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Sisterly Subjects:
Brother-sister relationships in female-authored domestic novels, 1750-1820

Katrina A. Clifford

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Department of English
School of Letters, Arts and Media
Faculty of Arts
University of Sydney
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Abstract

‘Sisterly Subjects’ argues that female novelists from Eliza Haywood to Jane Austen established a tradition within the female-authored domestic novel that was based on the possibilities presented by the brother-sister relationship, the only cross-gender relationship in the eighteenth century that carried with it expectations of equality. In various ways these novelists use the unusual familial space of the brother-sister relationship to critique the emergent ideology of domesticity, to challenge authority structures, and to experiment with form in a key period of the development of the novel.

This thesis examines two main functions of this relationship in eighteenth-century female-authored novels through two arguments about sisterly subjects. First, it deals with the position of women – their subjection – in the family and in society. In many novels written by women, a brother’s usurping of authority in this supposedly equal relationship is used to demonstrate women’s right to autonomy and the negative effects of their continued subjection within the family and, particularly after the French Revolution, within society. Second, it traces the establishment of the sister as the subject of the domestic novel. Female-authored novels involving brother-sister relationships not only make obvious the privileging of the sister’s story over the brother’s, they also demonstrate the connection between the subjection of women within the family and the form of the novel.

This thesis challenges critical orthodoxies regarding the conservative nature of the domestic novel and the tendency of women novelists to promote a domestic ideal. Instead of promoting women’s subjection, these novelists use the brother-sister relationship to assert women’s autonomy, to question gender inequalities in the family and in society, and to affirm the importance of the female subject and the sister’s story.
Like many others, my thesis is the result of many years’ work and could not have been completed without the help, insight and commitment of many people, some of whom I wish to thank publicly here. First, to my supervisor, Nicola Parsons, for her unfailing support, her critical insight, and her continued belief that I not only could, but should, do better. Much of the strength of this thesis is a direct result of that belief, and not only is this thesis the better for it, but it has made me a far better researcher and scholar than I could have imagined I would become. Enormous thanks also to my associate supervisor, Will Christie, who oversaw this project from its germination in a third-year tutorial, through a Masters thesis, and finally into its completed form. Will’s constant encouragement and personal support, particularly at difficult moments, has been invaluable. I also wish to thank my examiners, Devoney Looser, Lisa O’Connell and Gillian Russell, for their kind, insightful and challenging reviews of my work.

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Introduction

The relationship between brother and sister was unique in eighteenth-century British society. Of all relationships – familial, social, and political – it alone allowed for close cross-gender interactions and carried expectations of equality, despite differences of age, gender, or marital status. Born to the same parents, with the same socio-economic background and shared childhood experiences, brothers and sisters differed only in gender. Yet their different genders led ultimately to divergent life experiences, as sisters found their opportunities limited and their lives circumscribed by domesticity in ways that did not affect their brothers. A sister’s relationship with her brother, and the comparisons between a woman’s life and a man’s which it enabled her to make, gave many sisters an opportunity to reflect upon and challenge the familial and social structures which disadvantaged women on the sole basis of gender.

Female novelists in particular used this unusual relational space to examine women’s lives. Focusing their narratives on sisters who experience inequality and conflict with their brothers, novelists from Eliza Haywood to Jane Austen participated in what could be termed a tradition within female novel-writing of using the brother-sister relationship to explore issues of gender, authority, and independence at a point in time when political, familial, and social structures were changing. As heroines reflected upon their experience of cross-gendered siblinghood, they also developed a sense of self, or subjectivity, which allowed them greater control over their choices, and in particular over the ways their stories were told. In both conservative and reactionary novels, featuring both proper and coquettish heroines, written as third-person narrative and in epistolary form, eighteenth-century female novelists used the unique familial space of the brother-sister relationship to critique the emergent ideology of domesticity, challenge authority structures, and experiment with form in a key period of the development of the novel.

The brother-sister relationship offered a number of advantages to novelists that were not available in the more commonly examined relationships between parents and children, and husbands and wives. Because the brother-sister relationship was cross-gender, it could allow for a comparison of men’s and women’s roles and their respective places in society
without needing to deal with the often vexed question of sexuality. Because it was a relationship between equals that did not entail automatic authority structures, it was a space in which women’s independence and autonomy could be asserted, and in which women’s unlawful subjection could be challenged. Because it lay outside the social and novelistic pattern in which a woman would move from being under her father’s authority to under her husband’s control, it could challenge both gender roles and assumptions about women’s natural submission without appearing to confront the familial structures which governed society. In short, it proved an ideal space for female novelists to question the position of women, even within a novelistic form that was expected to conform to quite conservative ideas about domesticity and gender roles.

The ways in which women novelists used the brother-sister relationship also sheds light on the development of the domestic novel in the second half of the eighteenth century. Novels featuring brothers and sisters explicitly draw attention to a key characteristic of the domestic novel that is easily overlooked – the privileging of the woman’s narrative. It is the sister who is the subject of these novels and, in novels in which the brother-sister relationship is significant, her place as the subject often contrasts with the subjection under which her brother seeks to place her. The development of the sister’s subjectivity, moreover, often happens in direct response to her brother’s actions. As she seeks to understand herself, her world, and her place in both her family and society, the sister-heroine develops an interiority that establishes for her a privileged place within both her novel, and the broader history of the domestic novel.

The argument of this thesis develops along two strands that roughly correlate to the dual definition of ‘subject’ that Michael McKeon offers as part of his discussion of categorical separation in The Secret History of Domesticity. He suggests that people’s understanding of themselves as subjects altered in the late seventeenth century, involving

a shift in status from, on the one hand, that of a “political subject” who undergoes “subjection” to royal authority to, on the other hand, the status of an “ethical subject” who reflects upon his or her condition of “subjecthood” and thereby lays the ground for the growth of a reflexive and autonomous “subjectivity.”

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While British women were not considered political subjects in any meaningful sense of the term, they were certainly under ‘subjection’ within the family, particularly in relation to husbands and fathers. Yet the relationship between brother and sister implied no such authority structures, despite the attempts made by many novelistic brothers to demand submission from their sisters. It was a unique space within eighteenth-century society and within the domestic novel in which female independence could be claimed and through which implications for the place of women in society could be investigated.

McKeon’s second usage of ‘subject,’ to mean the ethical subject or ‘autonomous subjectivity’ was, he claims, more directly connected with women than with men in the eighteenth century, explicitly because of their lack of political subjecthood. It was women’s ‘wholesale deprivation […] in the polity’ that made it possible ‘to imagine a different kind of subjecthood, one not of the political but of the ethical,’ an ‘innermost privacy of mind, breast, affections, and sexuality, a transit from subjecthood to something like “subjectivity.”’\(^2\) Furthermore, as Nancy Armstrong has demonstrated in *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, one of the primary ways in which this female subjectivity was developed was through the domestic novel. This new form of fiction portrayed a woman who was valued not for her external features – her appearance, wealth, or class status – but rather for her interior being, her ‘essential qualities of mind.’\(^3\) This woman, according to Armstrong’s model, became the focus of the novel, and, as she moved from being merely a fictional character to being a model of the real woman, she became the foundation of both a new concept of the household, and eventually of the middle class. The domestic novel was focused on and through her subjectivity, and in the process it gendered subjectivity female. Ultimately, Armstrong argues, this gendering process led to a ‘discourse of sexuality’ that ‘made its way into common sense and determined how people understood themselves and what they desired in others.’\(^4\)

Armstrong’s more recent study, *How Novels Think*, also engages with ideas of the development of the novel and subjectivity, but approaches them from a different angle. Arguing that ‘the history of the novel and the history of the modern subject are, quite

\(^2\) McKeon, *Secret History*, 150, 152.
\(^4\) Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, 14.
literally, one and the same,’ she demonstrates that novels that focused on heroes and heroines who developed in conflict with society produced the modern notion of the ‘individual.’⁵ In order to be a hero or heroine, ‘a character had to harbour an acute dissatisfaction with his or her assigned position in the social world and feel compelled to find a better one,’ Armstrong claims.⁶ Following Armstrong’s theory, this thesis argues that for the sister-heroine, it is her ‘assigned position’ in the family, rather than in society, and particularly her ‘acute dissatisfaction’ with her relationship with her brother, that prompts the development of individuality as well as subjectivity, and thus qualifies her as the subject of her novel.

The brother-sister relationship in domestic novels is integral to the development of female subjectivity in the heroine. But it also emphasises her subjectivity in a very basic sense, for in a series of novels written in the second half of the eighteenth century, the inclusion of a sister-brother pair in the narrative highlights the fact that it is the sister who is the subject of the story, and that it is her subjectivity through which the narrative is being focused. It thus demonstrates how female subjectivity became integrated with the form and subject of the domestic novel. But it also suggests that such subjectivity need not be associated with sexuality, despite being gendered. In privileging the sister’s subjectivity over the brother’s, novelistic representations of this relationship do imply that subjectivity is a female characteristic, a state that belongs more to the heroine than to the hero. Yet it does so through a relationship that is consistently represented as asexual. While Armstrong suggests that ‘language, which once represented the history of the individual as well as the history of the state in terms of kinship relations, was dismantled to form the masculine and feminine spheres that characterise modern culture,’⁷ the brother-sister relationship, particularly in the eighteenth-century when Armstrong’s ‘dismantling’ was occurring, accommodates both discourses. In portraying sisters, novelists could display heroines who were both kin – connected to the old ideas of identity that came from one’s family of origin and social status – and as a woman, defined by one’s female characteristics entirely separate from one’s social or class position. The asexuality of the brother-sister relationship could challenge the

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⁶ Armstrong, How Novels Think, 4.
⁷ Armstrong, Desire and Domestic Fiction, 14.
emerging separate spheres thesis, asserting the similarities between brothers and sisters, men and women. It provided a site for resistance for female authors who, while participating in the domestic project which granted the middle class a greater social authority and granted them particular authority as domestic women, nonetheless sought to influence the nature of the new society the domestic novel sought to produce. As the eighteenth century became dominated by fraternal revolutions, both in America and in France, the brother-sister relationship could also be used to reassemble the dismantled family and state, providing the basis for a more egalitarian structuring of society for both men and women.

These two meanings of ‘subject’ – subjection and subjectivity – form the basis of the two strands of my thesis. While distinct, they tend to occur in the same novels as dual functions of the brother-sister relationship. A novel will privilege a sister’s subjectivity and present her as a truly ethical subject, while simultaneously representing her subjection – usually unjust – to her brother. In this way, these novels argue implicitly for the value of the female subject, critiquing the injustice of social inequality based only on gender, and thus suggesting a social change that would allow men and women – brothers and sisters both within the family and outside of it – to achieve equal independence and autonomy as both ethical and political subjects.

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8 While there was always a possibility of a relationship between a brother and sister becoming incestuously sexual, this seems to have happened only rarely in the eighteenth century and was not a matter of great public concern. Likewise, while incest features in the occasional text from the period, it is unusual. In most cases, it occurs not between blood siblings, but between siblings-in-law, as in Aphra Behn’s Love Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister (1684-87), or in Anne Dawe’s The Younger Sister (1771), examined in Chapter 2 of this thesis. Sibling incest in domestic novels written in the second half of the eighteenth century tends to be unintentional, with siblings separated as young children meeting and falling in love as young adults, but the relationship is usually discovered before the relationship is sexually consummated, as in Sophia Lee’s The Recess (1783) or Sophia Briscoe’s History of Miss Melmoth (1772), again examined in Chapter 2. This second plot device, Amy Harris suggests, is less about illicit sexuality and the breaking of social taboos, and more indicative of the ‘instinctual love between siblings’; it moreover reveals ‘a belief that shared childhood would prevent inappropriate sibling interaction.’ Amy Harris, Siblinghood and Social Relations in Georgian England: Share and Share Alike (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2012), 100. Actual sibling incest is, as far as my own reading has demonstrated, limited to early-eighteenth-century amatory and late-eighteenth-century Gothic fiction, rather than in the domestic novel that is the focus of this thesis.
Family and State in the Domestic Novel

I have focused my argument on domestic novels from 1750-1820, in part to demonstrate how these ideas affected the form of the domestic novel at a particularly significant time in its development, but also because it is in the domestic novel that the family is first examined for its own sake. The metaphor connecting state and family had long been in use by the early eighteenth-century, and literary forms reflected how the state was like a family, using, for example, the father as an analogy for the king. Sir Robert Filmer’s Patriarcha, written around 1640 but unpublished until 1680, uses this analogy as its basis, describing the responsibilities of kingship in terms of those of fatherhood: ‘As the Father over one family, so the King, as Father over many families, extends his care to preserve, feed, clothe, instruct and defend the whole commonwealth.’\(^9\) However, the period between the Restoration and the ascension of George I in 1714 saw a ‘shift in the weighting of [the metaphor’s] component parts.’\(^10\) McKeon elaborates:

> The realm of the family had tended until this historical moment to be placed in the position of “signifier” and thereby to be used experimentally to interpret or construe the nature of the state. Henceforth this relationship is rebalanced in the opposite direction: the family assumes the place of the “signified,” and the state becomes one important means for signifying it, for making sense of the family.

The metaphor does not become redundant, but its usage changes. The domestic novel offers the prime example of the shift, for no longer are relationships within prose fiction metaphorical pictures of real political relationships, as they were in the roman a clef, for example; rather, they are considered important for their own sake. If such relationships reflect back onto a broader realm, they do so only secondarily. Their interest is in the family as the family, and in family relationships as family relationships, and not as metaphors or symbolic representations of another sphere of life.

Once the representation of the family was elevated above its political signification, a woman’s subjecthood within the family could be construed as of vital importance for its own sake. In particular, the relationship between a brother and a sister, which had no meaningful corollary in the political schema, could be examined meaningfully without

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\(^10\) McKeon, Secret History, 127.
needing to represent any other form of relationship. In depicting relationships of equality between brothers and sisters within the family and the problems that resulted from such equality being denied the sister, novels could argue, with varying degrees of explicitness, for greater equality between men and women, brothers and sisters in the broader family of the state.

This conclusion, however, rests on two understandings: first, that brothers and sisters in the eighteenth century experienced an unusual degree of equality that could be translated more broadly into progressive social visions, and second, that this equality reflected the changes in authority structures of the eighteenth century, such that sisters could expect to have absolute authority over their own lives.

The relationship between a brother and a sister was arguably the most equal cross-gender relationship in eighteenth-century society. In her study of shifting family relationships in eighteenth-century novels, Novel Relations: The Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture, 1748-1818, Ruth Perry describes the relationship between brothers and sisters – at least in novels – as being ‘more egalitarian, more gender-neutral’ than a wife’s with her husband, for a sister had ‘power and place’ that was ‘analogous to that of her brother,’ whereas a wife’s place was distinctly different from her husband’s.

Brother-sister relationships have long been largely overlooked in historical scholarship, but what evidence is available confirms her conclusions about the equality of relations between brothers and sisters in the eighteenth century. Unlike relationships with parents or

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11 Here, and throughout this thesis, I use the terms ‘brother’ and ‘sister’ in an anachronistically limited sense to mean only biological siblings of the opposite sex. As Naomi Tadmor has noted, in eighteenth-century English texts ‘the term “sister” is commonly used to indicate a brother’s wife, a husband’s sister, a wife’s sister, and a sister by half-blood. Similarly, “brother” is used for a sister’s husband, a wife’s brother, a husband of a wife’s sister, and a brother by half-blood.’ Naomi Tadmor, Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England: Household, Kinship, and Patronage (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 137. While relationships between all of these different brothers and sisters would have been described in the same manner, it is only those between blood relatives, who share the same parents, the same social and economic background, and the same childhood experiences, who exhibit the characteristics of deep affection and genuine equality, that are key to my argument here.


13 Until very recently, the relationship between brothers and sisters had been almost entirely overlooked by family historians. Lawrence Stone, for example, in his massive The Family, Sex and Marriage, devotes only two pages to sibling relationships, and does not comment on brothers and sisters beyond claiming that they were ‘particularly intimate’ and ‘very special’ relationships. Lawrence Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in...
husbands, the brother-sister relationship came with no automatic assumptions of authority on the basis of gender, age, wealth, or marital status. C. Dallett Hemphill, in her historical study of siblinghood in the period, states that ‘there is no evidence that elder siblings were expected to exercise authority over younger ones’ and likewise ‘no suggestions that younger brothers or sisters had to defer to older siblings.’¹⁴ Likewise, siblings were ‘free to enjoy a sort of equality as family members who shared a generation, an equality that trumped the unequal positions their culture generally conferred on men and women.’¹⁵ In a society composed of hierarchies – of gender, age, duty and social status – the relationship between brother and sister was arguably the only relationship that was close, cross-gender, and equal.

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¹⁴ Hemphill, Siblings, 77. Hemphill’s study of siblings focuses on American siblings, comparing Euro-American, Afro-American and Native American families, and many of her conclusions, particularly about siblinghood after the American War of Independence in the 1770s are not directly transferrable to the English situation. However, it seems reasonable to translate her basic claims about Euro-American siblings pre-Revolution to English siblings. Due to a general lack of historical studies of brother-sister relationships I have selectively used Hemphill’s study to inform my own; where her conclusions are specific to the American colonies I have indicated so in my discussion.

¹⁵ Hemphill, Siblings, 6.
This equality seems to have stemmed from a shared childhood and common background. Brothers and sisters were after all the same in every respect except that of gender: they shared identical ‘family, lineage, class, rank, and original economic circumstances.”\textsuperscript{16} William Dodd, in his \textit{Sermons to Young Men} (1771), describes the similarities of siblings that should lead to their natural love for one another:

> Born of the same parents, brothers and sisters hang at the same fond breast, and drink the same milk; fed beneath the same roof, they share the same united and tender cares, the same ideas are impressed, and they are taught to regard each other as cemented by ties of the most endearing and indissoluble sort.\textsuperscript{17}

This shared experience and common background has led one recent historian to claim that the sibling relationship is thus ‘inherently egalitarian.”\textsuperscript{18}

This social equality extended beyond childhood. Eighteenth-century conduct books, a collection of texts designed to instruct young women on how to behave in order to marry well, and how to run their household after marriage, urged parents to treat their children as equals and ‘advised siblings to treat one another equally.”\textsuperscript{19} Thomas Gisborne, in his late eighteenth-century conduct book, \textit{An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex} (1797), instructs mothers not to show ‘partiality’ in how they treat their children, to ‘urge no comparison, provoke no competition’ between them.\textsuperscript{20} The same principle was designed to apply among children themselves, particularly on the part of elder siblings. Elizabeth Hamilton, in her 1806 conduct book \textit{Letters Addressed to the Daughter of a Nobleman}, advises the elder sibling who is in a position to be a judge of their younger siblings to ‘consider yourself bound to divest yourself of every degree of partiality.”\textsuperscript{21} While this did not always translate to lived experience it seems to have informed how siblings expected to be treated.

\textsuperscript{16} Perry, \textit{Novel Relations}, 110.
\textsuperscript{17} William Dodd, \textit{Sermons to Young Men} (London: J. Knox and T. Cadell, 1771), 101.
\textsuperscript{18} Hemphill, \textit{Siblings}, 26.
\textsuperscript{19} Amy Harris, “‘That Fierce Edge’: Sibling Conflict and Politics in Georgian England,’ \textit{Journal of Family History} 37.2 (2012): 158.
Amy Harris’s recent work on probate disputes among English siblings suggests that even primogeniture was not a bar to experiencing or expecting sibling equality in the matter of their treatment by their parents. Younger brothers and sisters accepted the privilege of the eldest son, but beyond that expected to be treated equally. She concludes that ‘no other familiar or social relation carried the same expectation to share and share alike not just in inheritance, but in all matters.’

The success of many probate disputes, in which sisters could take their brothers to court to gain an equal share of the family inheritance, suggests that sibling equality had a basis in the law. Sisters were legally the equal of their brothers in matters of authority too, not just in inheritance. Linda Pollock’s study of seventeenth-century siblings suggests that a brother ‘had no automatic right to [a sister’s] deference and no scriptural or legal justification to command obedience from her,’ and there is no evidence to suggest that either the scriptures or the law changed in the intervening century.

And while customs and social regulations may have given preference based on gender, age, or marital status, it seems that none of these considerations operated between siblings. Harris states that ‘being the oldest brother could grant one socially and culturally recognised power, but it did not promise any automatically privileged standing with younger siblings of either sex.’

With the exception of the eldest son’s inheritance, siblings of all ages, genders and marital statuses expected to be treated equally by their parents and by one another.

The degree of equality expected and experienced by eighteenth-century siblings is contrary to what we might expect of cross-gender relationships in the period. In part this is because of our false assumptions about the eighteenth-century family, and about women’s place in it. Most of our understandings of sibling relations come from the nineteenth century; as I shall demonstrate briefly in my conclusion, a significant shift occurs in the ideology and experience of the brother-sister relationship around the turn of the century, making Victorian siblinghood quite different to Georgian siblinghood. Hemphill notes a similar change – towards greater hierarchy within the relationship, and an increasing deference to elder and male siblings – in America following the Revolution, and suggests that it is in fact a

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22 Harris, ‘That Fierce Edge,’ 159.
24 Harris, ‘That Fierce Edge,’ 162.
result of the Revolution: ‘once the Revolution undermined traditional patriarchy, parents sought a new means of family rule in gender and age differences among their children.’

While England did not experience the same challenge to patriarchy during the time period, the effects of the French Revolution and fears of the invasion of French fraternity may well have had a similar impact on the lived experiences of brothers and sisters in the reshaped society following the Napoleonic Wars. That sibling relationships were more equal in the eighteenth century than in the nineteenth is clear from the historical evidence, as well as from the novelistic depictions of those relationships, and we should be equally wary of importing nineteenth-century hierarchical structures onto them as we should be of assuming they resembled late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century sibling equality.

It is also important to be clear about the nature and limits of the equality that eighteenth-century brothers and sisters experienced. It was an equality within the family and within the relationship, but it did not automatically translate into equality beyond the family boundaries. Harris notes that ‘from their earliest years siblings sat between injunctions that they should be equals and the reality that equality did not mean identical treatment or opportunities.’ Parents were encouraged by conduct books to treat their children without partiality, but were also required to instruct them in a manner appropriate for their gender and future social position. Brothers and sisters would, because of their different genders, have different social expectations, different educational and travel opportunities, move in different social circles, and end up with lives that varied greatly from one another. All these distinctions would have an effect on how they related to one another. The conduct books, while encouraging impartiality in parental treatment, nonetheless acknowledge the different expectations of sons and daughters. James Fordyce, in his *Sermons to Young Women* (1766), notes the different requirements of behaviour for young men and young women, commenting that ‘the world, I know not how, overlooks in our sex a thousand irregularities, which it never forgives in yours,’ demonstrating clearly that outside the family, brothers and sisters would be viewed and judged according to different standards.

Gisborne observes the impact of different opportunities on sisters, noting that, particularly young women ‘endowed with good understandings,’

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26 Harris, *Siblinghood and Social Relations*, 45.
disappointed at not perceiving a way open by which they, like their brothers, may distinguish themselves and rise to eminence, are occasionally heard to declare their opinion, that the sphere in which women are destined to move is so humble and so limited, as neither to require nor to reward assiduity.\textsuperscript{28}

The manner in which Gisborne discusses the problem, however, makes it clear that this is an experience of inequality that lies \textit{outside} the family: it is an inequality between ‘the sphere in which women are destined to move’ and the ‘way open’ to their brothers by which they ‘may distinguish themselves and rise to eminence,’ a reflection on the nature of society rather than on the nature of the family, and an indication that these sisters see themselves as equally capable as their brothers, and equally ambitious. Their upbringing has not led them to see their brothers as inherently more deserving or able than themselves, on the basis of their gender, and their complaints arise from a recognition that the equality they experienced with their brothers within the family did not extend beyond it.

Sibling equality was therefore, as Harris states, ‘situated within a broader framework that ordered families, societies, and nations along hierarchical lines.’\textsuperscript{29} Brothers and sisters would experience inequality on the basis of gender, wealth and marital status outside the family, but within the family, and within their relationship, they nonetheless expected equality. This meant that neither had authority over the other, regardless of gender, age or marital status, and that neither owed obedience or deference to the other. Moreover, while brothers were regularly encouraged to advise their sisters, and sisters were expected to have a positive moral influence over their brothers, neither was to usurp the other’s ability to make their own decisions. They inherited from their parents equal control over their own lives, free from the authority of siblings; they were raised to treat one another as of equal value. It is in this sense that they were equal.

This assumption of equality complicates Michael McKeon’s theory of the devolution of absolutism in terms of gender. McKeon is one of many scholars who have not considered the brother-sister relationship and its implications for their arguments. In McKeon’s case, it has been an effect of his focus ‘on the act of marriage and the nuclear unit, which are central both to the constitution of households and to the issue of lineage that fuels the

\textsuperscript{28} Gisborne, \textit{Enquiry}, 10-11.
\textsuperscript{29} Harris, \textit{Siblinghood and Social Relations}, 12.
power struggles between parents and children, husbands and wives, through which the
analogy with princes and people is pursued." That is, because his work focuses on
authority structures, his interest is in familial relationships in which authority is clear, and
which can be fruitfully compared with political structures.

McKeon’s study of authority begins with a concept he terms the ‘devolution of absolutism,’
a process that has broad implications for understanding the early modern period. It involves
the transposition of “public” authority from greater to lesser spheres: paradigmatically,
from the political to the economic, from the economic to the domestic, from the domestic
to the female, the subjective, and the sexual." In the political crises of the seventeenth
century, absolute authority, which had once been invested solely in the monarch, became
detached from the person and then from the office of the king. Once detached from
kingship, it ‘devolved’ to fathers and husbands, as monarchs of their households, then to
individuals, as monarchs of themselves, and finally resided in a person’s inner subjectivity.
This process involves a continuing process of privatisation, in which authority gradually
moves from the most public figure – the king – to the innermost privacy of an individual.

With authority as a key concept throughout his work, it is reasonable for McKeon to focus
on those relationships within the family in which authority structures are clear and
established. Moreover, he focuses on these particular relationships because they easily find
parallels in state authority structures. However, in examining only these two familial
relationships, he limits considerably his picture of men’s and women’s positions within the
family and thus within society. He perceives men as being able to experience the devolution
of absolutism as an increase in their personal authority, particularly over family members
but also with regards to their interactions with king and government. Women, on the other
hand, are denied any public forms of authority. In relationships with parents and with
husbands, moreover, women are in positions of submission regardless of the progress of the
devolution of absolutism. McKeon therefore concludes that, being constantly and
unavoidably under the absolute authority of another, and unable to experience authority in
the public sphere, women could only experience absolutism as an interior quality:

30 McKeon, Secret History, 121.
31 McKeon, Secret History, 323.
in its devolution to women absolutism manifests itself in a peculiarly immaterial, interior, metaphorical, virtual, and ethical form because in their sociocultural existence women are deprived of the potential for that material and actual sufficiency on which the movement from necessity to freedom is predicated and through which the devolution of absolutism might be registered.  

Subjectivity, therefore, is largely a female domain in McKeon’s formulation. Beginning as the sole form of absolutism women could experience, it came to be seen as characteristically female.

McKeon’s identification of subjectivity as a female domain correlates well with Nancy Armstrong’s view of the development of female subjectivity in the novel as argued in *Desire and Domestic Fiction*. She suggests that the early modern period saw the development of a new ideal woman whose key characteristic was subjectivity, and this new woman became first the subject of the domestic novel, and then a genuine model for all middle-class women to follow. This new woman, who was defined by her femaleness and interiority, rather than the traditional signs of wealth, beauty, or status, provided an example that almost all women could seek to attain, and a standard for the emerging middle class to rally around. In focusing the novel on a heroine defined by subjectivity, eighteenth-century novelists sought to produce the very woman they present, encouraging female readers to take on the same characteristics of properly feminine subjectivity in order to be rewarded, like the heroine, with authority over ‘the household, leisure time, courtship procedures and kinship relations,’ and most importantly, the shaping and formation of the characters of the members of her household. In subjecting her character to the formation of a new type of femininity, and limiting her desires to the newly imagined female and domestic sphere, the heroine, and the female reader, would gain subjectivity, and in subjecting herself to the authority of a husband, she would gain authority over that sphere.

Catherine Gallagher, in her reading of seventeenth-century female writings, also views subjectivity as a female domain, although in a more positive light than either McKeon or Armstrong, both of whom view it as a compensation for the loss of a more substantial authority. Basing her reading on the works of Margaret Cavendish, Gallagher argues that a

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33 Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, 20.
34 Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, 3.
woman’s experience of the absolute was different from a man’s precisely because she was
denied political subjecthood. ‘The subjectivity of the male,’ she argues, was ‘impaired by the
need to choose between the self and the monarch,’ whereas ‘exclusion from political
subjecthood allows female subjectivity to become absolute.’35 Female subjectivity thus
becomes a truer experience of absolute authority than anything experienced by a man,
because it has no conflicting interests.

McKeon, Armstrong and Gallagher all argue that subjectivity is gendered female, suggesting
similar connections between that subjectivity and female authority, an authority that
encompasses both an autonomous self and, for Armstrong, control over the household. Yet
the brother-sister relationship in a number of female-authored novels suggests a slightly
different meaning for both the autonomy and the subjectivity of heroines, one that has
more in common with that experienced by their brothers. McKeon’s idea of the devolution
of absolutism predominantly sheds light on authority structures within society and between
individuals. It also has implications, however, for the more equal relationship between
brothers and sisters, in which absolutism devolves in an unexpected manner. When the
father is alive, and absolute power has devolved to him, his sons and daughters are equally
subject to his absolute authority. But in the absence of the father, when his daughters are
orphaned and also unmarried, it is reasonable to assume that the equality experienced by
brothers and sisters leads to a situation in which absolutism, once positioned in the father,
devolves equally to all siblings.

Likewise, sisters in domestic novels are rarely content to be granted domestic authority
without personal autonomy. Armstrong suggests that novels featuring female subjects and
promoting female subjectivity were a significant part of the cultural movement which
dismantled a structure of the state based on wealth and status, and restructured it on the
basis of separate spheres for men and women, under the authority of the newly emergent
middle class who saw themselves as more morally fit for leadership than the indulgent
upper classes. The role novels played in promoting this restructure suggests to Armstrong
that their authors are complicit in the developments that encouraged the subjection of
women in the home and promote the ideology of domesticity, and that female authors in

35 Catherine Gallagher, ‘Embracing the Absolute: The Politics of the Female Subject in Seventeenth-Century
particular knowingly and willingly engaged in the middle class’s struggle for dominance through the formation of separate gendered spheres. Yet her argument, which fails to examine in depth any novels from the eighteenth century, with the exception of *Pamela*, tends to see the results of the domestic project, and particularly of the novel’s involvement with it, and read those results as the desired outcome of all authors, and the aims of all novels. The reality of the eighteenth-century novel is far less straightforward. As it developed as a genre, the novel took many forms, explored many ideas, and encountered many different challenges. Eighteenth-century female novelists are hardly homogenous; while some do appear to have participated fully in the domestic project, others were considerably more wary. An examination of brother-sister relationships within many of these domestic novels reveals levels of dissatisfaction with domesticity under the surface of apparent conformity to that ideal. In insisting on their own autonomy, sister-heroines enact a belief in their right to the same absolutism that has devolved to their brothers, not merely an interior subjectivity or a place in a domestic establishment. In this way, brother-sister relationships in these novels suggest a different perspective on McKeon’s view of the way absolutism devolved to women, Armstrong’s ideas about the effects of subjectivity in the novel, and Gallagher’s reading of the difference between male and female subjectivity. While absolutism was internalised as subjectivity, and while that subjectivity was displayed in the privileging of the sister’s narrative and her interiority in the developing novel, a sister also gained authority over her person, a freedom from subjection within the realm of the family. And if the family, having become the signified, was able to represent ethical principles which then reflected back upon the nature of the state, then the novel’s use of the brother-sister relationship to assert a woman’s right to be absolute monarch of herself can be read as a broader argument for greater equality between men and women – to each of whom absolutism has devolved – in society also. Rather than being straightforwardly complicit in the promotion of the domestic ideal, female novelists using this relationship argued for a different type of female authority, and sought to create a different type of new society, a middle class in which women too could experience genuine freedom and equality.
Explicitation and the French Revolution

The idea that the brother-sister relationship could be used to figure relationships of greater equality between men and women in society was not limited to the domestic novel, however. Its use in eighteenth-century political thought mirrors that of the father-child allegory in the seventeenth-century and the process Michael McKeon refers to as ‘explicitation.’ This term refers to the way that traditional knowledge – which was ‘tacit in the sense of being deeply embedded in a political, social and cultural matrix of practice whose guidance suffuses daily experience and discourages the separation out of knowledge for self-conscious examination’ – was challenged by modern knowledge – an ‘explicit and self-conscious awareness’ that is ‘disembedded from the matrix of experience it seeks to explain.’ McKeon identifies the debate between the patriarchalists and the social contract theorists of the late seventeenth century with regards to the nature and structure of state authority as one of the most significant examples of explicitation. Both sides based their model on a familial metaphor: the patriarchalists suggested that the authority of the king is based on the patriarchal authority of the father over his children, while the social contract theorists, or contractarians, suggested it was more akin to the authority of the husband over the wife, entered into voluntarily by the wife and established by contract.

A similar process occurred in France, albeit with different players and different ideas. In England, constitutional crises, revolutions, and political theories all combined to first make explicit and then refute assumptions about the absolute patriarchal power of the monarch. In France, political theorists and philosophers were debating a different alternative to patriarchy – fraternity. Drawing both on the ‘military traditions of the medieval court’ of brothers in arms and the ‘civic duties of Renaissance friendship,’ Denis Diderot and Jean-Jacques Rousseau made fraternity ‘a ubiquitous catchword in the political and social discourse of the Enlightenment,’ at least in France. In both France and England, a political crisis combined with a specific set of Enlightenment theories led to revolution, albeit a century apart. Yet the two theories – contractarianism and fraternity – had very different implications, particularly for the place of women in society.

36 McKeon, Secret History, xix.
Contractarianism held that those weaker in society would give up some of their freedom to be governed by the strong, to the greater benefit of all, just as a woman would give up her freedom to be governed by a husband. As a theory it therefore had most relevance for the strong, those who would take on positions of leadership, with few implications for those considered weaker, including most men and all women. It was in fact ‘irrelevant to the rights of women’ who ‘were deemed naturally inferior to men.’ Fraternity, on the other hand, had vast implications for women, and its explicitation as a system of social governance raised questions of gender in France that remained unasked in England.

Because sisters and brothers experienced equality within their families, the French adoption of social fraternity led contemporaries to question the role of women in their new society. Would sisters be included as full citizens alongside their brothers? Would they too be allowed to bear arms and join in the military fraternity that protected their new nation? Would a country governed by a principle of fraternity allow for greater equality between men and women? These questions were asked by a number of women and men, both French and English, in the early years of the Revolution, a situation I will elaborate in my third chapter. While the explicitation of patriarchy in England made visible its vulnerabilities

39 Here, and in the chapters that follow, I use the term ‘fraternity’ to mean both the particular social and political system instituted in France following the Revolution and a broader concept of inclusive brotherhood that welcomes both men and women. A survey of the use of the term in a variety of texts included in the *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* database indicates a significant increase in the use of this term from the 1780s – the decade preceding the French Revolution – to the 1790s – the decade immediately following its inception. Before the Revolution, the term was generally used to refer to religious groups, freemasons, or as a synonym for a guild, and only rarely as a way of referring to the commonality of humanity, the ‘brotherhood of man.’ It certainly had this connotation, and ‘brother’ was, as Tadmor has demonstrated, both an inclusive and exclusive term in the period: ‘The near-kinship term “brother” was also used to indicate not only a variety of siblings by blood and marriage, but also much broader relationships of amity, sympathy, and fellowship. ... Indeed, in religious language... the term “brother” could be used very broadly as a reference to “man in general.” But at the same time it could also be used for designating fellow-members in exclusive associations.’ Tadmor, *Family and Friends*, 159. In the 1790s, however, it increased in both specificity and generality. While still being used to describe religious orders and specific groups of professionals and tradespeople – doctors, academics, chimney sweeps, even thieves – it increasingly was used to refer to the system of governance of France, and also to refer to a broader fraternity existing among people of different social groups and even nationalities. My employment of it to describe a change in social structure that would enhance equality between men and women is thus reflective of the shifts in the word’s usage in the decades following the Revolution. Moreover, while it is a gender-specific word, and both pre- and post-Revolution the term often referred to groups of men, it was never exclusively so; nuns could belong to religious fraternities, and various social groups which included both men and women were described using the term, including gypsies, the poor, Quakers and writers.
to critique and challenge, and ultimately its downfall, the explicitation of fraternity in France made visible its assumptions about gender. Once made explicit, these questions could be explored. While ultimately it was decided that women, who were deemed naturally inferior and subservient to men, would be excluded from full citizenship, the debate made women in England as well as in France aware that the theory of natural gender inferiority was vulnerable to refutation. English female novelists of the 1790s and beyond, such as Charlotte Smith, Frances Burney and Jane Austen, would continue the discussions made explicit by the French Revolution about the place of women in society, finding in the fictional brother-sister relationship an ideal site for the exploration of gender inequality and the supposed naturalness of women’s subjection to men.

Subjectivity, family, and the form of the novel

McKeon’s view of the way absolutism devolved to women in the eighteenth century is thus limited by his focus on the English state and on relationships in which men have authority over women – relationships between fathers and daughters and husbands and wives. Examining the impact the devolution of absolutism had on brother-sister relationships, and the implications of that devolution, broadens our understanding of the sort of authority that could be granted to women in certain situations. Widening our view to also include the debates surrounding fraternity in France demonstrates even further how the relationship between family and state, and changing political structures, could affect understandings of gender and of female independence.

A focus on the brother-sister relationship, however, also expands our understanding of how the novel developed in the eighteenth century. It affected not only the content of these novels, but also their form, as female novelists sought the best ways to tell the sister’s story. Jane Spencer has suggested that the novel is a fraternal form, established by Henry and Sarah Fielding and Samuel Richardson through a process that involved both sibling collaboration and sibling rivalry.40 While the Fieldings had no biological relationship to

Richardson, Henry Fielding and Richardson were referred to as ‘brother Biographers’ and ‘brother novelists,’ suggesting that, despite the significant differences in their conception of the novel and their stylistic choices, they were perceived as together creating the new genre in a fraternal endeavour. Moreover, Spencer suggests that Richardson’s relationship with Sarah Fielding was one of a figural brother to a sister, in contrast with other female novelists whom he considered daughters, and both brother novelists encouraged and assisted Sarah Fielding in her own writing, participating in a ‘struggle for possession of [her] as sister author.’ For Spencer, however, the fraternal aspect of the novel applies only to its genesis: ‘Where the fraternal metaphor seems to me to have most significance for literary relations is in the way it is used to establish new literary paradigms.’ Fraternity, however – at least in the form of brother-sister relationships – had a significant influence upon the form of the novel, particularly in the hands of female novelists.

Brother-sister relationships tend to be overlooked in literary criticism largely because they are so often incidental to the domestic novel’s main storyline, which centres on a young woman’s experiences as she moves from her father’s house to her husband’s. In this plot, her relationship with her brother can be regarded as of only secondary importance. Brothers therefore can be considered details, background to the real story. In this sense they fit well into Catherine Gallagher’s theory of the development of fiction. Gallagher argues that, because ‘thinness of detail’ in the character of a novel would suggest an ‘allegorical or symbolic reference,’ characters were ‘loaded with circumstantial and seemingly insignificant properties’ in a bid to prove their very fictitiousness. Superfluous ‘particularities’ would convince an audience of a heroine being ‘nobody in particular,’ thus guaranteeing their purely fictional existence. Gallagher mentions ‘specific class, gender,
and regional characteristics\textsuperscript{46} as examples of these particularities, but a specific and detailed range of relationships, and particularly those relationships that were unusual political referents, also belong in this category. When novelists depict realistic brother-sister relationships, therefore, they are emphasising one of the key characteristics of the eighteenth-century novel – its fictionality. Moreover, as Gallagher demonstrates, it was the very fictionality of the characters in novels that encouraged readers to identify with them, for ‘a story about nobody was nobody’s story and hence could be entered, occupied, identified with by anybody.’\textsuperscript{47} Female readers could thus see a version of their own story in the story of the ‘nobody’ heroine and a reflection of their own relationships in hers. The very fictionality of the novel, which was itself indicated by factors including the realistic depiction of brother-sister relationships, allowed women to see themselves in the heroines and to understand their own situation through viewing the heroines’ increasing comprehension of their place in the family and in society.

This identification rests on an assumption of the historical verisimilitude of the representations of brother-sister relationships in these novels. A comparison between literary and historical family relationships is the subject of Ruth Perry’s exhaustive study, \textit{Novel Relations}. Perry’s work details a range of familial relationships, including those between parents and children, between siblings, and between aunts and nieces, in both novels written between 1748 and 1818, and in historical, biographical and autobiographical material. While she does not claim that novels accurately represent historical reality, she does argue that they ‘represent the foci – the obsessions – of the culture’ and can thus be used to examine how eighteenth-century men and women thought about their family relationships.\textsuperscript{48} Novelistic relationships can thus shed light on historical and cultural changes, even if they do not represent them entirely accurately. In comparing literary and historical depictions of brother-sister relationships, Perry explores not only how siblings related to one another in the eighteenth century, but also how they felt about the changes occurring in the family at that time.

\textsuperscript{46} Gallagher, \textit{Nobody’s Story}, 173.
\textsuperscript{47} Gallagher, \textit{Nobody’s Story}, 168.
\textsuperscript{48} Perry, \textit{Novel Relations}, 5.
Perry’s is, in fact, one of the few scholarly studies to examine sibling relationships in eighteenth-century novels in some detail. Sidestepping the historical debates about the development of the nuclear family in the eighteenth century, Perry identifies the century’s major familial change as one of allegiance rather than of structure, a shift ‘in the definition of what constituted the primary kin group,’ which involves ‘a movement from an axis of kinship based on consanguineal ties or blood lineage to an axis based on conjugal and affinal ties of the married couple.’\(^49\) When the family is viewed in this way, the relationship between a brother and a sister becomes ‘a fascinating flashpoint for understanding the deeper psychological meanings of the kinship shift,’\(^50\) which is demonstrated in novelistic depictions of siblings struggling with questions of authority and submission, responsibility and expectations, questions that will recur throughout this thesis. The ways siblings related became a ‘moral index more sensitive than any other,’ and, particularly for the brother, a ‘fundamental marker of his character,’ as a man who was a good brother could be trusted to also make a good husband.\(^51\) While eighteenth-century novels contain many bad brothers who neglect or abuse their sisters, Perry suggests that the regular depiction of good, caring brothers and close brother-sister bonds represents a nostalgic yearning for the consanguineal family that had provided a strong role for the sister and that was being replaced by the conjugal unit, which denied the sister any place at all. But these relationships, even when positively represented, also ‘foregrounded the difference that gender made in a person’s station and expectations in the world,’\(^52\) and were therefore regularly used to explore gender inequalities both in the family and in society more generally. It is this aspect of Perry’s argument that my own thesis is most interested in exploring.

In the past few years, a number of historical studies of brother-sister relationships have been published, one of which also includes a substantial amount of information drawn from literary sources. The second half of Christopher H. Johnson and David Warren Sabean’s edited volume, *Sibling Relations and the Transformation of European Kinship, 1300-1900*, is devoted to the period 1750-1900, and includes a chapter by Ruth Perry on sibling incest in

\(^{49}\) Perry, *Novel Relations*, 2.
\(^{50}\) Perry, *Novel Relations*, 107.
\(^{51}\) Perry, *Novel Relations*, 7, 144.
\(^{52}\) Perry, *Novel Relations*, 110.
Scottish ballads in this 150-year period. Here she demonstrates similar changes in the family, particularly in the ‘diminution of the sister’s agency,’ to those she identified in *Novel Relations.* Other chapters in the collection examine sibling relationships in bourgeois families in France, in German novels, in artistic circles in nineteenth-century Berlin and in Victorian fiction, all of which demonstrate the importance of brothers and sisters culturally, economically, and socially, but none of which overlap with my project here.

JoAnna Stephens Mink and Janet Doubler Ward’s edited collection, *The Significance of Sibling Relationships in Literature,* published in 1993, focuses more narrowly on literary representations of brothers and sisters. Of its seventeen chapters, however, only two investigate eighteenth-century texts. Michael Cohen’s contribution, ‘First Sisters in the British Novel: Charlotte Lennox to Susan Ferrier,’ examines relationships between sisters. Elisabeth Rose Gruner’s “‘Loving Difference’: Sisters and Brothers from Frances Burney to Emily Brontë,’ on the other hand, takes as its content brother-sister relationships in Burney’s *Camilla,* Austen’s *Mansfield Park* and Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights.* Gruner, viewing Burney’s and Austen’s texts as forerunners of the Victorian novel, suggests that the ‘brother-sister relation is [...] essential to understanding a particular aspect of the nineteenth-century heroine – the self-sacrificing, desexualised “angel” – and to understanding some writers’ resistances to that model.’ Brother-sister relationships that transform into conjugal unions exhibit, for Gruner, both an affirmation of domesticity and a subtle challenge to patriarchal systems of female exchange. Her selection of texts that lie at the more conservative end of the spectrum of eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century novels enables her to draw lines of influence between the three novelists, and to suggest

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55 Elisabeth Rose Gruner, “‘Loving Difference’: Sisters and Brothers from Frances Burney to Emily Brontë,’ in *The Significance of Sibling Relationships in Literature,* ed. JoAnna Stephens Mink and Janet Doubler Ward (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1993), 33. This article is a condensed version of Gruner’s Ph.D dissertation, “‘Loving Difference’: Sisters and Brothers from Frances Burney to George Eliot’ (University of California, Los Angeles, 1992), which I discuss briefly in the conclusion of this thesis. A separate article of Gruner’s, focused on the brother-sister relationship in Burney’s *Camilla,* informs part of my argument in Chapter Four.
the importance of the brother-sister relationship in the development of the Victorian family.  

A similar reading of Austen as a conservative proto-Victorian is the basis of the only book-length study of sibling relationships in her novels, Glenda Hudson’s *Sibling Love and Incest in Jane Austen’s Fiction*. Repeating what she terms a ‘commonplace,’ Austen’s ‘deep-rooted “conservatism,”’ Hudson nonetheless suggests that sibling relationships in all of the novels represent what sounds, in some ways, like a far more radical social agenda. Claiming that ‘in her concern with the family and her depiction of the home as, ideally, the haven of domestic bliss, Austen anticipates Victorian attitudes,’ she suggests that Austen is interested in shoring up the power and ‘sanctity’ of the home by concluding her novels with a revitalised familial circle, one which has been recast around sibling relationships, or ‘sibships.’ The reaffirmation of these familial bonds, and the strengthening of them through ‘incestuous’ marriages demonstrates Austen’s conservatism, Hudson concludes, by emphasising the ‘stability’ of the family amid the ‘radical changes of the time’ towards which she is ‘skeptical’ and defensive. However, she describes these sibships in terms which could easily be applied to those ‘radical changes’: they are characterised by ‘meritocracy,’ are ‘relatively egalitarian,’ and can be described as a ‘fraternity,’ terms which recall the catch-cry of the French Revolution, suggesting that, despite Hudson’s

56 Other studies of siblings in Austen’s work likewise focus on *Mansfield Park*, finding in Austen a conservative pre-Victorian novelist. Valerie Sanders’s *Brother-Sister Culture* suggests that Austen’s formulation of the ‘brother as lover,’ found primarily in *Mansfield Park* and *Emma*, was replicated by a number of nineteenth-century novelists. Valerie Sanders, *The Brother-Sister Culture in Nineteenth-Century Literature: From Austen to Woolf* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002). The plot of ‘marriage within the family’ – to cousins, in-laws, or figural siblings – and its potential benefits for heroines is also the subject of Mary Jean Corbett’s investigation of Austen’s novels in *Family Likeness*. While beginning her study with Austen, examining, to different degrees, all six of her major novels, Corbett’s focus on sex and marriage means that she investigates Austen’s portrayal of cousin-marriage rather than relationships between brothers and sisters. Mary Jean Corbett, *Family Likeness: Sex, Marriage, and Incest from Jane Austen to Virginia Woolf* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2008).


60 Hudson, *Sibling Love and Incest*, 40-41, 35.
commitment to Austen’s conservatism, the author’s sympathies are not so clear. This conflict in Hudson’s analysis is most problematic when it comes to her investigation of *Persuasion*, in which, as I will argue in Chapter Five, the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity are most clearly met. The absence of strong sisterly bonds or a landed community for Anne to retreat to at the novel’s conclusion suggests to Hudson that, despite Austen’s portrayal of the navy as an ‘idealistic moral vision,’ Anne faces a ‘the harsh reality of sororal breakdown.’

Hudson’s commitment to gender-specific siblinghood – heroines marry brother-figures, but require the company of sister-figures to be truly content – forces a negative reading of the ending of *Persuasion* which the novel does not support.

Relationships between brothers and sisters in Austen’s work have been occasionally examined in shorter forms. Both Peter W. Graham and Kay Tourney Souter have published articles on sibling dynamics and the impact of birth order in Austen’s novels, bringing modern psychological and developmental insights to bear on her representations of families. More recently, the 2009 annual meeting of Jane Austen Society of North America (JASNA), held, appropriately, in Philadelphia, was dedicated to the topic, ‘Jane Austen’s Brothers and Sisters in the City of Brotherly Love,’ and considered both Austen’s representations of siblings in her novels and ‘how her own sibling relationships inspired and influenced those she created.’ Papers presented addressed various aspects of sibling relationships in the novels and juvenilia, as well as discussions of Austen’s own experience of siblinghood and possible intersections between biographical and literary brothers and sisters. A number of presented papers were published in revised versions in both *Persuasions* and *Persuasions On-Line*, many of which expand on features of the novelistic sibling relationships noted by Ruth Perry in both *Novel Relations*, and in her own contribution, ‘Brotherly Love in Eighteenth-Century Literature,’ which she acknowledges as an elaboration of her arguments in her earlier work, but with an Austen focus. Most of

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these published papers are primarily interested in the ways in which Austen’s representations of sibling relationships either reflect or distort real relationships between brothers and sisters, whether in society as evidenced by the expectations of the conduct books or in her own personal history as a sister in a family of eight children.

My own study is less interested than these, or even than Ruth Perry’s, in historical brother-sister relationships, and more concerned with that relationship’s ideological and aesthetic value to female novelists of the eighteenth century. Rather than asking whether the relationships in novels were representative of actual brothers and sisters and how they interacted, this thesis seeks to answer the question of what broader concepts the relationship conveys. These relationships operate similarly to Gallagher’s ‘circumstantial and seemingly insignificant properties’ in enhancing the particularity, and therefore the fictionality, of heroines, but they are also a key way in which female novelists investigated a woman’s place in society and argued for her right to autonomy and independence. In enhancing a sense of the novel’s fictionality, of its being nobody’s story, these relationships formed part of the system by which female readers were encouraged to identify with the novel’s heroine. But they also became part of the narrative with which the reader identified, such that the concerns illustrated by the brother-sister relationship – concerns for female independence, for example – would be adopted by the reader as she came to sympathise with the heroine’s struggles. The inclusion of realistic and detailed brother-sister relationships was thus intricately bound up with the novelists’ quest to encourage readers to question women’s submission and subjugation within the family and society.

In this way, the content of the novel (its depiction of a brother-sister relationship) shapes its form (its fictionality), and both its form and its content affect its reception and its impact upon the reader. Enhancing its fictionality and thus its encouragement of readerly identification is, however, only one minor way in which content and form connect with regards to familial relationships. The interaction between the form of the domestic novel and its representation of the family is the topic of Christopher Flint’s broader study, *Family Fictions: Narrative and Domestic Relations in Britain, 1688-1798*. Responding to what he claims is an acute urge shared by a number of scholars to ‘align the history of the family with the history of prose fiction,’ he argues that writers of eighteenth-century prose fiction used ‘the family paradigm as a source for both their subject and their technique.’ Prose fiction was, he claims, ‘the single most effective means for the period’s own complex theorising about family relations,’ largely because the form’s length and ‘flexible incorporation of other discourses’ allowed for ‘the minute examination of family concerns’ in a manner ‘not usually or readily sustained in other literary genres.’ The novel’s form was thus shaped by its familial concerns; its form and its content both reflect the period’s obsession with family relations.

Flint, however, argues more concretely that the novel and the family have distinct similarities. One of these is a tendency towards ‘linear narrative,’ which he sees as common to the novel and the genealogy, and which makes sense of the events of a story or the lives of people by seeing them within a narrative that has a beginning and an end. While this is not necessarily particular to the novel, the novel’s advantage in this respect is the level of detail with which it can make sense of a series of incidents, characters, and relationships by placing them within an overarching narrative structure. Thus Flint asserts that ‘the intense detail of prose fiction, its protracted form, and its sentence-by-sentence scrutiny of the verbal and familial intricacies of relationships’ suggests that, just as a novel is fully legible and comprehensible, so too are family relationships in broader society. For Flint, then, the novel’s realism and level of detail enforces not its fictionality, as it does for Gallagher, but the family’s naturalness. He concludes, ‘eighteenth-century fiction usually treated the family

67 Flint, *Family Fictions*, 16-17.
as a given, a natural order, rather than a historically constituted entity, and its literary form – the prosaic treatment of a fundamentally ordinary and familiar world – represents that assumption.\textsuperscript{68} This conclusion – that the novel is an integral part of the naturalising of the family in the eighteenth century – leads nicely into Flint’s main concerns regarding how the novel in fact shaped both shaped the family and influenced broader societal concerns, notably the rise of individualism and the ways in which a society could balance the claims of the individual and the needs of society as a whole. In detailing how individualism and the contractual obligations of the family could be balanced, novels represented ways in which the individual could likewise maintain their state obligations, and ways in which the state could continue to maintain control over the new individual. The novel, particularly those focusing on courtship narratives and containing detailed family relationships, provided a space for ‘a reconception of the individual’s relation to community, from the family circle to the national estate.’\textsuperscript{69}

Flint’s identification of the novel as a site for a discussion of the rights of the individual over and against the needs of the family/society squares well with the novels included in this thesis, which regularly portray a heroine trying to assert her individuality against the demands of her brother, and yet also attempting to balance her own needs against what she considers she owes to her family. While Flint focuses his investigations on interactions between parents and children, and particularly over the question of marriage, comparisons are easily made with the brother-sister relationship. Yet Flint’s tendency to view the family as a homogenous entity, rather than as a set of individuals with different relationships between them, limits the scope of his enquiry. His parent-child focus leads him to conclude that the novel is ultimately a conservative form that seeks to contain the desires of the individual within the family, or transform a person’s rights such that they serve the interests of society rather than those of the individual. But because there is a difference between the obligations a young woman owes to her parents or her husband, and the obligations she owes to her siblings, the battle between individual freedom and familial obligation is constituted differently depending on the relationships investigated. The brother-sister relationships in these novels, rather than exhibiting conservative tendencies, repeatedly

\textsuperscript{68} Flint, \textit{Family Fictions}, 17.

\textsuperscript{69} Flint, \textit{Family Fictions}, 18.
demonstrate the appropriateness of the individual’s desire and the unreasonableness of the demands of the family, thus suggesting a more progressive agenda.

A second difficulty in Flint’s argument lies in his conception of the individual. While most of the novels he examines have heroines, and detail those heroines’ courtships and their conflicts between individual desire and family obligations, he does not examine whether the gender of the characters impacts upon how their narratives develop. Arguing that the battle between the individual and the family reflects upon the broader struggle to reconcile the different desires of the individual and society, he regularly invokes ‘Lockean paradigms of the self’ and demonstrates how the individual’s relationship to the family is reminiscent of Locke’s ideal of the individual’s ‘cooperation and contract’ with society. 70 The Lockean individual is, however, consistently gendered male. To describe heroines as instances of a ‘Lockean paradigm of the self’ overlooks the substantial differences in social standing, familial standing, and autonomy that existed between men and women in the eighteenth century, both in society and in the novel.

Nancy Armstrong tackles this problem head-on by reframing it. Claiming that ‘the modern individual was first and foremost a woman,’ 71 she argues that it was the heroine’s — and subsequently the domestic woman’s — subjectivity that granted her a right to the individuality that for Locke came through property. In How Novels Think, Armstrong further develops her ideas about the creation of the modern individual. As I have already noted, an important part of the individual’s development is a struggle against an unsatisfactory social, or, I would suggest, familial, situation, and a ‘restlessness to grow […] both more complete as an individual and more worthy in social terms.’ 72 In setting themself on a ‘collision course with limits that the old society had placed’ on them, the new individuals would develop a ‘unique subjectivity’ and ‘achieve a place commensurate to [their] desires and abilities.’ 73 But subjectivity takes on an important new aspect here for Armstrong, for the new individual must also possess a literacy that would enable them to write their own story, to ‘inscribe him or herself in writing as an object,’ and thus turn ‘an early modern subject into a

70 Flint, Family Fictions, 18, 17.
71 Armstrong, Desire and Domestic Fiction, 8.
72 Armstrong, How Novels Think, 4.
73 Armstrong, How Novels Think, 4, 28.
self-governing individual.\textsuperscript{74} Subjectivity is not merely an inner quality, as it had seemed in *Desire and Domestic Fiction*; it is also the requisite quality of the subject of a novel, and provides the ability for the individual to author his or her own life story. While this aspect of subjectivity is applicable equally to men and women, to heroes and heroines, it is particularly noticeable in the novels examined in this thesis, in which sisters develop subjectivity through colliding with their brothers and the limits those brothers impose upon them, but also express that subjectivity as they write their own stories.

Armstrong’s connection between subjection and subjectivity is therefore particularly applicable to the brother-sister relationship in domestic novels. Rather than subjectivity being a response to a lack of subjecthood, as McKeon and Gallagher suggest, the privileging of the sister as the subject of the novel and the focalisation of the novel through her interiority, her subjectivity, is a way of representing formally the struggles of the sister to avoid being subjected to her brother. In a series of domestic novels, sisters whose brothers seek to assume unjustified authority over them assert their independence not only in their behaviour towards those brothers but also by writing their own stories through letters to their chosen friends. Even in third-person narratives, the author’s focus on the sister’s narrative and the privileging of her interior perspective suggests there is a correlation between the independence she seeks in her life and the independence she is granted as subject of her own novel. In writing novels that place female subjectivity at the centre of the narrative, then, these female novelists are not promoting a domestic ideal that encourages female submission, nor are they seeing interiority as a woman’s only place of authority in a world that denies them any other form of subjecthood. Reading the sister’s subjection to the brother alongside the sister as subject of the novel leads this thesis to conclude that women novelists are using the brother-sister relationship to call for greater independence, autonomy and self-governance for women.

My decision to focus on female-authored novels reflects the concerns of the thesis more broadly. I have sought to trace how the sister’s voice was privileged over that of her brothers, and so have instinctively privileged the sister novelist’s voice over those of her

\textsuperscript{74} Armstrong, *How Novels Think*, 6.
brother novelists. I have been interested to discover how these female novelists understood and represented their own position in society, as women who desired their voices to be heard and who were able to write their own stories. Rather than include a comparison with brother-sister relationships contained in male-authored novels, I have prioritised depth of discussion of individual texts, and breadth of time period, covering several decades either side of the French Revolution, that great moment for fictive fraternity, in order to explore how the political changes affected the representation of relationships and of women more generally in novels of the late eighteenth century.

I have chosen to focus on domestic novels, by which I mean those novels which focus on the household and its preoccupations – domestic economy, domestic authority structures, courtship, marriage, and childrearing – and which consequently focus on those members of society most defined by the household – women, both married and unmarried, who governed or were being trained to govern such a space. They are also domestic in the sense that they focus on the home nation – these are books about Englishwomen, and largely (with only a few detours to France) set in England. Focusing thus on the domestic novel, thus defined, has excluded Gothic fiction from my survey, just as it has excluded travel narratives; it has on the other hand allowed for the inclusion of some epistolary and sentimental novels.

There are two reasons for this focus, and consequently the thesis’s starting point in the 1750s when the female-authored domestic novel becomes a regular member of the novel family. First, there are more, and more significant, brother-sister relationships in domestic novels than in the amatory fiction and political allegories that preceded them. This is largely because, as I have already noted, it is only in the domestic novel that familial relationships become represented for their own sake rather than for their referential value, and thus the brother-sister relationship, which had no automatic political referent, is more often investigated on its own terms. Second, the domestic novel, with its realistic presentation of women’s lives and relationships, allowed female readers to understand and challenge their own positions in the family and in society in ways which earlier political and amatory fiction did not. While novels written by women in the first half of the eighteenth century regularly focused on heroines – it was, Paula Backscheider claims, ‘the most revolutionary aspect of
the early novel”75 – those heroines rarely lived the sorts of ordinary lives to which readers could relate. Haywood’s amatory heroine Melliora in Love in Excess (1719) has a brother, Monsieur Frankville, but her relationship with him was not likely to invite comparisons with her readers’ own familial relationships. The pictures of brother-sister relationships in Delariviere Manley’s New Atalantis (1709), including the incestuous relationship between twins Polydore and Urania, were too well-understood as a political attack to be considered even as a warning to young women. And while Defoe’s Moll Flanders lived a normal domestic life at times, her incestuous marriage to her brother would hardly resonate with the average reader. It was only in the domestic novel that young women found portrayals of their own kind and so were challenged to consider their own relationships with their brothers and their place in society in light of the heroines’ experiences.

I have avoided biographical criticism, seeking to understand how women novelists used the brother-sister relationship to interrogate women’s roles in the family and in society rather than how those representations shed light on historical brother-sister relationships, or a particular novelist’s relationship with her brothers. The tendency to view novelistic sibling relationships through a biographical lens seems to be particularly misleading, and has perhaps contributed to the dearth of scholarly investigation on the topic. Claudia Johnson suggests that assumptions about Jane Austen’s family life have directly contributed to the absence of investigation of the brothers in her novels, commenting that ‘because it is assumed that Austen’s feelings for her brothers – about which we actually know rather little – were fond and grateful to the point of adoration, the sceptical treatment brother figures receive in her fiction has been little examined.’76 This thesis argues that representations of brother-sister relationships in these novels do not merely record a particular woman’s experience of siblinghood, or a historical snapshot of a segment of the family and society, but rather interrogate the gender inequality and social disadvantage that was the experience of so many heroines of the eighteenth-century domestic novel.

Overview

This thesis begins with one of the first female-authored domestic novels, Eliza Haywood’s *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (1751). This novel, long read as a conservative domestic work that charts the development of its heroine from irresponsible coquette to responsible domestic wife, has undergone significant critical revision in recent decades—and is now largely considered a critique of the very domesticity it was once considered to uphold. My argument continues this revisionary work by examining authority in the novel. Against Nancy Armstrong’s suggestion in *Desire and Domestic Fiction* that eighteenth-century domestic fiction supplied positive examples of women giving up their independence and authority over their own lives in order to gain authority over a home, *Betsy Thoughtless* demonstrates the failure of the domestic ideal to guarantee women a secure position within a household. Through its examination of Betsy’s relationships with her brothers, this novel argues that, rather than giving over their independence and authority, a woman’s happiness is dependent on her independence.

*Betsy Thoughtless* engages not only the domestic ideal, but also the form of the domestic novel. Betsy’s search for independence from the control of her brothers is mirrored by a narrative that allows her story to be told independently of the stories of her brothers. This privileging of the sister’s story is easily overlooked by a modern reader accustomed to the novel’s focus on the stories of women, but Haywood’s telling of the ‘history’ of her heroine demonstrates an important feature of women’s novel writing, present from the very beginning of the domestic novel: an insistence on the importance of normal women’s lives, women’s subjectivity, and the domestic plot.

A discussion of brother-sister motif in the domestic novel continues in Chapter Two, in which I chart the development of telling the sister’s story through an examination of five novels that feature significant brother-sister relationships from the 1750s, 1760s and 1770s. Novels written during this period tend not to include brother-sister relationships that have the same level of significance as those found in *Betsy Thoughtless*, and the different structure of this chapter, looking briefly at five novels instead of focusing on one or two, reflects the nature of the domestic novel during these decades. The novels chosen for investigation here, however, feature heroines with brothers who are important to their lives.
and stories, and demonstrate the connection between women’s independence and the form of the novel through their use of the brother-sister relationship. Consisting of plots in which the sister’s independence is constantly threatened by the actions of the brother, these novels raise similar questions about female dependence and submission to those asked in *Betsy Thoughtless*, but in ways that are more directly connected to the form of the novel. In Charlotte Lennox’s *Henrietta* (1758), form and content are reflective – as Henrietta’s brother takes over the direction of her life, he also takes over the telling of her story and her voice vanishes from the narrative. In Frances Sheridan’s *The Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* (1761) and Anne Dawe’s *The Younger Sister; or History of Miss Somerset* (1771), an uncomplicated epistolary form allows the sister to control the telling of her story even as her brother seeks to control her life and her choices, thus becoming an empowering form. Sophia Briscoe’s *The History of Miss Melmoth* (1772) and Frances Burney’s *Evelina; or The History of a Young Lady’s Entrance into the World* (1778) exhibit the vulnerability of the epistolary form as unknown brothers threaten – in some ways successfully although unintentionally – to take over the narrative even though they do not seek to take over their sisters’ lives. Through an examination of these novels, this chapter suggests that women novelists in these decades struggled to create and to use the best possible narrative form for telling the sister’s story, and used the brother-sister relationships in these novels to enhance, complicate, and challenge the sister’s right to tell her own story.

The brother-sister relationship, which began as something of an anomaly in Haywood’s *Betsy Thoughtless*, and was occasionally experimented with in the 1750s, 1760, and 1770s, found its moment in the 1790s, proving an ideal space for an examination of French Revolutionary ideology through an investigation of the family. As a result, I devote two chapters to authors working in the Revolutionary decade: Charlotte Smith and Frances Burney. In Chapter Three, my examination of Smith’s two early revolution novels *Celestina* (1791) and *Desmond* (1792) continues an investigation of the representation of the brother-sister relationship as social critique and the role of novelistic form in telling the sister’s story, but relates these ideas to the revolutionary context of the 1790s. In these two novels Smith further develops the ideas of dependence, submission and inequality that are displayed in the novels of the first two chapters but connects them very particularly with the events and ideologies of the French Revolution, specifically with the notion of fraternity. In a decade in
which the connection between the family and state was regularly invoked, these two novels use both brother-sister and parent-child relationships to engage revolutionary debates, particularly with Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). These connections are made even clearer through Smith’s combination of domestic novel and political tract, such that her novels suggest parallels between the home and the nation through form as well as content, forcing the reader to draw connections between political and domestic tyranny, and between the oppression of the poor in France and of women in England. In *Desmond*, Smith also takes up the epistolary form, although through a focus on a relationship between two male friends. Here she continues the ideas of epistolarity discussed in the previous chapter, elaborating it as a potential form for an alternative interpretation of people and events, and of a form of empowerment for the unheard and the unprivileged – in this case the revolutionaries who are misrepresented in English society, the new citizens of France, and the women still trapped under *couverture* despite the reforms in political governance in France.

The place of women in society, and the limitations of domesticity, are the subject of Burney’s *Camilla*, also written in the 1790s. Against readings that see this as an atemporal work, I argue that it is deeply embedded in its political moment, reflecting the decisions in France to deny women full citizenship and instead to reinforce gender boundaries and domestic expectations. *Camilla*, however, is not concerned with the impact of these decisions for the women of France, but rather examines the similar but more subtle process of the domestication and entrapment of women in eighteenth-century England, a process made evident by those decisions. Through the relationship between Camilla and her brother, Lionel, I explore the difference that gender makes to a woman’s experience, and in particular how the social expectations laid upon her because of her gender are to her disadvantage and to the advantage of her brother. *Camilla* also uses form to complicate a conservative reading of the text, by setting up expectations of a political engagement that it does not fulfil, and by continuing Burney’s examination of the failure of the letter to allow women to write their own stories. Having detailed the problems inherent in being born female, the entrapment of the domestic sphere, and the failure of epistolarity and narrative form to allow her heroine any control over her life, the novel does not suggest any better
alternative for women, leaving Camilla trapped in the same sphere that caused her problems.

Jane Austen’s *Persuasion* (1818), which I examine in my final chapter, displays the same difficulties as *Camilla*, the same sense of the claustrophobia of women’s lives in the domestic sphere, but posits an alternative for women in its revolutionary portrayal of the naval fraternity. Membership in the navy provides for Anne the advantages that earlier novelists sought: independence, freedom from domestic entrapment, a genuine equality, an ability to use her gifts, and true friendship. It also provides a positive realisation of the possibilities inherent in the brother-sister relationship, from which many heroines hoped but few experienced rewards. Austen’s novel also follows in the tradition of telling the sister’s story, but through the use of free indirect discourse, the obvious inheritor of the epistolary tradition in which a woman’s thoughts and feelings can be expressed honestly even within a third-person narrative. This technique allows Anne to be understood by the reader as she is understood by the members of the navy, and thus to shape her representation rather than be controlled by the narrator. It allows Anne freedom of expression, to match her freedom from the claustrophobia of landed life and of gendered expectations.

‘Sisterly Subjects’ thus traces the tradition of the brother-sister relationship in female-authored novels from Haywood’s portrayal of a sister seeking individual independence and autonomy through to Austen’s call for a new society in which women as well as men can experience freedom from gender restrictions, equality despite gender difference, and genuine relationships with members of both genders. By focusing on this relationship, unique in the eighteenth-century in its cross-gender equality, this thesis highlights female novelists’ engagement with discussions of gender and domesticity, and the novel’s development as a form. For women novelists, the brother-sister relationship offered an ideal site for an exploration of women’s position in society and more specifically of ideas of equality between men and women beyond that relationship. In representing heroines’ struggles with their brothers, female novelists could assert the importance of female independence, and the injustice of their expected submission to men.
Female novelists also participated in the broader project of the development of the novel, and their use of the brother-sister relationship to interrogate women’s place in society also influenced their experiments with novelistic form. Their focus on the sister’s story highlights the development of female subjectivity and its centrality to the domestic novel. Epistolary form and free indirect discourse, both of which are key characteristics of the eighteenth-century novel, were both instruments female novelists used as they attempted to find the best way of telling the sister’s story and privileging her voice and subjectivity. Relationships between brothers and sisters in female-authored novels shed important light upon the place of women in eighteenth-century society, but also on the development of the domestic novel. The subjection of sisters and the sister as subject intersect in the eighteenth-century female-authored novel in ways that draw attention to the interaction between fiction and society, and the rise of the new form of the novel.
Eliza Haywood’s *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (1751) did not receive rave reviews when it was first published. The *Monthly Review* described it as ‘insipid’ and suggested that its focus on a heroine who is ‘neither truly amiable nor infamous’ was a ‘barren foundation’ for a novel.\(^1\) Despite the lack of critical enthusiasm, however, *Betsy Thoughtless* proved to be one of Haywood’s most popular works, regularly republished in both London and Dublin, translated into various languages, and adapted for the stage.\(^2\) In the past two decades, literary critics have established not only its popularity, but also its innovative qualities and its long-term influence. *Betsy Thoughtless* is claimed as the first female bildungsroman by Lorna Ellis and Christine Blouch, and is placed ‘at the centre of the tradition of the eighteenth-century domestic novel’ by Aleksandra Hultquist and Kathryn R. King.\(^3\) It has long been seen as the precursor of Frances Burney’s *Evelina* (1778),\(^4\) and has been claimed as an influence on a broad range of female novelists of the late eighteenth century, including Jane Austen.\(^5\)


\(^4\) John Dunlop was probably the first to outline the similarities between Haywood’s and Burney’s novels, writing in 1814 of the ways in which the texts’ plans are ‘analogous’ and in which many of their characters ‘coincide.’ John Dunlop, *The History of Fiction*, 2\(^{nd}\) edition (Edinburgh: James Ballantyne and Co., 1816), III.455-57.

More significantly, *Betsy Thoughtless* is also innovative in being the first female-authored domestic novel that features significant brother-sister relationships, establishing this relationship as a key way to examine women’s experience and to critique issues of gender and the ideology of domesticity. The novel’s use of this relationship indicates that from its beginnings the domestic novel was a complex form with often conflicting aims. It was able to uphold conservative values of marriage, proper female behaviour, and patriarchy. It was also able to champion female autonomy and independence, and greater equality between the sexes in broader society. Its focus on the sister’s story, which is made evident by the dependence of the brothers’ stories on Betsy’s own, highlights the fact that it is the heroine’s development that is privileged in the emerging female-authored domestic novel.

A brief comparison with an earlier novel is helpful in drawing out some of *Betsy Thoughtless’s* main innovations. Haywood’s novel can be viewed as a reworking of Mary Davys’s *Reform’d Coquet* (1724), in which Amoranda, a young, beautiful, wealthy heroine, moves from being a thoughtless coquette to a happy wife. In the process of her reformation she encounters false friends, narrowly escapes rape, and is guided by her mentor-guardian, Formator, into a better consideration of the world and of her own behaviour. Whether her transformation is, as it has traditionally been read, a moral reformation in which she comes to acknowledge, repent of, and mend her erroneous ways, or, as Theresa Braunschneider has recently argued, a ‘reorientation of desire’ away from a multitude of suitors and towards just one husband, Amoranda’s change happens rapidly and without much struggle. She changes, but she does not really develop.\(^6\)

In Haywood’s novel, Betsy’s story follows the same ‘narrative structure’ as Amoranda’s, but it fills a novel more than five times the length of the earlier heroine’s.\(^7\) In part this reflects the focus in *Betsy Thoughtless* on a wider range of relationships. Amoranda only really interacts with her guardian, Formator, and her lover, Alanthus, who turn out to be the same person. Betsy, on the other hand, has multiple guardians, several well-developed female friends, a wide range of suitors, and two brothers. In developing all of these relationships, Haywood constructs a much more complex narrative than Davys does, reflecting a more

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\(^7\) Braunschneider, *Our Coquettes*, 119.
realistic picture of women’s lives as they negotiate the different demands of various family members and social obligations.

Braunschneider suggests that the length also reflects the increased importance placed on Betsy’s negative assessments about marriage, ideas that are granted far more weight both in terms of the narrative space given them and the novel’s demonstration of their truth in Betsy’s first marriage to Mr Munden. Braunschneider notes that Betsy’s ‘objections to marriage are never easily swept aside; a very long and complicated narrative is necessary to reconstitute Betsy’s desire and explain her ultimate conviction that true pleasure is to be found in the choice of one man as a husband.’ Hers is not merely a story of an easy transformation, but one of genuine and at times painful development. And while Amoranda’s reformation begins with physical attack and rescue, Betsy’s is mostly a response to her interactions not with a guardian or a suitor, but with her brothers, who play an essential and generally overlooked part in her individual development. It is through reflecting upon her experience of subjection to her brothers that Betsy comes to view herself as a familial, even a social subject, and thus to develop the subjectivity that would become a hallmark of the domestic novel. Yet for Betsy, personal subjectivity is no substitute for autonomy. Her relationships with her brothers force Betsy to understand the disadvantages of being born female. It is Betsy’s desire for independence and self-governance that causes the conflicts in the novel and particularly her conflicts with her brothers, as she seeks to maintain authority over herself and gain the right to take responsibility for her own actions.

The sister’s story – Betsy, Thomas, Frank, and the question of independence

Betsy’s desire for independence brings her into conflict with a number of traditional male authority figures during the course of the novel. Male authority in the text is, however, as Christopher Flint notes, largely ‘either incompetent or absent.’ As an orphan, Betsy has no paternal authority figure. Her guardians, Sir Ralph Trusty and Mr Goodman, old friends of

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8 Braunschneider, Our Coquettes, 122.
9 Christopher Flint, Family Fictions: Narrative and Domestic Relations in Britain, 1688-1798 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 212.
her father, are good men, but are ineffective as authority figures and moral guides. Sir Ralph lives in the country and rarely comes to town, and when offering his ward advice he relies upon information offered by Betsy’s brothers, rather than solicited from Betsy herself. Mr Goodman takes Betsy into his household and treats her kindly, but displays a lack of good judgement in marrying a woman who has been cheating him financially and sexually for some time, circumstances Betsy discovers far sooner than her ostensibly wise guardian. Neither guardian attempts to assume a position of moral authority over Betsy; they will advise, but do not seek to control her decisions, expecting her to listen to them and take their words into consideration but not demanding obedience. Mr Munden, Betsy’s first husband, misuses his rightful authority over her, forcing Betsy to leave him and begin divorce proceedings, an action approved by the narrator and all Betsy’s friends. Betsy’s best suitor, Mr Trueworth, who is set up as the hero of the novel, takes it upon himself to guide her, but recognises he has no basis for the authority he assumes over her. The advice he does give, however, is undermined by the text’s ambiguity when it comes to his true character, thereby casting doubt on his right to a position of authority on moral grounds. As Andrea Austin argues, although the narrator does not allow us to forget that Trueworth is the one true suitor in a series of many, as we find on page after page the warmest descriptions of Trueworth’s courage, integrity, goodness, and real affection for Betsy, ... Haywood includes a miscellany of episodes, heaped up in insistent detail, that undercut Trueworth’s role by subtly contradicting the narrator’s view of him.¹⁰

Trueworth’s name becomes ‘subtly parodic’ as the text balances these insistentences on his goodness and worth against his actions, which at times compromise that representation. While he is shown to be clear-sighted when it comes to advising Betsy on how she ought to behave, he is easily misled by a false accusation against her. And while he is virtuous in his courtship of both her and Harriot, not seeking to take advantage of either, his sexual dalliance with Miss Flora while courting Harriot casts some doubt on his fidelity and morality. At times, as David Oakleaf notes, his speech even sounds eerily similar to the

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seduction techniques of Haywood’s earlier amatory villains. His role as an authority figure is increasingly undermined until at the novel’s conclusion he, too, becomes subject to Betsy’s authority over her own life.

The question of authority is, however, played out most clearly between Betsy and her brothers, Thomas and Frank. As orphans, they each experience the individual autonomy that McKeon envisages as the end point of the ‘devolution of absolutism,’ the passing of power down from the monarch, through the father, and to the individual. Each has their own subjectivity, their own wills and desires, free from the control of a higher governing power. They are right, therefore, from a political point of view, to consider themselves as genuinely independent, despite being siblings – the power that devolved to the father has not devolved to the eldest brother upon his death, but to all three children equally. They are also, by virtue of their father’s will, financially independent. Betsy has her own wealth that, despite being under the control of her guardians until she comes of age, is available for her own use, granting her a certain amount of independence. In this she is contrasted with the anti-heroine of the novel, Harriot, who fits well into Ruth Perry’s mould of the sister in eighteenth-century novels, the ‘fatherless girl’ in need of a ‘brother’s care.’

Her brother, Sir Bazil, has control of her fortune and therefore authority over and responsibility for her. This effectively limits her control over her life, including her choice of marriage partner; Sir Bazil has rejected several suitors on Harriot’s behalf, and when Trueworth, having abandoned his pursuit of Betsy, decides to court Harriot, he goes first to Sir Bazil to ask his permission.

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14 In this he differs distinctly from his earlier courtship of Betsy. Trueworth and Betsy met because he was a friend of her brother’s, and saw her when she went to visit Frank in Oxford. Yet while he mentions to Frank his attachment to Betsy, most of their courtship occurs in London, while Frank is absent, rather than happening under the brother’s watchful eye. This indicates the degree of greater freedom which Betsy experiences, when compared to Harriot who has all things arranged for her by her brother.
Being neither under the guardianship of nor financially dependent on her brothers, Betsy’s situation is markedly different from Harriot’s. Nor does she require the broader care that Perry sees as important for many heroines: someone ‘to protect her honour, invest her money, escort her in public places, fend off unwanted importunities, and the like,’ and to ‘even the odds against her in a male-dominated world.’ At least early in the novel, Betsy does not feel that the odds are against her. Her role as a coquette has granted her power over men, an authority unusual to a young woman whose relationships would generally be characterised by dependence on and subservience to men. Nor do her brothers initially see a need for any extra care on their part. Their sister’s independence is both expected and desired by her brothers who benefit from the freedom from responsibility it allows them. Early letters from Frank to Betsy repeatedly insist upon her independence: he has ‘no pretence to claim any authority over [her] by ties of blood,’ implying that any show of authority would be false and unjustified. Rather, he would prefer her to make her own choices, claiming, ‘I would be far, my dear sister, from opposing your inclinations.’

Assuming that her ‘inclinations’ will be for her good, Frank is eager for her to remain, as she desires, ‘mistress of her actions and sentiments’ (166).

In fact, the brothers actively reject responsibility for, and therefore authority over, their sister. At the time of their father’s death, Thomas is abroad and, as Betsy is safely under the care of guardians, he is free to remain so. However, upon his return it is assumed by both Betsy and Mr Goodman that he will invite his sister to live with him as his housekeeper, a role often assumed by sisters in the house of an unmarried or widowed brother. To do so would involve taking a position of authority over her; as a member of his household, Betsy would have been subservient to Thomas for as long as she lived with him. Yet he refuses to issue this invitation, preferring to install his French mistress as his housekeeper and thereby denying Betsy her role as a sister in a domestic framework, and so excluding her ‘from her proper domestic place.’ He justifies this action to himself in terms of protecting

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17 David Oakleaf, ‘Circulating the Name of a Whore: Eliza Haywood’s Betsy Thoughtless, Betty Careless and the Duplicities of the Double Standard,’ *Women’s Writing* 15.1 (2008): 122. This is not the only time that Betsy’s role as a sister is taken from her. When Frank is recovering from a wound sustained while duelling at Oxford,
Betsy’s virtue, arguing that to invite her to live with him would, ‘under a shew of kindness, have done her a real injury,’ it being incompatible with ‘the character of a virtuous young lady, to have lived in the same house with a woman kept by her brother as his mistress’ (277). Yet the action is clearly selfish and frowned upon by a number of other characters as well as the narrator, further undermining male authority in the novel by once more invoking the sexual double standard, thanks to which, ‘an eldest brother can gallantly protect his virtuous sister’s reputation only by excluding her from the privileges of the home he has devoted to his whore.’ In denying Betsy her role as a sister, he subtly undermines his prerogative as a brother to direct her behaviour in the future.

Moreover, in forcing Betsy to set up her own household, effectively granting her a position as head of that household, Thomas condones her independence, encouraging her in what is a declaration of autonomy. That Betsy considers herself under only her own authority, free to make her own choices, is supported by both her household structure and the brothers who have made such a structure a necessity.

The three siblings are clearly independent of each other, but independence does not, in this instance, mean disconnection. While they are not bound by ties of obligation, they are attached by both affection and blood. Betsy’s love for her brothers, and especially for her brother Frank, is one way the reader’s allegiance with Betsy is maintained. Her coquetry may pain her suitors, but it does not indicate she is heartless. In contrast with a number of the other women in the narrative, Betsy’s heart is affectionate, and her feelings are strong. Her devotion to her brothers is seen as a positive quality in Betsy by those she trusts. Lady Trusty, the older, wiser woman who advises Betsy in the manner of a conduct book, considers that ‘the interest of families very much depended on the strict union among the branches of it, and the natural affection between brothers and sisters could not be too much cultivated’ (65). It is in the best interest of family members, she believes, that they be united not divided, and, if bonded by affection, family unity can be both pleasant and

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he forbids his sister from visiting and caring for him. A sister’s role as a positive religious or moral influence on a brother is obviously not likely for a woman of Betsy’s character, but the text seems to mock this idea by making the highest influence Betsy ever has over her brothers be one of interior design – on two separate occasions she is required to attend her brother Thomas when he makes purchases of furniture or decorations for his house, in which she is not allowed to live.

18 Oakleaf, ‘Circulating the Name of a Whore,’ 122.
beneficial. That such a union needs to be ‘cultivated,’ however, implies that it does not necessarily come naturally. While Lawrence Stone in his historical work *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* describes relationships between brothers and sisters in the eighteenth century as ‘often the closest in the family’ and ‘particularly intimate,’ such a level of affection was clearly not always the case.\(^\text{19}\) In fact, as Naomi Tadmor notes, in the eighteenth century the word ‘friend’ was regularly used to refer to both kin and non-kin, with a distinction in the quality of relationship between one referred to as a ‘friend’ and one called simply by their relationship to the speaker.\(^\text{20}\) Letters between Betsy and Frank demonstrate this when the siblings sign themselves both ‘sister/brother’ and ‘friend.’ Betsy’s conclusion to her letter to Frank, ‘My dear brother, by friendship, as well as blood’ (84), or Frank’s to Betsy, ‘Your very affectionate friend, and brother’ (205), each indicate the degree of affection they have for one another, beyond their blood relationship.

While brothers and sisters could choose to be friends, they could also choose not to be. Gregory indicates that this choice was open to both brothers and sisters when he instructs his daughters to befriend their brothers only if they ‘should have the good fortune to have hearts susceptible of friendship, to possess truth, honour, sense, and delicacy of sentiment.’\(^\text{21}\) Measured against these characteristics, none of the Thoughtless children make perfect friends, and it is unsurprising that, given their imperfections, the unity Lady Trusty intends for them is not realised. In contrast, this oneness of spirit and purpose, bonded by affection, between people who do in fact exhibit ‘truth, honour, sense, and delicacy of sentiment’ is amply demonstrated by Sir Bazil and his two sisters, Harriot and Mrs Wellair. Sir Bazil’s delight when his sisters come to town is evidence of his affection for them, and the interactions between the family members is enough to convince Trueworth that he has stumbled upon true domestic bliss. Unlike Betsy and her brothers, the Loveit household is one of agreement and peace, with lively debate but no need for the arguments and confrontations which characterise Betsy’s relationship with her brothers.

For the Thoughtless children, familial connectedness is experienced as a problem as much as it is a blessing. Because they are connected by family honour, which they all hold in high


regard, any action that casts doubt on the honour of one of the siblings brings them all into disrepute. This is particularly true of Betsy’s behaviour, as her brothers increasingly realise. ‘The honour of a family depended greatly on the female part of it’ (337), Thomas considers after a long conversation with Betsy’s guardian regarding her past behaviour, repeating a commonplace of the conduct books, that ‘the honour and peace of a family are... much more dependent on the conduct of daughters than of sons.’ While Betsy does not bring public disgrace on her family, her coquettish behaviour and frequent near-rapes at length bring her brothers to question the wisdom of allowing her to be independent. It is instances like these that lead Oakleaf to suggest that in this novel ‘the power of independent choice can precede the maturity to choose wisely.’ Thomas’s thinking reflects his understanding of the difference between men and women, and consequently of the situation of his sister: he considers that it is in his ‘power’ to protect the family honour by saving Betsy from the ‘snares’ that wicked men might lay ‘to entrap her innocence’ (337), revealing a stark contrast between his ability to act and hers merely to be acted upon.

Thomas and Frank’s motivation in seeking to protect their sister does not ultimately centre on concern for her own good or her happiness. They do not consider what effect such ‘snares’ might have upon her personally; rather, they are concerned for the family honour, and particularly for how they will be impacted by her conduct. This is not the first time that the brothers have prioritised their own desires or feelings above those of their sister. When Betsy is molested at Oxford, Frank challenges the offending gentleman commoner to a duel, in order to defend not her honour and reputation but his own. He takes ‘such measures as he thought would best become him for the reparation of the affront offered to the honour of the family’ (75, italics mine), focusing very much on his own reputation – what ‘would best become him’ – and on the family honour, rather than on what would be best for his sister and her honour. This concern for family honour is rephrased only a few pages later, when he is described as being ‘determined to repair the affront which had been offered to him in the person of a sister’ (78, italics mine). His duel satisfies his sense of honour, but only further damages Betsy’s reputation. Once it becomes known that Frank has fought the gentleman commoner, and thus also known that she has been found in a compromising

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23 Oakleaf, ‘Circulating the Name of a Whore,’ 126.
situation, Betsy and Flora are ‘shunned’(83) by the ladies of Oxford, and taunted by the young men, until they leave town in disgrace. Frank’s duel has saved his honour, but only at the expense of his sister’s; under pretence of avenging a wrong done to her, he has in fact serviced his own reputation and in the process damaged hers.  

When the brothers decide that their sister requires protection, both from the consequences of her own foolishness and from unscrupulous men who seek to take advantage of her, it is worth considering who benefits from that protection. Rather than consulting Betsy, the brothers have a ‘very long and pretty serious conversation’ (337) on the matter of how best to protect her which very little takes into account her own desires. Deciding marriage will be the best solution to both her coquettishness and her vulnerability to attack – that is, to the threat to their family honour occasioned by both her active behaviour and her passive experience – they seek to persuade her to choose a suitor and enter a life of quiet domesticity. That family honour is their primary concern – the family honour being merely a cover, as in the case of Frank’s duel, for their own concerns – immediately suggests that, as Hultquist argues, they are ‘acting selfishly’ and ‘have their interests more at heart than hers.’  

Hultquist goes on to state that although Betsy ‘has immense power to destroy their reputation if not properly attended to, [her guardians do not] step forward to guide her adequately.’ Rather, in forcing her to marry, they place her outside of their family and therefore beyond their protection. Betsy’s marriage is not designed primarily for her wellbeing, but for the good of the family, and to allow the brothers to regain their independence, free from the necessity of caring for their sister. Her independence has become problematic for the family as a whole; control is their solution.

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24 This is not a failing limited to the Thoughtless brothers. Sir Bazil is also guilty of prioritising his own needs above those of his sister, refusing a number of suitors to her hand because he cannot afford to pay her dowry, and accepting Trueworth largely because he is willing to marry her without the money being paid down immediately, thus allowing Sir Bazil to marry Mabel, who likewise comes without a dowry (359-361).

25 The description of the conversation as ‘very long and pretty serious’ is of course the narrator poking fun at these otherwise ‘thoughtless’ young men, but it indicates clearly how serious they believe the situation to be.


27 Hultquist, ‘Marriage in Haywood,’ 40.
All along, the brothers have advised Betsy to marry, seeing it as the only option for a woman of her wealth and status. Betsy, however, has ‘rather an aversion than inclination’ (128), considering that the state required ‘a serious behaviour unsuitable to one of her years’ (93). Her role as a coquette gives her power over men, but more importantly, grants her independence. Seeing marriage as a situation in which a husband ‘from a slave becomes a master, and perhaps uses his authority in a manner disagreeable enough’ (488), Betsy understands that her ability to control her own life lies in remaining unmarried. She is therefore ‘tenacious of her independence, for upon it rests her freedom to direct her life.’

A husband would have a right to direct and control, a fact which Betsy sees much more clearly than either brother. Given her clear-sightedness regarding her situation, it is characteristic that when Frank first writes to Betsy recommending Trueworth as a potential husband, she is ‘a little vexed to find herself pressed by one so dear, and so nearly related to her’ (93) to consider marriage seriously. As her brothers become more convinced that marriage is the only means by which Betsy’s character and their family honour can be salvaged, she becomes increasingly torn between her desire to maintain her independence, and her wish to please her brothers, those connected by affection and blood, ‘so dear and so nearly related to her’ (93).

For the brothers to advise Betsy is not unreasonable; rather, it was expected that as men, and Betsy’s elders, they ought to have had a better knowledge of the world, of their sex, and of the way women were viewed by society, putting them in an excellent position to give their sister wise and thoughtful advice. Nor does the provision of advice imply the assumption of authority over her. Brotherly advice could carry with it, in fact, suggestions of equality. The Rev. James Fordyce, author of one of the most popular eighteenth-century female conduct books, chose the position of a brother for his advice-giving in his *Sermons to Young Women* (1766). He addresses his readers:

I have taken the liberty to address you in [the style] of zeal and friendship; a style not the less sincere, or the less worthy or your attention, for being sober and impartial. Will you permit me to proceed? Suppose me speaking to you as a brother. … With a brother’s affection then I will go on to lay before you some better ornaments than wealth can

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purchase, in which I wish my beloved sisters to shine, that they may appear as becomes their high birth [as children of the great God], and the noble expectations they are encouraged to attain [in seeking the New Jerusalem].

It is ‘as a brother,’ ‘impartial,’ ‘sincere,’ with ‘zeal and friendship’ that he gives his advice to the young women of his readership. In placing himself in a fraternal relationship he recognises his lack of familial authority and their relative equality to him: he has ‘taken the liberty to address’ them, recognising their authority in this situation, and they must ‘permit’ him to proceed, for without their permission he must be silent. His reasons for giving advice are also unusual. Conduct books were generally designed to make women more feminine and therefore more marriageable. Fordyce, instead, sees a higher purpose to his writing: that his readers might ‘appear as becomes their high birth, and the noble expectations they are encouraged to attain.’ Far from being an aim necessarily specific to female readers, these are general Christian principles, which could be equally applied to male readers. Fordyce’s aim, then, implies equality between men and women, as both sexes strive towards the same goal of Christian maturity.

Betsy, however, realises that her brothers are not advising her as if she were an equal, nor are they likely to give her good advice, with the characteristic of thoughtlessness running in the family. She states early on that she is ‘willing to be advised’ by her brothers, but not willing to ‘submit to be directed by them,’ not believing it their ‘province to prescribe rules for her behaviour’ (386). Her brothers are willing for her to choose her husband, but when it becomes clear she would rather maintain her independence, their advising takes a stronger turn. While they at no point command Betsy to marry, she perceives their increasingly insistent words as orders, and when she finally decides to do as they recommend, describes it as a ‘compliance’ (488) and considers, ‘they will have it so: - I have promised, and must submit’ (489).

Far from giving their sister the zealous, impartial and humble advice provided by Fordyce in the position of a brother, Betsy’s brothers compel her to marry against her wishes. She is not convinced by their advice, but rather views herself as ‘patiently [submitting] to the fate

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29 Fordyce, Sermons to Young Women, 85-6.
her brothers had, in a manner, forced upon her’ (502). In this she contrasts strongly with Harriot who, upon being told that Trueworth’s suit is approved by her siblings, says that ‘she would be guided by her friends, who she was perfectly convinced had her interest at heart, and knew much better than herself what conduct she ought to observe’ (371). Tadmor notes that her submission to the advice of her ‘friends’ was a ‘formulaic form of acceptance’ in the eighteenth century, indicating an expectation that those friends will bear responsibility for the consequences of the decision. ‘As the woman obliges her “friends” by placing herself under their guidance, so should they remain obliged to her, and give her their guidance and assistance if the marriage fails.’ Betsy, too, is careful to put her consent in similar terms, declaring to Lady Trusty,

“since I find [Mr Munden] has the approbation of all my friends, [I] shall no longer attempt to trifle with his pretensions. ... Since my marriage is a thing so much desired by those to whose will I shall always be ready to submit, Mr Munden has certainly a right to expect I should decide in his favour” (484, italics mine).

Yet Betsy’s submission to her ‘friends’ does not derive from a conviction that they ‘had her interest at heart’ or that they knew how she ought to behave, but from a desire to preserve their relationship. Before her submission she contemplates her position:

she loved her brothers, and could not bear their displeasures; the thought of having any disagreement with them was dreadful to her, yet the putting a constraint on her inclinations to oblige them was no less so: in this dilemma, whether she complied, or whether she refused, she found herself equally unhappy (458-9).

In the end, the solution to her ‘dilemma’ is to prioritise her relationships; her love for her brothers and her desire to avoid ‘disagreement’ and ‘displeasures’ triumphs over her longing for independence. Believing in her brothers’ ‘sincerity’ and ‘natural affection’, and little imagining how much they have placed their own wellbeing ahead of her own, Betsy submits. That she places their happiness above her own, while they do not do the same for her, is certainly a moment of great sisterly love, but is also one of the ironies of the novel. Had she realised how little her own happiness meant to her brothers, she may have been less ready to submit to their wishes.

31 Tadmor, Family and Friends, 252, 257.
The perceived necessity for Betsy to marry displays a contrast between the sexes that is clearly played out in the brother-sister relationship. While Thomas and Francis believe Betsy must marry in order to preserve their family honour, they feel no need to do the same themselves. Betsy notices this, commenting when she becomes engaged that ‘since both of you have so high an opinion of matrimony, and will needs have me, who am by some years younger than either of you, lead the way, I hope I shall soon see you follow the example’ (485). Because she is a woman, marriage is inevitable, ‘the fate of most women in a divine-right patriarchal society.’ As a woman she cannot maintain her freedom and her propriety, but is in a ‘double-bind,’ for ‘a woman who desires freedom and an equal share of life’s entertainments puts herself in serious danger, but a woman who denies herself these things and maintains the character of a “proper” woman risks giving up all authority over her own life.’ Her brothers, on the other hand, can have their share of entertainments as well as propriety and authority over their own lives, and Betsy is astute enough to notice the difference between their options and her own.

Betsy’s desire to remain unmarried, enjoying the attentions of many suitors, until a time ‘when she should be grown weary of the admiration, flatteries, and addresses of the men, and no longer found any pleasure in seeing herself preferred before all the women of her acquaintance’ (94) is very much like Thomas’s justification for his behaviour. After being chastised by Mr Goodman for his licentious lifestyle, Thomas ‘thought he had talked well, but he had talked like an old man, and that it was time enough for him to part with his pleasures when he had no longer any inclination to pursue them’ (337). Both desire to pursue their pleasures while they find them pleasurable; both see this pursuit of pleasure as part of being young and free. Yet despite this similar logic, and despite Betsy’s pleasures being virtuous while Thomas’s are not, only Thomas is allowed to continue in his chosen way of life. The brother is free to choose his behaviour, the sister is not.

The difference between them is not that noted later in the century by Thomas Gisborne, in his conduct book An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex (1797), a difference of

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33 Austin, ‘Shooting Blanks,’ 271.
opportunity to ‘distinguish themselves and rise to eminence.’ Betsy does not desire a career and is quite content with her London social sphere. Rather, in the differences between her options and those of her brothers she sees the limitations placed on women by society. She may be thoughtless, but she is not blind to her powerless situation. Her recognition of women’s position in society is as clear-sighted as her views on women’s position in marriage. Even after she has consented to the marriage her brothers desire for her, she does not find the prospect of being a wife appealing.

“I wonder,” continued she, “what can make the generality of Women so fond of marrying? – It looks to me like an infatuation. – Just as if it were not a greater pleasure to be courted, complimented, admired, and addressed by a number, than be confined to one, who from a slave becomes a master, and perhaps uses his authority in a manner disagreeable enough” (488).

Her focus is still on the pleasures of coquetry, being ‘courted, complimented, admired, and addressed’ by many suitors, regretting what she will soon lose when Mr Munden ‘from a slave becomes a master’ and who does, in fact, exert his authority in a ‘disagreeable’ manner. When Betsy’s marriage, advised strongly by her brothers, proves disastrous, the text implicitly questions the appropriateness of Thomas and Frank’s ‘advice’ to their sister by contrasting their lack of foresight with Betsy’s far better understanding of the marriage state, thereby encouraging a reading that privileges Betsy’s point of view and reasserts the importance of her being allowed to make her own choices.

While Betsy sees that, for a woman, matrimony means a loss of power and independence, her brothers assume that her marriage is unavoidable, merely encouraging Betsy to find the best husband. It is ‘a brother’s part’ (337) to look into those seeking their sister’s hand, and it is a part they take seriously but perform ill. Betsy’s own prediction is that ‘they are in such haste to get me out of the way of what they call temptation, that I believe they would marry me to any man that was of good family, and had an estate’ (415). She is proven correct when her brothers recommend her marriage to Mr Munden merely upon examining his estate records, little regarding his character or behaviour. Whether this is a result of their idea of marriage as underpinned by ‘economic gain and increased (or at least not diminished) respectability,’ or whether it is simply thoughtless laziness on their part is

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unclear. What is clear, however, is that Betsy’s understanding of marriage is far more insightful than that of her older, wiser brothers. Mr Munden happily inhabits the role of a Petrarchan lover during courtship, but his behaviour changes drastically after marriage: ‘he considered a wife no more than an upper servant, bound to study and obey’ (507). In taking a position of authority over their sister ‘to which they had no claim’ (342) and advising her without taking care to be properly informed themselves, Thomas and Frank have condemned Betsy to an unbearable marriage in which she is expected to exchange her independence for a role of such subjection that it is equivalent to a senior servant.

The text presents Betsy’s first marriage as an avoidable evil. Had she maintained her independence, or had her brothers not assumed a position of authority over her, she may have freely made a happier choice of her own. Similarly, Harriot is not allowed a happy marriage; despite three months of wedded bliss, she suddenly dies of smallpox. Neither of the women, each encouraged into marriage by her brothers, experiences a happy future. While Deborah J. Nestor views Harriot’s death as an event that serves to ‘call attention to the artificiality of the plot structure’ and which thus ‘subtly subverts the ideology of virtue rewarded,’ given the similarity between the endings of Harriot’s and Betsy’s marriages, the reader is encouraged to conclude that the other similarity between the heroines – the promotion of their marriages by their brothers – is the ultimate cause of Harriot’s demise, as it is of Betsy’s unhappiness. For brothers to assume authority over their sisters, regardless of their sisters’ willingness to be submissive, disallows their independence and therefore their ability to make positive choices regarding their own lives.

Harriot’s death in the early days of a happy marriage poses a significant problem to a reading of Betsy Thoughtless as a conservative domestic novel. Betsy Thoughtless sets itself up to be read within this framework, with the narrator stating:

> Though it is certain, that few young handsome ladies are without some share of the vanity here described, yet it is to be hoped, there are not many who are possessed of it in that immoderate degree Miss Betsy was. It is, however, for the sake of those who are so, that these pages are wrote, to the end they may use their utmost endeavours to correct that

35 Stuart, ‘Subversive Didacticism,’ 568.
error, as they will find it so fatal to the happiness of one, who had scarce any other blameable propensity in her whole composition (94).

The novel is written, the narrator claims, for those young women who are at risk of destroying their happiness by their vanity, of putting a desire for general adoration above the satisfactions of proper domesticity, and who seek to be a coquette rather than a wife. The narrator therefore sets up her tale as one that promotes the domestic woman and that demonstrates what happens to those women who fail to live up to the domestic standard.

While it is arguable that Betsy must learn to be a properly domestic woman before she can be rewarded with a good husband and a home to rule over, Harriot already is that woman. A perfect conduct book heroine, Harriot is quiet, reserved, domestically inclined, chaste, and careful of her reputation. Her willingness to submit to both her brother and to her future husband, trusting their judgement above her own, bodes well for her conduct as a wife. In a novel that seeks to promote the domestic ideal and encourage women to aim for a happy marriage, Harriot ought to be rewarded for her proper behaviour with a good husband and a home to manage. Yet while she does receive this, her household rule is only brief, cut short by smallpox only three months after her wedding to the admirable Trueworth. She is rewarded, but her reward is only temporary. Her fate is hardly one to be wished for by the novel’s readers. It is problematic to claim, as Hultquist does, that Harriot shows Betsy ‘how she should behave, with respect, reserve, and honesty.’37 In this novel, female independence, not properly practiced domesticity, is the key to a happy ending, and its conclusion confirms, rather than undermines, Betsy’s assertion of independence. After the death of Mr Munden, Betsy finds herself free from all relationships of authority; as a widow with a secure income she is truly independent. Ruth Perry confirms that historically, this would have been the case: ‘because a man was his wife’s family, if he predeceased her, no one was responsible for her; she was in some sense “orphaned” by his death.’38 This is, in a sense, Betsy’s second orphaning in the novel. The first, occurring when her father died, granted her independence, as the absolute power of her father devolved equally, upon his death, to all three Thoughtless siblings, none of whom were granted the father’s authority over another. But it is only at her second orphaning, upon the death of her husband, that

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37 Hultquist, ‘Haywood’s Re-Appropriation,’ 149.

38 Perry, Novel Relations, 55.
Betsy truly experiences the benefits of this devolved absolutism. As an consequence of this newfound autonomy, when she decides to remarry she does so without consultation, retaining a ‘just regard to the advice of [her] friends’ but not willing to be again ‘a sacrifice to their persuasions’ (630), using, and rejecting, the formulaic acceptance form based on ‘friendship’ exhibited in her earlier acceptance of Mr Munden to claim authority to make her own choices, and thereby also taking upon herself the responsibility for her marriage’s success.

It is this second marriage, not Harriot’s or Betsy’s first marriage, which is the conclusion to which the narrative has been heading. It is a conclusion that could only be reached when Betsy has learned to use her independence appropriately, and when her friends and relatives have realised her right to it. Far from representing marriage as a reward for virtuous behaviour, as Richardson did a decade earlier in Pamela, ‘Betsy’s reward is only possible once she has developed a sense of identity that she herself can control, that is distinct from masculinist expectations and that takes her desires as well as her virtues into account.’\(^{39}\) That the text’s ending applauds Betsy’s ability to direct her own life is confirmed implicitly in the work of a number of critics, who acknowledge the novel’s emphasis on ‘admonishing women to be independent and self-controlled’\(^ {40}\) and the importance of Betsy learning ‘self-government.’\(^ {41}\) ‘Self-controlled’ and ‘self-government’ are, at root, phrases that indicate personal authority and responsibility. They are not necessarily radical words. In fact, many conduct books encouraged women to be self-controlled, or to practice ‘self-regulation,’ monitoring, censoring, and governing their words and behaviour carefully.\(^ {42}\) But the idea of self-government in Betsy Thoughtless goes beyond this conduct book commonplace. Betsy must learn to govern her behaviour in a way that protects her reputation and earns her a proper domestic position, but she must also learn to govern herself, making her own decisions, controlling her own actions, and taking responsibility for the consequences. In order to do this she needs not only wisdom and maturity, she also needs to be given the opportunity to be self-governing, free from the control of guardians,

\(^{39}\) Hultquist, ‘Marriage in Haywood,’ 33.
\(^{40}\) Backscheider, ‘The Story of Eliza Haywood’s Novels,’ 36.
\(^{41}\) Merritt, ‘Reforming the Coquet?’, 187.
\(^{42}\) See for example, Armstrong, Desire and Domestic Fiction, 93, and Barbara Darby, ‘The More Things Change... The Rules and Late Eighteenth-Century Conduct Books for Women,’ Women’s Studies: An Inter-Disciplinary Journal 29.3 (2000): 338.
brothers, and husbands. She requires more than the semblance of independence; her independence must be a reality reflected in her ability to make her own decisions and take responsibility for her own actions. The novel suggests not that the conduct books are wrong in arguing for women’s self-control, but that they do not go far enough – that women need to be given the opportunity to have more control over themselves, and that those in traditional positions of authority need to allow and encourage them to do so.

Betsy’s quest for independence is clearly played out in her relationships with her two brothers, and reinforced by the experiences of the more submissive, but not more happy or successful, Harriot. While ostensibly a domestic novel that portrays the reform of a vain coquette into a properly domestic wife, subduing the heroine’s quasi-aristocratic showiness and granting her the opportunity to conform to the image of a woman defined by her subjectivity, the brother-sister relationships are a decisive way in which the text subtly but strongly critiques domestic ideology. If, as Nancy Armstrong claims, novels were designed to educate young women in the ways of proper femininity, it is difficult to fit Betsy Thoughtless into this framework. It is in the domestic sphere, when Betsy has given up her personal authority as women were encouraged to do, that she finds she has the least power or happiness. In that situation, even the advice of the conduct books fails to be of assistance. Rather, this novel demonstrates that ‘conduct book behaviour... was not always a reasonable expectation. Haywood emphasises that the perfection of the domestic heroine depends on her living in nearly ideal circumstances.’43 Married to a man who has no respect for the domestic ideal or for his wife, the advice of conduct books becomes ‘ineffectual’, demonstrating only its ‘inherently contradictory’ nature.44 Far from demonstrating the consequences of failing to live up to the domestic standard, that standard itself is shown to be wanting. And while the novel concludes with Betsy happily married, fulfilling the requirements of the domestic genre, it does not do so in accordance with Armstrong’s argument regarding the goal of the domestic novel. Betsy Thoughtless argues not for the authority to govern a home, but to govern oneself, not for a separate sphere in which women could be dominant, but for relationships between men and women that demonstrate their similarities and equality rather than their inherent differences. Betsy is

43 Hultquist, ‘Haywood’s Re-Appropriation,’ 156.
44 Stuart, ‘Subversive Didacticism,’ 570, 560.
not condemned for lacking domesticity, but for giving up her independence too easily to those who had no right to it. The conflict of the novel does not lie in Betsy’s struggle to become a proper domestic woman, but in her debates with her brothers as she seeks to maintain authority over herself and gain the right to take responsibility for her own actions. Far from seeking to restructure society along gendered lines, it consistently argues that women, as well as men, have a right to be self-determining individuals, and to engage with the world on their own terms, rather than on those dictated to them by the new notions of the domestic ideal.

**Telling the sister’s story – Betsy, Haywood, and the development of the novel**

Betsy’s experience of subjection within her family and her conviction that it is unjust lead her to cling to her independence, her individuality, and her autonomy. It also helps her to develop as a character, and in particular to develop the subjectivity that would come to characterise the heroine of the domestic novel.

A number of critics have claimed that Betsy is the first heroine in the English novel whose narrative demonstrates complex character development. King argues that she is ‘a new kind of female protagonist, an ethical subject capable of reflection, growth, and integration into the social order – in contrast to all those [amatory] heroines destined by a generic fate to disappear into death, madness, or exile.’ King’s description of the new heroine as an ‘ethical subject’ recalls McKeon’s distinction between different forms of subjecthood. An ethical subject, McKeon claims, is one ‘who reflects upon his or her condition of “subjecthood” and thereby lays the ground for the growth of a reflexive and autonomous “subjectivity.”’ Ethical subjecthood is thus the result of considering one’s political subjecthood. For Betsy, the development of ethical subjecthood comes not through reflection upon her political position, but through a consideration of her familial subjection, primarily to her brothers. Merritt argues that it is in her first marriage that Betsy acquires the ‘knowledge both of self and the world’ that allows her to develop her subjectivity. But

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45 King, ‘Afterlife and Strange Surprising Adventures,’ 204.
47 Merritt, ‘Reforming the Coquet?’, 185.
the marriage only confirms Betsy’s negative expectations about the conjugal state; she may learn self-control as a result of her experience as a wife, but her journey to self-understanding begins earlier. It is in her conversations with her brothers, as they urge her to marry, that she first considers her state, both as a coquette and as a sister. As a response to those urgings she ‘began to consider seriously, what she meant by all this’ (459), reflecting seriously on her actions, motivations, and desires, and on her position of familial subjection. Betsy’s movement from subjection to subjectivity happens precisely as McKeon predicts if we substitute the family for the political realm, through her reflections upon her subjection as a sister. Her experiences with her brothers are fundamentally important to the development of her subjectivity.

King’s description of the characteristics of the ethical subject – one who is ‘capable of reflection, growth, and integration into the social order’ is a succinct summary of the female Bildungsroman, as defined by Lorna Ellis, a form which Ellis claims begins with Betsy Thoughtless. While the male Bildungsroman is usually considered a conservative form because it ends with ‘the protagonist’s eventual reintegration with society,’ Ellis argues that the female version, at least in its early incarnations, is more ambiguous, portraying female development as both conservative and subversive, as it displays ‘the oppressive nature of that society for women.’ 48 These conclusions reflect the domestic ambiguities of Betsy Thoughtless. The novel’s ending, with the heroine happily married, seems conservative, designed to uphold an ideology of domesticity that involves female submission within marriage. Yet its presentation of Betsy’s relationships with her brothers indicates not the value of female submission but rather the importance of female independence and autonomy. It thus offers a complex response to domesticity and to women’s place in society that complicates Nancy Armstrong’s account of the role of the domestic novel in the restructuring of that society. Likewise, the portrayal of female development is not straightforward, involving a protagonist who must learn to conform to social expectations, but who also achieves power over herself and, to an extent, over the way she is perceived by others. While, therefore, Betsy’s growth seems to involve her ‘increasing silence and propriety,’ her concurrent ‘increasing control over her situation’ suggests that in her case, the development of subjectivity is empowering rather than constricting.

48 Ellis, Appearing to Diminish, 25, 40.
Betsy’s growth in subjectivity, in fact, can be read as an exchange of one sort of power for another. As a coquette, she has power over a number of suitors, but she is effectively the ultimate female object, ‘a spectacle of desirable femininity.’\textsuperscript{49} But in giving up this form of power, she gains power over herself, and a greater ability to control how others view her. In moving from object to subject she accrues power, rather than being deprived of it.

The development of the female protagonist became such a feature of the domestic novel that it is easy to overlook how innovative a move this was on Haywood’s part. Several critics have pointed out the similarities between Haywood’s novel and Fielding’s \textit{Tom Jones}, published only three years earlier. Margaret Case Croskery believes the two novels are so similar that she feels confident in claiming that Haywood was ‘purposefully rewriting Fielding’s novel.’\textsuperscript{50} But the difference that all critics note between the two is the gender of the protagonist. Haywood is, King suggests, ‘a great deal more interested than either [Fielding or Richardson] in mapping the contours of female growth.’\textsuperscript{51}

Moreover, the presence of Betsy’s two brothers highlights the fact that this novel focuses on the sister’s story, privileging her development, at the expense of the stories of her brothers, who by comparison do very little developing.\textsuperscript{52} While all three Thoughtless children become arguably less thoughtless over the course of the novel, it is only Betsy who manages to escape her name, becoming first worldly-wise as Mrs Munden, and finally a woman of ‘true worth.’ Her character development is complex, while that of her brothers is not. They come to sound slightly less clichéd, particularly in their views of women and of marriage, but they do not essentially change. Betsy is given the treatment that would usually have been the domain of her brothers. Her brothers’ stories are dependent on hers, intersecting with her story largely to help her character to develop. Given the brothers’ tendency throughout the novel to deny Betsy her independence, the novel’s structure,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{49} Merritt, ‘Reforming the Coquet?’, 188.
\item \textsuperscript{50} Margaret Case Croskery, ‘Novel Romanticism in 1751: Eliza Haywood’s \textit{Betsy Thoughtless}’ in \textit{Enlightening Romanticism, Romancing the Enlightenment: British Novels from 1750 to 1832}, ed. Miriam L. Wallace (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), 28.
\item \textsuperscript{51} Blouch, introduction to \textit{Betsy Thoughtless}, 16; King, ‘Afterlife and Strange Surprising Adventures,’ 216.
\item \textsuperscript{52} This is unusual even for Haywood, whose other novels of the same period do not focus exclusively on the sister’s story. Both \textit{The Fortunate Foundlings} (1744) and \textit{The History of Jemmy and Jenny Jessamy} (1753) give equal weight to the man’s and the woman’s lives.
\end{itemize}
which does not allow for narrative independence for either brother, is a subtle but
important way in which narrative and plot intersect.

The narrative dependence of the brothers’ stories on that of the sister is seen in a number
of different ways within the novel. While, like many eighteenth-century novels, the stories
of minor characters are regularly inserted into the main narrative of Betsy Thoughtless,
these stories are never those of her brothers. We hear the background and experiences of
Miss Forward, of Flora Mellasin and her mother, Lady Mellasin, of Miss Mabel, and of
Harriot Loveit, sometimes in quite significant detail, but we do not hear of the lives of
Betsy’s brothers unless they intersect directly with hers. When Thomas comes to town, his
reason for not taking his sister into his house is that he has returned home with a French
mistress, but we hear nothing further about her until Betsy encounters her at her milliner’s,
and we do not hear the story of her relationship with Thomas until she tells it to Betsy
directly. Frank, thrown out of Oxford for fighting a duel, goes into the army, but while the
narrative includes a number of letters written to his sister during his time away, they
contain no details about his life or adventures. The only conversations we hear the two
brothers have when Betsy is not present are conversations that concern her, whether with
her guardians, or with each other as they work out how best to guard their family honour.

A telling example of the way in which this narrative is focused on Betsy’s story, rather than
on those of her brothers, is how the three duels of the novel are related. One duel, fought
between two strangers Betsy accidentally encounters, is related in only four paragraphs. An
earlier duel, between Frank and the gentleman-commoner, ostensibly fought over Betsy’s
honour, receives a longer narration, but still without a great amount of detail, being more
summarised than recounted. Having described the first injuries in Frank’s shoulder and arm,
and the gentleman-commoner’s side, the narrative then concludes its recording of the event
with, ‘[b]oth of them received several other hurts’ (79). In contrast, the duel fought
between Mr Staple and Mr Trueworth over Betsy’s hand receives an entire chapter, and is
narrated in considerable detail, despite the narrator claiming that ‘[i]t would be needless to
mention all the particulars of this combat’ (170). We hear not only the various moves of the
combatants, but also the degree of their wounds, and even the words they utter as they
fight, which make it clear that their battle is all about Betsy.
The difference between the level of detail in these three scenes is best explained by how closely the action relates to Betsy. The first is only incidentally connected to her, and so, while it is included in the narrative, it is not accorded much importance. Frank’s duel is ostensibly about Betsy, but is really more about himself and his own honour. It is part of the brother’s story, not the sister’s, and so, like other elements of the brother’s story in this novel, it is relegated to second place. In terms of narrative interest, the duel between Frank and the gentleman-commoner is equal to that between strangers. The duel between Staple and Trueworth, however, is only about Betsy, and is an integral part of her story, demonstrating the devotion of her suitors, highlighting the true worth of one in terms of his honour and bravery, and occasioning the dismissal of the other from pursuit of her hand in marriage. While all three duels may have been much alike, the level of description and thus narrative importance placed on each exemplifies the emphasis on Betsy’s story, over and above those of her brothers.

The focus on the sister’s story, and on her development, is a foundational characteristic of the female-authored domestic novel, one that endures at least until Austen. Yet as a number of scholars have indicated, the purposes of this novel go beyond Betsy as an individual. Rather, as Ellis has argued, Betsy is pictured as ‘not an anomaly but a representative of many typical young women.’ For Ellis, this suggests that Betsy’s individual struggles can be interpreted as also belonging to women more broadly such that, as in the broader Bildungsroman tradition, ‘the individual represents the universal.’ Spacks agrees, suggesting that while ‘the story of Tom Jones is presented as a story of English life, purporting to contain the whole of a society,’ Betsy’s story is ‘self-consciously about a woman’s life based on an understanding of the enormous differences between male and female experience.’ Betsy’s desire for independence and personal authority, and her belief in her right to it, can thus be extrapolated into an argument for independence and authority for all women, whether they be sisters struggling against brothers, wives against husbands, daughters against parents, or women against a domestic ideal that limits their choices and confines their desires.

53 Ellis, Appearing to Diminish, 76.
While Betsy Thoughtless was not designed to be an anomaly, in its prioritisation of the sister’s story over those of her brothers’, Betsy Thoughtless was one, at least in the context of Haywood’s career. The novel that preceded it, The Fortunate Foundlings (1744), presents the story of two siblings, a brother and a sister, but it is structured to give equal time to the telling of each sibling’s story. Likewise, the novel which followed Betsy Thoughtless, The History of Jemmy and Jenny Jessamy (1753), also features a dual plot, this time following the lives of two cousins who are destined to marry but desire some experience of the world before making such a serious commitment. Katherine Sobba Green suggests that Haywood’s choice ‘to separate female and male plots’ in these two novels ‘is unmistakeable evidence that she conceived these late novels in terms of sexual politics.’\(^{55}\) While Green’s assertion is not incorrect, the dual plot structure is not the only way to represent ‘sexual politics.’ Betsy Thoughtless’s lengthy examination of the brother-sister relationship enables a more subtle comparison between the experiences of men and women, and by focusing the reader’s attention and affection on the sister it heightens our sympathetic response to her situation. Moreover, the privileging of Betsy’s story over that of her brothers suggests not a balanced overview of gender difference, but rather a triumph of women’s independence from male authority.

Writing before the domestic novel became central to women’s writing and understood as the only acceptable novel form for proper women to write, Haywood could manipulate the genre to be an argument for independence and authority in overt ways. As women’s literary place, like the sister’s domestic place, became more limited and marginalised, and as fiction became more conservative, didactic, and concerned with enforcing domestic norms, it became harder for other female novelists to do the same. And yet this novel continued to have an influence on later novelists, providing an example for how they too might subvert the ideology of domesticity while still writing a novel that upheld its overarching characteristics.

Nancy Armstrong implicitly claims Richardson’s Pamela as the domestic novel’s ‘foundation,’ suggesting that eighteenth-century domestic fiction adopted its presentation of domestic ideology to the point where that ideology was established as common sense.

Placing Haywood and *Betsy Thoughtless* at the beginning of the story of the domestic novel makes the history of domesticity and the political history of the novel look quite different. Female novelists building on the foundation of Haywood’s novel wrote superficially conservative novels, but regularly used the brother-sister relationship to question the domestic ideals they seemed to uphold. Haywood provided a model of a heroine who desired independence and autonomy, and who believed in her equal right with her brothers to self-governance. Betsy’s struggles with her brothers to achieve that independence forced her to develop the subjectivity that would become characteristic of the heroine of the novel, but it granted her a way of understanding her situation and thus gaining control over her life, and not merely a subordinate place in a domestic household. Likewise, female novelists following Haywood promoted female independence and autonomy, and used female subjectivity and a focus on the sister’s story as techniques to grant women some degree of control over their lives and their representation. These novelists developed not the domestic ideal, but the complex heroine living in a world in which the domestic ideal is too simplistic to fit her reality.

The brother-sister relationship therefore became a motif within the female-authored domestic novel. Yet this tradition of discussing a woman’s place in society and the possibility for greater equality offered by the brother-sister relationship receives no recognition in Armstrong’s history of the development of the domestic novel. In leaping from *Pamela*, published in 1740, to *Emma*, published in 1816, Armstrong’s argument skips generations of female novelists. In focusing on the overarching development of the domestic novel, she ignores the ways in which authors used the marginal relationships in their novels to scrutinise the conventional domestic narrative, being not complicit in the forwarding of the domestic project but subverting it from within. They too would use a heroine’s relationship with her brother to draw attention to her experience of inequality and to allow her to develop the subjectivity that would grant her control over her life and, increasingly in the decades following Haywood’s novel, its written representation. Written before the domestic standard became entrenched in society, a text like *Betsy Thoughtless* demonstrates clearly how brother-sister relationships could be used to undermine the standard authority structures and question women’s place in society even within the confines of the traditional domestic novel. In Betsy herself, who from a traditional reformed coquette has gradually
shown herself to be a woman who coquettishly calls for female independence, we can see the beginnings of a significant trend within early women’s novel writing. As domestication became more established, both in literature and society, questions of female authority became a side theme in fraternal motifs, subtly challenging and questioning the domestic patterns and ideologies these later novels seem to uphold. Yet these novels also continued to develop the idea of the sister’s story, and the importance of female subjectivity as a tool allowing women to write their own narratives. It is to these novels that my next chapters turn.
Chapter 2
Fraternal Narrative:
Telling the Sister’s Story in Five Novels of the 1750s, 1760s and 1770s

The period between the publication of Haywood’s *Betsy Thoughtless* in 1751 and Charlotte Smith’s *Celestina* in 1791 was one of experimentation and consolidation in the form and content of the novel in Britain as the ‘finishing touches’ were applied to the ‘making of the novel,’ as J. A. Downie argues.¹ It was during these decades, James Raven claims, that the novel was ‘secured as an acknowledged category of fiction.’² Female novelists played an important role in the creation and definition of this new category, experimenting with different forms, styles and content as the ‘novel’ slowly took shape.

In this chapter I will examine five novels from this forty year period to investigate how a small selection of female novelists contributed to the development and consolidation of the novel in this period. My focus on five novels, rather than on one or two, is in part because this chapter seeks to chart the development of the idea of telling the sister’s story, and in part due to an absence of novels written by women which feature significant brother-sister relationships in these decades. The novelists considered in this chapter – Charlotte Lennox, Frances Sheridan, Anne Dawe, Sophia Briscoe and Frances Burney – all used the relationship between a brother and sister to assert the importance of the sister’s autonomy and the significance of her story in ways that recall Haywood’s portrayal of Betsy Thoughtless. They are, however, more interested than Haywood in exploring the formal potential of the novel to complement or complicate how the sister’s story is told. These novelists use the formal aspects of narrative, in particular epistolary form, to either enhance or contrast their representation of the sister’s experience at the hands of her brother. In Lennox’s *Henrietta* (1758), the heroine’s discovery of her brother in the final volume removes her independence as a character, but also her independent voice in the novel. Sheridan’s *The Memoirs of Sidney Bidulph* (1761) and Dawe’s *The Younger Sister; or, History of Miss*

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Somerset (1770) both demonstrate the ways in which brothers could treat their sisters as objects to be manipulated or traded, and yet the ways in which the epistolary novel allowed those women to be subjects and to retain control over their stories. Finally, in Briscoe’s The History of Miss Melmoth (1772) and Burney’s Evelina: or the History of a Young Lady’s Entrance into the World (1778) the epistolary form itself is compromised by a brother who, while not threatening the heroine’s control of her life, very much threatens to subsume her story into his own.

Through these five novels, I will suggest that female novelists in these decades struggled to create the best possible narrative form for telling the sister’s story, and deployed the brother-sister relationships in these novels to enhance, complicate, and challenge the sister’s right and ability to tell her story. While the use of multiple novels is a variation on the structure of the rest of the chapters in my thesis, other scholars, particularly scholars looking at family relationships in novels in the eighteenth century, seem to have had similar difficulty locating examples in this period, or have likewise opted for an overview of these decades rather than a focus on single texts. A chapter on the family in April London’s Cambridge Introduction to the Eighteenth-Century Novel, for example, compares Samuel Richardson’s Sir Charles Grandison (1753-4) with Oliver Goldsmith’s The Vicar of Wakefield (1766), Eliza Haywood’s Betsy Thoughtless (1751) with Jane Austen’s Emma (1815) and Eliza Fenwick’s Secresy (1795) with George Walker’s Theodore Cyphon (1796), examining three characteristic representations of the family, and particularly familial politics, in the second half of the eighteenth century. While two of these novels fall in the period in question in this chapter, they are both male-authored. London examines a number of other female-authored novels written between 1751 and 1791 in her Introduction, but they are not included in the chapter which focuses on representations and uses of the family in the novel.3

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3 In other chapters London examines Lennox’s Female Quixote (1752), Fielding’s David Simple: Volume the Last (1753) and Ophelia (1760), Sheridan’s Sidney Bidulph (1761), Scott’s Millenium Hall (1762) and Sir George Ellison (1766), Brooke’s Emily Montague (1769), Burney’s Evelina (1778) and Gibbes’s Hartly House, Calcutta (1789), a strong list of novels written by women in these forty years which highlights their absence in the chapter on the family. April London, The Cambridge Introduction to the Eighteenth-Century Novel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
There would be little noteworthy in such a selection, given the scope and brevity of London’s examination, but the absence of female-authored novels is also characteristic of longer studies on the family in the eighteenth-century novel. Christopher Flint’s *Family Fictions: Narrative and Domestic Relations in Britain, 1688-1798* works its way slowly through the first half of the century, examining a single text per chapter, but then allows only one chapter to the period 1760-1798, examining the different ways in which the fractured family worked itself out in literature during this forty-year period. In focusing on three quite different texts, however – Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* (1759-67) and Mary Wollstonecraft’s *The Wrongs of Woman; or, Maria* (1798) – he gives only a fragmented picture of the very fragmentation he claims dominated the period.\(^4\)

Ellen Pollak’s *Incest and the English Novel, 1684-1814* leaves an even wider gap, jumping from Daniel Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* (1722) to *Mansfield Park* (1814), including in the middle, as Flint does, a chapter of compendious examples covering the anonymous *Eleanora* (1751), Henry Fielding’s *Tom Jones* (1749), Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* (1759-67), Sarah Fielding’s *David Simple* (1744), and Frances Burney’s *Evelina* (1778). Like Flint, she identifies displacement and tension as the key underlying forces of the period, but her choice of novels is too disparate to provide a real sense of what is happening to the family or to the novel during the later eighteenth-century.\(^5\) Both texts also point to what is a significant lack in these decades – novels written by women. Between Flint and Pollak, the only female-authored novel investigated between 1751 and 1791 is *Evelina*.

Neither Flint nor Pollak is interested in asking why there are so few female novelists or female-authored novels written during this time period, in comparison with the periods immediately before and after. Nor do they stop to consider what the implications of this absence might be for the eighteenth-century family or the domestic novel. While a definite answer to these questions is beyond the scope of my investigation here, I will begin this chapter by proposing answers to two separate but related questions: first, where are all the female novelists in the period between the end of Haywood’s career and the beginning of


Charlotte Smith’s, and second, why do so few of the novels written by women during this period contain significant relationships between brothers and sisters? The most obvious response to both questions is, perhaps, that they are not the best questions. I will therefore start my discussion by demonstrating why it is not unreasonable to expect both more female-authored novels and more brother-sister relationships in those novels before offering some suggestions as to why neither is as common as one might suppose.

**Female novelists in the 1750s, 1760s and 1770s**

That female novelists increased in number in the second half of the eighteenth century is an idea with a long critical history, dating back at least as far as Ian Watt’s classic study *The Rise of the Novel*. Yet despite this common knowledge, studies of the eighteenth-century novel tend to focus on the male canonical quintumvirate of Defoe, Richardson, Fielding, Smollett and Sterne, regarding women’s contribution to the novel as quantitatively significant but of little qualitative value. Feminist literary historians of the 1980s such as Janet Todd, Jane Spencer and Dale Spender sought to correct this assumption, restoring the female novelists who had been, in Spencer’s words, ‘underestimated’ or ‘ignored’ by modern critical studies to their rightful place as co-developers of the new novel form.

In seeking to counter the previous treatment of these novelists, however, these studies may have inadvertently overestimated the prevalence of women novelists or misrepresented their significance, giving the impression of a ‘proliferation of women writers.’ The publication of Cheryl Turner’s *Living by the Pen: Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century* in 1992 provided an important corrective to the assumption of women’s dominance in the field of novel-writing. Basing her arguments on statistical information, Turner points out that

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the growth in women’s fiction during the 1700s was neither exponential nor continuous. Rather, it fell into two distinct periods: a growth and then rapid decline before 1740 [...]; followed by a very gradual increase (in output and authorship), culminating in a dramatic, unparalleled surge in the 1780s which incorporated not only an increase in the number of authors but also, proportionally, a rise in their rate of production.9

What is more, Turner provides her readers with the raw data, allowing them to see that, far from the market being overrun by new titles by female novelists, in most years between 1740 and 1780 there were only a handful of published novels that can be identified as having female authors.10

The weakness of Turner’s data is, as she admits, that it covers only novels known to be written by women; she does not provide comparable statistics for male-authored novels or those written by authors who are anonymous and unidentifiable. Turner suggests that such data would likely demonstrate that women writers were numerous but not dominant, and that their gradual increase reflects the trajectory of the novel more generally.11 Information in the bibliographical surveys by James Raven (for the period 1750-1769) and Raven, Antonia Fraser and Stephen Bending (for 1770-1799) confirms these suggestions, and strongly opposes the assumption of the dominance of women’s novel-writing in the eighteenth century. While many of the novels recorded in these two surveys are anonymous, those that declare authorship, or for which an author has been identified, show that, until the 1790s, the number of male novelists either equalled or exceeded that of female novelists.

Raven states that while this period has a ‘reputation’ ‘as one of predominantly women novelists,’ his data shows that between 1750 and 1769, only around seventeen per cent of novelists, or forty out of 236, can be positively identified as women, and only seventeen per cent of all novels published, re-published or translated, or 185 of 1077, can be attributed to

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10 Turner’s data shows that, with the exception of a spike in publications in the 1720s largely attributable to the prolific writings of Eliza Haywood, less than ten novels per year can be attributed to women novelists until the late 1780s, and that in many years the number was as low as two or three. Raven’s more inclusive survey confirms these figures. See Turner, Living by the Pen, 34-39; Raven, ‘Historical Introduction,’ 46-7; James Raven, British Fiction 1750-1770: A Chronological Check-List of Prose Fiction Printed in Britain and Ireland (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1987), 19.
11 Turner, Living by the Pen, 39.
female novelists. When looking only at new titles, both original works and new translations, the numbers drop even further to fourteen per cent, or seventy-six of 531. While there are a large number of works by unidentified authors, he claims that

> even if all these [anonymous] works ... are assumed to be by women and added to the titles known to be by women, the case for a predominance of women writers of early fiction is far from overwhelming. Only eleven years between 1750 and 1769 have more novels written by women and unknown authors than novels written by men.  

These numbers remain fairly consistent for the 1770s, and it is only in the 1780s and 1790s that ‘the balance shifts, with slightly more novels by [identifiable] women than by [identifiable] men.’ He concludes that ‘from the late 1780s, then, the march of the woman novelist (and of the more prolific individual woman novelist) is clearly visible, but through the 1790s and to the end of the century it is not at all certain that women greatly outpaced the male writers of novels.’ While there were increasing numbers of female novelists in the second half of the eighteenth century, they certainly did not dominate the marketplace.

The question remains: why did more women not write novels? For women who were keen to write, to engage with the broader issues affecting women, and to seek to influence their society, the novel provided a respectable opportunity. It dealt with domestic and female concerns, and was largely considered the province of women, in which they could ‘claim and develop the special kind of authority concerning the education and socialisation of children and women,’ as Susan Staves notes, and requiring little education or financial backing and offering potential fame and fortune. What, then, stopped women from taking up this opportunity?

A number of women do seem to have turned to novel writing out of financial need. Widows with dependent children and wives with bankrupt husbands feature in many prefaces, with authors claiming that the needs of their families impelled them to write. Novel-writing was a good option for women who had a basic education but little money and no formal training. Unlike the cost of an apprenticeship or a better education, ‘the entry fee for authorship was

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12 Raven, British Fiction, 18.
14 Raven, ‘Historical Introduction,’ 49, italics mine.
15 Susan Staves, A Literary History of Women’s Writing in Britain, 1660-1789 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 356.
The rewards were generally equally low, with booksellers preferring to reprint a known bestseller than to take a risk on a new title. While a few novelists were paid large sums for their manuscripts, such cases were rare. ‘Copyrights to fiction were bought at extremely low prices compared even to the sums paid for more serious literature,’ and prices were not necessarily based on literary merit or even potential saleability. Of the novels considered in this chapter, both the critically decried *Younger Sister* (1770) and the acclaimed and often reprinted *Evelina* (1778) earned their authors twenty guineas, quite a high price for first novels; Sophia Briscoe received the same sum for her *Fine Lady* (1772), published soon after *Miss Melmoth*. Turner points out that ‘the average copyright fee from one novel was roughly equivalent to the annual wages of a laundry, scullery, or dairy maid, and therefore entirely inadequate for anyone attempting to maintain middle-class status.’ While the possibility of earning more and the lack of other options for earning an income may have encouraged women to take up the pen, novel-writing was too uncertain a means of supporting oneself to prove an avenue with broad appeal.

Nor was it an easy road to lasting fame. Few novels written in this period achieved a second edition. Moreover, during the 1770s and 1780s, over eighty per cent of all novels were published anonymously, ‘without attribution of authorship either on the title-page or within the preface or elsewhere in the text.’ Novels were not written by those seeking lasting literary fame, nor by those seeking to make a name for themselves as a skilled literary professional.

Yet the assumption remains that, despite the lack of advantages, large numbers of women in this period wrote novels, and only novels, and this assumption has informed the study of women writers of these decades. This is particularly true of the Bluestockings, the first

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19 According to Robert Hume, who uses information from publishers’ records of payments to authors, twenty pounds was the average price paid for a new book in the first half of the eighteenth century. While the novel market grew during the century, it seems that payments for authors did not. Hume concludes that writing was not a reliable way to make a living, and that ‘booksellers were the principal beneficiaries of publication,’ not authors. Robert D. Hume, ‘The Economics of Culture in London, 1660-1740,’ *Huntingdon Library Quarterly* 69.4 (2006): 510, 515.
21 Raven, ‘Historical Introduction,’ 41.
generation of whom were among the most educated and influential thinkers and writers of the 1750s, 1760s and 1770s. Yet the only Bluestockings who wrote novels either were novelists before they joined the Bluestocking group (as is the case with Sarah Fielding in the 1740s and Frances Burney in the 1770s), or were only loosely connected with the group (as was Sarah Scott, sister to Bluestocking hostess Elizabeth Montagu). Those at the core of the group were talented writers, but chose not to exert their talents in writing novels. Nicole Pohl and Betty Schellenberg have commented that the absence of Bluestocking novels has meant that literary historians have at times found them ‘awkward’ because ‘they did not often choose fiction, a genre to which women were assumed to be relegated.’ Instead, they wrote in what Haslett claims were more ‘respectable’ genres: poetry, translations, essays, history, literary criticism, conduct books, and periodicals. Additionally, the women writers they patronised were those engaged in poetry and scholarly works, reflecting a desire, Turner argues, ‘to foster serious and intellectual interests amongst their members’, but also mirroring the preferences of other patrons, men and women, ‘who favoured women’s poetry, translations, erudite texts, and plays.’

Susan Staves suggests that the Bluestockings may have turned to other forms in part because they were able to do so, from education, from the patronage and support of men like Samuel Johnson, and from social standing, but also because, at a time when ‘the parameters of what kind of writing was appropriate for women began to narrow’ and ‘a narrower domestic sphere was marked out as the only one appropriate for women,’ works such as translations, literary criticism and history provided more scope for the educated and intelligent female than ‘the kind of domestic novel thought suitable to lady writers.’ Translations allowed women to enter into wider ‘intellectual provinces’ than those bound by the domestic sphere, writing ‘more worldly texts’ than novels could hope to be. Moreover, translations escaped the sort of critical judgements passed on novels regarding

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23 Moyra Haslett, Pope to Burney, 1714-1779: Scriblerians to Bluestockings (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 133-34.
24 Turner, Living by the Pen, 107-8.
their suitable audience, significantly broadening the scope of such works and their interest for writers, readers, and critics.26

Histories and works of literary criticism could likewise earn authors greater respect and greater sums of money than novels, and offered a broader scene for the contemplation of ideas by intelligent and thoughtful women. Hume notes that, at least in the first half of the century, ‘elite-culture books’ compare ‘favourably’ to more low-brow productions in terms of the payments authors could earn from them.27 Devoney Looser points out that, like novel-writing, the writing of history required ‘little education and few special skills,’ and could suit women ‘looking for a lucrative and polite genre.’28 Furthermore, Staves claims that during the period from 1756-1776, ‘history was the dominant literary genre,’ with writers and readers motivated by a desire to understand Britain’s role in the world as its empire grew and as wars with France and the American colonies changed its shape.29

Compared with the novel, ‘history offered a much less claustrophobic discursive space in which women could contemplate human actions in a wider world and consider human behaviour and human motives of a darker, more complex, kind,’ allowing women to ‘shine beyond the domestic sphere.’30 For the Bluestockings, whose private correspondence shows them to be ‘far more engaged in public and in worldly matters than the representation of women in the contemporary domestic novel would suggest,’ the chance to engage in broader social and literary debate, to produce texts of greater learning and depth than what was circumscribed by the domestic novel, must have had a strong appeal.31

The Bluestockings also demonstrate the diversity of genres that a single eighteenth-century author could master. Even those who did write novels also engaged in other forms: Sarah

26 Staves, Literary History, 359.
27 Hume, ‘Economics of Culture,’ 511.
29 Staves, Literary History, 288.
30 Staves, Literary History, 289, 359.
31 Elizabeth Eger, commenting on the Bluestocking’s legacy, points to their influence on future women novelists, including Virginia Woolf. It is somewhat ironic that, given their tendency to write anything but novels, their influence can be seen most clearly in the nineteenth-century women’s novel, ‘an important cultural space in which the place of women in society can be explored, challenged, and developed.’ Elizabeth Eger, ‘The Bluestocking Legacy’ in Brilliant Women: 18th Century Bluestockings, ed. Elizabeth Eger and Lucy Peltz (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 134.
Fielding wrote a work of literary criticism, *Remarks on Clarissa* (1749), historical fiction in *The Lives of Cleopatra and Octavia* (1757), and translated Xenophon’s *Memoirs of Socrates* (1762); Sarah Scott wrote various histories, translated Pierre Antoine’s *Le Laideur aimable* (1754), and designed ‘a set of cards to teach geography to children’ (1758-59); Frances Burney was a devoted diarist, as well as writing a number of plays (only one of which, *Edwy and Elgiva*, was produced), and compiling the *Memoirs of Doctor Burney*, her father (1832). 32 The Bluestockings were not unusual in their pursuit of success in a number of literary modes. Charlotte Lennox wrote novels but also wrote poems, translations, a women’s periodical and several plays; Frances Sheridan was a successful playwright as well as a novelist. Nor was this the case for women alone; Turner argues that the major male novelists would not have considered themselves solely as novelists any more than their female counterparts. For Turner, the explanation for this is partly financial:

A varied output from professional novelists is only to be expected since writing was a difficult, unpredictable, and, for the majority, not especially lucrative occupation. ... Those female authors – amateur and professional – who looked to other material found their alternatives were improving. 33

For both male and female writers, then, whether seeking money, fame, or intellectual stimulation, there were better options than writing novels. That the Bluestockings chose not to write novels is thus not ‘awkward,’ nor does it make them particularly exceptional. However distinct they may have been from other women in their society, in terms of their publishing habits and preferences for patronage, they were far more typical of the eighteenth-century intellectual than has often been recognised. Perhaps it is better to view the Bluestockings as a more representative example of intelligent women and female writers, and to see their reluctance to write novels and their preference of other forms as characteristic of both male and female writers of the mid-eighteenth century.

There were, however, still a number of novels written by women during the 1750s, 1760s and 1770s that are of interest to scholars investigating the novel during these decades. There are fewer if one is looking for novels written by women which involve relationships between brothers and sisters that are of equal significance to the novel and the heroine as

33 Turner, *Living by the Pen*, 125.
Betsy Thoughtless’s relationships with Thomas and Francis are for Haywood’s novel, or as Camilla’s relationship with Lionel is for Burney’s novel, which I will consider in Chapter Four. Having done extensive reading of women’s novels published in these decades, the five I discuss here all have brother-sister relationships that are important for both the heroine and the novel, but these relationships are all minor aspects of their novels, relegated to a subplot or a small portion of the narrative. Despite this relegation, however, these novels are nonetheless much more interested in the relationship than any other novels written by women during this period. Before discussing them, I would like to offer a couple of suggestions as to why this relationship, which could be so central to women’s experience of life, may have dropped out of focus during this period.

One explanation could lie in the changing nature of the family during this period. Ruth Perry argues that the late eighteenth century saw a shift from ‘from an axis of kinship based on consanguineal ties or blood lineage to an axis based on conjugal and affinal ties of the married couple,’ meaning that ‘the biologically given family into which one was born was gradually becoming secondary to the chosen family constructed by marriage.’34 This shift weakened a woman’s relationships with her parents after her marriage, lessening the likelihood of a woman having competing obligations to her consanguineal and conjugal kin. But it also weakened her relationships with her siblings, and particularly her brothers. Perry’s reading has uncovered a range of eighteenth-century novels in which the brother-sister relationship is central, and claims that ‘these representations of sibling intimacy corresponded to a real, if deteriorating, significance in the relationship between sisters and brothers and their respective children.’35 My own reading, more narrowly focused on these forty years between 1751 and 1791 and on novels written by women, suggests that, far from regularly idealising the brother-sister relationship, or granting it a centrality in novels which it was losing in real life, more novels reflected the shift in familial definition and allegiance than wrote nostalgically against it. Women writers, seeking to understand the changes occurring within families and the difference those changes were making to women’s lives, were less likely to idealise a relationship which was being lost, and more likely to use the novel to negotiate the new terrain of family relationships.

35 Perry, Novel Relations, 116.
The focus on the parent-child and husband-wife relationships at the expense of the brother-sister relationship may reflect a more particular response to the passing of the ‘Act for the Better Preventing of Clandestine Marriage,’ more commonly known as Hardwicke’s Marriage Act, in 1753, at the beginning of these decades. Designed to regulate marriages, the Act made it ‘illegal for underage young adults to marry without the permission of their parents.’ As many novels’ heroines are under the age of twenty-one, this particular stipulation would apply to their situation. In light of the new legislation, the focus on a heroine’s relationship with her parents, particularly as she goes through a series of courtships designed to help her to choose a husband and so move herself from the consanguineal to the conjugal family, can be read as a deliberate attempt on the part of female novelists to explore the impact that such regulations might have on young women’s experience and on their psychological and mental states.

But the Act gives no role to a brother, even in the absence of parents. A sister never needed her brother’s consent to her marriage, nor a brother his sister’s, regardless of their ages or situations. Brother-sister relationships, therefore, are of secondary importance to a novel interested in engaging with the new laws regarding marriage and the implications of those laws.

The novels which do deal with brother-sister relationships are notably lacking in fathers, the traditional symbol of parental authority. Henrietta in *Henrietta*, Meliora in *The Younger Sister* and Caroline in *The History of Miss Melmoth* begin their novels as orphans. Sidney in *The Memoirs of Sidney Bidulph* and Lavinia in *The Younger Sister* have mothers but not fathers. Only Evelina in *Evelina* has a living father, but as he will not recognise her as his daughter, he likewise has no control over her. It is in these situations, where women are

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37 A number of scholars have suggested connections between the Marriage Act and the content of the domestic novel in the second half of the eighteenth century. Katherine Sobba Green links the resurgence of the ‘blazon’ in the novel with the increasing objectification of women following the passing of the Marriage Act in 'The Heroine’s Blazon and Hardwicke’s Marriage Act: Commodification for a Novel Market,' *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* 9.2 (1990): 273-290. Eve Tavor Bannet, in an article I will refer to later in this chapter, suggests that Frances Sheridan’s *Sidney Bidulph* (1761) is structured by a ‘fundamental difference of opinion between generations and genders separated by the Marriage Act.’ Eve Tavor Bannet, ‘The Marriage Act of 1753: “A Most Cruel Law for the Fair Sex,”’ *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 30.3 (1997): 245. Lisa O’Connell notes that ‘Scotch marriage’ and particularly the flight of an English couple to Gretna Green in an attempt to circumvent the new marriage laws become a notable feature of the theatre in the 1770s, but do not regularly appear in the novel until the 1790s, when it becomes a ‘leitmotif’ in the novel of courtship, thus suggesting that the novel was slow to engage overtly with the implications of the Marriage Act. Lisa O’Connell, ‘Dislocating Literature: The Novel and the Gretna Green Romance, 1770-1850,’ *Novel* 35.1 (2001): 10.
fatherless if not actually orphans, that brothers have a role to play, for better or worse – and on the whole, in these novels, they do more harm than good. The ways in which the sisters negotiate their relationships with their brothers, with greater and lesser success, are important to these novels, but these relationships are always either relegated to a position of lesser significance, beneath relationships with mothers, aunts, and friends, or are confined to only a small space within the narrative. Nonetheless, these novels continue the debates raised by the brother-sister relationships in *Betsy Thoughtless* – how do questions of authority, independence, and equality work between brothers and sisters? What are the roles and responsibilities of adult brothers and sisters towards each other? And how does the brother-sister relationship impact the form of the novel, and particularly the telling of the sister’s story?

**Charlotte Lennox, *Henrietta* (1758)**

The beginning of Charlotte Lennox’s career intersected with the end of Eliza Haywood’s. Both were popular and successful novelists in the 1750s, and it is not uncommon for modern scholars to compare *Betsy Thoughtless* with Lennox’s best-known novel, *The Female Quixote*, published just one year later in 1752, particularly in terms of the heroine’s education and development. While the similarities of these two novels are instructive, Lennox’s later novel, *Henrietta*, arguably has more in common with *Betsy Thoughtless*. Henrietta, like Betsy, is orphaned early in the novel. Her only brother, Charles, like Betsy’s brother, Thomas, is overseas at the time, and remains absent for much of the novel. Both young women learn how to negotiate London society while keeping their virtue intact. Both learn to distinguish between worthy friends and those whose company they had better not keep. Both long for the return of their brother, and are disappointed at the longed-for reunion. Both will go on to marry friends of their brothers, gaining the happy domestic ending anticipated in Nancy Armstrong’s formulation, in *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, of the

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eighteenth-century novel. But both novels, despite these happy endings, complicate Armstrong’s narrative, suggesting that femininity and domesticity were investigated in more varied ways in mid-century novels. And both do so through representations of dependence and independence that are deeply intertwined with the fabric of the novel itself, and centred on the relationships of the heroines with their brothers.

Yet the two novels also differ in important ways. Where Betsy is rich, Henrietta is poor. Where Betsy is well-provided with good and trustworthy (even if at times impotent) guardians, Henrietta’s guardian is overseas and out of contact upon her mother’s death, and she is left to the care first of the vulgar Mrs Manning, then to her aunt, Lady Meadows, who is easily manipulated by her personal Jesuit priest, and then to her legal guardian’s son, whose lust for her almost destroys her virtue and her reputation. Where Betsy is virtuous but unwise, constantly putting her reputation at risk through her bad judgements and impulsive behaviour, Henrietta is virtually faultless, making a few errors of judgement early in the novel but learning from them and not repeating them. Most significant for my purpose, however, are their differing attitudes towards their own independence.

Betsy’s coquetry is largely about independence. She recognises that, as a woman, her options are limited, that once married she will be required to submit to her husband, and that coquetry gives her a short window of independence before entering the married state. It is when Betsy gives up her independence and submits to the directions of her brothers that she ends unhappily married; it is when she regains that independence as a widow and uses it to make her own decision about who she will marry, that the novel achieves its happy ending. Haywood’s novel thus argues for the necessity of independence in order for women to achieve happiness. But while Betsy is virtuous, her behaviour regularly calls her virtue into question. Coquetry cannot coexist with unquestionable female propriety. So, too, the independence that coquetry enabled for Betsy could not be similarly experienced by the more conventionally proper heroines who followed her.

Henrietta, unlike Betsy, has no desire for independence. Her situation forces her to fend for herself, but she considers it only a temporary situation, to be endured until her brother comes to ‘take [her] under his own care’ and ‘countenance and protect’ her from the
difficulties she encounters in his absence.\textsuperscript{39} That continued absence, however, requires her to take upon herself an independence she does not desire and that does not come naturally to her.

Her uncertainty in making her own decisions and lack of confidence in her ability to use her independence wisely is clear in her narration of her first major decision – to leave her aunt’s protection rather than be forced to change her religion. ‘In anguish’ (\textit{H 74}) and ‘perplexed’ Henrietta ‘seize[s]’ on ‘the first opportunity’ to run away because she cannot think of a ‘better expedient’ (\textit{H 75}). She successfully escapes her aunt, but the social and financial troubles that result from the action, and the other options that are subsequently pointed out to her, suggest that she could have made a wider choice. Yet she learns from the experience, becoming wiser, more confident, and less emotional in her decision-making. From then on she calmly and carefully considers her options, gathers the information she needs, makes her decisions, and then goes ahead with what she has decided to do, regardless of the objections of those around her. As Ruth Perry claims, she proves herself ‘more than capable of handling all exigencies that arise.’\textsuperscript{40}

While \textit{Henrietta} has been described as a bildungsroman, it barely qualifies for the category. This is Henrietta’s only learning experience, and unlike Betsy, she does not make the same mistake twice. From the beginning she has a fully formed sense of self and no need to develop as a person, only to adjust to what it means to go from dependence to sudden independence. The narrator of \textit{Betsy Thoughtless} encourages the reader to not trust Betsy’s judgement but to learn from her mistakes; Henrietta is set up as the wisest and most trustworthy voice in the novel. Against the foolishness of Miss Woodby, her quixotic companion, or the overweening pride and vanity of Miss Cordwain, whom she briefly waits upon, or the gullibility of her aunt, Lady Meadows, taken in by her Catholic priest, Henrietta alone sees the world and its inhabitants as they truly are, and judges them correctly.

She is also set up as the novel’s moral compass. While those around her compromise their principles for money, power, flattery and sex, Henrietta remains true to herself and her

\textsuperscript{39} Charlotte Lennox, \textit{Henrietta}, ed. Ruth Perry and Susan Carlile (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 43, 69. Subsequent citations will be indicated parenthetically, preceded by the abbreviation \textit{H}.

\textsuperscript{40} Perry, \textit{Novel Relations}, 187.
sense of familial and personal honour. As Perry and Carlile summarise it, Henrietta spends
the novel refusing various offers of support ‘because she will not compromise her moral
position – her “delicacy,” in the language of the day – for the sake of an inheritance, an
establishment or even just a situation.’\(^{41}\) Preferring poverty to dishonour, serving to being
dishonourably dependent, and determined to act in a way which will not bring disrepute
upon her or her family, Henrietta becomes a trustworthy voice for the reader not only in
terms of her good sense and good judgement, but in terms of her morals.

The novel changes dramatically early in book five.\(^{42}\) Henrietta, under the name of Miss
Benson, has travelled to France, accompanying her new employer Miss Belmour, when they
meet two young Englishmen, travelling under the names of Melvil and Freeman. Melvil falls
desperately in love with Henrietta, becoming ill when Freeman convinces him that his father
will never consent to the marriage. In desperation for his friend’s wellbeing, Freeman
approaches Henrietta with a proposal that she consent to be his friend’s mistress. Urging
her not to ‘throw away this opportunity of freeing yourself from poverty and dependence’
because of a ‘romantic notion of virtue’ (H 216), Freeman unwittingly summarises
Henrietta’s experience of the world in the first four books – a constant struggle to maintain
her sense of virtue, which many characters have seen as ‘romantic,’ and an equally constant
choice to remain in ‘poverty and dependence,’ so long as she could do so with virtue and
honour. Henrietta, despite her attraction to Melvil, chooses her ‘romantic notion of virtue,’
as she has on countless previous occasions in the novel, and the continued ‘poverty and
dependence’ that accompany it, over the dishonour of becoming a mistress.

Freeman’s proposition and Henrietta’s rejection of it seem very similar to the heroine’s
other encounters with young men in this novel until Freeman is revealed as her brother. The
brother whom Henrietta expected to protect her enters the novel threatening her virtue
and reputation, and the way she handles the threat serves to prove how little she really

\(^{41}\) Ruth Perry and Susan Carlile, introduction to *Henrietta* by Charlotte Lennox (Lexington, Kentucky: University
Press of Kentucky, 2008), ix.

\(^{42}\) It is book five upon which Lennox chose to focus when she dramatized *Henrietta* in the decade following its
publication. Whether this demonstrates that Lennox found this the most important book of her novel, or
whether it was simply the most receptive to dramatic treatment, the fact that the play singles out the
interaction between brother and sister indicates that Lennox thought of this section of her novel as
significantly different to the previous four books. See Charlotte Lennox, *The Sister* (London: printed for J.
Dodsley, in Pall-Mall, and T. Davies in Russell St, Covent Garden, 1769).
needs protection. The incident also demonstrates her moral superiority to her brother, and the fact that she chastises him for the attempt upon her virtue indicates that she is not unaware of the difference in their behaviour. Yet despite her superiority, she willingly, even eagerly, makes herself dependent upon him. Honourable dependence is, after all, what Henrietta has spent the novel seeking. Unlike other characters who have offered her a dependent position, her brother is her social equal, her familial superior, with the same sense of family pride and care for his family’s reputation. This position of dependence does not come with unacceptable conditions, as so many previously offered positions have done. In Henrietta’s view, it only comes with benefits:

She was no longer in the humiliating condition of a servant; or, what to her was far more mortifying, a dependent upon the bounty of another; an unknown wanderer, without friends or protectors. She was now under the care of a brother, whom she tenderly loved, whose merit could not fail of distinguishing him, and of forcing that respect and consideration due to a noble birth, and which he, though in a deprest fortune, so nobly supported (H 235).

Having left behind her ‘humiliating’ life as a ‘servant’ and an ‘unknown wanderer,’ becoming a dependent on her brother has restored her to ‘friends and protectors,’ to the ‘respect and consideration’ due to her noble birth as much as to her brother’s. Viewing the situation as entirely positive, she willingly submits to her brother’s leadership, telling him to ‘dispose of me as you please’ (H 223).

Constance Platt suggests that at this point in the novel ‘restoration to fortune has dulled Henrietta’s memory of the desirability of independence.’ What Platt fails to recognise is that Henrietta has never found independence desirable; it has always been a fall-back option. But Platt’s comment registers a more general feeling of discontent with the way the novel proceeds. From the entrance of her brother until the end of the novel, Henrietta is essentially disposed of. If the Henrietta of the first four books can be described as ‘spunky’ by Perry and Carlile, the Henrietta of the final book is better characterised by ‘docility’ (H 237) and silence. As her brother takes over her life, the novel increasingly shows the decisions he makes concerning her and her future. Moreover, these actions are

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43 Constance McCormick Platt, ‘Patrimony as Power in Four Eighteenth-Century Women’s Novels: Charlotte Lennox, Henrietta (1758); Fanny Burney, Evelina (1778); Charlotte Smith, Emmeline (1788); Ann Radcliffe, The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794)’ (PhD Diss., University of Denver, 1980), 61.
44 Perry and Carlile, introduction to Henrietta, xiv.
represented as being more about him than about his sister. Much as Betsy’s brothers convinced her to marry Mr Munden in order to save their family honour, Henrietta’s brother will not allow her to marry because, were she to marry his friend without that friend’s father’s permission, it would reflect badly upon Charles and taint his personal honour. The story thus goes from being about Henrietta, to being about Charles.\(^{45}\) And while he seems to be acting in his sister’s best interests and seeking her happiness, and while Henrietta herself has no objection to the shift, the reader has not lost the sense of the ‘desirability of independence’ of the heroine.

The only character to question Henrietta’s dependence on and obedience to her brother is the marquis who wants to marry her, but whose courtship is thwarted by Charles. ‘“You are no more than the brother of miss [sic] Courteney,”’ he declares; ‘“What have you to do with the affair at all?”’ (\(H\) 230, 233). Asking simply that Henrietta be allowed to decide for herself, rather than have the decision made for her, the marquis seems to be stating an opinion that the novel’s first four books have fostered. Yet the fact that it is the marquis who makes this suggestion limits its effectiveness in challenging the rule of the brother. While the reader may agree with his question, the fact that the marquis, a rash, foolish, selfish and inconsiderate young man, is the only one asking it casts doubt upon Lennox’s commitment to this position. Indeed, Henrietta’s brother’s protection of her, his ‘utmost endeavours to prevent’ (\(H\) 233) the marquis from marrying his sister without his father’s permission, strike the reader as a far more considered and reasonable action than the marquis’s desire to let Henrietta decide for herself.

There is, however, another sense in which Henrietta is ‘disposed’ of by her brother. From their first conversation to the end of the novel, Henrietta’s voice virtually disappears. The novel does not merely focus on Charles’s actions, it also focuses through his consciousness. While the reader has been accustomed to hearing Henrietta’s thoughts and trusting her judgements, suddenly we are deprived of access to her mind, and even to her speech, as her conversations are increasingly reported indirectly. Charles not only takes away her independence, her choices and her judgements – as well as, it turns out, the inheritance that her aunt had intended to give her – he also takes away her voice and her ability to tell

\(^{45}\) This shift is reflected in the dramatized version of the novel, where Charles becomes the play’s protagonist, and Harriot (Henrietta) is placed in a subordinate role as merely his sister.
her story. For the first four books, Henrietta is Henrietta’s story, viewed through Henrietta’s eyes, reflecting Henrietta’s ideas. The final book gives us the conclusion to her narrative, but it is no longer her story. She loses control of her story at the same time that she loses control of her life, and both are taken over by her brother. If in Betsy Thoughtless the stories of Betsy’s brothers were made dependent upon the sister’s story, in Henrietta the sister’s story can only be told in the absence of her brother. Once he enters the story he overpowers it, and her story, like her life, becomes dependent upon his story and his life. Henrietta enacts the formal representation of its plot, for as Henrietta becomes subject to her brother she goes from being the subject of her own novel to being the object.46

That the novel concludes in the typical domestic style, with Henrietta established well and everyone settled in domestic harmony, does not make up for the loss of Henrietta’s voice. The plot moves steadily towards placing Henrietta in a position of honourable dependence, the proper conclusion for all novels as it was for most women of the eighteenth century. Several of Book Five’s formal aspects, however, interfere with attempts to read Henrietta as a conservative domestic text. The shifting viewpoint from the likeable and reliable Henrietta to the morally suspect, ‘peevish’ and, as Catherine Talbot described him, ‘execrable’ Charles,47 Henrietta’s loss of control over her choices, and most importantly, the silencing of Henrietta’s voice and thoughts, all suggest Lennox was not entirely persuaded of the benefits of dependence for her heroine. Having seen the possibilities of individuality and independence for such a heroine, watching her submit to a traditional place in the domestic sphere where dependence and submission will be expected is deeply disappointing for the reader. If Betsy Thoughtless encourages women’s independence of thought and action by presenting a negative picture of dependence followed by a positive one of regained independence, Henrietta leads us to question whether women’s dependence is ever a positive situation, even if dependent women themselves consider it to be so.

The loss of Henrietta’s voice, and the way in which her voice and her story is taken over by her brother, is hinted at much earlier in the novel. When choosing a novel to read, Henrietta rejects her hostess’s library of Manley and Haywood, instead selecting Joseph Andrews. Her

46 Platt, ‘Patrimony as Power,’ 62.
rejection of amatory fiction in favour of Fielding’s new style of novel has been interpreted both as Lennox’s signalling of her own literary ambitions, and as the author’s hinting at her own literary influences, despite her heroine’s reading habits.\textsuperscript{48} The only reason contemporary scholars have given for the particular choice of Joseph Andrews above any of Fielding’s or Richardson’s other novels, however, is that having been written by one great author and inspired by the other, it worked as a shorthand reference to both.\textsuperscript{49}

Looking back on this scene from the conclusion of Henrietta, another reason for this choice becomes apparent. Joseph Andrews, like Henrietta, involves a brother and sister who are separated and unable to contact each other for the greater part of the novel. In each case, the absent sibling reappears at the novel’s conclusion to help tie up the narrative. But more significantly than the plot similarities are the formal aspects of the novels. Just as Joseph Andrews rewrites Pamela by removing the sister’s voice, replacing it with the brother’s voice and the brother’s story, so too does Henrietta. As Samuel Choi notes in his discussion of Fielding’s novel, ‘If one takes seriously the way that Fielding seems to construct Joseph Andrews out of Richardson’s Pamela, not only usurping its name, fame, and popularity (and, hence, economic inheritance), one would have to conclude that it threatens, at least literally, to re-close the possibility of a woman’s narrative.’\textsuperscript{50} There are obvious parallels here with the way Charles usurps Henrietta’s life – placing his name and fame above hers, taking her inheritance – and her story in the final book of Henrietta. Because Pamela’s name and story was so well known, Fielding only needed to mention her name in order to evoke her narrative before his own narrative ‘efface[d] her and her story.’\textsuperscript{51} Henrietta’s story needed to be written and established before it could be overwritten and negated, but the effect is the same: the sister’s story becomes subservient to the brother’s. The broader challenge – the implication in Fielding’s text that the brother’s narrative will always triumph over the sister’s – is taken up by Haywood, who deliberately writes the sister’s narrative and makes the brothers’ stories dependent upon it, and also challenged through the


\textsuperscript{49} Clarke, \textit{Dr Johnson’s Women}, 125.


\textsuperscript{51} Choi, ‘Signing Evelina,’ 271.
dissatisfying ending of Henrietta, where the brother’s story does overpower and efface the sister’s, but not in a way that is designed to convince the reader of the legitimacy of such an action. Henrietta demonstrates the danger of the brother, even the well-intentioned, affectionate brother. Charles threatens Henrietta’s virtue, but more importantly he threatens her story in ways that are foreshadowed by her reading of Joseph Andrews. Lennox seems to be implying that a brother, with the benefits allowed to men in a patriarchal world, with power, authority, money and strength, will always pose more of a threat to a sister than he will provide support. The sister’s independence, as well as the sister’s story, will only be secure in the absence of the brother.⁵²

The loss of the sister’s voice and the replacement of her story makes the conclusion of Henrietta problematic. Arguably it is the third-person form of the novel that allows for Charles to take over his sister’s tale, because Henrietta was never truly in control of her narrative. Novelists in the next two decades who were interested in portraying the brother-sister relationship tended to do so in an epistolary form, allowing the sister to tell her own story even if she could not control her own life or necessarily make her own decisions. Emulating Pamela rather than Joseph Andrews, taking Richardson as their model rather than Fielding, these novels manage to preserve the sister’s story even in the presence of the brother. The rest of this chapter will examine four such epistolary novels. The first two display how the epistolary format enables sisters to control the telling of their stories, even while their brothers attempt to control their lives. The second two exemplify how in the 1770s even the epistolary form became problematic, as authors portrayed the power of brothers to interrupt and take over even this seemingly more secure form of telling the sister’s story.

⁵² Henrietta’s overshadowing by her brother seems an early instance of what Juliet Flower MacCannell terms ‘the regime of the brother’ in her Freudian study of the fraternal structures of modernity. The brother, as the privileged party of post-patriarchy, suppresses his sister, such that she is ‘adamantly denied any value, place, identity – or desire,’ as part of the process of asserting his own power. MacCannell notes this sibling struggle in operation in a number of nineteenth- and twentieth-century novels, but examples such as Henrietta suggest that it is not simply a characteristic of the post-patriarchal period; situations such as this one, in which the father’s death has created a similar situation, may well display the same power relations between brother and sister on a familial level, even if not on a broader social scale. Juliet Flower MacCannell, The Regime of the Brother: After the Patriarchy (London: Routledge, 1991), 24.
Anne Dawe, The Younger Sister; or, History of Miss Somerset (1770) and Frances Sheridan, The Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph (1761)

The decades covered by this chapter correspond almost exactly to the rise and fall of the epistolary novel in England. James Raven states that the number of novels written in letters ‘increased steadily from a handful of new titles and reprints in the early 1750s to well over two dozen in 1769.’53 In the 1770s and 1780s just over forty per cent of all new novels were epistolary in form, and the subgenre only lost its popularity in the final years of the century, ‘swamped, it seems, by the diversity and directness of new historical and gothic narratives that were not well-suited to relation by imaginary letters.’54

The four novels considered in the remainder of this chapter all use epistolary form to tell – and to complicate the telling of – the sister’s story. Their use of a particular epistolary format – that of letters written between female friends, which I will refer to as friendly epistolary – was not uncommon in the late eighteenth century, as many novelists sought to imitate Richardson’s Clarissa and its sequence of letters between Clarissa and her friend, Anna Howe. This format, however, has been largely overlooked by scholars of epistolary fiction, who tend to assume that novels in letters will be written between lovers or between a mentor and a student, and many of the conclusions drawn about the purpose and effect of epistolary fiction is based on this assumption.55 April Alliston’s Virtue’s Faults is a notable exception. Describing what she terms the “confidante” convention’ in women’s correspondence novels, she notes two important aspects of these novels written between female friends: their intense emotional charge, and their dedication to advice-giving, particularly on matters of conduct, both of which will become apparent in the following investigations.56 My discussion of these novels will begin with Anne Dawe’s Younger Sister; or, History of Miss Somerset, in which the key characteristics of friendly epistolary form are

53 Raven, British Fiction, 12.
54 Raven, ‘Historical Introduction,’ 31.
55 Janet Altman, for example, sees the epistolary genre as largely divided into ‘two basic categories – erotic and educational.’ Janet Gurkin Altman, Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1982), 196. Clare Brant’s study of eighteenth-century letters includes chapters entitled ‘Writing as a Parent’ and ‘Writing as a Lover’ (among others) but does not focus at any length on writing as a friend. Clare Brant, Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).
most apparent, and that therefore allows for a simple exploration of how this form works and how it enables the telling of the sister’s story.

The Younger Sister was not a great success when it was published in 1770. One reviewer was particularly unimpressed, suggesting that the characters were unoriginal, the situations dull, and the style laboured. Unsurprisingly, it never went into a second edition and has garnered no scholarly interest. It is made up of three fairly clichéd tales of virtuous young women in varying degrees of distress who share their stories with one another. Meliora, the younger sister of the title, is being bullied by her sister, brother-in-law, and aunt, to marry one of several odious young men. The friend to whom she writes, Lavinia, is battling with her brother over which of them has the best right to determine whom she should marry. And in an inset story, Miss Padstow tells of having run away from her Catholic aunt, married in secret, been quickly widowed, escaped a kidnapping and attempted rape, and fled to England in search of her long-lost brother. Despite these tribulations, all three end happily married without too much suffering or too many pages being expended on the effort.

Dawe’s novel, as I will demonstrate, displays a number of the key characteristics of the epistolary novel and how it could be used to tell the sister’s story, and how the relationship between brother and sister was used by women novelists in the second half of the eighteenth century to discuss issues of female independence and autonomy. It also shows how these two ideas – of female independence and epistolarity – were connected by women novelists during the decades of the epistolary novel’s popularity. While the brothers in this novel attempt to control their sisters and to assert authority over them, they do not succeed in silencing them or taking away their ability to tell their own stories. The epistolary form, at least at its most basic, cannot be manipulated by the brother-figure as can a third person narrative like that employed in Henrietta. Writing letters becomes a form of power for the powerless, an assertion of autonomy against those who seek to control the writers and the way those writers are represented to the world. Following in the footsteps of Samuel Richardson’s Clarissa, who thanks her friend Anna for ‘the opportunity you have given me to tell my own story’ and to counter the ‘public talk’ that seems so likely to

damage her ‘fame,’ the sisters in these novels counter the ‘public talk’ of brothers, neighbours, and society by telling their own stories to friends of their choice.

That these letters are perceived as a threat to the authority of those in positions of power over the friends is clear from the number of times those authority figures seek to stop the writing and receiving of the letters. The power which letter-writing is perceived to have, and the idea that it could be used to undermine the authority structures of the family, correlates to the challenge to patriarchy that Janet Todd argues is characteristic of female friendship in eighteenth-century fiction. Todd finds her prime example in Clarissa, where Clarissa and Anna’s correspondence – indeed their very friendship – is perceived by Clarissa’s family and by Lovelace as a threat to the patriarchal systems on which their power is based. The threat is in part a formal one. Epistolary fiction, by its very nature, lacks an authoritative controlling voice. The friends can write their stories in whatever manner they choose partly because there is no narrator controlling the way in which their stories are told. Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook, in her study of epistolary fiction, connects this absence of narrative authority with the political ideology of the Enlightenment that was gaining popularity alongside the epistolary novel. Cook argues that epistolary fiction is the ‘most appropriate’ literary genre for the ‘secular, antiabsolutist politics of the Enlightenment.’ Her reasoning is two-fold. First, the epistolary novel ‘reject[s] the authority of a controlling narrative perspective’ in a similar way to social contract theory’s rejection of the absolute patriarchal monarch in favour of a society of equals. This is particularly apparent in novels written between friends, for whom parents and teachers are either dead or absent from the writing-process. With no one to write for them or to supervise their writing, the friendly epistolary form demonstrates a relationship of equals in which their writing is under no one’s authority. Structurally, the epistolary form best expresses the new ideal of social equality and the absence of overarching figures of government.

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61 Cook, Epistolary Bodies, 37.
This equality is evident in the relationship between Meliora and Lavinia who are bound by mutual affection. Meliora writes to her ‘amiable friend,’ her ‘lovely girl,’ and her ‘dear Lavinia.’ Lavinia responds in kind, referring to her ‘charming Meliora’ (YS I:112), her ‘amiable girl’ (YS I:113) and her ‘dear girl’ (YS I:115). Their letters are full of confessions of affection and promises of its continuance, clearly demonstrating the ‘erotic force of the love-letter’ which Alliston notes as being preserved in ‘the confidante relationship’ but in a more stable bond made ‘much more reliable through the guarantee of sympathy’ that exists between friends. Meliora and Lavinia are not only bound by affection and sympathy, but also by conscious choice. Female friendship, Todd suggests, is ‘the only [relationship] the heroine actively constructs,’ as ‘the woman chooses the friend.’ It is therefore a relationship which the young women have control over and for which they set the terms, terms of uncomplicated, dependable, long-term affection and confidence.

The equality of the relationship is perhaps most fully demonstrated not in their mutual affection and confidence, nor in their ability to construct their relationship in terms of equality, but in the function of advice-giving and receiving that the letters also serve. For Cook, this is the second way in which the epistolary form reflects and is influenced by enlightenment theory. She suggests that

Because the patriarchal Father-King structurally united the domains of government and the family, the dislocation of this figure meant that the political (public) and domestic (private) spheres once conjoined by the body of the patriarch split apart into differentiated domains of human experience, each of which had now to be separately regulated.

The idea of fraternity regulated the political public sphere, but the private sphere remained ‘dangerously unregulated.’ The regulation of the domestic sphere became the focus of ‘the institutions of print culture generally and individual works of literature in particular,’ as authors sought to answer ‘the question of how to harness what were now seen as the private energies and appetites of individual men and women.’ The collapse of the

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62 Anne Dawe, The Younger Sister; or, History of Miss Somerset (London: Printed for T. Lowndes, at No. 77, Fleet-Street, 1770), I.1, I.4. Subsequent citations will be indicated parenthetically by volume and page number, preceded by the abbreviation YS.
63 Alliston, Virtue’s Faults, 98.
64 Todd, Women’s Friendship in Literature, 2.
65 Cook, Epistolary Bodies, 15.
66 Cook, Epistolary Bodies, 15.
patriarchal model of social and familial governance, in other words, left an absence of authority in the domestic sphere. Ruth Perry seems to agree with Cook’s representation of a perceived need for domestic regulation in the wake of Enlightenment theory when she suggests that the rise of the epistolary novel was ‘probably also a symptom of the moral uncertainty of the period.’ It was the domestic novel, and the epistolary novel in particular, ‘a form well suited to a detailed working through of moral issues,’ that sought to resolve this uncertainty. The letter, which from the beginning of the eighteenth century had been ‘intimately identified with the body, especially a female body, and the somatic terrain of the emotions, as well as with the thematic material of love, marriage, and the family,’ was particularly suited to a discussion of the governance of the individual, the home and the family. Not only was it identified with the body, it also symbolised it. Alan Bray notes that the ‘familiar letter’ could also be a ‘token of the friend’s body’ through both its contents and personal handwriting. A letter could serve as a material object that reminded one of, or even symbolically stood in for, the absent friend, serving as both a ‘literary gift’ and a ‘bodily token.’ The letter, therefore, is not only ideally suited to democracy and domesticity, but also to a representation of genuine friendship.

If epistolary fiction aimed to regulate the domestic sphere and sort through issues of moral ambiguity and uncertainty, the advice that these friends give to one another is an excellent example of the way equals could have as great an impact behaviourally and morally as could an authority figure. While both these heroines are exemplary young women, their letters enable them to view their actions through one another’s eyes, providing opportunity for chastising and advising as appropriate. After describing a new acquaintance as ‘a compleat coxcomb,’ Meliora anticipates Lavinia’s response: ‘Will not my Lavinia say I am a little too severe? Yes, I know she will. Methinks I hear her blame me for indulging a disposition which she at all times so justly condemns’ (YS I:22). Meliora needs no conduct book or parent figure to chastise her for being ‘too severe.’ Lavinia has ‘at all times’ been such a figure for her friend, and is valued as such.

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Friendly epistolality can therefore be seen as a version of both erotic epistolality and educational epistolality. It features the affection of the former without the ungovernable passion, and the educational potential of the latter without the authority structure. It therefore most clearly fulfils Cook’s ideas about the function of epistolary fiction, allowing for both equality and a space for the regulation of private behaviour. It could even, in some ways, be referred to as ‘fraternal epistolality.’ The problem with the latter term is that, in novels in which friendly epistolality is used, the heroines regularly experience conflict with their brothers. The form seems particularly well suited to complaints about brothers. For like the relationship between friends, brothers and sisters have a relationship that is not characterised by authority structures. They have a putative equality and are supposed to be connected by affection. The friendships in these novels provide both a space for safe discussion of the fraternal relationship, and an implicit critique of that relationship as the relationships between the friends demonstrate what the ideal brother-sister relationship should look like, were it not corrupted by bad morality, neglect, or a desire for power.

These, then, are the key characteristics of friendly epistolality, as relevant for this discussion: a relationship of equality, outside of regular authority structures, expressed in mutual affection and in confident correspondence; a function of advice-giving, bringing the project of the conduct books out of the realm of authority and into a relationship of equals who can together work out the best way to behave; control of their own story, even if not of their own lives, by women, and particularly by sisters; and a place for the critiquing of domesticity and particularly of family relationships, often relationships with brothers. These characteristics tend to overlap in the novels themselves. The idea of control is particularly far-reaching, and is a focus of both Dawe’s Younger Sister and Frances Sheridan’s The Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph (1761). In particular, both present brothers who seek to control their sisters, treating them as objects and removing from them their ability to make their own decisions. Yet both also demonstrate the way in which, even as they are treated as objects, these women can still construct themselves as subjects by writing their own stories in letters to their chosen friends.

The two correspondents of Anne Dawe’s The Younger Sister both have considerable problems with their brothers who seek to control them against their will. For Meliora, the younger sister of the title, the conflict comes with her elder sister, but particularly with her
brother-in-law, Sir Peter. While not biologically related, there was no regular distinction made in the late eighteenth century between a biological brother and a brother by marriage; all brother figures – brothers, half-brothers, step-brothers and brothers-in-law – were addressed with the same term, ‘brother.’ Yet there is an important distinction in terms of the nature of the relationship between Meliora and Sir Peter. They have no shared history or personal relationship. They are brother and sister, but in name rather than in connection, making it far easier for Sir Peter to see and to treat Meliora as an object rather than as a person, as a ‘younger sister’ rather than as herself. She is objectified from the beginning by this brother who has no interest in knowing her personally. His interest in her is one of control, physical, sexual and financial.

Sir Peter believes that his position in the family, as a husband but also as the eldest male, grants him control over the young women. While this is undoubtedly true of his relationship with his wife, the novel constantly questions his right to control his sister-in-law, Meliora. His attempts to control her begin indirectly, as he forces Meliora’s sister, his wife, to place stricter demands on the heroine. Meliora is thus pressured by her sister, who has authority over the disposal of her fortune, into accepting an abominable suitor, and when she refuses to do so she is banished to her aunt’s house where she is treated badly in order to convince her to agree to her sister’s demands. When this does not work, she is brought back home, where Sir Peter’s attempts at control become more evident: first he threatens her correspondence with Lavinia – and thus her voice and her control over her own story – and then he threatens her physically, attempting rape when seduction fails. Meliora escapes unharmed and Sir Peter is eventually revealed as a scoundrel, but his actions demonstrate how his position as her sister’s husband gives him financial power over his sister through his control of his wife, and how his masculinity gives him physical power over her. All Meliora has is power over her own responses. While her sister and her brother see her as a financial and sexual object, she continues to view herself as a subject with control over her own story. The epistolary form allows for an expression of that, for despite Sir Peter’s attempts

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to control her and her correspondence with Lavinia, it is still Meliora who writes her own life, in her own way, to the friend of her choosing.\footnote{Joe Bray notes that, while ‘the epistolary novel is often thought to present a relatively unsophisticated and transparent version of subjectivity, as its letter-writers apparently jot down whatever is passing through their heads at the moment of writing,’ it actually displays a complex investigation of the narration of the self. Particularly in the more delicately wrought epistolary novels, such as Frances Sheridan’s Sidney Bidulph, the letter writer’s ability to reflect upon the ‘experiencing self’ allows them to both use the letter to explore questions of self-identity and to construct a ‘narrating self.’ It is thus a form that is deeply interested in identity, and in particular how writers can use letters to portray a particular version of their own experiences and feelings. Joe Bray, The Epistolary Novel: Representations of Consciousness (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 7, 20.}

Lavinia’s experience of brotherly control is far less threatening, but her brother also considers his sister as an object to be controlled and bargained with. When he returns from a long absence, what begins as a happy reunion turns quickly into a power struggle between the siblings. In her brother’s absence, Lavinia has become engaged to Sir Thomas Watts, an old school-fellow of her brother’s and a man with ‘goodness of … heart’ (YS I.120). The wedding has been delayed at her mother’s request because of her brother’s absence, her mother wanting Lavinia’s brother to ‘officiate as father.’ But while he is wanted to play a father’s role in the ceremony, he is not granted patriarchal power in his family. As Lavinia reminds Meliora, ‘it is not in his power to hinder my marrying the man I like, if it meets my mother’s approbation’ (YS I.196), a sentiment with which Meliora, Lavinia’s external conscience, wholeheartedly agrees.

This is not the view of Lavinia’s brother, however, who has returned expecting her to be unengaged and ready to be submissive to his own ideas regarding her future state. While Lavinia considers it her right to choose her own husband, her brother considers her as his own property, to be given away in a manner of his choosing. Like Henrietta’s brother Charles, Lavinia’s brother seeks to make his sister an object in his story, rather than the subject of her own. He has brought back from the continent a friend, the Chevalier de Guidarade, whom he proposes to Lavinia as a husband: ‘he is the man, of all others, whom I should have wished you for a partner, could I have taken my choice of the whole world. – He is, I know, exactly calculated to render you perfectly happy’ (YS I.168) The number of first person pronouns in his declaration demonstrates that this action is more about himself than about his sister – it is his wish, his choice, the man he knows will be best for Lavinia.
Moreover, the outcome of the marriage has little to do with his sister. Describing the way in which he has sought to recommend her to the Chevalier, he declares his happiness in considering that it would be ‘in my power to present him with a wife that would be an honour to me, and a comfort to him!’ (YS I.188). There is little thought of Lavinia and her happiness in all this – ‘honour’ for the brother, ‘comfort’ for the husband, but no say on the part of the wife, who is an object to be presented by a brother in whose power she is considered to be. When informed that Lavinia has decided elsewhere, effectively proclaiming her own subjecthood and denying herself as a commodity to be disposed of by her brother, he declares that her choice ‘would never meet with his approbation’ (YS I.170). But Lavinia is not swayed, asking her brother, ‘How could you think of answering for me, before you was [sic] acquainted with my sentiments?’ Her objection is not that her brother has found her a husband or proposed the match, but that he has not taken into account her ‘sentiments,’ those markers of her individuality and subjecthood that form so much of her correspondence with Meliora and which both heroines believe ought to be regarded as more important than Lavinia’s brother’s opinion.

That we are led to agree with Lavinia’s estimation of her situation is not merely the result of seeing the situation through her eyes and reading the story in her words. She also demonstrates her moral and social superiority to her brother, whom she represents as a rash, irresponsible, hasty young man, without thoughtfulness or self-control. ‘Between you and I, my friend, I am apt to think his travels have not much improved him’ (YS I:163), she suggests to Meliora before the full situation comes to light. Her evocation of privacy – ‘between you and I, my friend’ – and her hesitation in pronouncing judgement – ‘I am apt to think’ – along with her softening of that judgement – not that his travels have had a negative impact but that they ‘have not much improved him’ – all demonstrate Lavinia’s feminine propriety, revealing her to be unwilling to speak ill of her brother but nonetheless willing to demonstrate the inferiority of his character in comparison with hers. His subsequent behaviour shows the truth of her suspicion, for when his commands fail, he tries emotional manipulation: ‘my peace of mind, Lavinia, is at stake’ (YS I.189). But Lavinia considers her own happiness as more important than her brother’s ‘peace of mind,’ and the wedding is conducted in his absence, demonstrating how unnecessary he is to the process.
The petulance of the brother can delay the happy ending, but in *The Younger Sister* he is not allowed to ultimately control or destroy his sister’s life and happiness.

Frances Sheridan’s *The Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph*, written a decade before *The Younger Sister*, begins with a very similar situation. Sidney, a proper young woman, writes to her friend, Cecilia, who is travelling with her family on the continent. While Cecilia’s replies are not reproduced, Sidney’s awareness of a particular audience and the novel’s stylistic borrowing of Richardson’s ‘new Manner of Writing – to the Moment’ places this novel firmly in the epistolary category, rather than being a true memoir written with the benefit of hindsight. Sidney’s narration begins when she travels to London with her mother and her brother returns from his travels. The reunion between brother and sister is a happy one. Sidney admits that the return of her brother has ‘given new life to the family’, but she focuses on the reaction of her mother rather than her own feelings, relating that Lady Bidulph was ‘so rejoiced, and so thankful, and so full of praises’ of her son. This is an early example of Sidney’s constant deferral of her own opinions and emotions in favour of those of her mother, a deferral that complicates her narrative. We have no reason to doubt the sincerity of her friendship with Cecilia, which is expressed in terms similar to that between Lavinia and Meliora. She refers to her ‘dear and ever-beloved Cecilia’ (*SB* 49), and expresses her confidence in her friend by calling her a ‘second self’ to whom she will ‘disclose the inmost secrets of my soul’ confident that with Cecilia ‘they are as safe as in my own breast’ (*SB* 163). Yet Sidney’s tendency to place greater emphasis on her mother’s feelings and opinions than on her own, and her determination to act properly in all circumstances,

73 While Sidney’s letters form the bulk of the novel, Cecilia, who has kept and passed on those letters to a younger friend, has provided an introduction, describing Sidney’s family background, and a conclusion, summarizing Sidney’s life after her letters cease. While she thus frames, and in some ways controls our reading of Sidney’s letters, the fact that she is the friend to whom Sidney’s narrative has been entrusted justifies her editorial interference and implies that she will at least seek to be true to her friend’s narratorial wishes. However, the fact that her conclusion breaks off, merely a fragment, calls into question whether she truly has the right to rewrite her friend’s story and suggests that she would have done better to allow the tale to end where Sidney wanted.


75 Altman suggests that it is the relationship between present and past that distinguishes the epistolary novel from the memoir. See Altman, *Epistolarity*, 123.

76 Frances Sheridan, *The Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph*, ed. Heidi Hutner and Nicole Garret (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2011), 54, 50. Subsequent citations will be indicated parenthetically, preceded by the abbreviation SB.
occasionally leads the reader to doubt the truth of her writings, even if we cannot doubt the sincerity with which she writes them. Without intending to deceive, Sidney is nonetheless not entirely trustworthy. Jean Coates Cleary, in her introduction to the novel, suggests that ‘the reader recognises that even as Sidney strives to be perfect, she continually misunderstands, or is forced to deceive herself about, the dictates and desires of her heart.’ I would suggest that it is Sidney’s very desire to be perfect that forces her to misunderstand herself and to leave those desires unrepresented, even unacknowledged.

This self-deception is clearest in her responses to the man her brother intends for her husband. Just as Lavinia’s brother did in The Younger Sister, Sir George brings his sister back a husband, Orlando Faulkland, a friend he has met on his travels. George and Sidney’s discussions about the proposed match show marked similarities to those between Lavinia and her brother, particularly in the way that the sister is objectified and deprived of her personhood. Faulkland is inclined to like Sidney largely because, as George says, ‘he has a mind for my sister’ (SB 52). Sir George’s focusing around himself – it is his sister – is reminiscent of Mr Knightly’s view of Lavinia’s marriage as bringing honour to himself. Sidney certainly feels commodified, describing herself as ‘a piece of goods that was to be shewn to the best advantage to the purchaser’ upon her first meeting with Faulkland (SB 57) and resenting her brother’s discussion of the marriage in a ‘bargaining way’ (SB 52). Sue Chaplin suggests that this event ‘dehumanises’ Sidney, causing her to see herself ‘as a commodity to be exchanged’ and leading to a ‘sense of degradation’ in Faulkland’s presence.

Chaplin, however, states the case somewhat too strongly. Sidney is certainly commodified in these early conversations about marriage, and continues to be treated as an object by her mother, brother, cousin and even husband throughout the novel, rarely being allowed any choice or decision-making ability. Faulkland is one of the few characters in the novel who allows her to have her own subjectivity, and who values that subjectivity in her. He may have originally been attracted to her as his friend’s sister, but in the end he loves her for her own character, for her ‘heroic soul’ (SB 463) and for her mind. He demonstrates his

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devotion to her personally throughout the novel, and while her decisions directly affect his happiness and wellbeing, he does not dispute her right to make and stand by them.

But just as the engagement to Faulkland is arranged for Sidney, it is also called off without her having any say in the matter. When Lady Bidulph, Sidney’s mother, discovers that Faulkland has had an affair that has resulted in an illegitimate pregnancy, she immediately calls off the wedding. That Sidney has no say in the situation is emphasised by the fact that it occurs while she is ill, largely unconscious, and most importantly, unable to write. Her illness deprives her of her ability to make her own decisions and the ability to write her own story, thus doubly denying her subjectivity. By the time she recovers, the decision has been made and, as Margaret Anne Doody suggests, Sidney is given ‘only a nominal right to choose what to do – as the mother has done everything.’

Sidney’s response is merely to obey her mother, and ‘to shew her that I would endeavour to imitate her’ (SB 44). While this is a choice on her part, Sidney recognises that there was no real option, writing to Cecilia: ‘You know my mother has ever been despotic in her government of me; and had I even been inclined to dissent from her judgement in a matter of this importance, it would have been to no purpose’ (SB 45). Sidney reveals to Cecilia the truth of the situation – that while she has chosen to ‘imitate’ her mother and follow her direction, this was really no choice at all, for she would not have been allowed to ‘dissent’ from her mother’s ‘despotic’ government.

Soon after, when her mother arranges a subsequent marriage for Sidney to Mr Arnold, Sidney describes herself as a ‘puppet’ and almost cries ‘for very vexation’ (SB 116) at her lack of control over her situation. Her use of the word ‘puppet,’ an inanimate object made to seem alive, describes her mental state well, expressing her feelings of going through the motions required of a bride-to-be but having no personal ownership of her actions or any control over them. Her expression of ‘vexation’ is one of only a few moments where she allows herself to register complaint over the situation, but she expresses it only to her trustworthy correspondent, concealing from her mother her frustration with her inability to control her life.

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George too recognises the control their mother has over Sidney, referring to her as an ‘Eastern monarch’ (SB 46) and as ‘absolute mistress of your daughter’s will, as well as of her person’ (SB 121). He nonetheless tries to argue that Sidney ought to make her own decision about Faulkland, begging their mother:

“suffer her to see Mr Faulkland; let her hear what he has to say in his own vindication: I think you may trust to her honour, and her discretion; and if the affair appears to her in so heinous a light as it does to you, I will be contented to give Mr Faulkland up; but don’t shut your own ears, and your daughter’s too, against conviction” (SB 46).

It is as close as the novel comes to encouraging an independent voice and thought in Sidney. Yet just as in Henrietta the marquis’s objection to Charles making his sister’s decisions for her is undercut by the representation of his character, so too here George’s objection to his mother’s control is problematised by both the situation and his own behaviour. He urges the meeting between Sidney and Faulkland because he is convinced not that he can ‘trust to her honour, and her discretion,’ but that she will decide in favour of his friend, so making the choice that he wants her to make. His emotional and physical withdrawal when Sidney refuses his request casts serious doubt on his commitment to her independence and suggests that he feels she should submit to his control rather than to her mother’s. His own character also resembles that of Henrietta’s marquis, described by Gerald A. Barker as a ‘vain, often tactless and even heartless young man’ whom the novel presents in an ‘unsympathetic light.’

That George is the only character to protest against his mother’s control of Sidney renders that protest ineffective, just as a similar protest in Henrietta was unconvincing because delivered only by the marquis. Sidney’s suggestion to Cecilia that George wants her to marry Faulkland because he ‘would sacrifice every consideration to aggrandise his family’ (SB 88) also calls into question his disinterestedness as a judge; he stands to benefit personally from his sister’s marriage to his eligible friend.

Sidney therefore views herself as an object to be controlled by her mother, or traded by her brother for his own ‘aggrandisement.’ Yet she also sees herself as an object in the eyes of her God. Sidney’s life is characterised by undeserved suffering. Her husband, Mr Arnold, proves unfaithful and then dies, leaving Sidney in great debt. Her eventual marriage to

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Faulkland proves illegitimate when it is revealed that his first wife lives, and ends with his suicide. And the novel closes with promises of further suffering for herself and the two daughters of her first marriage. As she reflects on her series of misfortunes, she can only make sense of them by seeing herself as a creature whose life is under the control of her God, rather than her own. ‘I have been set up as a mark, my Cecilia,’ she writes towards the end of her narrative of almost unending suffering; ‘let me fulfil the intention of my Maker, by shewing a perfect resignation to his will’ (SB 460). Again, there is no sense of her having any choice in how her life has turned out. In referring to herself as a ‘mark,’ she is comparing herself to the biblical figure Job, who likewise declared that God had ‘set [him] up for his mark.’ Just as Job lost everything – children, possessions, and health – but still resigned himself to the will of his God, so too Sidney seeks to be patient through the suffering she experiences at her God’s hands. Yet her connection to her God seems impersonal, such that she sees herself not as a person in a relationship, but as a ‘mark,’ an object to be examined by others and to inspire them to follow her example of ‘perfect resignation’ to the will of another, rather than an exertion of a will of her own.

Sidney’s position as an object to be traded by her family or used as a divine example by her God ties in with Sandra Macpherson’s ideas about agency and liability in the novel more broadly. For Macpherson, Sidney’s objectification and commodification throughout the novel allows Sheridan to explore the degree to which people are responsible for harms they have caused unintentionally. Faulkland’s affair with Miss Burchell, Sidney’s encouragement of their marriage, and even her act of allowing her husband to go hunting on the day he is killed all fall under the category of ‘deodand,’ or ‘thing liability,’ according to which objects – or non-agential people – are held responsible for the crimes and accidents which their words and actions have caused, even if no harm was intended. Macpherson contrasts Sidney’s acceptance of faultless blame for her part in these disasters, with Faulkland’s objections to being held responsible for Miss Burchell’s pregnancy. While Sidney concludes towards the novel’s end that, despite her best intentions, she has been the ‘unhappy cause’ of Faulkland’s ‘misfortunes’ (SB 439), he refuses to accept blame, claiming that he was ‘a willing victim’ rather than a perpetrator of crime, and that because he can justly claim not to have seduced the young lady, he owes her no ‘reparation’ (SB 352). For Faulkland,

81 Job 16:12 (Authorised King James Version).
Macpherson claims, ‘(legal) personhood is synonymous with the capacity for reasoned action’; being held responsible for actions for which he was not actively an agent compromises his sense of self and in particular his masculinity and must therefore be disavowed.\textsuperscript{82}

In this way, Macpherson claims, Sheridan challenges the connection between character and action, between who a character is and what they do. For Faulkland to maintain a coherent sense of self he must deny responsibility for his actions. Sidney, on the other hand, recognises her own objecthood, and accepts responsibility for the harm she does unintentionally. For Macpherson, this is the tragedy of the novel, that ‘persons discover who they are by discovering that they have acted in a way that inevitably goes against (and makes irrelevant as an account of who they are and what they have done) their own sense of themselves.’\textsuperscript{83} But Sidney has always recognised that she lacks control over her own actions and their consequences. Unlike Faulkland, Sidney’s subjectivity comes not from agential action but from the ability to write about and thus reason through her liability, to comprehend, and then shape and frame her actions and their repercussions. Her sense of self is not threatened by being held responsible for harm she did not intend to cause. In writing, she neither denies nor escapes liability for her actions, but controls the representation of that liability, and thus gains subjectivity despite her position as an object. It is the narrative, and her control over it, that makes her a character, a subject, rather than anything she does or does not do within that story.

Sidney’s ability to control the representation of her actions, even if she is largely denied agency and control over her life, does not mean that the novel represents her life situation as a positive one. While Sidney rarely complains, and never suggests that her life could have been otherwise, the novel’s ‘haunting layer of implication’ and ‘at times rebellious authorial anger’ impels the reader to question the decisions she makes, or fails to make, about her life.\textsuperscript{84} Yet the novel offers no answers as to whether Sidney’s life could have been different. This is partly a result of its epistololarity, and partly because of the nature of Sidney’s relationship with her brother, George.

\textsuperscript{82} Sandra Macpherson, \textit{Harm’s Way: Tragic Responsibility and the Novel Form} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 154.
\textsuperscript{83} Macpherson, \textit{Harm’s Way}, 173.
\textsuperscript{84} Cleary, introduction to \textit{The Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph}, xix.
Patricia Meyer Spacks argues that, while Sidney ‘considers Providence or fate the cause of her misfortunes,’ her brother ‘thinks her afflictions Sidney’s own doing, and considerable textual evidence supports his view.’ Had Sidney married Faulkland in the first place as her brother urged, many of her difficulties could have been avoided. Eve Tavor Bannet suggests that the mistake Sidney makes is to ‘obey her mother’s directions rather than her brother’s,’ and that this is a problem because, while her mother abides by the ‘sexual attitudes and moral judgements’ of a previous generation, Sir George, offers ‘more informed, worldly and contemporary advice.’ Thus while to Sidney’s mother the fault for which Faulkland is condemned and dismissed is unforgiveable, to Sir George his mother and his sister fail the ‘reality test’ by ‘failing to take either the way of the world or particular and palliating circumstances into account.’ Sidney’s refusal to listen to her brother’s advice and to accept his view of the world is seen by her brother as the cause of all her later sufferings, and one for which he finds it difficult to forgive her. Yet the novel’s presentation of George as an unreliable moral figure, one who is sexually immoral and lacking in generosity, both emotionally and financially, challenges any easy conclusions about Sidney’s failure to follow his advice or view the world through his eyes. As Doody comments, Sir George ‘is right, but only accidentally.’

The novel’s epistolary form also complicates the reader’s perception of Sir George’s character, and whether or not Sidney ought to have followed his advice. John C. Traver argues that the fragmentary ending of the novel ‘calls attention to the fragmentary character of knowledge upon which judgements are formed,’ reflecting that in this novel, ‘characters have access to only part of the story’ giving them a ‘limited perspective’ on which to base their judgements. This is not only because of its ending. The entire novel, written only from Sidney’s point of view, demonstrates the way in which knowledge is limited, particularly for young women. Sidney cannot understand the world in the way her brother does, because as a virtuous female she is cut off from certain situations and certain personalities. This limitation is enhanced, however, by Sir George’s unwillingness to be open

88 Doody, ‘Frances Sheridan,’ 344.
with his sister and to share his knowledge with her. Sidney discovers too late that the woman who has seduced Faulkland and caused her own ruptured engagement with him, has also seduced Sir George, proving herself not the injured innocent Sidney’s mother takes her to be, but a ‘female libertine’ (SB 392) as George describes her. Yet instead of sharing this information with Sidney when she needed it, he attempts to defend his friend by asking Sidney to listen to Faulkand, or even to his discarded mistress. As Sidney’s mother forbids her from doing either, she remains unaware of the young woman’s true story and thus does not possess the relevant information to make a good decision about her own future with Faulkland.

Epistolary form thus forces the reader to dwell not only in the moment, without knowing what the outcome of any event might be, but also in a particularly limited viewpoint. The form may give Sidney the ability to control her own narrative, and to tell her story the way she chooses, but it also limits her ability to tell that story, as it confines her to her own sphere of knowledge. Her brother could have widened her range of vision but chose not to do so. In the end, Sidney’s sufferings come as much from lack of knowledge as they do from allowing herself to be made a ‘puppet.’

*The Younger Sister* and *Sidney Bidulph* thus both use epistolary form to depict young women who are treated as objects by their families, but insist on their subjecthood by writing their own stories. While the third-person narrative of *Henrietta* allowed her brother to take over both her life and the narration of that life, making her doubly an object of her own tale, the epistolary form allows these heroines to maintain control over the narrative which they create and into which the brothers cannot intrude.

These novels thus control the brother’s desire and ability to override and overwrite the sister’s story. But the more complex epistolary fictions of these decades were not so optimistic about a sister’s ability to control her own story. In *The Younger Sister* the form is used somewhat naively – the young women always receive the information they need when they need it, and their control over their stories is eventually translated into control over their life choices. But in *Sidney Bidulph*, epistolary form, and the lack of knowledge that it entails, is of no great benefit to the heroine, even if it does allow her some degree of control over her own story. In the last section of this chapter I will examine the ways in which the
figure of the brother invades and complicates the epistolary form in Sophia Briscoe’s *History of Miss Melmoth* and Frances Burney’s *Evelina*, to demonstrate the ultimate failure of epistolarity to allow for an uncomplicated telling of the sister’s story.

**Sophia Briscoe, *The History of Miss Melmoth* (1772) and Frances Burney, *Evelina; or, the History of a Young Lady’s Entrance into the World* (1778)**

While Meliora, Lavinia, and Sidney experience different problems in their interactions with their brothers, one thing that all three have in common is the ultimate security of belonging to an established and known family. They have names, identities, and fixed social positions. They may write to gain control over their stories, but they do not need to write to establish their identities or to claim a place in the world.

The heroines of the final two novels I will consider here are in a different position. Both Caroline Melmoth and Evelina Anville are abandoned daughters, unknown and unacknowledged by their parents. Evelina knows who her father is, but he will not accept her and she thus cannot declare it publicly. Caroline has no idea as to her identity, nor any way of finding it out. During the course of the novel, both young women will discover a parent willing to own them, and both will find a brother, of whose existence they were previously unaware.

These novels are also written in epistolary style, but it is used in more complex and ambiguous ways than in the previous two novels. Both include letters from other correspondents, not just the heroine and her primary addressee. The inclusion of those letters complicates the telling of the sister’s story in different ways to the intrusion of the brother’s narrative in *Henrietta*, and calls into question the value of the epistolary form as a way of empowering women’s histories.

It is Evelina who, close to the end of her novel, states her particular powerlessness in fraternal terms. Accosted by Lord Merton, whose advances she is powerless to avoid, she cries out, “Would to Heaven… that I, too, had a brother! – and then I should not be exposed
to such treatment.” A brother, she perceives, could protect her physically from such an affront, but he would also afford her a place in an established family. The absence of an established familial position puts both Evelina and Caroline in danger, to different degrees; while both manage to achieve happiness on their own, both would benefit from a good brother, someone to protect them from the dangers that threaten them as unconnected young women.

*The History of Miss Melmoth* centres on the figure of Caroline Melmoth as she writes to her friend, Sidney Vere. Abandoned as an infant, Caroline has been brought up by Mr Melmoth and, tellingly, his sister, Lady Grafton. The novel tells the story of Caroline’s courting by Sir George Darnley, the vile rumour started by Lady Grafton’s niece that destroys both Caroline’s engagement and her reputation, and her reinstatement in proper society when her name is cleared by her surrogate brother, Sir John Evelin, an act which results in her discovering her parentage and being reunited with Sir George.

Caroline’s relationship with Sidney Vere bears close resemblance to those between Lavinia and Meliora, and between Sidney Bidulph and Cecilia. The letters regularly claim complete honesty, encourage rebuke and correction, and even assist in their understanding of themselves, as they see through one another’s writing. ‘Ha! ha! ha! what pains have you taken to deceive yourself and me!’ Sidney teases Caroline, upon her declaration that she has no unsisterly feelings for Sir George. There is no suggestion of willing deceit or of trying to lie to her friend; like Sidney Bidulph’s letters to Cecilia, Caroline and Sidney are as honest with one another as they are with themselves. Yet unlike those previous correspondents, all of whom have been perfectly proper young women, Sidney Vere has a sly, sarcastic streak, and is not always wise in the advice that she gives to Caroline or in the way she acts herself. That Caroline follows her friend’s advice demonstrates the closeness of their relationship, but it does not always work out for the best. Where friendly advice-giving was a good

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90 Frances Burney, *Evelina; or, The History of a Young Lady’s Entrance into the World*, ed. Stewart J. Cooke (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), 259. Subsequent citations will be indicated parenthetically, preceded by the abbreviation E.

91 Sophia Briscoe, *The History of Miss Melmoth* (Dublin: Printed for James Williams at No.5, Skinner-Row, 1772), I.12. Subsequent citations will be indicated parenthetically, preceded by the abbreviation MM.
substitute for conduct books and authority figures in *The Younger Sister* and *Sidney Bidulph*, in *Miss Melmoth* it is not always reliable.

The lack of reliably good advice from Sidney is a minor way in which this novel complicates the epistolary form. A more significant complication comes in the form of letters written between other characters. While these feature in *Sidney Bidulph*, where Sidney includes letters written between her brother and Faulkland, for example, or where she delegates the writing of her letters to a doctor or to her servant Patty, these letters never intrude on Sidney’s control over the story. The letters from others always serve to forward the story of Sidney’s life; their inclusion reflects the choices she makes regarding how to tell it. Those written by her doctor or Patty, both of whom are entirely devoted to the heroine, focus exclusively on Sidney; those between her brother and Faulkland allow her to convey to Cecilia knowledge that, as a proper young woman, she ought not possess. In *Miss Melmoth*, letters are exchanged of which Caroline and Sidney know nothing, but which serve to forward and to complicate the plot.

The first of these, the opening letter of the novel, is written by Sir John Evelin to his friend, Edward Grenville, describing his first meeting with Caroline. This letter, in which he describes his instant attraction to the heroine, demonstrates his good nature and positions him as the novel’s likely hero. His first instinct is to make her happy, exclaiming, ‘O what transporting joy, to dispel every cloud of uneasiness from her lovely brow, and place love, and lasting happiness there!’ (*MM* I.5) Despite the uncertainty of her birth and fortune, Sir John does not hesitate to confess his love and make Caroline an honourable proposal. Nor is he peevish when she refuses him, declaring that as her heart belongs to another, all she can offer him is ‘my friendship, my esteem’ (*MM* I.114), asking that she be permitted to consider him ‘in the light of a sincere amiable friend and brother’ (*MM* I.115). While the discovery, gain, or return of a brother proved a challenge to Henrietta’s, Lavinia’s, Meliora’s and Sidney’s control over their lives, for Caroline the acquisition of a brother brings a certain degree of safety, a protector for an otherwise unprotected heroine.

His commitment to serving her is real, and extends far beyond that of any other character in the novel. When Caroline is falsely accused of being the mistress of Lord L. and cast out of
her home by her guardian, Lady Grafton, only Sir John believes in her innocence. Coming across her unexpectedly one day, he instantly resolves to help her in any way he can:

I am convinced you are innocent. ... will you permit me to take you home, it may be in my power to dispel the clouds that have enveloped you; if not, my protection you may claim, since in spite of every effort you still hold the same place in my esteem you ever did. And were all the world against you, I would at the hazard of my life protect and defend you from that world insensible of your merit. You once said ... you considered me as a friend, may I hope you still look on me in that light; my study shall be to deserve that distinction. (MM II.120-121)

The conversation in which Caroline declared that she considered Sir John ‘as a friend’ is her response to his proposal, in which she used the word ‘esteem’ which Sir John repeats here. While he does not frame his offer of protection and defence in fraternal terms, he is clearly referring back to the conversation in which Caroline claimed him as a brother to convince her to accept his help. He offers her financial support, clears her name and salvages her reputation by taking it upon himself to challenge her accuser, and despite what the world thinks of her character, he is still determined to marry her. Caroline concludes that he is ‘the most amiable of men’, a man with ‘uncommon merit’ (MM II.132). And yet when she agrees to marry him, she feels

a kind of repugnance – nor it was not a repugnance neither, – I cannot find a name for it. – I think of him with pleasure in every other relation than that in which I must now consider him, when I behold him in that point of view, I feel as I could not before describe. ... How is it that I cannot forbear shuddering when I think of being his wife? (MM II.132)

Caroline’s hesitation about marrying Sir John is, she concludes, the result of having already had her heart broken by Sir George, who likewise has believed that she has been sexually engaged with Lord L. and has cast her off, and that she is therefore not able to love Sir John as she ought. However, such feelings are not uncommon in eighteenth-century novels, and contemporary readers may have realised that they indicate that Caroline and Sir John are biologically sister and brother. Ruth Perry notes this element in a number of eighteenth-century domestic novels. It ‘appears as an instantaneous and inexplicable repugnance to sexual contact with a man who turns out to be blood kin,’ in Caroline’s case, a shrinking ‘from marrying the wealthy Sir John Evelin, who believes in her, adores her, and wants to
save her.\textsuperscript{92} In hindsight, their behaviour towards one another (with the exception of Sir John’s proposal) has been characteristic of an ideal brother-sister relationship. Sir John alone has protected, supported, believed in, and championed his sister, as a good brother should. In return, Caroline has given Sir John genuine affection and esteem, has valued his friendship, and has communicated with him openly and confidently. When their relationship is discovered, Sir John implores his mother to look well on Caroline, her recovered daughter, and to love her as she loves him.

Sir John’s generous behaviour is constantly contrasted with the peevish behaviour of the man Caroline loves, Sir George Darnley. While Sir John openly and willingly declares his love for Caroline, and asks her to marry him, Sir George tries to hide his, behaving in a way which Caroline deems ‘cruel usage’ (\textit{MM} 1.148). When he realises that Caroline loves him and confesses his own love and desire to marry her, he does not openly admit their relationship, unwilling to entrust his family with their mutual affection for fear of opposition. Instead, Sir George convinces Caroline to enter into a private correspondence with him, an action that requires Caroline to cultivate an ‘ingenuous mind’ and forces her into ‘deceit’ and ‘insincerity’ (\textit{MM} II.11). The correspondence ultimately places her at the mercy of those who wish her ill. The letters from Sir George, designed to express his love and the security of their relationship, instead lead directly to her ruin.

Most significantly, when Miss Grafton and Lord L. hatch their plot to damage Caroline’s reputation, Sir George instantly believes the worst of her, not able to imagine that she might be a wronged innocent whom he ought to trust and protect. While this is typical of romantic comedy, reminiscent of Claudio’s treatment of Hero in \textit{Much Ado About Nothing}, the contrast between Sir George’s quick rejection and Sir John’s continued belief in her innocence cast doubt upon the reasonableness of the former’s response. More importantly, because the focus of the novel is on Caroline’s emotions (in a way in which Shakespeare’s focus is never on Hero’s), the reader sees and feels the pain this response causes, and her great need for her hero to act in a less conventional, but more loving and trusting manner. When the plot is revealed, and Sir George is finally convinced of her innocence, he turns quickly from apologies to accusations. Caroline has engaged herself to Sir John, the man

\textsuperscript{92} \textit{Perry, Novel Relations}, 397.
who believed in and rescued her, and Sir George is unable to contain his disappointment:

“All – Oh! Can I call you cruel, – you have pronounced my doom: but I cease to complain: Ah, wherefore should I: She only who could give relief to my burning heart, it is she who pierced it” (MM II.145). His outburst places her in a position where she feels the need to justify her actions despite her act of forgiving him without asking for an apology for his desertion of her.

The contrast of character between Sir George and Sir John differs from the portrayals of hero and brother in the previous novels I have examined. In Henrietta, The Younger Sister and Sidney Bidulph, and even in Betsy Thoughtless, the hero has always been superior to the brother, morally, behaviourally, and in the way he treats the heroine. Here, it is the brother whose behaviour merits reward. In terms of character, then, the novel sets up the reader to expect that Sir John’s faithful and constant love will eventually be rewarded by the hand of the heroine. The structure of the novel encourages this expectation. The first letter included in the novel is written not by Caroline, nor even by Sir George, but by Sir John. His style of writing, expressive but genuine, encourages the reader to trust his voice, and to desire his success. Caroline’s story, while largely written and controlled by her, is placed into a wider context, a context which in the end is discovered to be that of the brother. At least at the outset, it looks like it is his story we are being presented with, and that she is a subordinate character within it. Nothing in his behaviour encourages the reader to withdraw their sympathy and affection from him, nor to distrust his word or his character. While there are very few letters of his after this first one, the initial prioritisation of his letter over those of Caroline makes him a primary character in her story, and, while benevolent, does in a manner overwrite her story.

The brother also dominates the ending of the sister’s tale. Despite Sir John’s evident superiority, Caroline has always been destined for Sir George. The discovery of siblinghood makes Sir John and Caroline’s marriage impossible, thus freeing Caroline to marry Sir George, but it also distorts the comedic ending of the marriage plot with the tragedy of a man who cannot transform his passion into fraternal affection. While Caroline can easily consider him a brother, having never felt more for him than friendship, his incestuous passion is unconquerable, ‘interwoven with my existence’ (MM II.193). His death removes him and his unruly passion from the narrative, and allows Caroline to marry Sir George.
without concern for the feelings of her brother. And yet it is hard to believe that the sacrifice of Sir John is justified by Caroline’s marriage to Sir George, who, throughout the novel, has been very much the lesser of the two men. Her brother was the best man for her, but fraternal love is not allowed to triumph in this near-tragic and utterly sentimental novel, which has as its goal an unsatisfactory marriage for the heroine, rather than a satisfying reinstatement in her family of origin.

Nor is Caroline allowed to conclude her narrative. Just as Sir John began it, Sidney concludes it, writing to another friend. The final few letters could be described as a conclusion to the history of the Evelins, describing the brother’s death, the mother’s story and the sister’s engagement. Caroline’s inclusion in this family has afforded her a place, a name and a fortune, but it has also incorporated her story into that of their family, to be told by a third party. The epistolary form, which allowed Sidney, Lavinia and Meliora to tell their own stories fails Caroline. Her story is begun by her brother, and concluded by her friend, and this external framing demonstrates how little control she has over her narrative, and thus the fragility of the epistolary form as a way of telling the sister’s story. The epistolary, as much as the third-person narrative, can be taken over by the brother, even if – or perhaps especially if – that brother is of good heart, strong emotion, and deep attachment to his sister. In allowing him to write his story, and including it in her story, the sister risks the emotions of the brother overpowering her own. Sir John’s love for Caroline means the reader cannot desire her marriage to Sir George; Sir John’s death introduces an unavoidable overshadowing of tragedy on what ought to have been a happy conclusion. The death of the brother, which allows the marriage of the sister, is fundamentally disconcerting and discomforting.

Frances Burney’s *Evelina*, published seven years after *The History of Miss Melmoth*, seems in many ways to be a more benevolent rewriting of Caroline’s story.\(^{93}\) The structural similarities begin in the first letter, for just as Caroline does not write the first letter of her

\(^{93}\) That Caroline’s true name, Caroline Evelin, is almost identical to that of Evelina’s deceased mother, Caroline Evelyn, is surely a coincidence, given that Burney wrote and destroyed her manuscript of the *History of Caroline Evelyn* years before Briscoe’s novel was published. There is, to my knowledge, no evidence that Burney read *The History of Miss Melmoth* or that it influenced her first published novel in any way. Yet the similarities between the two lead me to question whether Burney may have read and been influenced by Briscoe’s novel.
history, so too Evelina’s story is begun as a correspondence between her surrogate father, Rev. Villars, and his acquaintance, Lady Howard. These opening letters provide the reader with important background information about Evelina, but, as Marta Kvande has argued, they also mean that ‘at first, Evelina hardly seems to have a voice in the novel, let alone an authoritative one.’ These letters have a different effect to that of Sir John Evelin that opens *The History of Miss Melmoth*. Focusing on fact and history, rather than on emotion, the letters written between Villars and Lady Howard draw our attention to Evelina and to her history, enabling the reader to understand the heroine without encouraging us to identify with either of the correspondents. But they also enact formally what they describe—that Evelina’s life and story have been written by Villars, rather than by herself. It is Villars who has given her the name of ‘Anville’, and who, ‘by concealing her name, family, and story’ (E 15) has controlled what the world knows of her. This control, and this choice of when and to whom the history should be revealed, is continued through these letters, showing how little authority Evelina has had over her own history.

Yet her removal from Villars to travel to London with the Mirvans allows her for the first time to use her own voice. Writing of her experiences to her guardian allows her to control the narrative of her life. Her claim that ‘I shall write to you every evening all that passes in the day, and that in the same manner as, if I could see, I should tell you’ (E 21) is a subtle reminder of the fact that she has gone beyond the bounds of his authority – he no longer sees her ‘every evening.’ Samuel Choi suggests that, with her first piece of correspondence, ‘her letter and signature mark her assertion of self-identity and demonstrate, quite literally, her act of assuming the role of subject and author of her life.’ For the first time, she is free to write her own story.

That Evelina does not always write ‘all that passes in the day’ to Villars is evident from the inclusion of several letters to Maria Mirvan, who becomes Evelina’s closest friend and correspondent and whose letters are characteristic of the friendly epistolarity of the previous three novels. As Kvande claims, ‘Having once left her guardian’s immediate protection, [Evelina] seeks an entirely different kind of confidante: one who is female and is

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95 Choi, ‘Signing Evelina,’ 268.
also her own age, a peer rather than an authority figure, someone who cannot browbeat her over her failure to tell all.’\(^{96}\) The absence of authority encourages her ‘to tell all’ to her friend, and her letters to Maria are open about her feelings towards Lord Orville, a subject which she cannot broach with the same freedom in her letters to her guardian.

Friendly epistolarity in *Evelina* thus complicates our reading of her letters to Villars. While her absence from her guardian allows her to write her own story in her own way, the differences between her letters to Maria and her letters to Villars indicate that her story can be told in different ways to different audiences. The sister’s story, when told to an authority figure, is controlled by that relationship of authority in a way that it is not when told to a peer. Evelina must abide by the rules of her relationship with Villars and the proprieties expected of a young woman; even in an epistolary format, she is *not* free to tell her story in whatever way she pleases.

Evelina’s story is more directly threatened, however, by her brother’s story. It is here that the main difference in the representation of brotherhood in *The History of Miss Melmoth* and *Evelina* becomes important. While both novels allow their heroines to discover a real brother and to gain a surrogate brother, *Evelina* avoids the tragic sentimentalism of *Miss Melmoth* by separating these brothers into two characters – the real brother, Macartney, and the surrogate brother/fiancé, Orville, emptying the surrogate brother’s story of its power to overwhelm the sister’s story. And while Orville briefly uses his adopted fraternal position to control Evelina and threaten her independence, it is Macartney who most directly threatens Evelina’s story.

Their relationship begins as an empowering experience for Evelina. She saves him from suicide, despair and financial want, exerting agency rather than being a victim. And because she becomes aware of their biological connection before he does, she also controls the terms of their relationship. While her story is largely one of waiting to be claimed, by her father or by a husband, when it comes to Macartney, the power of naming and claiming is hers, and it allows her to define their siblinghood as one characterised by equality.\(^{97}\) Their

\(^{96}\) Kvande, ‘Frances Burney and Frances Sheridan,’ 177.

\(^{97}\) Amy J. Pawl notes Evelina’s ability to increase her family circle through a process of naming and claiming, suggesting that the establishment of multiple family links provides the heroine with ‘external evidence of her identity – assurance of her presence,’ without which ‘she might disappear.’ Macartney, however, is the only
claim to one another’s affection is, she claims, one which is ‘mutually’ owned; they are “reciprocally bound” to one another; and while she does not deny that he is more in her debt than she in his, she believes this to be a situation which will be righted in time, and made more equal, for she desires that he will “suffer [her] to expect from [him] all the good offices in [his] power” (E 300). Along with the relationship, she claims an obligation from him and to him – an obligation that is mutual and reciprocal, founded on the twin pillars of blood and regard.

Evelina seems to perceive her relationship with Macartney as being one of equals partly because of the similarity of their situations. Both characters are unacknowledged children of Sir John Belmont, both unable to claim his name or his fortune, and both motherless. The only two differences in their circumstances are that Evelina is legitimate while Macartney is not, and that Macartney is male, and therefore has some control over his situation, while Evelina, a young woman, has none. Macartney can challenge his father, both with violence (as when he thinks he has killed him) and with words (as when he goes directly to him to claim kinship). Evelina can do neither. Her legitimation and recognition are dependent on the actions of others and her father’s willingness to admit her. In fact, for most of the novel, even the actions of her friends on her behalf are ineffectual in improving her situation, and it is only when Mrs Selwyn forces Evelina into Sir John’s presence that her identity is acknowledged. Despite her legitimacy, and therefore her stronger claim to her father’s acknowledgement, her gender works against her. Macartney, with no legitimate claim to his father’s wealth or name, succeeds in gaining recognition with far more ease than his sister. Yet the fact that the sister, despite her gender, ultimately triumphs, that she supersedes Macartney as her father’s legitimate heir, in a move which Doody claims is a ‘feminist fantasy’ of female empowerment, reflects the superiority she has always had in their relationship.98 Evelina’s financial superiority has enabled her to help Macartney when he was penniless, her moral superiority inspired him to follow her example, and her superiority of knowledge allowed her both to reveal and to control their biological relationship.

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Yet despite Evelina’s superiority, Macartney still threatens Evelina, and in a way that returns my discussion to the formal aspects of Henrietta. Just as Charles took over Henrietta’s story formally as well as literally, so too Macartney threatens Evelina’s identity and ability to tell her story. Samuel Choi describes this danger as a ‘meta-narrative crisis’ in which the reader’s loyal to the heroine is put to the test:

In terms of gripping the reader with awe at the fantastic, the incredible events of Macartney’s story, related in just a few pages, seem to outstrip by far all those preceding that Evelina narrates. [...] his story threatens to overshadow and to replace her story, [...] to usurp the central plot and to leave Evelina a nameless nobody by the wayside.\(^9\)

The threat is not only to the details of his story – a story which includes possible incest, parricide, mysterious identities, and a foreign setting – but also appears in the ways in which his narrative intrudes on Evelina’s, briefly influencing and even taking over her letters. When relating her story of saving his life, Evelina slips into Macartney’s style – her writing becomes full of strong verbs – ‘impelled’ (E 151), ‘seized’ (E 151), ‘shocked’ (E 150), ‘fly’ (E 150) – and adjectives – ‘stiff with horror’ (E 150), ‘inexpressibly shocked’ (E 150), ‘breathless and senseless’ (E 150), ‘motionless with terror’ (E 150), ‘half frantic’ (E 151), ‘petrified’ (E 151), ‘wild with fright’ (E 151). While Evelina has been in dangerous situations before, it is only at this point that her writing is transformed and she seems to lose control of her own voice, having it replaced by the language and style of her brother. Likewise, in this scene, even her name is replaced by his, as the way Macartney’s letter to Evelina is included within her own letter to Villars means that his name both concludes her letter and dominates it, with only a brief introduction from herself.

Evelina’s ability to reclaim her name, her style and her story, however, demonstrates the significance of the female, domestic narrative, but more importantly of the sister’s story. Not only does the triumph of Evelina’s domestic narrative over Macartney’s tale of adventure prove a win for women’s writing, but the triumph of the sister’s narrative over the brother’s suggests the possibility of way of telling history which does not focus on patrilineage and thus emphasises the importance of telling the stories of the women in the family as well as the men. Evelina’s and Macartney’s stories are virtually the same, both beginning fatherless, abandoned by the same man, and ending acknowledged by that

\(^9\) Choi, ‘Signing Evelina,’ 268.
father. They even marry in the same ceremony. Yet the fact that Evelina’s story dominates the narrative, according Macartney only a subordinate place in her family history, connects with her victory of recognition – that despite being a daughter, she is acknowledged as the true, legitimate heir; that in her case, the son is not privileged, but the daughter is recognised as the real inheritor of the family line, name, and fortune. Far from the threat of Macartney displacing her in the family or in the narrative, Evelina achieves what Macartney does not – a right to her family name and fortune, a right to acknowledgement by her father, and a right to tell her own story.

Choi views this move by Burney as an attempt to ‘pre-empt the possibility of another Joseph Andrews.’ While Henrietta echoed Fielding’s novel of the brother effacing the sister and her story, here Burney recognises the potential for such a retelling of her heroine’s tale and seeks to cut it off before it has a chance to be written. In Evelina, the epistolary format is used both to allow for this attack on narrative control, and to overcome it. Evelina is allowed to regain her voice, and ultimately triumphs over this attempt to efface her and her story. The takeover that succeeded in Henrietta does not work in Evelina. Yet the challenge the brother can pose to the sister, even in a form where she ought to be able to control her own story, strongly suggests that the epistolary form does not allow for the telling of the sister’s story as confidently as earlier novels may have suggested. If women novelists were searching for a secure way to tell the sister’s story, Burney’s first novel demonstrates that the epistolary form might not be an unproblematic means of doing so.

Conclusion

This chapter covers the time period between the publication of Eliza Haywood’s Betsy Thoughtless (1751), the focus of the previous chapter, and the 1790s, in which the novels of the next two chapters of this thesis were published. The novels considered in this chapter vary in style, tone and purpose, but they exhibit a number of similar characteristics. In particular, their variations on the use of the brother-sister relationship and the epistolary form add to our understanding of the development of the novel in the second half of the eighteenth century.

100 Choi, ‘Signing Evelina,’ 271.
Just as Betsy Thoughtless challenges Nancy Armstrong’s idea of the development and role of the domestic novel in the formation of the domestic sphere and the subsequent restructuring of society along gendered lines, so too do the novels of this period. Haywood’s novel did so by demonstrating the failure of the domestic ideal through the heroine’s marriage to Mr Munden, suggesting that female independence was more important to happiness than proper behaviour and that the life and authority offered by the domestic project was not sufficient in granting that happiness. Haywood’s dark picture of women’s dependence and submission cast a shadow over the work of the women novelists who followed her, many of whom wrote novels which Spacks describes as having a ‘dark tone’ and ‘malevolent plots.’

This may have been the era which saw the development of the ‘courtesy novel,’ as Joyce Hemlow has claimed, and the courtship novel, as described by Katherine Sobba Green, but it was also a time when a large number of women wrote novels that, as Felicity Nussbaum has pointed out, spoke ‘in the language of traditional femininity while calling attention to its restrictions, absurdities, and impossibilities.’ The novels this chapter examines resist easy insertion into any simple category. Some argue, like Betsy Thoughtless before them, for women’s independence from the control of their brothers. Others include heroines who happily submit to their brothers, but their narratives are dissatisfying and discomforting precisely because of that submission and what it ultimately leads to. All of these novels focus upon heroines who are proper domestic women, yet all discover that this is not enough to guarantee them happy endings or good marriages. Sidney Bidulph was widely criticised for the effect it was thought it might have on women’s morality because it refused to reward its perfect heroine with happiness, but none of these novels suggest that proper feminine behaviour will automatically lead to a happy domestic conclusion. The world in which the heroines live, and in particular, the families

105 In their introduction to Sidney Bidulph, Heidi Hutner and Nicole Garret suggest that the novel ‘follows in the Richardsonian tradition of the conduct novel,’ but that ‘despite (or because of) Sidney’s compliance’ with the rules of the conduct books, ‘she suffers endlessly, and the novel ends tragically,’ leaving contemporaries concerned about ‘what kind of message’ it would send ‘to young women learning how to conduct themselves
into which they are born, threaten to compromise their happiness and their domestic goals. While Armstrong sees the domestic ideal as solidifying between Richardson’s *Pamela* (1740) and Austen’s *Emma* (1816), these novels show that the depiction of the domestic heroine may have taken more firm shape during this time period, but the reward for her proper behaviour was still very uncertain.

In part this is because the novel itself was still solidifying as a genre and still working out its final shape. Richardson’s *Pamela*, Armstrong suggests, began the process of domesticating fiction, and novelists writing in the fifty years which followed its publication continued to experiment with the form and the content of the domestic novel, both replicating and complicating Richardson’s first novel. While many of the novelists in the second half of the century followed Richardson’s lead in writing in the epistolary style, the ultimate replacement of that style by the end of the century with third-person narrative suggests that it was not considered to be ideal. In particular, this chapter has demonstrated how epistolary form could enable the sister to tell her own story, even when her brother is included in her narrative, and can thus make herself a subject and author of her life despite his attempts to objectify and control her and her decisions. But it has also shown the possibility of the brother taking over even the epistolary novel, as demonstrated in *Miss Melmoth* and *Evelina*, two examples that suggest that even this form is an unreliable vehicle for the faithful telling of the sister’s story. This very unreliability may have been one among several factors why the epistolary form had fallen out of fashion by the 1790s.

The five novels I have considered here also continue the discussion of the brother-sister relationships that I began with *Betsy Thoughtless*, and the uses to which that relationship is put in the work of female novelists. Just as in Haywood’s novel, this is twofold, both a case of content and plot, and of form. *Betsy Thoughtless* portrayed a heroine whose search for independence from the control of her brothers was mirrored by a narrative that allowed her story to be independent of theirs; instead, the stories of her brothers were dependent on her own. The heroines of the novels in this chapter do not all follow Betsy’s example. Not all desire independence and none are as opposed to marriage as she, the coquettish heroine,

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was for most of her story. Yet their novels still raise questions about female dependence and submission, either by allowing the heroines to directly question and challenge their brother’s assumed authority, or by concluding the novels in ways which are ambiguous or even tragic. These novels also take up the challenge of telling the sister’s story, and saving that story from a position of dependence upon that of the brother. In both content and form, then, these female novelists used the brother-sister relationship to continue to ask the questions raised in Haywood’s earlier novel, questions of authority, equality and independence for women in the family and in society.
In the early, hopeful years of the French Revolution, between the fall of the Bastille in July 1789, and the execution of Louis XVI in January 1793, Charlotte Smith conceived of, wrote and published two novels, *Celestina* (1791) and *Desmond* (1792). A Girondin, rather than a Jacobin, ‘favouring reform by peaceful means,’ Smith’s support for the Revolution before the 1793 Reign of Terror is expressed in both of these early-Revolution novels.¹ Both were also conceived by Smith as her response to Edmund Burke, whose *Reflections on the Revolution in France* was published in 1790. Burke’s bestseller celebrated ‘the aristocratic concepts of paternalism, loyalty, chivalry, the hereditary principle, bonding to the land through ownership of it,’ and presented a picture of society that was both based on and reflected a conservative, patriarchal family.² It sparked what Marilyn Butler has termed the ‘Revolution Controversy,’ prompting a wide range of responses from conservatives, radicals and reactionaries alike. Smith was the first to publish a response in the form of a novel, directed towards an already-established audience, those readers who had previously read and enjoyed her *Emmeline* (1788) and *Ethelinde* (1789).³ The novel, as many authors after Smith also found, was an apt choice for her purpose. It easily enabled comparisons between the family and the political situation that allowed Smith to elaborate on a familial politics alternative to that commemorated by Burke, and granted her space to propose a different model for the family, and thus society more broadly, which would be more positive and empowering for women.

As well as responding to Burke’s particular arguments, *Celestina* and *Desmond* examine the way in which Smith’s particular historical moment affected women’s lives. The French

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¹ Loraine Fletcher, introduction to *Celestina*, by Charlotte Smith (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press Ltd., 2004), 31.
³ Smith’s awareness of her established audience is evident in her Preface to *Desmond*, where she confesses feelings of apprehension at ‘sending into the world a work so unlike those of my former writings,’ with which her readers would, she assumes, be familiar. Charlotte Smith, Preface to *Desmond*, ed. Antje Blank and Janet Todd (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press Ltd., 2001), 45.
Revolution, while opening up the possibility of freedom and equality for male French nationals, was hesitant to grant women citizenship under the new political structures. Smith’s two early-Revolution novels subtly comment on women’s contribution to the Revolution, as well as the debates occurring in Paris regarding women’s role in the new society. Lynn Hunt repeats these questions when she asks, ‘Would the restriction of paternal authority make everyone in the political family equal, brother with brother, brother with sister, and children with parents?’ If they were to be excluded, how would that exclusion be justified, once the power structures of patriarchy had been overturned? Reflecting on the works of the major social contract theorists of the seventeenth century, Smith’s vision of the new French society suggests that full freedom and equality for women was unlikely to arise simply as a result of the new political structure.

These novels also examine the structure of the family more specifically. Both *Celestina* and *Desmond* examine the effects for women of the rise in importance of the conjugal family at the expense of the consanguineal family, and ask whether a reversion – a revolution – to an older style of family based on blood and not on marriage, with a stronger role for women to play, might be possible under the new political system of fraternity in France. As women’s roles in society became more limited, and as women found themselves increasingly unable to support themselves, could a society organised on fraternal principles offer greater options familially, as well as politically?

In this chapter, I examine *Celestina* and *Desmond* in both their political and familial contexts. I look at the ways in which both novels reflect changing family structures, and the possibility that a return to an older, consanguineal family structure might empower sisters, granting them a degree of independence not experienced in the conjugal unit. My discussion of family structures will also reflect Smith’s engagement with Burke’s *Reflections*, sparking an examination of how systems of inheritance and principles of family honour prove less straightforwardly positive than he suggests. Having looked at family structures and the ways in which these novels use them to interact with the revolutionary debates, I will then move into a consideration of the way in which women’s place in society was limited in familial and

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5 Eleanor Ty notes that ‘the original meaning of “revolution” was astronomical, referring to the rotation of bodies: a circular motion returning to its point of origin.’ *Unsex’d Revolutionaries: Five Women Novelists of the 1790s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 6.
domestic terms by the social contract theorists and then by the French Revolutionaries, examining how the limitations of domesticity continued to affect women’s lives even in Revolutionary France, but more particularly in England.

*Desmond, family and inheritance*

Ruth Perry, as I noted briefly in the previous chapter, argues that novels of the eighteenth century demonstrate a ‘seismic shift’ in the meaning of the family in British society. The primary kin group changed, she notes, moving ‘from an axis of kinship based on consanguineal ties or blood lineage to an axis based on conjugal and affinal ties of the married.’ This shift had particularly profound effects for women. Their roles as sisters, in which they could experience a certain degree of equality and independence, diminished, and their lives became increasingly controlled by the authority first of parents, and then of husbands. This, combined with an increasing pressure on women to confine themselves to the domestic sphere, led to women being viewed more as property than as free agents.

The two types of familial structure – one based on consanguinity, and one on conjugality – are represented and contrasted in Smith’s most revolutionary novel, *Desmond*, through the portrayal of two families, one English and one French. The similarities between the families, in terms of their makeup and their histories, invite comparisons. Yet while a number of scholars have noted the twinning of the English heroine, Geraldine, and the French anti-heroine, Josephine, both of whom are middle-daughters, nothing has been said regarding the similarities of their wider families. In each family there is one son and multiple daughters. Each family has been fatherless for some time, and therefore under the control of the mother. The son has been privileged in each family, while the daughters have been

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disadvantaged. And in each family the daughters have been either married against their will, or kept captive in some form, so that the son could be enriched. Finally, in each case the daughters are in need of protection – and it is the way the sons behave towards their sisters when they are most in need which provides the richest vein of contrast between the two families.

The Waverlys, Geraldine Verney’s family of origin, exemplify the family aligned along an axis of conjugality. This is made evident in the importance of the son (the heir) in the family, and the dismissal of the concerns of married daughters. The son, Waverly, is ‘of more consequence’ to both parents ‘than the rest of the family,’ because, as the only son, he alone stands to inherit ‘a considerable part’ of the family estate.\(^8\) An entail of this nature, which allows the son to inherit while providing against any inheritance for any daughters, indicates the importance of the conjugal family at the expense of the consanguineal family – the wealth is concentrated into the direct family line, rather than being dispersed among various nuclear families as daughters marry. But in the Waverly family, the son’s inheritance is not the only way that he is privileged above his three sisters. Arriving after the birth of six daughters, Waverly has been over-indulged during his father’s lifetime, at the expense of his sisters, who have ‘uniformally seen [their] interest yield to his’ (D 50). And while Geraldine does not pass judgement on her parents’ treatment of their children, she notes that this indulgence has not been to her brother’s benefit. Rather, it has ‘coincided with his natural temper to produce that continual inability, to pursue any study or even any pleasure steadily’ (D 50). Consequently, being left by his father’s death ‘master of himself and his fortune,’ he has not been able to ‘resolve what to do with either of them.’ The conjugal family line has been maintained, and the inheritance has been passed on in full from father to son, but it has not ensured the happiness or stability of the heir, the head of the family. In Waverly’s wavering character, this novel demonstrates that the privileges of eldest sons, obtained at the expense of other family members, are not an automatic benefit either to them or to the society to which they are expected to contribute. Rather than using his position and wealth for the good of his nation or his family, Waverly wanders between

\(^8\) Charlotte Smith, Desmond, ed. Antje Blank and Janet Todd (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press Ltd., 2001), 50. Subsequent citations will be indicated parenthetically, preceded by the abbreviation D.
France and England aimlessly, allowing others to make his decisions and spend his money for him.

The matter of inheritance, however, does not just reflect changes in the family. It is also a significant way in which this novel interacts with and critiques Edmund Burke’s anti-revolutionary text, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, published in November 1790. As a politically aware and astute woman, Smith would have read Burke’s book, the text that ‘every literate man and woman in London or Brighton was talking about’ as Smith conceived and wrote *Desmond*. Anne Mellor points out that ‘Smith signalled that she was answering Edmund Burke’s letters to Depont by constructing her novel as a series of letters primarily exchanged between her hero Desmond and his friend and mentor Erasmus Bethel,’ using the similar initials for the correspondents to emphasise the intended connection between the texts. The combination of domesticity and politics in Smith’s novel could easily have been inspired by Burke. This seems to be Deirdre Coleman’s implication when, discussing the novel more generally, she suggests that,

> Given Burke’s sentimental emphasis on the importance of kinship and the patriarchal family unit, and his mobilisation of the family in the name of unquestioning loyalty to government, it is not surprising that the domestic novel should become intensely politicised, particularly in the 1790s.

Burke’s use of letters combines two earlier roles of the letter, as both a feminine form depicting domestic concerns and sentimental impulses, and as a vehicle for political debate, a combination he also adopts in his consistent use of domestic imagery – bodies, families, houses – to discuss political issues.

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12 Mary A. Favret, commenting more generally on the idea of the letter in the late eighteenth-century notes, that ‘in the mind of late eighteenth-century Europe, the letter fused the world of epistolary romance, the domestic tragedies of *Clarissa* and *Julie*, with the world of political revolution.’ Mary A. Favret, *Romantic Correspondence: Women, Politics, and the Fiction of Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 7.
Similarly, Smith’s novel combines domesticity and politics, both in its subject matter and its epistolary form. The main difference between Burke’s and Smith’s use of letters, however, is in the writers. In Burke’s text, all the letters are penned by himself, to a correspondent whose replies are never recorded. He thus has complete authorial control over his words. Smith’s novel, on the other hand, includes letters from both Desmond and Bethel, as well as from a number of other characters. This does not, as some critics have suggested, work to separate Smith from the radical ideas of her characters, creating ‘distance ... between the author and the political beliefs she is expounding’\textsuperscript{13}; that idea is directly contradicted by her statement of political intent in Desmond’s preface, where she states:

I have given to my imaginary characters the arguments I have heard on both sides; and if those in favour of one party have evidently the advantage, it is not owing to my partial representation but to the predominant power of truth and reason, which can neither be altered nor concealed (D 45).

Amy Garnai, reflecting on this passage, points out that ‘by emphasising the power of “truth” [in her preface], Smith rejects the possibility the epistolary narrative affords her of concealing, or blurring her own political agenda.’\textsuperscript{14} Smith’s choice of epistolary form, therefore, is not an attempt to create a protective distance between herself and the opinions of her characters, allowing her to disavow those ideas despite being the author ultimately responsible for their presentation. Rather, it is a demonstration of the form’s ‘democratic’\textsuperscript{15} nature, in which ‘no one voice is enabled to elect itself unambiguously as the centre of authority,’ much as no single Revolutionary could claim political authority in France’s new fraternal order.\textsuperscript{16} Like the novels of the previous chapter, the form of Smith’s novel is reflective of her content: her support of the French democratic reforms influences her choice of epistolary form.

In allowing her novel to be a genuine conversation, Smith allows her characters to change their viewpoints. While most do not do so, one does: Bethel, the older, wise mentor figure

\textsuperscript{13} Ty, Unsex’d Revolutionaries, 131.
\textsuperscript{14} Amy Garnai, Revolutionary Imaginings in the 1790s: Charlotte Smith, Mary Robinson, Elizabeth Inchbald (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 22.
who is clearly meant to represent Burke, experiences what Fuson Wang describes as a ‘conversion’ in which he moves from being against the Revolution to cautiously and carefully recognising its potential.\(^{17}\) Bethel’s own experience, together with Desmond’s arguments, convince him to shift his own position. Smith seems to have hopes that Desmond’s arguments might do the same for Burke.

Smith’s target is, however, larger than Burke’s view of the French Revolution, as the inclusion of letters from women dealing with issues of domesticity and women’s role in society indicates. Smith’s use of ‘the metaphor of a castle to represent the state’ has been recognised by Loraine Fletcher as a direct response to Burke, who uses an image of the ‘careful preservation or demolition of the castle as metaphors for traditional loyalties or revolutionary violence,’ but her novels go far beyond Burke’s anti-revolutionary campaign, aiming to strike at problems currently facing British women and not merely problems that might arise should Britain succumb to the same revolutionary principles that were at work in France.\(^{18}\) It does so not primarily through directly addressing these domestic concerns, as she does with the political issues, but rather by using the epistolary form and the presence of a number of letter-writers to juxtapose ideas about the revolution and ideas about domesticity, thereby implicitly connecting the critiques of the tyrannical nature of the ancient regime of France with the similarly tyrannical system of domestic government in England. Desmond is interested in the French Revolution and in its ideology, but its main concern is with the implications of that ideology for the English people and, in particular, for English women.

In this, Smith’s novel is much like Burke’s Reflections. For while Burke’s text discusses the Revolution, and does so in the form of a letter to a French national, its main concern is with English politics. Fearing that England will follow the French example, Burke’s polemic is designed to extol the English system, descry the French innovations, and convince the British to stand firm against their influence. Regarding the Revolution as ‘the most astonishing [event] that has hitherto happened in the world,’ he considers it right for him to respond to it out of concern that such an event might also occur to the detriment of


\(^{18}\) Fletcher, Charlotte Smith, 133.
England. He is not seeking to repair the broken French constitution, but to prevent similar damage to his own country. He justifies himself thus:

Formerly your affairs were your own concern only. We felt for them as men; but we kept aloof from them, because we were not citizens of France. But when we see the model held up to ourselves, we must feel as Englishmen, and feeling, we must provide as Englishmen. Your affairs, in spite of us, are made a part of our interest; so far at least as to keep at a distance your panacea, or your plague. If it be a panacea, we do not want it. We know the consequences of unnecessary physic. If it be a plague, it is such a plague that the precautions of the most severe quarantine ought to be established against it.

Using the image of a healthy body to describe the English body politic, he declares they do not need to be made healthier—any ‘physic’ would be ‘unnecessary’ and potentially harmful—and must guard against the revolution in case it is a ‘plague’ against which the ‘most severe quarantine ought to be established.’ This view is found throughout Burke’s text—that the English state and constitution is natural, healthy and living, while the changes in the French political structures are unnatural, reflecting a sickness of mind and body. Other related images compound this idea. Notably, the English constitution is seen as natural and healthy because it reflects a properly functioning family; the French, by destroying the power of the monarch, have effectively destroyed the power of the father and therefore the wellbeing of the family unit. Not only does the structure of the state reflect a healthy family, with a paternal ruler at its head, but its transmission also operates ‘after the pattern of nature’ by being passed from father to son, from generation to generation, largely unaltered.

Burke’s image of the state as a family, or the family as a microcosm of the state, was neither new nor revolutionary. The connection between a father as head of the family and a king as head of the state dates back at least as far as the seventeenth century to Sir Robert Filmer’s *Patriarcha* (1680), as I have previously demonstrated. In the same century the social contract theorists started proposing alternative political structures—in England, one based on the principle of conjugality, and in France, one based on the principle of fraternity. Yet while the patriarchalists and the social contract theorists disagreed on the nature of the

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20 Burke, *Reflections*, 76.
family on which the state ought to be based, the idea that the family could be made to represent political structures was something they held in common.

When Smith, then, uses images of the family to represent the state or uses changes in the family to represent changes in political structures, she is participating in a well-established conversation of political philosophy. Her use of the family as a metaphor is not in and of itself a response to Burke. But within that broader metaphor, she critiques a number of his more particular complaints regarding the new French society, and exposes a number of problems with his picture of an ideal English social structure.

One major aspect of Burke’s argument that is critiqued in Desmond is the immense value Burke places on the principle of an inheritance passed in full from father to son. Dismissing the French notion of making for themselves a ‘new government,’ an idea which fills Burke with ‘disgust and horror,’ he claims that Englishmen take pride in knowing that they ‘derive all [they] possess as an inheritance from our forefathers.’

This is, he perceives, a particularly English phenomenon. Surveying several centuries of English legal and constitutional history, he summarises his findings:

You will observe, that from Magna Charta [sic] to the Declaration of Right, it has been the uniform policy of our constitution to claim and assert out liberties, as an entailed inheritance derived to us from our forefathers, and to be transmitted to our posterity; as an estate specially belonging to the people of this kingdom, without any reference whatever to any other more general or prior right. By this means our constitution preserves a unity in so great a diversity of its parts. We have an inheritable crown; an inheritable peerage; and a House of Commons and a people inheriting privileges, franchises, and liberties, from a long line of ancestors.

For Smith, on the other hand, an inheritance is not so straightforwardly positive. As we have seen, Waverly’s inheritance has not contributed to his happiness, and while it has granted him ‘privileges, franchises, and liberties,’ he has not made use of them to benefit himself, his family, or his country. Waverly has inherited wealth and property, and with them the potential to do great good, but he has used his inheritance ill. Inheritance, then, is not an unqualified benefit if the hands it falls into are not able to use it beneficially. For his sisters, who have been deprived by his inheritance and have failed to inherit ‘privileges, franchises, and liberties,’ a system of entailed inheritance has deprived them of any means of

22 Burke, Reflections, 27, italics in original.
supporting themselves, and any semblance of freedom from the authority of those who have inherited.

The problems inherent in a conjugal familial axis, and the problems of a son’s complete inheritance, are even more pronounced in the situation of Geraldine, the novel’s heroine. In order to preserve her brother’s inheritance, she was married at a young age to a man of wealth and social standing, a marriage that soon turned sour as Verney became dissolute, squandering his wealth and treating his wife and children poorly. While Geraldine’s early marriage indicates how a focus on the familial line of inheritance, from father to son, considers daughters as merely a drain on family finances, it is the Waverly family’s response to Geraldine’s suffering during her marriage that indicates the greatest problem for women in a system that privileges the conjugal above the consanguineal.

At the opening of the novel, Geraldine has been married for several years, and has just borne her third child. Her husband, Verney, has during this time proven himself unprincipled and profligate, gambling away his fortune, mortgaging his estates to pay his debts, spending months away from his wife and children in the company of likeminded aristocrats and their favourite prostitutes. By the end of the novel, he has risked his wife’s and children’s health and lives, failing to provide for their basic needs, and has even arranged to prostitute his wife to a French nobleman as payment for debt, an arrangement the virtuous Geraldine will not countenance. Trapped in such a marriage, with such a husband, Geraldine is powerless to change her situation. Without the right to divorce, with no money, with three young children to support, and with no ability to earn a subsistence, Geraldine’s only hope of escape is in her family of origin.

Yet this hope is entirely without substance. The prioritisation of vertical structures of inheritance within her family has led to the Waverly daughters being considered as mere property, and thus upon her marriage Geraldine has been transferred fully and irrevocably from her family of origin to her conjugal family, passed from the authority of her parents to that of her husband. Her consanguineal family has given her over, and has no further responsibility for her. Thus when she is about to be turned out of her London home because of non-payment of her husband’s debts, her mother and brother make no move to pay the sums required to keep a roof over her head. Likewise, when Geraldine refuses her
husband’s order to travel to France as the Duc de Romagnecourt’s mistress, seeking instead refuge with her mother, Mrs Waverly condemns her daughter’s disobedience towards her husband and insists she leave for France immediately. Well may Desmond cry, in the first instance, that ‘in such a situation, [she] has no father, brother, or friend to support her’ (D 166). Fully under the power of her husband, her ties to her family of origin having been cut by her marriage, Geraldine is indeed brotherless, even with a brother alive, well, and wealthy enough to help.

Nor is Desmond the only one to descry Geraldine’s conjugal situation, and her family’s disinterest in saving her from her husband. Bethel, a more conservative voice in the novel, exclaims to Geraldine’s equally powerless sister, Fanny, upon hearing of Verney’s attempted prostitution of his wife:

If such, my dear Miss Waverly... are your apprehensions for your sister, surely your mother, or your brother, ought to interfere, before they can be realised. – Surely, they ought to rescue this excellent and lovely woman from the power of a husband, of whom such horrors can be expected (D 228).

Bethel’s response to Geraldine’s situation indicates the extent to which the conjugal has been privileged in her family: while rescue by a family of origin would not be inappropriate in such a situation, and could even be expected, such a solution is not to be hoped for from the Waverlys, who consider Geraldine to be completely removed from their family.

Geraldine writes to her sister shortly afterwards, expressing this sense of removal. Speaking of her brother, who has recently become engaged, she declares, ‘I love my brother, and should rejoice in his being happily married; though he seems to have forgotten that he has a sister’ (D 243). Cut off from her family of origin financially and emotionally, Geraldine has no option but to hope in vain for the reformation of her husband’s finances and character.

The role her brother might have played, had their family structure been different, is exhibited by Desmond’s actions towards Geraldine at her points of greatest distress. Not only does he pay off the debtors, allowing her to remain in her London home, he also protects her from succumbing to her husband’s wishes in travelling to France with the Duc du Romagnecourt. While Desmond cherishes a chaste passion for the married heroine, his behaviour towards her until the novel’s end is described by both as that of a brother for his sister. He speaks to her ‘as to a sister’ (D 257), and from him she receives ‘brotherly
kindness’ (D 258) and ‘brotherly friendship’ (D 279). But it is in their conversation regarding her response to her husband’s summons that this relationship is most clearly articulated. Desmond’s refusal to leave Geraldine ‘in a predicament which, were you my sister, I could not bear that you should remain a moment’ (D 280) demonstrates a different conception of a brother’s responsibilities towards his sister from that exhibited by her own brother, Waverly. Despite Geraldine’s situation as a married woman, and therefore under the authority of her husband, Desmond’s response indicates that a brother may have a responsibility to act in his sister’s best interests even after she is married. Geraldine is far from disagreeing with him, wishing that such were the actual situation of her family of origin. “I thank you most truly, Desmond,” she replies, “for supposing me your sister – Ah! Would to God I were indeed so! – Had I such a brother, I could not be exposed to a situation so cruel – I should then have a protector! But as it is (and her tears fell fast) I am deserted by all those on whose guardianship I have a claim” (D 280). Geraldine’s perception of her brother’s non-response as desertion is important here. While she is aware that familial preference will always be given to her brother, and while she seems to expect little from him, nonetheless she senses the propriety of her family of origin acting to help and support her in a situation where she is being severely mistreated by her husband, particularly when her marriage had been arranged by her family and for the benefit of her brother. Desmond’s response – that a brother ought to protect his sister – displays a sense that a sister is more than a piece of property to be given – or sold – to a husband and then forgotten. Rather, some ongoing care and support is far from inappropriate, and may in fact be called for in certain situations. For Desmond, the consanguineal family still has a role to play, even in conjugal situations.

That Desmond should respond in such a way, despite his status as an only child without living parents and a single man without wife or child (and thus free from both consanguineal and conjugal bonds for the duration of the novel), reflects his exposure to a very different sort of family in France. The actions and attitudes of the Montfleuris function as a critique of the behaviour of the Waverlys, providing a different model of an extended family. Again we find a brother with multiple sisters whose interest has been made to give way to his by their parents. Their mother, ‘anxious that her daughters, of whom she had four, might not be an encumbrance on an estate which his father had left a good deal embarrassed, compelled
the second and the youngest of them to become nuns; and married the eldest and the third, who were remarkably beautiful, to the first men who offered’ (D 91-92). In this situation, as with the Waverlys, the brother’s wealth and freedom came at the expense of his sisters who have been removed from the family, placed either in convents or in their own conjugal families.

Yet here the brother has not been spoiled by such attentions from his parents. Respecting that his mother acted out of ‘fondness, however unjust,’ and recognising it as ‘mistaken zeal’ on her part, he has taken the opportunity created by her recent death to make amends to his sisters, from whose disadvantage he has had so much benefit. Not seeing them, as the Waverly sisters were seen, as having been permanently removed from his family and therefore no longer his responsibility, Montfleuri reclaims his sisters, re-establishing his consanguineal family upon the death of his mother. Empowered by the Revolutionary effects on church regulations, he has freed his youngest sister, Julie, from her convent and brought her to live with him. His second sister remains in her convent by choice, but is welcome to return to his house whenever she wishes. His eldest sister is a widow, presumably of independent means, for she is never discussed by her brother. But it is for his third sister that he feels the greatest anguish, for she, like Geraldine, was married against her inclination at a young age to a man who is ‘one of the most worthless characters in France’ (D 92). It is this sister, Josephine, who Montfleuri is attempting to help by having her come to live with him, even though he cannot break the ‘cruel bonds’ which bind her to her husband.

Montfleuri thus gives to his sisters what Waverly does not even think of – protection from those in positions of power over them (be they church authorities or husband), a safe home to live in, and love and affection. They, in return, seek to give him what they can – Julie endeavours to overcome her feelings of guilt at leaving her convent and to gratify her brother by ‘entering into the world’ (D 111), and Josephine, at her brother’s request, attends Desmond in his illness, showing her ‘gratitude’ to her brother ‘by giving her sisterly attendance’ to his friend (D 190). It is, in effect, a familial revolution – in both the sense of a dramatic shift in power and structure, and in the sense of a return to an older order. If Perry is correct, and the eighteenth century did see a shift from the consanguineal to the conjugal in the structure of the family, then Montfleuri’s determination to shift the axis of his family
back from the conjugal to the consanguineal enacts a dramatic return to an earlier familial structure. It also reflects a desire to give his sisters some independence and agency, rather than being treated as mere property to be transferred to a convent or a new family and then forgotten.

Montfleuri’s actions on behalf of his sisters also counter Burke’s claim that the French disregard for the ways of their ancestors has been their downfall. While Montfleuri has inherited the whole fortune and property of his parents at the expense of his sisters, he has not kept it intact since becoming its possessor. As well as altering his habitation and the living conditions of his tenants, thus changing his property in dramatic ways instead of passing it on unaltered to his own sons, he has also dispensed with parts of his inheritance – he has voluntarily relinquished his title, and has taken in his sisters in an effort to make amends for their deprivation at the hands of his parents.

The point is subtle but significant. Systems of familial inheritance in England may benefit sons – although not automatically – but they certainly do not benefit daughters. Likewise, the English inheritance of a strong constitution, and legal and political principles, is also not actually a guaranteed benefit. In France, however, where the son is enlightened enough to see the difference between his situation and that of his sisters, and enabled to use his inheritance to effect change for them, women’s lives can be dramatically improved. The parallel is clear – changes in the French political structure may, if made by enlightened, compassionate and powerful men, improve women’s situation in society. And if this could be the case in France, then how much more ought it be the case in England, which has such pride in the liberty of its citizens? A loosening of the principle of an unchanging inheritance of political and social structures could, far from proving an unnecessary panacea or a plague, be of great benefit to the women of Britain.

Montfleuri’s desire to help his sisters, however, is limited in ways which reveal a major stumbling block for female independence in his society. Monastic vows were abolished in France in early 1790, allowing monks and nuns to leave their monasteries and convents.²³ Legally, then, the new situation in France enables Montfleuri to free his sisters from their enforced lives as nuns. But his sister Josephine is not so easily rescued. While women in

²³ Fletcher, introduction to Celestina, 34.
Paris in the early days of the revolution were campaigning for equal legal rights within marriage, including the right to divorce, at the time the events of Desmond unfold these rights had not yet been granted. Josephine can be taken in by her brother, and provided for financially and emotionally, but she cannot be legally freed from her abusive and neglectful husband. While her life may be bettered by a loving brother, he has no authority to free her from her domestic bonds or from the power of her husband.

While Montfleuri is unable to overcome Josephine’s conjugal ties, however, he has taken the opportunity afforded by the Revolution to loosen those bonds which are within his power to affect. Not only has he freed Julie from her convent, he has also made a substantial difference in the livelihood of those tenants under his local authority. His willingness to help his sisters reflects a more general political stance – that of using his power to help those in need, and to lessen the differences between weak and strong, poor and rich. This is most clearly seen in his relationship with those people who would, before the Revolution, have been called his vassals, but whom he calls his ‘neighbours,’ those whom ‘he will not allow to be called dependents, since no beings, he says, capable of procuring their own subsistence are dependent’ (D 116). He has, in fact, since coming into his inheritance and seeing the opening stages of the Revolution, made a revolution on his own estate, ‘where his liberal and enlightened spirit has, ever since he became his own master, been occupied in softening the harsh features of that system of government, to which only the poverty and misery of such a country as this could, at any time, be owing’ (D 112, italics in original). This ‘softening’ has involved making his house a useful habitation, turning the local abandoned monastery into a house of industry to employ local people, and contributing to the happiness of his neighbours in whatever way he can, ‘giving them all the advantages their condition will allow’ (D 115). In return, he receives from them ‘the homage of grateful hearts’ (D 116), which Desmond sees as the ‘best and sincerest of all homage,’ and thus of the greatest value to him who possesses it.

The limits on how much change he can effect even on his own estate – able to ‘soften’ their experience but only work within what ‘their condition will allow’ – reflect the limits on how

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much assistance he can give to his sisters. While his parents’ deaths have freed him to act in whatever way he chooses with regards to his estate, and while the revolution has removed from his society unnatural distinctions and unjust power structures between men, the problems that face women run deeper than mere paternal or political structures. As Amy Garnai states, revolutionary values ‘are limited, if not totally ineffectual, in their ability to alleviate the oppressiveness of female experience.’\textsuperscript{25} And while fraternity was a strong principle of the Revolution, the question of whether women would be included in the new society as sisters and \textit{citoyennes} was unresolved at the time of these novels’ composition.

\textbf{Charlotte Smith’s family politics}

Women’s place in society was a matter of quite serious debate in France while Smith was writing both \textit{Celestina} and \textit{Desmond}, and Smith, as an educated Englishwoman interested in both women’s situation and in the progress of the Revolution, would likely have been well informed about the ideas being circulated in the French capital. Seeing their new social structure in familial terms, French authorities and philosophers began asking questions about how women would fit into the new French political family. In her examination of the developing ideology of a family without a father, Lynn Hunt traces the changing views of women’s place in a fraternal social structure. But in the early years of the Revolution, she describes the status of women as a ‘vexed issue,’ arguing that ‘the question of the status of women was still an open one.’\textsuperscript{26}

While the use of the family as a political analogy is common in Smith’s early Revolutionary novels, the comparison between the domestic and the political is only made explicit once, in a reflection of Geraldine’s during her travels in the new French society. Having heard rumours of chaos and bloodshed following the first stages of the revolution, she instead finds a people largely at peace and content, but still showing the effects of recent changes. In a letter to her sister, she compares the situation in France with a household:

\begin{quote}
We know, from daily experience, that even in a private family, a change in its oeconomy [sic] or its domestics, disturbs the tranquillity of its members for some time. – It must surely then
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{25} Garnai, \textit{Revolutionary Imaginings}, 19.
\textsuperscript{26} Hunt, \textit{Family Romance}, 42-3.
happen, to a much greater degree, in a great nation, whose government is suddenly dissolved by the resolution of the people; and which, in taking a new form, has so many jarring interests to conciliate (D 324).

In making a direct comparison between the changes in a household and the changes in the government of France, Geraldine is expressing what is implicit throughout this narrative – that is, that domestic situations are representative of political realities.

By correcting through her description of her own experience the tales she has heard in England of the progress of the French Revolution, she also participates in a broader concern of Desmond, which Scott Campbell describes as the novel’s preoccupation with and ‘uncertainty about truth telling.’27 This is partly the effect of Smith’s use of epistolary form, and in particular the juxtaposition of political and personal conversations. Letters contain false reports about both people and nations, demonstrating, as Judith Miller notes, Smith’s ‘association of the political deception that prevents a nation from ascertaining the truth with the personal rumour that prevents society from accurately assessing an individual’s moral character.’28 They contain rumours about Desmond’s relationship with Geraldine, and about the Revolutionaries’ conduct in France, each of which are proven untrue and clarified in later letters. Campbell suggests that ‘by placing the political letters amid personal letters, Smith can represent the reports of the “troubles” in France as partial, personally motivated, and incorrect,’29 just as the rumours about Geraldine having borne Desmond’s child are ‘partial, personally motivated, and incorrect,’ begun by a woman who has been deserted by her fiancé and has a particular dislike for Geraldine.

Desmond and Geraldine, as characters who have been set up as trustworthy and who both personally experience the situation in France, can correct the false assumptions and reports that circulate in England regarding the progress of the Revolution and the behaviour of the Revolutionaries. But Smith also uses epistolarity in ways that are analogous to how it was used in the novels discussed in the previous chapter. An important aspect of epistolarity in

29 Campbell, ‘Disagreeable Misconstructions,’ 62.
those novels was the chance for the sister to tell her own story, to allow the heroine without a voice an opportunity to gain speech and be heard, even if only by one other character. In Desmond, which focuses on the hero and whose letters are predominantly penned by him and his male friend, it is not the sister whose story needs to be told, but the French Revolutionaries, whose stories do not have their own voice or are not told accurately. In Desmond, a revolutionary sympathiser who experiences first-hand the changes in France, and who befriends a revolutionary ci-devant marquis, the Revolutionary cause finds a voice that can represent it truthfully to a deceived English audience.

Celestina too provides a truthful, eyewitness account of the Revolution, one that also makes explicit the connection between the familial and the political, between personal events and national events. Most of the novel tells the story of Willoughby’s search for the truth about Celestina’s parentage (a search to which my discussion will return later in this chapter), but towards the end of his quest he meets the Baron de Rochemarte, who turns out to be her uncle. As Willoughby hears the story of what happened to Celestina’s parents from this relative, Smith takes the opportunity to tell a broader story. Celestina’s parents’ history is, in fact, an allegory of the French Revolution, and an instance of what McKeon terms narrative concentration, ‘a technique for reducing broadly conceived and widely ramified narratives to stories of simpler scope and more circumscribed dimensions.’\(^{30}\) It depicts a family whose members represent various social groups in France in the 1780s, the years leading up to the Revolution. The Baron de Rochemarte’s father, and Celestina’s grandfather, the Count of Bellegarde, was a political and familial tyrant who, deprived of his position at court, retired to his isolated estate with his three young children, two sons and a daughter. A man ‘accustomed to dictate and command,’ he now found himself with only his family to tyrannise, and thus his children became ‘the victims of his harsh and imperious spirit.’\(^{31}\) The


\(^{31}\) Charlotte Smith, Celestina, ed. Loraine Fletcher (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2004), 494. Subsequent citations will be indicated parenthetically, preceded by the abbreviation C. Until the publication of Fletcher’s edition, Celestina had not been in print since the 1790s. It has likewise received little critical attention, with only a few recent scholars examining the novel in any detail. See especially Jacqueline Labbe, ‘What Happens at the Party: Jane Austen Converses with Charlotte Smith,’ Persuasions On-Line 30.2 (2010): no pagination; William D. Brewer, ‘Charlotte Smith’s Celestina and the Rousseauvian Moral Self,’ Eighteenth-Century Novel 8 (2011): 227-246.
two brothers, unable to bear their father’s unjust treatment of them, decided to ‘break the fetters’ (C 495) and run away from their father, joining the army, but leaving their sister, Genevieve, behind. After some years, news reached one brother, the Baron, of their father’s mistreatment of her, and particularly of the sexual advances being made towards her by their father’s resident monk. As a result, the Baron returned to see her, taking with him an English friend, Ormond. During their short stay, Ormond fell deeply in love with Genevieve, while the Baron fell in love with her friend, Jacquelina, the daughter of one of the Count’s vassals. Both couples married secretly but could not stay hidden from the Count who, when he discovered them, sent both the Baron and Ormond to prison, and sent Jacquelina to a convent. Genevieve, after giving birth to a girl, Celestina, died; Ormond was killed in the American wars. The Baron was still in prison in the Bastille, having been released for military duty but reimprisoned for writing fiery political tracts, when the Revolution swept through and freed him from his unjust confinement. “Between four and five years had I been a captive in that gloomy prison,” he exclaims, “when the glorious flame of liberty of which I only saw the first feeble rays, burst forth. I regained my personal freedom, when my country became free. I found my father dead!” (C 517) He has spent the intervening months working to free Jacquelina from her convent, and becoming acquainted with his daughter, Anzoletta.

With two brothers rising up against the tyrannical rule of a father, and finally finding their freedom only upon that father’s death, this episode is clearly an allegory of recent events in France. By framing it as a familial narrative, Smith could include it in her domestic novel without turning polemical, but could also encourage her readers to consider how different family members might be affected by different political structures. Given the novel’s preoccupation with fraternity prior to this point, the relationship demonstrated here between the Baron and his sister, Genevieve, is worthy of particular examination.

From the start of the narrative, the siblings are described differently. Genevieve is younger than her brothers, and suffers less at the hands of her father while they are around. ‘She was my father’s favourite,’ says the Baron, ‘and her influence had, for some time, the power to assuage the harshness of his temper’ (C 494). While feeling herself ‘the weight of those chains’ of ‘solitude and confinement,’ she nonetheless endeavours, ‘by her soothing sweetness, to make ours sit more easy.’ Her ability to do so is claimed to be not only the
result of her father’s preference, but of her ‘sex and disposition,’ which is ‘more accustomed to, and able to endure’ the treatment of her father. This notion – that a woman is more able to bear suffering and injustice, and that it is a sister’s role to assuage her brother’s suffering – is common in the conduct book literature of the time, and Genevieve plays her part perfectly. When, in fact, the brothers decide to leave, they try in vain to convince their sister to come with them, knowing that her situation will be worse without them. She would, they are convinced, ‘be compelled to encounter all the fury and indignation of the Count’ (C 495), suffering for their escape. Yet she will not agree to come. “It is fit you should go, but that I should stay. No point of honour, no military duty calls me; and I will not desert my father; he is unhappy – he has need of me – he must not be deprived at once of all his children”’ (C 495-96). She helps her brothers escape, and stays herself to bear the punishment for it, believing it to be her duty to stay with her father, as it is theirs to serve their country.

Genevieve’s assistance of her brothers’ escape particularly reflects the history of women’s involvement in the Revolution. In the year before the publication of Celestina, Helen Maria Williams had included in her Letters Written in France a description of French revolutionary women:

> The women have certainly had a considerable share in the French revolution: for, whatever the imperious lords of the creation may fancy, the most important events which take place in this world depend a little on our influence; and we often act in human affairs like those secret springs in mechanism, by which, though invisible, great movements are regulated.

The influence of women in the early days of the Revolution was even clearer by 1792, when the ‘Friends of the Rights of Man associated at Paris,’ a group of British supporters of the

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32 Thomas Gisborne, for example, states that one of a woman’s primary duties is to contribute ‘daily and hourly to the comfort of husbands, of parents, of brothers and sisters, and of other relations, connections and friends, in the intercourse of domestic life, under every vicissitude of sickness and health, of joy and affliction.’ Thomas Gisborne, An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex (New York: Garland Publishing, 1974), 12. Jane West similarly suggests that ‘our services are most valuable, and consequently most requisite, in the dreary season of distress;... the faithful wife, the tender mother, the dutiful daughter, or the affectionate sister, must still be the guardian angel to bring the cup of consolation; and though the world renounce or condemn the sufferer, her arms must (except in cases of very extraordinary turpitude) afford the wretched outcast a secure asylum.’ Jane West, Letters to a Young Lady, in which the Duties and Character of Women are Considered (New York: Garland Publishing, 1974), i.70.

Revolution assembled in Paris, drank a toast ‘to the women of France, especially those who have had the courage to take up arms to defend the cause of liberty.’

Celestina’s assertion that a sister helped her brothers to liberty is thus a small reminder of the work women played in the early days of the Revolution to achieve liberty for others, even if not for themselves. Women participated in the storming of the Bastille, and the protest of October 5-6 – the ‘October Days’ – is described by Joan Landes as ‘the momentous march of women to Versailles’ on account of the large number of women who participated in that political movement.

The significant contribution made by women in forwarding and preserving the Revolution was recognised at the time, at least by some. In the days following the women’s march on Versailles one liberal journalist exclaimed: ‘our liberty is strengthened. It needed that much. It could have endured but a minute longer; it was being ruined on all sides. ... And it’s the women who restored it to us!’

Women were involved in political clubs, contributed money and jewellery to the public funds, and argued for the right to bear arms for their country. While the act of rebellion and escape in Celestina was achieved by the brothers, their success, like the success of the Revolution itself, was dependent on the help of their sister, who not only willingly assisted them – without whom they could not have succeeded – but also suffered for their actions.

It is not until his sister is sexually threatened that the Baron returns to see her – after a period of six or seven years. Yet while the brothers are free, their sister’s liberty is still unobtainable. He can return to ‘defend and protect’ his sister (C 501), but he cannot simply remove her from his father, and in the end her only escape is through her own death. Yet before her death, before the imprisonment of the Baron and Ormond, even before their


36 Anon., ‘Par un homme de lettres connu, qui va publier un ouvrage intitulé La France vue dans l’avenir’ [author’s note to title], in *Women in Revolutionary Paris*, ed. and trans. Levy et al., 51.

marriages, the two young men discuss Genevieve’s position. When, seeing Genevieve for the first time, Ormond decides to marry her, the Baron sees a difficulty: his father will never allow his daughter to marry an Englishman and a Protestant. Ormond’s response is telling: “Do you think I would ask him?” (C 502). To Ormond, a father who has thus mistreated his daughter ought to have no power over her, and he is shocked to discover that his friend might leave his sister in the Count’s power. Ormond considers Genevieve to be independent of her father, able to make her own decision about her marriage without reference to his wishes. She does not, in other words, belong to her father.

While this seems to be an appropriately revolutionary statement, including women as well as men in freedom from parental tyranny and granting to each individual self-ownership and self-governance, the Baron is not so enlightened. Without denying that his father’s tyrannical treatment of Genevieve has indeed taken away his right to claim her as his own possession, the Baron seems merely to have transferred ownership of his sister from his father to himself.\(^{38}\) Willing as he is for his friend to marry his sister without his father’s permission, he nonetheless is keen ‘to give Genevieve to my friend’ (C 502) in much the same manner that George sought to give his sister Sidney to his friend Faulkland in Sheridan’s Memoirs of Sidney Bidulph, or Lavinia’s brother sought to give her to his friend, the Chevalier de Guidrarde, in Dawe’s Younger Sister. The implication behind the concept of ‘giving’ is that one has ownership of the object to be given – in this case, the sister. The Baron’s own freedom from his father has not led him to consider his sister in the same light – as a free being – it has simply transferred ownership of her, and responsibility for her, from his father to himself, thereby granting him the right to transfer it again to his friend. Since the Baron’s choice matches Genevieve’s, this contest of ownership is not problematic. Yet the idea that a sister could be given out of her family of origin and into a conjugal family not only denies her personhood, but, as in the case of Desmond’s Geraldine, can leave her without protection should her husband prove a tyrant.

\(^{38}\) Juliet Flower MacCannell anticipates this shift in authority and its negative implications when she notes that, at the father’s death, he is replaced by the son – the brother – who ‘gets to imitate and mock up relations to all other family members,’ including being ‘his sister’s boss,’ able to command and to control but simultaneously ‘absolv[ing] himself of any obligation’ toward her. Juliet Flower MacCannell, The Regime of the Brother: After the Patriarchy (London: Routledge, 1991), 16-17.
The brother’s escape from parental tyranny means freedom and independence. The sister’s escape – or proposed escape – does not. Rather, it means a shift in ownership of her person from her father, to her brother, and then to her husband. And while the political system of fraternity freed men to be equal, regardless of wealth or social standing, it did not have the same effect for women, who continued to be trapped in familial, domestic servitude, if not also in political servitude.

This point is made even clearer in the conclusion of Celestina’s Revolution narrative. Those who benefit from the ultimate freedom the Revolution brings – ‘the glorious flame of liberty’ (C 517) – are the Baron, who is freed from the tyranny of his father, and Jacquelina, who is freed from the convent to which she had been confined after the Baron’s imprisonment. It is the Frenchman, and the representative of the lower classes, who are set free to live lives of happiness by the political struggle, while the Englishman, and the Frenchwoman, both die. While the Baron is determined to be a part of the movement sweeping his country, to ‘hasten to assist in the glorious business of securing the liberty of France – yes! – the immortal work of defending myriads yet unborn from ever suffering the oppressions, under which I have groaned’ (C 518), there is no freedom, no liberty for the English or for women in this tale.

Stephanie Russo argues that, because the ‘Revolutionary activities in the summer of 1789 have directly led ... to the uncovering of Celestina’s true identity,’ her restoration to her family and her fortune are portrayed as the result of the Revolution. Russo thus concludes that ‘from Smith’s perspective, it is women who stand to benefit most from the overthrow of the French monarch, for the Revolution has secured not merely political freedom but domestic freedom from tyrannical and unjust patriarchal rule.’39 It is true that in Celestina’s story, the events of the Revolution have brought personal benefit to the heroine. In the broader analogy, however, it has been far from beneficial either for her or for women, leaving her an orphan, her mother dead, and her aunt imprisoned in a convent.

In fact, the absence of women’s liberty in the tale of Celestina’s parents is echoed in her own tale, in which she is denied not her liberty but a genuine experience of fraternity. The

question of fraternity lies at the heart of Celestina, an earlier novel than Desmond but one no less informed by its revolutionary context. While little critical attention has been paid to this text, which has been read largely as Smith repeating the old formula of the courtship novel she had so successfully reinvented with her first two novels, Emmeline (1788) and Ethelinde (1789), it could rightfully be included in any study of the revolutionary novels of the 1790s. On the surface a tale of a young woman’s search for identity and a suitable husband, Celestina’s story reflects far more broadly on her historical and cultural context, and particularly on a woman’s place in a family and in society, in a period in which familial, social and political structures were hotly debated. In particular the novel subtly explores a woman’s right to be treated as a person, an independent but valued family member, rather than as a possession, to be passed from one man to another. As Celestina’s own sororal rights are denied, she comes to realise her powerlessness in a world in which her sisterhood is devalued, and to recognise the strength available in non-familial sorority which reaches across class lines.

Like many eighteenth century heroines, Celestina is an orphan, adopted at a young age by Mrs Willoughby from a convent in the south of France. Her parentage was kept a close secret by the nuns who accepted her as an infant, and remains so until the closing pages of the novel. Unlike many orphaned eighteenth-century heroines, however, Celestina’s parentage seems initially to be of no concern. Beloved by her adoptive mother and welcomed into society as her ward, there is no hint of illegitimacy about her, nor any suggestion of a fortune to be claimed. There is, therefore, no reason for anyone to hunt down the circumstances of Celestina’s birth. Who she is only becomes an issue when, after the death of Mrs Willoughby, her son, George, alongside whom Celestina has been raised, wishes to marry her. A relative, who opposes their marriage, indicates to George that Celestina may indeed be his half-sister, raising the spectre of possible incest should they marry. It is for this reason – in order to demonstrate that his beloved is not his blood relative – that his search for Celestina’s parentage commences.

The search occupies three of Celestina’s four volumes, and the uncertainty of its outcome allows many opportunities for a variety of characters to consider what a brother-sister relationship ought to look like, and how siblings should relate to one another. The different ways characters approach these questions provide two quite distinct views on the value and
responsibilities of the fraternal role, views that correspond in striking ways to the conjugal and consanguineal familial axes that we have seen in *Desmond*. Willoughby cannot bear the thought that Celestina might be his sister, and therefore unable to be his wife, viewing the conjugal as the only relationship which he can value. When he first hears that she might be related to him, he resolves ‘to discover the real circumstances’ of the situation, and not see her again until he ‘could learn to consider’ (C 323) her as his sister, if such proved to be the truth. But the idea that he will need to ‘learn’ such a relationship implies that it is not natural. For Willoughby, a conjugal state is clearly most desired; any other relationship will be something which is forced upon him unwillingly. Siblinghood is a relation ‘from which his heart recoiled’ (C 371) and against which ‘his heart absolutely revolted’ (C 396). In fact, he regularly declares that he would rather forget her, ‘determine never to see [her] more’ (C 333), than see her as nothing more than a sister.

It becomes clear as the novel continues that a great part of his inability to learn to regard Celestina as his sister comes from a desire for permanent ownership of her. As a sister, Willoughby may have some say over how she lives her life, and some responsibility for her, but she cannot belong to him more than temporarily. He recognises this most strongly as he contemplates her belonging to another, a situation he cannot bear. ‘Observing the favour’ she has shown to another suitor ‘gave him a cruel foretaste of what he should suffer were he to see her married to him’ (C 396). And while his inability to consider her marrying someone else is couched in terms of passion and devotion befitting a sentimental hero, his denial of any form of relationship with Celestina that does not involve her becoming his is deeply problematic. Willoughby understands that, as her brother, he ought to be promoting her happiness, and that, given ‘the age, family, and circumstances’ of Thorold, her suitor, ‘were all without objection, he ought, if she believed such an alliance would make her happy, not only to rejoice in it but promote it’ (C 396). But while he recognises this, he cannot act upon it:

all he could prevail upon himself to think of was, to make for Celestina some more ample provision if he was once convinced of their relationship, and to wish her happy: for to see her happy, when another was to be the object of her love, he found would be to him the cruelest punishment that Fate could inflict (C 396).
Recognition of a fraternal relationship between them, which would enable Celestina to marry another, would not for Willoughby involve rejoicing in his sister’s happiness. Rather, it would extend only as far as his finances would allow: he will grant her a ‘more ample provision,’ but will not suffer the ‘cruellest punishment’ of maintaining any sort of personal relationship with her.

It is a different sort of denial of brotherhood from that which Geraldine experienced from her brother, Waverly, who simply forgets his sister after her marriage. But at the heart of each denial lies the same conviction that one’s sister is property, rather than a free agent, and property that must belong to someone. For Waverly, Geraldine’s marriage means she no longer belongs to his family, and therefore no notice of her is required. For Willoughby, the idea of Celestina’s belonging to another leads to the same desire for forgetfulness – and the same experience for Celestina of neglect by her supposed brother.

Celestina notices and regrets the neglect Willoughby shows towards her after the rumour of their siblinghood reaches him. She, however, can see the advantages of having a brother, and is eager to embrace a consanguineal relationship with him. While she recognises that his inability to marry her will probably mean that he will marry another, she resolves to act in a way which she believes will constitute his happiness, recollecting that, even if she cannot marry him, she can still enjoy his company ‘as his sister and his friend’ (C 344). And while she can see a role for herself in promoting his happiness as a sister, she hopes to receive the benefits of a brother from him: ‘protection and pity’ (C 383), ‘fraternal affection’ (C 427), and an ownership of ‘that connection by blood’ (C 427) which she believes he must have found evidence for. As a young woman without family or fortune, she is struck by his desertion of her, behaviour which strikes her as ‘strange’ and ‘unnatural’ not only for him, but particularly for a brother. Her expectation of brotherly behaviour is shared by other characters in the novel, who declare that he ought to ‘own [her] as his sister, and become [her] protector as relation’ (C 391) rather than leaving her to depend on others.

Expecting, as her friends do, that she will receive protection, kindness, and guidance – not to mention financial support – from her newly-discovered brother, Celestina instead finds that Willoughby fails her. The rumour of her parentage does not provide her with brotherly support. It merely takes away the possibility of her marrying Willoughby, and with it the
possibility of achieving social and financial security, as well as finding happiness. Recognising the value of consanguinity and hoping that her ‘brother’ will do the same, Celestina instead discovers that while she could be Willoughby’s greatest desire as a potential wife, as a sister she is rejected and neglected. His focus on the importance of the conjugal has eliminated his ability to see value in the consanguineal. If he cannot own Celestina, he is unwilling to have any other form of relationship with her. If he cannot be her husband, then he will be nothing to her.

Willoughby, it appears, considers Celestina more as a commodity, to be ‘consigned, like a bale of merchandise’ (C 320) to an appropriate suitor. She, however, as William Brewer notes, conceives of herself as an independent moral agent who ‘does not mindlessly conform to traditional or fashionable morality’ or succumb to the ‘unjust political, legal, and economic pressures’ that lead other characters to act immorally or improperly. 40 While the novel is written as third-person narrative, featuring an omniscient narrator who represents the internal mental states of not only the heroine, but also the hero and a number of other less important characters, it nonetheless privileges Celestina’s thoughts and feelings, forcing the reader into an emotional connection with the heroine. This is particularly true of her uncertainty regarding Willoughby’s actions. On the eve of their wedding, Willoughby is called away, and warned that Celestina may be his sister. Deciding that he cannot bear to see her again until he knows the truth or falsehood of the assertion, he immediately leaves on his quest for knowledge of her parentage, neither saying farewell nor explaining his actions. Celestina spends the whole of volume two and half of volume three in ‘painful suspense,’ experiencing ‘vague but terrible apprehensions’ (C 153) that are heightened by the ‘mystery which surrounded the whole affair’ (C 161). The reader, likewise, is left to ‘wear[y] herself with conjectures’ (C 161) as to the nature of the situation; it is not until Willoughby explains his actions in a letter to Celestina that we too understand them, and still longer until we are once more allowed into his consciousness to fully understand his reasons for the concealment and his feelings of distress.

By the time his thoughts and feelings are once more privileged by the narrator, the reader has become accustomed to viewing Celestina’s as the governing consciousness of the novel,

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40 Brewer, ‘Charlotte Smith’s Celestina,’ 233.
and has come to sympathise with her sufferings and value her opinions. While we are granted insight into the minds of a number of characters, the intense focus on Celestina’s thoughts and feelings for almost half the novel ensures that it is her voice that we most identify with and her predicament for which we feel the most. Willoughby’s sufferings are depicted, but do not elicit the same level of compassion; it is the heroine with whom the reader associates most closely.

Unlike the heroines of the previous chapter, Celestina does not write her own story; despite the close focus on her consciousness, and a very sympathetic narrator, she does not ultimately control the telling of her tale. She is, nonetheless, a writer, and regularly expresses her thoughts and emotions through spontaneously composed poetry. The inclusion of poetry in novels of the 1790s was not uncommon; Smith’s characters often wrote poetry, as did those of Ann Radcliffe, Matthew Lewis and Mary Robinson.41 Celestina is Smith’s first novel to grant the writing of poetry solely to the heroine; in her first novel, Emmeline, it is the hero and a secondary character, Lady Adelina, who are poets, and in her second, Ethelinde, poetry is entirely absent.42 To grant the writing of poetry solely to Celestina, then, is a significant way in which Smith allows her heroine to express her own thoughts and feelings in her own words and at moments of her own choosing. That her poems are an expression of her self and her inner being is recognised by other characters, notably by her impertinent suitor, Montague Thorold, who borrows a copy of an early poem and refuses to return it, keeping it ‘under his waistcoat’ (C 196) until she consents to give him ‘some yet dearer memorial to remain there’ (C 197). Thorold is being characteristically over-romantic, but his insistence that what Celestina refers to as ‘trifling’ lines, ‘hastily written’ (C 191) are in fact an important expression of her innermost being is affirmed by the narrative, which regularly privileges Celestina’s poetic outbursts.

Celestina uses poetry both to express her emotions, largely her grief and confusion at Willoughby’s behaviour, and to try to make sense of those emotions and of her situation, in much the same way the heroines of the previous chapter used letters. Of the six poems recorded, almost all are about her sense of desolation and her grief at the loss of her love,

42 Fletcher, Introduction to Celestina, 23.
and Fletcher suggests that she, like Smith, uses her writing ‘in an attempt to make sense of the world,’ and particularly of Willoughby’s inexplicable behaviour.\(^{43}\) The inclusion of Celestina’s five sonnets in Smith’s sixth edition of *Elegiac Sonnets* suggests moreover that their purpose in *Celestina* is similar to Smith’s broader purpose for her poetry. Stuart Curran, reflecting on the *Elegiac Sonnets*, comments on their tendency to represent women’s struggles against a ‘male system’ which ‘threatens the autonomy of the self’ in much the same way that Celestina’s sense of self is both threatened and strengthened by her encounters with the expectations of those around her and particularly by the treatment she receives from Willoughby.\(^{44}\) Like so many earlier heroines, her identity and autonomy is developed in response to the actions of a brother; in this case the biological connection is questioned and proven false, but the relationship functions in much the same way. Celestina’s poetry, written in response to the absence of her ‘brother,’ allows her to explore her ‘mental states and evolving self-conception,’ as Brewer notes.\(^{45}\) Jacqueline Labbe, examining Smith’s poetry more generally, suggests that she ‘recognises that poetry can be used to map aspects of the self,’ a statement which is just as true of Celestina’s poems as it is of Smith’s.\(^{46}\) Her poetry thus grants her an opportunity, if not to tell her story, at least to express her thoughts and emotions in her own words and her own style, granting her a narrative autonomy more limited but nonetheless comparable to the heroines of the previous chapter. As she writes, she develops a sense of self, a subjectivity, which she can express through her poetry even at her most isolated and lonely moments.

Isolation is not, however, Celestina’s primary experience. While she fails to find support in her ‘brother,’ she discovers it in the company of other young women. It is in the friendship of two young women from very different social strata who support Celestina and give her the chance to support and befriend them that she finds the sort of affectionate relationship she sought with Willoughby. Jessy, a farmer’s daughter who has moved to London to work as a servant, and Sophy, a young mother with a spendthrift husband, provide for Celestina the family she lacks. Loraine Fletcher argues that this is a deliberately radical political move,

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\(^{45}\) Brewer, ‘Charlotte Smith’s *Celestina*,’ 238.

designed to reflect the pledge of fraternity made by the French National Assembly.\textsuperscript{47} Yet rather than being a representation of the benefits of fraternity, as Fletcher reads it, it is an indication of women’s exclusion from that pledge, given that this community only arises after Celestina has been cast off as a sister, cast out of an experience of brother-sister fraternity.

Women in Paris in the early years of the Revolution recognised that they were not being advantaged by the new social structure. While they could see that men were being freed from unjust authority, women were still suffering injustice and confinement. One woman argued in 1791, ‘would you weight down with chains the hands that have helped you with so much ardour to raise that altar of the Fatherland? Will you make slaves those who have contributed with zeal to making you free?’\textsuperscript{48} Olympe de Gouges made similar claims in her *Declaration of the Rights of Woman* (1791) when she argued that ‘enslaved man has multiplied his strength and needs recourse to yours to break his chains. Having become free, he has become unjust to his companion. Oh women! Women! When will you cease to be blind? What advantage have you received from the Revolution? A more pronounced scorn, a more marked disdain.’\textsuperscript{49} Women, these authors argue, having contributed in significant ways to freeing France from the bonds of the *ancien régime*, have failed to benefit from the advance of liberty and equality that the Revolution has brought. Instead, while men have been freed, women have continued to be enslaved. Celestina was not welcomed as a sister; Josephine was not freed from her conjugal bondage.

Written in 1791, *Celestina* anticipates later historical developments. Women in France were not officially denied citizenship until 1793, and the possibility of revolution in England with its potential political and social changes was still very much feared or hoped for in the early stages of the Revolution in France. Yet *Celestina*, in the stories of its heroine and her mother, holds out little hope for women from fraternity. As a familial structure as well as a social structure, it is not strong enough to free them from the multiple ties that bind them – duty to fathers, husbands, brothers, children, and society.

\textsuperscript{47} Fletcher, *Introduction to Celestina*, 14.


Nor is this merely a comment made by Smith regarding what she perceived of the new French society and how it treated women. The denial of citizenship for women was already entrenched in the ideology behind the Revolution, over a century before it was enacted. Carole Pateman has argued persuasively that the works of the social contract theorists destroyed patriarchalism, but failed even to attack patriarchy:

Patriarchalism has two dimensions: the paternal (father/son) and the masculine (husband/wife). Political theorists can represent the outcome of the theoretical battle as a victory for contract theory because they are silent about the sexual or conjugal aspect of patriarchy, which appears as non-political or natural and so of no theoretical consequence. ... The contract theorists rejected paternal right, but they absorbed and simultaneously transformed conjugal, masculine patriarchal right.\(^{50}\)

This framework, when applied to French society in the years following the Revolution, is very helpful in explaining the position of women in the new society. The Revolution did not defeat male rule; it defeated the rule of the father. But neither the contract theorists nor the revolutionaries had any intention of dismantling the gendered lines of authority of their society. While the father was displaced as an authority figure, the husband was not. The revolutionaries defeated patriarchalism, but conjugal authority remained firmly in place.

Significantly, the retention of conjugal authority was represented not in terms of a political act – as was the defeat of the king and the introduction of a fraternal structuring of society – but as a natural order. Pateman continues, ‘both sides agreed, first, that women (wives), unlike sons, were born and remained naturally subject to men (husbands); and second, that the right of men over women was \textit{not political}.’\(^{51}\) Recognising that ‘the new doctrine of natural freedom and equality had subversive implications for \textit{all} relationships of power and subordination,’ implications which thinking women in Paris seized upon in their arguments for female citizenship, these subversive ideas were quickly dismissed as irrelevant. Men could be freed from the authority of the father-figure because such a movement towards liberty was political. Women, on the other hand, were naturally subservient. No political movement was necessary to free them, because their bonds were not perceived as political in the first place. By the end of 1793, this was being firmly acted upon in Paris. Women were


\(^{51}\) Pateman, \textit{Disorder of Women}, 39, italics in original.
no longer allowed to participate in political clubs, a move which Hunt argues was designed ‘to re-establish the “natural order” and prevent the emancipation of women from their familial identity.’\textsuperscript{52} Instead, a difference was established between what constituted ‘virtuous’ behaviour for men and women: ‘Male virtue meant participation in the public world of politics; female virtue meant withdrawal into the private world of the family. ... The republican ideal of virtue was based on a notion of fraternity between men in which women were relegated to the realm of domesticity.’\textsuperscript{53} The most important role of female revolutionaries was as mothers, raising the next generation of patriots and republicans.\textsuperscript{54}

When Willoughby denies Celestina her sisterhood, then, seeing value only in a conjugal relationship, his decision resonates with a desire to keep her in her domestic place, rather than granting her a political identity of her own, and the independence which would go with a place in a fraternal society. This is the problem for Josephine, too, for while she can be freed by her brother in ways that echo the political liberties of fraternity, she cannot be so easily freed from her conjugal bonds, because they are not viewed as political bonds to be broken. This offers a way around the central contradiction of Desmond, in which it seems to uphold the revolution and rebellion against the political tyranny of the ancien régime, but does not encourage Geraldine’s rebellion against and escape from her tyrannical husband.\textsuperscript{55}

The novel indicates in clear ways that these types of authority, both of which hold sway over women’s lives, are different in nature and therefore cannot be overcome in a similar manner. Geraldine’s patience, and her dedication to doing what she perceives to be her duty by her husband, reflect her understanding of her true position as a woman in the world. Whatever her political situation might be, her domestic situation cannot be easily changed.

\textsuperscript{52} Hunt, \textit{Family Romance}, 119.
\textsuperscript{53} Hunt, \textit{Family Romance}, 121-22.
\textsuperscript{54} Hunt, \textit{Family Romance}, 122.
\textsuperscript{55} A number of scholars have noticed this seeming contradiction, offering a variety of different explanations. See for example, Eleanor Wikborg, ‘Political Discourse versus Sentimental Romance: Ideology and Genre in Charlotte Smith’s Desmond,’ \textit{English Studies} 6 (1997): 522-31; Ford, ‘No Business with Politics,’ no pagination.
**Celestina, Desmond, and the idea of chivalry**

The logic of the exclusion of women from fraternity, and the denial of citizenship to women, was based on the argument from nature. Women, it was claimed, are naturally subservient, because their bodies are naturally different from men’s – dominated by passion rather than reason, and therefore unable to make the sorts of rational decisions required by citizens for the good of the state. This focus on women’s physical bodies also relates to a second criticism of Burke that Smith makes in these novels: that of women’s susceptibility to sexual violence, and how a society should respond to that threat. Burke argues that the attack on Marie Antoinette, which he describes in terms of sexual violence, demonstrates that ‘the age of chivalry is gone.’

It was this, which, without confounding ranks, had produced a noble equality, and handed it down through all the gradations of social life. It was this opinion which mitigated kings into companions, and raised private men to be fellows with kings. Without force or opposition, it subdued the fierceness of pride and power; it obliged sovereigns to submit to the soft collar of social esteem, compelled stern authority to submit to elegance, and gave a dominating vanquisher of laws to be subdued by manners.

Burke’s lament is that the same gallants who, less than two decades earlier, would have leapt to their swords to avenge any wrong done their queen, took no regard for her rank or her sex when they attacked and arrested her ‘on the morning of the 6th of October, 1789.’ She is taken from her bed, where she was sleeping when a ‘band of cruel ruffians and assassins, reeking with [her guard’s] blood, rushed into the chamber of the queen, and pierced with a hundred strokes of bayonets and poniards the bed, from whence this persecuted woman had but just time to fly almost naked, and, through ways unknown to the murderers, had escaped to seek refuge at the feet of a king and husband.’ The image of a woman attacked in her bed and fleeing ‘almost naked’ to her husband clearly has sexual overtones. It is a picture of ‘woman as seen in the chivalric tradition,’ Marilyn Butler argues, ‘calling upon men for protection.’ The revolutionaries, Burke claims, have no respect for sex and rank, and far from being civilised reformers of their society, are instead preying on

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56 Burke, *Reflections*, 64.
58 Burke, *Reflections*, 60.
those whose nature demands respect and protection. ‘As Burke sees it,’ argues Essaka Joshua,

the principled man rescues the lady because he wishes to uphold tradition and social stability. His description in Reflections of the pursuit of Marie Antoinette by revolutionaries is made so shocking because it reveals that in France “the age of chivalry has gone” and that principle has gone with it.60

Little wonder that, with examples such as these at hand, the English in Desmond conceive of revolutionary France as a place filled with violence and bloodshed.

The trope of sexual violence or at least sexual threat against women features in both Celestina and Desmond. Burke’s argument, using the example of Marie Antoinette, is that sexual violence or sexual threats are the result of an abandonment of an old regime, showing the lack of respect inherent in the new system. But in Smith’s novels, that violence comes not from the characters most closely associated with new political structures, but those who are connected to old systems of privilege and power.

The first example of this comes in the story of Celestina’s parents. Having fled his father’s house and authority some years before, the Baron returns to visit his sister upon hearing that she is sexually threatened by the priest who tends to her father. While her father is unaware of such a threat, it is too clear for Genevieve to ignore. What is significant, though, is that the threat comes not from an outsider or a rebel, but from inside her father’s house, in the shape of a religious authority. The church authorities of France were dismantled and reformed in an early stage of the Revolution, and churchmen were seen as part of the system of the ancien régime which had reigned so despotically over the common people. But while Genevieve’s adversary is a man fully immersed in the power structures of the old system, her rescuers are not. Rather, it is her brother who seeks to rescue her from her persecutor – the same son who has rebelled against his father and escaped from his father’s house and authority. It is a revolutionary, and a rebel, who ensures the safety of this woman, rather than a member of the old systems and their authorities. In this novel, it is the people who wish to uphold tradition and social stability who are threatening to women – the polar opposite of Burke’s view with regards to the attack on Marie Antoinette.

With this in mind, it is worth considering the sexual violence in *Desmond*, and in particular the number of duels that are fought or contemplated as a way of salvaging the honour of disgraced young women. A duel was symbolic of a chivalric way of life, considered to be a way in which an honourable man could remove the disgrace of an otherwise powerless woman and punish the man who had wronged her. Essaka Joshua claims that Desmond’s actions towards Geraldine, protecting her when she is attacked in France, reclaims chivalry for the radical cause, demonstrating that chivalry is not dead (as Burke had claimed) but is being preserved by the revolutionaries. While Desmond’s actions in this instance stand alone in the novel, the three contemplated duels (only one of which is fought) clearly demonstrate a changing conception of chivalry and the nature of women in the 1790s.

The most significant point of comparison between the three duels is that all three involve a brother contemplating fighting for the honour of his sister. Each brother considers his sister’s honour to have been violated, and proposes to challenge the man who has violated it to a duel. The only one who actually does so is the Chevalier de St Eloy, who, when Desmond convinces Waverly to break off a foolish engagement with the Chevalier’s sister, challenges Desmond to a duel, badly wounding him in the process. While Desmond’s wound is regretted by Waverly’s sisters, no one considers that the Chevalier has acted improperly – it is only reasonable that he should take offence at his sister’s mistreatment and seek reparation from the man who has wronged her. By contrast, both Geraldine and Josephine are seen to have been compromised by Desmond. Having visited Geraldine in her isolation and escorted her to Bath when she was in danger, Desmond is suspected of a deeper intrigue when a young man and a young woman are seen again in the same countryside, where she is delivered of a child. Having been misinformed that these people were again Desmond and Geraldine, Waverly considers whether he should ‘apply to [Desmond] for immediate satisfaction’ (*D* 354). Without stopping to discover the truth of the rumour, without enquiring of his sister whether she has recently borne a child, and without considering how this will influence her reputation and that of the family, Waverly jumps to the most extreme and clichéd of responses. And yet Fanny is right in concluding that nothing will come of it, as is usual with her brother’s plans. Having contemplated such a

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61 Joshua, ‘Romance and the Man of Principle,’ 305.
step, Waverly soon seems to forget all about it, leaving his sister’s honour – violated or otherwise – unavenged.

It is not until the final letters of the novel that we discover that the man and woman who have been mistaken for Desmond and Geraldine are in fact Montfleuri and Josephine, and that the baby Josephine has borne is Desmond’s. Montfleuri is thus in quite a different position from either the Chevalier or Waverly. Having definite proof of his sister’s ill-treatment and knowing precisely who is the man responsible, he chooses not to challenge Desmond. Rather, taking into account what is best for his sister, and not blaming, condemning, or casting her off for her indiscretion, he willingly takes his part of the blame – for encouraging her attachment in the first place – and does what he can both to save her reputation and to support the child. Writing to Desmond some time after the fact, he states, ‘I differ so much from all the rest of the world in such circumstances, that, I think, I have done much better than if I had killed my friend, or been killed myself, because he was amiable, and my sister was a woman’ (D 372). Choosing to act with compassion and rationality, and also choosing to see his sister as in some respects a free agent, he is willing to support her even in her bad choices. This response of his provides some rationale for the inclusion of an affair between Desmond and Josephine which many critics have complained sits oddly in the text and with the hero’s character. If seen as a test of a brother’s response to his sister’s situation, rather than seen merely as illuminating Desmond’s own character, it fits with the overall message of the novel – that even if not perfect, this French brother has a greater understanding of fraternity than does his English counterpart, one which he is willing to extend to his sisters.

More significantly, though, what this third contemplated (and rejected) duel proves is that the sort of chivalric code which demands satisfaction is not only out of place in a brother-sister relationship, but that it is also demeaning towards the woman involved. The code of chivalry is not dead; the brothers who have rejected the authority of the father are well able to maintain chivalric behaviour in support of their sisters. Those who genuinely threaten the women sexually are, in fact, their husbands, rather than those against whom the duels are threatened. It is the members of the old regime who are violent towards women, and those

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62 Many of the earliest reviews of Desmond took issue with this element of the plot. See for example the summaries provided in Bowstead, ‘Charlotte Smith’s Desmond,’ 247-248.
who support the new who are acting as their protectors, in a direct contradiction of Burke. But Montfleuri’s refusal to contemplate a duel on his sister’s behalf indicates a different sort of attitude towards women. It demonstrates a level of respect for his sister as a person able to make her own decisions and act upon her own desires, without his approval or permission. His decision not to fight Desmond for the affair with Josephine is at her request. The absence of a chivalric response here, then, indicates a greater level of respect for women, and for sisters in particular, than the sort of behaviour Burke would advocate. Unlike Willoughby, who can only perceive Celestina through a chivalric lens as a woman to be possessed and protected, Montfleuri is willing both to protect his sister and to allow her independence of thought, emotion and action. If chivalry is in fact dead, then it is a boon to women, rather than a disadvantage, for in its absence they might be treated as people, rather than as property, as subjects rather than as objects, and be allowed responsibility for their fates, rather than being forced to rely on the strength of those men who would take those fates upon themselves.

Montfleuri’s decision against fighting a duel on his sister’s behalf then fits with what we have already seen of his character. Enlightened by the Revolution to see injustice and oppression, enabled by his inheritance to change the situations of others, and affectionate towards his family, he allows his sister to have agency in matters of her own personal relationships. This is not, as Desmond believes, a result of his lax French principles, but an understanding of the brother-sister relationship – and of fraternity more generally – which allows freedom and equality for the other. While Josephine is still under the power of her husband at the novel’s conclusion, her brother’s willingness to help and support her, and to allow her responsibility and independence, demonstrates the positive outcomes that a social system of fraternity might have, if women are indeed welcomed into it.

For Geraldine, no such system is in sight. With her husband dead, her future is in Desmond’s hands. And while she will achieve no independence, going from one man’s wife to another’s, there is some hope in the novel’s conclusion that her second marriage will bring her more happiness than her first. Katherine Binhammer argues that, while Geraldine ends the novel just as much under male authority as she begins it, there is hope for a ‘revolutionary domesticity’ here as she marries not a tyrant but a hopefully ‘benevolent dictator’ in Desmond. The ‘gender boundaries in the family remain fixed and stable’, but the
revolutionary context allows this novel to project a home that is ‘more hospitable to women.’ Both Josephine and Geraldine, under the protection of enlightened, wealthy, affectionate men, have at least a chance to experience happiness, even if that happiness is not the result of the sort of liberty the revolutionary discourse might have promised to some women.

What Geraldine has gained, however, is an increased subjectivity. Just as Betsy Thoughtless developed a sense of herself as an ethical subject through reflection on her subjection to her brothers, Geraldine has done so through considering her subjection to her husband, a consideration inspired by her experiences in France. As Leanne Maunu suggests, ‘Geraldine – she who was formerly so silent and submissive – finds her own voice through and because of the French Revolution.’ Maunu continues:

Smith uses the idea of France to help her character find a voice. The Revolutionary cause provides Geraldine with the opportunity to observe impartially her own position within British society and to recognise her own lack of rights. The idea of France allows her to recognise her own subservient position as a British woman, as little more than a slave to her supposedly enlightened British husband.

From accepting her position, she comes to question it, just as she comes to question the reports she has heard about the state of affairs in France. Her marriage to Desmond, therefore, will be different from her marriage to Verney not only because he is a ‘more benevolent’ man. Her changed understanding of herself and of her position in society will affect her experience of marriage, empowering her to challenge the assumptions she has learned from her mother and her society about a wife’s duty and a mother’s responsibility. Thus while she is granted only a ‘conventional’ liberation – ‘the freedom and financial security’ of a widow and then hopefully a happier experience as a wife – Geraldine’s development demonstrates the same sort of liberation experienced by Betsy, liberation from being an object controlled by others, to having a sense of oneself as an ethical subject, able to make one’s own judgements and decisions.

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64 Leanne Maunu, Women Writing the Nation: National Identity, Female Community, and the British-French Connection, 1770-1820 (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2007), 111, italics in original
65 Maunu, Women Writing the Nation, 113.
66 Garnai, Revolutionary Imaginings, 19.
Conclusion

While both *Celestina* and *Desmond* have conventional, sentimental endings, with a resolution of financial and social conflicts, and a series of happy marriages, the situations in which the women in the two novels find themselves throughout their narratives gives us pause before declaring the conclusions of these novels complete resolutions. Celestina, as a wife, will have a safe and secure future, and will continue to find joy in her sororal connections that cross class boundaries. Josephine, it is suggested, will soon find herself freed from her conjugal bonds, and will be free to marry a man of her choice. In the meantime she has a secure home with her brother. And Geraldine is set to marry Desmond, a man who has proven his worth by acting towards her as a brother ought to have done, protecting her and supporting her emotionally and financially, but with chastity and respect. For all three heroines, the future looks more positive than the past.

But in many ways, the issues contained in the novels have not been resolved. The structures of patriarchy in England remain untouched. Brothers will continue to inherit, leaving sisters in positions of financial uncertainty; they will continue likewise to benefit from the inherited systems of law and governance so praised by Burke, while their sisters will remain in positions of ‘natural’ subservience, not sharing in the political rights of their brothers. Sisters will still be subject to distress on account of their sex, whether in the form of sexual attack, as Burke imagined for Marie Antoinette and as Genevieve experienced at her husband’s hands, or in the more subtle forms of the suppression of women to both husbands and, in many cases, brothers, on the basis of sex. In France, too, the situation for sisters barely improved in the years following the publication of these novels. While the Revolution freed some sisters from their bondage to the church, and did eventually grant them equal rights to divorce, it never granted them full, equal membership in the fraternity of citizens. Their brothers benefited from fraternity; despite having contributed to the progress of the Revolution, women found themselves excluded from its benefits.

In both *Celestina* and *Desmond*, the problems faced by women in political society as a result of their sex are played out through their relationships with men, both brothers and husbands. Josephine’s life, protected by a generous and forward-thinking brother, is the most certain and stable of the three; Celestina’s uncertainty regarding her status as a sister,
and Genevieve’s rejection by her brother, lead both heroines into positions of homelessness, financial insecurity, and dependence on others less connected to them. The difference a brother could make to their experience of life, regardless of their marital situation, is clear. But even with a kind and involved brother, the problems these women face cannot easily be solved. All three women remain tied by their conjugal bonds, and no great social change is in sight for English society. Amy Garnai’s comments on Desmond’s conclusion are applicable to both novels: ‘a less contrived freedom for women from the exigencies of financial duress, and from the subjugation of patriarchy itself, remains elusively outside the purview of the narrative.’

Celestina’s happy ending is dependent on an unlikely meeting between Willoughby and her uncle; Josephine’s and Geraldine’s both rely on their husbands conveniently dying. Neither novel provides a broader liberation for women or a more dependable form of release from bad marriages, failing families or repressive political regimes.

Smith’s decision to parallel the domestic lives of her heroines with the early events of the French Revolution nonetheless evokes hope for women’s experience. In Montfleuri, she provides an example of how a fraternal figure could improve the lives of his sisters, should he choose to do so; in the deaths of both Josephine and Geraldine’s husbands, and their consequent ability to marry men of their own choosing, she suggests that systems of governance can be changed, and that authority figures can be exchanged, given certain circumstances. But more importantly, the women themselves have come to better understand their situations through their experiences with their brothers, and are thus better able to make good choices regarding their futures. Just as Smith has Geraldine understand her position as a subject wife through an experience of Revolutionary France, so too these novels challenge women, both characters in the novels and female readers, to undergo ‘a revolution in how they understand their own position as British women.’ The Revolution pointed out the inherent instability of all social structures. Living in the aftermath of such a change, women could begin to think about other structures that dominated their lives as equally changeable, and how discussions regarding the rights of men could also lead to questions about the rights of woman.

67 Garnai, Revolutionary Imaginings, 19.
68 Maunu, Women Writing the Nation, 112.
Smith, however, was too thoughtful a writer, and too experienced a woman, to believe that there could be easy solutions to women’s situation. Recognising the differences between men’s oppression and women’s, and the vast difference between men’s political liberty and women’s domestic bondage, Smith chose not to press for a women’s rebellion to echo the French. Instead, placing her novels in a revolutionary context enabled her to encourage her readers to glimpse ‘events that may one day free women’ from their bonds – conjugal, familial and political – without actually indicating what those events may look like, or when they might happen.\textsuperscript{69}

\textsuperscript{69} Wikborg, ‘Political Discourse versus Sentimental Romance,’ 531.
Chapter 4
Fraternal Difficulties:
Frances Burney and *Camilla* (1796)

*Camilla*, Frances Burney’s third novel, like *Celestina and Desmond*, was conceived, written and published during the French Revolution. In a decade in which writers like Smith demonstrated the ease with which the novel could display political ideas, and politicians, both French and British, used the family increasingly as a political metaphor, Burney chose to write a novel that deals with a family but seems to take no interest in the major political and national debates of its moment. She was eager to convince readers this was the case, assuring the Princess Sophia that in her work ‘Politics were, all ways, left out,’ being ‘not a feminine subject for discussion.’¹ Many modern scholars have been guided by this sentiment. A recent collection of essays, *The French Revolution and the British Novel in the Romantic Period*, contains a chapter on Burney that examines *Evelina* (1778) and *Cecilia* (1782), both written long before the Revolution, and *The Wanderer* (1814), published long after, but leaves out *Camilla*, Burney’s only novel written during the Revolution, with no explanation for the omission.² Rather than being understood as engaged with its political milieu, *Camilla* is rarely considered suitable for inclusion in discussions of the politics that so defined the novels of the Revolutionary decade.³

Yet *Camilla* raises expectations that it will deal with political matters. Its epic form, its invocation of national symbols, its focus on a family rather than a heroine, and its occasional suggestion that Camilla’s actions have national significance, should all lead the reader to

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³ There are, of course, exceptions to any general statement. Johnson’s *Equivocal Beings*, for example, discusses *Camilla* in light of the crisis of authority of the 1790s.
question the apolitical readings most often assigned to this novel. It is, however, easy to see why so many scholars overlook these political signposts, for *Camilla* seems to go out of its way to depoliticise itself. Claudia Johnson describes it as having a ‘studied reticence about matters political’⁴ and most critics view this novel as merely a social commentary rather than a text with a political agenda. Readings that focus on gender and the domestic ideal are common, but are rarely connected to the time in which *Camilla* was written; in fact, most readings treat this novel as an almost a-temporal work, which could have been written at any point in the late eighteenth century.⁵

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⁴ Johnson, *Equivocal Beings*, 143.

In this, *Camilla* is treated differently from Burney’s three other novels. Studies have drawn comparisons between *Evelina* and *Cecilia* and the American War of Independence, and have examined the connections between *The Wanderer* and the French Revolution. It has become common to recognise Burney’s interest in politics, particularly revolutionary politics, but to assume that in *Camilla* she does not choose to concern herself with such matters. Certainly Burney has no obligation to conform to our expectations, nor to be consistently interested in the same aspects of life, but it is strange that such a distinction between *Camilla* and her other three novels should so regularly go unnoticed and unchallenged. If the other three are political, why is *Camilla* so determined not to be? Why, when so many novels of the 1790s were deliberately and consciously concerned with questions of nation and state, is *Camilla* so uninterested in those same questions?

In this chapter I will suggest that the absence of politics in *Camilla* is in fact a reflection of the politics of the 1790s, one which is hinted at in Burney’s own defence to Princess Sophia. In suggesting that politics is an ‘unfeminine’ subject, Burney is participating in the same investigation of gender and politics that Charlotte Smith undertook in her early Revolutionary novels. Writing in 1791 and 1792, Smith suspected that women would not be granted the full freedom and equality of fraternity. By 1794, the year Burney began writing *Camilla*, Smith was proven correct. The women of France found themselves bound by their gender to the domestic sphere and excluded from the full rights and responsibilities of citizenship. *Camilla* re-enacts this development, for just as the Frenchwomen had their expectations of a greater freedom and equality raised by the changes in their state, only to discover that their gender left them ineligible to experience its benefits, so too *Camilla* raises our expectations of a political discussion only to bury that discussion under the burden of gender inequality. Burney’s novel suggests that the women of England are so constricted by the expectations of gender that no political change will affect their state until

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Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 64-94. While a number of these studies have been useful to the development of my own argument, the tendency of a large number of studies to place *Camilla* in a broader social or cultural context without considering its revolutionary circumstances strikes me as odd.

the boundaries of the gendered spheres and the expectations of domesticity are somehow relieved. Politics may change, nations may change, structures of authority may change, but little will change for women unless a woman’s experience in the family is changed first. And, as other female novelists had done before her, Burney chose to represent the difference that gender makes for a woman’s experience through the relationship between Camilla and her brother, Lionel.

I will begin this chapter by demonstrating how Camilla establishes an expectation of political engagement, only to fail to deliver any straightforward comment about either the French political situation or English political and social structures. In particular, I will examine how the character of Camilla’s brother, Lionel, not as a type of French Revolutionary but rather as a mimicry of the Vice figure from the medieval morality plays. Viewing Lionel as a Vice allows for a reading of gender in this novel in which the brother’s and the sister’s faults, deceptions, and use of comedy all demonstrate the different life experiences and expectations of men and women. Whatever similarities there may be between the two siblings, it is clear from the novel’s presentation of the consequences of their actions that gender makes them more dissimilar than alike, despite their shared background.

Yet Camilla is not interested merely in demonstrating these differences; it also investigates the particular condition of being born a woman and thus relegated to the domestic sphere. Through a discussion of domesticity in this novel, and particularly of the challenges to domesticity that are presented by Lionel, I will suggest that while all the characters in Camilla believe the domestic sphere to be a place of safety, security and blessing for women, it is in fact a claustrophobic and confining place that causes problems it cannot solve, and raises challenges it cannot overcome. Ultimately, the picture of women’s lives in Camilla, despite the happy ending, is one of disappointment and dissatisfaction, not unlike the experience many readers have had of the novel itself.
Burney was reluctant to refer to *Camilla* as a novel. Unlike *Evelina*, in the preface to which she labels herself a ‘Novelist’ and likens herself to Richardson, Fielding and Smollet, Burney never referred to *Camilla* as a ‘novel.’ Rather, she called it a ‘work,’ even a ‘grand work,’ in the ‘prose epic Style.’ While this label echoes Fielding’s description of his *Joseph Andrews* as a ‘comic Epic-Poem in Prose,’ such a comparison is unlikely to have been Burney’s intention. There is little in common between Fielding’s witty, short and often improper response to Richardson’s *Pamela*, and Burney’s *Camilla*, which has comic moments but is on the whole drudgingly serious, moralistic, and, above all, long. Furthermore, Burney’s description of what she believes constitutes this book written in ‘prose epic Style’ differentiates it considerably from Fielding’s novel. She claims that, rather than being a work focusing on the romantic experiences of a young woman, *Camilla* consists of ‘sketches of Characters & morals, put in action,’ hardly an apt description of Fielding’s work. Sara K. Austin suggests that Burney was ‘quite interested in the formal qualities of the prose epic’ which she describes as ‘a unified fiction of large scope.’ Its unity, Austin argues, is provided by its focus on a single family, and by Camilla’s single-minded devotion to her family and to her suitor, Edgar.

Austin, however, overlooks the political implications of the epic form, a form which Bernard Schweizer, in the introduction to the edited collection *Approaches to the Anglo and American Female Epic*, describes as extolling ‘the heroic deeds of illustrious men in warfare and nation-founding while validating the dominant moral, religious, and cultural values of the author’s society.’ Elizabeth Kraft, in her essay on *Camilla* in this collection, suggests

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8 Quoted in Edward and Lillian Bloom, introduction to *Camilla; or A Picture of Youth*, by Frances Burney (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972, reissued 2009), xiv.
10 Quoted in Bloom, introduction to *Camilla*, xiv.
11 Austin, ‘All Wove into One,’ 277.
12 Austin, ‘All Wove into One,’ 287.
that this is the type of epic Burney is writing, one which deals with the ‘epic aims’ of ‘the founding of nation,’ ‘the transfer of empire from one location to another’ and ‘the passing of culture from one generation to succeeding generations.’

She notes that the names of both Camilla and her sister, Lavinia, connect Burney’s novel with Virgil’s *Aeneid*, his account of the founding of Rome and of the Roman Empire. The choice of Virgilian names increases the expectation that this novel will deal with political matters, for, as David Quint has argued, it was Virgil’s work which ‘decisively transformed epic for posterity into... a genre that was overtly political,’ and was so influential that ‘epics of the Latin West subsequently took political issues as central subjects.’

Burney’s epic however has a decided difference to Virgil’s in focusing on a young woman, rather than a male hero, thus placing, as Kraft notes, ‘the burden of responsibility’ for national stability and the preservation of British culture ‘squarely on the shoulders of her female characters.’

*Camilla* directly states the importance of a young woman’s behaviour for the state of the nation. Camilla’s father’s sermon, in which he gives his daughter advice on how to behave as a proper young woman, concludes with adjuring her to act prudently and with ‘modest propriety,’ so as not to ‘wear away... all your life’s comfort to yourself, and all its social purposes to your friends and to the world.’ Her behaviour, he suggests, not only has an impact on her own happiness, and on the lives of her friends, but also affects ‘the world’ more broadly. Kraft reads this as a suggestion that the courtship and marriage of the heroine is ‘important to the nation as a whole.’ More than that, however, Mr Tyrold’s advice implies that *all* Camilla’s behaviour is important to the nation. Just as the behaviour of the hero in an epic was crucial to the business of nation-forming and culture-establishing, so too Camilla’s behaviour is of national, not merely personal, significance.

There are other smaller hints in *Camilla* that this novel is aiming at a broader, national agenda. Kraft points out that it is set in the New Forest, an area which, by the time of the

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16 Kraft, ‘Female Heroic Action,’ 46.


18 Kraft, ‘Female Heroic Action,’ 41.
novel’s composition, had ‘been the site of revisionist inscriptions of both the monarchy and the British national identity.’ Representing the ‘conservative belief’ in the importance of the ‘preservation of landed family wealth’ in order to maintain ‘Britain’s national stability,’ this setting strongly suggests a political agenda, and that the fate of the landed Tyrolds is a case of national importance. This is reinforced by the presentation of Camilla’s uncle Sir Hugh Tyrold, the landed and titled member of the Tyrold family, as a decidedly English character, whose ‘stature as a national type was quite apparent to Burney’s politically discriminating readers,’ Claudia Johnson argues. As an example, Johnson notes that Frances Anne Crewe, ‘an indefatigable projector for the counterrevolution,’ invited Burney to ‘contribute to an antijacobin weekly magazine’ using Sir Hugh as a mouthpiece who would oppose ‘newfangled Frenchified speculative systems with old-fashioned English virtues of the heart.’ While Burney declined the offer, she did not dispute Sir Hugh’s aptness for such a role.

Moreover, the novel’s focus on a family is also politically suggestive. Austin argues that ‘Burney clearly conceived of Camilla from the beginning primarily as a family tale’ rather than a story focused on an isolated heroine, as were her other three novels. Camilla’s interest is thus in structures and relationships, and not merely in the courtship experience of the individual. This unusual focus is reminiscent of the broader political debate of the 1790s, and particularly of Edmund Burke’s Reflections on the Revolution in France, which, as I demonstrated in the previous chapter, was heavily dependent upon metaphors of the family. But Burke went further than to make metaphorical connections between the family and the state, suggesting that a person’s experience of belonging to a family was an important indicator of a nation’s stability. ‘To be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle (the germ as it were) of public affections,’ he claims. ‘It is the first link in the series by which we proceed towards a love to our country, and to mankind.’ Rather than claiming that the family is the equivalent of the state, Burke argues that one’s behaviour and one’s feelings towards one’s family has a

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19 Kraft, ‘Female Heroic Action,’ 46.
20 Johnson, Equivocal Beings, 150.
21 Austin, ‘All Wove into One,’ 279.
direct impact upon the nation; if one is not ‘attached’ to one’s immediate family, one will not love one’s country and will therefore threaten the national stability Burke views as predicated upon proper sentiment towards British laws, customs and traditions. Camilla’s focus upon a family and how its members relate to one another suggests that this novel is interested in precisely the sort of ideas Burke is suggesting: not merely how the family reflects political structures, but how one’s behaviour towards one’s family impacts upon the nation as a whole.

Given all these factors, it would be reasonable to expect Camilla to display a coherent political point of view. Yet it is reluctant to do so, remaining reticent and silent on political matters. The novel contains the occasional scene that can be read politically – the removal of Sir Hugh from his estate, Cleves, and that estate’s subsequent deserted appearance, for example – but on the whole these situations are isolated and short-lived. Sir Hugh is readily restored to Cleves, without any loss of prestige or authority, and without having learned from, or been changed by, the experience. As Johnson notes, far from criticising either Sir Hugh or any of the novel’s other authority figures, Camilla goes to ‘elaborate lengths to make sure that no damaging criticism falls on the hoary heads of men who are dear,’23 and no character in the novel questions their positions or their authority despite the suffering to which their ineptitude leads. Mr Tyrold’s guidance of his daughter proves disastrously wrong, but he is never actually discredited as a result, and no character in the novel thinks to lay the blame for events upon his advice. Edgar, whom Camilla eventually marries, is more responsible and is regularly held up as the most honourable young man of their society, but as Kristina Straub argues, his failure ‘to understand and reward the worth’ of the heroine indicates his own ‘ineptitude’ and ‘incapacity’ to ‘sustain the protective control of the male role in the patriarchal family.’24 His portrayal suggests that the future generation of patriachs will be no more worthy of their authority than the current generation, but he is accepted as the hero and the ‘true son’ (231) of the Tyrolds without any misgivings, despite having caused much of Camilla’s pain and many of her problems throughout the novel. To use Johnson’s formulation, Camilla may question these men’s authority, and conservative principles more generally, ‘on the level of narrative’ but does not directly challenge them

23 Johnson, Equivocal Beings, 142.
‘on the level of theory.’ Camilla thus neither reinforces the status quo, nor does it suggest any alternative. The current state of the nation is not criticised, but neither is it upheld. The novel, rather, seems either uninterested in working through the political implications of its representation of the family, or contradictory in its depiction of authority and social structures. Having led us to expect a political argument, Camilla leaves us with only ambiguity and equivocation.

Likewise, we are led to expect that Camilla’s behaviour will have an impact upon the nation, but it turns out that it does not even ultimately affect her wider family. In the short-term she sends herself mad, and her debts send her father to prison, but she recovers, and her father is quickly released, with no long-term effects. Her sufferings throughout the novel are caused by her family and society’s expectations of her, but these are never put right; they are simply ignored by a conclusion that claims happiness for all but is deeply dissatisfying. There is no alternative for Camilla, no new authority structure under which to begin a new life, no new society to join, no escape from that society which has caused all her troubles. Just as the novel avoids ‘damaging criticism’ of the authority figures it portrays, it avoids any direct criticism of society itself and offers no alternative. Comparing Camilla with Charlotte Smith’s revolutionary novels, which conclude with hopeful pictures of new families and new societies, however unrealistic, it is hard to find in Burney’s novel any gesture, however slight, towards either a critique of her current political situation or a championing of a new arrangement. In the end, nothing changes, and all is restored.

Nor do we find more political engagement if we look beyond Camilla and the authority figures to the presentation of her brother, Lionel. Following my reading of Charlotte Smith and her use of brothers to figure the French Revolution, it would seem natural to read Lionel as a revolutionary type. Certainly he bears some resemblances to the Revolutionaries beyond his relational title. Elisabeth Gruner suggests that, like the Revolutionaries, he is an usurper of authority, taking on his father’s role of disposing of his sisters in marriage. Yet it is difficult to read him as a political referent. Lionel is a fun-loving prankster with no ambition for authority except as it serves to entertain him. He has no vision for a different

25 Johnson, Equivocal Beings, 17.
future, and merely wants to enjoy himself, regardless of the needs or happiness of anyone else. Particularly after the 1793 Reign of Terror, during which sixteen thousand people were guillotined in the course of nine months,²⁷ to portray a Revolutionary as a relatively harmless practical joker would be absurd. He may do Camilla harm, but he does not do so for any purpose beyond having fun. And his usurpation of authority over his sisters is too reminiscent of other brothers in the novels I have examined to suggest a political referent automatically.

Lionel’s portrayal is, in fact, a challenge to understand. He is the closest figure Camilla has to a villain, yet the severity of his actions and the serious consequences they lead to are consistently played down in the novel. Moreover, Lionel himself is a likeable young man who has his sisters’ – and the narrator’s – inalienable affection and support. He behaves like a villain, but is not treated as one. In order to make sense of this representation, a number of scholars have seen in him an affectionate portrayal of Burney’s brother Charles. Joyce Hemlow argues that ‘the consternation caused by Lionel’s scrapes at the university is a reflection of the embarrassment and anxiety that Charles at one time brought to St. Martin’s Street.’²⁸ Edward and Lillian Bloom, in their notes to Camilla, suggest he is a ‘composite of three personalities significant in Frances Burney’s life: her half-brother Richard Thomas; her brother Charles, Jr.; and her friend Charles Locke’ (934). Ruth Perry disagrees, however, suggesting that the ‘inspiration’ for Lionel was Burney’s older brother James, who in his father’s words ‘had a natural genius for hoaxing.’²⁹ Katharine Rogers is even more assertive, although less specific, declaring that ‘Lionel is primarily, of course, an exaggerated projection of the Burney brothers.’³⁰ Given the affectionate and indulgent treatment he receives despite the problems he causes, viewing him as a sister’s loving portrayal of a brother is a reasonable way of accounting for his character.

³⁰ Katharine M. Rogers, Frances Burney: The World of ‘Female Difficulties,’ (Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), 71, italics mine.
Unlike later scholars, however, Hemlow’s description of Lionel is not limited to his resemblances to any young man Burney may have known. She suggests also that he is a character type: ‘in the dramatic or narrative sense he is the Vice impeding and embroiling the action.’\(^{31}\) Hemlow does not elaborate on the precise ways in which Lionel’s character resembles the Vice, or what the implications of that characterisation might be. The resemblance, however, is worth considering, for it not only helps to explain the novel’s curiously positive treatment of his character, but it more importantly draws attention to the differences between men’s and women’s experiences, particularly with regard to their faults, their deceptions, and their use of comedy.

**Camilla and the Vice: interrogating gender differences**

In the morality plays, the Vice is a ‘flamboyantly transgressive mischief-maker’ who is generally ‘a more engaging, amusing, energetic, and attractive dynamic character than the seduced hero.’\(^{32}\) While his aim is to turn the hero from the path of godliness, he is more motivated by fun than by evil, one who ‘acts from pure love of mischief, and can set a comic action going with the minimum of motivation.’\(^{33}\) This squares well with Lionel’s character. He is introduced thus:

> The zealot for every species of sport, the candidate for every order of whim, was the light-hearted, mirthful Lionel. A stranger to reflection, and incapable of care, laughter seemed not merely the bent of his humour, but the necessity of his existence: he pursued it at all seasons, he indulged it upon all occasions. With excellent natural parts, he trifled away all improvement; without any ill temper, he spared no one’s feelings. Yet, though not radically vicious, nor deliberately malevolent, the egotism which urged him to make his own amusement his first pursuit, sacrificed his best friends and first duties, if they stood in its way (79).

The light tone with which he is described is continued throughout the novel; words such as ‘sport’ and ‘whim’ are regularly associated with his actions. The description is one of misapplied talent, rather than of deliberate malice, but the narrative excuses even this deficiency as almost unavoidable. He is ‘incapable of care,’ rather than deliberately uncaring.

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or selfish; laughter is the ‘necessity of his existence,’ rather than his inclination. Just as his sisters are portrayed as by nature caring, virtuous, sensible and inclined to do their duty, Lionel is good natured – ‘without any ill temper’ – and yet incapable of considering the needs or feelings of others. His pursuit of pleasure and amusement leads him not to seek the happiness or amusement of others, but to ‘sacrifice his best friends and first duties’, a tendency we see repeated endlessly in the narrative. He is not condemned for wasting his ‘excellent natural parts,’ nor for sparing ‘no one’s feelings.’ Rather, these are explained as understandable consequences of his particular zeal, and an inevitable part of his ‘light-hearted, mirthful’ character. Never deliberately injurious to others, neither ‘radically vicious, nor deliberately malevolent,’ the narrative demands the reader’s affection for Lionel, portraying him as an over-enthusiastic youth, rather than harmful selfishness and lack of responsibility, and thus excusing his many faults.

Nor is he punished for any of the problems he causes. Finding himself in debt and likely to go to prison, Lionel escapes to the Continent towards the end of the novel, leaving behind him chaos and disruption, but not suffering personally for any of his actions. This too is characteristic of the Vice, who, having wrought his comic evil, departs the scene, whether willingly or unwillingly. Gruner reads Lionel’s absence from the conclusion of the narrative as a sign that he has been ‘banished’ as the ‘scapegoat for the family’s failings’ and replaced by Edgar. Yet Lionel leaves willingly, taking his mischief elsewhere, and not because he has been defeated by the powers of good, as the Vice in the morality play would have been, but because his actions have caught up with him. In response to his father’s insistence that he ‘pay to the laws of society what retribution they require for their violation’ (734), he declares that ‘my poor dear little body is not of that opinion’ (738), concluding that he will ‘whisk over to the Continent’ (737) instead of remaining in England to be taken to gaol. His exile is self-imposed, and rather than a sign that he is taking responsibility for the wrongdoing of the entire family, it is a further sign that he is avoiding doing so. If there is a scapegoat for the family's failings, it is not Lionel, but Camilla.

34 Robert Withington, “‘Vice” and “Parasite.” A Note on the Evolution of the Elizabethan Villain,’ PMLA 49.3 (1934): 751.
35 Gruner, 'The Bullfinch and the Brother,' 28
Camilla is punished for what she perceives to be her own faults, but the novel insists they are not ultimately of her own doing. If we consider her to be the heroine influenced by the figure of the Vice, it quickly becomes apparent not only how her failings are caused or inspired by her brother, but also how much they resemble Lionel’s faults. Moreover, Lionel’s faults are characteristic of the Vice figure, a ‘representative of the secular spirit, the enjoyment of present pleasure under the threat of extinction.’ His faults are financial, involving gambling and racking up large debts, and sexual, being engaged in an adulterous relationship, each of which are the effect of seeking immediate pleasure and satisfaction without counting the cost.

Camilla’s faults are, like her brother’s, financial and sexual, although to a different degree. Reflecting the ways in which the hero of the morality play would be tempted by the key characteristics of the Vice figure, the traps Camilla falls into mirror Lionel’s but show the different expectations of men and women in her society. While Lionel’s debts – not including his debts of honour or gaming debts – amount to far more than £500, Camilla’s, which include debts of charity, come to less than £200. Yet they are considered to be at least equal, and possibly far worse. Comparing herself to her brother and her cousin Clermont, who is also in debt, she imagines addressing her mother: “To find... that I, as well as Lionel, have involved my family in debts – that I, as well as Clermont, have committed them clandestinely to a usurer!” (791) She credits her debt with bringing down her entire family, little reflecting that, had her brother and cousin not incurred much larger debts, hers would have been as nothing. When her uncle closes down his estate, and her father is put in prison, both as a consequence of lacking the money to pay for the next generation’s extravagances, Camilla runs mad and almost dies from an over-developed sense of responsibility which seems, if anything, designed to balance out Lionel’s complete lack of it. As Claudia Johnson concludes, Camilla, ‘whose debts are so modest, shoulder[s] criminally intense responsibility for her family’s ruin, while the massive depredations of Lionel and Clermont, legitimate heirs, receive scant mention.’ Lionel, it seems, has ruined only himself; Camilla shoulders the blame for ruining her entire family.

37 Johnson, Equivocal Beings, 142.
Camilla also blames herself for the way she has related to a number of suitors, allowing the novel to compare the difference between her ‘sexual’ failings and her brother’s. While Lionel can carry on an affair with a married woman, expecting that payments to the right servants will compensate for this criminal offence, Camilla sees the loss of Edgar as the result of her mild flirtations with Sir Sedley, Hal Westwyn and Lord Valhurst. Nor is she as much to blame for her ‘flirtations’ as she seems to Edgar; in many cases she is accused of encouraging suitors who have, in fact, been encouraged only by her brother, for the sake of entertainment and in order to make mischief. Yet the multitude of suitors who feel themselves approved makes Camilla, in Edgar’s eyes at least, a coquette, a sin for which she is punished more severely than Lionel is for being an adulterer.

Allowing herself to go into debt and to act in a way that casts doubt upon her morality demonstrates the different treatment the brother’s and the sister’s faults receive in this novel. Julie Shaffer views this as key to understanding Camilla:

Unable to recognise that her brother has caused the family woes, her self-judgement makes clear an assumption that the book demands we interrogate: men’s wasting of family resources is expected, if not sanctioned, but a woman’s morality, her value, is defined otherwise: it is a(n economic) resource for her family, her immorality a catastrophic drain on both their coffers and their respectability.38

A brother can go into debt and act criminally but be excused: such is the behaviour expected of young men. But a sister cannot put a foot wrong; any slight deviation from proper behaviour has disastrous consequences not only for her but for her whole family. Likewise, a brother can threaten suicide but ultimately run away from his responsibility: his response, as Barbara Zonitch notes, ‘is active and violent.’ A sister, on the other hand, unable to undo her actions, must take responsibility for them by actually dying: her reaction ‘must be passive and censored.’ Zonitch connects the options available to Camilla and Lionel to those open to Evelina and Macartney when they desire to confront their father: ‘the solutions available to them are determined strictly by their sex.’39 In fact, Camilla’s response is precisely the same as Lionel’s in that both seek to escape the consequences of their actions. The difference lies in what that escape looks like. For Lionel, it is merely fleeing abroad until

38 Shaffer, ‘Romance, Finance, and the Marketable Woman,’ 53.
39 Barbara Zonitch, Familial Violence: Gender and Social Upheaval in the Novels of Frances Burney (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1997), 103.
his debts are paid and his affair is forgotten. Camilla cannot run; her only option for escape is death. That death is something she actively seeks as much as Lionel seeks a passage to France is clear. ‘O Death!’ she cries, ‘let me not pray to thee also in vain!’ (862) and her conscience chastises her as a ‘self-devoted corpse... self-murdered through wilful self-neglect’ (873). Her search for an escape is no less violent than Lionel’s, simply more extreme and self-directed.

Viewing the failings of the siblings as gendered versions of the same basic faults allows Camilla to depict the different experiences of men and women in the late eighteenth-century. Lionel’s faults are far greater than Camilla’s, but they are expected and he is able to escape their consequences. Camilla’s ought to be be less serious, as they involve less debt and no real sexual immorality, yet their repercussions are far greater. She loses a family, is rejected by her parents, runs mad, and almost dies. Her uncle is displaced from his home, and her father is imprisoned. Camilla, only mildly at fault, blames herself utterly for all these consequences, and nothing in the narrative suggests that she is wrong to do so. A brother’s great faults can be excused, but a sister’s minor faults are catastrophic, both for her and for her family.

The same is true of the deceit and disguise practiced by Lionel. These too are characteristic of the Vice, whose actions often involve ‘subterfuge’ and ‘dissimulation.’ Lionel uses disguise and deception to protect himself and to control his situation. What is more, he often uses the deceptive potential of the letter to achieve his own ends. In need of money, he has been using letters to intimidate his uncle Relvil, whose fortune he expects to inherit, into sending him ready supplies of cash. When Relvil discovers it is Lionel who has manipulated him, Lionel turns instead to his other uncle, Sir Hugh, whom he approaches first in person, and then through Camilla’s mediation. Before she leaves for her first excursion away from home, Lionel convinces her to ask their uncle for £200 to cover some immediate expenses. Camilla reluctantly obliges, but when Sir Hugh asks her not to ask for Lionel’s sake again, she promises that she will not do so. When Lionel, therefore, turns up in Southampton asking her to write to Sir Hugh for another £200, ‘as if it were for [her]self’ (497), Camilla refuses to do so.

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The use of a letter here to deceive and extort money from their uncle is necessitated by both plot and character. Lionel perceives that his sister, motivated by honesty, will not be able to deceive her uncle in person, and even if she could, the physical distance between them makes a face-to-face request impossible. A letter, therefore, is the best medium for his purposes. It is, however, not merely dictated by narrative necessity. In Lionel’s demand that Camilla write a letter on his behalf, *Camilla* continues the investigation of the limits of epistolarity which Burney began in *Evelina* two decades earlier, and particularly examines the effect of the brother on a sister’s epistolary control.

*Evelina* demonstrated how the writing of letters allowed Evelina to frame her own reality and tell her story in her own way. Yet even Evelina found her letters in danger from her brother, Macartney, whose story threatened to overwhelm hers. *Camilla*, a novel that abounds with letters written and not written, delivered and not delivered, exhibits far less faith in the letter as a vehicle for telling the sister’s story. Julia Epstein points out that throughout the novel ‘Camilla either cannot write at all, her language paralysed, or she produces a disordered writing that is more confusing than silence.’

Her writing, ‘paralysed,’ ‘disordered’ and ‘confusing,’ contrasts with the control that the epistolary form gave the heroines of chapter two. It is in her focus on the ‘unwritten and undelivered letters’ of Camilla that Burney displays her most insightful critique of epistolarity, continuing the investigation of its limits that she briefly explored in *Evelina*. In *Camilla*, the heroine’s communication failures are often failures of epistolarity, the failure of the letter form to allow a young woman to accurately express herself and her situation. In particular, this failure is often the direct result of the actions and words of Camilla’s brother, Lionel, but it takes two forms – resisting being forced to write, and being physically incapable of writing when she desires to do so.

Considering the scene of writing to Sir Hugh in light of the ideas about letter-writing explored in Chapter Two of this thesis, it is clear that here the expectation that a letter could be used by a sister as a way of writing her own story has been once more compromised by the actions of a brother, although in a much more direct fashion. Camilla’s experience of

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writing this letter is one not of control over her narrative but of coercion. Lionel demands she write: ‘Write, I say, write!’ (499). When she objects, he tries emotional manipulation, describing the consequences for their entire family should she refuse to request the money. ‘You don’t know what mischief you may have to answer for!’ he exclaims. ‘You may bring misery upon all our heads! You may make my father banish me from his sight, you may make my mother execrate me!’ (499). Refusing to acknowledge his own part in the mischief, he directs all the guilt towards his sister, who alone will ‘have to answer for’ the ‘mischief,’ and who will ‘bring misery’ and cause the breakdown of their family. Eventually she relents, desiring to save her parents the shame of discovering Lionel’s guilty behaviour.

Yet even when she agrees to write the letter, Lionel still seeks to control its content, and thus Camilla’s self-representation. Initially he even dictates to her: ‘Come begin. Dear Sir’ (497). When she objects, he suggests what she might write: ‘say you must have some new gowns and caps. ... I’ll tell you what is still better; say you’ve been robbed. ... if you won’t say that, tell him it’s for a secret purpose. At least you can do that’ (497). Far from the letter being an open, honest, and self-generated mode of truthful communication, here the letter is an instrument of deceit, entirely controlled not by the sister who writes it, but by the brother who dictates its content.

Ultimately, however, Camilla finds herself unable to write the letter her brother requires. She still believes, as did the heroines of Chapter Two, that a letter ought to be a representation of one’s nature, and being herself ‘incapable of any species of fraud’ and detesting ‘even the most distant disguise’ (501), she ‘began twenty letters without proceeding in any one of them beyond two lines’ (502). Eventually she abandons her task, writing instead to Lionel explaining why she has failed to do what he has asked.

Epstein suggests that ‘the unfinished collection of letters to Sir Hugh on Lionel’s behalf fail [to be completed] because they are instigated from outside rather than from within.’\textsuperscript{43} But they also fail because they contradict the purpose of the letter as imagined by authors of friendly epistolary novels. These letters were controlled by their writers, who wrote in their own words for their own purposes. In demanding and coercing his sister to write a letter that is not reflective of her character, her situation, or even her language, Lionel here

\textsuperscript{43} Epstein, \textit{The Iron Pen}, 133.
distorts the nature and purpose of the fictional letter, demonstrating the form’s weakness and susceptibility to control by the brother.

This failure of letter-writing has two important consequences for the rest of Camilla’s story, both of which lead to her disadvantage and her brother’s advantage. Just as deceit has gained Lionel large sums of money from both his uncles, so too Camilla’s first attempts at writing to Sir Hugh achieve Lionel’s ultimate goal of immediate funds when they are found by Sir Sedley Clarendel, a suitor, who forwards the £200 to Lionel and thereby makes Camilla his debtor. In addition, Lionel’s revelation of his actions has both horrified Camilla and led her to swear to keep them secret, allowing him to escape the consequences of his actions but effectively taking away her ability to explain her own actions, leading to undeserved negative consequences for herself. Knowing the pain the revelation would cause her family, she promises to keep it from her parents: ‘never let it reach the knowledge of either!’ (500). The brother’s deceit leads to the sister’s deceit, in a shift that is justified by a desire to protect the wellbeing of the family to which they both belong.

Yet while Lionel’s deceit works to his advantage and comes with no long-lasting ill consequences, the silence that characterises Camilla’s deception breaks apart the Tyrold family, fulfilling what more recent scholars have seen as the ultimate purpose of the Vice – ‘the destruction of community’ and of the ‘hierarchal organisation of society’ of which the family is a key structural part. Camilla’s secrecy about Lionel’s debts and the reasons for them is perceived by Gruner to be a case of ‘false sibling loyalty’ which, rather than solidifying the family unit, is a key factor in the ‘family falling apart.’ Elizabeth Kraft goes even further, suggesting that Camilla’s secret-keeping is a ‘greater failing’ than any action Lionel commits, for in not revealing what she knows about her brother she ‘threaten[s] the family’s security.’ Lionel keeps secrets in order to protect himself from being chastised by his father, and while he does receive a firm talking-to when his debts and actions are revealed there are no serious consequences arising for him from his deceit. Camilla is led to

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47 Kraft, ‘Female Heroic Action,’ 46-7.
deception from a desire to protect her father from the knowledge of his son’s mistakes, but not disclosing Lionel’s actions leads to terrible consequences not only for her but also for her entire family.

One of these consequences is *Camilla’s second instance of failed epistolarity* – Camilla’s inability to write to her father to explain the increasing financial and moral difficulties into which she has been led, largely by her brother. Writing to explain is not her first intention, however. At several points she seeks to tell her father of her situation with Sir Sedley, but does not do so, considering that ‘all was so closely interwoven in the affairs and ill conduct of her brother, that she believed herself engaged in honour to guard the fatal secret, though hazarding by its concealment impropriety and misery’ (543). That she considers herself bound ‘in honour’ to keep his secret, and even required to endure ‘impropriety and misery’ for his sake, demonstrates how successful Lionel has been in convincing her to take upon herself the responsibility for his actions. His debts ultimately become known to his father despite Camilla’s discretion when a merchant appears at their family home demanding payment. Yet the full extent of Lionel’s wrongdoing – his adultery, his gambling, and his acceptance of money from Sir Sedley – still remain solely the knowledge of Camilla. Her silence on these matters has already cost her dearly; she has ‘suffered,’ ‘sacrificed,’ ‘irretrievably lost’ her fiancé, and is left with ‘regrets scarce supportable for herself’ (734-35).

Even after the revelation of Lionel’s debts, however, her knowledge of his situation continues to silence her. Needing to confess her own debts and improprieties, she cannot raise the matter with her father, recognising that she cannot ‘be even intelligible in the history’ of her actions ‘without exposing the guilty Lionel beyond all chance of pardon’ (740). Convincing herself that she has ‘voluntarily’ assisted him and willingly agreed to keep his secret, she views any exposure as ‘treachery’: ‘vainly she took up her pen; not even a line could she write’ (794). Less able to communicate in this circumstance than in her forced letters to Sir Hugh – there she managed at least a couple of lines on twenty attempts – Camilla cannot even begin her own letter to her parents. She writes willingly and has the opportunity to construct her own narrative, but her vow of silence to her brother, and her prioritising of his reputation over her own, silence her more effectively in this situation than in the last. Wanting to write and take control of her situation by confessing her wrongdoing,
she cannot. The act of letter-writing, which granted previous heroines authority over their story, is not available to Camilla, demonstrating how little power she has over her life or its interpretation by others.

It is only the threat of impending death that enables Camilla finally to put pen to paper to communicate honestly with her parents and with Edgar, her estranged fiancé, but by this stage she is almost as incapable physically of writing as she previously was psychologically. ‘With infinite difficulty’ (869) she manages a letter of farewell to her parents, and barely three lines to Edgar. Juliet McMaster sees a direct connection between Camilla’s final illness and her inability to communicate, claiming that it is because Camilla is ‘deprived of the means of expression’ that she is doomed to ‘undeserved suffering and insanity.’ An inability to write even haunts what she believes will be her final moments. Her vision of Death virtually replays her two attempts at writing letters. Commanded by a ‘direful voice’ to ‘write with thy own hand thy claims, thy merits to mercy!’ (875) Camilla tries to resist, but ‘a force unseen, yet irresistible, impelled her forward’ and ‘her own hand involuntarily grasped a pen of iron’ and began writing. Just as Lionel has earlier compelled her to write to her uncle, here an unknown force compels her to write a confession, ‘guilty characters’ over which she has no control, but that nonetheless condemn her.

As the scene continues, however, it begins to resemble her second failure to write. Once more ‘unlicensed by her will, her hand seized the iron instrument,’ but this time ‘her pen made no mark,’ ‘the paper was blank’ (875-76). First her power to write is controlled by another; second, her attempts to control her narrative through writing fail to produce even a mark on the page. For Epstein, this vision is a summation of Camilla’s problems of communication throughout the novel: ‘letters, words, sentences – the component parts of a written object – are fully transparent in Camilla’s nightmare, first as sulphuric, biblical illuminations, and then as the radical transparency of empty space and blankness, the physical representation of Camilla’s inability throughout the novel to speak or write clearly.’ But Camilla’s vision is more than a ‘physical representation’ of this ‘inability’ to communicate generally. It functions more specifically as a conclusion to Burney’s insistent anti-epistololarity in *Camilla*, demonstrating the inability of the pen to allow women to write

their own lives. It is the written word that is beyond Camilla’s power in her vision, not the spoken word. Unlike Evelina whose letters enabled her to narrate her experiences, Camilla, as Joanne Cutting-Gray notes, ‘has no authority except that of the unnamed voice to “author” her own life; her own discourse ... leaves no marks.’

Epstein compares the two novels more directly, suggesting that the heroines’ different experience of language is directly related to the ‘radically differing narrative strategies and narrating voices in the epistolary Evelina and the indirectly told Camilla.’ Epistolarity allowed Evelina to ‘recreate experience by writing it down,’ ‘re-enacting it in a way that will win [Villars’s] approbation’ and thus controlling the version of her story her guardian reads. Camilla, however, is rarely in control of her story, ‘rarely speaks for herself even in dialogue’ and her novel is characterised by ‘not writing, not speaking, and misinterpreting.’ While epistolary heroines could to some extent control the interpretations their correspondents formed of their lives through deliberate and conscious writing, Camilla has no option to do so. In particular, Edgar continually misinterprets her actions, and because she cannot explain herself to him she cannot offer him an alternate interpretation of her character.

The technique of free indirect discourse, with which Burney was an early experimenter, means the reader does not misinterpret Camilla as Edgar does. Nor is Camilla’s consciousness solely viewed through the lens of the Camilla’s narrator, him/herself a character who tends towards an overly conservative interpretation of the other characters and their actions, often in ways that seem contrary to the direction of the narrative and the characters’ own self-representations. Free indirect discourse might be considered a third-person narrative equivalent to friendly epistolarity, allowing for an open, honest expression of what is in the heart and the mind of the character being represented without the intervention of a narrative voice. It grants the reader an unfiltered insight into Camilla’s thoughts, feelings, and motivations, allowing us to understand what the heroine cannot express to any character in the novel. Yet the fiction of epistolarity holds that it is the letter-writer who chooses what is represented and in what way, allowing the character to determine what is included in the telling and what is left out, and in this way it differs

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50 Joanne Cutting-Gray, Woman as ‘Nobody’ and the Novels of Fanny Burney (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1992), 75.
51 Epstein, The Iron Pen, 140.
52 Epstein, The Iron Pen, 140.
significantly from free indirect discourse. Burney’s use of free indirect discourse in *Camilla* ensures that we understand the title character, but it negates any impression that Camilla herself might be in control of the telling of her story. The reader cannot believe, as we do when reading epistolary fiction, that Camilla determines which of her thoughts are represented to her readers, or in what way they are revealed. Free indirect discourse allows us unfettered access to all her thoughts, without the intervention of the narrator but also without her own editing. Unlike her epistolary forebears, she has no narrative power to conceal anything or to distort her narrative to suit her own purposes. Not only her actions, but her entire being are exposed to the reader, and while we are granted enough insight into her mind to understand her and interpret her correctly, free indirect discourse takes away Camilla’s power to control the way she is narrated, rather than empowering her to tell her own story.\(^\text{53}\)

Camilla’s inability to control her own story and her vulnerability to exposure through narrative form parallels the novel’s presentation of the vulnerability of her gender, which is most clearly revealed through her relationship with Lionel and in particular through his use of pranks and comedy throughout the novel. Lionel’s role as Vice explains his predilection towards the comedic and his love of mischief-making. He is certainly the main comic character of the novel; other characters may be incidentally amusing, even caricatured, but only Lionel seeks to create fun and laughter. Yet he is always at risk of his pranks becoming dangerous. A case of dressing up at Mrs Arlbery’s early in the novel, in which Lionel, ‘after attiring himself in the maid’s gown, cap, and apron’ (264), has placed a soldier’s cap upon a young girl’s head, and a coachman’s wig upon the soldier’s head, quickly turns sour. Lionel himself is ‘almost in a convulsion of laughter’ over the scene, but the soldier’s ‘resentment’ threatens to become violent. In this case it is Camilla who, picking up on Lionel’s tone, uses comedy to diffuse the situation. Referring to Lionel as both Sir Francis and Lady Wronghead of Colley Cibber’s *The Provoked Husband*, Camilla ‘restore[s] order and avert[s] violence by styling Lionel’s disruptive behaviour as comedy, literally, “merely burlesque”’ (265), thereby,

\(^{53}\) This is not true of all instances of free indirect discourse in all novels, and is markedly different to Jane Austen’s use of it in *Persuasion*, as I will demonstrate in the next chapter. As McKeon notes, ‘free indirect discourse is less an ideology than a method of achieving a broad and subtle range of ideological possibilities,’ one of which Burney uses to great effect in *Camilla*. Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 707.
as Kristina Straub has argued, ‘containing the violence’ of the scene ‘within the realm of comedy.’\textsuperscript{54} That a female character here uses comedy in order to control male characters reflects what Audrey Bilger sees as Burney’s own strategy in writing fiction: ‘writing comic novels’ allows for the exercise of ‘female power’ and particularly for the critiquing of a system of ‘gender politics’ that would limit ‘women’s proper place in society’ to one of ‘subordination.’\textsuperscript{55}

Yet much as Burney uses comedy as a form of ‘female power,’ \textit{Camilla} also demonstrates the dangers of it for women. Moreover, the technique of free indirect discourse heightens the reader’s experience of the heroine’s vulnerability to the sorts of problems that comedy, particularly in the hands of a brother, can cause. The novel is focused not on Lionel, who appears only for the occasional comic interlude, but on the heroine, with whom we are forced to identify and sympathise, however much we may prefer Lionel’s adventure to her unwavering commitment to Edgar. We may enjoy Lionel’s ‘ludicrous diversion’ (95) of introducing the vulgar Mr Dubster to his sister as an agreeable partner and we are encouraged to laugh at Mr Dubster ourselves, yet we feel the uneasiness of Camilla at having such a partner forced upon her, and wish that Lionel would regard his sister’s ‘appealing looks’ and put an end to the joke.

As the novel continues, Lionel’s pranks become more violent and have increasingly serious consequences. He pulls his sisters into a river ‘in defiance of their entreaties’ (245), abandons them in Mr Dubster’s summer house, once more ‘in defiance of the serious entreaties of his sisters’ (282), and most seriously, he teases Camilla about her relationship with Sir Sedley in front of that suitor, leading to great embarrassment for both of them. Ruth Perry astutely notes the significance of gender for these pranks, arguing that

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all of these incidents, represented in violent slapstick, are ominous because Camilla is female; none of Lionel’s pranks – ruining her dresses, frightening her with a bull, subjecting her to embarrassing encounters with inappropriate men – would matter if Lionel played them on another man. More than inconvenient and less than fatal, the symbolic value of Lionel’s influence is to remind Camilla repeatedly of the limitations imposed by gender.\textsuperscript{56}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{54} Straub, \textit{Divided Fictions}, 216.  
\textsuperscript{55} Audrey Bilger, \textit{Laughing Feminism: Subversive Comedy in Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth, and Jane Austen} (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 9, 81.  
\textsuperscript{56} Perry, \textit{Novel Relations}, 173.
Lionel’s use of violent comedy here is a further reminder of the differences experienced by men and women in society. Much like social attitudes towards male and female debt and sexual impropriety, Lionel’s pranks are problematic because they are played upon women rather than upon men.

Burney thus has a double use for comedy in *Camilla*. As Bilger demonstrates, it can be used to write a subtle critique of male authority, of gender inequalities, and of women’s place in society. But *Camilla* also demonstrates more particularly the danger of male comedy for young women, and the different experiences of brothers and sisters in terms of pranks and laughter. The novel repeatedly presents situations in which the brother’s use of comedy endangers his sisters simply because they are female. He uses comedy for his own benefit, because laughter is the ‘necessity of his existence’ and his ‘first pursuit,’ but his sisters cannot do the same and are injured by his search for constant amusement. In comedy, as in so many other areas, he seeks his own good without considering that of his sisters. His pranks enhance his experience of life, but cast shadows of shame, anger and ill-repute on his sisters. Like his use of sex and money, his use of comedy is impulsive and selfish, ultimately harming his sisters who are powerless to resist and whose complaints go unheard.

*Camilla*’s interest in examining the difference that gender makes to a person’s experience is thus focused through its depiction of the brother-sister relationship. In paralleling Lionel’s and Camilla’s faults, the novel demonstrates the different consequences failures of propriety bring for men and women, ensuring that the punishment Camilla receives far outweighs Lionel’s, although his faults are far greater than hers. It also investigates the question of deception, indicating that Lionel, as a man, can use deception to his advantage, while Camilla, as a woman, can only be trapped by it. The deceit that Lionel causes Camilla to adopt leads to her loss of control over her own story; his adoption of a false voice leads to her voicelessness. So too, Lionel’s quest for amusement shows the ways in which a brother can use comedy for his own enjoyment, but that such a use is not harmless. A sister can be damaged by the laughter-seeking actions of her brother without having any power to do anything about it.
One prank I have already introduced deserves closer examination, for it symbolises the heart of the problem of gender in *Camilla*. Early in the novel, Lionel takes his sisters Camilla and Eugenia to visit Mr Dubster, an insufferable lower-class suitor of Camilla’s, and in the course of their visit traps them in Dubster’s summer house when he runs after a hunt, taking the ladder with him. Thus ‘hoisted up in [a] cage’ (282), as Dubster phrases it, they suffer the taunts of three market women, but more significantly cause several young men to doubt their reputations when they are discovered unchaperoned with a young man. They are soon rescued, but the prank is indicative of a broader entrapment that pervades the novel. Not only does it demonstrate the different options available to the brother, who can run away and seek amusement, and the sisters, who remain trapped in the society of a man whom they do not wish to know, the incident also demonstrates the situation of women in the domestic sphere, here represented by the summer-house itself and by the unwanted suitor, Mr Dubster.

The incident shows the Tyrold sisters trapped in a comic version of domesticity, one which is unfinished, uncomfortable, and from which there is no escape – the stairs have not yet been built. Just as the Tyrold sisters are trapped in Dubster’s imitation of a domestic setting, so too women in the 1790s found themselves increasingly confined to the domestic sphere. *Camilla*’s examination of the different experiences of men and women is of particular political significance in this time period, when French women, having fought alongside their brothers in the Revolution and having campaigned for equal liberty with those brothers, found themselves excluded from full citizenship. Lynn Hunt’s assessment of the debates occurring in France regarding the position of women, which I discussed in the previous chapter, has bearing here too. In post-Revolutionary France, she argues,

> Male virtue meant participation in the public world of politics; female virtue meant withdrawal into the private world of the family. [...] The republican ideal of virtue was based on a notion of fraternity between men in which women were relegated to the realm of domesticity.  

Hunt’s choice of words is revealing. Men and women do not have different roles, but rather belong to different worlds: the ‘public world of politics’ and the ‘private world of the family.’ Not only this, but women belong in the ‘realm of domesticity,’ a deliberately political

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representation of gender difference using the political and authoritative ‘realm’ rather than the more neutral and common ‘sphere.’

As I noted in the previous chapter, far from realising Olympe de Gouges’s 1791 declaration that ‘Woman is born free and lives equal to man in her rights,’ women in France were ultimately bound by their gender and were granted only limited rights. They were not considered true citoyennes, as early in the Revolution they had laid claim to be; they were rather ‘mothers or sisters or wives of [...] citizens,’ defined by their familial relationships and their domestic responsibilities rather than by their political position.

What Hunt thus recognises in the historical development in France is a specific, definite enactment of what Nancy Armstrong views as the longer-term process of domestication that was taking place in England in the eighteenth century, by which women were encouraged into a particular form of domesticity and a particular mode of feminine behaviour through conduct books and courtesy novels. That the depictions of gender and domesticity in Camilla are not viewed as reflections of the decisions made in France indicates how ingrained the connections between women, domesticity and the novel had become by the mid-1790s, and how thoroughly such categories had been disconnected from the public, political world of men. But the deliberate decisions made in France allowed women in England to see the same process occurring far more slowly and subtly in their own society. Camilla does not reflect the changes in France as much as their correlative in England, but the novel is a product of its decade in that the Revolutionaries’ declarations about gender made the gender boundaries which are explored in Camilla both evident and of particular social and political relevance. As Kari Lokke has argued, the Revolution ‘gave

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birth to a consciousness of their daily lives for many women writers of the 1790s. It is the form and detail of those daily lives that *Camilla* examines, but it is an examination which is dependent on the awareness of the constructs of gender and domesticity that the Revolution gave to Englishwomen.

**Camilla's claustrophobic confinement in domesticity**

Far from being viewed as revealing this process, however, *Camilla* has often been read as an important part of that very process of the domestication of women in England. When in 1950 Joyce Hemlow identified the subgenre of eighteenth-century fiction she called the ‘courtesy novel,’ a cross between conduct books and domestic novels, she used *Camilla* as her prime example. She argues that Burney’s third novel, more than her first two, ‘betrays the influence of the moral and utilitarian ideas of the courtesy books and books on the education of youth,’ and ‘was intended as a system of education.’ While Armstrong does not include a reading of any of Burney’s novels in her discussion of domesticity and the novel, her use of Hemlow’s conclusions regarding the purpose of the courtesy novel and her repeated connection of ‘Burney and Austen’ in her final pages suggest how strongly she views Burney as an integral part of the process of domestication through the novel.

That *Camilla* is a domestic novel is difficult to dispute. Whether defined in Ruth Perry’s terms, as a novel that detailed the movement of a young woman ‘from a consanguineal to a conjugal kinship system,’ or in Nancy Armstrong’s formulation of a work ‘devoted to producing the domestic woman,’ *Camilla* fits the requirements, for its heroine does indeed become a proper domestic woman, and does move from her father’s household to her husband’s by the novel’s conclusion. But it is also domestic in the sense that it focuses not on a heroine but on a household. It is, as Coral Ann Howells describes it, a ‘domestically

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64 Perry, *Novel Relations*, 51.
centred novel, being about the history of Camilla Tyrold’s family and its fortunes,’ 66 a novel which is focused on domesticity. It is, however, most concerned with Camilla, who is determined to be a domestic heroine. Unlike Betsy Thoughtless, who wants nothing more than independence, Camilla is quite content to remain ‘in the bosom of her respectable family’ (8), under the authority of her parents. When she comes to desire marriage, it is to Edgar, the ward of her father, who has been raised as a brother to the Tyrold girls, and will not remove Camilla from the neighbourhood in which she has grown up. In fact, when they do marry, it is the connection to her family of origin that is emphasised in the description of their life together, for Edgar ‘rarely parted her from her fond Parents and enraptured Uncle,’ making his estate of Beech Park, her father’s home at Etherington and her uncle’s at Cleves all ‘his alternate dwellings’ (913). Happy at home, happy in her family, and desiring nothing more than to remain among them, Camilla is from the beginning designed for an almost claustrophobic domesticity.

The novel’s impulse is thus towards a happily domestic ending. Yet despite this impetus, Camilla’s story is repeatedly derailed. Desiring domesticity, Camilla instead finds herself removed from her family, separated from Edgar, and caught up in the excitement and scandal of the larger world. A movement away from the safety and security of home is typical of many eighteenth-century domestic novels, even Burney’s own novels – Evelina, for example, begs Villars to allow her to travel to London – and the journey is often a useful means of testing the character and behaviour of the heroine. But it is not something Camilla desires, and certainly not something she seeks. Rather, Camilla’s non-domesticity, her movement away from home and away from the domestic conclusion Edgar represents, is almost always due to the interference of her brother, Lionel.

In terms of plot, Lionel regularly disrupts the meetings between Camilla and Edgar that could bring about their reconciliation. The scene discussed previously, in which Lionel asks Camilla to write to their uncle, is one such example. Edgar, confused by Camilla’s treatment of another suitor, has requested a time to speak with her; she has responded by willingly engaging herself for a serious conversation that evening at the Assembly Rooms. Both recognise it as an important moment. Edgar ‘hoping and fearing, at once, every thing that

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was most interesting from a confidence so voluntary and so unexpected’ (495) believes it may clarify all his doubts about Camilla, and she, determined to ‘converse with him openly, to be guided by his counsel’ (496), looks forward with ‘confidence’ to the happy outcome of ‘the approaching conference.’ As she prepares to leave for the Rooms, however, Lionel appears unexpectedly, demanding ‘a moment’s chat with his sister’ (496). The brief conversation he desires turns into a long discussion, and ends with him leaving her to write to their uncle. Moreover, he ensures she is unable to meet with Edgar, for while she is writing, he declares that he will ‘un-order the carriage, that she might have no interruption to her composition’ (501). Her ‘compulsive failure,’ as she perceives it, to meet Edgar and have the frank conversation she had intended is ‘tormenting’ to her. It is also distressing to Edgar, whose disappointment is increased by Lionel’s admission that his sister has remained at home merely to write a letter. Edgar therefore feels that she is ‘sporting with his curiosity and warm interest in her affairs’ (536), and when he, later that evening, overhears Lionel urging another suitor to ‘proceed straight to Hampshire, with his final proposals of marriage with Camilla,’ he decides to leave town immediately. Lionel’s control over his sister’s movements, his description of her actions to Edgar, and his encouragement of a second suitor, cause a break between Camilla and Edgar and lead him to act with ‘evident coldness’ (512) and ‘cruel and pointed indifference’ (513) towards her. The conversation which had promised to bring about a conclusion to their miscommunications through open and honest discussion has been foiled by Lionel. Furthermore, like Camilla’s inability to be honest with her father for fear of exposing Lionel, she is likewise unable to be completely honest with Edgar as she cannot explain her apparently coquettish actions without disclosing her brother’s failings.

Lionel’s disruption of the relationship between Camilla and Edgar may not be deliberate. His interruptions of their domestic plot are usually incidental, not designed to separate the two or to hinder their courtship. But Lionel does more deliberately threaten the domesticity of Camilla. He is himself decidedly non-domestic. The most obvious example of his anti-domesticity is his affair with a married woman, a deliberate sundering of an established domestic unit, and a sexual relationship he can experience without the risk it might lead to his own domestic establishment. Yet it is in his dealings with his two sisters that his tendency to distort the domestic plot is most striking. Rather than assisting Eugenia and
Camilla to find proper husbands, he takes every opportunity to complicate their respective searches, preferring comedy and excitement to sobriety and security.

His interference in his sisters’ domestic hopes begins at their first presentation into society, at the Northwick ball. Accompanying Camilla and Eugenia, with only the inadequate supervision of Miss Margland and Sir Hugh, Lionel instantly begins making mischief, declaring to the visiting officers that one of his sisters is the heiress of their uncle, but ‘purposely mis[leading] their conjectures’ (60) as to which. He declares joyfully to Camilla, ‘I have made a fine confusion among the red-coats about the heiress of Cleves! I have put them all upon different scents’ (69). Lionel’s joy in creating this confusion is not shared by his sister, who foresees future complications, but when she attempts to correct the misunderstanding, ‘an eager sign of silence from Lionel, forbade her explaining this mistake’ (95). What begins as a harmless enough prank leads Camilla into debts she cannot repay, because her creditors believe her to be an heiress, and it results in the abduction of Eugenia, the legitimate heiress, by the fortune hunter, Bellamy, whom she meets at this ball.

Lionel does not, however, merely spread rumours and leave the scene. As Elisabeth Gruner points out, ‘he overtly assumes his father’s prerogative at the Northwick ball, where he arranges an introduction and partner for his sister,’ one of many occasions upon which ‘he anticipates positions which are not yet (and may never be) his,’ including ‘the disposal of his sisters.’

Noting that Miss Margland is not doing her duty by his sister – she has taken ‘no care to get her a better’ (72) partner than the vulgar Mr Dubster whom he introduces – Lionel assumes that his sisters, and their futures, are his to play with. His encouragement of various suitors is not designed to lead any of them to happy domestic lives, but to create entertainment for him. In the absence of parents and the authority they would bring, Lionel steps into the authority void, and, in the process, shifts the narrative away from its domestic pattern and into the realm of comedy, farce and slapstick.

His interference in his sisters’ romantic lives does not stop at the ball. He continues to encourage Mr Dubster to court Camilla, taking both her and Eugenia to visit his summer house and then abandoning them with their unwanted host. Most dangerously, he encourages the suit of Sir Sedley by accepting money from him which he expects his sister

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to answer for, thus sacrificing her happy domestic ending for ready cash, and the expectation of a sure banker in the future. Gruner argues that, while Mr Tyrold ‘never seems mercenary in his hope’ for Camilla’s marriage to the very eligible Edgar, Lionel ‘clearly is,’ believing that ‘a sister may be bought’, and that ‘women can be exchanged for money – and should be, for his benefit.’ Lionel addresses Camilla as ‘my dear Lady Clarendel’ (505) before Sir Sedley has made a declaration, considering her to be the ‘little debtor’ (523) and Sir Sedley’s ‘immense wealth’ to be ‘nearly at his own disposal’ (532). Camilla’s marriage to Sir Sedley will allow Lionel to continue his own lifestyle unimpeded by financial difficulties; her happiness is of no moment to him. Yet even when rejoicing in the accession of such a brother, he still encourages other suitors. ‘In a state of almost intoxication of delight’ (531-32) at the idea of Sir Sedley, he sends Major Cerwood to propose to Camilla, confirming the Major’s understanding that Camilla is Sir Hugh’s heiress. Despite his assumption of Sir Sedley’s success, Lionel cannot resist playing out his game until its final moments; as long as Camilla remains unmarried, he will continue to sport with her suitors and play games with her future.

In terms of plot, then, Lionel’s disruption of the courtship narrative between Camilla and Edgar, and his complication of Camilla’s search for a happy domestic conclusion, mean he is constantly leading the storyline away from the settled domesticity towards which it otherwise so insistently heads. His own story also does so, for while the plot for the most part is concentrated on Camilla and on her story, when Lionel enters the novel the very nature of the narrative shifts to focus upon him, much as Macartney’s story interrupted and took over Evelina’s. Lionel, like Macartney, has a much more interesting story to tell than that of Camilla or Evelina; his entrances and descriptions of his adventures are far more intriguing than hers, which regularly border on dull and are, at the very least, repetitive and circular, as she and Edgar continually misunderstand one another. Lionel’s story is full of gambling debts, duels, affairs, and close escapes, and when he enters the novel it is generically transformed from feminocentric domestic fiction to masculine adventure. He enters disguised; he cannot explain his actions; he hints at secrets and events of great moment; he escapes by the skin of his teeth. The reader cannot help but be interested in his

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tale, and relieved at the momentary break from Camilla’s story that he provides, and he thus threatens not only Camilla’s happiness and wellbeing, but the very nature of her narrative and, thus, the domesticity which is a woman’s only option for life.

Yet it is ultimately Camilla’s story, and domesticity, that triumph in Camilla. Lionel’s disruptions, like Macartney’s in Evelina, are only temporary. In Evelina, this triumph signals the primacy of the sister’s story over the brother’s. In Camilla, the triumph of domesticity over adventure, of the safe over the unstable, is at best an equivocal good. While Camilla does conclude with ostensibly happy domesticity, with Camilla returned to her family of origin, married to Edgar, and rewarded with a household of her own, many critics have refused to see this as a positive ending, and have questioned the narrator’s declaration of Camilla’s ‘exquisite lot’ (913). Despite the problems and difficulties encountered by Camilla throughout the novel, in the end nothing has significantly changed. The questions raised about proper female behaviour have not found answers. The punishments meted out to Camilla, so much harsher than those given to her brother for crimes much less serious, have been forgotten without being justified or explained.

The ending of the novel sees Camilla married to Edgar, who is viewed as the ‘true son’ of her father, and remaining in the same geographical location and familial sphere, to the extent to which she is ‘rarely parted’ from her family of origin, and her new home becomes a series of ‘alternate dwellings’ (913), adding Edgar’s estate of Beech Park to her uncle’s estate of Cleves and her father’s home of Etherington. Gruner suggests that the ending is dissatisfying because, re-establishing Camilla in the situation in which she began, it ‘reduplicates elements of the system [Burney] so explicitly criticises.’70 If we examine the ending in terms of the confines of domesticity to which women are relegated, the failure of Camilla to leave home even when she marries becomes an even sharper example of a woman’s inability to escape the domestic sphere. A change of master – from father to husband – will make little difference to her experience of life. Before marriage and after, she is confined to the same domestic sphere, the same domestic space. Likewise, a change of political structure will

70 Gruner, ‘The Bullfinch and the Brother,’ 34.
have little impact upon women’s lives more generally. No matter who is the master of the state, women will be confined to the same domestic realm.\textsuperscript{71}

Burney’s third novel thus raises questions that it does not answer, and invokes problems for which it offers no solution. Claudia Johnson’s conclusions about women’s lives in Austen’s \textit{Persuasion} are perhaps even more strikingly relevant to \textit{Camilla} than to that later novel. \textit{Camilla}’s conclusion is dissatisfying because, while it may on the surface seem to extol the ‘strong and stabilising attachments, the changeless pace, and the unceasing familiarity’ for which conservatives ‘laud membership within a neighbourhood,’ the novel leaves the heroine in a ‘particularly narrow and unwholesome confinement.’\textsuperscript{72} The disruptions that Lionel offers to the domestic narrative, while providing a welcome change in the story and suggesting that there is life beyond the domestic sphere which Camilla inhabits, are ineffectual. The brother may have the power to postpone his sister’s fate, but he cannot ultimately change the fact that domesticity is a woman’s only option. His interruptions are enjoyable for the reader, but are only temporary. Lionel, the brother, escapes; Camilla, the sister, remains comfortably trapped in the only home she has ever known.

\textit{Conclusion}

While Elizabeth Kraft sees the focus on domesticity in \textit{Camilla} as a means of commenting on the broader political scene, arguing that ‘the domestic setting is the core of English life,’ and that it is ‘under siege by forces that threaten to destroy the nation,’\textsuperscript{73} I suggest that the novel’s presentation of domesticity reflects not the state of the nation but the state of

\textsuperscript{71}Stephanie Russo’s \textit{Women in Revolutionary Debate} offers a similar reading of \textit{Camilla} to my own, suggesting that Burney is a ‘political skeptic’ who ‘displays a deep cynicism towards change of any kind, betraying in her novels a belief that revolution achieves nothing, for nothing can ever really change.’ Russo, however, makes no distinction between the ways men and women are treated in Burney’s novels, and thus does not note how the novelist is participating in the broader debate concerning woman’s place in society in the 1790s. Russo, \textit{Women in Revolutionary Debate}, 23, 49.

\textsuperscript{72}Claudia L. Johnson, \textit{Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel} (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 158. Johnson’s comments, which I will examine in more detail in the following chapter, refer particularly to Elizabeth and Anne Elliot, and to Mrs Musgrove. For Johnson, Austen solves the problem of women’s landed lives by offering her heroine an alternative life on the high seas, akin to that of Mrs Croft. Burney envisages no such option for Camilla.

\textsuperscript{73}Kraft, ‘Female Heroic Action,’ 40.
women’s lives in the ‘realm of domesticity’ and the confines of the private sphere. But far from this being an apolitical discussion, it is heightened by the recent events in France, in which the process of confining women to the domestic sphere which had quietly been taking place in England was brought to the fore and publicly declared. If the Revolution forced people to see what had been assumed – that political structures were human constructs and could be changed – so too the exclusion of women from citizenship demonstrated that women’s place in the domestic sphere was a human decision, rather than a natural state of being, no matter how hard the Revolutionaries tried to present it as an apolitical move.

Burney’s third novel thus deals very specifically with the political context of the mid-1790s in which it was written. But rather than tackling the ideas of gender raised by the French Revolution overtly, Burney demonstrates instead the difference being born female makes to a normal young Englishwoman, using the established trope of the brother-sister relationship to do so, and examining the domestic sphere to which women are confined through using the form of a domestic novel to challenge domesticity but ultimately uphold its values. The unsatisfying nature of Camilla’s conclusion draws attention to the problems inherent in the domestic sphere, and the challenges faced by the heroine simply by virtue of being a woman. Camilla does not move and does not grow. Enclosed by her family, her geographical position, her gender and the realm of the domestic, she makes the best of her limited options. But the lack of change in the novel’s conclusion draws attention to the inability of political structures to change a woman’s experience. Burney’s insistence on the disadvantages of being born a woman, examined through the relationship between Camilla and Lionel, their similar faults and failings, shows that the situation in England was much the same as that in France – women, far from being able to share in the benefits of political change, were confined by their gender. Camilla’s apparent lack of interest in overt politics, its reluctance to discuss structures and revolutions, is not the result of a lack of interest in such matters. Rather it reflects a deep conviction that they are, ultimately, ‘unfeminine,’ not because they are of no interest to women or beyond a woman’s understanding, but because until women can be released from the trap of gender, so acutely demonstrated through the brother-sister relationship, politics will remain irrelevant to a woman’s experience.
Camilla contains no more positive vision. Tied to the particular domestic sphere of her home and family, Burney’s heroine is trapped. Her brother, who was the immediate cause of so many of her problems, has been banished, but her shift from the consanguineal family to the conjugal does not impact upon her life, and it is clear that she will remain where she is, with no further options for alteration. As Stephanie Russo suggests, the novel’s conclusion, like the French Revolution, is simply a case of power changing hands between men, ‘leaving women in much the same place as they ever were: powerless and vulnerable.’\(^{74}\) It would be another two decades before Austen, depicting the same struggles and claustrophobia of landed life for women, would envisage a new society in which women could experience the liberty, equality and fraternity denied them both in the French legislation and the more subtle English limitations of gender and the domestic sphere.

\(^{74}\) Russo, Women in Revolutionary Debate, 50.
Chapter 5
Fraternal Equality?
Jane Austen and *Persuasion* (1818)

Interpretations of *Persuasion* changed dramatically in 1972 with the publication of Nina Auerbach’s ‘*O Brave New World: Evolution and Revolution in Persuasion.*’ Viewing the novel less as an elegiac autobiography of a dying author, and more as a call to revolution, Auerbach drew new attention to what is one of the most obvious features of the novel – its representation of two different social groups, the nobility and landed gentry, and the Navy. For Auerbach, the important difference between the two is on the level of feeling and sentiment, reflecting the emotional register of the novel. While the world of the nobility is defined by tradition, formality and exclusion, the navy ‘is associated with nature, openness, hospitality, romance,’ and the officers come to reign in a world that is ‘governed by nature and by human desire’ rather than traditional social structures and wealth.¹

While Auerbach’s thesis has been regularly challenged in the four decades since its publication, her insistence on the importance of the social divide in *Persuasion* is largely uncontested. Critics have argued about the nature of the divide, about its consequences for Anne, and about its significance in the novel as a whole. All these debates have contributed to the sense that, whatever else this novel may represent, the division of landed and professional classes is central to its meaning.

One way in which this comparison of societies can be seen is between patriarchal and fraternal social structures. While a number of scholars have seen revolutionary potential in the two societies, none has examined them using the patriarchal/fraternal paradigm, so significant to the French Revolution and England’s response to it. To claim that Sir Walter, Lady Russell and Mr Elliot represent a traditional patriarchy is far from original. Sir Walter’s favourite book, the Baronetage, is a record of lands and titles being passed from father to son, and a testament to the families who held power over the middle and lower classes in modern Britain. It provides for him ‘occupation for an idle hour, and consolation in a distressed one’ because it reminds him that, whatever ‘unwelcome sensations, arising from

domestic affairs’ might trouble him, his place in society is established and secure. Lady Russell, too, has ‘prejudices on the side of ancestry; ... a value for rank and consequence’ (12) which colours her vision of people and her priorities. It is the value she places on ‘rank,’ ‘consequence’ and ‘ancestry’ that leads her to prefer Mr Elliot, himself a man who takes pride in his place in the patriarchal family. When accused of having neglected the Ellots for many years and of speaking ill of Sir Walter, ‘he was quite indignant. He, who had ever boasted of being an Elliot, and whose feelings, as to connection, were only too strict to suit the unfeudal tone of the present day! He was astonished, indeed!’ (150) Pride in family, in connections, and in rank form an important part of all three characters.

The navy is set up in direct opposition to the nobility. This is indicated right from its introduction into the novel, as Sir Walter exclaims against it for its tendency to bring “persons of obscure birth into undue distinction, and raising men to honours which their fathers and grandfathers never dreamt of” (21). The navy, rather than respecting the social structures upon which Sir Walter’s rank depends, rewards men for nothing more than ability and achievement, regardless of their family or connections. Its representation here as a meritocracy, however, is not the most revolutionary aspect of this society. More telling still, it is described as a brotherhood. While Austen never uses the word ‘fraternity’ with reference to the navy, she clearly evokes the idea of the officers as brothers, and the society as one founded on principles of equality, merit and strong community – principles that are more recognisably fraternal than patriarchal.

This chapter will examine three different ways in which this contrast between patriarchy and fraternity works itself out in Persuasion. First, it will demonstrate how Persuasion uses actual relationships between brothers and sisters in both social groups to demonstrate the superiority of the naval fraternity. Second, it will investigate how the literal brother-sister relationships between naval siblings inform a wider reading of the navy as a fraternal community, but how the novel manages to portray this fraternity as distinct from that of the French Revolutionaries. And third, it will consider how the social structures of each group impact the women in its society, and how this wider fraternal society is used to call for greater equality between men and women.

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Literal brother-sister relationships in both societies

Mary Favret has argued that, ‘distressed, anxious, and punctuated by confusion and pain,’ *Persuasion* is far more a wartime novel than any of Austen’s other works, a text in which the author ‘evokes the costs of prolonged war.’\(^3\) Certainly heartache and accident are more prevalent in this novel than is generally the case in Austen’s work. While distress and pain characterise much of the narrative, the stories behind the novel’s action are also governed by negative experiences and emotions. In no other novel do we find so many characters whose lives have been affected by the death of family members, and particularly by the deaths of brothers. Fraternal death is experienced by members of both the landed and professional classes, by both the gentry and the navy. The reactions of these societies to the death of a brother provides a fascinating comparison between the families that make up those societies.

*Persuasion* opens with Sir Walter’s examination of the *Baronetage*, a book which records the death of his only son, a stillborn child. From the beginning of the narrative, then, the Elliots, like the Bennet sisters in *Pride and Prejudice*, are defined as a family marked by fraternal absence. The absence of an Elliot brother means that the line will end with Sir Walter’s death, when the estate will pass not to one of his descendants, but to an estranged, distant cousin, Mr William Elliot. This failure on the part of Sir Walter to father a living son indicates the failings of patriarchy as a social system. With no son, Sir Walter has no natural heir; with no brother, the Elliot sisters have no one on whom to depend at their father’s death. Even before we learn of Sir Walter’s extravagant expenses and his need to retrench, the presence of a stillborn son indicates the fall of the house of Elliot. Jocelyn Harris notes further how this son presages the end of the social system of patriarchy: ‘The fact that Sir Walter’s son was born and died on November 5, 1789, a conflation of two ominously revolutionary dates, suggests that he is on the way out.’\(^4\) November 5 was the date of both the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, and the beginning of the Glorious Revolution in 1688, both of which were remembered annually with ‘thanksgiving’ in Anglican church

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\(^3\) Mary Favret, ‘Everyday War,’ *ELH* 72 (2005): 606.

services as moments of divine deliverance from ‘Popish’ threats.\textsuperscript{5} The Glorious Revolution, however, also serves as a reminder of the potential for the laws and governance of Britain to change, a change that is symbolically encoded into \textit{Persuasion} through its comparison of the gentry and the navy. 1789, of course, was the year the French Revolution began, a much more recent governmental shift, and one which was regularly compared with the Glorious Revolution by the pro-Revolutionary societies of the early 1790s.\textsuperscript{6} This combination of dates thus draws attention to not only Britain’s political and revolutionary past, but also to the more recent activity, notably fraternal, in France. The death of the Elliot brother is both a symbol of the death of the nobility and an indication that landed familial and social structures are failing.

A second fraternal death is recorded in the Musgrove family. While the Musgroves are not nobility like the Elliots, they are notable gentry ‘whose landed property and general importance, were second, in that country, only to Sir Walter’s’ (31). They, too, have lost a son and brother, drowned at sea during a brief stint in the navy. The family is reminded of this incident, which seems generally to be of little consequence to them, by the arrival of Captain Wentworth at Kellynch. The narrator’s words describing this son are harsh and damning:

\begin{quote}
the Musgroves had had the ill fortune of a very troublesome, hopeless son; and the good fortune to lose him before he reached his twentieth year; he had been sent to sea, because he was stupid and unmanageable on shore; he had been very little cared for at any time by his family, though quite as much as he deserved; seldom heard of, and scarcely at all regretted, when the intelligence of his death abroad had worked its way to Uppercross, two years before.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{5} \textit{The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments} (Cambridge: Printed for J. Archdeacon, 1789), service for 5 November (no pagination). This is one of only four dated special services, the others being for 30 January, seeking mercy for the execution of Charles I, 29 May, giving thanks for the Restitution of the Royal Family in 1660, and the first day of the current monarch’s reign (in the 1789 edition, 25 October).

\textsuperscript{6} Lois Schwoerer notes that in 1788, ‘men of every political stripe laid claim to the legacy of the Glorious Revolution and memorialised it to serve their own political goals and convictions.’ Radicals used the centenary to argue for the need for greater reform along the same peaceful lines, and were inspired by a number of the innovations of the French Revolutionaries. Anne Mallory notes that the connections made by the radicals between the Glorious Revolution and the French Revolution influenced Burke’s \textit{Reflections on the Revolution in France}, as he ‘devoted much (some have thought too much) of the early part of \textit{Reflections} to the argument that the 1688 revolution was completely different from that of 1789.’ Lois G. Schwoerer, ‘Celebrating the Glorious Revolution, 1689-1989,’ \textit{Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies} 22.1 (1990): 3, 5; Anne Mallory, ‘Burke, Boredom, and the Theatre of Counterrevolution,’ \textit{PMLA} 118.2 (2003): 227.
He had, in fact, though his sisters were now doing all they could for him, by calling him “poor Richard,” been nothing better than a thick-headed, unfeeling, unprofitable Dick Musgrove, who had never done any thing to entitle himself to more than the abbreviation of his name, living or dead. (54)

Of little more worth, and much more trouble, than the still-born Elliot son, ‘thick-headed, unfeeling, unprofitable Dick Musgrove’ is himself an indictment of landed life that is far more damning than the mediocrity which Claudia Johnson ascribes to the gentry of this novel. Even a stint at sea could not redeem his character, or make him dear to his family of origin. Yet he is mourned, excessively, by those very parents who sent him away as too difficult to keep at home, ‘unmanageable on shore,’ and spoken of with respect by sisters who ‘scarcely at all regretted’ his death when news of it arrived. Rather than remembering him as he was and mourning appropriately, Penny Gay argues that the Musgroves have adopted an image of their lost brother as the worthy young midshipman of so much of the sentimental drama and ballads of the Napoleonic War period. Their mourning takes on the character of melodrama rather than truth. It is a picture of fraternal mourning that brings no credit to the Musgroves, but rather heightens the folly of a society in which blood ties are held to be sacred, and the loss of a sibling a great tragedy to be endlessly mourned, regardless of the value of the people involved.

The picture that is developed of fraternal mourning in the world of the nobility and landed gentry, then, is one in which bloodlines are of paramount importance, and in which people are valued not for their abilities or personal attributes, but for their gender and their position in a family. In other words, it is blood and connections that count. The Musgroves are compared unfavourably in their grief to the Harvilles, a naval family. Captain Harville’s sister, Fanny, has also recently died. Yet far from being a Dick Musgrove, Fanny was a worthy sister, “a very superior creature” (199) as Captain Wentworth remembers her. Not only was she sister to a naval officer, but she was also engaged to another, Captain Benwick, making her an integral part of their small naval society. Her death, rather than being

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8 Penny Gay, Jane Austen and the Theatre (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 152. Gay notes that, while the ‘most famous theatrical midshipman, William in [Douglas] Jerrold’s Black-Ey’d Susan’ (150) did not appear on stage until 1829, a ballad from 1731, also called ‘Black-ey’d Susan’ contains a similar character who was probably the inspiration for both Jerrold’s hero and Austen’s William Price of Mansfield Park. Richard Brinsley Sheridan’s The Glorious First of June (1794) also stars a ‘heroic midshipman’ (150).
forgotten or remembered inaccurately, is genuinely regretted by her brother who, when Benwick forgets her and engages himself to another, “feels a deal on his poor sister’s account” (179).\(^9\) Benwick’s own forgetfulness of his lost fiancée brings this point into even sharper relief. It is not that the men of the navy remember their lost loved ones, and mourn them, longer or more reasonably than do their landed counterparts; Harville makes this point when he comments to Anne ‘with a quivering lip [...], “Poor Fanny! She would not have forgotten him so soon!”’ (252) Rather, there is something particular here about brother-sister relationships in a naval context, a sense in which the bond between siblings is increased and strengthened by their belonging to a fraternal community. Naval fraternity, it is implied, loves longer and remembers more truly the real virtues and values of those within its society, a demonstration of its composition as a meritocracy. Those, on the other hand, who live by the patriarchal system of the land are caught in a system of family, and thereby mourning, which can just as easily result in nonsensical grief, required by the ties of blood.

It is not only in the differences in fraternal mourning that naval siblings are presented more positively than landed siblings in *Persuasion*. The sets of living brothers and sisters reinforce the distinction between the two societies, albeit in more subtle ways. The living Musgrove children – or at least the eldest three, Charles, Henrietta and Louisa – do have a reasonably positive relationship. The Musgroves as a family are described by the narrator as being ‘in a state of alteration, perhaps of improvement’ (43), and the relationships between the siblings certainly seem to indicate this, for there is less of a sense of obligation to their relationship than that which they feel towards their dead brother Dick. Yet when we compare them to other siblings in Austen’s work, their relationships appear mediocre, lacking in real life and spirit. Claudia Johnson says of the gentry established around Uppercross:

> just as the Admiral’s tendency to confuse Henrietta and Louisa suggests their indistinguishability, so the redundancy of [Charles] Hayter’s Christian name, doubling with that of Charles Musgrove, calls attention to what is undistinctive about eldest sons in general.\(^{10}\)

\(^9\) This is Mary’s account of Captain Harville’s feelings, recounted in a letter to Anne, but as her information is from Mrs Harville it is reasonably trustworthy.

\(^{10}\) Johnson, *Jane Austen*, 158.
Just as eldest sons are ‘undistinctive,’ so too there is nothing distinctive about the Musgrove siblings’ relationship. It is not exceptional, either good or bad. It is simply the way the family is structured. While the use of brother-sister relationships as simple background material may be common in many eighteenth-century novels, in Austen’s novels this relationship is of deep significance. A brother-sister relationship that has nothing remarkable about it, we are led to assume, indicative of a failing in the family or the society in which it belongs.

Yet it is worth following Johnson’s lead a bit further here, for her claim that the Musgroves and Hayters are indistinguishable, undistinctive, and therefore mediocre is set in comparison to Captain Wentworth. ‘Taken by himself,’ Johnson suggests, ‘Charles Hayter [...] could appear as an earnest and respectable gentleman. But placed alongside Frederick Wentworth [...] he fades into nonentity.’¹¹ Likewise, the fraternal relationships of the Musgroves cannot compare to the relationship Captain Wentworth experiences with his sister, Mrs Croft. This fraternal relationship, set in the context of the navy, is certainly the strongest relationship between a brother and sister in Persuasion, and is arguably one of the truest fraternal friendships in all of Austen’s novels.¹² Those between Fanny and William Price in Mansfield Park and Henry and Eleanor Tilney in Northanger Abbey come closest, but lack the genuine equality of the Croft/Wentworth relationship; for both the Prices and the Tilneys, it is the brother who takes the lead role, the sister who lovingly submits to his authority. In part the equality experienced by Captain Wentworth and Mrs Croft is due to their complete independence of one another, a factor that makes their relationship markedly different from most of Austen’s other brother-sister relationships. Coming from a lower class background, both siblings have been expected to make their own way in the world, and both have done so successfully through their membership in the navy. Mrs Croft achieved an excellent marriage some fifteen years before the action of the novel, and her husband is able to provide her with a home, having prospered in the navy, and made an admiral. Likewise, Captain Wentworth has made his fortune in the war, and therefore is not

¹¹ Johnson, Jane Austen, 158.
¹² This certainly is the opinion of John and Edith Hubback, who were themselves descendants of Austen’s own brother Francis. Deeply interested in relationships between brothers and sisters in Austen’s work, they commend the relationship between Wentworth and Mrs Croft as one characterised by a ‘firm friendship,’ equal in value only to that between Henry and Eleanor Tilney in Northanger Abbey but more delicately rendered. J. H. Hubback and Edith C. Hubback, Jane Austen’s Sailor Brothers: Being the Adventures of Sir Francis Austen, G.C.B., Admiral of the Fleet and Rear-Admiral Charles Austen (London: John Lane, 1906), 6.
dependent on his sister’s hospitality. Yet he comes ‘to Kellynch as to a home, to stay as long as he liked, being as thoroughly the object of the Admiral’s fraternal kindness as of his wife’s’ (79). Being close friends with his sister and her husband, and enjoying the community of Kellynch and particularly of Uppercross, he neither desires to find himself another home, nor is encouraged to do so. He is ‘to stay as long as he liked’ and he does.

Mrs Croft’s and Captain Wentworth’s respective ages and independence removes from their relationship any of the inherent authority structures we find in so many other brother-sister relationships in Austen’s novels. They are free from the financial dependence of the Dashwood sisters, or the moral dependence of Fanny Price on Edmund, or the almost filial dependence of Georgiana Darcy on her brother. Having no ties of obligation, Mrs Croft and Captain Wentworth are instead close friends. They are open and honest with one another, and Captain Wentworth is willing to confide in his sister in a way he does not seem to do with his fellow officers or friends. When he decides to marry, it is to his sister that he describes his ideal wife. He jokingly tells her, “Any body between fifteen and thirty may have me for asking. A little beauty, and a few smiles, and a few compliments to the navy, and I am a lost man. Should not this be enough for a sailor, who has had no society among women to make him nice?” (66) She, however, will not take him at his word: ‘He said it, she knew, to be contradicted.’ It is only a short exchange, but it reveals an intimacy and an understanding which, given that they have spent much of their adult lives apart, indicates a high level of commitment to one another. For the Musgroves, living only a short distance from one another and seeing each other every day has not led to anything like this degree of understanding and confidence. Having demonstrated her understanding of Wentworth’s joke, Mrs Croft presses him to be more serious, and he obeys willingly.

Captain Wentworth and Mrs Croft are also much alike. When Anne first meets Mrs Croft she looks closely for any similarities between the siblings, either of appearance or manner, ‘in the voice, or the turn of sentiment and expression’ (52). And while the results of her examination are not reported, Anne’s impression of Mrs Croft could be directly applied to Captain Wentworth himself: ‘Her manners were open, easy, and decided, like one who had no distrust of herself, and no doubts of what to do; without any approach to coarseness, however, or any want of good humour’ (52). Each sibling is of a strong mind, confident, intelligent, and personable; each is well liked and respected by their new community. Their
similarities of talent, ability and personality demand that they be equally respected and valued, despite their difference in gender.

This equality of ability is seen most clearly in their conversations with one another. They regularly challenge each other’s opinions and statements, and Mrs Croft certainly does not feel bound to agree with her brother in all matters, or to submit to his knowledge and experience. Her trust in her own opinion is nowhere more evident than in her debate with her brother over women’s experience on board ship. Like a number of naval wives of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Mrs Croft has spent many years travelling the world with her admiral husband in the course of his career. She consequently has a ‘reddened and weather-beaten complexion’ (52) of which Sir Walter would surely not approve. Bearing as she does the marks of her experience on her countenance, she is well within her rights to speak of that experience with some authority. And so when Captain Wentworth, in her hearing, deprecates the custom of having women on board ships, she responds in opposition. Viewing his attitude as a “superfine, extraordinary sort of gallantry” that treats women as “fine ladies” rather than as “rational creatures” (75), she mounts an argument from her own experience. Hoping he is not serious, she nonetheless takes up the debate with vigour, accusing him not of want of gallantry, as does the Admiral, but of an inappropriate view of women – particularly when he has the example of his own sister’s experience so close to hand. No wonder, then, she cries, “I cannot believe it of you. – All idle refinement!” (74) and goes on to dismiss his views as idle talk, inconsistent with any rational woman’s experience of life at sea.

While they are willing to argue with one another – and in public, too – their disagreement is far from causing a storm between them, or dulling their affection for one another. It is a sparring of equals, taking place within the context of a society that is accustomed to war, and well knows the difference between an ally and an enemy. But it is also a decidedly fraternal debate. It is an argument between a brother and a sister, taking place at the Musgrove’s house, but not including anyone outside their relationship. In fact, when the Admiral intervenes, Captain Wentworth ends the conversation. His sister can argue with

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him, criticise him, and seek to change his point of view, but it is behaviour he will not
tolerate from another, even a brother-in-law and superior officer.

This, then, is a fraternal relationship characterised by affection, openness, respect and
equality. It is a relationship that demonstrates Captain Wentworth’s suitability as a husband
for Anne by showing him to be committed to his family and respectful of the abilities of
women. But the relationship between the siblings has a more important role to play in this
novel than merely demonstrating the hero’s worth, a role which makes the brother-sister
relationship more significant in *Persuasion* than in any of Austen’s other novels. It reflects,
almost synecdochically, another, broader fraternal relationship – that of the naval society,
suggesting that the relationship between a brother and a sister can be both a reflection of,
and a foundation for, a different way of organising and structuring society. Examining the
way this brother-sister relationship is represented helps us understand what it means for
the navy to be a brotherhood. And because the relationship between Captain Wentworth
and his sister involves a man and woman relating as strongly connected equals, it also
provides an example of what it might look like for a woman to be a part of a fraternal
society, such as the navy, that welcomes, values and respects her and her contribution to
their community.

**The Navy as a fraternity**

The relationship between Captain Wentworth and Mrs Croft is significantly strengthened by
their mutual membership in the society of the navy. This is partly why their conversation
about women on board ship is so interesting. Captain Wentworth will discuss such matters
with his sister not only because he respects her and her opinion, but also because he
recognises that her viewpoint is valid. Not only has she spent much of her life on board ship,
as he has; she too is a member of the navy. While women in the early nineteenth century
could not join the navy, with the exception of a few women who dressed as men and passed
themselves off as regular sailors,\(^1\) women in *Persuasion* are indisputably shown to belong

\(^{14}\) Lincoln particularly discusses the case of Hannah Snell, a ‘working-class woman’ who ‘disguised herself as a
man and joined the marines to find her lover,’ but refers to a number of other ‘well-attested cases of women
to its society. The fact that we are not told what Mrs Croft’s role on her husband’s ships might be, or given any indication of what Anne’s role as a naval wife might look like, does not mean that they are not included in the navy in a real and meaningful way. Austen, in fact, is not interested in giving us the details of their professional obligations. The naval officers we encounter are firmly fixed on land and the stories they tell of their careers are very short on details regarding how they occupy their time. Mrs Croft’s career is no more and no less documented than any of the other sailors in the novel. The reason for this is simple: in this novel, the navy is not viewed as a profession, a career, or a lifestyle. It is a community.

It is a community moreover that is just as real on shore as it is at sea. Naval men were often accused of ‘clannishness’ when in society, 15 a fitting description of the little clusters of naval officers Admiral Croft meets at Bath. While Bath, for the Elliots, is a place to recapture their dignity and enjoy the importance of their rank, for the naval officers it is a place to enjoy their community. Admiral Croft expresses as much when he asks Anne, “How do you like Bath, Miss Elliot? It suits us very well. We are always meeting with some old friend or other; the streets full of them every morning; sure to have plenty of chat” (184-85). And it is in Bath that Mrs Croft appears most clearly as a member of the naval community. Anne describes seeing her almost every morning with the Admiral, and was always ‘delighted to […] observe their eagerness of conversation when occasionally forming into a little knot of the navy, Mrs Croft looking as intelligent and keen as any of the officers around her’ (183). Far from staying at home while her husband goes abroad, or remaining silent as the men discuss naval and social matters, Mrs Croft’s membership in the naval community, together with her experience and intelligence, entitles her to take her place in their conversations and debates, just as it has done in those with her own naval brother.

Her speech also reveals her membership in this community. Although it is not dotted with nautical metaphors, as is her husband’s, she speaks with confidence and knowledge about naval matters. She can explain in practical terms the difference between life on ships of different sizes, has travelled the world, crossing the Atlantic and going even as far as the

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15 Lincoln, Representing the Royal Navy, 9.
East Indies, and understands distinctions in terminology in a manner not common for women of the landed class. Nowhere is this more obvious than in her conversation with Mrs Musgrove. When speaking about her own life experience travelling, she clarifies her list of foreign locations, saying, ‘“We do not call Bermuda or Bahama, you know, the West Indies”’ (76, my italics). Mrs Musgrove’s lack of response emphasises how unusual such knowledge would be for a normal woman: ‘Mrs Musgrove had not a word to say in dissent; she could not accuse herself of having ever called them any thing in the whole course of her life.’ The ‘we’ of Mrs Croft’s original statement is a naval ‘we,’ a strong indication that she belongs to a different set of people from Mrs Musgrove, a set of people who are educated in global matters, who have seen the world. It is a ‘we’ that Mrs Croft belongs to just as fully as her husband or her brother, naval officers both.16

It is, however, not in Bath, nor at Uppercross, but at Lyme that *Persuasion* most clearly indicates the status of the navy as a community. As soon as Wentworth discovers his fellow naval officers are near, his feelings for his brother-officers leads him to visit them, taking with him the Musgroves and Anne, all of whom are promptly considered friends by the Harvilles and Captain Benwick. This, for Anne, is an indication of what she has lost by refusing Wentworth. “These would have been all my friends”’ (105), she considers to herself, regretting the community that she could have been a part of. Monica Cohen describes this as an instance where, in the society of the navy, ‘company substitutes for property,’ and there is certainly a sense in which Anne’s regret parallels Elizabeth Bennet’s thought, “of this place […] I might have been mistress!” when viewing Pemberley for the first time.17 For Elizabeth, at least at that moment, it is the property that she regrets. For Anne, whose marriage to Wentworth could have brought no property, it is lost membership in the community that prompts an equivalent disappointment. As they leave the house, ‘Anne thought she left great happiness behind her’ (106), despite the cramped rooms, and

16 In a similar example to Mrs Croft’s language reflecting her fraternal experience of the navy, so too Captain Wentworth’s speech reveals a close relationship with his sister. Deborah Klenck notes that when speaking to the Musgroves about the state of his first ship, the Asp, he compares her with ‘a threadbare woman’s cloak,’ demonstrating that he, like Northanger Abbey’s Henry Tilney, has learnt to make small-talk about women’s clothing from time spent attending to his sister. Deborah J. Knuth Klenck, “‘You Must be a Great Comfort to Your Sister, Sir’: Why Good Brothers Make Good Husbands,’ *Persuasions On-Line* 30.1 (2009): no pagination.

upon her arrival in Bath, and her sister’s insistence on her admiration of their own accommodation, Anne reflects on ‘how much more interesting to her was the home and the friendship of the Harvilles and Captain Benwick, than her own father’s house in Camden-place’ (134). Here, the lodgings and the friendship of the officers in Lyme are intricately connected by ‘a degree of hospitality so uncommon,’ reinforcing Anne’s preference of the warm community of the navy to her own family’s world, governed by ‘the usual style of give-and-take invitations, and dinners of formality and display’ (105).

This community in *Persuasion* is described not merely as warm, friendly and hospitable, but as a brotherhood, a fraternity. After visiting the Harvilles at Lyme, Louisa Musgrove, herself filled with ‘fine naval fervour’ (181),

> burst forth into raptures of admiration and delight on the character of the navy – their friendliness, their brotherliness, their openness, their uprightness; protesting that she was convinced of sailors having more worth and warmth than any other set of men in England; that they only knew how to live, and they only deserved to be respected and loved (106-07).

Her choice of words is worth considering. Their ‘friendliness’ seems to refer to their openness to new people and their hospitality, so recently experienced by the women. As people characterised by warm affections in their existing relationships, they are willing and eager to welcome strangers into their home and embrace them as friends. Their ‘brotherliness’ however is a different characteristic, and needs to be carefully distinguished from ‘friendliness.’ It is important to note here that Louisa’s comment is broken into two halves. The first half, her praise of ‘friendliness, brotherliness, openness, uprightness’, is a description of ‘the character of the navy.’ The second half refers to ‘sailors.’ So while ‘brotherliness’ could seem, at first glance, to refer to homosociality – not an unreasonable assumption when describing an exclusively male profession – Louisa’s connection of this term with the navy as a group, rather than with the sailors as professionals, complicates this reading. So, too, does the novel’s insistence that Mrs Croft is a member of the navy, and the vision of Mrs Harville’s involvement in her husband’s community that directly precedes Louisa’s outburst. She shares ‘the same good feelings’ as her husband, the same ‘unaffected, warm, and obliging’ manners (105). And the hospitality of the Harville household is equally demonstrated by both husband and wife – it is *their* desire of considering the whole party as friends of *their own*; the guests receive *their* entreaties for
their all promising to dine with them; and ‘they seemed almost hurt’ when the guests cannot stay for dinner, ‘considering it a thing of course that they should dine with them’ (105, my italics). Like Mrs Croft going ‘shares’ with her husband ‘in everything’ (183), the Harvilles operate as a unit in the society of the navy. And Louisa herself is hoping to become a member of the navy through marrying Captain Wentworth. Homosociality simply does not fit this context.

What, then, is Louisa referring to when she mentions the navy’s ‘brotherliness’? Or what do the officers mean when they refer to each other as ‘brother-officers’ (105)? Naomi Tadmor has demonstrated that in the eighteenth century kinship terminology was used not only to describe biological or marital relationships, but also ‘to signify social relationships and moral duties.’ Calling someone by a kinship term ‘was an announcement of status and a possible undertaking of obligations. Solidarity, consideration, duty and support could be expected, even if not given.’ The term ‘brother’ referred not only to relationships between biological brothers, or relationships between unrelated men, but to a wide range of relationships of ‘amity, sympathy, and fellowship.’ More than a description of duties owed or behaviour to be followed, brotherhood denoted an expectation of an affectionate relationship, a certain camaraderie.

Austen is also tapping into a more specific social trend, however, for in the early nineteenth century brotherhood was a commonly used military image. ‘Brother-officer’ could refer to men in both the army and the navy, but the brotherhood of officers was a concept particularly loved by Lord Nelson, the quintessential naval officer, after whom so much of Wentworth’s naval career and character appears to be modelled, including his ‘meteoric rise’ based purely on merit, his concern for those under his command, and his recklessness. Brotherhood had, however, long been a military image; it dates back at least as far as Shakespeare, whose Henry V declares at Agincourt,

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19 Tadmor, *Family and Friends*, 159.
20 Harris, *Revolution Almost Beyond Expression*, 92-97, quote 92.
We few, we happy few, we band of brothers.
For he today that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother.\textsuperscript{21}

Henry’s description of his brotherhood – of the brothers being a select few, connected by shared experience and by the sharing of blood – translates well into \textit{Persuasion}, for in this novel the officers are a select section of wider society, and they have shared experiences, including experiences of battle. But Nelson’s adoption of the phrase ‘band of brothers’ to refer to his fellow officers had a broader scope. Brother officers were ‘joined by ties of friendship, profession and the fire of battle’ – that is, joined emotionally, in a long-lasting manner.\textsuperscript{22} For Nelson, this meant caring for his men and their well-being, but also ensuring that their services were recognised by others with a fair share of public glory. It also extended beyond the men themselves, for he had a strong sense of familial responsibility towards the wives and children of those men with whom he had served.\textsuperscript{23} For Nelson, the ties of blood of which Henry V speaks not only connect serving sailors to one another, but also connect their families into the wider naval family. His fellow officers and their families were an extension of his family.

The brotherhood of \textit{Persuasion} exhibits all these characteristics. While there are no grown children to be adopted by the naval society, wives are certainly included in its ‘brotherhood.’ The sense of responsibility to one another is also vital to these naval characters. Harville tells Anne of Wentworth’s self-denying devotion to Benwick upon the death of his fiancée, and he has even broken his firm rule of not having women on board his ship by bringing “‘Mrs Harville, her sister, her cousin, and the three children, round from Portsmouth to Plymouth’” (75), as his sister reminds him. His explanation of his actions only serves to confirm his devotion to his brother-officers and to serving them and their families: “‘I would assist any brother-officer’s wife that I could, and I would bring any thing of Harville’s from the world’s end, if he wanted it.’” And when Louisa is injured at Lyme, the


\textsuperscript{23} Edgar Vincent, \textit{Nelson: Love and Fame} (Yale University Press, New Haven, 2003), 500.
Harvilles and Captain Benwick have ‘looked forward and arranged every thing, before the others began to reflect’ (121) in order to take care of her themselves until she is fit to be moved.

Anne’s experience of these naval officers is, with the exception of her relationship with Captain Wentworth, that of a sister with good brothers. Her discussions with both Benwick and Harville call to mind those of Captain Wentworth with Mrs Croft. In recommending that Benwick include ‘a larger allowance of prose in his daily study’ and in particular mentioning ‘such works of our best moralists, such collections of the finest letters, such memoirs of characters of worth and suffering, as occurred to her at the moment as calculated to rouse and fortify the mind by the highest precepts, and the strongest examples of moral and religious endurances’ (108-09), she is playing the exact role which the conduct books of her era gave to sisters. Sisters were expected to practise propriety and religion, to be self-controlled and to serve others. It was thought by some conduct book writers that a sister behaving in such a way could be a positive example and influence over a wayward brother. Jane West, for example, places this concept in a religious framework, when she advises young women, ‘Let us endeavour to lead a libertine brother or a deistical father to the safe paths of piety and virtue; showing them, by our own deportment, that they really are the paths of pleasantness.’ While Benwick is not explicitly straying from his religion, the idea of the sister as the one to lead a straying brother back to the ‘safe paths’ is amply demonstrated by Anne, even if she does recognise that in doing so ‘she had been eloquent on a point in which her own conduct would ill bear examination’ (109).

Anne’s relationship with Captain Harville is more explicitly described as fraternal. When they speak, it is ‘the kind-hearted intercourse of brother and sister’ (267), characterised by ‘the unaffected, easy kindness of manner which denoted the feelings of an older acquaintance than he really was’ (252). And just as Captain Wentworth has debated the place of women on board ship with his sister, allowing for her knowledge, intelligence, and respecting her point of view, so, too, Harville debates a woman’s place in society with Anne, again disagreeing with her, but with respect for her experience and strength of mind. Their conversation, like that between the real siblings, focuses on the personal. As Mrs Croft

shared her experiences in the navy, Anne shares hers of landed life: “‘We live at home, quiet, confined, and our feelings prey upon us’” (253); as a result, she openly claims the “‘privilege’” of “‘loving longest, when existence or when hope is gone’” (256). In return, Harville seeks to share with her what he feels but cannot express – “‘If I could but make you comprehend,’” he begins; “‘if I could convey to you,’” and yet again, “‘If I could explain to you all this’” (255). Their conversation is a demonstration, on both sides, of an emotional openness even when there are no words to express those emotions, and a willingness to understand and be understood. And as with the earlier debate, there is no conclusion reached: Harville cannot either be convinced or convince Anne of his point of view, but ends respecting her opinion. What is more, the conversation, which borders on an argument, has not damaged their relationship. They know more of each other as a result, and when at the conclusion of their conversation Harville puts ‘his hand on her arm, quite affectionately,’ and calls her a “‘good soul’” (256), one feels their discussion has connected them more strongly as brother and sister.

The fraternity of the navy, then, is a way of describing their strong sense of community, coupled with a common purpose and a commitment to serving one another. While Austen does not use the word ‘fraternity,’ the novel’s insistence on the navy as a band of brothers, Louisa’s praise of their ‘brotherliness’ and the way many of the naval relationships are set up as either literally or symbolically fraternal, all provide solid foundation for the use of this word to characterise the naval society. It is also a valid way of characterising a society set up in opposition to a traditional patriarchy, as the navy is set up in opposition to Sir Walter’s world. But in portraying the navy as a fraternal community, *Persuasion* not only describes a close community. It also invokes one of the key principles of the French Revolution. Describing a section of the British community as fraternal thus carries potentially revolutionary implications. The matter becomes even more serious when the fraternal society is set against the traditional patriarchy, and not only condoned but actually commended. How, then, are we to reconcile an author not usually connected with a radical agenda who writes a novel which not only condones, but recommends, a society run on a principle of fraternity?

As a framework for considering this question, it is valuable to look at the character of Mrs Croft. Johnson describes her as a ‘tour de force of characterisation,’ and draws attention to
the ways in which she is decidedly feminine, while completely lacking all the ‘features usually construed as feminine, such as bashfulness, roundness, sweetness, and daintiness.’

What is most surprising about Mrs Croft, however, is the way she embodies radical ideas about women in society. In her conversation with her brother regarding women on board ships, she declares, without any qualification, that women ought to be treated as “‘rational creatures’” rather than as “‘fine ladies’” (75). As there is no reaction to this comment from those around her, it is easy to pass over it when reading. But in using these particular phrases, Mrs Croft sounds remarkably like Mary Wollstonecraft, who begins her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* by addressing her female readers:

> My own sex, I hope, will excuse me, if I treat them like rational creatures, instead of flattering their fascinating graces, and viewing them as if they were in a state of perpetual childhood, unable to stand alone. I earnestly wish to point out in what true dignity and human happiness consists – I wish to persuade women to endeavour to acquire strength, both of mind and body, and to convince them that the soft phrases, susceptibility of heart, delicacy of sentiment, and refinement of taste, are almost synonymous with epithets of weakness, and that those beings who are only the objects of pity and that kind of love, which has been termed its sister, will soon become objects of contempt.

Mrs Croft not only sounds like Mary Wollstonecraft – wanting women to be treated as ‘rational creatures’ – she also embodies Wollstonecraft’s ideals for women. She is strong in ‘mind and body,’ and dismisses sentiment, refinement and delicacy as unnecessary for happiness. “‘We none of us expect to be in smooth water all our days’” (75), she claims, and having experienced rough seas, Mrs Croft recognises the importance of strength in women as well as in men.

As an embodiment of Wollstonecraftian ideals, then, Mrs Croft could be read as a radical, with the potential to be placed with other represented advocates of reactionary ideology in Johnson’s type of the ‘freakish feminist, or, “female philosopher,” as she was then called,’ espousing ‘the feminist principles of the 1790s in a ridiculously caricatured form,’ ‘duly mocked throughout the novel and contrasted unfavourably to modest and sensible young ladies.’ But Mrs Croft is nothing of the sort. In fact, even Lady Russell is ‘very well pleased’

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(139) with her acquaintance. While she may prefer the accommodation of a man of war to the best house in England, and be adamant about women’s rights, Mrs Croft is nonetheless characterised as a proper, domestic woman, faithful to her husband and intent on improving him in the eyes of society. Anne’s experience of riding in a cart with the Crofts gives her an impression of the way their marriage is run: without taking control or issuing orders to her husband, Mrs Croft ensures that they neither hit a post, ‘fell into a rut, nor ran foul of a dung-cart’ by ‘coolly giving the reins a better direction herself’ or ‘judiciously putting out her hand’ (99). Without show or display, Mrs Croft has tailored her own reason and ability to the benefit of her marriage, rather than to serve herself or a radical cause.

This embodiment of radical ideas within a safe figure provides a good model for what Austen is doing in *Persuasion* with the idea of fraternity. Rather than condoning the French Revolution in any sense, this novel presents a fraternal community that is decisively different from the manner in which the French had interpreted and put that term into practice. The differences between the two lead Jocelyn Harris to claim Austen to be painting a picture of ‘an alternative kind of fraternity to that of the French Revolutionaries.’

While Harris does not elaborate on what the differences between French and Austenian fraternity might be, two qualifying factors are apparent – the placement of her fraternity within a section of society that was seen in the early nineteenth century as quintessentially British, and its inclusion of women in its community.

While Sir Walter’s world is confined essentially to those families mentioned in the Baronetage, his removal from Kellynch Hall early in *Persuasion* signifies a change in the way the British national character could be defined. If the nobility neglect their role in society and fail to fulfil their duties towards those under their leadership and dependent upon them, then they are no longer positive examples of what it means to be British. The navy, on the other hand, increasingly came to be a ‘national symbol’ in the early nineteenth century. Britons increasingly saw themselves as a sea power, a maritime empire, and it was for the most part the navy that ensured their dominion of the oceans. Captain Wentworth’s casual descriptions of his travels, from the Mediterranean to the Western

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28 Harris, *Revolution Almost Beyond Expression*, 137.
Islands, as well as Mrs Croft’s own experiences give the impression of this domination. British ships, it is implied, go everywhere and are everywhere; and the prize money that has made Wentworth quickly rich reinforces the notion of the Royal Navy commanding the seas. Likewise, Captain Harville’s home, decorated with ‘some few articles of a rare species of wood, excellently worked up, and with something curious and valuable from all the distant countries [he] had visited’ (106) is a microcosm of the globe, and a reminder that British trade, too, was protected by the efforts of the navy.31 The navy was a symbol of all that Britain stood for – hardly the section of society to choose if one wanted to argue for the adoption of French Revolutionary principles.32

Even more significantly, however, it was the navy that was seen to be keeping Napoleon from invading Britain. Anne, at least, is aware of this, arguing against her father that ‘“the navy, I think, who have done so much for us, have at least an equal claim with any other set of men, for all the comforts and all the privileges which any home can give. Sailors work hard enough for their comforts, we must all allow”’ (21). The Elliots have had no direct or personal contact with the navy. The ‘us’ to whom Anne refers is the nation, and what the sailors have done is keep the French at bay. Sir Walter may not have considered the possibility of a French invasion, but Anne certainly has. So had the British people of the time. During the Napoleonic wars, naval victories were celebrated and naval heroes glorified. Nelson, the victor at the Nile and Trafalgar, was virtually canonised.33 Far from embodying French ideology, it was the navy that was keeping those ideologies from destroying British life and culture.

The naval fraternity is also presented as fundamentally different from French fraternity in its view of women’s place in society. In the early stages of the French Revolution, the status of women in the new fraternity was widely debated, as I have already noted. Would it be a

31 Marshall, ‘Empire and British Identity,’ 56.
32 Frey also argues that the navy is representative of Britain, but for different reasons. She claims that ‘Austen argues that it is in fact impossible for any person to imagine the nation. Instead, she suggests, administrative agencies such as the British navy define individuals’ obligations to the nation as a whole and the people within it. Such a model is surprising because it removes content from the nation: nationality does not designate a shared history or culture, and does not arise from among the people, but is imposed on them through government agencies.’ These agencies, then, become ‘the crux of national identity.’ Anne Frey, ‘A Nation Without Nationalism: The Reorganisation of Feeling in Austen’s Persuasion,’ Novel 38.2/3 (2005): 214.
society of brothers and sisters, or merely a masculine brotherhood? In 1790 Condorcet could argue that ‘Either no individual of the human race has true rights, or all of them have the same ones; and he who votes against the right of another, whatever his religion, his colour, or his sex, has from that moment abjured his own rights.’ The time of debate, however, was soon over. By 1793, the debate regarding women’s place was solved by a resurgence of the idea of masculine and feminine spheres, spheres that were held to be natural and therefore not overthrown by political revolution and social restructuring.

Women gained inheritance rights, and equal rights to divorce as men, but were not admitted as true citizens. With their position in the private, domestic sphere reaffirmed, all women’s political clubs were outlawed, and a number of prominent female politicians were executed.

Given that French Revolutionary principles were largely based on the work of the social contract theorists of the seventeenth century, the exclusion of women from full citizenship is unsurprising. Carole Pateman has argued that, while the theory may present ‘civil society as a universal realm that (at least potentially) includes everyone,’ it is actually ‘a fraternal pact that constitutes civil society as a patriarchal or masculine order.’ Just as the early revolutionaries saw the position of women in society to be at stake in their new fraternity, so too ‘both sides in the seventeenth-century controversy [between the patriarchalists and the social contract theorists] were well aware that the new doctrine of natural freedom and equality had subversive implications for all relationships of power and subordination.’ And just as the revolutionaries came to see female subordination as a natural state, and woman’s rightful place being in the domestic and private, rather than in the political and public sphere, so too the early social contract theorists, Locke, Hobbes and Rousseau, used the notion of separate spheres to justify freedom and equality as a political reality for all men, and familial subordination as the norm for all women. Pateman states:

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35 Hunt, Family Romance, 81, 119, 121.
36 Hunt, Family Romance, 119-20.
38 Pateman, Disorder of Women, 39.
The fraternal social contract creates a new, modern patriarchal order that is presented as divided into two spheres: civil society or the universal sphere of freedom, equality, individualism, reason, contract and impartial law – the realm of men or ‘individuals’; and the private world of particularity, natural subjection, ties of blood, emotion, love and sexual passion – the world of women, in which men also rule.\(^\text{39}\)

*Persuasion* paints a different picture. Here it is not only men who experience ‘freedom, equality, individualism, reason’ and impartiality, or women who are bound by ‘ties of blood, emotion, love and sexual passion.’ In portraying the navy as a fraternity that includes – even welcomes – women, this novel makes a distinctive break with French fraternity, but also remedies one of the main flaws of social contract theory.\(^\text{40}\) That women are part of the navy, and that familial bonds are created and sustained through naval society, is only one part of how this is accomplished. The other part of the distinction lies in *Persuasion*’s reconsideration of the idea of natural, separate spheres for men and women.

The novel’s conclusion declares the navy to be a ‘profession which is, if possible, more distinguished in its domestic virtues than in its national importance’ (275), suggesting that it embodies both male and female spheres. ‘National importance’ implies action in Pateman’s ‘civil society or the universal sphere,’ the place of law, politics, and public deeds. ‘Domestic virtues,’ on the other hand, reflects the ‘private world’ where women, as guardians of both domesticity and virtue, found their place. Yet in *Persuasion* both of these spheres are combined in the navy. Even more than that, we find that the navy excels in both areas – it is, ‘if possible, even more distinguished’ in the female, private sphere than in the male, public sphere for which it was most commonly praised. And just in case we had not yet been entirely convinced that women belong to this public/private, civil/domestic, male/female fraternity, the final sentence leaves us in no doubt as to the matter, for it is Anne who is described as ‘belonging to that profession which is, if possible, more distinguished in its domestic virtues than in its national importance.’

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\(^{39}\) Pateman, *Disorder of Women*, 43.

\(^{40}\) Megan Woodworth also notes the way in which Persuasion’s fraternity differs from the French model in its inclusion of women. As Woodworth’s focus is on constructs of masculinity she does not pursue what this implies for the women included in the navy, and in particular the difference it makes for Anne. Megan A. Woodworth, *Eighteenth-Century Women Writers and the Gentleman’s Liberation Movement: Independence, War, Masculinity, and the Novel, 1778-1818* (Farnham, Surrey, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 212.
Charles Rzepka views this conclusion as a way of imbuing Anne’s natural maternal, nurturing abilities with ‘national importance.’ He claims,

As “a sailor’s wife”, Anne’s maternal, nurturing skills will extend beyond the immediate family circle and into the larger, informally extended “family” of her naval brothers and sisters, linking her “domestic virtues” with the navy’s “national importance” in the historical arena.  

The implication here is not that the navy combines the two spheres, but that, with the inclusion of women into the naval family, both spheres are represented in the wider naval community. The men continue to work publicly to achieve ‘national importance,’ while their wives behave privately, ensuring the navy’s reputation for ‘domestic virtues.’ What Rzepka has overlooked, however, is the fact that, throughout Persuasion, the gendered spheres are blurred. Captain Harville’s main characteristics are not his courage or heroism in wartime, but his ‘domesticity and family sensibilities,’ and Benwick’s whole demeanour, his “soft sort of manner” (186), his speechlessness, and his Romantic agony make him appear far more feminine than many of the women in the novel.  

Not only are the men feminised, the women of the navy also take on male characteristics. Anne takes charge of sorting out her father’s financial situation, just as the “shrewd” Mrs Croft demonstrates herself to be “more conversant with business” (25) than her husband in negotiating the lease of Kellynch Hall. In fact, as Harris notes, in Persuasion ‘Austen constantly erodes gender boundaries,’ suggesting ‘a surprising ease of movement between the public and private spheres that convention labelled male and female.’ The two spheres are not combined in Persuasion’s navy, but dismantled such that those who belong to the navy participate in both the public and private spheres, in matters of national importance and in domestic virtues.

The navy, then, is a fraternity unlike that of the French, but also decidedly different from that of the social contract theorists. Rather than supporting the French cause, Austen bases her fraternity in a decidedly British section of society, arguing that fraternity could be a social model for Britain without it being overrun by the full force of Napoleonic ideology.

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42 Harris, Revolution Almost Beyond Expression, 106.
43 Harris, Revolution Almost Beyond Expression, 105, 91.
But in making her fraternity genuinely inclusive of women, and by demonstrating it as a place where male and female spheres are not rigidly divided and where gender roles can be, to an extent, fluid, *Persuasion*’s fraternity becomes not only dramatically different from that of France, but also becomes a social structure that can offer genuine opportunities for the women of its community. The naval fraternity provides the space Charlotte Smith sought in her early-Revolution novels, where revolutionary principles could be extended to women as well as to men, and the answer to the problem of domestic claustrophobia depicted in *Camilla*, a society in which the gender boundaries that confined women to the domestic sphere could be breached. In *Persuasion*, membership in fraternal society of the navy grants women a chance to experience the freedom and equality that fraternity was supposed to bring.

**Liberty and equality in fraternity: the impact of the navy on women’s lives**

The navy in *Persuasion* represents more than an alternative fraternity. The novel uses this society to provide an alternative liberty and an alternative equality also, particularly for the women of the navy. For, in contrast to the social structures of England, which excluded women from the public political sphere, or the new French society, which actively excluded women from its notion of fraternity, the navy in *Persuasion* is a community that welcomes those women who deserve to belong to it, and who can add something to its society. For those women, it provides equality with their brother-officers, and freedom from the constrictions of landed British life.

The novel’s insistence that Mrs Croft – and women in general – could be genuine members of the navy demonstrates a conviction that fraternity is a social model that can include women as well as men in significant and equal ways. The navy is an appropriate model for such a claim, as the Royal Navy of early nineteenth-century Britain was, in fact, one of the most egalitarian sections of British society. Sir Walter’s own objection to it is that it ignores the hierarchies of landed rank: it is, he claims, “the means of bringing persons of obscure birth into undue distinction, and raising men to honours which their fathers and grandfathers never dreamt of” (21). His objection certainly reflects reality, for the navy was more truly a meritocracy than any other section of society. While the navy, and particularly
ships at sea, had very definite hierarchical structures, it was known as a profession in which rank, nobility and wealth were not defining factors in terms of position or authority. In fact, in the early nineteenth century

the Navy was the only profession for a gentleman which did not require – indeed, did not admit – the application of money or influence. It took its future officers young and provided them with a rigorous, and free, professional training with which they might rise to fame and fortune. [...] The Navy’s attraction for future officers, or their parents, was straightforward; it offered excellent prospects and required negligible capital, financial or political.  

While the ‘negligible capital’ enabled men from all levels of society to join the navy, only those who demonstrated skill and determination would be able to rise through the ranks. It was the only branch of the armed services in which commissions could not be bought but had to be earned, and in wartime especially the demand for competent officers was very high.  

The main criterion for success could be described as ‘usefulness.’ But in *Persuasion* this openness to talent is expanded to women also, and they are allowed to join, and rise, in this profession according to ability and usefulness, just as the men are. Mrs Croft, with her intelligence, shrewdness and confidence, Mrs Harville with her competency in nursing and hospitality, and Anne, with her ability to keep her head in a crisis, are all welcome in this meritocratic community.

Women’s opportunities for equality and usefulness in the naval community are contrasted with a woman’s place in landed society. Anne’s position as a ‘nobody’ in her family, ‘only Anne’ (6), demonstrates that her genuine abilities are unacknowledged and unvalued by her father and two sisters. Her desire to be of use to those around her is taken for granted by her sister Mary and while Anne is ‘glad to be thought of some use, glad to have any thing marked out as a duty,’ rather than ‘being rejected as no good at all’ (36), it is not until she begins to interact with the naval community that her abilities are recognised. It is Wentworth who, after Louisa’s fall, declares that there is “‘no one so proper, so capable as Anne!’” (123) to stay and look after her. As Rzepka notes, ‘Austen points up the natural affinities between Anne’s desire to “be of use” through the exercise of her nurturing and healing skills, her personal “domestic virtues,” and the “national importance,” or “utility” of

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the profession she is to join.\textsuperscript{46} As a capable, useful woman, Anne will undoubtedly grow in importance in her naval community, proving the true partner of her brilliant husband who has earned, and will in all likelihood continue to earn, wealth and promotion. Just as Mrs Croft experiences equality in her relationship with her brother, as a result of their common intelligence, confidence and experience, so too women of ability – not women of birth or wealth – can be counted as equals in this new community, playing important roles according to their talents and circumstances.

The navy does not only provide equality and opportunity for women to be valued and useful in its society. It also provides them with freedom from the confinement of landed life. The Royal Navy was virtually a symbol of freedom during the Napoleonic Wars. For young men, it provided freedom from parental control; for merchants, freedom to trade globally; but most importantly, for all Britons, freedom from French invasion.\textsuperscript{47} But the navy in \textit{Persuasion} brings freedom of a different kind. Women in this novel are mostly trapped by their situations. The lack of freedom they experience is felt most intensely by Anne, who views her time in Bath as an ‘imprisonment’ (148). She can see that this is not only her experience, but that of women more generally. “‘We live at home,’” she says, “‘quiet, confined, and our feelings prey upon us’” (253). Johnson argues,

\begin{quote}
Landed life is not taken to task simply because it promotes mediocrity or ignorance, but rather because its insularity is psychologically damaging, especially for women. Conservatives laud membership within a neighbourhood precisely on account of the strong and stabilising attachments, the changeless pace, and the unceasing familiarity that it carries with it. But for women it also carries with it a particularly narrow and unwholesome confinement.\textsuperscript{48}
\end{quote}

This has been the case not only for Anne, who can recognise the problems with her lifestyle, but also for Elizabeth, whose experience of landed life has brought her to the age of twenty-nine without marrying, and whose ignorance about people leads her to trust Mrs Clay. It is even true for Mary Musgrove whose life has become particularly insular and has led to her becoming increasingly self-focused and unhappy.

\textsuperscript{46} Rzepka, ‘Making It in a Brave New World,’ 109.
\textsuperscript{48} Johnson, \textit{Jane Austen}, 158.
Mrs Croft’s life is different. As a naval sister, both literally and metaphorically, she has been freed from the ties of both the traditional feminine domesticity that ties women to unhelpfully insular lifestyles, and landed hierarchy. Her gifts and talents have been recognised and appreciated not only by her family, but also by her society. Her intelligence and confidence have been fostered and developed. And she has bloomed in an environment that values women as well as men, in which both sexes play an important role. This, too, is the future promised to Anne. Auerbach has famously claimed that, ‘Like Mrs Croft, Anne will be “liberated” after her marriage. She will go to sea.’\(^{49}\) Whether or not we suppose that Anne will follow Mrs Croft’s example of a childless, seafaring life, she will certainly be freed from the confinement of her life as a member of the landed community. And while such a life is not absolutely positive – the ‘dread of a future war’ dims her sunshine, and she is required to ‘pay the tax of quick alarm’ (275) which is owed by all loving naval wives – *Persuasion* suggests that, as Johnson has concluded, ‘life on the high seas, for all its dangers, is to be preferred to the “safety” of helpless immobility’ which is the experience of landed wives.\(^{50}\) Anne, once a ‘nobody,’ seeking to ‘be of use’ to those who did not know how to value her, finds in the navy freedom from the confinement of her life, equals who will value her abilities, and a genuine community of brothers and sisters to serve.

Importantly, the benefits of belonging to the naval community have already begun for Anne. Her naval siblings have learnt to value her as her family have never done, as is clear from the attention they pay to her voice. Anne’s experience of landed society has not only been one of claustrophobia and a lack of opportunities. It has also been a voiceless one. ‘Her word had no weight’ (6) with either her father or her elder sister; her opinions go unheard. Nor is she more listened to at Uppercross; as Judy Van Sickle Johnson points out, on the walk to Winthrop, she ‘roused herself to say, as they struck by order into another path, “Is not this one of the ways to Winthrop?” But nobody heard, or, at least, nobody answered her’ (91). She is, Johnson concludes, a ‘mute listener’\(^{51}\) who, even when she makes sound, is unheard. Her reflections on her experience of playing the piano for the Musgroves are equally applicable to her speaking, that ‘excepting one short period of her life, she had

\(^{49}\) Auerbach, ‘O Brave New World,’ 127.  
\(^{50}\) Johnson, *Jane Austen*, 160.  
never, since the age of fourteen, never since the loss of her dear mother, known the happiness of being listened to’ (50). It is among the naval officers at Lyme that she finds her voice as ‘Captain Benwick listened attentively’ (109) to her consoling and advice giving; it is with Captain Harville that she is at her most eloquent and honest. In a situation in which she has long been silent, it is her newfound brothers who encourage and value her voice.

*Persuasion* is thus radically different from a number of novels examined here, not only in portraying a fraternal society but also in the way in which that society treats the sister’s voice. Anne, without a brother, is in a very different situation to that of the previous heroines examined in this thesis. Her voice is not threatened as a sister’s by her brother, but it is ignored by her family and her society in ways which are equivalent to a brother’s treatment of his sister in a number of other novels, making Anne a member of a sisterhood of heroines. She is, however, also distinct from her earlier sister-heroines, many of whom struggled to tell their own story and maintain control of their own narrative against the pressures of their brothers, and developed their own internal sense of self in opposition to or in reflection upon their relationships with their brothers. In Austen’s last completed novel the heroine has no self-discovery to make, but is enabled to represent herself to the world through her experience of fraternity – it is as a sister in this naval society that she finds her voice and is able to express her inner thoughts and feelings. As Massimiliano Morini notes,

[Anne’s] rise from her initial unimportant and neglected state is mirrored in her acquisition of relative conversational dominance – for in Austen’s novels, becoming powerful means gaining a right to speak, just as losing power means being sentenced to silence. [...] In the course of the novel, Anne gradually finds a polite but assured voice.\(^{52}\)

Moreover, in this novel that is so saturated with positive representations of fraternity, Austen most fully develops a similarly positive form of free indirect discourse, what Nicola Watson describes as ‘a narrative method inflected to an unprecedented degree by individual subjectivity.’\(^{53}\) While this narrative technique was yet another form of destructive surveillance for Camilla in Burney’s novel, for Anne it is a way of having her voice heard when no one is listening. Through it she is able, as Finch and Bowen note, ‘to speak ... her

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\(^{52}\) Massimiliano Morini, *Jane Austen’s Narrative Techniques: A Stylistic and Pragmatic Analysis* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), 125.

own mind at any time,"^54 to be ‘eloquent’ (32) despite her external silence, or as Michael McKeon phrases it, to be ‘read without benefit of another character who does the reading.’^55 While free indirect discourse can be used to ironise a character’s point of view, to judge their opinions and actions, or to enforce an authoritative viewpoint, in Persuasion the narrative’s ‘sympathetic alignment’^56 with the heroine’s consciousness enables Anne to truly tell her own story in a way which genuinely represents her subjectivity but is not in danger of being taken over by another.^57

^57 The use of free indirect discourse in the English novel has received a significant amount of critical attention in the past four decades. Dorrit Cohn’s early study, Transparent Minds, refers to this technique as ‘narrated monologue’ (13), identifies many of its key characteristics, and suggests it is a ‘more complex and more flexible technique for rendering consciousness’ (107) than the rival techniques Cohn terms ‘psycho-narration’ and ‘quoted monologue.’ Cohn also postulates that the ‘growth’ of narrated monologue in the late eighteenth-century was related to its ability to enter the ‘domain’ of first-person epistolary and confessional fiction, translating their ‘focus on the mental and emotional life of its characters’ (113) into third-person narrative, a suggestion which bears similarities to my own reading of the shift from epistolary form to the use of free indirect discourse. Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978). Ann Banfield’s Unspeakable Sentences gives an alternative name, ‘represented speech and thought’ (12), and discusses at length the implications for the concept of the speaker in narrative. Unspeakable Sentences: Narration and Representation in the Language of Fiction (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982). Both Cohn and Banfield’s studies were foundational for later scholars, but both regarded free indirect discourse as predominantly a stylistic phenomenon in the English novel. In 2000, Frances Ferguson’s study of the technique, which she terms ‘free indirect style,’ in Austen’s Emma, proposed viewing the technique as an element of form, and not just as style, arguing that ‘free indirect style is the novel’s one and only formal contribution to literature’ (159), noting in particular how Austen uses it to develop both Emma’s character and Emma’s portrayal of society and the marriage market. Like Cohn, Ferguson also sees free indirect style as a logical step from the epistolary novel (169-70). Frances Ferguson, ‘Jane Austen, Emma, and the Impact of Form,’ Modern Language Quarterly 61.1 (2000): 157-180. Daniel P. Gunn continued the expansion of scholarly understandings of free indirect discourse, suggesting it be viewed as ‘a kind of narratorial mimicry’ (35, italics in original) in which the ‘subjectivities’ of character and narrator ‘intermingle.’ This, he notes, serves as both a comic technique and a method of representing an ‘imitation’ of the ‘idiom of the characters’ (37) rather than an unmediated inclusion of their words and thoughts. It also allows for a mirroring of Emma’s own mimicry of other characters in her speech and thought. Daniel P. Gunn, ‘Free Indirect Discourse and Narrative Authority in Emma,’ Narrative 12.1 (2004): 35-54. Rachel Provenzano Oberman suggests a further way in which Austen’s use of free indirect discourse in Emma reflects character and plot, noting that Emma’s development is directly connected to her ‘ability to incorporate others’ voices into her consciousness’ (12) in much the same way that free indirect discourse allows for the incorporation of the characters’ voices into the narrative. Rachel Provenzano Oberman, ‘Fused Voices: Narrated Monologue in Jane Austen’s Emma,’ Nineteenth-Century Literature 64.1 (2009): 1-15. These articles demonstrate a growing interest in free indirect discourse’s formal aspects and its interconnection with character and plot in Austen’s
In taking as its focal character a heroine whose subjectivity is fully formed before the novel begins, *Persuasion* can use free indirect discourse to allow her to speak despite not being listened to. Anne needs no fraternal relationship or revolutionary example to understand her position as a woman. Rather, the novel’s use of free indirect discourse demonstrates what the naval fraternity come to understand but what her own family do not – that she has a voice, and that her voice ought to be valued. Writing in a tradition in which the brother-sister relationship is key to the development of female subjectivity, and in which such relationships regularly impact upon the form of the novel, the perfecting of free indirect discourse within a text that presents a fraternal society as a genuine alternative for women is surely no coincidence. The freedom and equality which the fraternity of the navy offers to Anne is more than physical and emotional, it is also formal – the freedom to speak, and the expectation that women’s voices will be granted equal weight with men’s.

Glenda Hudson views *Persuasion*’s conclusion as unsatisfying, claiming that Anne, without strong sisters to support her, or a landed inheritance to look forward to, appears ‘alienated’ and ‘disoriented’ at the novel’s end.58 But what Hudson does not consider is the strong fraternity that Anne enters into upon her marriage, a fraternity which more than makes up for the lack of conventional ideals of sisterhood and property. It is only when Anne walks away from her sisters and her father’s property that her past worries fall away from her. Mr Elliot can be avoided, Mrs Clay left uncared for, even Lady Dalrymple and Miss Carteret ‘would soon be innoxious cousins to her’ (267). Anne and Wentworth begin their understanding not at a private card party but walking together in ‘the comparatively quiet and retired gravel-walk,’ among ‘sauntering politicians, bustling house-keepers, flirting girls, [and] nursery-maids and children’(261-62), a place not dominated by the hierarchical structures of Bath nor frequented by those who feel superior. Apart from that world, this mingling of people and occupations is an image of the non-hierarchical structure of the novels. Most contemporary studies of this technique focus on *Emma* and are therefore not directly relevant to my argument here. Moreover, Austen’s use of free indirect discourse in *Persuasion* is quite different to her use of the technique in *Emma*, where it tends to heighten irony rather than enhance sympathy. Nonetheless, my interpretation of Austen’s use of free indirect discourse in *Persuasion* to tell the heroine’s story and to demonstrate the value of her unattended voice moves beyond the boundaries of mere style, and is thus indebted to the examples of scholars like Ferguson, Gunn and Oberman, who broadened scholarly perceptions of the potential of free indirect discourse.

naval society that they will enter, themselves as equals. Their marriage, like that of Admiral and Mrs Croft, will be a relationship of genuine esteem, affection, respect and equality – the very characteristics of the naval fraternity. And together they will continue in the community of the navy, that group of brothers and sisters among whom they will live and serve.

**Conclusion**

For a number of female authors of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, brother-sister relationships provided an excellent opportunity for the exploration of women’s place in society. A heroine’s relationship with her brother could be used to argue for greater female responsibility and autonomy, or could point out the inequalities of expectation and opportunity placed on men and women in society. A hero’s relationship with his sister could be used to demonstrate his worth by indicating his attitude towards women in a way that was safe, chaste and genuine. And heroines without brothers, alone in the world and unprotected, could meditate on the difference a brother would make to their situation, reflecting the difficulties and struggles facing women in a male-dominated, patriarchal world.

While this tradition carried on in women’s novels, fraternity was also being used as a potential – and then real – metaphor for society. Social contract theory in France had been theorising a model of society which was patterned on brotherhood rather than fatherhood for decades, and in this time period it found willing subjects in both the American colonies and in France. These two revolutions shaped English experience and thought dramatically.

Austen uses both these elements in her exploration of the place of women in her society. Drawing upon the novelistic tradition of brother-sister relationship, she uses such relationships in all her novels to examine how women were, and ought to be, treated. But she is far more interested in the metaphor of fraternity than in literal brother-sister relationships, and in *Persuasion* she draws out her fraternal metaphor most completely and convincingly. While still interested in the ways in which literal brothers and sisters relate, and how their relationships reflect or defy social expectations, her focus is much broader. In
describing a society in which traditional familial structures are failing – failing fraternally as well as paternally – she opens a door for a new concept of society, one based on fraternity. Yet her fraternity is based in the navy, a community of brothers that is still quintessentially British – a fraternity quite distinct from that of the French Revolutionaries.

While the use of brother-sister relationships to debate women’s place in society is a common device in eighteenth-century fiction, Austen’s use of the relationship, the ideological weight she places on it, and the broad scope of society which it is brought to reflect upon, show her to be attempting something far beyond her predecessors. While she certainly drew upon their methods, her investigation of the relationship itself, and its implications for women in society, is more sustained and therefore more significant than in any other writers of the eighteenth-century. And far from using the relationship to develop a proto-Victorian ideal of the sister as the perfect other, the safe haven in a changing world, she uses this very relationship in order to demonstrate how the world might be changed, and how men and women can be treated as equals. Johnson claims that, because conservatives portray the family as “pre-eminently moral and moralising,” to suggest... that fathers, sons and brothers themselves may be selfish, bullying and unscrupulous, and that the “bonds of domestic attachment” are not always sweet, is to attack the institutions which make morality possible and so contribute to the dissolution of the government.59

But Austen is not interested in the dissolution of the government. She is arguing for a reform, not a revolution, for a new England in which women, whether in the traditional ‘female sphere’ or participating in the professions with husbands and brothers, can be viewed not as ‘fine ladies’ but as ‘rational creatures.’ Austen’s presentation of fraternity, in both its literal and metaphoric forms, is a subtle, but significant, way in which she undercuts the social hierarchy of traditional English society, and focuses on the possibilities open to women in her era of revolution and potential social change.

59 Johnson, Jane Austen, 5-6.
Conclusion

This thesis is a narrative about narrative, a story about how women novelists of the eighteenth century told the sister’s story. Starting with one of the first female-authored domestic novels, Eliza Haywood’s *History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*, it traces a tradition of using brother-sister relationships to assert women’s autonomy, to question gender inequalities in the family and in society, and to critique the emergent ideology of domesticity. It also demonstrates how the sister was established as the subject of the domestic novel, examining ways in which a series of female novelists, writing in different forms and styles, connect the subjection of women within the family with the form of the novel.

Reading Haywood’s *Betsy Thoughtless* with a focus on the heroine’s relationships with her brothers reveals a more complex narrative than the reformation of coquette into wife, or the redirection of a young woman’s desire towards exclusive heterosexuality in marriage. Betsy’s struggles against her brothers reveal the differences gender makes to a person’s experience. As she compares her experience to theirs, she comes to an understanding of her society, her family, and her place within both. Having developed as an ethical subject she achieves independence and autonomy even within marriage. Betsy moves from being an object of admiration to being a subject, in control of her own fate and aware of her own situation as a woman.

For Charlotte Lennox’s *Henrietta*, understanding and subjectivity come much sooner and more easily. The most ethically aware and responsible subject in her novel, she reveals the ability of the brother to control a sister, taking away both her independence and her voice as he takes charge of her story, a change in narrative focus enabled by the third-person narrative form. Women novelists of the 1760s and 1770s moved away from this form and the threat the brother posed to it by creating epistolary texts in which heroines could literally tell their own stories to correspondents of their own choosing. While heroines like Meliora Somerset, Lavinia Knightly and Sidney Bidulph find themselves objectified by brothers who seek to control them and remove their choices, particularly with regards to marriage, these young women assert their independence and their moral authority through
their letters which, like Clarissa’s to Anna, tell their own version of their story against the false representations of siblings, spouses, and society.

Yet even the epistolary form proves vulnerable when faced with a brother. Caroline Melmoth’s story is enclosed within her brother’s, and it is ultimately absorbed into a family narrative just as she is ultimately absorbed into her family of origin. Evelina’s tale retains its independence, but is threatened by the more exciting and adventurous tale of her brother, Macartney, just as her reputation and future happiness is threatened by her relationship with him. In these novels of the 1750s, 1760s and 1770s, brothers who are idolised as protectors and loved as true friends, prove threatening, neglectful, and controlling. Even at their most positive, they inflict unintended pain upon their sisters. Many of the sibling conflicts within these early domestic novels stem from the difference between sisters’ expectations of their relationships with their brothers – expectations based on ideals of fraternal equality and support – and the reality of lived experience as sisters within a family.

The idealisation of the brother-sister relationship continues in the 1790s, as the domestic novels of Charlotte Smith and Frances Burney connect their novelistic fraternal relationships with the broader ideals of fraternity that inspired and were inspired by the French Revolution. For Smith, fraternity offers possibilities for women that are unavailable to them under patriarchy. Celestina sees the benefits that she would attain from an established sisterly relationship with Willoughby but finds it denied her, and fraternity ultimately fails the heroine just as it had failed her mother. In Desmond, a comparison between the French family of the Montfleuris and the English Waverlys allows Smith to compare women’s position in each society through their treatment by their family, demonstrating the substantial difference a brother can make to his sister’s life, even after her marriage. Smith sees hope and possibility in fraternity for women both in the family and in society, but demonstrates its substantial limitations for them as they continue to be governed by patriarchy despite the Revolution. Still, while the Revolution may not have freed Geraldine, it has had the same impression upon her that Betsy’s struggles with her brother had – it has made her aware of her situation as a married woman, under subjection to her husband, and thus enabled her to begin to develop a subjectivity that will grant her greater personal independence. Desmond thus formally combines Haywood’s third-person development of
subjectivity with the later novelists’ use of epistolarity; Geraldine’s letters enable her to construct a self that is made aware of its condition by reflecting on fraternity.

Burney’s *Camilla* is a less obviously revolutionary novel, but it, too, exposes women’s continued subjection under patriarchy, and the damaging effects that subjection can have. Rather than comparing two sets of siblings, however, *Camilla* returns to the structure and concerns of *Betsy Thoughtless*, comparing the different experiences of a single brother/sister dyad. Through its preoccupation with issues of gender, focalised through this pair, *Camilla* reveals its interest in the social questions of the 1790s, reflecting an awareness of a woman’s place in society as a construct rather than a natural state of being. Camilla’s claustrophobic re-confinement in her family of origin at the novel’s conclusion only seems to recreate this situation anew for a new generation, rather than offering any solutions or escape for its heroine. And while Burney’s use of free indirect discourse enables Camilla, arguably more than any previous heroine, to have her story told accurately and her point of view understood by the reader, this form, which is mediated by the authoritative narrator, only serves to further limit Camilla’s control of her story, rather than granting her some authority over her narration.

My story concludes with Austen’s final novel, *Persuasion*. Building upon the tradition established by earlier women novelists, Austen uses the ideal of the brother-sister relationship and the possibilities it promised for so many female novelists to propose a fraternally-based solution to the problem of women’s experience in society. It is in the brotherhood of the navy, a new society based on fraternal bonds, that Anne finds escape from the claustrophobia of landed life, appreciation of her talents, and an audience for her opinions, providing a solution to the problems articulated by both Charlotte Smith and Frances Burney of a woman’s exclusion from the experience of true fraternity. In keeping with her more positive vision of the possibilities open to Anne in this new society, Austen uses free indirect discourse to grant to her heroine what she ultimately experiences in this naval society – a chance to tell her own story and to have her voice heard and valued, rather than ignored and unappreciated.

Studies of the eighteenth-century novel often conclude, as does mine, with the works of Jane Austen. In many cases, she is the apotheosis of whatever novelistic trait or tradition
the study traces. My thesis could easily be viewed in this manner, locating in Austen’s *Persuasion* the fulfilment of the promise of fraternity that has been held up by so many of her predecessors. This is, however, only one way of telling the story. Just as often as Austen is viewed as the endpoint of a tradition, she is also considered to be a starting point, a foundation for the nineteenth-century and Victorian novelistic traditions. This is the case with Valerie Sanders’s study, *The Brother-Sister Culture in Nineteenth-Century Literature: From Austen to Woolf*. Austen here provides Sanders with a proto-Victorian novelist who introduces supposedly new ideas about the brother-sister relationship upon which later novelists would build.

Sanders’s study of Austen focuses, unsurprisingly, on her most ‘Victorian’ novel, *Mansfield Park*. Reading Fanny and Edmund’s relationship as one between brother and sister, and comparing it with Fanny’s relationship to her biological brother, William, Sanders sees in *Mansfield Park* the beginning of the ‘brother as lover’ plot which was later used by Dickens, Eliot, Gaskell and the Brontës. Austen here presents a brotherly lover who embodies all the best of fraternity, and who demonstrates ‘new standards of masculinity,’ including ‘good domestic credentials.’ In keeping with Victorian ideals, the marriage between Edmund and Fanny represents a retreat into the family as a place of refuge, a case of the family ‘closing in on itself.’ For Fanny it represents a safe match, with a known brother rather than an unknown stranger, one who has already proven his emotional reliability and his willingness to grant her a relationship of openness and respect. In Fanny and Edmund’s marriage, all the blessings of fraternity are elevated into marriage. *Mansfield Park*’s focus on the family, the domestic space, and in particular its insular idealisation of the familial, make it particularly suited to a reading as an early Victorian novel.

Many of *Mansfield Park*’s concerns, however, are present in earlier novels. Comparing Austen’s novel with Burney’s *Camilla*, for example, as does Elisabeth Rose Gruner, presents

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1 Ian Watt is the classic example, seeing in Austen ‘the most successful solutions of the two general narrative problems’ of Richardson and Fielding, and claiming her novels are the ‘climax’ of ‘many other aspects of the eighteenth-century novel.’ Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1957), 338, 339.


3 Sanders, *Brother-Sister Culture*, 87-88.

4 Sanders, *Brother-Sister Culture*, 86.
a different view of the novel’s use of the brother-sister relationship.\textsuperscript{5} \textit{Mansfield Park} creates the same sense of claustrophobia and voicelessness for the heroine that \textit{Camilla} did, although with a more positive conclusion which does, as Sanders suggests, arise from a more positive view of the possibilities of fraternity. But Austen offers Fanny no more of an escape from domestic confinement than Burney did Camilla. Even fraternity cannot ultimately improve a woman’s lot if she remains within her domestic sphere. \textit{Mansfield Park} is not Austen’s last word on brother-sister relationships, \textit{Persuasion} is. But Sanders’s thesis does not include \textit{Persuasion}. Despite discussing the five other major Austen novels, \textit{Persuasion} receives only the barest of mentions. Austen may be readable as a proto-Victorian novelist, but only if her final novel is effectively left out.\textsuperscript{6}

Sanders’s focus on the emotional aspects of the brother-sister relationship means that her starting point of Austen is a sensible choice, even if it means some aspects of Austen’s use of that relationship are left out as a result. As I have demonstrated in this thesis, the brother-sister relationship in eighteenth-century female-authored novels provided a space not only for sisters to experience affection and a broad range of emotions, but also for novelists to explore ideas about gender, domesticity and social structure. But Sanders’s claim that the period between Austen and Woolf was that of the ‘greatest intensity’ for brother-sister relationships, taking on an added force during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and having at this time an ‘intense emotional significance in English literary and cultural history,’ are reasonable claims to make.\textsuperscript{7} None of the heroines considered in this thesis have felt an emotional attachment to their brothers to rival Maggie Tulliver in George Eliot’s \textit{The Mill on the Floss} (1860) or Catherine Earnshaw in Emily Brontë’s \textit{Wuthering Heights} (1847). Nor is a focus on the emotional aspect of family relationships particular to Sanders. It is also the main focus of another study of siblings in the Victorian novel, Leila Silvana May’s \textit{Disorderly Sisters: Sibling Relations and Sororal Resistance in Nineteenth-Century British Literature}, published only a year earlier than

\textsuperscript{5} Elisabeth Rose Gruner, “‘Loving Difference’: Sisters and Brothers from Frances Burney to Emily Brontë,’ in \textit{The Significance of Sibling Relationships in Literature}, ed. JoAnna Stephens Mink and Janet Doubler Ward (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1993), 32-46.

\textsuperscript{6} My own interpretation of Austen’s use of the brother-sister relationship as part of the eighteenth-century tradition does find room for \textit{Mansfield Park}, as I have demonstrated elsewhere. See Katrina A. Clifford, ‘Brothers, Sisters and the Ideal(l) of Fraternity in the Novels of Jane Austen,’ \textit{Sensibilities} 38 (June 2009): 30-47.

\textsuperscript{7} Sanders, \textit{Brother-Sister Culture}, 2.
Sanders’s work. May asserts that the Victorian obsession with family was ‘in large part an obsession with siblings, especially sisters,’ and that rather than the focus of the family being the wife/mother, it was the sister who was ‘the keystone of the entire system.’ Only the virginal sister could model the asexual virtues so idealised by Victorian culture, such that it is she who became ‘the paragon of Victorian virtue.’ Yet the novels of the mid-nineteenth-century demonstrate pressures upon the sister to live up to this ideal, and the struggles she encounters as she seeks to gain her ‘sororal desire,’ which May defines as a ‘search for identity understood in terms of agency and sexuality, as well as for a moral and social standing.’ Ultimately, as May notes in her reading of Dickens’s *Dombey and Son*, the Victorian family ‘is created at the expense of feminine agency and selfhood;’ as she similarly claims in her reading of Hegel’s idealisation of the sister in the early nineteenth century, sisterhood involves a disciplining ‘that serves as an incarcerating force constricting feminine subjectivity.’ Victorian sisters strive to achieve selfhood and subjectivity, but because of their socially and familially prescribed role as the ultimate angel in the house, they are unable to do so.

There are many points in this study that May, like Sanders, either implies or claims to be particular to the decades which she is investigating, but which have their roots in eighteenth-century depictions of brother-sister relationships. George Eliot’s Maggie Tulliver, for example, through her experience of being a sister and comparing her situation with that of her brother, Tom, discovers ‘that as a woman she is powerless’ in much the same way that Betsy Thoughtless did a century earlier. The inequality of gender, viewed through the lens of the brother-sister relationship, is a focus of many of the eighteenth-century novels examined in this thesis. Far from being particular to the mid-nineteenth century, it is a regular way in which female novelists of the previous century critiqued gender roles and gender inequalities. Sanders’s claims that ‘the brother stands for a deeply rooted inequality in private life which is then transposed on to the public sphere,’ and that ‘brothers and

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11 May, *Disorderly Sisters*, 70.
13 May, *Disorderly Sisters*, 79.
sisters act out the wider injustices of the cultural context in which they operate, \(^{14}\) could just as easily summarise my findings regarding the eighteenth-century novel as they do hers regarding the Victorian. Betsy found she could neither coquette nor remain unmarried, while her brothers were allowed to take mistresses and delay marriage as long as they pleased. Camilla’s brother Lionel could escape responsibility for both financial and sexual misdemeanours while she went to the brink of death for much less grievous sins of the same nature, simply because of her gender. Brothers travel while sisters sit at home, like Anne Elliot, unable to find distraction from a lost love or escape from the claustrophobia of their domestic existence. Brothers like Sidney’s George, Camilla’s Lionel, or Geraldine’s Waverly, spend money freely, while their sisters succumb to poverty or debt. As Ruth Perry has claimed, the brother-sister relation ‘foregrounded the difference that gender made in a person’s station and expectations in the world.' \(^{15}\) If this tendency to compare genders through the brother-sister relationship is characteristic of the mid-nineteenth-century novel, it arguably was inspired by the many eighteenth-century novels that had already made the same point.

In other ways, May’s study demonstrates the ultimate failure of the brother-sister project of the eighteenth-century novel. Many of the uses she finds in the sibling relationship at mid-century follow on from their literary forebears, but they are more negatively portrayed, or set up only to fail. Her contention that the Victorian domestic novel depicts – and ultimately destroys – the sister’s desire for identity and selfhood is very similar to the eighteenth-century heroine’s struggle for autonomy and independence – in both her life and her story – from her brother. Yet while the eighteenth-century heroine developed subjectivity through her family relationships and narratives, the Victorian sister-heroine finds the family an ‘incarcerating force constricting feminine subjectivity.’ \(^{16}\) The eighteenth-century heroine’s tale is one of growth and development, while the Victorian heroine’s is one of regression, a reversion to the ‘relative equality’ of the nursery, the longing for which infantilised women, or left them with only a nostalgic yearning for a lost childhood, focused on a lost

\(^{14}\) Sanders, *Brother-Sister Culture*, 108.
\(^{16}\) May, *Disorderly Sisters*, 37.
relationship of equality with a beloved brother.\textsuperscript{17} Moreover, the equality which the
eighteenth-century heroine sought with her brother and which Austen ultimately located in
the fraternal society of the navy, has no place in the adult world of the Victorian novel, in
which fraternal equality is remembered as existing only in childhood, with no place in the
‘larger domestic sphere’ in which women became ‘increasingly aware of the disjunction in
roles and in relative value between themselves and their brothers.’\textsuperscript{18}

Burney to George Eliot,’ notes a shift in the idea of the family occurring between Burney and
Austen in the eighteenth century and the Brontës and Eliot in the mid-nineteenth and
suggests that the difference lies in the conception of the family. According to Gruner, the
sentimental family, or constructed family, which welcomed outsiders and non-blood kin into
the family unit, gave way to a more natural, biological family as the nuclear family became
dominant.\textsuperscript{19} May, however, notes the continuing incorporation of non-biological brothers in
the Victorian family, following in the line of Sir John Evelin’s claimed brotherhood to
Caroline Melmoth, or Lord Orville’s to Evelina, or Edgar Mandlebert’s to Camilla, or
Desmond’s to Geraldine. This sentimental construction of the family finds its ultimate
expression in Austen’s presentation of the navy in \textit{Persuasion}, in which the ideals of
universal brotherhood are upheld and extended to women as well as to men. In Victorian
novels, however, the extension of family and particularly of siblinghood leads not to a more
equal society and greater freedom for women, but to a blurring, even a loss, of identity
which leads to the ultimate downfall of the family towards the end of the nineteenth
century.

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{May, Disorderly Sisters}, 20. Elisabeth Rose Gruner also notes this tendency towards infantilisation in
Victorian novels, suggesting that ‘self-identification as a sister means perpetuating childhood roles, and
condemns the heroine to childlike dependency.’ Elisabeth Rose Gruner. “Loving Difference”: Sisters and
Brothers from Frances Burney to George Eliot,’ University of California, Los Angeles, 1992, 166. Gruner
published a summarised version of her thesis, limited to the period from Burney to Emily Brontë, the year
following her submission. While I have used that article at other points in my study, it is only in the thesis that
she discusses at length the reasons for the shift in the idea of the family between Burney and Eliot. See, for
comparison, Gruner, ‘Loving Difference: Burney to Brontë.’

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{May, Disorderly Sisters}, 20-21.

\textsuperscript{19} Gruner, ‘Loving Difference: Burney to Eliot,’ 169.
The hope and possibility contained in the novelistic depictions of the brother-sister relationship of the eighteenth century, then, disintegrate under the weight of nineteenth-century domesticity. For the eighteenth-century heroine, a relationship with a brother could be an experience of subjugation, but it also allowed a space for the sister to claim autonomy, equality and independence. Moreover, a sister’s reflections upon her relationship with her brother often led to an awareness of her position as a woman in both the family and in society, which allowed her to develop as an ethical subject able to tell her own story. It may not have been a position of power, but it came with advantages that were not available in any other cross-gender relationship.

Ideologically as well, fraternity could be viewed as a positive model for society. What sisters could gain through a close and equal relationship with their brothers, women could experience more broadly in a society modelled not on patriarchy but on fraternity. The examples set by the American and French Revolutionaries as they recreated their political families upon new models inspired many female novelists to recreate such societies in fiction, such as is found at the conclusion to Charlotte Smith’s *Desmond* and, even more positively, in Jane Austen’s *Persuasion*.

This relationship, which had the potential to free the sister in the eighteenth century, was more likely to entrap her in the family, in domesticity, and in a child-like state, in the Victorian period. An eighteenth-century heroine could be confined, both literally and figuratively, in a domestic sphere, but could escape to an extent by asserting her independence from her brother and writing her own version of her story. As the domestic novel and the nuclear family became more closed off and conservative, sisters needed to go to greater lengths to free themselves, often wreaking greater havoc in the process. It is surely no coincidence that Poe’s Madeleine Usher, who escapes from the crypt where she has been buried alive only to cause the fall of the House of Usher – both family line and edifice – is a sister who has been confined within the house by her brother. Madeleine, the entombed heroine whom May describes as being the most ‘accurate portrait of the condition of the sister in British literature,’ represents the dramatic and destructive descendants of the eighteenth-century heroines who likewise sought escape from the

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confines of domesticity, but who found it either in more egalitarian relationships with their brothers or in the development of agency and autonomy that removed them from the constraints of their gender and family relationships.

What is the reason for this change, from the recognition of the positive potential of the sibling relationship to its negative uses in the Victorian domestic novel? C. Dallett Hemphill, in her historical study of siblings in America, suggests that sibling relationships shifted in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in reaction to political changes. Rather than siblings reflecting equality similar to that being proposed as a way of governing society, the sibling relationship actually declined in its practice of equality. Hemphill explains:

Colonial Americans had not needed to use sibling differences to bolster family hierarchy because the latter was unquestioned; instead, colonial sibling relations had provided relief from the inequality between husbands and wives or parents and children. Once the Revolution undermined traditional patriarchy, however, parents sought a new means of family rule in gender and age differences among their children.21

That is, as broader political structures became less hierarchical, familial relationships, including those between siblings, became more so. These relationships lost their automatic assumptions of equality, and siblings became differentiated on the basis of age and gender, with elder siblings and brothers gaining authority, and younger siblings and sisters becoming more submissive. While Hemphill’s examples are all American, it is not difficult to conceive of a similar process taking place in England, as the patriarchal model of government solidified following the threat posed by the ideology of the French Revolution. The Victorian model of novelistic sibling relationships, in which an older brother protects and instructs a younger sister, suggests that such was indeed the case.

The eighteenth century, then, provides a unique space for a consideration of brother-sister relationships and the ideas that could be attached to them. Lying between the political turmoil of the seventeenth century which resulted in the devolution of absolutism to both brothers and sisters, and the Victorian restriction of gender roles and controlling ideology of domesticity, particularly for women, it allowed for a moment the possibility for women to achieve a greater equality with men. When combined with the ideology of fraternity that

was so characteristic of the eighteenth century, and not yet inflected with the fear engendered by the French Revolution, this historical moment provided women novelists with a perfect model for exploring these ideas – the novelistic brother-sister relationship. For a brief time in the early years of the domestic novel, this unique relationship could be used to explore ideas of genuine equality for men and women, of independence for sisters, and of the development of female subjectivity. As women novelists explored this relationship, they also developed key characteristics of the domestic novel, including the focus on the sister’s story and the perfecting of free indirect discourse, in conjunction with the tradition of the brother-sister relationship. Largely neglected by scholars, relationships between brothers and sisters in female-authored domestic novels shed important light upon the place of women in eighteenth-century society, ideologies of gender and domesticity, and the development of the domestic novel. An examination of these relationships forces a new and different look at the family, women, and the novel in the eighteenth century.

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