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Chapter 3. Bearing Grudges: Marital Conflict and the Inter-Generational Family

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I

Marital conflict was an acknowledged part of life after marriage in the long eighteenth century, regularly appearing in print culture.[1] Writers of guidance for married couples advised them how to avoid strife.[2] Shocking accounts of cruelty against wives entertained and warned of conflict's outcomes, and mocking tales of battling spouses offered stress-relieving humour. Though divorce was impossible for all but a tiny minority, society offered solutions to couples suffering marital breakdown due to infidelity or cruelty. Scholars have found problem marriages to be rich sources of social history, revealing attitudes towards adultery and marital violence, patriarchal authority and gender relationships, and the several ways in which spouses tackled their problems, from family mediation to matrimonial litigation in the Church Courts.[3] This scholarship is very valuable, but much of it addresses marriages at crisis or breaking point, since the unions that entered the public sphere in print or law were at the extreme end of the spectrum of conflict, where officials could intervene or where spouses could call upon the law to resolve their problems, and usually involved adultery or cruelty. We still know less about the other end of the spectrum where marriage difficulties did not end in scandal, violence, separation or, for a handful of the population, divorce.

An especially obscure element of marital conflict is how it fits into the wider family and kin structure and relationships. Recent work, such as Naomi Tadmor's overview of kinship, stresses that the marital unit was not isolated from other family members.[4] So far, historians of marriage have dealt patchily with this. There is excellent work on the role of family across several social ranks in the making of marriage, from organising unions and marriage settlements, to approving prospective spouses, to acting as third-parties and facilitators.[5] The Duke and Duchess of Chandos, for instance, took great pains to financially manage the portions of their young female relations, prepare the women for marriage, and locate the right husband.[6] Histories of the family and illness also show that various family members, including grandparents, parents, uncles, aunts, and siblings played vital roles in managing life-course events within marriage such as the birth of children, child-care, nursing ill or indisposed spouses, or assisting them in financial, physical, and emotional crises.[7] As Rosemary O'Day recently observed, 'It is imperative that we set the marital economy, already acknowledged by historians to be important to individuals and the co-resident nuclear family, within the context of the wider family economy'.[8] The same can be said for other routine aspects of marital and family life and this chapter sets more 'mundane' marital disputes within the context of the wider inter-generational family.

This chapter focuses on three case studies assembled from ego-documents written in the period 1750–1830, which contain detail of conflict.[9] Although such sources often provide evidence, it is usually simply to note the parting of spouses or ~~they only~~ to hint at dispute.[10] For example, the letter that J. H. Hayward wrote from Portsmouth to Fawley Parish Vestry in May 1834 to request poor relief for his children, comments about their mother 'we are rather at variance I dont wish to see her'.[11] The survival of both sides of spouses' correspondence is the most rich, but rare, evidence. Katie Barclay's study of the marital disputes of Anna Potts and her husband Sir Archibald Grant, of Monymusk, Aberdeenshire, 1731–1744, for instance, reveals in superb detail the causes of their quarrels and their negotiation of patriarchal conventions of marital roles.[12] Journals can also give considerable insights into unhappy marriages, such as Lady Sarah Cowper's diary begun in 1700 and Elizabeth Shackleton's later that century.[13]

The cases used in this chapter are not so fulsome, but do give reasonably in-depth accounts of the marriage problems of middling-sort couples from its poorest to richest ends, all of whom were pious, though of different Protestant denominations. In order to raise funds, Simon Mason published *A Narrative of the Life and Distresses of Simon Mason, Apothecary* in 1754 describing his troubled life to date; an account which included his marital difficulties which he believed contributed to his woeful business failures.[14] In his sixties in the 1790s

Thomas Wright (DATES?), a West Yorkshire man who tried his hand at farming, and eventually became an inspector of mills, wrote a memoir for his family. His unhappy marriage to his first wife and terrible relationship with her parents formed the narrative thrust of his life-story.[15] The final troubled union is that of George and Ruth Courtauld (DATES or some info?)), occasionally discussed in their correspondence in the second decade of the nineteenth century.[16] George was a silk-throwster who was reasonably well-off, though not particularly successful in his various endeavours. This chapter surveys these accounts of marital conflict to consider their similarities and differences in comparison with more heavily scrutinised incidents in matrimonial litigation.

The accounts of marital difficulties in these ego-documents are problematic. They are generally from one participant's perspective and thus not necessarily accurate or truthful reports. Accounts of marriages in autobiographies were written after the events and could well be filtered through several decades' worth of resentments, honing accusations, and sharpening memories of culpability and bad behaviour. As such, autobiographies present an 'illusion of fixity which occludes the selective processes through which these narratives are formed' as Jessica Malay shows by comparing Lady Anne Clifford's marriage arrangements at the time with her description of them 40 years later.[17] Similarly, correspondence is not an authentic account of 'reality'. As Barclay shows, the

Potts-Grant spouses constructed identities in their letters, and used them as a way to influence each other and the balance of power between them.[18]

Nonetheless, both types of sources are valuable in two key ways. They indicate the themes that were considered to lead to quarrels, and they name who was involved in them. As such they offer insights into conflict which was not mediated through legal structures and demands of evidence. They confirm the importance of economic issues and lack of marital respect in undermining relationships, but also demonstrate the significance of religious differences, temperamental clashes, and the role of other family members in marriage disputes. Perhaps it is the nature of the ego-documents, but what is particularly striking is the extensiveness of the disputes. Not only did they impact on the inter-generational family as well as spouses, they endured across generations for as long as people's capacities to bear grudges.

II

Matrimonial litigation often lays bare two ~~other~~ important features of marital conflict not in themselves sufficient to launch a suit, but problematic enough to provide evidence of a thoroughly failing union: the economic basis of many disputes and the power of marital disrespect.[19] Thus, not surprisingly, both occur frequently in descriptions of marital conflict in ego-documents.

Disagreement over financial investment or outlay was a major trigger of conflict and distrust, regardless of level of wealth. The elite Anna Potts and Archibald Grant quarrelled over household finances; typically her ability to run the household economy on his provision. In 1740 Anna wrote defensively to Archibald: 'it is no ill management in me I cant work miracles and must tell you plainly I am vain enough to think my self as capable of governing a house as any of those that finds fault wit [sic?] me'.[20] Economic security could be divisive. Thus, although the family correspondence relating to George and Ruth Courtauld's unhappy marriage does not dwell on the causes of their discontent, Ruth's letters responding to George's desire to emigrate to America for a second time in the 1820s infer (imply?) that one of her dissatisfactions with him was his uncontrolled expenditure and unreliable provision. In 1822 she wrote to her daughter Sophia, who had accompanied her father to Ohio, insisting,

> I cannot go to America under the dread of being set adrift when your father spends all his money, which experience teaches us would be soon. I would rather trust to his parish in England for a support, but if he will give me the last £500 my father left me which I only lent him, I will then go next spring if I can be of any use or comfort to him or you.[21]

Further analysis of above passage needed?

Hardship drove even sharper wedges between couples. Usually this kind of extremity is mainly visible in the form of desertion recorded by the poor law or quarter sessions authorities.[22] It is rare to see a detailed account of financial

want eroding a relationship as it did for that of Samuel Mason and his wife (her name?). Samuel was an apothecary who enjoyed little success in following his trade. After several forced separations as Simon attempted to get established, he again left his family in Cambridge to seek work, belatedly discovering that his 'poor unhappy temper'd Wife' immediately sent two of his children, aged seven and five, to Simon's sister, their aunt, who kept them over winter despite her own financial difficulties. Simon only realised this when his sister wrote to him requesting money for their upkeep or that their parents take them back. Indeed, said Simon, 'My good Lady's journey to London was as much a secret to me as her sending my Children to my Sister's'.[23] Simon's ineptitude and their poverty destroyed the Masons' ability to live with each other. As Samuel, astutely reflected: 'couples ought to endeavour mutual happiness of each to make distressed circumstances tolerable …and not as some do, vilify, and reproach, insult, and tyrannise, ever uneasy, ever dissatisfied, perpetually destroying each other's Distress; …But where Tempers are not so agreeable as could be wish'd for, those Evils are in some Degree alleviated by Money'.[24]

The Masons also experienced another financial challenge to their relationship, which is only hinted at in separation court records, namely quarrels over the portion that a wife brought to her marriage from her natal family. Simon envied those men who received 'great Favours and helps from their Wife's Relations, who do not only relieve them when distress'd, but will forward and promote

their Interest'. Instead he got neither 'fortune' with his Wife nor 'affectionate Friendship' from her relations.[25] He had married her, the daughter of a Dyer in Southwark, after finishing his apprenticeship in 1722. Following the wedding Simon learnt that his wife was due £40 from her mother. He promptly informed his parents-in-law that he expected to be paid this sum and they handed it over on the understanding that he would invest it in business. The couple set up business in Stony Stratford with his father-in-law's assistance and some stock from his old master. Simon then went to London to receive the remainder of the fortune to buy drugs to sell, only to learn from his father-in-law that there was just £5 left thanks to the couple's expenses in the country, the £5 he'd borrowed at marriage, plus the stock. This set the scene for Simon's ongoing resentment towards his in-laws which often transferred to his wife.[26]

Thomas Wright was not well-liked by his in-laws either, which had financial repercussions. He married Lydia Birkhead in November 1766, after eloping with her to Gretna Green due to her parents' disapproval of their courtship which began when Lydia was 15 years old and Thomas around 26. Consequently they refused to give him their daughter's 'fortune,' which led to arguments with his wife.[27] In one argument a few years into marriage, he nobly told her that he did not blame her for her want of fortune and she retorted that she did not care if he were ruined the next day. This slur on his social and masculine identity removed, he said, any remaining esteem or love for her.[28]

Although both Simon and Thomas declared that their parents-in-law reneged on supporting them, they nonetheless record several contributions. For example, after falling into debt several times Simon managed to get financial assistance to obtain a small dwelling and shop in Cambridge. He conceded that his wife's father came from London and gave an order upon someone in the country for £10. Nonetheless in 1738, after yet more failures which entailed sending his wife and various children to her parents four times for support, he was again in debt. When two bailiffs came to arrest him and take his effects to pay for a bond, he turned to his wife's relations 'but could obtain no redress from them'. Forced to declare himself bankrupt, he declared: 'I could neither get credit for a Loaf, or any thing to keep us alive with; my Wife's Relations (who knew I was by this Commission clear'd) yet would not advance one Farthing to enable me to prosecute my Business'. By 1740 after losing several children to smallpox and disease he recalled that he was 'slighted by my Wife's Relations and others, who ought to have strove to alleviate the cares and difficulties I was struggling with; these things were too hard to bare!'.[29]

It is possible to speculate that the wife's parents were not ungenerous, but were wary and simply refused when it became clear that their son-in-law failed to advance. Thomas Wright faced a similar situation. Having foregone his wife's portion by running away with her, he nonetheless asked her to 'solicit for her fortune' to put out at interest to increase their annual income, when facing

financial difficulties a few years into marriage due to his inadequacies at farming.[30] His parents-in-law refused and he railed against their tight purses; yet he also recorded their assistance at various points in his memoir: gifts of furniture; an interest-free loan of £50 in the late 1760s; an interest-free loan of £50 in 1773; a home and board for at least three of his children; a £20 premium for the eldest boy's apprenticeship, and a loan to Thomas Junior of around £140 to buy a shop and its stock. Again, one wonders if it was his failures to earn a decent living that made his parents-in-law cautious. Perhaps tellingly, he reported his resentment that his parents-in-law publicly explained the cause of Lydia's excessive consumption of alcohol as due to Thomas's failure to follow a trade.[31]

III

The descriptive sections of Libels (the plaintiff's statement of the defendant's marital faults) in separation cases list the primary complaints, but also often refer to the defendant's poor spousal behaviour; defendants issued similar counter-accusations against the plaintiff. In addition to listing verbal abuse and gendered inadequacies, these secondary allegations often centred on spouses' lack of respect for each other.[32] The accounts can be fairly formulaic and precede the main accusations of cruelty or adultery, and thus historians can assume them to be more indicative of social and legal prescription than individualised problems. Interestingly, nonetheless, spouses make somewhat

similar complaints in informal records, noting anger and lack of respect. Archibald Grant complained to his mother-in-law in 1739 about Anna using 'unbecomeing language and conduct towards me both in private and publick'.[33] Simon Mason complained that his wife behaved insolently, noisily and tyrannically towards him. On one occasion he grumbled:

> and what a shocking Folly and Madness is it, when a Wife, to gratify a vile Spirit, will stick at nothing, be it ever so base and false, to vilify and and [sic] destroy the reputation of her Husband, tho's she knows his, her own and Childrens Bread depend upon it? [34]

Thomas Wright accused his wife of bad temper too; he records her falling into a 'furious passion' and their exchange of 'warm words'.[35] Like Simon, he felt that a wife's disrespectful words were dangerous:

> Hence I advise all my children of both sexes that may happen to enter into the matrimonial connection, to be doubly careful how they make use of such imprudent and disrespectful expressions to their partners, for though they may be uttered in passion, and perhaps afterwards retracted, yet are they apt to make such unfavourable impressions, and create such aversions in delicate minds, as perhaps they may never afterwards be able to surmount as long as they live.[36]

A couple of decades later, George Courtauld criticised his wife's 'capricious anger' in a letter to his children.[37] Thus, both formal and informal records relating to marriage display the power given to spouses' words and their ensuing impact on the quality of the relationship.

Disputed authority often appears in separation cases. This too is reflected in the ego documents in which men also sought to affirm their patriarchal authority over their wives when challenged. Lady Sarah Cowper recorded a nasty argument with her husband over the time the servants should rise in the morning. She noted 'He Swore – Damn mee for a Bitch did I Hector him, he wou'd fell me to the ground. This I must own was more than I Cou'd decently bear, so I set up to out dare, it being the only way to deal with it'.[38] Lydia Wright's derogatory words about her husband's economic status in spring 1774 not only resulted in him feeling less affection for her, but also prompted him to reassert his power. Previously he had emphasised his patience and toleration of her insistence in visiting her parents. On this occasion, however, he warned her that,

> I was no longer disposed to put up with similar insults to those I had received formerly, and that I insisted upon better behaviour for the future; otherwise, she might depend upon it, I would take more severe methods with her. This seemed (partly, at least) to have its effect, as she behaved

> afterwards, though not very respectfully, yet in a less offensive manner towards me to the day of her death.[39]

At another point in his memoir, Thomas stated that he beat two of his older children to bring them back into line and respect for him, so it is not unreasonable to speculate that the severe method he threatened was physical correction. Not unlike some legal and popular culture accounts of marital conflict, then, husbands' blows and wives' words were given rough equivalence in their ability to 'hurt' the recipient. Even when Lydia was dying of an unidentified complaint of the lungs at the age of 30, in 1777, spousal respect was still something Thomas demanded. Her physician suggested she stay at her parents' home since it had a southerly aspect. Thomas accepted this for a while, then tried to get her to come home again, but Lydia – probably by now simply unable to respond with her former anger – adopted what he felt was more appropriate behaviour: 'tears and a good deal of respectful submission'. This changed his mind and he let her stay; she died at her parental home shortly afterwards.[40]

As such, these more informal records conform to scholarly consensus that patriarchy was a contested and complex frame for matrimony. Indeed, memoirs and correspondence reveal perhaps most fully how the causes and outcomes of marital conflict in a patriarchal framework were by no means rigid or predictable. Barclay has unpicked the subtleties of this in Anna Potts' and

Archibald Grant's marriage, where Archibald frequently sought to remind his wife that she should obey him and Anna responded by ignoring him, or claiming confusion.[41]

IV

Ego-documents illuminate other areas of marital conflict that are not so sharply exposed in church court or quarter session records. Conflicting understandings of love and its expressions emerge as a site of tension in the Potts-Grant union, for instance.[42] A further reason for conflict that is rarely discussed in matrimonial litigation is temperament and personality clashes. Simon Mason, for example, confessed that he did not have much to complain about his wife, except:

> she is not blest with the best of Tempers; she is a very genteel, well behav'd Woman to every one but her Husband; she is certainly a notable, clean, industrious Woman; and was her Temper agreeable to her Person, she would make a Husband compleatly happy; and if after thirty-one Years, she should alter and behave in a mild affectionate Manner, nothing could be more pleasing, but I have hop'd for this so long, that I have but little Hope left.[43]

George and Ruth Courtauld did not seem to have found each other easy to live with either. They married in 1789 in America, and returned to England in 1794

following the birth of their two eldest children. They settled in Braintree, Essex, and had another six children; the last born in 1807. By 1809, 18 years into their union, Ruth was taking a lengthy sojourn at her family home in Ireland. It is unclear when the marriage ran into difficulties; it was being discussed in correspondence after this point. In his letter to his son in 1813, George offered his view of his failing marriage which suggests a fairly early development of problems. Perhaps countering an accusation, he declared that he had married for affection:

> I married from no other motive but a desire, by contributing to her happiness, to increase my own. My only hope was to have a friend and companion; 'tis true that that feeling soon began to give way, and that it has long been so crossed by very different sensations that it is by no means at this day a very lively principle.[44]

Studies of eighteenth-century marriage have until recently rarely focused on religion. Steve King has proposed that it needs integrating into the scholarship on courtship since it was a factor influencing spousal choice.[45] For example, religion was of acute interest during John Gray's courtship of Elizabeth Wilkinson, as their correspondence reveals. In his letters to her in 1810–1811, John explained that he was not a Calvinist as her Methodist family suspected, but in fact was more a Presbyterian. Thus he insisted that they were compatible in terms of religion and that this would determine their future happiness. This

was, he said, one reason for selecting her as a partner. On New Year's Eve 1810 he wrote explaining that her religious education and religion made him look forward to their future intimacy. Indeed, their shared religious values were 'the one thing needfull' and would provide hope and expectations of happiness in the difficulties and trials of life; it was the passport to future happiness and never-ending joy.[46] A year later, John was still putting Elizabeth and her family's mind at rest about his form of piety. His not attending Methodist meetings remained a hurdle, but John sought compromise and proposed she attend once a day with him and he would attend the other part of the day with her.[47] This worked and by 1813 they were married and had a long, seemingly happy union.

The role of religion after the wedding is less investigated. It does not appear as a cause of dispute in separation records during the long eighteenth century except in unusual cases, such as the cruelty separation brought by Anne More against Zachary, her Roman Catholic husband, in 1719. Her unsuccessful suit for separation accused Zachary of attempting to poison her when entertaining a 'Romish Bishop' to dinner at his Manor House, Loftus, North Yorkshire. She alleged that Zachary gave her poisoned wine, which made her ill for several weeks, to prevent her returning to her 'Mother Church'. Anna claimed that she had been educated in the Church of England till she was 13 when she was seduced by a relative to the Church of Rome. She married Zachary, while a

practising Roman Catholic, but recently wanted to return to the Protestant faith. Article 10 of her Libel stated that her husband, as a 'Bigotted Papist' refused to allow her to do so. Anne lost the suit because the deponents, including the local Church of England Minister, deposed that she was subject to fancies, or in harsher words, crazed. Even if Anne was delusional, what is interesting is that this was articulated in terms of their religious differences. It is also striking that Anne's accusations were so acutely historicised within the pervasive local fear of Catholics.[48]

More mundane religious divisions could be powerful. Thomas Wright repeatedly contrasted his Methodism with his wife and family's Calvinism in his memoir; he 'espoused the doctrine of Free-agency and Universal Redemption' in contrast with their strict Calvinism.[49] However, his most frequent complaint was simple: his in-laws had failed as Christians because they declared they would never forgive him for eloping with Lydia.[50] Thomas also believed the denominational differences led to his wife's inferior upbringing, their incompatibility, and his parents-in-laws' many wrongs. These tensions were variously expressed. He blamed his wife's excessive drinking of rum for bearing a sickly infant and for her having to stay in bed for three months after the birth. Though clergymen were often an aid in such situations, he condemned 'Mr. James Scott, the minister of the Calvinistic Chapel at Heckmondwike, of which her parents were members, [who] paid her a visit, to pray with her and

administer ghostly comfort and consolation'. Lydia responded to the clergyman by citing scripture and professing spiritual comfort 'in the cant strain of the party', according to Thomas. Thus, he said, the 'minister was imposed upon, and departed without ever discovering (that ever I could perceive) anything at all of her real situation'. In Thomas's view their shared denomination blinded them to Lydia's failings and therefore nothing was done to assist her.[51] Religious practices were pervasive enough to extend outward from the couple to include the wider family.

V

Historians have established that marital conflict was accompanied by mediation, whether the spouses voluntarily sought it or not. It lay within the remit of legal personnel in Church Courts and Quarter Sessions to facilitate agreements between spouses, typically aimed at them living together peaceably, to protect a wife from further abuse, or to ensure that husbands' obligation to provide was honoured. The stages of conflict and attempts at resolution revealed in separation cases also show that family members arbitrated between husband and wife.[52] Parents offered refuge to offspring experiencing marital breakdown, especially wives suffering abuse. Wives' brothers and fathers warned husbands against violence, though they also persuaded wives to return to husbands. Generally they had the women's interests at heart, as the marital unit was the only one that could financially support women with children. There were considerable vested interests too in getting couples to agree in wealthy, titled

families. As O'Day comments, establishing patronage links was a contributing factor for individuals promoting and organising relatives' unions; thus the prospect of those marriages ending in separation or divorce inferred the termination of the patronage network too.[53]

Familial intervention is also apparent in ego-documents though it is somewhat different from its more formalised representation in legal records. It might be as simple as providing a sympathetic ear, as Archibald Grant's letter to his mother-in-law reveals.[54] The case studies also show its less welcome aspects. Neither Simon Mason nor Thomas Wright framed their in-laws' actions as mediating between them and their spouses. Both men blamed their in-laws for instigating and maintaining conflict between them and their daughters. As well as complaining that their wives' parents' disliked them and refused to support them financially as they saw fit, both men claimed that their in-laws were spiteful and malicious. Thomas Wright even labelled his parents-in-law as 'malevolent'.[55] Strikingly, both often rhetorically linked their wives' faults to their wives' families' faults.

Neither the Masons nor Wrights kept their tensions and arguments to themselves. Both were firmly embedded within their inter-generational families. Initially Samuel Mason's mother helped him until she died, and thereafter his in-laws were prominent. He and his wife separated whenever he could no longer support her and his children. She would return to her family until he could

establish himself again. When he sought her out in 1746 after yet another separation, however, he noted that: 'I was oblig'd to take a Lodging for myself, not being permitted to be with her, for fear of disobliging her pious Relations'.[56] The situation worsened. His brother-in-law, Mr Cheshire, tried to help him get work,

> but the ill nature and malice of my good Father-in-law, and his Consort &c, knowing I was pretty often at his Son Cheshire's, and finding I pick'd up a small, tho' an uncomfortable living, insisted that his Son Cheshire should forbid me coming to his House, which Mr Cheshire was forc'd unwillingly to comply with: Such was the malice of this good Father-in-law, that I was forc'd to shift my Quarters, to the Stone-Kitchen in the Tower, where I was most kindly treated: But still this was an unhappy settl'd Life; I, in one Lodging, my good Wife, in another, and my Children, at the Parish; altogether almost depriv'd me of my Senses, for my little narrow Way of Business was scarcely sufficient to keep me in a State of Existence, much less to pay for my Children's Board; and my wife's Relations, not being willing to contribute one Farthing to save them from the Parish.[57]

Simon found it easier to blame his parents-in-law rather than himself for his separation from his wife and children.

Eventually both men came to see their wives as tainted by their families; apparently unable to separate the two. Thomas Wright regretted allowing his wife to visit her parents regularly without him for this 'soon operated for the worse on my wife's mind and behaviour'.[58] During the visits 'they continued to blackguard, vilify, and abuse me in her presence with all the virulence and malignity that the blackest and most diabolical pride and malice could inspire'. He insisted this 'entirely ruined the peace and happiness of our family', for she returned home 'in a bad humour, and would have abused me in the most provoking language for hours together, when I have hardly uttered a word in reply'. Nearer the end of the memoir he returned yet again to this, proposing that they 'completely inspired her with their own spirit and prejudices, which soon discovered itself in a want of proper esteem and regard for me'.[59] Indeed Thomas represented Lydia's visits to her parental home as going over to his 'enemies'.[60] He also accused them of joining in the couple's arguments. In 1774 Lydia went to live at her parents' following a falling-out. His attempts to make her return ended in more quarrels and his mother-in-law in a 'spirit of the most perverse malignity, [said] that she had rather she had married a chimney-sweeper ; nay, that she had rather follow her to her grave, than see her return peaceably home with her husband!'[61]

The offspring of separating spouses did not play a prominent role in matrimonial litigation. Rarely even named, their numbers were stated,

expenditure upon them occasionally recorded, and they were mentioned as bystanders and victims of marital violence. Even more rarely they appeared as deponents. In contrast, ego-documents indicate that older and adult offspring could play an important part in their parents' marital problems, acting as confidantes, supporters, and accusers. George and Ruth Courtaulds' oldest children, Samuel and Louisa, were drawn into their disputes and it is possible to infer that this caused strains. George began a letter to Sam in June 1813 expressing surprise at his silence even though he had (Sam or George?) received a packet that contained 'among other things a copy of a paper which your mother sent to me by Louisa – the greater part of which was, as you will believe, a tissue of gross misrepresentations'. Already it is possible to see that Louisa was acting as go-between between her parents.[62] George proceeded to defend himself vigorously to Sam, citing the offending chunks of Ruth's accusations, clearly intending Sam to be his father's champion. He doubted that Sam would be 'inclined to believe your father to have conducted himself towards your mother (from the time when she threw herself "completely into his power, far from friends, from country, or protectors"), without either "Affection, Honour, Generosity or Gratitude"'. The quotation he cited presumably referred to Ruth's account of their marriage in America in 1789. George used these categories of affection, honour and generosity in the remainder of the letter to detail the unfairness of his wife's accusation. In doing so, it is possible to see that a split in child-parent support might emerge. In

justifying his financial decision, George defended his plan to provide more money for Sam than the other six children as a sensible investment in a future business. Ruth clearly saw it as an unjustifiable inequity.[63]

As George's letter implies? Demonstrates?, people turned to their adult children to discuss their marital tensions. George updated Sam further on 31 July 1815, for example, explaining:

> Mother and I go on better than for a long time past. My last conversation upon my late proposals stated my conviction of the desirableness of separation for the comfort of both parties – and those proposals were such as appeared to fall in exactly with the favourite plan of both mother and Lou; yet there rather appears, I think, to be an intention of remaining at Braintree, which if at all tolerable I shall most certainly not oppose.[64]

A few weeks later he added a sad postscript to another letter: 'Your mother is also very well, and appears tolerably comfortable – I wish I could make her happy'.[65] These reflections might seem the conversations of friends rather than father/child. In this period, parents were encouraged to be their children's confidantes and friends. What is interesting is that George's attempt to discuss his marital tensions illuminates a facet of such relationships not revealed by the advice literature which ended its guidance for parents before the child reached adulthood. George was a man who prided himself on being a good father, and

perhaps this shows the other side of such ideals: parents turning children into their confidantes at times of crisis.

Given the large size of families, however, including one child as confidante could exclude another. In her letter dated August 1813, the eldest child Louisa complained to Sam about her father's assumptions:

> My father thinks that I defend my mother, viz. her opinions, whether good or bad, because they are her's; this I am sure I do not. It is true I do not always declare my sentiments when they run counter to her's, and I do mostly support her's when they coincide with my own in opposition to my father's.

Louisa explained that she could not lie or 'guard my expressions' when discussing her mother with her father. She may have been defending herself to Sam too, for she commented: 'You do not know what it was that influenced me "to take" as Papa says "My mother's part"'. While she admitted to Sam that her mother was 'often much to blame', she distinguished between her parents by their discussion of the other in front of their children. She approved of her mother because she praised her husband's abilities as a father, regardless of what she felt that he was like as a husband, but disapproved of her father because he attacked her mother's maternal abilities.[66] In a further letter Louisa updated Sam about 'the mutual domestic comfort of our parents'. She reported 'an increase of apparent kind attention on the one side is accepted by an

increased willingness to be pleased'. She attributed the alteration to having involuntarily declared her plan to assist her mother: 'while Cath, Eliza and I were in the room' her father 'began a conversation or rather a monologue on the desirableness of a separation; he then read a letter on the subject which he had written to you'. Louisa reported that her failure to reply to this 'displeased him, which displeasure he shewed by comparing my conduct in this instance to my mother's "infamous abominable" &c &c behaviour; this forced me to a perhaps sharp defence of Mo.' This included informing him that she was determined to take a small school where she would live with her mother.[67]

Children's involvement in parental marital breakdown shows its diachronic form far more powerfully in ego-documents than in court records, where at best a static picture is glimpsed. The offspring of couples who experienced sustained marital conflict often encountered it in childhood and it could influence their actions in adulthood. Ruth and George's inability to live happily together had impinged upon their children's lives throughout childhood. Ruth had spent several years in her natal home in Ireland with some of her younger daughters, leaving her younger sons and two eldest children in Essex with George. Louisa used these memories to support a second more permanent separation of her parents in 1813. She informed Sam: 'As to a separation, I am convinced my mother's happiness would be increased, I should therefore second such an arrangement; but I could not then remain at home: I never can forget the many

wretched dreadful hours I passed during my mother's absence'. There is also evidence that marriage conflict could alter the nature of the relationship between parent and children. In 1815 following an undisclosed dispute with his adult offspring, George wrote an open letter to them observing that they were his sole comfort in life:

> The only troubles worthy of the name which have hitherto been allotted to me (and of these indeed I have, I believe and hope, had a larger portion than falls to the lot of most men) have arisen from the relations of Husband and Father. When, (and long after) I had given up all expectation of being happy with my Wife – (tho' upon the hope of conjugal bliss no man I assuredly believe ever more fondly indulged himself and assiduously cherished for years, with but slight expectation of realising it) – when this fond hope proved but an illusion and all that I could look forward to in this connection was a bearable uncomfortableness – and even this has scarcely been attained. When this view of earthly comfort was gone, I consoled myself for many years that by making friends of my children I should secure a parent's best enjoyments.[68]

Apparently, he was not averse to a little emotional blackmail either. It is tempting to speculate that the couple's troubles shaped their offspring's lives for yet more years. George returned to America at the end of the decade with plans

to establish Englishtown in Ohio, taking with him all his children except the eldest two. Louisa Courtauld had already moved with her mother to Edinburgh in order to facilitate her separation from her husband and had backed out of the move to America at the last minute (Ruth or Louisa backed out?). Ruth seems to have been unable or unwilling to work for a living and Louisa opened and taught a school there, which supported them both. They remained together until Ruth returned to Essex to housekeep for her son Samuel, who also refused to join his father. The family were only physically reunited in Britain after George's death in America in 1823.

VI

Due to the nature of matrimonial litigation there is a tendency for scholarship on troubled marriages in the long eighteenth century to focus on its worst examples or its crisis points: often the immediate lead up to, or breakdown of, a union. Adding evidence of marital conflict that did not reach complete breakdown or did not involve infidelity, cruelty, or desertion, adds colour to this stark, monotone picture. It shows that the concerns of unhappy husbands and wives centred on financial problems and their spouse's appropriate behaviour, whether conflict was minor or extreme. Yet it also reveals other areas of tension, particularly differing religious views and practices. These are often neglected in the history of marriage, although historians of courtship are beginning to

recognise its power, and those who address marital difficulties will also find it worthwhile to consider, especially as it is peculiarly amenable to historicisation.

Autobiographies and correspondence demonstrate that it is important not to view marital conflict in isolation. Such conflicts were inter-generational, often involving the union's offspring as well as and parents and kin on either side of the married couple. While we know that some family members attempted to assist unhappy spouses, it is clear that in other marriages they were also blamed for exacerbating, or, even, causing arguments. Furthermore, the sources investigated in this chapter demonstrate that marital conflict could have (admittedly in the eyes of those remembering many years later) a very long genesis, occurring in some instances even before the wedding itself. Indeed what is strikingly evoked by correspondence and autobiographies is the extensive nature of familial involvement in spouses' marital problems. Even though this may be a feature of hindsight and memory in autobiographies, some of the husbands in the sample cited their parents-in-law as protagonists in the marriage going wrong from the start. It also could outlive the troubled marriage. Although Thomas Wright married a second time (at 45 to a 15 year old) four years after his first wife's death, his memoir still returned repeatedly to his first wife's parents to recount their continued personal animosity to him after Lydia's death, and their role in giving a home and work to several of his children into their own adulthood and marriage. His mother-in-law died in 1796

and his father-in-law in 1797 and by then two of Thomas's daughters had married two brothers who were themselves feuding over their Birkhead inheritances. Indeed, Thomas saw the taint of this continuing through the generations. His mother-in-law's conduct had, he warned his intended readers, his and his parents-in-laws descendants: 'done the greatest injury to some of her own offspring, and given occasion for the most implacable animosity to arise between the parties, who were near relations, immediately sprung from her own family, and which malice and animosity will probably be transmitted to future generations'.[69]

Some final concluding words here? It's a long quote to use as a summary….

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[1] Joanne Bailey, *Unquiet Lives: Marriage and Marriage Breakdown 1660-1800* (2003); Katie Barclay, *Love Intimacy and Power: Marriage and Patriarchy in Scotland, 1650-1850* (Manchester University Press, 2011)

[2] I. H Tague, 'Love, Honor, and Obedience: Fashionable Women and the Discourse of Marriage in the Early Eighteenth Century, Journal of British Studies 40 (2001), pp. 76-106

[3] Bailey, *Unquiet Lives;* E. Foyster, Marital Violence: An English Family History, 1660-1857 (2005)

[4] Naomi Tadmor, 'Early modern English kinship in the long run: reflections on continuity and change'. *Continuity and Change*, 25 (2010). pp. 15-48

[5] N., Eustace,"The cornerstone of a copious work": love and power in eighteenth-century courtship', *Journal of Social History* 34, 3 (2001), pp. 517-546; J. Malay, 'The marrying of Lady Anne Clifford: marital strategy in the Clifford inheritance dispute' *Northern History*, 49 (2), (2012) pp. 251-264; .D. O'Hara, *Courtship and Constraint: Rethinking the Making of Marriage in Tudor England* (2002); R. O'Day, 'Matchmaking and moneymaking in a patronage society: the first duke and duchess of Chandos, c. 1712–35', 66/1, *The Economic History Review* 2013, 273–296.

[6] O'Day, 'Matchmaking', passim.

[7] J. Bailey, *Parenting in England, 1750-1830: emotions, identity and generation* (2012)

[8] O'Day, 'Matchmaking,' 273.

[9] Collected for another research project.

[10] For instance, in discussing Lady Anne Clifford's marriage in the 17c, Jessica Malay refers to three elite marriages that ended in separation, 252, 256, 262

[11] Hampshire Record Office, 25M60/PO35, May 6th 1834 [1588]

[12] Katie Barclay, 'Negotiating Patriarchy: The Marriage of Anna Potts and Archibald Grant of Monymusk', Journal of Scottish Historical Studies, 28(2) (2008), pp. 83-101

[13] Anne Kugler, *Errant Plagiary: The Life and Writing of Lady Sarah Cowper 1644-1720*, Standford University Press, 2002; Amanda Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 1999.

[14] Simon Mason, *A Narrative of the Life and Distresses of Simon Mason, Apothecary* (Birmingham, 1754). For more detail on Mason's working life see K. Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities: Economic Lives in Early Modern Britain*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 2000, pp. 295-6.

[15]Wright, Thomas (ed.), *Autobiography of Thomas Wright of Birkenshaw in the county of York, 1736-1797* (London, 1864).

[16] Transcribed and printed in: S. L. Courtauld, The Huguenot family of Courtauld, 3 vols. (privately printed, London, 1957–67) and S. A. Courtauld, ed., Courtauld family letters, 1782–1900, 7 vols. (1916).

[17] Malay, 'Marrying of Lady Anne Clifford', 251.

[18] Barclay, 'Negotiating Patriarchy', 86.

[19] Joanne Bailey and Loreen Giese, 'Marital cruelty: reconsidering lay attitudes in England, c. 1580 to 1850'. *The History of the Family*, August 2013 , Volume 18 , p ; Bailey, *Unquiet Lives*, p.

[20] Barclay, 'Negotiating Patriarchy,' 88, 96-99, quote, 97.

[21] Sam and Mrs Sam [Ellen] Courtauld to Sophia Courtauld, and Mrs George Courtauld to Sophia Courtauld, Bocking, morning 6 Aug 1822, Courtauld family letters, vol 2, p. 928.

[22] For example, see the chapter of the Soundys in S. King, T. Nutt, A. Tompkins (eds.), *The Narratives of the Poor in the eighteenth century* (London, 2005), vol. 1., 219-97

[23] Mason, *Narrative*, p. 85.

[24] ibid.

[25] ibid., pp. 86-87.

[26] ibid., pp. 22-9.

[27] Wright (ed.), *Autobiography*, p. 116.

[28] ibid., p. 102.

[29] Mason, *Narrative*, pp. 39, 63, 66, 72.

[30] Wright (ed.), *Autobiography*, p 116.

[31] ibid., p. 101.

[32] Bailey, *Unquiet Lives*, p. ; cases of marital violence in Paris, 1775, also included verbal abuse, J,. Merrick, 'Domestic Violence in Paris, 1775', *Journal of Family History* October 2012 vol. 37 no. 4 418.

[33] Quoted in Barclay, 'Negotiating Patriarchy,' 93.

[34] Mason, *Narrative*, p. 95.

[35] Wright (ed.), *Autobiography*, p. 104.

[36] ibid., p. 103.

[37] 1815 George Courtauld to all his children, S L Courtauld, The Huguenot Family of Courtauld, 3 vols. (1957) vol 2, p. 71.

[38] Quoted in Kugler, *Errant Plagiary*, p. 50.

[39] Wright (ed.), *Autobiography*, p. 105.

[40] ibid., p. 128.

[41] Barclay, 'Negotiating Patriarchy,' pp. 93-6.

[42] ibid., 89.

[43] Mason, *Narrative*, p. 87.

[44] George Courtauld to his son Samuel, 23 June 1813, Courtauld, The Huguenot Family of Courtauld, 3 vols. (1957) vol 2.

[45] Steve King, 'Love, Religion and Power in the Making of Marriages in Early Nineteenth-Century Rural Industrial Lancashire', *Rural History*, 21, (2010) .pp 1-26.

[46] Cadbury Research Library: Special Collections, University of Birmingham, John Shaw to Elizabeth Wilkinson at Rochdale, 31 Dec 1810, Shaw 1

[47] Cadbury Research Library: Special Collections, University of Birmingham, John Shaw to His Future Wife Elizabeth Wilkinson, 20 Dec 1811, Shaw 7

[48] Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, C.P. I 699, Anna More v. Zachariah (Zachary) Moore.

[49] Wright (ed.), *Autobiography*, p. 258.

[50] ibid., pp. 94, 280.

[51] ibid., pp. 107-8.

[52] Bailey, *Unquiet Lives*, chapter ; Foyster, *Marital Violence*, chapter, ; Merrick, 'Domestic Violence in Paris, 1775', 419.

[53] O'Day, 'Matchmaking,' 292.

[54] Barclay, 'Negotiating Patriarchy,' 93.

[55] Wright, (ed.), *Autobiography*,p. 78.

[56] Mason, *Narrative*, p. 88.

[57] ibid., p. 90.

[58] Wright, (ed.), *Autobiography*,p. 94.

[59] ibid., pp. 100, 253.

[60] ibid., p. 102.

[61] ibid., pp. 104-5.

[62] For another example, dated 1692, see Kugler, *Errant Plagiary*, p. 30.

[63] George Courtauld to his son Samuel Courtauld, 23 June 1813, S L Courtauld, The Huguenot Family of Courtauld, 3 vols. (1957) vol 2.

[64] George Courtauld to his son Samuel Courtauld, 29 July 1813, S L Courtauld, The Huguenot Family of Courtauld, 3 vols. (1957) vol 2, p. 58.

[65] George Courtauld to his son Samuel Courtauld, 7 Sept 1813, S L Courtauld, The Huguenot Family of Courtauld, 3 vols. (1957) vol 2, p. 64

[66] Louisa Courtauld to her brother Samuel Courtauld 1813, S L Courtauld, The Huguenot Family of Courtauld, 3 vols. (1957) vol 2, p. 50

[67] ibid., pp. 53-4.

[68] George Courtauld to all his children, 1815, S L Courtauld, The Huguenot Family of Courtauld, 3 vols. (1957) vol 2, pp. 71-2

[69] Wright (ed.), *Autobiography*, p. 215.