

'You know I am all on fire': writing the adulterous affair in England, c.1740–1830*

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Abstract

This article analyses rare surviving adulterous love letters alongside published epistles and trial reports to reveal the practical and emotional importance of letter-writing in conducting an affair in England c.1740–1830. While attitudes to adultery have received widespread scholarly attention, illicit letters remain largely overlooked. The article is the first to outline distinguishing features of adulterous letters, and the language of infidelity. It distinguishes missives from courtship letters as a secretive genre carefully shielded by writers. By scrutinizing the letters which sustained affairs, the article rediscovers the happiness, jealousy and desire of illicit love in the words of lovers themselves.

When the Quaker gentleman Richard How II (1727–1801) came to the aid of his fellow Friend Silena Ramsay (d. 1779) from 1758, her husband Robert was 'much straitend [*sic*] for money' and struggling to pay the rent. Richard expressed sympathy for Silena's distress, making a number of visits to her, her infant son Tommy, and her parents. Soon he was writing long melancholy letters describing his affection for her, proclaiming that 'my most ardent Desire is thy Happiness' and 'thy Letters alone preserve me from plunging into Despair'.¹ The couple embarked on an illicit affair, which caused a great scandal in the tight-knit Quaker community of Aspley Guise in Bedfordshire. Robert tried 'all methods rough & smooth' to keep Silena, including threatening to seize their infant Tommy, which was within his legal rights as her husband and could be enforced by the common law courts.² However his resistance had little effect, and the couple signed a deed of separation in January 1761, with Richard acting as Silena's trustee. As Richard wrote to Silena proclaiming his unalterable love, Robert set off in March 1761 to recover his fortunes

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¹ Bedford, Bedfordshire Archives Service (hereafter B.A.S.), HW88/5, Silena Ramsay to her mother Sarah Moore, 7 1 mo [Jan.] 1760. Richard had previously praised how Robert had 'acted with great Honor, & been cruelly treated' by his friends (B.A.S., HW87/254, Richard How II to Richard How I, 13 March 1758; HW88/6, How II to Ramsay, 7 Jan. 1761).

² On the legal custody of children, see L. Stone, *Road to Divorce: England 1530–1987* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 153, 170–80.

trading on the perilous Gold Coast in Africa. Richard scoured the newspapers with ‘dread’ for news of Robert’s return, which could deprive his life ‘of its only charm’. The unfortunate lace dealer had died at James Fort in Gambia by August 1762, finally allowing Richard and Silena to marry on 3 November that year.³

This article analyses the letters exchanged by adulterous couples to establish the indispensable role they played in conducting an affair during the long eighteenth century. Engaging with scholarship on adultery, letter-writing and emotions, it asks, what defines adulterous letters as a genre? How did they shape an affair? What do they reveal about emotional experiences of adultery? What motivated their writers? The article is divided into three sections, the first of which locates illicit letters within the historiography of adultery and romantic epistles exchanged during courtship and marriage. Second, it positions illicit love letters as a secretive genre shielded by burning and secret codes, compared to courtship letters which were routinely shared. Finally, it is the first study to analyse distinct features of the language of infidelity, including men’s descriptions of jealousy and desire, and women’s attempts to replicate a wifely concern over health, or seek lasting financial stability. These tropes reveal how couples strove to recreate licit relationships in an adulterous setting, which could wither under monetary pressures once the veneer of romance had faded.

Adultery and divorce have been the subject of sustained analysis by historians. Trial literature and the perceived ‘mode’ for adultery within the *beau monde* have been analysed at length by Donna Andrew, Katherine Binhammer, Faramerz Dabhoiwala, Sarah Lloyd, Gillian Russell, Susan Staves and David Turner, among others.⁴ These scholars have revealed how attitudes to sexual morality shifted in the post-Restoration period, where adultery was ‘felt to be more predominant and more dangerous’ than before. The flood of detailed newspaper reports of criminal conversation (crim. con.) cases after 1770 saw adultery suffuse ‘all the venues of popular discourse’, as seemingly private affairs were transformed into public concerns. By the French Revolution, the rise in divorce cases involving crim. con. fuelled a ‘sex panic’ about female sexuality and society’s perceived moral degeneracy.⁵

Among this burgeoning scholarship, the letters which adulterers used to sustain their affairs remain largely overlooked. Clare Brant’s *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British*

³ B.A.S., HW88/11 and 48, How II to Ramsay, 28 Jan. 1761, 18 March 1762. For further details, see M. Ashcroft, ‘The courtship of Richard How’, *Bedfordshire Magazine*, x (1965), 50–4, also reproduced in B.A.S., HW catalogue.

⁴ D. T. Andrew, *Aristocratic Vice: the Attack on Duelling, Suicide, Adultery, and Gambling in 18th-Century England* (2013), esp. ch. 4, and ‘“Adultery à-la-mode”: privilege, the law and attitudes to adultery 1770–1809’, *History*, lxxxii (1997), 5–23; K. Binhammer, ‘The sex panic of the 1790s’, *Jour. History of Sexuality*, vi (1996), 409–34; F. Dabhoiwala, *The Origins of Sex: a History of the First Sexual Revolution* (2012); S. Lloyd, ‘Amour in the shrubbery: reading the detail of English adultery trial publications of the 1780s’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, xxxix (2006), 421–42; C. McCreery, ‘Keeping up with the Bon Ton: the *Tête-à-Tête* series in the *Town and Country Magazine*’, in *Gender in 18th-Century England: Roles, Representations and Responsibilities*, ed. H. Barker and E. Chalus (1997), pp. 207–29; G. Russell, ‘The theatre of crim. con.: Thomas Erskine, adultery, and radical politics in the 1790s’, in *Unrespectable Radicals? Popular Politics in the Age of Reform*, ed. M. T. Davis and P. A. Pickering (Aldershot, 2007), pp. 57–70; S. Staves, ‘Money for honour: damages for criminal conversation’, *Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture*, xi (1982), 279–97; D. Turner, *Fashioning Adultery: Gender, Sex and Civility in England, 1660–1740* (Oxford, 2002).

⁵ Andrew, *Aristocratic Vice*, pp. 129, 147, 154, 244; Binhammer, p. 414. Parliamentary divorces were extortionately expensive and therefore incredibly rare. On the whole, the church courts held key jurisdiction over adultery, granting ‘divorce’ with no right to remarry. Crim. con. cases were increasingly required to secure a successful verdict, with 30% of divorces in 1700–49 preceded by crim. con. actions, rising to 96% in 1800–19 (see Stone, pp. 184–6, 326–7, 424–34).

Culture (2006) unusually categorizes these epistles under ‘Writing as a criminal’ (chapter four) rather than ‘Writing as a lover’ (chapter three), which removes adulterous love letters from the context in which they were first written. The letters of ‘guilty lovers’ are situated within notions of criminality rather than romantic love, excluding innumerable undiscovered affairs which did not enter the court system.⁶ A rare piece considering epistolary interactions outside the courtroom is Clara Tuite’s article ‘Tainted love’ (2007) analysing Lord Byron’s four-month affair with Lady Caroline Lamb in 1812. Tuite situates the affair within ‘Romantic celebrity culture’ and ‘Byronic fandom’, with Lamb acting as the bohemian poet’s dutiful fan, lover and stalker. While Lamb luxuriated in the relationship’s ‘exclusivity’, Byron copied out passages of her love letters for the entertainment of a ‘tightly circumscribed’ group of elite whigs.⁷ This article expands its remit to encompass a wider number of affairs beyond the courtroom context. It adopts the terminology of Brant and Tuite in treating adulterous letters as ‘personal’ and ‘exclusive’ rather than strictly ‘private’, a term which Lawrence Klein has unravelled to reveal a ‘mobility of meanings’ in different spaces.⁸ It adds the term ‘secret’ to indicate that knowledge of an affair was ‘studiously hidden’ and ‘not revealed’, while letters were further restricted, and their contents even more so.⁹

Adulterous love letters as a genre can be contextualized using romantic missives exchanged during courtship and marriage. Love letters in England have been analysed by Fay Bound Alberti, Clare Brant, Amanda Vickery and Susan Whyman, alongside the work of Katie Barclay on Scotland, Elizabeth Cohen on Italy, Rebecca Earl on Latin America, Nicole Eustace, Karen Lystra and Ellen Rothman on America, and Martyn Lyons on France, Italy and Australasia.¹⁰ There are several important parallels between these missives and their adulterous counterparts. As Bound Alberti notes, love letters played a guiding role in shaping how writers and recipients felt. They were defined by their high value, as to produce a letter was ‘suggestive of the giving of the self.’¹¹ While Brant argues that lovers were ‘especially compulsive’ writers, Lyons has relationships

⁶ C. Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture* (Basingstoke, 2006), pp. 125–68.

⁷ C. Tuite, ‘Tainted love and Romantic literary celebrity’, *E.L.H.*, lxxiv (2007), 59–88, at pp. 60–1, 64, 67.

⁸ Brant, p. 5; Tuite, p. 67; L. Klein, ‘Gender and the public/private distinction in the 18th century: some questions about evidence and analytic procedure’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, xxix (1995), 97–109.

⁹ Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (2 vols., 1755–6), ii. 618. See Roderick Phillips’s notion of ‘discreet adultery’, which evaded public notoriety by being ‘known’ only to lovers themselves, and perhaps to spouses and local rumour. The reverse was ‘blatant and public adultery’, which flaunted a relationship, representing ‘a direct affront’ to community standards (R. Phillips, *Untying the Knot: a Short History of Divorce* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 104–5).

¹⁰ On love letters in England, see F. Bound Alberti, ‘“Writing the self?” Love and the letter in England c.1660–1700’, *Literature and History*, xi (2001), 1–19; Brant; A. Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors: at Home in Georgian England* (2009); and S. Whyman, *The Pen and the People: English Letter Writers 1660–1800* (Oxford, 2009). For the rest of the world, see K. Barclay, *Love, Intimacy and Power: Marriage and Patriarchy in Scotland: 1650–1850* (Manchester, 2011); E. S. Cohen, ‘Between oral and written culture: the social meaning of an illustrated love letter’, in *Culture and Identity in Early Modern Europe (1500–1800): Essays in Honour of Natalie Zemon Davis*, ed. B. Diefendorf and C. Hesse (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1997), pp. 181–201; R. Earl, ‘Letters and love in colonial Spanish America’, *The Americas*, lxii (2005), 17–46; N. Eustace, ‘“The cornerstone of a copious work”: love and power in 18th-century courtship’, *Jour. Social Hist.*, xxxiv (2001), 517–46; M. Lyons, ‘Love letters and writing practices: on *écritures intimes* in the 19th century’, *Jour. Family Hist.*, xxiv (1999), 232–9, and ‘“Questo cor che tuo si rese”: the private and the public in Italian women’s love letters in the long 19th century’, *Modern Italy*, xix (2014), 355–68; K. Lystra, *Searching the Heart: Women, Men, and Romantic Love in 19th-Century America* (Oxford, 1989); and E. Rothman, *Hands and Hearts: a History of Courtship in America* (New York, 1984).

¹¹ Bound Alberti, pp. 5, 10.

‘almost exclusively defined’ by letters.¹² Both genres conform to Whyman’s assertion that writers used poetic language and inserted literary extracts into their love letters.¹³ Nonetheless, adulterous missives differ from courting and marital letters in important ways, including their secrecy, power relations and formulation of emotions such as jealousy and lust, which will be highlighted throughout this article.

Illicit letters evince a wider spectrum of emotions than love, also revealing written formulations of agitation, shame and unhappiness. Letters provide privileged access to the emotional experience of adultery in a writer’s own words, particularly compared to crim. con. cases where plaintiffs and defendants could not provide testimony, and divorce suits mediated by legal professionals.¹⁴ In published missives, these words are likely to have been heavily edited. Epistles cannot be read as straightforward transcripts of a person’s feelings, but followed conventions ‘governing the correct phrasing of sentiments’.¹⁵ While letters reveal how a writer decided to conceptualize their emotional state at a given moment, we cannot access their feelings beyond these linguistic expressions. Nonetheless, the language chosen by writers helped to shape the experience they sought to convey. In the words of Susan J. Matt, by ‘choosing to identify and name one’s feelings in one way rather than another, individuals define their emotions in the process of expressing them’.¹⁶ The most influential analysis of this process is William Reddy’s work on ‘emotives’, meaning terms which ‘are influenced directly by, and alter, what they “refer” to’. Reddy’s ‘emotives’ build on the philosopher J. L. Austin’s notion of ‘performatives’, a type of ‘speech act’ used to perform or accomplish something, in both spoken and written form. Thus, in crafting a letter to describe their shame, an adulterer actively elucidated, concretized and even intensified this feeling, ‘uttering in a changed state’.¹⁷

This article analyses the language of adulterous love using detailed case studies of nine extra-marital relationships. Since the majority of evidence was destroyed by writers themselves, illicit relationships with accompanying documentary evidence are incredibly scarce. Relationships include relatively unknown affairs between Robert Ramsay’s wife Silena and the Quaker gentleman Richard How II (c.1760–2), Lady Mary Stuart’s husband Sir James Lowther, first earl of Lonsdale, and Isabella Carr (c.1759–69), Thomas Bennett’s wife Anna Maria and Admiral Sir Thomas Pye (c.1769?–85) and the Lincoln housekeeper ‘B. F.’ and William Pratt (1814–16). Other affairs received considerable publicity due to the higher social or celebrity status of the protagonists, including Thomas Robinson’s wife Mary ‘Perdita’ Robinson and John ‘Jew’ King (1773), and Sir William Hamilton’s wife Emma and Admiral Horatio Nelson (1798–1805), who was also married himself. These are supported by evidence from selected crim. con. and divorce trials, which relied heavily upon love letters as evidence. Such trials paint a revealing portrait of the affairs between Roger Mainwaring’s wife Mary and the yeoman John Road (1748–59), Richard, first earl of Grosvenor’s wife Henrietta and the duke of

¹² Brant, p. 99; Lyons, ‘Love letters’, p. 235.

¹³ Whyman, pp. 99–100, 121.

¹⁴ Stone, pp. 195–7, 234.

¹⁵ L. Pollock, ‘Anger and the negotiation of relationships in early modern England’, *Historical Jour.*, xlvii (2004), 567–90, at p. 572.

¹⁶ S. J. Matt, ‘Recovering the invisible: methods for the historical study of the emotions’, in *Doing Emotions History*, ed. S. J. Matt and P. N. Stearns (Urbana, Chicago and Springfield, Ill., 2014), p. 43.

¹⁷ W. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: a Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 96–105. Cf. J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (2nd edn., Cambridge, 1975).

Cumberland (1769), and John Wilmot's wife Fanny and the footman Edward Washbourn (1790–1). The relationships are contextualized using further crim. con. and divorce suits.¹⁸

Illicit language is reconstructed using a sample of approximately 250 adulterous letters, spanning the period from c.1740 to 1830 as evenly as possible. Collections were isolated providing both sides of a correspondence, frequent detailed missives from one writer, or supporting evidence revealing family and community attitudes towards an affair. Letters feature passionate encounters and lasting affairs, inexperienced and consummate writers, Anglicans and Quakers, domestic servants and titled elites. The selection includes eight letters from 'B. F.' to William Pratt, fourteen between John King and Mary Robinson, fourteen between the duke of Cumberland and Lady Henrietta Grosvenor, fifteen from Isabella Carr to Sir James Lowther, twenty between Anna Maria Bennett and Admiral Sir Thomas Pye, and forty-two from Richard How II to Silena Ramsay.¹⁹ The most numerous collection features over 100 letters exchanged by Admiral Horatio Nelson and Lady Emma Hamilton. In situating affairs within a broader framework, the article draws upon letters to wider correspondents, meeting house minutes, trial literature, dictionaries, pamphlets and poetry.

Adulterous relationships differ from those on the path to matrimony as many involved individuals of significantly different social status. As Joanne Bailey notes in her case study of thirty-two instances of female infidelity 1660–1800, only 19 per cent of cases involved women with a lover and husband of similar status.²⁰ Friends attributed the crossing of social divides to the power of 'inordinate passions'. While Mary Mainwaring was the daughter of Sir William Dudley, her amour was an illiterate yeoman. Mary's friends warned her that her 'Family Rank and condition in Life' should preclude such a relationship, but she believed 'That Love was a Levellar' and John was a 'Clean sweet man'.²¹ Likewise while Fanny Wilmot (b. c.1759) was the wife of an M.P., her lover was a footman in their household. In such cases, it was usually the married man or woman who occupied a higher social position. This was presented as a particular cause for outrage in texts such as *Adultery Anatomized* (1761), where a woman's husband had 'raised her from a very low degree of life, to the dignity of a woman of condition', and she had repaid him with her 'prostitution'.²² Men indulging in affairs with women of lower status include Sir James Lowther (1736–1802), who enjoyed a decade-long relationship with the gentlewoman Isabella Carr, continuing through his unhappy marriage to Lady Mary Stuart (1740–1824) in 1761. Finally, the Quaker gentleman Richard How II engaged in an affair with the lace-dealer's wife Silena Ramsay for up to two years before the death of her husband in 1762, enabling a marriage which was hugely 'advantagious' to her status.²³

Adulterous affairs can be sub-categorized into short-term dalliances, women whose husbands tolerated their infidelity, and long-term 'kept' mistresses who bore bastard

¹⁸ *The Trial of the Hon. Mrs. Catherine Newton, Wife of John Newton, Esq.* (1782) and *Adultery: the trial of Mr. William Atkinson, linen-draper, of Cheapside* (1789).

¹⁹ Figures include drafts of letters, but exclude later decodings and letters to and from wider correspondents.

²⁰ J. Bailey, *Unquiet Lives: Marriage and Marriage Breakdown in England, 1660–1800* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 152–3, 221.

²¹ York, Borthwick Institute (hereafter B.I.), TRANS.CP.1766/2, *Roger Mainwaring, Esq. c. Mary Elizabeth Mainwaring*, appealed from consistory court of Chester to consistory court of Durham, 1766, divorce by reason of adultery, fo. 157.

²² *Adultery Anatomized* (2 vols., 1761), i. 221.

²³ B.A.S., HW88/54, Ramsay to How I, Woburn, 25 Oct. 1762.

children and lived as illicit ‘wives’. While Fanny Wilmot’s relationship with her footman lasted at least six months, the affair between John King (c.1753–1824) and Mary Robinson (1756/8–1800) barely made it to three. Certain women, such as Silena Ramsay, eventually married their paramour. Others were disappointed, with Lady Grosvenor (1745–1828) hoping in vain that the duke of Cumberland (1745–90) would eventually make her his wife. A small number of couples settled into long-term arrangements where women became ‘kept’ mistresses, including Admiral Nelson (1758–1805) and Lady Hamilton (1765–1815), and Admiral Pye (1708/9–85) and Anna Maria Bennett (d. 1808). The tacit consent of their husbands granted these women greater freedom, with Anna Maria living as the admiral’s ‘housekeeper’ to give their relationship an air of respectability. The couple had at least three children together, christened ‘Pye Bennett’ in a rare official recognition of illegitimacy.²⁴ The record would have given ‘Proof Enough to divorce me if B. was so disposed’, but provided her with a temporary salve against accusations from lodgers that she was raising a ‘Parcel of Bastards’.²⁵ While Anna Maria’s husband may have turned a blind eye to her adultery, the wider community did not.

Personal epistles such as courtship letters were regularly read to and circulated among family and friends. As Lyons has noted, our perception of correspondence ‘as a private dialogue between individuals is not always appropriate’ due to ‘the collective nature of much letter writing and attempts by parents and husbands to supervise it’. The majority of courting couples wrote under the ‘assumption that third parties would read their letters’.²⁶ The phenomenon of the public love letter was remarkably common, with suitors often writing their ‘most emphatic’ letters to a woman’s friends and family in order to gain approval for a match.²⁷ The same was not true during adulterous liaisons, where the contents of love letters were fiercely guarded. In comparison with many familiar letters, adulterous missives were not usually composed in company, and were not voluntarily circulated beyond the addressee. However, they did frequently find their way into print, subverting the secrecy that once defined them.²⁸

During general correspondences, many writers censored letters they had received with large blots of ink, in case they fell into the wrong hands and ‘anything unpleasant or

²⁴ While previous studies have only noted two children (Thomas and Harriet), manuscripts reveal that Anna Maria had four daughters and one son. Thomas Pye Bennett (d. 1808) was a lieutenant in the navy, while Harriet Pye Bennett (later Esten) (1761?–1865) found fame as an actress. If Anna Maria’s and Admiral Pye’s affair began c.1769, it is possible that Harriet and Thomas were her husband’s progeny. One undated letter to Pye describes how Caroline could be ‘fetched to you when you wish to see her I never Refused that to Mr Bennett a father . . . alas for me my children are all fatherless’ (Louisiana State University (hereafter L.S.U.), 77:41/1, box 7). It is this view of her children as ‘fatherless’ that leaves such uncertainty about their parentage. Anna Maria’s letters describe the christening of Caroline Sophia Pye in 1781, and two further girls named Polly and Nancy. Admiral Pye’s will refers to Caroline Sophia Pye (also called Caroline Sophia Bennett), plus ‘the three girls’ Harriet, Polly and Nancy Pye Bennett (see The National Archives of the U.K., PROB 11/1136, will of Admiral Sir Thomas Pye, and letters from Anna Maria Bennett to Admiral Sir Thomas Pye, divided between Westminster City Archives (hereafter W.C.A.), 36/62–75 and L.S.U., 77:41/1–8, box 7). For further discussion, see J. F. Fuller, ‘A curious genealogical medley’, repr. from *Miscellanea Genealogica et Heraldica* (1913), pp. 2–5; D. Lewes, ‘Bennett, Anna Maria (Agnes) Evans’, in *The Encyclopedia of Romantic Literature*, ed. F. Burwick (2 vols., Chichester, 2012), i. 120–1; and S. Brown, P. Clements and I. Grundy, ‘Anna Maria Bennett’, in *Orlando: Women’s Writing in the British Isles from the Beginnings to the Present* (Cambridge, 2006) <<http://orlando.cambridge.org>> [accessed 29 June 2015].

²⁵ W.C.A., 36/69 and 72, Bennett to Pye, undated (Nov. 1781 and July 1785).

²⁶ Lyons, ‘Love letters’, pp. 234, 236.

²⁷ Eustace, pp. 517, 530.

²⁸ Features of familiar letters based on Brant, p. 5.

personal was brought up'.²⁹ Writers urged friends to be careful with letters gossiping about others, with Richard How II asking his friend William Tomlinson to 'take particular Care to prevent any body's seeing this Letter' concerning tensions with his German relations in 1745.³⁰ While writers 'often asked' for personal letters to be burned, their incineration during adultery was widespread, to prevent their contents from 'leaking'.³¹ Lady Grosvenor wrote in her sixth letter to the duke of Cumberland that she would 'always burn your letters immediately', which made the couple 'as safe as a thief in a mill'.³² Her caution was evidently overstated, as scores of letters from both parties survived, and were used as evidence both during her husband's crim. con. suit in 1770 and in the ensuing separation suit. Richard How II repeatedly reminded Silena Ramsay to be careful with his letters, writing to her in May 1762, 'Perhaps it may be best to burn this, or else be sure lay it by carefully'.³³ The footman Edward Washbourn was equally wary, burning the 'many letters' he received from Fanny Wilmot 'on the preceding day' before his possessions were searched in the presence of Fanny's husband.³⁴ While the yeoman John Road promised to burn Mary Mainwaring's letters, he failed to carry this through, informing one of her friends that 'he had told Mrs Manwaring [*sic*] he had burnt it and that she . . . would kill him if she knew he had shewn it to her'.³⁵ Mary was right to be cautious, as even though her letters were not produced during her divorce trial, it was considered proof enough that her friend could depose to having seen her handwriting. A person's handwriting constituted a key element of their identity; depositions that 'hand writings were in every respect similar' possessed the power indelibly to connect an individual to their illicit passions.³⁶ Both the burning of letters and constant discussion of their destruction reveal the inherently secretive nature of this furtive genre.

The most rapid missives were scribbled in pencil, of which few or none have survived. Even at the time, the text appeared 'a little rubb'd out'. These notes could be jotted and even exchanged in the presence of others. Mary Mainwaring's friend Amelia Sparre deposed that while they were together in her dressing room, 'she saw Mary write something upon a piece of Paper with a Pencil and after she had done so she tore it away' and 'putt it into her pocket'. Later while they were walking around the village, she observed Mary 'take a paper out of her pocket and holding it . . . in her hand she saw the said John Read take it privately from her and putt it into his pocket'. Unfortunately Mary was either unaware or had forgotten that John was illiterate, so would inevitably have needed to show her letter to someone in order to discover what it said. When Amelia confronted him a few days later he 'took a paper out of his

²⁹ Whyman, p. 201.

³⁰ B.A.S., HW87/116, How II to William Tomlinson, 7 July 1745.

³¹ Lyons, 'Love letters', p. 232. Carlisle, Cumbria Record Office (hereafter C.R.O.), D/LONS/L1/1/67/3, Isabella Carr to Sir James Lowther, 25 Oct., c.1759–69.

³² Lady Henrietta Grosvenor to Prince Henry Frederick, duke of Cumberland, Thursday night, c.1769 (*The Genuine Copies of Letters which passed between His Royal Highness the Duke of Cumberland and Lady Grosvenor* (1770), letter VI, pp. 14–15).

³³ B.A.S., HW88/51, How II to Ramsay, 11 May 1762.

³⁴ *The Trial of Fanny Wilmot, Wife of John Wilmot, for Adultery with a Footman* (1792), pp. 37, 53. Similarly, Fanny's lady's maid Elizabeth Barnes deposed that 'she hath frequently seen her mistress . . . throw papers into the fire and burn them' (p. 7).

³⁵ B.I., TRANS.CP.1766/2, *Mainwaring, Esq. c. Mainwaring*, deposition of Amelia Sparre, fo. 259.

³⁶ *The Trial of the Rev. Mr. James Altham, of Harlow, in the County of Essex . . . for Adultery . . .* (2 vols., 1785), i. 14. For a further example see the crim. con. trial of the linen draper William Atkinson, where a letter was produced and 'proved to be his hand writing' even though he had avoided signing it (see *Adultery: the Trial of Mr. William Atkinson*, p. 9). On handwriting, see Whyman, *passim*.

Breeches Pocket and gave it to this Deponent telling her “He could not make it out” . . . and being well acquainted with her Character and manner of Writing she knows the same were of her proper hand’.³⁷ Catherine Newton’s notes to her coachman were also ‘always written with a pencil’, and shared with other servants to read.³⁸ The exclusivity of illicit correspondences varied significantly according to the epistolary capabilities and resources of those involved, forcing numerous writers to share their secret in order to sustain an affair. In this way, adulterous letters mirrored their licit counterparts, where poverty and illiteracy often made privacy a luxury of the wealthy.³⁹

The duke of Cumberland and Lady Grosvenor used a particularly inventive method to prevent their love letters from being read by outsiders; the duke wrote in ‘Lemon Duce’ rather than ink. Unfortunately for historians, the letters survive only in published form, obscuring their material properties. Lemon juice was thinner than regular ink, with Lady Grosvenor complaining that ‘I wish I could find a Meethod [sic] for you to write in ink, I’ll consider about it night & day, but I fear I cant but realy I make out the Lemon Duce very well’.⁴⁰ It was not unusual for writers to concoct different coloured inks, with recipes published in magazines, cookery books and texts on household governance.⁴¹ The duke may have gleaned his recipe from publications such as the *Gentleman’s Magazine*, which advised that ‘If you write with any acid (juice of lemons as good as any) upon paper, then let it dry, and it will be invisible, till it be held to the fire, and then it will be as black as ink. – Juice of onions will do the same’.⁴² Similar advice was reproduced in new editions of Ovid’s *Art of Love*, which gave readers ‘several ways to write letters, so that the writing may not be perceived. The moderns have their sympathetic inks, the most common of which are made of a solution of lead in vinegar, and a lixivium of lime and orpiment; but new milk, or the juice of a lemon, will produce the effect Ovid describes’.⁴³ The circumstances of adultery directly shaped the form of the letter, with even the ink on the page shrouded by a carefully constructed veil of secrecy.

Adulterous lovers also relied upon code names to conceal their identity in case their letters were intercepted. The most famous couple utilizing literary pseudonyms were Mary Robinson and the prince of Wales (future George IV), who christened themselves ‘Florizel’ and ‘Perdita’ after she charmed him with her performance in David Garrick’s adaptation of Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale* on 3 December 1779. Such names took inspiration from the love affairs they represented: Florizel, the son of King Polixenes, fell in love with the beautiful Perdita, whom he believed was the lowly daughter of a shepherd. Writers of lower social status such as the Lincoln housekeeper ‘B. F.’ who may have been unfamiliar with classical texts successfully concealed their identity by consistently revealing only their initials.⁴⁴ The

³⁷ B.I., TRANS.CP.1766/2, *Mainwaring, Esq. c. Mainwaring*, deposition of Amelia Sparre, fos. 256–8, 259–60.

³⁸ *The Trial of the Hon. Mrs. Catherine Newton*, p. 66.

³⁹ E. S. Cohen, p. 188.

⁴⁰ Grosvenor to Cumberland, undated (c.1769) (*The Genuine Copies of Letters*, letter XII, p. 25).

⁴¹ See, e.g., recipe for green ink in *The Accomplish’d Housewife; or, the Gentlewoman’s Companion* (1745), p. 137; black ink in *The London and Country Cook* (1749), p. 216; red ink in *The London Complete Art of Cookery* (1797), p. 186; and multicoloured ink in *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, xx (March 1750), 116. On orange juice as invisible ink, see J. Daybell, *The Material Letter in Early Modern England: Manuscript Letters and the Culture and Practices of Letter-Writing, 1512–1635* (Basingstoke, 2012), pp. 167–8.

⁴² *Gentleman’s Magazine*, xx (March 1750), 117.

⁴³ ‘Notes on Ovid’s Art of Love’, in Ovid, *The Art of Love* (1813), p. 293.

⁴⁴ See Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Record Office (hereafter L.L.R.R.O.), DE1184/6–7, ‘B. F.’ to William Pratt, 30 Jan. 1816, undated (c.1814–16). Nelson likewise advised Emma Hamilton that her letters were ‘all read; therefore, never sign your name’, 19 Apr. 1804 (*The Letters of Lord Nelson to Lady Hamilton* (2 vols., 1814), ii. 32, letter XLIV).

use of pseudonyms was shared with courtship letters, where couples adopted names like ‘Lucius’ and ‘Honorius’.⁴⁵ Such names allowed lovers to retreat into a fantasy world. As the poem ‘The Adulteress’ lyricized in 1773:

But some more cautious do in Figures write,
And use fictitious names when they indite;
As *Helen, Paris, Ariadne, Sol*;
These raise the passions beyond *Ned* and *Moll*.⁴⁶

Fictitious names thus endowed relationships with an extra frisson that transported individuals beyond the reality of their domestic lives, a factor which took on greater importance when the writer was married. The particular pseudonyms they selected allowed writers to switch between different selves, such as from the unhappily married ‘Moll’ to the beautiful Helen of Troy, or the heroine Ariadne who helped Theseus overcome the Minotaur. Such measures not only concealed a relationship but added an extra degree of excitement to raise illicit passions.

To hide their passion from interlopers or intermediaries such as servants, writers educated in foreign languages often wrote to one another in French. Sentiments in French were viewed as particularly romantic for their sophisticated modes of expression, yet it was also feared that ‘Frenchified’ language would emasculate and enervate the English tongue.⁴⁷ Despite his execrable spelling, the duke of Cumberland routinely used French for his parting addresses, writing ‘aimons toujours mon adorable petite amour je / vous adore plus que la vie mesme’. In return, Lady Grosvenor’s missives noted ‘Je vous eumerois etternelement tres cherre est adorable Amme’.⁴⁸ Disguising closing addresses in this way was especially important because they featured some of the most ardent declarations across all genres of love letters. The gentleman Richard How II travelled around Europe in his youth, living with his uncle’s relations in Altona to learn German, High and Low Dutch, and ‘perfect’ his French. His European education enabled him to draw liberally upon French in his love letters to Silena Ramsay, to conceal forbidden sentiments from third parties. He had used a similar practice in letters to his friend William Tomlinson in his youth, writing whole paragraphs about his aunt in ancient Greek.⁴⁹ This device was only available to writers who had received a formal education or taught themselves classical and European languages, marking a clear divide in the secret measures available to writers of different social rank.

⁴⁵ See S. Holloway, ‘Romantic love in words and objects during courtship and adultery c.1730–1830’ (unpublished University of London Ph.D. thesis, 2013), pp. 46 n. 142, 92, 107–8, 111–16, 134, 162, 168, 276. See also Eustace, pp. 519–20, 539.

⁴⁶ *The Adulteress*, p. 14. For the various types of historical and geographical pseudonyms and the circumstances in which they were used, see Brant, pp. 180–5; and on courtship code-names in 18th-century Philadelphia, see Eustace, pp. 519–20.

⁴⁷ M. Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity: National Identity and Language in the 18th Century* (1996), p. 39.

⁴⁸ Cumberland to Grosvenor, letter III, and Grosvenor to Cumberland, letter XII, c.1769 (*The Genuine Copies of Letters*, pp. 5, 27). Samuel Pepys also used a combination of French, German, Spanish, Italian, Latin and code when recording his encounters with servant girls (see D. McCormick, *Love in Code: or, How to Keep Your Secrets* (1980), pp. 31–2).

⁴⁹ B.A.S., HW87/96 and 116, How II to Tomlinson, 17 March 1744/5, 7 July 1745. Richard also composed parting addresses to his sweetheart Elizabeth Johnson in French during their courtship from c.1747 to 1751 (HW87/224).

a = w	k = p	u = e
b = x	l = j?	v = s
c = h	m = n	w = c
d = v	n = k	x = u
e = f	o = l	y = a
f = t	p = m	z = y
g = d	q = i	
h = r	r = o	
i = b	s = g	
j = z?	t = q	

Figure 1. Translation of code used by Richard How II, listing letters in code first and letters of the alphabet second (Bedford, Bedfordshire Archives Service, HW88/33–53).

As Richard and Silena's affair progressed, French was no longer a sufficient disguise and they created a code of jumbled letters to conceal their love. The making and breaking of codes was a vast enterprise in the eighteenth century, with a government agency termed 'the Deciphering Branch' translating letters intercepted by 'the Secret Office', a spying division of the Post Office connected to a network of 'Black Chambers' in Europe.⁵⁰ More simplified codes were also translated by eighteenth-century correspondents; the novelist Jane Austen experimented with coded letters, writing a backwards letter to her niece Cassandra in 1817 to 'hsw uoy a yppah wen raey' ('wish you a happy new year').⁵¹ Perhaps the most unusual romantic code was created by the seventeen-year-old Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, who used an alphabet of crotchet notes to communicate his love to a young English girl in Salzburg in 1774.⁵² Translating these codes and playing with language was a fun pastime for literate individuals, providing a way to improve their epistolary skills and add intrigue to their letters. The use of ciphers also provided an 'extreme form of privacy' for the adulterous letter-writer, concealing 'material that had dangerous public implications'.⁵³

Richard's code to Silena was particularly sophisticated, and appears to have been devised completely at random, with 'a' substituted for 'w', 'g' substituted for 'd', and 'u' substituted for 'e' (see Figure 1). The code might have taken weeks if not months for

⁵⁰ Equivalent branches were the 'Cabinet Noir' in France and the 'Geheime Kabinets-Kanzlei' (Secret Legal Office) in Vienna (see S. Pincock and M. Frary, *Code Breaker: the History of Secret Communication* (2007), p. 60 and D. Kahn, *The Codebreakers: the Story of Secret Writing* (New York, 1996; 1996), esp. ch. 5, pp. 157–88).

⁵¹ New York, Morgan Library and Museum, MA 1034.6, Jane Austen to her niece Cassandra, 8 Jan. 1817.

⁵² McCormick, pp. 48–50.

⁵³ Brant, p. 5.

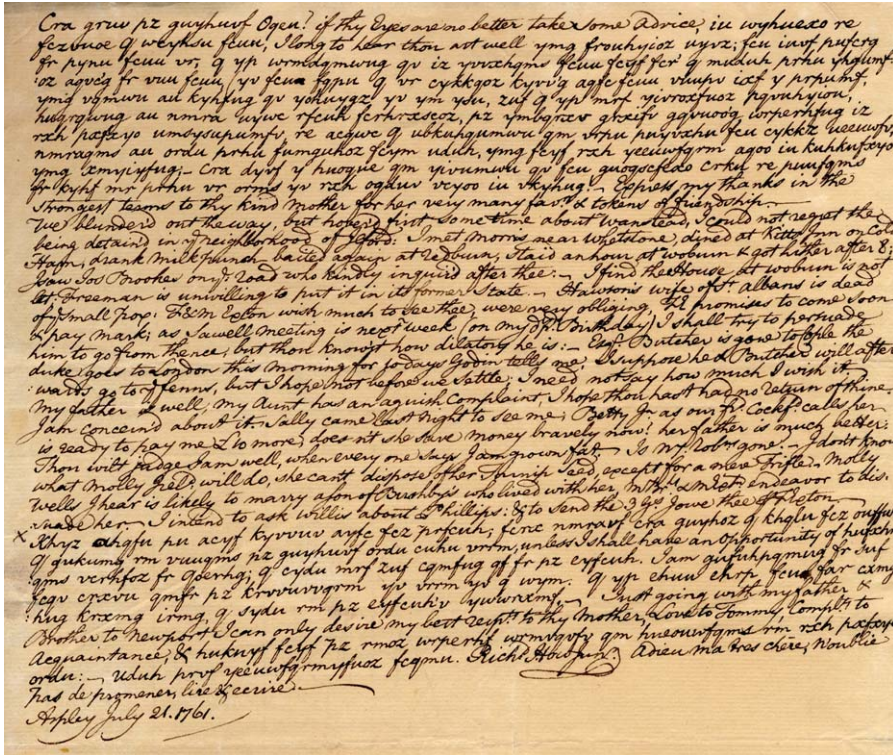


Figure 2. Bedford, Bedfordshire Archives Service, HW88/34, letter from Richard How II to Silena Ramsay which begins in code and ends in French, 21 July 1761.

individuals encountering his letters to decipher, depending on the skill of the decoder. Thankfully for modern readers it was partially translated by one of Richard’s descendants in the nineteenth century.⁵⁴ Silena must have memorized the code, or perhaps taken the risk of recording it on a slip of paper and then hiding this within a locked box or writing desk. Richard first tested his code in 1761 using shorter statements such as ‘Pz guyhuvf oqeu’ to conceal the shift in his opening address from the standard Quaker greeting ‘My dearest Friend’ to the more incriminating ‘My dearest life’. The coded portions of letters gradually increased, leading to whole paragraphs and letters in code. Surprisingly, this did not seem to present an obstacle to Richard, whose encoded drafts and letters appear to have been written at speed in his minute joined-up hand. The code was then interspersed with French for extra security, leaving mundane statements such as ‘my father is well’ in normal text (see Figure 2). His code allowed Richard to wish boldly for marriage, entreating Silena ‘yhu au mrf rmu?’ (‘are we not one?’) and exclaiming ‘rc fcyf au pyz iu qmvukyhuioz xmqfug’ (‘oh that we may be inseparably [sic] united’).⁵⁵ Without a code of this kind, expressing such sentiments to a married woman would have been potentially scandalous, providing Robert Ramsay with clear

⁵⁴ See B.A.S., HW88/33. The coded letter for ‘j’ is difficult to discern, as words such as ‘enjoy’ are spelled ‘enjoy’ (‘umqrz’).

⁵⁵ B.A.S., HW88/34, 44 and 48, How II to Ramsay, 21 July 1761, 14 Oct. 1761, 18 March 1762.

grounds to seize his son Tommy, bring a crim. con. suit against Richard, and seek disciplinary action within the Society of Friends.

The clandestine nature of affairs disrupted normal routines of romantic correspondence, where spouses made agreements ‘to write with particular frequencies’, which became more regular over the century.⁵⁶ Adulterous couples instructed one another when it was safe to use the post, and when it was wiser to use intermediaries such as servants or friends. The gentlewoman Isabella Carr and Sir James Lowther used their mutual friend Mr. Garforth to facilitate their affair. This allowed the couple to enquire with him whether particular missives had been delivered, and proclaim themselves ‘extremely glad’ when they found a letter had failed to arrive (rather than being ignored). When she was away from home, Isabella ‘left my own servant at Home on purpose [*sic*]’ to receive James’s letters, as this was safer than forwarding them by post.⁵⁷ When servants delivered the letters of their employers, they usually remained unaware of their contents. The exceptions are Anna Maria Bennett’s letters to Admiral Thomas Pye, which were summarized on the reverse in a third hand, probably that of his housekeeper. Anna Maria’s earliest surviving epistle in c.1780–1 was condensed to ‘Changing the urn / new coffee pot / your living at your house in Town’. By 1784, a *précis* of a less amiable missive read, ‘Respectg disposing of Diamds to pay her Debts / Her Curses on you / Mentions Connection of 16 years’.⁵⁸ Compared to the usual steady rhythms of romantic correspondence, adulterous exchanges were halting and unpredictable. While their licit counterparts were customarily shared to assess the suitability of a potential spouse, the delivery and receipt of illicit letters was facilitated by a trusted few.

The opening of adulterous letters by Admiral Pye’s housekeeper was deeply unusual, merited by the length of the affair and Anna Maria’s apparent separation from Thomas Bennett. Wax seals provided a symbolic and material gateway to a writer’s most intimate thoughts; adulterous lovers repeatedly noted their disquiet after discovering that a seal had been broken. As ‘B. F.’ wrote in 1816: ‘I received yours dated the 22 but I am unhappy about it for I fear it has been opened before I got it it was sealed wit two wafers of different colours and I did not get it untill the 28’.⁵⁹ Horatio Nelson and Lady Emma Hamilton also closely monitored the sending and receipt of their love letters, noticing instantly if a seal had been opened by a third party. To catalogue their correspondence as accurately as possible, Horatio numbered both Emma’s and his own letters, to alert him when one was missing. While at sea in 1801 he wrote how

I cannot imagine, who can have stopped my Sunday’s letter! That it has been, is clear: and the seal of the other has been clearly opened; but this might have happened from letters sticking together. Your’s [*sic*] all came safe; but the numbering of them will point out, directly, if one is missing. I do not think, that any thing very particular was in that letter which is lost.⁶⁰

Horatio and Emma’s *ménage à trois* with Sir William Hamilton was widely known; five days before the above letter was written, James Gillray published an etching depicting

⁵⁶ Barclay notes that Scottish couples who were apart in the 17th and early 18th centuries wrote to one another once a week, with a longer gap if one party was abroad. By the end of the century, spouses frequently corresponded on a daily basis when apart (Barclay, pp. 27–8).

⁵⁷ C.R.O., D/LONS/L1/1/67/3, 10 and 14, Carr to Lowther, 25 Oct. c.1759–69, 14 Dec. 1764, Sept. 1768.

⁵⁸ W.C.A., 36/62, Bennett to Pye, undated (c.1780–1); L.S.U., 77:41/1, box 7, March 1784.

⁵⁹ L.L.R.R.O., DE1184/6, ‘B. F.’ to Pratt, 30 Jan. 1816.

⁶⁰ Nelson to Hamilton, 16 Feb. 1801 (*Letters of Lord Nelson*, i, letter X, no. 2, p. 15).

them as the passionate lovers Mark Anthony and Cleopatra, with Emma's husband as the Emperor Claudius below cuckold's horns.⁶¹ However, secrecy remained an integral part of their romantic correspondence, in order to shield their most intimate thoughts, and protect their missives from publication. Adulterous love letters provided couples with a vital means of elucidating their emotions, which would have left lovers 'truly miserable, in not having them'.⁶² The careful monitoring of letters enabled Horatio to prevent the frenzied publicity surrounding couples such as the duke of Cumberland and Lady Grosvenor, and stop their own letters becoming the next scandalous publication.

The publication of adulterous letters turned intimate epistles into public concerns. In the preface to *Letters from Perdita [the first signed M. H. R.] to a certain Israelite, and his answers to them* (1781), the editor apologized for the indelicacy and ungallantry of their distribution: 'Women will exclaim against the Indelicacy of publishing private Letters, however obtained, and Men, who have any Turn for Gallantry, always express a Disapprobation of such a Measure'.⁶³ Both volumes of *Adultery Anatomized* printed an extract from William Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700) on the title page, presenting the letters as a warning to courting couples: 'From hence let those be warn'd who mean to wed, / Least mutual Falshood stain the Nuptial Bed'. The text argued that the public trial was a 'remedy worse than the disease . . . which instead of plucking the evil out by the root, preserves it green to latest posterity'.⁶⁴ In a world where familiar letters were assumed to be widely shared, the adulterous letter provides a unique example of a romantic epistle not designed for a broader audience. An epistolary veil of secrecy enabled couples to evade the shame and stigma levelled at exposed adulterers, creating both sexual frisson and a closer emotional bond.

The exceptional circumstances of extra-marital affairs meant that the language of infidelity was defined by a number of distinct features. These often remain hidden from sources such as court records, which simply record the 'tenor' of letters.⁶⁵ Historians such as Amanda Vickery and Nicole Eustace have argued that courting men often found themselves 'at the mercy of the women they wooed'.⁶⁶ Adulterous letters suggest that the balance of power was significantly different in illicit relationships, where women could find themselves comparatively disempowered. As the gentlewoman Isabella Carr agonizingly wrote to Sir James Lowther in 1759: 'I hope I don't love you more than you wish me to do'. Isabella described her desperation to make her aloof lover happy, writing, 'there is nothing I would not do to please you', longing to be 'y^e lowest of y^r servants'. Anna Maria Bennett's letters in c.1780–1 present a similar picture, pledging that 'my happiness is totally in your own Power'. Her ailments during periods of separation reflect the emphasis on physical suffering as evidence of sensibility later in the century,

⁶¹ Connecticut, Farmington, Lewis Walpole Library, 801.02.11.01, hand-coloured etching, 'A Cognocenti contemplating ye Beauties of ye Antique', 11 Feb. 1801.

⁶² Nelson to Hamilton, 28 Jan. 1801 (*Letters of Lord Nelson*, i. 12).

⁶³ *Letters from Perdita*, preface, p. i.

⁶⁴ *Adultery Anatomized*, title page of vols. i and ii, and i, p. v.

⁶⁵ Letters were said to contain 'professions of familiar kindness, never known but between lovers' (*Adultery: the trial of Mr. William Atkinson*, pp. 9, 19).

⁶⁶ Eustace, pp. 526–7. As Vickery notes, 'men coaxed and petitioned while women sat in judgement' (A. Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (1998), p. 46). For Barclay, women's role was more restricted, as 'his victory was almost always inevitable' (Barclay, p. 90).

noting that ‘I was Regularly and very ill after you Left me’. In an inversion of courting customs, adulterous women across the period used letters to present themselves at the mercy of their lovers, with the Lincoln housekeeper ‘B. F.’ in c.1814–16 desperately seeking ‘Wich [*sic*] Way to turn my Self for the Best’ and promising to ‘Be gieded By you’.⁶⁷ These women variously risked their reputation, social circle, financial stability and custody of their children on an affair.⁶⁸ Through emphasizing their vulnerability and relative powerlessness in writing, women actively reinforced their investment in a relationship.

Married women used their letters to placate lovers, and to reaffirm their love when restricted by their domestic lives. The widening spectrum of literacy increasingly gave poorer women such as ‘B. F.’ the opportunity to maintain their affairs in writing.⁶⁹ The housekeeper begged William Pratt to forgive her for failing to come and meet him in 1816, as her husband was so suspicious that it prevented her from leaving the house. She produced painstaking notes to William using phonetic spelling to explain the uncertainties she faced:

ho pratt you But lettel know me yet in the fior place ded I ever refuse you anny Won thing that was in my power to grant . . . it is my firm Determination to see you the very furst opprtunity I can Com safe but the thing is this you know W is very un Certain and when I could com safe then I have to leat you know and then by that time I ham all unsearten agean I could hav Com this this [*sic*] preasant satterday but then I was not shoore.⁷⁰

Her letters reveal the difficulties of arranging illicit encounters, as she could never be ‘shoore’ that they were safe. Such strategies to attract sympathy were far more pronounced than in licit epistles, as writers faced the ‘impossebel’ task of conducting an affair under the watchful eye of their spouses. As William suggested he was ‘out of sight out of mind’, ‘B. F.’ used her letters to plead ‘do not my onley Love be hangery [angry] with me’. Her missives implored William to make greater allowances for her unhappy situation, enabling her to appease him and sustain their affair during extended periods of separation.⁷¹

Letters reveal that illicit communication was particularly difficult when both individuals were struggling financially. In the words of ‘B. F.’, ‘you well kno I have no monny and I as well know that you have non’. She described serving her husband ‘herrings and no tates [potatoes] for denner’, siphoning money from the household by buying no ‘butter or shuger and very lettel met [meat] and less aill’.⁷² Poverty provided another means for ‘B. F.’ to demand sympathy, but undoubtedly placed additional constraints upon her affair. In comparison, elite women engaging in affairs with servants enjoyed greater proximity and opportunity to contact their lovers. Adultery with a

⁶⁷ C.R.O., D/Lons/L1/1/67/1–2 and 7, Carr to Lowther, 5 March and 5 Oct. c.1759–69, 6 Sept. 1759; W.C.A., 36/62, Bennett to Pye, undated (c.1780–1); L.L.R.R.O., 1184/3, ‘B. F.’ to Pratt, undated (1814–16).

⁶⁸ Bailey in particular has emphasized the flexibility of penalties against adulterous wives, depending on their transgression (Bailey, pp. 149–52, 180). See also Phillips, pp. 104–6 and Vickery, *Gentleman’s Daughter*, p. 73 and *Behind Closed Doors*, pp. 137–43.

⁶⁹ By 1840 the literacy rate was 67% for men and just over 50% for women (R. Schofield, ‘Dimensions of illiteracy in England 1750–1850’, in *Literacy and Social Development in the West: a Reader*, ed. H. J. Graff (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 206–8 and D. Cressy, ‘Literacy in context: meaning and measurement in early modern England’, in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, ed. J. Brewer and R. Porter (1993), pp. 305–19, at p. 311). On ‘epistolary literacy’, see Whyman, pp. 9–11.

⁷⁰ L.L.R.R.O., DE1184/10, ‘B. F.’ to Pratt, undated (c.1814–16).

⁷¹ L.L.R.R.O., DE1184/7–8, ‘B. F.’ to Pratt, Monday 15 (no month), 14 May (c.1814–16). On sympathy, see Lyons, “‘Questo cor che tuo si rese’”, p. 357.

⁷² L.L.R.R.O., DE1184/3, 8 and 10, ‘B. F.’ to Pratt, undated (c.1814–16). Even on Christmas Day she reportedly had ‘not anny thing for dinner’ (L.L.R.R.O., DE1184/3).

coachman might involve sticking notes in the springs of a carriage, or dropping them in the boot of a chaise.⁷³ While trial reports repeatedly detail such exchanges, we are reliant on surviving and published missives to discover their contents. Compared to ‘B. F.’ and her amour William Pratt, moneyed genteel and titled lovers had the financial resources to arrange meetings in rented rooms and inns whenever was ‘prudent’. In 1759, Isabella Carr used her letters to request ‘some little Place near Lowther’, such as a cottage where James could visit her regularly. The following decade, Lady Grosvenor’s chief concern was avoiding ‘any thing imprudent . . . for our meeting imprudently might endanger our not meeting so often at another time’.⁷⁴

Confident writers were able to correspond in a hasty ‘scrawl’, recounting their fear at the risk of detection.⁷⁵ These rapid missives often provide fleeting glimpses of spouses in the marital home. As Lady Grosvenor hurriedly concluded her letter to the duke of Cumberland in 1769, ‘he is coming up stairs I find so I shall conclude till to-morrow, God bless you my Dear Dear Friend’. She even risked writing while her husband was at home, noting that ‘I’ve but a few minutes to write in as my Lord is at home . . . I’m all in a twitter dreading every moment he may come in’. The production and content of these letters was shaped by restrictions on adulterous behaviour, distinguishing adulterous missives from their courting and marital counterparts. Emphasizing these constraints enabled Henrietta to demonstrate her commitment to the duke, insisting on communicating despite ‘dying with fright’.⁷⁶ Depending upon the temperament of adulterers and their families, affairs did not necessarily become less secretive over time. Due to the disapproval of her family and friends, Isabella Carr’s decade-long affair between c.1759 and 1769 still required letters to be abandoned mid-sentence. As she wrote on 29 September, ‘y^e fear of being Interrupted as [*sic*] made me write as fast as my fingers would move’.⁷⁷ Isabella may have felt genuine fear at being interrupted, concretized by interpreting her emotions in writing. However, the neat presentation of her letters suggests that confronting her ‘fear’ also provided an apt way to demonstrate her devotion.

These risks were worth taking, as women’s missives repeatedly reflected on the happiness and joy they derived from an affair. As Darrin McMahon has observed, by the eighteenth century ‘it was increasingly common to think of happiness in terms of pleasurable feelings, sensations, and states in ways that might readily be equated with joy’.⁷⁸ The gentlewoman Isabella Carr praised how Sir James Lowther had ‘made me Happy this two or three days past’, regretting that ‘it is impossible such happiness as I then enjoy should last for a contenance’. After receiving two letters from the duke of Cumberland in 1769, Lady Grosvenor was ‘made quite happy to night by having fresh assurances of yr love’, forming ‘a thousand happy ideas’ about his return and anticipating being ‘unable to speak from Joy’. She later described the duke’s company as ‘so great a

⁷³ *The Trial of the Hon. Mrs. Catherine Newton*, pp. 55, 65–6.

⁷⁴ C.R.O., D/LONS/L1/1/67/7, Carr to Lowther, 6 Sept. 1759; Grosvenor to Cumberland, undated (c.1769) (*The Genuine Copies of Letters*, letter XII, p. 24).

⁷⁵ B.I., TRANS.CP.1766/2, *Mainwaring, Esq. c. Mainwaring*, deposition of Amelia Frederica Wilhemina Melesina Sparre, fo. 257; C.R.O., D/LONS/L1/1/67/3, Carr to Lowther, 25 Oct. c.1759–69.

⁷⁶ Grosvenor to Cumberland, Sunday 18 and Monday night, c.1769 (*The Genuine Copies of Letters*, letters IV, X, pp. 7, 21–2).

⁷⁷ C.R.O., D/LONS/L1/1/67/5, Carr to Lowther, 29 Sept. c.1759–69.

⁷⁸ D. McMahon, ‘Finding joy in the history of emotions’, in Matt and Stearns, pp. 103–19, at p. 109.

happiness to me'.⁷⁹ By elucidating their emotions in writing, literate women were able to process an affair and reflect on the moments that made their transgressions worthwhile. Recounting their happiness also provided women across the century with a way to praise lovers and commend their behaviour. Conversely, verbally demonstrating their unhappiness enabled women to censure negligent lovers. Between 1814 and 1816, 'B. F.' repeatedly reminded William Pratt of her 'unhappy mind' and 'unhappy setteash', demanding sympathy by prostrating herself as his 'unhappy freand'. In her final surviving letter attempting to salvage their soured relationship, she pleaded 'my furst and last prayer will be for your happiness altho mine is blasted for ever'.⁸⁰

Formulations of unhappiness were supplemented by accounts of the shame, distress and awkwardness that writers endured. The gentlewoman Isabella Carr emphasized the overwhelming strength of her attachment through physical agitation: 'I am sometimes distressed least when I hear y^r name mentiond; I should shew an Awkwardness [*sic*] for it is never mentiond but I find myself Effected, and Agitated'. Social disapproval made Isabella muse that at least if she left for America she would have 'the advantage of not being shun'd by all the conversable people, and pointed at by the vulgar'. Isabella's ignominy had forced her to lead a 'quiet' and 'prudent' life for the previous two or three years, which had the happy consequence of persuading 'Ladies of my former Acquaintance to visit me again they make no secret of their coming, which may induce a few more to follow their example'. She was estranged from her family throughout her affair with James, including the date of her mother's death in 1762. Two years later, Isabella insisted on remaining within 'their reach' in case a reconciliation was possible.⁸¹ Anna Maria Bennett bore at least three illegitimate children by her lover Admiral Pye. Despite Thomas Bennett's tacit acceptance of her status, she still noted the shame she felt when pregnant with an illegitimate child in 1781. She wrote to the Admiral that 'Every body observes how Lusty I Grow in the waist and how thin in the face . . . I feel so awkward and ashamed of Every ones observation'. This included lodgers in her Suffolk Street House, who were said to be 'distressed to death' at living alongside Anna Maria's growing illegitimate brood.⁸²

The scandal was particularly acute for Quakers such as Richard How II and Silena Ramsay, who lived in the intimate Quaker community of Aspley Guise in Bedfordshire. Richard's father Richard How I was a leading figure in the village, making it particularly shameful to find his own son the subject of slander. Richard dutifully reported the details of local gossip to Silena, writing in January 1761 that 'I find R Saw¹ was y first who comunicated y Scand¹ to WD . . . I lament only they can find no bett^r Topics, & pity the want of Taste'. It was futile to try to evade village gossips, as 'like death they spare none'.⁸³ It is surprising that no action was taken by their local meeting house at Hog Sty End, which disciplined other Friends for 'great misconduct' during the same period. Silena presented herself as a Quaker of 'strict obedience', wearing simple dress and writing to her mother in 1760 that she was 'every day more and more

⁷⁹ C.R.O., D/Lons/L1/1/67/1 and 7, Carr to Lowther, 5 March c.1759–69, 6 Sept. 1759; Grosvenor to Cumberland, Tuesday evening 20, Tuesday evening 5 (c. 1769) (*The Genuine Copies of Letters*, letters IV, XIV, pp. 10, 32).

⁸⁰ L.L.R.R.O., 1184/3, 8 and 10, 'B. F.' to Pratt, undated (c.1814–16).

⁸¹ C.R.O., D/LONS/L1/1/67/5 and 10, Carr to Lowther, 29 Sept. c.1759–69, 14 Dec. 1764.

⁸² W.C.A., 36/67 and 72, Bennett to Pye, summer 1781, undated (July 1785); Brown, Clements and Grundy, 'Anna Maria Bennett'; T.N.A., Prob 11/1136, Pye will (see above, n. 24).

⁸³ B.A.S., HW88/7, How II to Ramsay, 8 Jan. 1761.

sensible' of God's goodness. She was a regular attendee at the women's meetings, and was appointed a delegate to the quarterly meeting in 1762. The same year, the upset caused by the affair forced Silena to write to Richard's father to beg forgiveness for the shame she had brought upon their family. In a carefully constructed letter of apology to her 'Respected Friend', Silena admitted that 'many things have concur'd to inspire thee an unfavourable opinion of me, Appearances have been Against me, I know it', but hoped that his sentiments would change after marriage, given her good conduct.⁸⁴

The letters of men such as Richard How II are marked by jealous accusations concerning intimacies with other men. While married men worried that their mistresses would desert them and leave them saddled with their wives, unmarried men were concerned that a woman's husband would take precedence over them. Although jealousy constituted a guiding theme of men's letters, it was notably absent from women's replies. *The Dictionary of Love* (1753) defined 'Jealousy' as an emotion felt by a man towards his mistress: 'Where the *fear* of losing one's mistress is the principal constituent of it, and that fear arises from a modest diffidence of one's merit, it is the delicatest, and not the commonest, proof of love'. While this statement remained in the 1776 edition, it had been removed by 1795. Nonetheless, the notion of keeping a mistress 'purely to prevent another's having her' remained.⁸⁵ Unfortunately the scarcity of records makes it impossible to discern any related shift in adulterous letters. Jealousy remained notably absent from love letters produced during courtship, where jealous scorn could precipitate the swift termination of a man's suit. It has been the subject of sustained attention from historians of emotion such as Peter Stearns, who has argued that 'jealousy was assumed to be a particularly masculine emotion in support of proper patriarchal governance'.⁸⁶ Written tirades of jealousy did not detract from a man's love, but enforced his power while providing a sign that he cared.

Richard How II utilized an epistolary campaign of jealousy in order to keep his lover away from other men whom he considered a threat. He was consumed by fear that Robert Ramsay might revoke his deed of separation from Silena, after Robert threatened to have 'the articles [of separation] cancelled' before sailing to Africa in March 1761. In January, Richard offered to remain with Silena and her mother until Robert had left, with the aim of 'protecting' them from Robert's violent temper. His letters described how 'if thy Mother & self think my coming to Ilford & staying till RR's departure may be of any use I shall immediately comply; the plea would be most welcome, to satisfy others'. He even prevented Robert from staying the night at Silena's mother's house when visiting their son Tommy, fearing that Robert would kidnap Tommy and abscond to Africa. A manuscript memorial of the family written in 1840 records that the unfortunate Robert Ramsay sailed to Africa 'under the auspices' of his duplicitous friend. However, the conniving Richard still did not consider himself safe,

⁸⁴ B.A.S., HW88/5, Ramsay to her mother, 7 1 mo [Jan.] 1760; B.A.S., HW88/53, Ramsay to How I, 25 Oct. 1762. See B.A.S., Beds. quarterly minutes, FR1 1/1/2, men's minutes 1709–85; FR4 2/2/1, women's meeting minutes; FR4/1/1/2, Hog Sty End monthly meeting book 1742–94.

⁸⁵ *The Dictionary of Love. In which is Contained, the Explanation of Most of the Terms used in that Language* (1753), p. 80; *A Dictionary of Love* (1795), p. 69.

⁸⁶ Courtly love poetry, such as Andreas Cappellanus's *The Art of Courtly Love*, even presented jealousy as a way to increase love (see P. N. Stearns, *Jealousy: the Evolution of an Emotion in American History* (1989), pp. 14–18). See also A. Ben-Ze'ev, 'Jealousy and romantic love', in *Handbook of Jealousy: Theory, Research, and Multidisciplinary Approaches*, ed. S. L. Hart and M. Legerstee (Chichester, 2010), pp. 40–54.

reminding Silena that ‘should R.R. return I depend on thy acting with spirit, and depend on my seconding thee to the utmost of my power’.⁸⁷

Incredibly, Richard even went as far as warning Silena off other men whom he considered a threat, such as ‘B-n’, whose ‘former Endeavors to cultivate an Intimacy were sufficiently apparent’. According to Richard, ‘B-n’ had ‘triumphed (in his own Mind) at having gain’d his point in persuading thee to go with ~~to see him, not being used I suppose to have many female visitors~~’. His anguish is apparent in the numerous crossed-out phrases purposefully left in the letter, as Richard performs his jealousy to demonstrate his love. Such features provide historians with a valuable window onto Richard’s emotional state not available in court records or published trial reports. A small ‘x’ led Silena to an additional warning written vertically down the left side of the page, cautioning her: ‘Is it not advisable to treat a Man of a forward disposition, whose Character & Intentions are at best suspicious, with a determined, constant, distant, reserve & carefully to guard against his assuming disagreeable Freedoms, to prevent his becoming too familiar’. He was still consumed by ‘B-n’s’ liberties in a letter written in French eleven days later.⁸⁸ Richard’s controlling tone is significantly different from his deferential courtship letters of the previous decade, where he politely entreated ‘worthily esteemed Sally’ for permission ‘to express myself seriously, plainly & freely’.⁸⁹ His revered sweetheart Sally seems to have wielded significantly more power than the put-upon Silena. Richard was not alone, as John King wrote jealous letters to Mary Robinson in 1773, asking her: ‘If some *other* happy Youth has attracted your wandering Eye, tell me my Doom’.⁹⁰ In 1801, Horatio Nelson despaired at the prince of Wales’s pursuit of Lady Emma Hamilton, ranting: ‘Do NOT let the lyar come . . . Do not, I beseech you, risk being at home. Does Sir William want you to be a whore to the rascal?’⁹¹ Such jealous diatribes provided men with a means of attempting to exert control over their lovers, restricting contact with other men to prove the strength of their own attachment.

Men’s jealousy was especially aroused by the thought of continued sexual relations between women and their husbands. Women such as ‘B. F.’ were at pains to emphasize that ‘W and me as not het nor slept to geather sens he Cam hom nor Do I intend it’.⁹² The sexual urgency of men’s letters distinguishes them from courtship letters, where English missives largely remained stubbornly chaste.⁹³ While sexual frisson can be detected in letters between married couples, the ‘delicious’ pleasure of ‘wanton love’ is elucidated most brazenly in adulterous letters.⁹⁴ Sexual desire runs rapaciously through the letters of men such as the moneylender John King. In his third letter in October 1773 he ‘pant[s]’ to be in Bristol with Mary Robinson, while his fourth becomes more

⁸⁷ B.A.S., HW88/11–12 and 17, How II to Ramsay, 28–29 Jan., 30–31 Jan., 9–10 March 1761; B.A.S., Z813/1, B. B. Wiffen, *Memorial of Richard Thomas How addressed to those who knew him not* (Mount Pleasant, 1840), p. 147.

⁸⁸ B.A.S., HW88/19–20, How II to Ramsay, 4, 15 March 1761.

⁸⁹ B.A.S., HW87/182, How II to Sally, Sept. 1751. See also courtship letters between How II and Elizabeth Johnson, 1757 (B.A.S., HW87/223–5).

⁹⁰ King to Robinson, 16 Nov. 1773 (*Letters from Perdita*, answer to letter VI, p. 38).

⁹¹ Nelson to Hamilton, 19 Feb. 1801 (*The Hamilton and Nelson Papers*, ed. A. Morrison (2 vols., privately published, 1893–4), L521, ii. 118).

⁹² L.L.R.R.O., 1184/3, ‘B. F.’ to Pratt, undated (c.1814–16).

⁹³ In contrast, American couples from the mid 19th century became less hesitant about discussing sexual matters, and ‘engaged freely in a kind of sexual banter’ (see Holloway, p. 268 and Rothman, pp. 122–43, at p. 125).

⁹⁴ King to Robinson, 1 Nov. 1773 (*Letters from Perdita*, answer to letter V, p. 33). For hints at sexual activity in letters between spouses, see Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, esp. pp. 93, 97, 99.

intense, fantasizing about ‘such delicate wellformed Limbs, such panting snowy Breasts, such – Oh! what *Raptures* ineffable seize my *delighted Imagination*, when I *recollect* the *delirious Transports* that throbbd to my very Soul, when that beauteous Form stood confessed in all the resistless Power of – *Nakedness*’.⁹⁵ These thoughts only grew in intensity throughout their correspondence, as by his fifth letter all of his happiness was ‘*entwined* in those snowy Arms, reposed on thy *panting Bosom*’, and he longed for the moment when her ‘*magick Touch* will again throw me into a *Delirium of Ecstasy*’. By his penultimate letter, John compared his feelings to a burning fire, while hers were like ice in return: ‘You know I am all on *fire*, and your *luke-warm* Strain is colder to me than *Lapland Blasts*’.⁹⁶ King’s elaborate letters are situated at the apex of sensibility in the seventeenth-seventies, with all sense of self-control subsumed by his ‘wanton’ passion. Such rampant sexuality was also present in the duke of Cumberland’s letters to Lady Grosvenor, where he recounted dreaming about holding her ‘on the dear little *couch* ten thousand times in my arms kissing you and telling you how much I loved and adored you’.⁹⁷ These sexualized descriptions were solely the preserve of frustrated men, demonstrating how the epistolary conventions of adultery were strongly drawn along gendered lines. They reflect what Dabhoiwala has termed ‘the chillingly ruthless, misogynist celebration of gentlemanly sexual conquest’ which was firmly established by mid century, presenting men – especially gentlemen – as cold-blooded seducers.⁹⁸ Sexual desire constitutes a defining feature of illicit love letters, providing adulterous men with a further means of ‘possessing the object beloved’ and asserting control over their lovers.⁹⁹

Both sexes drew upon the language of friendship to conceptualize an affair, reflecting Aristotle’s philosophy of *philia*, the supreme form of love. Marriage was conceived as perfect friendship between a man and woman, where wives and husbands ‘should be’ friends. A ‘friend’ was also a relative or patron who looked out for your interests, and – like an illicit lover – could be relied on for financial support.¹⁰⁰ In 1769, the duke of Cumberland described himself and Lady Grosvenor as ‘two of the most sincere Friends alive’. Her responses were addressed to ‘My Dearest Friend’ and ‘my Dear little Friend’, hinting at marriage by hoping to ‘prove’ her ‘sincere friendship’ in the future, ‘if fortune will but let me’.¹⁰¹ Four years later, the actress Mary Robinson referred to John King as ‘my dear Friend’ and ‘very worthy Friend’. Their relationship was conceived as a form of friendship, with Mary bestowing upon him ‘the Title of Friend’ in November 1773. After John accused her of insincerity and immorality, Mary complained that ‘Your Thoughts on Friendship are very different from mine at present’. As their affair sharply

⁹⁵ King to Robinson, Oct. 1773 (*Letters from Perdita*, answers to letters III, IV, pp. 25, 28–9).

⁹⁶ King to Robinson, 1, 16 Nov. 1773 (*Letters from Perdita*, answers to letters V, VI, pp. 33–4, 38).

⁹⁷ Cumberland to Grosvenor, undated (c.1769) (*The Genuine Copies of Letters*, letter III, p. 3). His letters were damned as ‘illiterate and vulgar’, and ‘simple and void of meaning’ (A Civilian, *Free Thoughts on Seduction, Adultery and Divorce* (1771), p. 183; *The Genuine Copies of Letters*, p. 52). On public mockery of the duke as a dunce, see Andrew, pp. 142–3.

⁹⁸ Dabhoiwala, pp. 169–79.

⁹⁹ ‘Desire’, in *The Dictionary of Love* (1753), p. 48.

¹⁰⁰ S. May, *Love: a History* (2011), pp. 56–68; N. Tadmor, *Family and Friends in 18th-Century England: Household, Kinship and Patronage* (Cambridge, 2001); and L. Johnson, ‘Friendship, coercion, and interest: debating the foundations of justice in early modern England’, *Jour. Early Modern Hist.*, viii (2004), 46–64. On friendship in Scotland, see also Barclay, pp. 134–9. Quotation from Samuel Richardson, *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded*, ed. T. Keymer and A. Wakely (Oxford, 2001), ii. 448–9.

¹⁰¹ Cumberland to Grosvenor, undated and 17 June (c.1769) (*The Genuine Copies of Letters*, letters III, V, pp. 4, 13); Grosvenor to Cumberland, Sunday 18, Tuesday evening 20, Tuesday night 5 (c.1769) (*The Genuine Copies of Letters*, letters IV, XIII, pp. 6, 9, 28–9).

deteriorated, John accused her of substituting her ‘Love and Friendship’ for ‘Ambition and sordid Avarice’.¹⁰² Such language appears again in letters from the housekeeper ‘B. F.’ to William Pratt approximately forty years later, demonstrating how ‘worthy friendship’ provided a cross-class means of crafting licit relationships in an adulterous context.

As in letters between spouses, adulterous writers enquired after the ‘minutiae’ of a lover’s ‘health and comforts’ to connote love.¹⁰³ Concern over health was far more pronounced in women’s letters, suggesting a desire to replicate a matrimonial bond. Isabella Carr continually reminded Sir James Lowther to take care of himself, praying ‘for its being fine Weather for you next week to make y^e Fatigue less to you, bliss you take Care of y^r self, how dose [sic] y^r leg do: dont [sic] fail to tell me when you write that y^r well’. During an affair spanning a decade, Isabella took care to note intimate occurrences such as when James had been bled for his health.¹⁰⁴ Anna Maria Bennett sympathized with Thomas Pye in 1781: ‘am very sorry to hear your headach [sic] is so Bad but hope this will find you Quite Relived [sic]’.¹⁰⁵ The letters of Lady Grosvenor again prioritized her lover’s health, providing her with an appropriate way to verbalize her love and assess her influence. As Henrietta noted in her fourth letter: ‘I’m so much obliged to you for saying you will take care of your dear Health because I desire you’. When the duke suffered from ‘a little cough’, Henrietta’s letters hinted at her desire properly to ‘take care of you’ as his wife.¹⁰⁶ Fussing over men’s physical health provided a way for mistresses to communicate their affection by behaving as a wife might towards her husband, noting that ‘you command me . . . as your wife’ and referring to men in the longer term as ‘the Best of fathers & Husbands’.¹⁰⁷ It also provided women with a means to assess their power when men acted on their advice. As Henrietta noted, it was particularly gratifying to see a man alter his behaviour ‘because I desire you’. While Anna Maria was financially and emotionally supported as the admiral’s illicit ‘wife’, Isabella and Henrietta never attained the role they coveted.

Letters written by long-term ‘kept’ mistresses utilized different epistolary strategies, focusing on their financial instability and need to care for illegitimate children. While the purchase and furnishing of a marital home only preoccupied couples in the final stages of courtship, household finances provided a dominant trope of long-standing affairs.¹⁰⁸ Women such as Anna Maria Bennett, Isabella Carr and Lady Emma Hamilton relied on their lovers to keep them in the lifestyle to which they had become accustomed. Both Isabella and Anna Maria gave full accounts of their expenses to their lovers, asking them to pay their debts and the wages of their servants, and to buy new furnishings for their home. While Isabella’s lover Sir James Lowther was one of the wealthiest men in England, her letters develop over time into rambling accounts of her financial misfortunes. As she wrote on 9 October 1762:

Williamson and Miss Borrow have both been in danger of being arrested, which has forced me to part with my ready money, and between the rest of the Bills I owe of a long standing, the

¹⁰² Robinson to King, 29 Sept., 7 Oct., 14 Oct., 23 Oct., 9 Nov. 1773 (*Letters from Perdita*, letters II–VI, pp. 19, 23, 26, 30–2, 36); King to Robinson, 30 Nov. 1773 (*Letters from Perdita*, answer to letter VII, p. 42).

¹⁰³ Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, p. 97; Barclay, pp. 103–4; B.A.S., HW88/61, How II to Ramsay, 11 May 1762.

¹⁰⁴ C.R.O., D/LONS/L1/1/67/4–5, Carr to Lowther, Monday 10 and 29 Sept., c.1759–69.

¹⁰⁵ W.C.A., 36/66, Bennett to Pye, Feb. 1781.

¹⁰⁶ Grosvenor to Cumberland, Tuesday evening 20 and Friday night (c.1769) (*The Genuine Copies of Letters*, letters IV, VII, pp. 10, 16).

¹⁰⁷ L.S.U., 77:41/6, box 7, undated (c.1783–5); W.C.A., 36/69, Bennett to Pye, undated (Nov. 1781).

¹⁰⁸ See Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, pp. 83–105; Holloway, p. 147 n. 115.

misreckoning I mention'd to you before, and going into a new House, where some things must be purchased, and pay'd for directly, I never was under greater difficulty for money . . . I ought to beg pardon for entering into all these trifling particulars, but do it by way of excuse for being so troublesom [*sic*].¹⁰⁹

Isabella's spending began to grate on James, and the following year he accused her of 'extravagance' and of making him a subject of 'abuse' for forcing her to remain 'distressed for money'. Despite receiving £550 in instalments, in December 1764 her debts amounted to nearly £800. Matters came to a head in 1765, when James demanded she sell her house and furniture, and raise money using her own fortune. Isabella reflected that 'I certainly have spent money I might have saved . . . as I never doubted the security of my Income'. The relationship appears to have ended due to her continuing financial demands, with her final letter accusing him of enjoying 'the pleasure of tormenting me'.¹¹⁰ Isabella's letters confirm the widespread view of Lowther as a miserly and selfish man – known as 'Wicked Jimmy' and 'Jimmy Grasp-all' – as he declined to help his mistress despite his vast fortune.¹¹¹

Anna Maria Bennett appears to have had more influence over Admiral Thomas Pye in her earliest surviving missives between 1780 and 1783, as she bore and cared for his children. As she wrote while carrying Thomas's child in the summer of 1781, 'Every pregnant woman wants a male support'. Later that year she wrote again to describe the newly Christened Caroline Sophia Pye, who 'to my infinite Pleasure was Pronounced by Every Bodye to Resemble both father and Mother she is indeed an angel'.¹¹² Anna Maria used her letters to request that the admiral refund the exact pounds, shillings and pence that she had spent. Much of this was invested in furnishing, managing and letting out rooms in his Suffolk Street house. The house, household goods and furniture to which she had devoted so much time were later bequeathed to Anna Maria in Thomas's will.¹¹³ In February 1781, Anna Maria sent him a bill for £21 5s 8d spent on damask, £5 18s spent on a tailor and £3 5s to pay the maid. In 1783, she sent Thomas a three-page breakdown of her expenses based on her memorandums and receipts, excluding only the 'Little things' which had 'slipt my memory'. These included the cost of a maid in Suffolk Street, the expense of her coachman, a wardrobe, dressing glass, bottle stand, sideboard and china plates.¹¹⁴ Later in 1804, Lady Emma Hamilton received £100 per month, plus money to pay the bills and £200 'pocket money', from Horatio Nelson.¹¹⁵ The assembly and cost of particular objects provided a dominant trope of letters in long-term affairs. Indeed, Anna Maria's letters were almost entirely taken up with the cost of damask, linen, carpets, curtains, kitchen accessories and the 'Constant Expence of that house'.¹¹⁶ The content of her letters was directly shaped by the realities of life as a 'kept' woman, and they read as invoices as much as love letters.

¹⁰⁹ C.R.O., D/LONS/L1/1/67/8, Carr to Lowther, 9 Oct. 1762.

¹¹⁰ C.R.O., D/LONS/L1/1/67/10–12, Carr to Lowther, 14 Dec. 1764, 29 March 1765, 27 May 1768.

¹¹¹ Lowther's estates in Westmorland and Middlesex alone had an annual rental value of £1,200 in 1755 (see J. V. Beckett, 'Lowther, James, earl of Lonsdale (1736–1802)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004) <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/17110>> [accessed 23 June 2014]).

¹¹² W.C.A., 36/67, 69, Bennett to Pye, undated (summer 1781 and Nov. 1781).

¹¹³ T.N.A., PROB 11/1136, Pye will.

¹¹⁴ W.C.A., 36/66, 70, Bennett to Pye, Feb. 1781 and early 1783.

¹¹⁵ Nelson to Hamilton, 1 July, 13 Oct. 1804 (*Letters of Lord Nelson*, letters L, LVI, ii. 60, 81).

¹¹⁶ W.C.A., 36/66, Bennett to Pye, c. Feb. 1781.

The tensions over men's financial provisions in longer-term affairs suggest that many came to an end amidst conflicts over money. In the words of Anna Maria Bennett, deserting a kept mistress freed a man from 'a burthen on your Peace and fortune'. In 1785, she begged Thomas to 'send me an Explicit answer with Respect to my income'. Anna Maria complained of being 'sent from the ark to where no olive Branches Grow, to seek an Establishment to save you a few Pounds in the year, while your Ridiculous Expences from Every other Quarter are as Endless as illaudable'. Financial insecurity forced her to sell personal 'ornaments' such as earrings to pay her creditors, while not touching anything that she 'did not Conceive to be my own absolute property'. In response, she was pacified by the admiral that 'Carolines mama must not want mony – tell me your wishes and I will Grant them if I can'.¹¹⁷ As Thomas transferred his attentions to another mistress, their sixteen-year relationship descended into acrimony, and she vowed to 'no Longer Exist in a state of dependence on a savage'.¹¹⁸ Admiral Sir Thomas Pye died in the house from which these letters were written on 26 December 1785. The same year, Anna Maria's debut novel *Anna: or Memoirs of a Welch Heiress* sold out on the day of publication, granting her lasting financial independence.¹¹⁹

To conclude, this article has presented adulterous love letters as a distinct genre characterized by secrecy, and the strategic exercise of male power through jealousy and desire. Missives provide unique insight into the motivations and emotional experiences of couples during an affair, in words of their own choosing. Nonetheless, adulterous epistles are not without their problems, with the scarcity of records making direct comparisons difficult between writers of different time periods and social groups.

Secretive adulterous missives differ from courtship letters through their overwhelming emphasis on concealment and destruction. The survival of so few original manuscripts testifies that the majority were indeed committed to the flames. Surviving and published examples retain this emphasis on hiding their contents through ciphers, invisible inks and entreaties to 'please burn this'. This is unique within romantic letter-writing, where courtship letters were presumed to be widely shared. Secretive measures varied according to social rank, where education added additional tools such as French to a writer's arsenal. Conversely, yeomen and servants were often forced to share secret letters in order to read their contents. While adultery was by no means unique to the *beau monde*, they were certainly better equipped to shield their missives. Every couple made fastidious efforts to avoid sexual scandal, and guard their intimate epistles from the public gaze. Deciphering codes and invisible inks added to the frisson of an affair, while declarations in French were viewed as particularly romantic, and pseudonyms could transport writers beyond their domestic lives. Evidently, secrecy brought pleasures of its own.

Adulterous letters suggest that power relations were significantly different in licit and illicit relationships. While courting men politely petitioned women for their hand, men engaging in affairs deployed jealous language to warn women away from their rivals.

¹¹⁷ L.S.U., 77:41/4, box 7, Bennett to Pye, undated (c.1783–5); W.C.A., 36/71–2, Bennett to Pye, undated (July 1785) (and notation by Pye on W.C.A., 36/71). On the restricted range of goods deemed women's personal property, see S. Cavallo, 'What did women transmit? Ownership and control of household goods and personal effects in early modern Italy', in *Gender and Material Culture in Historical Perspective*, ed. M. Donald and L. Hurcombe (2000), pp. 38–53.

¹¹⁸ L.S.U., 77:41/4, box 7, Bennett to Pye, undated (c.1783–5).

¹¹⁹ Lewes, p. 121.

These jealous tirades have no equivalent in courtship letters. Far from sitting in judgement, adulterous women used their missives to present themselves as at the behest of lovers, placate their jealousy, and apologize when unable to escape domestic responsibilities. Missives also illuminate women's financial dependence in the longer term, where their letters become consumed by increasingly desperate requests to pay bills, debts, rent and other expenditures. They provide a rare glimpse of the end of an affair, which was repeatedly occasioned by men's refusal to provide further financial support.

Correspondences provide additional evidence of couples' motivations for conducting an affair. The relationships analysed largely conform to Bailey's schema of why women engaged in extra-marital affairs: that a married couple had already separated, the frequent absence of a husband, disparity in age, and childlessness.¹²⁰ Letters reveal further emotional motivations for adultery, such as the desire to find happiness. While women's repeated protestations of happiness may have been an epistolary tool to praise their lovers' behaviour, they nonetheless reveal that writers viewed happiness as an essential component of a rewarding affair. Affairs were also motivated by desire, attested by the sexual rapacity of men's letters. Forceful accounts of lust in adulterous letters and their absence in those written during courtship present desire as an accepted component of an affair, as men claimed to be 'all on fire' with passion. These accounts of desire enabled adulterous men to claim ownership of women's bodies, and insist on exclusivity in their relationship. Letters enabled couples to construct licit relationships in an adulterous setting, referring to themselves as 'sincere' friends, and in the longer term even 'husband' and 'wife'.

Taken as a whole, adulterous love letters provide historians with a way to access both the small-scale dramas of particular couples such as Richard How II and Silena Ramsay, and broader issues such as marital disharmony, epistolary constructions of love, desire and jealousy, covert modes of communication, and the reality of conducting an extra-marital affair during the long eighteenth century.

¹²⁰ Bailey, pp. 154–5.