalising their romantic friends Gray and Seward are also immortalising and commemorating the form of friendship which

⁷⁸⁴ As we saw in the first chapter to this thesis, Gray wrote West telling him that he cares little for his condition, as he will always be his as long as he maintains his virtues:

... be assured, that your future state is to me entirely indifferent. Do not be angry, but hear me; I mean with respect to myself. For whether you be at the top of Fame, or entirely unknown to mankind; at the Council-table, or at Dick's coffee-house; sick and simple, or well and wise; whatever alteration mere accident works in you, (supposing it utterly impossible for it to make any change in your sincerity and honesty, since these are conditions *sine quâ non*) I do not see the likelihood of my not being yours ever.

Correspondence of Thomas Gray, I, p. 178 (Gray to West, Florence, September 25th, 1740).

⁷⁸⁵ Shenstone, *The Works*, I, p. 18.

proved so central to their lives. These same-sex bonds were not deviant, as social mores increasingly supposed, but, the poets were keen to maintain, based in the highest forms of virtue.

Trust is inherently tied to concepts of virtue and altruism in the literary works examined here, and a lack of virtue creates untrustworthy, fickle and at times deliberately destructive friendships. The *Nicomachean Ethics* stress the importance in distinguishing true friendship from false friendship, which is unstable and short-lived: “Quarrels occur also in unequal friendships; for sometimes each claims the larger share, but when this happens the friendship is dissolved.” (Aristotle, p. 283). This classical notion of false friendship translated directly into the literary works of the Georgian period, with a variety of terms being used to describe such weak bonds: ‘false’, ‘fashionable’, ‘fair-weather’ and ‘juggling’.

Anna Seward’s sonnets make clear what constitutes false friendship through the castigation of Honora Sneyd.⁷⁸⁶ This depiction of betrayal is made evident by the phrase (from the nineteenth sonnet), ‘Farewell, false friend!’ (*Original Sonnets*, p. 21). The eighteenth-century novel went into false friendship in more detail, with whole characters having no function but to highlight the dangers of manipulative and/or superficial friends. Freke and Gifford – the villains of *Belinda* and *Fleetwood* respectively – both use the language of friendship in order to manipulate people for their own ends. Harriot Freke does so for her own amusement, whilst Gifford does so

⁷⁸⁶ On a biographical note, even from a very young age Anna Seward had a keen idea on what did and did not constitute true romantic friendship. Writing at fifteen she commented:

Friendship, less influenced than love by the intoxication of the eye, is less apt to lead the soul out of her bonds; yet sometimes, in the choice of friends, even thinking minds are dazzled by the glitter of superficial attractions, and caught by the fascination of a smile; and oftener still, as I before observed, circumstances of convenience, consciousness of obligation, or reverence for imputed virtues, shall over-rule the want of native sympathy in the formation of friendship.

Seward, *Poetical Works*, I, p. xlvi (Seward to ‘Emma’, Lichfield, October, 1762). Her statement on how superficial and flimsy attractions do not provide a secure grounding for true friendship is greatly similar to the argument provided by Aristotle.

for material gain. Both have fatal consequences: Freke gets a young suitor killed as a result of her actions, whilst Gifford deliberately attempts to have Fleetwood murdered.⁷⁸⁷ Whereas the presence of altruism and benevolence show true friendship in its healthiest context (the reformation of Lady Delacour and of Fleetwood), the absence of altruism shows untrustworthy forms of friendship at their most lethal.⁷⁸⁸

As both Edgeworth and Godwin portrayed romantic friendship amongst both sexes, so too they demonstrated false friendship. *Belinda*'s Clarence dramatically discovers the superficial nature of his friendships when his friends leave him to drown – a contrast being drawn when he is then saved by the man who would become his true friend, 'Dr. X' (*Belinda*, p. 83). Fleetwood's wife Mary likewise has a friend who fails the test: after Mary loses her entire family in a shipwreck, she is emotionally deserted – her supposed friend only having been interested in maintaining a bond that was purely light-hearted and fun. She is referred to by the narrator as a 'fair-weather' and 'fashionable' friend (*Fleetwood*, p. 174). Once again we find equal portrayals of gender in friendship writing by the turn of the century, this time regarding untrustworthy acquaintances.

The stress on false friendship speaks to the wider social situation in which the authors wrote: in a society in which intimate friendship was becoming at best less and less fashionable (and at worst confused with sexual acts which carried the death penalty) these writers sought to distinguish romantic friendship from other forms of friendship. As Aristotle criticised friendships of utility, so Edgeworth, Godwin and

⁷⁸⁷ Freke shows no remorse at the death of the innocent Lawless: Edgeworth, *Belinda*, III, p. 42. Gifford's plot is uncovered at the end of *Fleetwood*: Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 278.

⁷⁸⁸ This is not to say that all forms of friendship which are not intimate romantic friendships are presented as unhealthy or wrong: the eleventh chapter of the second volume of *Fleetwood*, which forms the conclusion on friendship, details the more light-hearted bonds Fleetwood forms, which, though dissatisfying, are not condemned: *Fleetwood*, p. 146. Likewise paternal friendships develop in both *Fleetwood* and *Mary: A Fiction* (and we also have the example of Seward and Saville) which are healthy and rewarding in their own manner. There is, however, a sharp distinction between romantic friendship and false friendship.

Wollstonecraft sought to criticise those bonds that are based solely in social advancement rather than affection or altruism (characterised by sensibility and reason, respectively). As such *Mary: A Fiction*, *Belinda* and *Fleetwood* all provide an indirect criticism of the mindset present in social groupings: the villainous figures in all three novels are tied to fashionable urban circles (despite the democratic and reformist potential of such groups described by Habermas).

False friendships in the literature examined here rarely contain a great degree of emotional sentiment: sentiment which is usually expressed via grief. Throughout this thesis mourning has remained an important facet of friendship writing: Thomas Gray's poetical works on West, Seward's sonnets on Sneyd, Wollstonecraft's tribute to Blood and the shared grief of Ruffigny and Fleetwood all prove romantic friendship in literature to be inextricably tied to grief and elegy. There are two central explanations for this phenomenon: firstly, as has been suggested throughout this thesis, works of mourning provide cultural capital for friendship: elegy elevates its status and renders it much less open to criticism from an increasingly sexualised and homophobic culture. The second explanation is a practical means of enabling intimacy to be acknowledged: the shadow of death allows for physical signifiers of friendship to be enacted without courting controversy. The elegy utilises the language of sensibility but makes it into a public utterance via the ceremonious act of mourning.

Physical intimacy was the last of the central signifiers of true friendship detailed in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.⁷⁸⁹ Acts of same-sex physical intimacy had extremely different connotations, however, in fourth-century BC Athens when compared to eighteenth-century Britain. As we saw in the introduction, first and

⁷⁸⁹ Aristotle's quote on cohabitation also covers physical intimacy: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 261.

second chapters to this thesis, sodomy and sapphism became tied to inverted gender roles and gained extremely negative connotations as a result.⁷⁹⁰ The language and physical gestures of mourning therefore provided a literary space in which to express the intimacies of nonsexual same-sex love. The culture of early-modern Western Europe had reversed the common associations of effeminacy with the classical world: whereas Aristotle applauded physical gestures between men but despised shared mourning as effeminate, the opposite was becoming the case by the time of Thomas Gray.

Gray, as we explored in the first chapter, held a dual literary identity: one based around his sexualised love for Walpole, the other his platonic love for West. Though Gray does, in fact, utilise the language of the grave on occasion with Walpole (notably in his jocular ‘graveyard letter’), the majority of it is reserved for West.⁷⁹¹ In his ‘Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College’ and ‘Sonnet on the Death of Mr Richard West’ (1742), Gray uses the language of mourning to portray same-sex intimacy in a manner which would have been far less acceptable had the subject still been alive. George E. Haggerty may have followed Traub in asserting Gray’s poetry to be safely quashing a subversive form of love by presenting it in elegiac form, but Gray’s works – as with the others in this thesis – are brought into the present by the strength of their emotive language, whilst being presented as noble, virtuous and timeless.⁷⁹² It is true that many of his lyrics may not have been acceptable had their subject been living, but the necessity of elegy does not render the language or theme any less queer or subversive. His poems are far from apologetic.

⁷⁹⁰ This process is described in detail by historian Randolph Trumbach and was examined in the introduction to and first chapter of this thesis: Trumbach, ‘Modern Sodomy’ in *A Gay History of Britain*, ed. by Cook and others, p. 77.

⁷⁹¹ The ‘graveyard letter’ was examined in detail in the first chapter: *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, I, p. 11 (Gray to Walpole, St. Peter’s Charnel-House, December, 1734).

⁷⁹² Haggerty’s contrasting perspective is clear from his study on the subject, *Men In Love*, which was examined in the first chapter: *Men in Love*, p. 120.

The same is true of Anna Seward, who uses her elegiac sonnets to present possessive and forceful female-female love. The sonnets written after Honora Sneyd's death do not seek to hide frustration and lament, nor do they obscure physical intimacy between the two women. Seward relates the bond to marriage, with 'Sonnet XXXII' radically invoking the language of marital vows, which in any other form may have brought public hostility due to the supposition of Sapphic intimacy (*Original Sonnets*, p. 35). As we saw in the second chapter, the elegiac sonnets also show anger at opposite-sex marriage, directed through Seward's persona of Richard Edgeworth: 'Sonnet XXXI' referring to him as 'false' and 'cruel' (*Original Sonnets*, p. 34).

The presence of death in *Mary: A Fiction* allows Mary also to perform a role which would otherwise have been denied her: Ann's slow physical deterioration grants a physical intimacy which can only end at the grave. The satisfaction of this intimacy is sharply contrasted by the revulsion Mary feels toward her husband, yet it is still tied to elegy and the language of death: "An extreme dislike took root in her mind; the sound of [her husband's] name made her turn sick; but she forgot all, listening to Ann's cough, and supporting her languid frame. She would then catch her to her bosom with convulsive eagerness, as if to save her from sinking into an open grave." (*Mary: A Fiction*, p. 17). The embrace between the two women is rendered necessary by Ann's infirmity and eventual death, and once again we have seen the elegiac form allow for physical desire.

We see similar situations in the final two novels. Though neither *Belinda* nor *Fleetwood* are strictly elegiac, both use the language of death to enable physical

intimacy.⁷⁹³ Following Mary Wollstonecraft, Maria Edgeworth ties the female embrace to the grave when Lady Delacour declares to her friend Belinda: “Your promise was to be with me in my dying moments, and to let me breathe my last in your arms.” (*Belinda*, p. 276). Likewise Ruffigny and Fleetwood embrace one another several times whilst in the throes of mourning, with the supposedly rational Godwin indulging in the language of sensibility in these key passages. Though the bond between Fleetwood and Ruffigny is paternal not romantic, mourning is again tied to sacred friendship as Ruffigny physically demonstrates his grief with the son of his deceased romantic friend. Elegy provided a firm social standpoint, a dedication to friendship in opposition to marriage. As the novels of Godwin and Edgeworth prove, the sentiments provided by the elegiac form also influenced non-elegiac works on friendship, and death remained central to the physicality of same-sex intimacy.

The six signifiers of friendship laid out by Aristotle (equality, trust, cohabitation, exclusivity, virtue and physical intimacy) are all central to the elegiac queer friendship literature examined in this thesis. The classical tradition allows for romantic friendship to be presented as beneficial both to the individual and to society, whilst the elegiac form allows for passion and emotive sentiment which might otherwise be taboo. The six signifiers also present an inevitable conflict with sexuality and companionate marriage, and each of the authors developed their own way of dealing with this social difficulty.

⁷⁹³ The poetry and novels of Gray, Seward and Wollstonecraft provided a legacy to their friends which opposite-sex couples will often have pursued through the creation of offspring.

As we have established, Thomas Gray's dual literary persona allowed him to both celebrate and degrade contemporary discourse on sexuality in his poetry, whilst Anna Seward's works present friendship and marriage to be fundamentally incompatible. The 'vows' between her and Honora in her sonnets are automatically negated by the latter's marital contract with a man (*Original Sonnets*, p. 35). Yet Seward's poetry is far less rigidly gendered than Gray's. Via her Horatian odes she is able to adopt a male persona and play a male voice in order to declare her love of women. This flexibility is another aspect of Seward's poetry which strongly conflicts with the strict gender roles required by traditional marriage. It is perhaps her privately written works, however, which are most revealing with regard to her queer radicalism. As was explored in the second chapter, her private letters to Sophia Weston (now stored at the Beinecke Library at Yale University) go even further than her sonnets in demonstrating her love of friendship and contempt for marriage, and her phrase 'my stand' reveals a conscious and deliberate socio-political rebellion.⁷⁹⁴

The inevitable opposition between friendship and marriage brought about by the discourse of sexuality present in the works of Gray and Seward was central to Wollstonecraft's first novel and helped her develop her radical insights in *Rights of Woman*. It was taken to an even more daring extreme in Godwin's revolutionary *Political Justice* (1793). However, the opposition between the two began to collapse by the end of the century, as we have seen in the novels of Godwin and Edgeworth studied here. The two novelists sought to prove that friendship was not socially deviant and did not conflict with the demands of domesticity. Despite the centrality

⁷⁹⁴ Yale U., MSS OSBORN C202 (Anna Seward to Sophia Weston, March 25th, 1785).

of friendship to the novels, however, the compromise in *Fleetwood* and *Belinda* is on the part of friendship: in neither is permanent cohabitation required between friends, and both end with happy heterosexual marriages. However, it is important not to discount the radicalism present in both works: Edgeworth subverts the courtship genre in order to present a novel in which friendship is the main theme, whilst Godwin suggests altruistic bonds of friendship to be the answer to social inequality.

Chronologically the last literary work examined in this thesis, Godwin's 1805 novel merges the concepts of friendship and marriage in a manner which recalls the widely-circulated social commentaries earlier in the century.⁷⁹⁵ Godwin transforms the principle behind the marital vow along Aristotelian lines, and the strife in Fleetwood's marriage is caused by his inability to recognise any equality between himself and his wife. In *Fleetwood* the author takes the principle of companionate marriage to its logical conclusion, and marriage becomes friendship. As the narrator suggests: "I had not been aware that nature has provided a substitute in the marriage-tie, for this romantic, if not impossible friendship."⁷⁹⁶ It would take until the turn of the century for romantic friendship and marriage to converge in written works, and when it did so it was within the boundaries of sexuality. The concept of intimate and passionate nonsexual love faded from prose works.⁷⁹⁷ In the poetic tradition,

⁷⁹⁵ Social commentaries on marriage including, of course, Defoe's discourse on marriage.

⁷⁹⁶ Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 190. It should be noted that there were other aspects of friendship and marriage which overlapped even before *Fleetwood*. One aspect of friendship which was not covered by Aristotle's writings on friendship but manifest in the eighteenth century was the influence of romantic friendship on offspring: Anna Seward had her friend Mrs Smith name her child after Honora Sneyd, Mary Wollstonecraft named her own daughter after her former companion Fanny Blood, whilst Godwin has one friend adopt the offspring of another (all of which are detailed in their corresponding chapters). Literary works may have been the primary means of providing a legacy between same-sex companions, but the involvement of genetic offspring in the process suggests that this may not have been wholly satisfactory to the authors, merging notions of friendship and domesticity.

⁷⁹⁷ With the exception of some social radicals such as Mary Shelley: Shelley's *Frankenstein* contains a friendship whose intimacy rivals that of the primary heterosexual narrative (the friendship between Victor Frankenstein and Henry Clerval): Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein: Or, the Modern Prometheus* (London: Dutton, 1818). Anne K. Mellor's biography states Shelley's aversion to the patriarchal family unit: *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* (New York; London:

however, Gray's example continued to inspire followers. Not marginal but forming the very canon of English poetry, Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley and Alfred Tennyson's elegies to male friends became the Victorians' favourite Romantic poems.⁷⁹⁸

Beyond the Eighteenth Century

Despite the theme of romantic friendship in poetry, Victorian science was busy codifying sexual norms, and, in large part due to the power of the medical establishment, the terminologies they employed entered mainstream discourse. The sexual binary which had emerged in the eighteenth century was recognised and labelled: firstly the term 'homosexual' was coined, with the corresponding term

Routledge, 1989), p. xii. Mary Shelley herself developed a friendship with Jane Williams, and Shelley's desires echo Seward's:

After Percy Shelley's death, having lost confidence in male companionship, Mary turned to women for emotional support. She demanded of them the intensity and commitment of a lover or a mother and was constantly disappointed. She assumed on her return to England in 1823 that she and Jane Williams would live together forever.

Mellor, *Her Life*, p. 179. Williams, however, did as Sneyd did and moved in with a man. The two did live together however, as detailed in Julian Marshall's account: *The Life and Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, 2 vols. (New York: Haskell House Publishers Ltd., 1970), I, p. 347. Jane Dunn comments on the unrequited nature of Shelley's love for Williams: *Moon in Eclipse: A Life of Mary Shelley* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1978), p. 274. Like Seward (and Wollstonecraft), Shelley was the stronger personality but the more dependent partner: *Moon in Eclipse*, p. 283. Dunn unsympathetically refers to Shelley's desire for friendship as 'pathetic': p. 284. John Williams' biography indicates Williams to have been an especially poor friend, gossiping and calling Shelley 'frigid' (interesting considering the opposition to sexuality inherent to friendship to century prior): *Mary Shelley: A Literary Life* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 2000), p. 116. Shelley was continually disappointed in subsequent years, attempting romantic friendships with Isabella Robinson, Anne Frances Hare, Georgiana Beauclerk, Lady Paul and Louisa Robinson: Mellor, *Her Life*, p. 179. Despite her literary bond between Frankenstein and Clerval, Nitchie maintains that she was unable to write of her friendships: "... in her fiction, there is no false friend like Jane Williams.": Elizabeth Nitchie, *Mary Shelley: Author of "Frankenstein"* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1970), p. 128.

⁷⁹⁸ Lord Byron's relationships with men are covered by Louis Crompton's influential biography *Byron and Greek Love: Byron and Greek Love: Homophobia in 19th-Century England* (Swaffham: The Gay Men's Press, 1998). Crompton talks specifically on the difficulty in distinguishing between friendship and sexual love by the period and the wane of romantic friendship: pp. 72-74. There is, however, no hostility to sexuality: allusions to homoeroticism in Byron's works predominates Gary Dyer's article: 'Thieves, Boxers, Sodomites, Poets: Being Flash to Byron's Don Juan', *PMLA*, 116 (2001), 562-588.

'heterosexual' being utilised shortly afterward.⁷⁹⁹ As we saw in all four chapters to this thesis, William Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft, Anna Seward and Thomas Gray were all retroactively (and anachronistically) categorised by biographers in the twentieth century along these lines: Seward and Gray as homosexuals, Wollstonecraft and Godwin as heterosexuals. The ideology of romantic friendship was largely forgotten and – as has been evident throughout this study - subsequent investigations into its literary expression were distorted along sexual lines. I hope to have demonstrated the error of such an approach.

There has, however, been a shift in social recognition of intimate friendship in recent times. The late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have gradually seen the language of nonsexual passionate love re-enter social and literary discourse – even aside from influential works such as Alan Bray's *The Friend*. No doubt due in large part to a relaxation of the homophobic attitudes which stifled the idea of any sort of same-sex intimacy, friendship has been slowly regaining emotional significance. This shift has traditionally been confined to minority groups (perhaps unsurprising considering the marginalised status of the romantic friendships detailed in this thesis): gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans and queer subcultures have recognised the importance of platonic love from at least the 1960s.⁸⁰⁰ Since the 1990s the polyamorous movement has promoted the equality of all forms of love – sexual and platonic.⁸⁰¹ Religious

⁷⁹⁹ 'Homosexual', *Oxford Dictionaries* (April 2010), *Oxford University Press* <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/view/entry/m_en_gb0384640> [accessed 2nd July, 2010].

⁸⁰⁰ See Martin Duberman's widely acclaimed historical narrative of LGBT movements through the 1950s and 1960s (with the culmination of the Stonewall riots) for an in-depth look at the attitudes and beliefs of the various subcultures, which were influenced not only by sexuality but also ethnicity and class, and in which friendship often proved a necessity to survival – especially amongst the Hispanic male prostitutes (or 'queens'): Martin Duberman, *Stonewall* (New York: Plume, 1994).

⁸⁰¹ Dossie Easton and Janet W. Hardy's extremely influential text on polyamory points to the importance of all forms of love from the outset: Dossie Easton and Janet W. Hardy, *The Ethical Slut: A Practical Guide to Polyamory, Open Relationships & Other Adventures* (Berkeley: Celestial Arts, 2009), p. 6. The theme is repeated throughout the text. Various 'polyfestos' (manifestos of the polyamorous movement) found across the internet also stress the value of nonsexual love: Paige

minorities have also formally recognised friendship: it is not uncommon for Neopagan 'handfasting' ceremonies to be conducted between nonsexual lovers.⁸⁰²

There is even evidence that the recognition of nonsexual love and of intimate friendship is re-entering the cultural mainstream: one example being the recent emergence of the term 'bromance' to refer to media portrayals of intimate male friendship.⁸⁰³ There are numerous possible causes which will doubtless be the subject of study amongst future sociologists: declining marriage rates, the increasing visibility of minority groups and a deconstruction of Victorian sexual categorisation being but a few. It is even possible that modern versions of romantic friendship will inspire new fiction throughout the coming decades. Thomas Gray, Anna Seward, Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin will have their twenty-first century equivalents.

Turner, 'Polyfesto', *Mostly Water* (23rd September 2007) <<http://mostlywater.org/polyfesto>> [accessed 1st April 2010].

⁸⁰² For more information on handfasting ceremonies amongst the various Neopagan traditions see former president of the UK Pagan Federation Pete Jenning's text: *Pagan Pathways: A Guide to Wicca, Druidry, Asatru, Shamanism and Other Pagan Practices* (London: Random House, 2002).

⁸⁰³ Thomas Morgan directly compares friendship and marriage when he opens his article on the subject published in an Australian newspaper with: "In this age of divorce and singles, friendship is playing an increasingly important role in our lives, especially friendship between men ...": Thomas Morgan, 'A Fine Bromance', *The Age* (12th October 2008) <<http://www.theage.com.au/national/a-fine-bromance-20081011-4yst.html?page=1>> [accessed 1st April 2010].

APPENDIX

FLEETWOOD, SECTION II CHAPTER XI

I saw that I was alone, and I desired to have a friend. Friends, in the ordinary sense of the word, and that by no means a contemptible sense, I had many: friends who found pleasure in my conversation, who were convinced of the integrity of my principles of conduct, and who would have trusted me in the most important concerns. But what sort of a friend is it whose kindness shall produce a conviction in my mind that I do not stand alone in the world? This must be a friend, who is to me as another self, who joys in all my joys, and grieves in all my sorrows, not with a joy or grief that looks like compliment, not with a sympathy that changes into smiles when I am no longer present, though my head continues bent to the earth with anguish.— I do not condemn the man, upon whom a wound through my vitals acts but as a scratch; I know that his feelings are natural; I admit him for just, honest, and humane — a valuable member of society. But he is not the brother of my heart. I will not suffer myself to be beguiled, and to fall into so wretched an error as to mistake the friendship of good-humour, or even of esteem, for the friendship which can best console a man in calamity and wretchedness, whether of mind or external circumstances. I walk among these men as in an agreeable promenade; I speak to one and another, and am cheered with the sight of their honest countenances: but they are nothing to me; I know that, when death removes me from the scene for ever, their countenances will the next day be neither less honest nor less cheerful. Friendship, in the sense in which I felt the want of it, has been truly said to be a sentiment that can grasp but one individual in its embrace. The person who entertains this sentiment must see in his friend a creature of a species by itself, must respect and be attached to him above all the world, and be deeply convinced that the loss of him would be a calamity which nothing earthly could repair. By long habit, he must have made his friend a part of himself, must be incapable of any pleasure in public, in reading, in travelling, of which he does not make his friend, at least in idea, a partaker, or of passing a day or an hour in the conceptions of which the thought of his friend does not mingle itself.

How many disappointments did I sustain in the search after a friend! How often this treasure appeared as it were within my grasp, and then glided away from my eager embrace! The desire to possess it, was one of the earliest passions of my life, and, though eternally baffled, perpetually returned to the assault. I met with men, who seemed willing to bestow their friendship upon me; but their temper, their manners, and their habits, were so discordant from mine, that it was impossible the flame should be lighted in my breast. I met with men, to whom I could willingly have sworn an eternal partnership of soul; but they thought of me with no corresponding sentiment; they were engaged in other pursuits, they were occupied with other views, and had not leisure to distinguish and to love me.

Some one, perhaps, will ask me, Why are qualities of this nature necessary in a friend? If I die, why should I wish my friend to bear about him a heart transfixed with anguish for my loss? Is not this wish miserably ungenerous and selfish? — God knows, in that sense I do not entertain the wish: I wish my friend to possess every possible enjoyment, and to be exempted from every human suffering. But let us consider the meaning of this. I require that my friend should be poignantly affected by my death, as I require that he should be affected if I am calumniated, shipwrecked,

imprisoned, robbed of my competence or my peace. Not that I have any pleasure in his distress, simply considered; but that I know that this is the very heart and essence of an ardent friendship. I cannot be silly enough to believe that the man who looks on, at my calamity or my death, without any striking interruption of his tranquillity, has a vehement affection for me. He may be considerate and kind; he may watch by my bed-side with an enlightened and active benevolence; he may even be zealous to procure every alleviation of my pains, and every aid for restoring me to enjoyment and health: but this is not love. No, if he can close my eyes, and then return with a free and unembarrassed mind to his ordinary business and avocations, this is not love.

I know not how other men are constituted; but something of this sort seemed essential to my happiness. It is not wonderful, perhaps, that I, who had been so circumstanced from my infancy, as to accustom me to apprehend every discord to my feelings and tastes as mortal to the serenity of my mind, should have had so impatient a thirst for friendship. The principle of the sentiment may be explained mechanically, and is, perhaps, to a considerable degree, mechanical in its operation. The circumstances, whether allied to pleasure or pain, in which I am placed, strike upon my mind, and produce a given sensation. I do not wish to stand alone, but to consider myself as part only of a whole. If that which produces sensation in me, produces sensation no where else, I am substantially alone. If the lash inflicted on me will, being inflicted on another, be attended with a similar effect, I then know that there is a being of the same species or genus with myself. Still we are, each of us, substantive and independent. But, if there is a being who feels the blow under which I flinch, in whom my sensations are by a kind of necessity echoed and repeated, that being is a part of myself. Every reasoning and sensitive creature seems intuitively to require, to his perfectly just and proper state, this sort of sympathy. It is inconceivable how great an alleviation is in this way afforded, how it mitigates the agony of every kind of distress. It is inconceivable in how deep and insurmountable a solitude that creature is involved, who looks every where around for sympathy, but looks in vain. Society, an active and a crowded scene, is the furthest in the world from relieving the sensation of this solitude. The more moving and variegated is the assembly in which I am present, the more full is my conviction that I am alone. I should find as much consolation and rest among what the satirist calls the vitrified inhabitants of the planet Mercury, as here.

The operation, as I have said, is in one view of it mechanical; in another it is purely intellectual and moral. To the happiness of every human creature, at least in a civilised state, it is perhaps necessary that he should esteem himself, that he should regard himself as an object of complacency and honour. But in this, as well as every other species of creed, it should seem almost impossible for any one to be a firm believer, if there are no other persons in the world of the same sect as himself. However worthy and valuable he may endeavour to consider himself, his persuasion will be attended with little confidence and solidity, if it does not find support in the judgments of other men. The martyr, or the champion of popular pretensions, cheerfully encounters the terrors of a public execution, provided the theatre on which he is to die is filled with his approvers. And, in this respect, the strength of attachment and approbation in a few, or in one, will sometimes compensate the less conspicuous complacence of thousands. I remember to have heard a very vain man say, "I have a hundred friends, any one of whom would willingly die, if it were required for my preservation or welfare:" no wonder that such a man should be continually buoyed up with high spirits, and enjoy the most enviable sensations. Alas, what this man was

able to persuade himself he possessed in so wild an exuberance, I sought for through life, and found in no single instance! —

Thus I spent more than twenty years of my life, continually in search of contentment, which as invariably eluded my pursuit. My disposition was always saturnine, I wanted something, I knew not what. I sought it in solitude and in crowds, in travel and at home, in ambition and in independence. My ideas moved slow; I was prone to ennui. I wandered among mountains and rivers, through verdant plains, and over immense precipices; but nature had no beauties. I plunged into the society of the rich, the gay, the witty, and the eloquent; but I sighed; disquisition did not rouse me to animation; laughter was death to my flagging spirits.

This disease, which afflicted me at first but in a moderate degree, grew upon me perpetually from year to year. As I advanced in life, my prospects became less gilded with the sunshine of hope; and, as the illusion of the scenes of which I was successively a spectator wore out, I felt with deeper dejection that I was alone in the world.

It will readily be supposed, that in these twenty years of my life I met with many adventures; and that, if I were so inclined, I might, instead of confining myself as I have done to generals, have related a variety of minute circumstances, sometimes calculated to amuse the fancy, and sometimes to agitate the sympathetic and generous feelings, of every reader. I might have described many pleasing and many pathetic incidents in Merionethshire: I might have enlarged upon my club of authors, and thus, in place of making my volumes a moral tale, have converted them into a vehicle for personal satire: I might have expanded the story of my political life, and presented the reader with many anecdotes of celebrated characters, that the world has little dreamed of: I might have described the casualties of my travels, and the heart-breaking delusions and disappointments of a pretended friendship. It is by no means for want of materials, that I have touched with so light a hand upon this last portion of my life. But I willingly sacrifice these topics. I hasten to the events which have pressed with so terrible a weight on my heart, and have formed my principal motive to become my own historian.⁸⁰⁴

⁸⁰⁴ Godwin, *Fleetwood*, p. 146.

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