University of Southampton

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Orange-flower wreaths or buds of deadly nightshade: Matrimonial Reform in the Broken-Marriage Novels of Lady Charlotte Bury (1775-1861)

by

Kerry Parker

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2024

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Abstract

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As the first full-length critical work on Lady Charlotte Bury *née* Campbell (1775-1861), this project discredits the entrenched critical view, based upon the novelist's association with Henry Colburn (1784-1855) and his stable of commercial silver-fork writers, that her fiction merely chronicles the shallow lifestyles of an exclusive, metropolitan elite. This thesis makes the case that Bury's ground-breaking fiction progresses the revolutionary agenda of Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-97) and other late eighteenth-century proto-feminist writers who critiqued the gender injustice of matrimonial law as well as the cultural values which sanctioned it. In *Self-Indulgence* (1812), *Conduct is Fate* (1822) and *The Divorced* (1837)—published during a three-decade period which historians generally regard as a hiatus in women's campaigns to improve their legal rights—Bury embeds her radical message within the context of contemporary political events and the conventions of the *roman–à-clef* to extend the appeal and reach of her novels. She also uses immersive narrative extensively as a device not only to increase women's awareness of their legal vulnerability, but to establish the emergent genre of 'divorce fiction' that authors such as Charles Dickens, Anne Brontë, George Eliot, Wilkie Collins and Thomas Hardy would later adopt and progress.

During this project, I demonstrate that Bury focuses not upon courtship, but on the injustices of coverture: a legal practice which applied to all marriages and worked to women's detriment. Starting in the 1810s with *Self-Indulgence*, Bury corrects public misconceptions about illegal and bigamous marriage in society, uncovering abuses such as desertion, the violation of women's property rights and the debarment of illegitimate children from inheriting parental wealth. Because there had been no improvement ten years later in women's legal entitlements, her second novel, *Conduct is Fate*, centralises problems such as the indissolubility of matrimony. Here, I also discuss Bury's connection to the early feminist orator Anna Doyle Wheeler (1780-1848): one of several radical Unitarian campaigners who sought to harness progressive contemporary literature to their cause. My subsequent and final chapter focuses on the seventh novel Bury published with Colburn, *The Divorced*, in which she responds to the writer and women's rights activist Harriet Taylor-Mill (1807-58). The chapter also illuminates ways in which *The Divorced* was shaped by high-profile infant custody battles involving society figures such as Caroline Norton (1808-77) and Wheeler's daughter, Lady Rosina Bulwer Lytton (1802-1882)—both of whom protested publicly after domestic violence and adultery, respectively, forced them out of their marital homes. Throughout the project, I draw on the historical and legal contexts of the early nineteenth century to chart the evolution of Bury's pioneering 'broken-marriage' genre. In particular, I explore the marriage breakdown of Princess Caroline of Brunswick (1768-1821) and the Prince of Wales, then Regent (1762-1830); I also explain how Bury dramatises notorious criminal conversation cases of the 1820s and 30s and the seismic erosions of widowed and divorced women's property rights which were passed into law between 1811 and 1833. Ultimately, the project redefines Bury's body of work as matrimonial reform fiction and enriches our knowledge of nineteenth-century literature and the history of marriage law. As this thesis emphatically claims, Lady Charlotte Bury is one of the most influential and least understood women's rights activists of the nineteenth century.

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Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

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I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

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Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the commitment and professionalism of Dr Justine Pizzo, whose attentiveness as a supervisor has seen me continuously developing my writing and critical thinking skills, and whose guidance over the years has helped me to transform my research methods. Her generosity and extraordinary efficiency in responding to my work have always exceeded the call of duty. Thanks also to Prof Stephanie Jones for her unfailing assistance and encouragement, and whose discerning observations have been invaluable in helping me to grapple with the organisation of the project. I would also like to extend my gratitude to the wider English Department at the University of Southampton where I have been welcomed into a dynamic and supportive intellectual community of the highest professional calibre.

I consider myself extremely fortunate to have had the opportunity to participate in, and receive support from, numerous postgraduate research forums at UOS, including the Southampton Centre for Eighteenth Century Studies and the Southampton Centre for Nineteenth Century Research. It goes without saying that I am immensely grateful to staff at Inter-Library Loans at the University of Southampton Hartley Library for their tireless and sustained efforts in locating and sourcing extensive primary and secondary materials for me. I would like also to acknowledge staff in the manuscript

t reading room at the National Library of Scotland along with librarians at the British Library for their assistance with accessing materials and overcoming the logistical problems involved in researching texts which have been out of circulation for nearly two centuries. Equal thanks are due to Dan Mitchell at UCL Special Collections.

My thanks also to Professor Rebecca Probert for answering my queries about marriage legislation in nineteenth-century England and generously allowing me access to unpublished material concerning matrimonial law in Napoleonic France. My especial gratitude for his continuing support and academic advice go to my friend Dr Stephen Derry, who mentored me during my employment at the Open University, and whose encyclopaedic knowledge of women's writing during the long eighteenth century helped me envision the project as a whole.

Finally, I am indebted most of all to Prof E.J. Clery, who has guided this dissertation from its earliest stages through its final draft, and pushed me to produce a work far beyond my original conception. Despite moving from the University of Southampton to Uppsala University during the third year of the project, she has unfailingly given me her time and attention even when other demands must have been more pressing. Without her belief in the project, the thesis would not have materialised.

Definitions and Abbreviations

BL.....British Library

CF .....*Conduct is Fate*, Charlotte Bury

JSTOR.....Journal Storage of academic, journals, books and primary sources

NLS .....National Library of Scotland

OUP .....Oxford University Press

SI.....*Self-Indulgence: A Tale of the Nineteenth Century*, Charlotte Bury

TD .....*The Divorced,* Charlotte Bury

TW .....*The Wanderer; or, Female Difficulties*, Frances Burney

Introduction

The second half of the 'long Regency', spanning the period 1820–1837 — the reign of George IV (1820 to 1830) and that of his younger brother William IV (1830–1837) — has been described by scholars as a missing piece in the history of the novel.[1] Recognising the demand of a newly emerging, prosperous middle class for 'literature about the exclusives, written by the exclusives […] for the exclusives', the commercial publisher Henry Colburn (1784–1855) formulated the silver-fork novel: a genre which celebrated the vacuous and excessive lifestyles of the secretive aristocratic elite and which reached the height of its popularity during the 1820s and 1830s.[2] Lady Charlotte Susan Maria Bury, née Campbell (1775–1861), the younger daughter of John, fifth Duke of Argyll (1723–1806), was recruited to Colburn's stable of silver-fork novelists in 1828 and enjoyed great success as a popular novelist and diarist during this period.[3] According to Cheryl A. Wilson, the technique formulated by Colburn's writers can be defined in terms of their preference for 'taking their characters from the nobility and the world of *ton*; drawing out their plots over three or more volumes; inserting improbable, but convenient, plot points; lingering over descriptions and bringing the romance to a happy (and financially advantageous) ending.'[4] While Lady Charlotte doubtlessly hoped to benefit from the financial profits of authorship, she was not questing primarily for public acclaim: the coincidences between her fiction and the silver-fork genre are actually somewhat scanty and this makes the existing critical consensus of her corpus hard to validate. As will be seen in the following chapters, while her body of work certainly draws

[1] Edward Copeland, *The Silver Fork Novel: Fashionable Fiction in the Age of Reform* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p.1. Referred to hereafter as 'The Silver Fork Novel'. 'Prince George', 'George' or 'the Regent' refers hereafter to George, Prince of Wales (1762–1820), The Prince Regent (1811–1820) and King George IV (1820–1830). 'Princess Caroline', 'Caroline' or 'the Princess' refers hereafter to Caroline of Brunswick (1768-1821), Caroline, Princess of Wales, (1795–1820) and Queen Caroline (1820–21).

[2] Ellen Moers, *The Dandy, from Brummell to Beerbohm*, (New York: Viking Press, 1960), p.52.

[3] Bury caused a storm of controversy when, in the year of Queen Victoria's accession, she published the *Diary Illustrative of the Times of George the Fourth, Interspersed with Original Letters from the Late Queen Caroline, and from Various Other Distinguished Persons*, 4 vols (London: H. Colburn, 1838). Referred to hereafter as 'Diary 1838'. Despite her anonymity, the connection with Bury was easily made, and the *Diary 1838* became her greatest commercial success. Later in the same year, a second edition was issued: *The Murdered Queen! Or, Caroline of Brunswick*, a diary of the court of George IV. By a lady of rank (London: W. Emans, 1838). Referred to hereafter as *The Murdered Queen!*

[4] Cheryl A. Wilson, *Fashioning the Silver Fork Novel*. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012, p.97. Winifred Hughes defines one of the most central of the fashionable tropes — '*ton*' — as an 'indefinite yet definitive quality of fashion […] that both identified the social elite and regulated their conduct'. Winifred Hughes, 'Silver Fork Writers and Readers.' *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 25.3 (Spring 1992), pp.328-347 (p.333).

on characters from the nobility, only two thirds of her novels comprise three volumes; while her narratives occasionally incorporate improbabilities of plot, this can be said only of her three earliest published works. Lady Charlotte's chief objective, I will demonstrate, was to circulate her political ideas as widely as possible by assimilating progressive discourse, which regarded the institution of marriage as servitude, within the conventions of the contemporary courtship genre. Through a close examination of three of her novels: *Self-Indulgence*; *A Tale of the Nineteenth Century*, (1812), *Conduct is Fate* (1822), and *The Divorced* (1837), this project will demonstrate how she adopted and adapted contemporary literary conventions both to make late-eighteenth century political ideas newly available to readers during the long Regency and to support the campaigns of contemporary women activists for the reform of matrimonial law.[5] Her first and second publications, however, which precede the author's association with Henry Colburn, have never been re-issued in this country; even her best-selling novels – *Flirtation* (1827) and *The History of a Flirt* (1840) — along with her biggest commercial success, the *Diary Illustrative of the Times of George the Fourth* — have long since passed out of the cultural memory.[6]

The critical context

The 'silver-fork novel', an ephemeral literary genre aimed at a popular readership and designed to attract a socially aspiring, middle-class demographic, was first so-described by William Hazlitt (1778–1830) in an article in *The Examiner* on 'The Dandy School' in 1827. Angered by their apparent lack of concern for the poor, Hazlitt criticises the emerging fashionable author typified by Theodore Hook (1788–1841) and Benjamin Disraeli (1804–1881) for focusing too narrowly upon the leisured lifestyles of a privileged elite: 'provided a few select persons eat fish with silver forks, he considers it a circumstance of no consequence if a whole country starves.'[7] Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881) later articulated an equally furious reaction to the superficiality and moral

[5] Lady C.S.M. Bury, *Self-Indulgence: A Tale of the Nineteenth Century*, 2 vols (Edinburgh/London: G.R. Clarke, and Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, & Brown,1812) —referred to hereafter as 'Self-Indulgence' or 'SI'; *Conduct is Fate,* 3 vols (Edinburgh: T. Cadell; London: William Blackwood, 1822) —referred to hereafter as 'Conduct is Fate' or 'CF'; *The Divorced,* 2 vols (London: Colburn, 1837) —referred to hereafter as 'The Divorced' or 'TD'. Subsequent references in-text. Lady Charlotte's debut novel which appeared anonymously—in common with all of her publications until the *The Divorced* (1837) — was written shortly after she had been widowed from her first husband, Col. John Campbell (c. 1770 –13 March 1809). For the avoidance of doubt I have referred to her in chapter 1 by her first married name, 'Lady Charlotte Campbell'. In subsequent chapters and elsewhere I have used her later married name, 'Lady Charlotte Bury'.

[6] Bury*, Flirtation* (London: Colburn, 1827) and *The History of a Flirt, Related by Herself,* 3 vols (London: Henry Colburn, 1840).

[7] William Hazlitt, "The Dandy School," Examiner (November 18, 1827), pp.721–23 (p.722).

impoverishment of the novel of fashion in *Sartor Resartus* (1838).[8] In the meantime, writers such as Dickens and Thackeray parodied the genre relentlessly, and in 1856, George Eliot singled out women silver-fork novelists for particular obloquy in 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists' in the *Westminster Review*.[9] Nearly a century later, Matthew Whiting Rosa inflicted almost irreversible damage on Bury's reputation by claiming, in *The Silver Fork School* (1936), that 'she justified Thackeray's attacks by showing just how bad a fashionable novel could be'.[10] With the exception of Michael Sadleir, who referred to silver-fork fiction in his bibliographical record of 1951 as 'the output of upwards of fifteen still neglected years', the genre received little further attention.[11]

During the 1960s, when a small number of writers next discussed the genre, Hazlitt's views re-emerged virtually intact; influenced by Rosa, additionally, they either omitted or elided Bury's corpus in favour of fiction written by Catherine Gore (1798-1861) or Marguerite Gardiner, Countess of Blessington (1789-1849).[12] A significant development in Alison Adburgham's work of 1983 (which, along with Rosa's monograph, was considered the most authoritative critique of the mode for much of the last century)[13] was a willingness to acknowledge the criticism levelled at the treatment of women in high life both in *The Divorced* (in which Bury attacks the double standard

[8] Thomas Carlyle, (1833–34) *Sartor Resartus* (Oxford: OUP, 1987).
See also < https://victorianweb.org/authors/carlyle/carlyletl.html> [accessed 27 September 2023].
[9] See: Westminster Review, vol 10 (Oct. 1856), pp.442–61.
[10] Matthew Whiting Rosa, *The Silver Fork School* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), p.158.
[11] Michael Sadleir, *Nineteenth-Century Fiction: A Bibliographical Record Based on His Own Collection*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), p.31. In 1963, Ian Jack included the silver-fork genre in his general history of English literature but discussed only male novelists. Ian Jack, *English Literature 1815-1832: Scott, Byron, and Keats* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963).
[12] Catherine Grace Frances Gore [née Moody], (1798–1861), silver-fork novelist and playwright. Marguerite Gardiner, Countess of Blessington (1789–1849), salonniere, diarist and author. Referred to hereafter as 'Blessington'. In 1905, Lady Charlotte's granddaughter, the memoirist Lady Constance Russell (1832–25), claimed that a firm friendship existed between her grandmother and society figures such as Blessington and Lady Sydney Owenson. Lady Constance Russell, *Three Generations of Fascinating Women and other sketches from Family History* (London, New York and Bombay: Longmans, Green and Co.,1905), p.202. Constance Russell was the daughter of Adelaide Constance Campbell and Lord Arthur Lennox. See: chapter 3.1 n.9. For additional primary evidence which confirms the friendship between Owenson and Bury, see 3.1 n.19.
[13] Francis Russell Hart's literary history of 1981 resembles that of Adburgham and others by focusing on the ephemeral, fashionable credentials of the silver-fork genre. His overview essay elides Bury's fiction, however, by focusing instead on contemporary novelists Maria Edgeworth (1867–1849) and Susan Ferrier (1782–1854). Francis Russell Hart, 'The Regency Novel of Fashion,' in *From Smollett to James*: *Studies in the Novel and Other Essays Presented to Edgar Johnson*, ed. by Samuel I. Mintz, Alice Chandler, and Christopher Mulvey (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1981), pp.84–133.

and the social standing of women divorcees) and Blessington's satirical *roman-à-clef*, *The Victims of Society* (1837).[14] While Winifred Hughes iterated previous discourse in 'Elegies for the Regency: Catherine Gore's Dandy Novels' (1995) by defining silver-fork fiction as a commercial genre which can be characterised solely in terms of its celebratory London locus, she advanced the conversation by concurring that women silver-fork novelists were, indeed, more concerned with domestic values than their male counterparts.[15] The critical conversation moved forward again in 2004 in 'Gendering the Silver Fork' when April Kendra, following Hughes, proposed that women writers in Henry Colburn's stable consciously attempted to critique aristocratic lifestyles in their novels. While Kendra usefully subdivided the silver-fork genre into 'first generation novels' by men and 'second generation' novels by women — or 'fashionable' (male) and 'society' (female) novels — she nevertheless chose to pass over Bury's fiction.[16] In the following year Bury was overlooked again when Harriet Devine Jump issued a new collection of six of Colburn's titles: *Silver Fork Novels, 1826–1841*.[17] Paradoxically, considering the centrality to Bury's fiction of scandal and broken marriage in high life, the assumption this time was that her aristocratic, insider status makes her work less interesting: in 2007, Muireann Ó'Cinnéide duly queries Jump's claim that choosing 'authors like Rosina Bulwer Lytton, Lady Blessington and Letitia Landon, whose relation to fashionable society was marginalised by marital breakdown, scandal and/or class status, produces a more interesting selection than would be achieved by more securely aristocratic silver-fork authors like the Marquis of Normanby or Lady Charlotte Bury'.[18] Over the course of the following three chapters, I will make the case that Jump's is, indeed, a false assumption; that Bury, equally in need of the financial profits of writing, critiques fashionable society from as impecunious and marginalised a perspective as any of her supposedly more impoverished and audacious contemporaries.

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[14] Marguerite Blessington, [Countess of], *The Victims of Society*, 3 vols (London: Saunders and Otley, 1837).

[15] Winifred Hughes, 'Elegies for the Regency: Catherine Gore's Dandy Novels', *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 50.2 (Sept 1995), pp.189-209.

[16] See: April Kendra, 'Gendering the Silver-fork: Catherine Gore and the Society Novel', *Women's Writing* 11.1 (2004), pp.25–38. As the only scholar to date, besides Pam Perkins, to have published a full review of one of Bury's literary publications, Corin Throsby focuses exclusively on Bury's first silver-fork novel, *Flirtation* (1827), centring her discussion of 2004 on conventional nineteenth-century debates about courtship and female propriety. See: 'Romanticism and Flirtation', *Literature Compass*, 1.1 (January 2004), pp.1-4.

[17] Published in 6 vols (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2005).

[18] See: Muireann Ó'Cinnéide, 'The Silver-fork Novel across Romantic and Victorian Views: Class, Gender and Commodity Culture, 1820–1841', *Literature Compass* 4.4 (2007), pp.1227–1240 (p.1230). Bulwer Lytton, Rosina Anne Doyle Bulwer *née* Rosina Anne Doyle Wheeler, Lady Bulwer Lytton (1802-1882), novelist. Referred to hereafter as 'Rosina Bulwer Lytton' or 'Lady Lytton'.

In 2008, Muireann Ó'Cinnéide developed her discussion of aristocratic models of authorship in the period 1832–1867 as part of her timely, if not completely positive, contribution to the critical conversation. While acknowledging Kendra's gendering of silver-fork fiction in 2004, she ultimately devalues Bury's achievement by claiming that, irrespective of generation or gender, silver-fork novels merely assume the authority of a *roman-à-clef* to celebrate decadence and absolve the dandy of blame. She also iterates formulaic critical perspectives: displays of opulence in the silver-fork novel, Ó'Cinnéide maintains, are intended to reveal the wickedness of high class society to a wider audience and women silver-fork writers, in particular, melodramatise 'the beleaguered aristocratic woman menaced by sexual, financial and emotional predators'.[19] In discussing the domestic concerns which characterise these novels, she considers Blessington to be the moral crusader: 'Her writing becomes an instrument of reform through its capacity to produce sympathy'.[20] Ó'Cinnéide thus entrenches existing prejudices, her study typifying a critical mode which homogenises and perpetuates misconceptions about Colburn's women authors — Lady Charlotte Bury in particular.

The year 2012 marked the last but most critically significant phase in modern silver-fork scholarship. Two overview chapters on the genre appeared that year along with two major monographs which, innovatively, feature analysis of some of the novels Bury wrote on commission to Henry Colburn after 1828. In her chapter about the genre, Sue Chaplin provides a detailed overview of Colburn's authors, proposing that the popular readership during the period was a female middle-class demographic: 'literate, leisured middle-class women with aspirations towards social mobility'.[21] This is a contextual observation which usefully enables us to situate the novels Bury published after 1828. Chaplin moves the critical conversation forward at this point by alluding to the centrality of the double standard in Blessington's *Victims of Society '*and the severe sanctions governing women's conduct invariably visited upon them': Bury, however, whose anti-fashion fiction had been challenging received standards of morality since 1812, receives no mention.[22] In the second silver-fork chapter to appear in 2012, Diane Sadoff, like Ó'Cinnéide, develops the work done by April Kendra on 'fashionable' versus 'society' novels; while she concurs that novels by Bury, Blessington and Gore belong to 'the second generation of silver-fork

[19] Ó'Cinneide, *Aristocratic Women and the Literary Nation, 1832–1867* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p.51.
[20] *Aristocratic Women*, p.59.
[21] Sue Chaplin, 'Silver-fork Novel,' in *The Encyclopedia of Romantic Literature*, ed. by Frederick Burwick, Nancy Moore Goslee, and Diane Long Hoeveler, 1261–1265 (Chichester, UK, and Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), p.1264.
[22] Ibid.

novels written by women generally about women', she goes only so far as to observe that they all 'satirise the fashionable Exclusives and the social system they superintend'.[23] While Sadoff takes an important step forward in acknowledging the intervention of these writers in 'contemporary debates about marriages of convenience and divorce',[24] she focuses on the commercial characteristics of the genre instead of engaging specifically with the gender politics at the heart of Bury's texts.[25]

While useful points emerge from these chapters, Sadoff declines to move much beyond conventional critical notions of Colburn's writers. She ultimately concludes that the novels are populated with stereotypes that function only as a melodramatic threat to the heroine: 'the corrupt social system lacks religious principles and may fatally harm them'.[26] Some progress was made in the first of two major monographs to appear in 2012, however, Cheryl A. Wilson acknowledging the reputational damage done to silver-fork writers in the 1930s by Rosa; the overall tendency of her study, nevertheless, is to reprise earlier critical models of the genre. While Wilson freely acknowledges that both silver-fork novels and Jane Austen's fiction participate in a dialogue which concerns 'the education of the reader, attention to everyday interactions, depiction of class hierarchies and the treatment of the social world', she also finds that Colburn narratives amount to little more than observation characterised by superficiality.[27] I will counterclaim, however, that Bury (for whom Wilson makes some, if only minimal, space) generally resists the commodification of the genre: that she shares in Austen's all-embracing anxiety about the lack of educational and economic opportunities for women and, like her, warns readers about the implications of the marriage choice. Although Edward Copeland is reserved in 2012 on the subject of Bury's political protests in the most significant of the monographs to have appeared to date, *The Silver Fork Novel: Fashionable Fiction in the Age of Reform* does acknowledge the subversive energy which disrupts the conservative surface of the novels Bury published just before and after the First Reform Act of 1832.

While Copeland stops short of acknowledging the proto-feminism in Bury's fiction, Pam Perkins, one of the only scholars to date to have produced a single-author literary study of her writing, breaks new ground in her critique of 2002 by discussing the novelist's poetic output. In her

[23] Diane Sadoff, 'The Silver-fork Novel', in *The Oxford History of the Novel in English*, vol 3, eds. John Kucich and Jenny Bourne Taylor-Mill (Oxford: OUP, 2012), pp.106–121 (p.115).
[24] Ibid., p.119.
[25] Ibid., pp.114-15.
[26] Ibid., p.116.
[27] Wilson, p.152.

chapter 'Lady Charlotte Susan Maria Campbell Bury, 1775-1861' in *Scottish Women Poets of the Romantic Period* (2002), Perkins evaluates Bury's unpublished collection of 1797 alongside an anthology which appeared in the 1830s: *Poems on Several Occasions* and *The Three Great Sanctuaries of Tuscany, Valombrosa, Calmaldi, Laverna* (1834). In the course of her discussion, Perkins uncovers, amongst other invaluable primary evidence in the extensive Campbell family archive held at the NLS, a tendency in Bury's private letters to 'a certain robust outspokenness' about gender roles and marriage.[28] Perkins concludes of the earlier poetry collection that the author 'might in fact have intended the poems mainly or entirely for private circulation'; in examining Bury's fiction, the following chapters will progress this view by arguing that, even before beginning her private diary in 1799, Bury had developed strategies which enabled her to document and simultaneously conceal her progressive views.[29] Early in 2023, however, the critical conversation went full circle when Peter James Bowman included Bury in his animated account of five Regency figures, defining her as one of the earliest 'celebrities' because of her determination — and the tactics she employed — to keep herself in the public eye.[30] Not least amongst her strategies, Bowman explains, was her habit of authoring formulaic novels which make cursory allusions to serious social issues but which ultimately prove to be indistinguishable from other silver-fork publications. Bowman views Lady Charlotte's public role as no more than short-lived celebrity, eventually concluding that she perfectly represents a defunct fashionable age because her legacy merely amounts to a frustrated bid for fame. Bowman's anecdotal account of Bury is engaging but highly problematic because she was widely commemorated in obituaries specifically on account of her status as the daughter of a duke, her membership of the royal court and her role in fashionable society as a figure of note.

The revolutionary heritage

The critical view that Bury is a writer whose cultural significance can only be evaluated in terms of her function as a weather vane for historical market trends, clearly remains entrenched. This thesis robustly challenges existing critical opinion by showing that, far from pursuing acclaim as the aristocratic author of *romans-à-clef*, she channels the revolutionary agenda of late eighteenth-century proto-feminist writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-97) to critique the

[28] Pam Perkins, 'Lady Charlotte Susan Maria Campbell Bury, 1775-1861', in *Scottish Women Poets of the Romantic Period*, pp.1-16 (Alexandria: Alexander Street Press, 2002), p.9, n.2. Referred to hereafter as 'Lady Charlotte'.
[29] Ibid., p.9, n.7.
[30] Peter James Bowman, *The First Celebrities: Five Regency Portraits* (Stroud: Amberley Press, 2023). Referred to hereafter as 'The First Celebrities'.

politically conservative establishment whose values she is assumed to uphold. As this thesis will show, the prevalence of progressive ideas in her fiction strongly suggests that Bury was conversant with — and sympathetic towards — Wollstonecraftian discourse; that she would have been familiar with her work, if not at first hand, then certainly by virtue of her spheres of influence.[31] Andrew McInnes contextualises Wollstonecraft's feminist polemic in general by explaining that *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) had been well received at the time of its publication, 'catapulting her into celebrity status and being read generally as a sensible treatise on women's education, related to other works of women's writing […] such as Macaulay's Letters on Education'.[32] In 1798 however, William Godwin (1756-1836) — Wollstonecraft's widower — published a candid biography to commemorate the life and work of his late wife. An inadvertent effect of this was the destruction of her reputation by making public details which concerned her extra-marital relationships and unorthodox stance on sexual issues: according to Anne K. Mellor, the popular press took the opportunity at this point to launch particularly virulent attacks, denouncing her as 'a whore and an atheist, as well as a dangerous revolutionary'.[33] Another important development that year — and one that was formative in its effect on Bury's fiction — was Godwin's decision, as part of his efforts to commemorate his wife's work, to incorporate into his biographical text the posthumous publication of *The Wrongs of Woman; or, Maria* (1798).[34] In prefacing the work, he includes a letter in which Wollstonecraft avowed her intention 'to show the wrongs of different classes of women, equally oppressive, though, from the difference of education, necessarily various'.[35] In this early bad-marriage novel, Wollstonecraft attempts to

[31] Bury is almost certain, for example, to have known Wollstonecraft's daughter, Mary Shelley (1797-1851). Shelley is known to have frequented the Whig salon at Holland House and her friendship with Bury's friends and fellow campaigners, Lady Bulwer-Lytton and Caroline Norton, has recently been documented in a biography and collection of letters by Antonia Fraser and Marie Mulvey-Roberts respectively. See also: n.66 below.

[32] Andrew McInnes, *Wollstonecraft's Ghost: The Fate of the Female Philosopher in the Romantic Period,* (Abingdon; New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), p.24. Referred to hereafter as 'Wollstonecraft's Ghost'.

[33] Anne K. Mellor, 'Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman and the women writers of her day', in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. by Claudia L. Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.155. Referred to hereafter as 'Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman'.

[34] Mary Wollstonecraft, *The Wrongs of Woman; or Maria*. *Posthumous Works of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. by William Godwin (London: Joseph Johnson, 1798). Referred to hereafter as 'The Wrongs of Woman'.

[35] *Mary* and *The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria,* ed. by Gary Kelly (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2009), p.68. See also: Claudia L. Johnson, 'Mary Wollstonecraft's Novels', in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Claudia L. Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.200.

reform the reader by refreshing her critique — articulated first in the political essay, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) — of the social plight and legal oppression of women, both as wives and as the victims of marriage breakdown.[36] Narrating from a multiplicity of fictional viewpoints, Wollstonecraft's oppressed wives and casualties of broken marriage achieve levels of detail which convince the reader that their harrowing accounts are truthful; the formative effect of Wollstonecraft's narrative strategy is strongly suggested in the enhanced realism which, fifteen and twenty-five years later, characterises Bury's first and second broken-marriage narratives. Whilst the extent of Bury's first-hand knowledge of Wollstonecraft's publications remains unclear, it can be said that in addressing bad marriage, both writers are on a continuum; in the following chapters I will make the case that Bury's fiction clearly develops and contributes to the evolving public debate on the subject by adapting and circulating the polemic of the small community of revolutionary women writers who predate her.

The hazards and indissolubility of marriage for women in the early nineteenth century

What angered activists most of all was that while marriage was essentially indissoluble for women in England, a man who had sufficient financial resources could obtain a parliamentary hearing and divorce his wife by claiming that she had committed adultery. In 1801, Jane Campbell (a fellow Scot not otherwise connected to Lady Charlotte) became the first of the few women who did prevail; she managed to obtain a divorce from her husband, Edward Addison, on the grounds of his adultery aggravated by incestuous relations with her sister. It was not until 1840, however, that a woman next succeeded in having her marriage dissolved in England (this time on the basis of her husband's adulterous bigamy).[37]

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[36] Mary Wollstonecraft*, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman with Strictures on Moral and Political Subjects*. London: Joseph Johnson, 1792. Referred to hereafter as 'Vindication'*.* Subsequent references in-text*.*

[37] While Jane was Scottish, her husband (Edward Addison) was a London merchant whom she married in the church of St Clement Danes, Middlesex, on 29 April 1788. According to Dr Mari Takayanagi, Senior Archivist at the Parliamentary Archives, they lived nearby afterwards in 'Surrey Street in the Strand and in Blackheath, and had a son and a daughter'. In 1785, Jane's older sister Jessy (also spelt 'Jesse' and 'Jessie') had married their cousin, Dr James Campbell, in Edinburgh. When Edward Addison subsequently committed adultery with Jessy, Jane successfully brought proceedings against him in the consistory court, then petitioned Parliament for a full divorce. Takayanagi discusses the affair appositely within the context of the legal difficulties other women would go on to experience: 'Perhaps significantly for the success of her case, Jane had

Born into the Scottish nobility, Lady Charlotte was keenly aware of —and outraged by — the fact that for women, divorce was all but inaccessible outside the British nations: a wife and mother who wished to dissolve her marriage in Scotland, for example, had significantly greater judicial rights than would have been the case if she attempted to obtain an annulment in England. On 29 November 1810, Lady Charlotte's older brother George Campbell (1768–1839), the sixth Duke of Argyll from 1806, married Lady Caroline Elizabeth Paget (1774–1835) — formerly the wife of Field Marshal Henry Paget, 1st Marquess of Anglesey (1768–1854). In 1810, Lady Caroline had not only succeeded in divorcing her philandering husband by suing him through the Scottish courts: when she married George Campbell in Edinburgh three weeks later, she appears also to have maintained custodial rights to her children.[38] In his historical analysis of nineteenth-century divorce in England, Allen Horstman affirms that very different standards of divorce applied in the British nations: 'in 186 years of Parliamentary divorce only four women successfully braved the legal and social obstacles of English society to find permanent relief by legislation'.[39] Though wives in England could receive a separation and permanent maintenance in a church court for simple adultery by their husbands, they could only obtain a divorce through a private bill in the House of Commons, and only then if— like Jane Addison — they could prove that the adultery was coupled with incest or bigamy. Women who wished to annul their marriages found the additional burdens of proof required so difficult to achieve that the system continued to preclude them from divorce: 'the nineteenth century thus brought no substantial change from the eighteenth'.[40] The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 later enabled women in England to afford a divorce more easily and under its terms some provision was also made to allow a woman who was deserted to control

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Parliamentary connections. Her father was Sir James Campbell (1737-1805) MP for Stirling 1780-1789'. The History of Parliament <https://thehistoryofparliament.wordpress.com/2016/10/05/jane-campbell-parliamentary-divorce-pioneer> [accessed 20 September 2023].

[38] 'Field Marshall William Henry Paget, 1st Marquess of Anglesey, b.17 May 1768, d. 29 April 1854', The Peerage <https://thepeerage.com/p10840.htm#i108397> [accessed 13 March 2024]. More work is needed to confirm that Lady Caroline Paget, soon-to-be 6th Duchess of Argyll, was awarded full child custody rights after her divorce in 1810; according to Lindsay and Cosh, 1811 did indeed see 'this new Duchess established at Inveraray with her husband and lovely daughters'. Ian G. Lindsay and Mary Cosh, eds., Inveraray and the Dukes of Argyll (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1973), p.310. In 1819, moreover, Henry Paget (1797-1869) — Caroline's eldest son with her first husband— would marry Eleanora Campbell (1799-1828), daughter of Lady Charlotte and Col. John Campbell (and niece to her second husband, the 6th Duke of Argyll). These details suggest that the Scottish courts had, at the very least, permitted the Duchess to maintain contact with her first family.

[39] Allen Horstman, *Victorian Divorce* (1st ed.) (London; New York: Routledge, 1985), p.98 <https://soton.overdrive.com/media/4097067> [accessed 15 February 2023].

[40] Ibid.

her own property; nevertheless, the state continued to deny divorce to women for much of the nineteenth century. More substantial progress was made when the Married Women's Property Act of 1870 allowed any money which a woman earned to be considered hers, and not her husband's property; after further campaigning, this mandate was extended in 1882 to allow married women to have complete personal control over all of their property. While this legislation changed the standards of divorce, it was not until 1923 that women in England were able to use the same grounds as men and sue without having to prove aggravations additional to adultery to obtain a legal dissolution.[41]

The point which here emerges, and which forms a primary and personal point of departure in 1812 for Lady Charlotte in her critique of matrimonial law in England, is that women who wished to dissolve a marriage had no effective recourse to the law; if a husband sued his wife for divorce through the English judicial system, she would not only be financially compromised but would be certain to lose custody of her children. Starting in 1812 with her debut novel, *Self-Indulgence*, Charlotte Bury endeavoured first of all to correct public misconceptions and complacencies about the state of married women's welfare and secondly, to open the eyes of her female readership to the legal hazards of marriage. Women of Lady Charlotte's class frequently realised their vulnerability to problems such as financial exploitation and abandonment only after their legal rights had been completely razed; underscoring and aggravating their problems, the narrative warns, was the introduction of the chaos-generating Clandestine Marriages Act during the second half of the eighteenth century.[42] Passed into law in 1753 by the Lord Chancellor Philip Yorke, 1st earl of Hardwicke (1690-1764), the Act had been intended to standardise the criteria which a marriage must meet to be legal; the unforeseen effect of the legislation, as will be discussed in

[41] <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/private-lives/relationships/overview/changesindivorce/> [accessed 18 July 2023].

[42] Bury's views on the practice of clandestine marriage were no doubt coloured by her knowledge of her mother's first wedding in the year preceding the passage of the Clandestine Marriage Act. Elizabeth Gunning had been proposed to by her first husband on the day they met; two nights later, at a chapel in Curzon Street (where the Revd. Alexander Keith performed clandestine marriages), they improvised a wedding band with a curtain ring and were joined in matrimony. See: Rosalind K. Marshall, 'Campbell [*née* Gunning], Elizabeth, Duchess of Argyll and suo jure Baroness Hamilton of Hameldon [other married name Elizabeth Hamilton, Duchess of Hamilton and Brandon] (bap. 1733, d.1790), courtier,' in *Oxford Dictionary of National* Biography (2005, May 26). <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/11744> [accessed 30 July 2023]. See also: NLS, Edinburgh, Acc. 8110. Memoir and Journal of a tour to Italy of Charlotte Campbell. Referred to hereafter as 'Diary 1799'. The text is inscribed 'Woodhall Thursday 21st November 1799'; the final entry indicates the account was finished on Tuesday 8th July 1800. As the manuscript is bound and non-paginated I have followed Perkins in providing page numbers in my references to the journal, even though they do not appear in the book.

chapter 1, was to increase — not reduce— the incidence of irregular marriage. This was because, as Ian Ward explains, after 1753 a marriage had to meet such a significantly increased range of requirements, the means of achieving a legal and valid matrimonial union were exponentially complicated. With up to a third of marriages between 1753 and 1836 considered illegal and void, the need to address the problem was pressing.[43]

In her acclaimed critical discussion of the period 1837– 54, *Dickens and the Rise of Divorce: The Failed-Marriage Plot and the Novel Tradition* (2010), Kelly Hager attempts to correct the historical tendency of literary scholarship to marginalise literature where marriage fails: a discourse, she proposes, which originates with Ian Watt's landmark text, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (1957).[44] In her study, Hager focuses on Charles Dickens's use of covert narrative strategies to critique the institution of marriage in novels such as *Oliver Twist* (1837-39) — which began appearing in serial form just as *The Divorced* was published — and, later, *David Copperfield* (1850). In the latter plot, according to Hager, Hardwicke's Act is problematic mainly because the hero, bound legally to a woman he deems inadequate, is prevented from fulfilling himself romantically; Dickens, who likewise believed that he was shackled to a woman who was unworthy of him, was clearly narrating from a personal and necessarily partisan point of view. Lady Charlotte, also basing her narrative on autobiographical events, anticipates and exceeds Dickens's critique by confronting the problem from the perspective of the legally disenfranchised women involved. The legislation did not damage women by frustrating their romantic ambitions, she protests: the problems created by the Act were defined by a verifiable increase in women's susceptibility to profiteering and acquisitive men. Besides enhancing their vulnerability to sexual exploitation, the Act had far-reaching consequences for women's property rights including the debarment of illegitimate children from inheriting maternal wealth; particularly severe was the mandate that any mother of illegitimate offspring would be solely responsible for supporting them financially, irrespective of her ability to do so. Although the legislation had been intended to

[43] See: Ian Ward, 'Unnatural Mothers: Hardwicke's Children', in *Sex, Crime and Literature in Victorian England* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2015), p.96. Also: Rebecca Probert, *Double Trouble: The Rise and Fall of the Crime of Bigamy* (London: Selden Society, 2015), Table 2, p.25. Referred to hereafter as 'Double Trouble'.

[44] Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1857). Note that while Hager discusses Hardwicke's Act in terms of its function in making marriage legally indissoluble from the husband's as much as the wife's point of view, *Self-Indulgence* corrects perceptions that bigamy was not a gendered crime. See: K. Hager, *Dickens and the Rise of Divorce: The Failed-Marriage Plot and the Novel Tradition* (1st ed.) (London: Routledge, 2016, pp.35-37) <https://doi-org.soton.idm.oclc.org/10.4324/9781315577050>. Referred to hereafter as 'Dickens and the Rise of Divorce'.

frustrate practices such as the use of marriage as a tool of seduction or the financial exploitation of heiresses, the abuse of vulnerable parties was still widespread in England long after the Act had been passed.[45] While, historian Lawrence Stone identifies the age clause, rather than gender issues, as the main source of the difficulty, he does recognise the deleterious and widespread consequences of the Act: 'The public almost always found a way to get around the law for their own purposes, but the cost in human misery was very high'.[46]

As Bury well knew, the enormity of the problem was exacerbated by the inaccessibility of divorce; English divorce law conflicted with that of every other Protestant country at this time, including the United States. Enlightened attitudes meant that matrimony was also a far more equitable institution in many continental countries: even in Scotland, Bury's homeland, the legal system permitted the emancipation of unhappy wives by allowing them to remarry. As Stone attests, 'There was contrary evidence from Scotland, just across the border, to prove that the granting of cheap divorces on grounds of both adultery or desertion did not in practice open the floodgates to a tidal wave of family dissolutions.'[47] The inequities of a gendered legal system did not stop there, however. Even if a woman in England was able to afford the costs involved in petitioning parliament, the deterrents to seeking divorce, including financial hardship and the loss of children and caste, were sufficiently severe to deter nearly all of the women who would otherwise have tried to have their marriage dissolved during the period.

The biographical context

In the following chapters I will show that, in addition to her political convictions, Bury was motivated to enter into the struggle for the reform of matrimonial law by her own personal experience of wedlock as well as the broken marriages she had witnessed within the Campbell family itself. Marriage was an entrapment — legally, economically and physically — and in my first chapter I will discuss the unpublished diary she wrote in the period 1805–10 which discloses her own personal experience of abuse and exploitation. In the fiction which followed, she articulates

[45] Lawrence Stone explains the implications of Hardwicke's Marriage Act thus: 'Another serious defect of the bill as drafted was that it made null and void any marriage in which there was the slightest mistake, however trivial or accidental, in the wording of the banns or licence with respect to age. It was therefore possible for either spouse, years or even decades later, to annul the marriage because of an error about age, possibly caused by a false statement by him or herself'. Lawrence Stone, 'From the Marriage Act of 1753 to 1868', in *Road to Divorce: England 1530-1987* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), p.132. Referred to hereafter as 'Road to Divorce'.
[46] Stone, *Road to Divorce*, p.137.
[47] Ibid., p.351.

both the grief she experienced over the destruction of her older half-sister and the anger she felt about the abuses married women of rank were suffering in wider Regency and post-Regency society. In the *Diary 1799* – the earlier of her two surviving unpublished journals (written between the ages of twenty-four and twenty-five), Bury expresses her anger at men's conduct during two high-profile marriages which had involved women in her immediate family. She firstly records her intimate reflections upon the first marriage of her mother — Elizabeth Gunning (1733-90) — to the sixth Duke of Hamilton (1724–58). Gunning and her sister, Maria, had been celebrated society beauties; the match had been a step up for Bury's mother and society basked in its glow. Bury debunks urban myth, however, by revealing the private truth behind the public facade: 'they did not even live as man and wife'; she also details the general neglect Hamilton inflicted upon his wife and 'the mortifications she daily endured'.[48] The most significant crime she lays at Hamilton's door occurred when, 'tired of [her]mother's charms' he availed himself of his legal rights as a husband, 'placed a spy about her person' and 'immured her for three years'.[49]

The abuse women suffered within the confines of dynastic marriage was an enormity Bury felt compelled to uncover. When a marriage broke down, moreover, women bore not only the legal consequences of coverture: they also felt the full force of the misogyny corrupting fashionable life and its punitive practice of social ostracism. Within pages of the above account, the author chronicles a very public scandal in the closing years of the eighteenth century that centred upon Gunning's first-born child (and Bury's half-sister). The case was this: Elizabeth Smith-Stanley *née* Hamilton, Countess of Derby (1753–97), had married the 12th Earl of Derby in 1774 and subsequently gave birth to two daughters and a son. Four or five years after the marriage, she embarked upon a very public affair with John Frederick Sackville (1745–99) the 3rd Duke of Dorset — a close associate of the then Prince of Wales — eventually separating from her husband in the full glare of publicity and intense moral opprobrium. Bury discloses that when Smith-Stanley was forced into exile abroad in 1778, 'Lady Derby was at the time with child to the Duke of Dorset who before she had left England threw off all pretensions of affections and plainly told her he was surfeited with their guilty intercourse'.[50] She here recalls the pain of witnessing the homecoming of a sister who 'after three years had expired […] return'd to England with a broken heart and

[48] *Diary 1799*, p.1.
[49] Ibid., p.1. Bury's cousin, Lady Mary Coke — née Campbell (1727-1811) — had also been imprisoned when her husband availed himself of the powers invested in him by the legalities of coverture. See: 3.5 n.120.
[50] Ibid., p.17.

broken constitution'.[51] The distress which this caused Bury was keen: 'tho' I was at that time but an infant I remember her, and as I retrace her still lovely figure her sad story impresses me with deeper sorrow'; her plight also blighted the lives of her immediate family .[52] Far from disowning her daughter, Elizabeth Hamilton — who had married the fifth Duke of Argyll in 1759 — tried to persuade Derby both to reconcile with his wife and to assist with her endeavours to re-enter society. Perversely, instead of relenting, Derby not only embarked upon a relationship with an actress, but welcomed his wife's seducer, Sackville, into his social circle — all the while refusing to see or support his socially outcast wife as she attempted to rehabilitate herself socially.

Historian Lawrence Stone unpacks the issue of women's susceptibility to scandal and the personal and social consequences of ostracism for aristocratic wives like Lady Derby: 'Only those whose husbands also wanted a divorce in order themselves to remarry, and whose lovers were willing to marry them, could look forward to a happy resolution of the affair'.[53] After suffering rejection firstly by her suitor, and afterwards her husband, Lady Derby eventually lost her children and her place in society. In 1790, when Bury was only fifteen, her mother —the Duchess of Argyll— died of tuberculosis and Elizabeth Smith-Stanley's death followed in 1797. Clearly aware of the grief the situation had caused them both, Bury does not blame her half-sister but the man who — with complete impunity — violated and then abandoned her: 'the partner of her guilt never dreamt of restoring her the poor satisfaction it was in his power to give, by marrying her'.[54]

Bury's anger at the institutional frameworks which loaded power in favour of the men who designed them clearly took root in the early years of her childhood and played a large part in motivating her to professionalise as a writer. There can be little doubt, given her familiarity with the culture of legal abuse by which married women in her social circle were oppressed, about her pity for another woman of rank who became well known to her during the early years of her first marriage to Col. John Campbell. Lady Holland (1771–1845), born Elizabeth Vassall, had formerly been married to Sir Godfrey Webster, who divorced her on the grounds of her adultery with Henry Richard Fox (1773–1840), 3rd Baron Holland. Bury knew Lady Holland as the hostess of the celebrated Whig salon at Holland House and, it has been suggested, she was the basis for the socially outcast heroine in *The Divorced*. According to Lawrence Stone, 'in 1799 Lady Elizabeth

[51] Ibid., p.18.
[52] Ibid., p.17.
[53] Stone, *Road to Divorce*, p.340.
[54] NLS, ibid p.16.

Webster fled to Italy with her lover, Lord Holland, whom she subsequently married.'[55] Later that year, to prevent Sir Godfrey Webster from taking their daughter from her, she 'staged a mock funeral with an empty coffin' in an unsuccessful attempt to retain her.[56] Subsequent to this desperate exploit, Lady Webster concealed her daughter for three years before eventually conceding defeat and surrendering custody to her husband. She didn't see Harriet again until she was married — an event which coincided roughly with the publication of Bury's second novel, *Conduct is Fate*, and which is actualised even more powerfully fifteen years later in *The Divorced.*

Publication history

This biographical background demonstrates that while broken marriage blighted the well-being of the Campbell family circle in private, Bury was equally concerned by the havoc wrought in the lives of women in wider contemporary society. While early nineteenth-century courtship fiction appeared to uphold social structures, Bury's broken-marriage novels remodelled the tropes by placing the heroine's marriage at the beginning, not the end of the novel, connecting all of the problems she subsequently experiences to this one fatal event. While the courtship tale invariably ends with the heroine's triumphant union in matrimony with a pillar of the establishment, Bury attempts to convince her mainly female readership that, in this sense, conventional novels fall short. In *The Roses* (1853), the penultimate novel published during her lifetime, she disrupts narrative certainties when the women protagonists legally defeat a self-serving and acquisitive husband by uniting against him. As in her previous novels, Bury here offers a new, more politically- effective type of fiction which necessarily discredits traditional moral-domestic values: 'I have often been surprised at novels. They profess to display character, and exemplify life: alas! they end where they should begin […] The flutter is over, the choice is made but we are not

[55] Stone, ibid., p.341. Stone points out that, despite the trauma of losing the custody of her daughter, Lady Holland's divorce and remarriage did not prevent her from becoming a Whig salonniere and one of the most successful of the hostesses on the London circuit; at the same time, she was denounced publicly during the period by strict moralists such as Coke of Holkham (1754-1842) (ibid., p.344). While refusing to invite Lady Holland to his country seat, Coke accepted her invitations to Holland House, professing all the while '"She is not a woman I approve of at all"' (ibid.). Although such instances 'point to substantial social and moral reintegration of some divorced wives into high society in the period 1780-1820, it is equally evident that they ran the constant risk of exposure to obloquy and ostracism' according to Stone (ibid. p.342). While Bury sustains a penetrating critique of the sexual double standard in her novel of 1837, her more conscious narrative purpose in resurrecting memories of Lady Holland's divorce, as discussed above, was to humanise the tragic circumstances in which she had been forcibly separated in 1799 from her daughter, Harriet Frances Webster (?-1849).

[56] Ibid., p.341.

allowed to see the consequences of that choice; yet the bride is but then commencing life, and her sorrows and joys are to come'.[57]

Self-Indulgence and *Conduct is Fate* have generally been dismissed as belonging to a strange, hybridised subgenre which relates neither to contemporary courtship fiction nor the second generation Gothic narratives which began to emerge during the mid to late Regency. As will be seen in chapters 1 and 2, however, Bury's early fiction sustained a constant dialogue with other narrative modes and absorbed a variety of genres because she was consciously attempting to appeal to, and reform, a politically conservative readership. While her first literary writing— a volume of poetry— observes narrative and moral conventions, she both strained against and capitulated to normative codes of conduct in subsequent works. This is a trend which is noted by Perkins, particularly in Bury's later collection of verse: 'Rather than seeing Bury as daringly resisting conventional models of ladylike femininity in her later volume of poetry, we might wonder if the improving content was in fact part of what Bury might have hoped would make the book appealing to the fashionable readership she was obviously aiming to attract.'[58] Gleadle similarly contextualises the efforts made during the period by women writers like Bury to appear mainstream while using fiction to subvert orthodox codes of behaviour:

> within literary texts, those interested in progressive treatments of women's position, could find the imaginative space to develop alternative views of women's potential or to delineate more subversive aspects of female characters. By casing their narratives within traditional dénouements (such as marriage), or giving minor characters the most telling lines, novelists could also ensure that their novels would still reach the shelves of Mudie's circulating libraries.[59]

In line with the arguments of both Perkins and Gleadle, I will argue that by going into print, Bury was not progressing conventional discourse but protesting, under cover of the didactic mode, that matrimonial law was corrupt and unjust and must be urgently reformed. While she had initially approached the already long-established Bentley publishing dynasty in London in 1810, she eventually settled on high-end Longman's for the publication of her debut novel in 1812 (which was followed with a reprint in Edinburgh by G.R Clarke). Ten years later she made use of her contacts in Edinburgh to persuade another traditional publisher, William Blackwood (1776-1834),

[57] Bury, *The Roses* (London, Hurst and Blackett, 1853), iii p.289.
[58] Perkins, 'Lady Charlotte', p.8.
[59] Kathryn Gleadle, *Radical Writing on Women*, 1800–1850, (Basingstoke New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p.10. Referred to hereafter as 'Radical Writing'.

to take on her second novel, *Conduct is Fate*. While Bury was one of only five women whose fiction Blackwood ventured to publish during the 1820s, a period of serious decline in the bookselling trade, their association would be a short-lived.[60] On 18 January 1820, Blackwood wrote to one of his existing authors, Susan Ferrier (1782-1854) — who had persuaded him to publish *Conduct is Fate* — expressing his reservations about the novel's scenes of domestic abuse: a few years later, Bury was again in search of a publisher. She did not, as might have been expected, seize upon the idea of working with Henry Colburn, who had recently consolidated the success of his first silver-fork novel — Sydney Morgan's *O'Donnel: a National Tale* (1814) — by publishing the scurrilous *roman-à-clef*, *Glenarvon* (1816) by Lady Caroline Lamb (1785-1828), another of Bury's close associates and fellow authors.[61] She would instead enter into agreement with another established London publishing house for her next publication: Saunders and Otley.

Bury's *Alla Giornata* (1826) is a romance set in medieval Italy which sees the aristocratic heroine struggle to overthrow the political forces which oppress her; here, as in her first two novels, Bury articulates her anxieties about the mistreatment of women at the heart of metropolitan fashionable society within a continental framework. While the novel received positive reviews from conservative journals such as *La Belle Assemblée*, *The Literary Chronicle* focused instead upon the author's explicit personal rejection of masculine authority. This response, I propose, might have damaged the author's relationship with her publisher. While work remains to be done on the history of Bury's publications, I suggest that the covert proto-feminism of *Alla Giornata* might have been a source of concern for Saunders and Otley; although the novel almost immediately outsold *Self-Indulgence* and *Conduct is Fate* and ran to several editions, its author, in the summer of 1826, was again in search of another publisher. In a letter inscribed 'No. 6 New Cavendish Street Portland Place, Thursday 12th of June 1826' (only weeks before the success of *Alla Giornata* materialised), Bury's next, rather supplicating letter, was to the venerable John Murray II (178-1843) — publisher of four Jane Austen novels:

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[60] Peter Garside, James Raven, and Rainer Schöwerling (eds.), *The English Novel, 1770 –1829: A Bibliographical Survey of Prose Fiction Published in the British Isles*, 2 vols (New York: OUP, 2000), pp.89-90. Referred to hereafter as 'Garside and others, *The English Novel, 1770–1829'.*

[61] Garside points out that although Colburn had been publishing since 1807, he did not really achieve high visibility until the mid-1820s. His first 'big-name' author was Sydney Owenson, afterwards Lady Morgan (1781-1859) —another of Bury's regular correspondents. The rage for silver-fork fiction did not actually take off, Garside continues, until Colburn published Robert Plumer Ward's *Tremaine* (1825) and Thomas Henry Lister's Granby (1826). Garside, Peter, 'Colburn, Henry (1784/5–1855), publisher,' in Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (Oxford: OUP, May 25, 2006). Date of access 31 Jul. 2023, <https://www-oxforddnb-com.soton.idm.oclc.org/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-5836>.

> Bury presents her compliments to Mr. Murray and being anxious to speak to him on the subject of a little work she contemplates publishing, will attend to any appointment it may suit Mr. Murray to make for that purpose, either for tomorrow, Friday, or Tuesday next. (Letter to John Murray from Lady Charlotte Bury, NLS (John Murray Archive), MS.40174, 1826-1831: folios 49-66 (1))[62]

There is no record of a reply; I propose that it was for this reason and only after she had tried and exhausted several more orthodox avenues, that she finally became involved with the opportunistic Henry Colburn.[63]

By 1828, as I discuss in detail in chapter 2, Bury was experiencing financial problems and this no doubt partially determined her decision to move into commercial authorship. Paradoxically, she found that Colburn, instead of compelling her to churn out tales celebrating the lives of shallow fashionables, freed her to pursue her own agenda. The first novel she authored for her new editor — *Flirtation* (1827) — ran immediately to three editions and marked the beginning of a professional association which, through various permutations, would last for the rest of her long career.[64] Although Colburn was generally somewhat unscrupulous in his dealings, his over-riding concern was that his authors should be — or appear to be — of sufficiently elevated social status to attract and retain the interest of his moneyed middle and upper-class readership. Bury's political agenda would have been of little interest to the profit-driven Colburn; he evidently did

[62] The fact of Bury's approach to Murray marks her ambition and wish to be taken seriously as an author: 'According to the biographer Samuel Smiles, the success of Byron and Scott, meant that there arose "… a vast array of would-be poets, male and female, and from all ranks and professions. Some wrote for fame, some for money; but all were agreed on one point, namely that if Mr. Murray would undertake the publication of the poems the author's fame was secured"'. David McClay, 'Publishing women: John Murray and a remarkable publishing success story' (Unpublished, Chawton House Library, 25 September 2016).

[63] Colburn might have noticed Bury after the appearance of *Alla Giornata* — the third and last of the generically diverse novels which typified her early output and which appeared in the same year as *Vivian Grey* (1826) by Benjamin Disraeli — one of the most successful of Colburn's silver-fork publications. Interestingly, Perkins has identified a letter in the Murray archives written by travel writer Jane Watts *née* Waldie (1793-1826) in which she expresses her anxiety about possible competition from *Alla Giornata.* Far from justifying subsequent critical attacks, Bury's early publications seem to have marked her out as a literary professional who was not only respected by other writers, but regarded as a potential commercial rival.

[64] Four years earlier in 1824, Colburn had resigned his circulating library to Saunders and Otley (which could have been when he made the decision to poach Lady Charlotte for his silver-fork stable). Colburn entered into partnership with Richard Bentley in 1829 and when the arrangement broke down, Bentley took the concern forward, his authors' novels appearing henceforth with the publisher's moniker 'successor to H Colburn'. His business was subsequently taken over by Hurst & Blackett in 1841. See: Garside, Peter. 'Colburn, Henry' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

not interfere unduly, apart from insisting that the novels be located primarily within a London setting. The focus upon aristocratic wealth and excessive lifestyles, which characterises the work of his other (often less socially-elevated) authors, thus barely features in Bury's fiction.

Thesis outline

As the only full-length critical work on Bury's fiction to date, this project explores how three of her novels disrupt early nineteenth-century narrative trends by focusing not upon the heroine's progress towards matrimony, but on what happens to her after the marriage breaks down. Across the three chronologically-organised chapters that comprise this project, I demonstrate how Bury issued a direct challenge to the politically conservative establishment by focusing on the injustices of coverture: a gendered legal practice which applied to all marriages and worked to women's detriment.[65] I will make the case that, starting in the 1810s with *Self-Indulgence*, Bury imports the proto-feminism of Mary Wollstonecraft to address public misconceptions and complacency about problems such as illegal marriage. Her narrative dramatises, to this end, women's experience of bigamy, desertion and the limitation of the statutory rights of illegitimate children to inherit wealth and estates from their parents. As I show in my second chapter, because there had been no improvement ten years later in women's legal entitlements, her next novel — *Conduct is Fate* — centralises the problems caused to women by the indissolubility of matrimony. Here, I also discuss Bury's connection to the early-feminist orator Anna Doyle Wheeler (1780–1848) — one of several radical Unitarian campaigners who endeavoured to harness progressive contemporary literature for political ends. In my subsequent and final chapter, I focus on one of the putative 'silver-fork' novels Bury published with Colburn, *The Divorced* (1837): a text which changes the trajectory of her earlier broken marriage narratives and, by examining the experience of divorce from the woman's point of view, marks her as a pioneer of married women's rights in the fictional genre. This chapter will also show that *The Divorced* was both shaped by the campaigns of writers and women's rights activists such as Harriet Taylor-Mill (1807– 58) and instrumental in supporting

[65] Catherine Packham explains notion of coverture thus: 'Stemming from medieval times and designed to secure dynastic wealth in families, it was defined by legal commentator Sir William Blackstone as the suspension in marriage of the "very being or legal existence of the woman," who becomes "one person in law" with her husband, "under whose wing, protection, and *cover*, she performs every thing." No married woman – or "feme covert" – could contract, sue, or be sued independently from her husband, and any property not protected by premarital settlement, such as a "separate estate," passed to her husband.' Catherine Packham, 'Property Law', in *Mary Wollstonecraft in Context,* Literature in Context, eds. Nancy E. Johnson and Paul Keen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp.207–14 (pp.210-211) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/9781108261067.024>.

society figures such as Caroline Norton (1808–77) — a self-avowed admirer of Wollstonecraft whose circle included Mary Shelley and Anna Wheeler's daughter, Lady Rosina Bulwer Lytton (1802-1882).[66] Both Norton and Lady Lytton protested publicly after domestic violence and adultery, respectively, forced them out of their marital homes and into high-profile infant custody battles during the 1830s; in 1837, as the chapter will show, Bury used her reputation as a well-known author of *romans-à-clef* to publicise and support their campaigns to change matrimonial law.

Throughout the project, I draw on the historical and legal contexts of the early nineteenth century to chart the evolution of Bury's pioneering genre of 'broken-marriage fiction'. In particular, I explore the persecution in public during the 1810s of Princess Caroline of Brunswick (1768–1821) by her estranged husband, the Prince of Wales (1820–30) — later the Prince Regent, then George IV: an affair which significantly heightened women's anxieties about their own legal, financial, and domestic security. I also explain how Bury dramatises notorious criminal conversation cases of the 1820s and 1830s, consciously pricking the public conscience by confronting the seismic erosions of widowed and divorced women's property rights which had been passed into law between 1811 and 1833.

[66] Caroline Elizabeth Sarah Norton (*née* Sheridan), later Lady Stirling-Maxwell (1808–77), writer and political petitioner, was the granddaughter of the playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751–1816). See: Antonia Fraser, *Caroline Norton: A 19th-Century Heroine Who Wanted Justice for Women* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2021), p.4. The closeness of the relationship between Norton and Wollstonecraft's daughter is visible in a letter written prior to the first reading of the Infant Custody Act in 1837. Norton, who was reticent about women's rights in her published writings, readily communicated her subversive views to Mary Shelley in private: 'To-night Talfourd (blessed be his name for that same, and a crown of glory to him! as the Irish say) has given notice of a motion in the House of Commons to alter this law. I thought you would be glad to know this, both for the sake of the sex (whom you have not the clever woman's affectation of thinking inferior to men) and for me, whose first glad feeling for many months of struggling has been the public notice of an effort, at least, to be made in behalf of mothers'. Caroline Norton to Mary Shelley (1 February 1837), Perkins (1909), pp.137–89, in Gleadle, *Radical Writing*, p.103. Ross Nelson and Marie Mulvey-Roberts, also, have observed the contrast between Norton's public persona and 'her unguarded self'. Their acknowledgment that 'Norton's admiration for Wollstonecraft distinguishes her as a Victorian progressive 'very usefully supports a central plank in this thesis. C. S. Norton, *The Selected Letters of Caroline Norton*, ed. by R. Nelson and M. Mulvey Roberts, 1st ed (London: Routledge, 2020), p.4 <https://doi-org.soton.idm.oclc.org/10.4324/9780367814731>. For more on the connection between Norton and Mary Shelley see also: Diane Atkinson, *The Criminal Conversation of Mrs Norton* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2013), pp.99 and 123.

Proto-feminist politics in the 1820s

Because there had been no improvement in women's legal entitlements during the ten years which intervened between Bury's first and second novels, she dramatises the depletion of married women's property rights by the laws of coverture in *Conduct is Fate* by focusing upon the economic problems women encountered when a marriage broke down. The years 1817–1822, during which she worked on the novel, also spanned the royal divorce scandal and trial of Princess Caroline for adultery; *Conduct is Fate* thus responds to the political context by targeting the problems caused to women by the indissolubility of matrimony as well as the legal implications of their status as *feme covert*. In particular, the novel highlights the legal chicanery of the law concerning women's property and the heroine's difficulty in accessing paid employment that will sustain her. Published two years after the political defeat of Princess Caroline by her self-serving husband and her subsequent death, *Conduct is Fate* unsettles the assumptions of the readership by demonstrating that the gendered legal system in England extended its injustices to women of all classes. The novel is thus a claustrophobic tale which, by subverting genres that chronicle the moral growth, courtship and triumphant marriage of the heroine, cautions women and girls against the very institution which the moral-domestic tale recommends.

As part of my attempt to show that Lady Charlotte Bury's fiction responded to and supported the efforts of women's rights activists during the early decades of the nineteenth century, the thesis will attempt to uncover a link between her novels and contemporary political campaigns, the operations of which have, until recently, been overshadowed by the achievements of the women's suffrage movement which followed. Although numbering only 50,000 in 1851, Unitarians were particularly prominent in many intellectual and political circles; it is therefore possible, according to Kathryn Gleadle, to trace the development of their particular brand of feminism through the pages of several journals, articles and letters and, most importantly for this project, the fiction of contemporary novelists.[67] Using Gleadle's methodology, I will examine evidence that Bury can be connected, as early as the 1820s, with the early-feminist orator Anna Doyle Wheeler (1780-1848) — one of several radical Unitarian activists who sought to harness progressive contemporary literature as well as using more established periodicals and journals to

[67] According to Gleadle the Unitarians were fundamentally committed to using literature as a means of disseminating their feminist politics: 'there was a need to promote a new literature which might expose the truths of society, enabling them to lay bare the hypocrisies and injustices which informed existing sexist assumptions'. Kathryn Gleadle, *The Early Feminists. Radical Unitarians and the Emergence of the Women's Rights Movement,* 1831-51 (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995), p.55. Referred to hereafter as 'The Early Feminists'.

circulate their ideas to the widest possible audience. Dolores Dooley explains that Wheeler, an Irish-born socialist and feminist, first arrived in London in 1816 where, after a short period in France, she lived for most of her subsequent life (biographical details which were substantiated in 2021 by Ophélie Siméon).[68] Early on, Wheeler mixed in radical, political circles in both domains, and in London - where she hosted an intellectual salon between 1820 and 1825 — she 'began to appreciate the close link in the reforming ideals and aspirations of Owenites, Saint-Simonians and the London utilitarians'; to her frustration, however, 'she found them dragging their feet on the subject of women's participation in the public domain'.[69] In 1825, she joined another Irish-born socialist and feminist, William Thompson (1775–1833), to produce a book-length critique: *Appeal of One Half the Human Race, Women: Against the Pretensions of the Other Half, Men, to Retain Them in Political, and Thence in Civil and Domestic, Slavery: In Reply to a Paragraph of Mr. Mill's Celebrated "Article on Government"* (1825).[70] The tract, which, according to biographer Marie Mulvey-Roberts, revived Wollstonecraft's political legacy, offered an explicit feminist critique of the gendered social relations of the time by contradicting James Mill's claim, as the First Reform Act of 1832 approached, that women did not need to be given the right to vote.[71] James Jose explains the significant place of the *Appeal* within early nineteenth-century political thought with detailed reference to Anna Wheeler's contribution; of particular relevance to this project is his conviction that while she and Thompson clearly saw themselves progressing the tradition pioneered by Wollstonecraft and others at the end of the eighteenth century, they were, in their

[68] Dolores Dooley, *Equality in Community Sexual Equality in the Writings of William Thompson and Anna Doyle Wheeler* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996), p.62. See also: Ophélie Siméon, 'Goddess of reason': Anna Doyle Wheeler, Owenism and the rights of women', History of European Ideas, 47.2 (2021), pp.285-298 <https://doi.org/10.1080/01916599.2020.1798625>.

[69] Dooley, *Equality*, pp.66-67.

[70] Referred to hereafter as 'Appeal of One Half'. Subsequent references in-text.

[71] Jose, J. 'Feminist Political Theory Without Apology: Anna Doyle Wheeler, William Thompson, and the Appeal of One Half the Human Race, Women', Hypatia, 34.4 (2019), pp.827-851 (p.827). Referred to hereafter as 'Feminist Political Theory'. In his Essay on Government (1820), James Mill, father of John Stuart Mill (1806–1873), supported campaigns for a more widely representative form of government but did not recommend extending the franchise to women. See: Ball, Terence. "Mill, James (1773–1836), political philosopher." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.* 23 Sep. 2004. <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-18709> [accessed 2 October 2023]. For further biographical detail about Wheeler see also: Joanna Goldsworthy and Marie-Mulvey Roberts, 'Revolutionary Mothers and Revolting Daughters: Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley, Anna Wheeler and Rosina Bulwer Lytton', in C.D. Williams, A. Escott, and L. Duckling, eds. Woman to Woman: Female Negotiations During the Long Eighteenth Century (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2010), pp.67-8. Referred to hereafter as 'Revolutionary Mothers and Revolting Daughters'.

commitment to reforming the statutes of matrimonial law and enfranchising women, 'determined to pursue a much more radical tack'.[72]

In *Conduct is Fate,* the heroine's struggle to survive economically after her husband abandons her articulates the author's keen sense of the detriment caused to women by shackling and enslaving them within the bonds of coverture. In 1822, Bury singles out the oppressive practice of ostracising and arraigning women who fell foul of codes of propriety for particular criticism. This was an abuse which originated in the legal mandate that married women should tolerate an adulterous husband, irrespective of the severity or frequency of his crimes, while a husband should never exonerate an adulterous wife no matter how transient her transgressions. If a wife strayed, the argument went, she must be punished to spare her husband from the responsibility of raising and passing property on to children who were not his own. In the closing decades of the eighteenth century, Mary Hays (1759/60–1843) had explicitly demanded equality for the sexes as well as a reframing of the conventions which kept women subjugated in *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women* (1798). This extended an idea that had been introduced by Wollstonecraft herself in her protest that women were 'being denied rights while being held to duties, not least the duty to guard the one virtue held to be indispensable for women if they are to remain respectable: "reputation for chastity"'. [73] In her study of early feminism, Lena Halldenius contends that Wollstonecraft regarded this moral mandate to be the main source of society's authority in the economic subjugation women: 'There is no hope of redemption for a woman who loses that. Thus is women's morality undermined by focusing all attention on how they appear to others, rather than on the substance of their characters.'[74]

In confronting a partial and gendered system of matrimonial law through fiction, Bury navigated complex political territory in the first three decades of the nineteenth century. In *Road to Divorce*, Lawrence Stone duly acknowledges the power of cultural influences in society at large in gaining recognition for the anachronisms and inequities underlining the sexual double standard. Bury's personal anxiety about reputation finds particular egress in her second novel: four years before the publication of *Conduct is Fate*, the author had conceded, in a confessional letter addressed to her eldest daughter on 10th February 1818, that it was largely as a consequence of rumours circulating amongst the ex-patriate community in Florence that she had suddenly decided to

[72] Jose, 'Feminist Political Theory', p.840.
[73] Lena Halldenius, 'Feminist Republicanism', in *The Wollstonecraftian Mind*, eds. Sandrine Berges and others (London: Routledge, 2019), p.409.
[74] Ibid.

enter into wedlock with her second husband, the Rev John Edward Bury (1790-1832). The decision, she confesses, had been hastened by the fear of losing her own reputation — a danger which had destroyed her half-sister and continued to affect other women in her social circle, such as Lady Elizabeth Holland and Lady Caroline Lamb.

Bury's support for women's activism during the 1830s

In this thesis I will attempt to show that Bury used her novels not to educate an aspiring bourgeois demographic in the lifestyle protocols of an exclusive and secretive elite, but to change the consciousness of the class whose values she wanted to reform. On 3rd July 1828, Eleanora Campbell, one of her daughters with John Campbell, died at the age of twenty-nine, the loss of her daughter appearing to contribute to a crystallisation of purpose in her fiction. Eleanora's death would be followed on 6th August,1830, by that of her son, John George Campbell at the age of thirty. Bury's second husband, the Rev. John Bury, died not long afterwards in 1832; she had thus sustained the loss of two children and a spouse within the space of three years. Now in her late fifties, she moved away decisively from the composite novel, the didacticism and romance of her earlier fiction and focused her attention on the corruptions of the fashionable elite which populated the metropolis and, from there, governed and shaped women's lives unchallenged.

Given her personal circumstances, as well as her persisting anger at entrenched attitudes towards gender, it is unsurprising that Bury's next novel for Colburn — *The Exclusives* (1830) — saw a hardening of purpose and a darkening in tone. While appearing to concede to Colburn's demand for scurrilous tales of high life, this novel —an anonymously published but hugely-anticipated and all-encompassing *roman-à-clef* — discredited the values of an entire class.[75] Colburn, whose commercial approach to bookselling enabled him to weather both of the depressions in publishing in 1825–6 and 1831, puffed *The Exclusives* with especial vigour. Ever willing (unlike her previous publishers) to overlook Bury's subterranean politics, he waved through her narrator's caustic warnings to women about the entrapments of marriage and the dangers of taking a spouse, 'by him to be fostered and improved, or by him to be crushed and dissolved at pleasure' (iii p.209).[76] For *The Literary Gazette,* the novel was 'exaggerated and revolting', its outraged reviewer taking profound offence on behalf of 'the whole peerage', as well as 'certain individuals,

[75] Marsh and Miller published a 'key' (guide) later in the same year to arouse curiosity about identities and boost sales: *A Key to the Royal Novel: The Exclusives* (London/Edinburgh: Marsh and Miller, Constable and Co., 1830).
[76] *The Exclusives* (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1830).

too openly designated to be mistaken'.[77] Bury would no doubt have felt especially vindicated by Ellen Moers's judgment in 1960 that *The Exclusives* was 'the most bitter and violent attack on exclusivism produced by the Regency'.[78] The most important consequence of her association with Colburn however, was the visibility and acclaim that would shortly enable her to circulate her revolutionary ideas, under cover of the silver-fork mode, to the classes whose values formed the principal target of her political project.

By the time *The Divorced* appeared, Bury had had six texts commissioned by Henry Colburn, her decision to go into print under her own name for the first time in 1837 marking a developing professionalism and a new-found awareness of her potential as a political writer. This thesis will show that in *The Divorced*, published at the high-water mark of men's legal rights within matrimony, she inaugurates a literary genre. In this, the first of the two novels she published in 1837, she disrupts narrative and social convention by focusing not on the heroine's progress towards matrimony, but on the second marriage after a divorce. The emphasis is therefore not upon the wife who is rejected by her husband but on a woman who — having walked away voluntarily to remarry for love — is systematically stripped of her legal and economic security, dispossessed of her first-born child and destroyed by public values. By breaking narrative taboos, Bury's divorce novel marks a pivotal moment both in fiction and the drive for women's rights. The position occupied by her corpus in relation to wider contemporary marriage campaigns during the second and third decades of the nineteenth century has yet to be assessed, however; I will fill this gap in the cultural memory by arguing that *The Divorced* consciously responds to complaints about the condition of women published by such activists as Harriet Taylor-Mill (1807-58) in *The Monthly Repository* between 1831 and 1834. According to Helen McCabe, Taylor-Mill ('HTM') — who influenced and would later marry the philosopher and politician John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) — would have had access to the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft during her formative years because, while no new English editions of the *Vindication* were published between 1796 and 1844, some Unitarian churches kept copies, and customarily allowed young female members to borrow them.[79] James Jose has noted, pertinently, that in some respects, 'HTM's writings and

[77] *The Exclusives: a Novel.* The Literary Gazette: A weekly journal of literature, science, and the fine arts; Dec 5, 1829; 672; British Periodicals p.792.
[78] Ellen Moers, *The Dandy, from Brummell to Beerbohm* (New York: Viking, 1960), p.341.
[79] According to McCabe, while it is not possible to prove the case empirically, 'It is, therefore, possible that Taylor-Mill had access to Wollstonecraft's political texts before, or whilst, writing *On Marriage* (1833) and other contemporary works on women's rights and education, and even more probably she at least had access to them by the time she was writing *Enfranchisement of Women*

letters on marriage, divorce, domestic violence, work, and motherhood proved her to be closer to the ideas in Wheeler's *Appeal* and at times anticipate elements of contemporary feminist thought than to what Mill himself eventually presented in *The Subjection of Women* (1869)'.[80] The particular attraction for Bury of Taylor-Mill's polemic was no doubt the way in which her proto-feminism, like Wheeler's, evolved out of her own lived experience of marriage. As Menaka Philips observes, 'HTM's writings and letters on marriage, divorce, domestic violence, work, and motherhood […] reflect a merger between experience and theory on matters of gender and justice, which at times anticipate elements of contemporary feminist thought in ways that the work of her famed husband did not'.[81]

In all likelihood, as chapter 3 will show, Lady Charlotte would have encountered the views of Wheeler and Taylor-Mill through her reading, her intellectual networking and her friendship with high-profile casualties of marriage breakdown such as Lady Rosina Bulwer-Lytton. Lawrence Stone's view of the matrimonial machinery which entangled women of rank such as Lady Charlotte and Anna Wheeler and her daughter makes especially grim reading: 'Among the propertied classes cruelty was either pathological — the result of sadism — or else calculated — either to drive the wife out of the house, or else to force her to surrender control over her own property'.[82] The consequences, as well as the causes of the abuse — as this project will show — originated in a deficiency of legal measures protecting the rights of abandoned or separated wives, the most egregious of which involved 'the denial to separated or divorced women of custody of, or even free access to, their children; the denial to wives of legal rights to Parliamentary divorce; and the total exclusion of wives from the crim. con. action.'[83] Of particular

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(1851) under the title *Are Women Fit for Politics? Are Politics Fit for Women*?'. Helen McCabe, 'Harriet Taylor', in *The Wollstonecraftian Mind,* p.257.
John Stuart Mill (1806–1873), philosopher, economist, and advocate of women's rights, published successive tracts on the subject — a campaign which culminated in 1869 with *The Subjection of Women*. In this essay, Mill denounced the practice of legally subordinating women in marriage because 'it conferred domination, not on a single ruler or ruling class but on the whole male sex'. 'Mill, John Stuart', in <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/18711> [accessed 18 December 2020]

[80] Jose, 'Feminist Political Theory', p.842.

[81] Menaka Philips, 'The "Beloved and Deplored" Memory of Harriet Taylor Mill: Rethinking Gender and Intellectual Labor in the Canon', *Hypatia* 33.4 (2018), pp.626–42, (p.629).

[82] Lawrence Stone, *Broken Lives: Separation and Divorce in England 1660-1857* (Oxford: OUP, 1993), p.18. Referred to hereafter as 'Broken Lives'.

[83] Stone, *Road to Divorce*, p.355. 'In a case of criminal conversation, a husband charged another man with adultery with his wife, and, if the defendant was found guilty, the husband recovered "damages." ' Mary Lyndon Shanley, 'What Kind of a Contract is Marriage?: Married Women's Property, The Sexual Double Standard and The Divorce Act of 1857', in *Feminism, Marriage, and*

relevance for chapter 3 is the first statute to correct these injustices which passed into law when the marriage debates were at their height: the Infant Custody Act of 1839. While the effort to gain support for the legislation has conventionally been attributed solely to the efforts of Caroline Norton, this project will show that, besides the parliamentary representative, Thomas Noon Talfourd (1794–1854), Norton was also aided by Lady Charlotte Bury whose endeavours through the medium of popular fiction, I will argue, functioned to publicise and circulate her complaints as well as making them more persuasive and politically effective.

Three years before the publication of *The Divorced*, Bury had assiduously prepared the ground by serving up her now-forgotten female adultery narrative, *The Ensnared* (1834). Despite the originality of its plot, however, *The Ensnared* has yet to receive full critical appraisal. The novella was published alongside *The Disinherited* (1834), Edward Copeland observing tantalisingly, but without elaborating, that 'both of Bury's short novels break new ground'.[84] While Copeland stops short of attributing political power to Bury's fiction, Alison L. LaCroix and Martha C. Nussbaum contend that 'divorce law was substantially reformed during the mid-nineteenth century, so that access to divorce expanded dramatically in part as a direct result of the impact of novels'.[85] Ever aware of the difficulties radical eighteenth-century women writers had experienced in getting their work published, Bury shapes a narrative which strives consistently for, and ultimately succeeds in maintaining, a conventionally didactic tone in this subversive novel. She would have felt encouraged and vindicated when *The Examiner* subsequently recommended *The Ensnared* as the kind of merchandise which is well 'received by all respectable Booksellers'.[86] I will argue that by successfully filtering a tale of women's infidelity through the marketable conventions of the moral-domestic novel, Bury prepared the orthodox book-buying public in 1834 to accept an even greater challenge in her counter-cultural divorce tale of 1837. This project thus contends that, although frequently uncertain of her trajectory, she gradually succeeded by means of small and sometimes inelegantly shod steps, in extending tolerances and moving cultural and political attitudes forward.

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the Law in Victorian England, 1850-1895 (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989), p.24. Referred to hereafter as '*Feminism, Marriage, and the Law'*.

[84] Copeland, *The Silver Fork Novel*, p.179.

[85] *Subversion and Sympathy: Gender, Law, and the British Novel*, ed. by Alison L. LaCroix and Martha C. Nussbaum (New York, 2013); online edn, (Oxford Academic, 2013). 'Introduction', p.15 <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199812042.001.0001> [accessed 13 July 2023].

[86] *LADY CHARLOTTE BURY'S NEW WORK.* Examiner; Jun 29, 1834; 1378; British Periodicals p.409.

Rosa's dismissive view that she was 'a rather silly writer of bad novels' nevertheless continues to shape critical responses towards her writing.[87] While Bury demonstrates in her fiction a ubiquitous awareness of the moral standards demanded by the circulating libraries, it must be conceded that she is frequently conflicted by the requirements of a popular readership and does not always succeed in balancing the demands of her progressive agenda against marketplace forces. Her efforts to resolve these tensions sometimes result in over-complications which confuse, instead of persuading, the reader. The uncertainty Bury felt about her target audience — in her early novels, especially — is undoubtedly manifested at times in a lack of technical control, sudden generic shifts and a tendency towards episodic narrative. She also punctuates her omniscient narrations with sentences which open with explosive proto-feminist assertions and then collapse into platitudes; even more ubiquitously, she alternates punishment with pity implying, ambiguously, that the problems which afflict the morally transgressive heroine are both deserved and undeserved. No doubt, as observed by Carolyn Lambert, financial urgency determined her working practices to some extent: 'Married women writers … were frequently motivated to publish by their husband's financial failure, illness, or death, and thus took on double burdens of support. The effect of such financial needs can easily be traced in the too-rapid production of competent, not-quite-realized fiction.'[88] While Bury's political project is often obscured by technical flaws, I contend that, notwithstanding the varying narrative landscapes of her publications, *The Divorced* — her capstone novel — imports the radical political agenda of her earlier fiction and responds with the utmost cogency to contemporary debates. The following chapters will show that, in the very process of breaking women's silence, Bury's shape-shifting narratives supported the drive for improved women's rights and, despite their inconsistencies, were instrumental in raising public awareness of gender issues and the need for reform.

While Lady Charlotte Bury may not have been a great writer, she is an important one. During the early decades of the nineteenth century she crafted novels which appealed to a wide demographic, reshaping the moral-domestic and courtship genre to warn and enlighten her readership about matrimony: 'how many lovely brides exchange the orange-flower wreath for buds of the deadly nightshade, and doff the splendid lace dress, to wrap themselves in the garment of heaviness…It is not [in] how life is begun [but] how it wears and is brought to an end, that we require practical lessons'.[89] During a period which could otherwise be regarded as a hiatus in women's campaigns to improve their legal rights, Lawrence Stone, again, recognises the role of

[87] Rosa, *The Silver Fork School,* p.158.
[88] Carolyn Lambert, *For Better, For Worse* (London: Routledge, 2018), 'Introduction', n.4.
[89] Bury, *The Roses*, iii p.289.

women such as Bury in turning the political tide in their favour: 'It is only in the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s, when wellborn, well-connected, and intelligent but carefully unthreatening elite women like Caroline Norton and Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon began to lobby influential legislators and law lords, that one can begin to see significant changes in both male attitudes and statute law'.[90] While most of Bury's novels were published under the auspices of the silver-fork school, her affinities lay elsewhere. Using the genre as a platform, she continued to write long after the publication of *The Divorced* and while her novels, along with those of her silver-fork contemporaries, were superseded in popularity from the 1840s onwards by the Condition of England novel and fiction which focused more closely on morality and the minutiae of domestic life, in every decade thereafter she produced narratives which engaged afresh with problems such as domestic abuse, women's alcoholism and female abduction within marriage. She has not been credited, nevertheless, for articulating social issues which were iterated later by better-known authors such as Anne Brontë, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Wilkie Collins and Thomas Hardy. The work of this thesis intends to renew critical appreciation of Lady Charlotte Bury and, by enquiring more closely into her life and works, better understand the contribution she made to the campaigns of early nineteenth-century feminists for legal reform. This project will thus offer new possibilities not just for our reading of this lost writer, but for the history of marriage reform and women's literature, in general, during the early nineteenth century.

[90] Stone, Lawrence, *Road to Divorce,* p.14

Chapter 1 *Self-Indulgence; a tale of the nineteenth century* (1812)

Far from occupying an isolated, elitist niche, the broken-marriage novels published by Lady Charlotte Susan Maria Bury, *née* Campbell (1775-1861), during the first two decades of the nineteenth century engaged tenaciously with Romantic and contemporary gender politics and discredited rather than celebrating the values of her class. More than fifteen years before her novels achieved the recognition and public acclaim attendant upon her association with commercial publisher Henry Colburn (1784 –1855), Lady Charlotte authored *Self-Indulgence* (1812) — a hybridised, political text which both conforms to and departs from contemporary literary traditions.[1] In this chapter I will make the case that, instead of merely seeking popular acclaim, Lady Charlotte embarked upon her professional career as a novelist because she was concerned by the severe legal, financial and social oppression of married women: women who were both personally known to her and those who suffered injustice in wider society. While her debut novel is shaped consciously by a proto-feminist determination to rectify discriminatory practices, Lady Charlotte makes use of popular literary tropes to engage the attention of a leisured, affluent demographic; instead of confining herself to direct polemic, furthermore, she uses immersive narrative to appeal directly to the emotions of a readership whose values she wanted to reform.

This chapter argues that in *Self-Indulgence*, the author challenges injustice by adopting and adapting the discourse of earlier, revolutionary women writers to protest explicitly against the unequal system of moral and political values which framed social structures. Published in Edinburgh and London, the novel remodels the conventional courtship genre by placing emphasis upon the heroine's life after marriage — not her experiences during courtship. In this novel, matrimony is not the heroine's reward for virtue but an inescapable legal trap defined by her status as *feme covert*. Lady Charlotte also attempts to reform cultural practices by focusing polemically on the problem of illegal marriage, to this end shaping a compelling representation of bigamy and the blighting effect of desertion on the lives of married women during the first two decades of the nineteenth century. Illegal and clandestine marriage generated a range of abuses which were far more widespread and problematic than was commonly accepted during the period; married women of Lady Charlotte's class frequently realised their vulnerability only after

[1] Lady C.S.M. Bury, *Self-Indulgence* (1812) — see Introduction, n.5 for full citation. According to Peter Garside, further editions of Bury's debut novel appeared later in 1812 in Boston and Philadelphia. See Garside and others, *The English Novel,* p.363.

their own legal rights had been completely erased. This chapter thus contextualises and adjusts our understanding of Lady Charlotte's corpus within the social and cultural context, as well as augmenting our knowledge of early nineteenth-century matrimonial law.

1.1 Biographical background and Lady Charlotte's sympathy for the neglected wife

Lady Charlotte's texts were shaped definitively by the literary and historical contexts in which they were written: no scholarship yet exists, however, which uncovers the interrelation between her proto-feminist, broken-marriage novels and the communities and events which shaped them. In a biographical sense, the author was all too familiar with the oppressive system of coverture which operated unchallenged in England during the early nineteenth century: although scholars have conventionally held that she had twice married for love and enjoyed happy and stable marriages, primary materials in British and U.S archives definitively contradict this assumption.[2] In a letter written in 1818 by Lady Charlotte to her twenty-two year-old daughter, Eliza, held in the Gordon-Cumming archive at the NLS, the author describes the sustained sexual abuse her first husband, John Campbell (1770-1809), inflicted upon her during the near fifteen years of their marriage between 1795 and 1809.[3] In this harrowing account, Lady Charlotte claims not only that Campbell assaulted her continuously, but that she suffered acute mental trauma because of 'the treatment I received — while I was pregnant — and from the disgust of forced embraces — when frequently, too frequently inebriety render'd those embraces loathsome even to my tender and adoring nature'.[4] Besides describing Campbell's physical offensiveness and the ordeal of living with his alcoholism, she also implies he was involved in the sexual assaults perpetrated by his brother on their maidservants. Lady Charlotte's misery was compounded when he intimidated her into silence: 'I was made the most threatened of human beings — and never to mortal ear did I

[2] Pam Perkins's landmark discussion of Bury's poetry in 2002 has, until now, been the only acknowledgement in the critical context of Lady Charlotte's unhappiness in marriage. She has otherwise been ubiquitously assumed to have had two happy experiences of wedlock. See: Pam Perkins, *Lady Charlotte*, p.8. Although an anecdotal account of Lady Charlotte by P.J. Bowman references material in the Campbell family archive, this appeared when this thesis was in its final stages of preparation (see: Introduction n.30 above). The discussion which ensues is thus based exclusively on my own original reading and archival research.

[3] Letter to Eliza Gordon Cumming from Lady Charotte Bury, Florence, 10th Feb 1818. NLS, Gordon–Cumming Archive, Dep.175, box 164/1.
Eliza Maria Gordon-Cumming *née* Campbell (1795-1842) was the eldest child of Lady Charlotte and Col. John Campbell <https://www.thepeerage.com/p1397.htm#i13970> [accessed 16 April 2023]

[4] Ibid., NLS, Gordon –Cumming Archive, Dep.175, box 164/1.

breathe his disgrace or my wretchedness 'till heaven had parted us'.[5] Lady Charlotte goes on to disclose that, because many of her husband's 'forced embraces' resulted in pregnancy, she came to associate childbirth with trauma and was, for this reason, unable to bond with her children: 'I did not perhaps feel that exquisite maternal love for my young children which it is the innate privilege of most mothers to feel'.[6] In light of this evidence, I will argue that she professionalised as a writer to address and raise awareness of the widespread domestic abuse she knew to be many women's experience of matrimony — a plight which, legally circumscribed by the strictures of coverture, both she and they endured in enforced and often prolonged silence. Both A. James Hammerton and Lawrence Stone acknowledge the fact that marital abuse was frequently hidden from view during the period spanning Lady Charlotte's professional career and that women were compelled to campaign to have mental, as well as physical cruelty, recognised as grounds for divorce.[7] While Stone laments the scarcity of primary material and the prohibitive effect this has on historians' ability to access the private experiences of women of rank — of divorcees, especially — I will argue that Lady Charlotte used her debut novel to break their silence. *Self-Indulgence* was written, I thus contend, both to give a voice to those women in contemporary society who were trapped by marriage and to progress the political drive of the author's revolutionary antecedents for the reform of the statutes governing matrimonial law.

Because Lady Charlotte wrote *Self-Indulgence* after she had entered employment as a lady-in-waiting at the royal court in 1809, her debut novel, I propose, forms part of her larger political response to the marriage breakdown of the Prince Regent (1762-1830) — later George IV — and Princess Caroline of Brunswick (1768-1821).[8] I support this claim by referencing a personal diary and a letter held in archival collections, both of which indicate that the author did not conceive the idea of writing a novel before 1810. The first of these is a private journal Lady Charlotte kept during the period of her first marriage in the years 1805–10: the text I have accessed is a transcript compiled by Mary Isabel Fry held in the Huntington Library in California, a

[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.
[7] See: A. James Hammerton, *Cruelty and Companionship: Conflict in Nineteenth Century Married Life* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992) as well as the many case studies discussed in historian Lawrence Stone's foundational text, '*Broken Lives*'. Lawrence Stone, *Broken Lives: Separation and Divorce in England 1660-1857* (Oxford: OUP, 1993). Referred to hereafter as 'Broken Lives'
[8] Hereafter 'Prince George', 'the Prince Regent' or 'Regent' refers to George, Prince of Wales (1762– 1820), The Prince Regent (1811–1820) and King George IV (1820–1830). 'Princess Caroline', 'Caroline' or 'the Princess' refers hereafter to Caroline of Brunswick, Caroline, Princess of Wales, (1795–1820) and Queen Caroline (1820–1).

copy of which was provided for the purposes of this research by the Hartley Library at the University of Southampton.[9] In this private account of the five-year period ending in 1810, Lady Charlotte does not indicate that she was engaged in writing a literary work; a note held at The Women's Library at the London School of Economics confirms, however, that she did approach the Bentley family publishing firm in 1810 — almost certainly to discuss the possibility of having work published.[10] This letter, combined with the absence of references to the work in the *Diary 1805–10,* indicate that she did not begin writing *Self-Indulgence* until her employment as a lady-in-waiting had commenced in 1810. I therefore propose that the text was written as a direct commentary upon the royal marriage as George, newly empowered by his office as Regent, intensified his efforts to rid himself of his wife.[11]

Besides working on a fictionalised account of the royal marriage, Lady Charlotte kept a journal between 1810 and 1815 which she published in the year of Queen Victoria's accession as *Diary Illustrative of the Times of George the Fourth, Interspersed with Original Letters from the Late Queen Caroline, and from Various Other Distinguished Persons* (1838).[12] The memoir was published just over twenty-five years after the appearance of *Self-Indulgence* and was, according to Muireann Ó'Cinnéide, the key to her commercial success, 'selling several editions almost immediately and generating public notoriety and public warfare'.[13] The memoir (referred to hereafter as 'Diary 1838') is a penetrating critique of misogyny at the royal court; in the modern period, however, the text has received very little attention from literary scholars and has been of consequence mainly to historians as a source of primary evidence. The interface between Lady Charlotte's fictional and non-fictional writing thus remains unexplored: no substantial scholarship exists, either, which views her fictional agenda within the context of her commercial objectives and the problems which changing market pressures imposed upon her. This chapter will discuss

[9] For the purposes of clarity, Lady Charlotte Campbell's private journal, written during the period of her first marriage in the years 1805–10, is referred to as *Diary 1805-10*. Bury, Lady Charlotte Susan Maria, *Lady Charlotte Bury's diary 1805-1810, transcripts, approximately 1980*, ed. Mary Isabel Fry <https://app.library.soton.ac.uk/documents/huntington.pdf> [accessed 28 March 2023]. Subsequent references in-text.

[10] Lady Charlotte Bury to Mr Bentley, London University: London School of Economics, The Women's Library, Autograph Letter Collection: Literary Ladies. Bentley [probably Richard Bentley, publisher] 1810 9/07/003.

[11] When Lady Charlotte later reworked *Self-Indulgence* as *The Separation* (1830), Henry Colburn took the opportunity to puff the novel as a *roman-à-clef* which chronicled 'the secrets of a real-life event'. See: Copeland *The Silver Fork Novel*, p.185.

[12] Lady Charlotte Susan Maria Bury, referred to throughout this thesis as *Diary 1838* (see Introduction, n.3 for bibliographic details).

[13] Muireann Ó'Cinnéide, *Aristocratic Women and the Literary Nation,* 1832-1867 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p.37. Referred to hereafter as 'Aristocratic Women'.

Lady Charlotte's non-fictional writings alongside *Self-Indulgence* and will challenge entrenched critical views of her corpus by making the case that her debut novel, while attempting to appeal to a politically conservative reading public, transfers the proto-feminist debates of the previous two decades to the marketable courtship mode and in so doing, disrupts the conventions of the genre.

The motives with which Lady Charlotte approached her fictional debut were diverse. Her marriage to John Campbell had been a step down socially and throughout the marriage they were plagued by financial problems: 'no sooner had we recover'd from our late danger than the difficulties and embarrassments of our pecuniary affairs again rose up with Hydra head to overcome our spirits and blast our happiness'.[14] She was finally released from the constrictions of coverture by her husband's death in 1809 and it was in financially straitened circumstances that she accepted a post as a lady-in-waiting to the Princess of Wales the following year.[15] Lady Charlotte was still unable support her nine children, however; in the *Diary 1838* she reveals that to compound her problems, her salary, if and when she received it, was docked by a certain amount as if she was resident at court — this despite her choosing to live, unusually for a lady-in-waiting, at a private address in Mayfair.[16] According to granddaughter Lady Constance Russell (1832–1925), Lady Charlotte led a socially active lifestyle at this time and, while this no doubt continued to broaden her cultural horizons, her habits added to her expense.[17] Lady Charlotte's youngest child, Harriet Beaujolois Campbell (1801–1848), duly logs the economic problems experienced by the family in *A Journey to Florence in 1817* (1951). Scottish novelist Susan Ferrier (1782–1854), a close friend of Lady Charlotte's, also revealed that while visiting the family in London in 1812 she was obliged to walk 'because Lady Charlotte has no carriage': other letters of the period indicate that she was doing her own gardening.[18] It is thus possible, and even likely, that the commercial advantages of writing a *roman-à-clef* in 1812 motivated Lady Charlotte almost as much as her wish to publish a revelatory account in support of Princess Caroline, her persecuted employer.

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[14] *Diary 1805-10*, p.92.

[15] In a letter dated 13 November 1821, held in the NLS, Lady Charlotte reveals that during her widowhood the shortfall in her finances forced her into debt. See: NLS, Acc. 8508, box 3, folder 1. Letter from Lady Charlotte Bury to her brother, John Douglas Edward Henry Campbell, 7th Duke of Argyll (1777–1847).

[16] See: Bury, *Diary 1838*, i p.99. According to W. Willmott Dixon, Bury received a salary of £500 per annum. See: W. Willmott Dixon, *Queens of Beauty*, *and Their Romances*, vol 1 (London: Forgotten Books, 2018), p.208.

[17] Lady Constance Russell, p.188.

[18] Susan Edmonstone Ferrier, *Memoir and Correspondence of Susan Ferrier, 1782–1854*, ed. By John Ferrier and John Andrew Doyle (London: J Murray, 1898), pp.137 and 146. Referred to hereafter as 'Memoir and Correspondence of Susan Ferrier'.

This chapter offers a feminist re-reading of Lady Charlotte's debut novel and argues that, while she hoped to benefit from the financial profits of authorship, her primary purpose —in the interests of circulating her ideas as widely as possible — was to amalgamate the political discourse which cast the institution of marriage as servitude within the fabric of the contemporary courtship novel. Historian Joanne Bailey acknowledges that as early as 1735, the anonymous author of *The hardships of the English laws in relation to wives* had complained that the law put wives 'in a worse Condition than Slavery', subjected them to their husbands' unlimited power and allowed them 'no Property'.[19] Anne K. Mellor summarises the married woman's dilemma thus: 'Under the law, females were virtual non-persons: they could not make contracts, initiate lawsuits, or bear witness in court; they could not own property, keep the wages they earned, or possess custody of their children.'[20] According to Barbara Caine, while it was not until the modern period that the practice of feminist reading in nineteenth-century literature was evaluated extensively by literary scholars, 'even those active in the women's movement early in the century understood clearly the extent to which contemporary novelists — women novelists especially — articulated their interests and anxieties'.[21] Ann Heilmann advances this idea in 2014 by arguing that early proto-feminist novelists are on a continuum: that nineteenth-century political debates and revolutionary rhetoric evolved directly out of 'the intellectual challenge posed by the eighteenth-century "Bluestockings", the equality discourses of the French Revolution, and the political writings of Mary Wollstonecraft'.[22] In this chapter I argue that Lady Charlotte, who probably accessed much of this literature during her formative years, appropriated

[19] Joanne Bailey, 'Favoured or oppressed? *Married women, property and 'coverture' in England, 1660-1800'* in *Continuity and Change*, 17.3 (2002). <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0268416002004253>, p.352. Referred to hereafter as 'Favoured or oppressed?' According to Ruth Perry, *The Hardships of the English Laws in Relation to Wives* (London: Bowyer, 1735) was written by Sarah Chapone (1699-1764), who was a friend of Elizabeth Elstob (who knew Mary Astell), George Ballard, and Samuel Richardson. See: R. Perry, 'Privatized marriage and property relations', in *Novel Relations*: *The transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture, 1748–1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp.190–235 (p.199) <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511484438.006>. Referred to hereafter as 'Privatized Marriage'.

[20] Anne K. Mellor, 'Gender Boundaries', in *The Oxford Handbook of British Romanticism*, edited by David Duff (Oxford: OUP, 2018), p.205. Especially significant for this research is Mellor's assertion that '85-88 per cent of women in the Romantic era married' (p.206).

[21] Barbara Caine, 'Feminism and the Woman Question in Early Victorian England', in *Victorian Feminists* (Oxford: Clarendon Paperbacks, 1993), p.28.

[22] Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn, 'The Victorians, Sex, and Gender', in Juliet John (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Literary Culture*, Oxford Handbooks (2016; online edn, Oxford Academic, 2 June 2014), pp.161–177 (p.162) <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199593736.013.002>.

and consciously adapted the tropes of the popular novel both to progress previous political conversations and shape early nineteenth-century public debate about the institution of marriage and women's rights within it.

In her reappraisal of women's writing in eighteenth century (published in 2009), Vivien Jones creates an especially well-defined context for reconsidering Lady Charlotte's politically charged narrative of 1812. In her collection of essays, Jones positions Wollstonecraft's writing assiduously within the literary as well as the historical and political contexts; at the heart of her study is the idealisation of courtship and companionate marriage in eighteenth-century fiction with its ubiquitous inattention to such prosaic issues as money, compatibility and the legally binding nature of wedlock. According to Gillian Skinner, the courtship genre of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was popularised precisely because of its demonstrable willingness to overlook these issues in favour of focusing on sentimental discourse: 'Fiction was a fertile ground in which to produce the ideal of the companionate marriage, dealing as it so often did with the period of courtship and ending with the desired marriage, with scant regard for details of marriage settlements, every confidence in the happiness of the loving couple, and little investigation into the practicalities of daily married life'.[23] This is a view which has important implications for the provenance of Lady Charlotte's novel of marital breakdown in 1812. According to Jones, bad-marriage narrators other than Wollstonecraft — such as Charlotte Smith (1749-1806) — saw the political dangers to women and endeavoured to counteract the mollifying effect of courtship novels; Amy Garnai similarly sees Smith as a radical, describing her as a writer who, 'includes gender concerns in the political equation'.[24] In 2010 Andrew McInnes also advances these ideas, arguing that while Austen and contemporary courtship novelists such as Maria Edgeworth (1867–1849) alternately embrace and reject revolutionary discourse, their novels ultimately validate Wollstonecraft's politics; the incidence of these and other apparently conservative women writers in the early nineteenth century who developed and expanded Wollstonecraft's ideas, offers clear possibilities for my analysis of *Self-Indulgence*.[25] While work remains to be done on establishing the likelihood of Lady Charlotte having directly accessed Wollstonecraft's writing, her articulation of anti-establishment rhetoric within a conventional

[23] Gillian Skinner, 'Women's status as legal and civil subjects: 'A worse condition than slavery itself?' ', in Vivien Jones ed., *Women and literature in Britain, 1700 – 1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.96. Referred to hereafter as 'Women's status'.
[24] Amy Garnai, *Revolutionary Imaginings in the 1790s: Charlotte Smith, Mary Robinson, Elizabeth Inchbald* (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan Limited, 2009), p.18.
[25] Andrew McInnes, *Wollstonecraft's Ghost: The Fate of the Female Philosopher in the Romantic Period* (Taylor & Francis Group, London, 2017), p.98.

fictional framework implies her clear allegiance to the notion of gender equality, as does the commitment to improving women's legal rights which she embeds firmly in all of her narratives.

Lady Charlotte defines marriage for women exclusively in terms of their change of legal status from *feme sole* to *feme covert*, and her novels focus narrowly on problematic issues such as arranged marriage, the marriage contract, women's property rights and the entitlement of illegitimate children to inherit their parents' wealth and estates. In *Self-Indulgence*, the story of Sophia Dickens — an heiress bartered in marriage for her fortune — is shaped in considerable part by the law and as such, raises public awareness in 1812 of the systemic inequities which wedlock implied for women.[26] As will be discussed in greater detail later, numerous striking ideological and formal features in *Self-Indulgence* link Lady Charlotte's debut novel to pro-revolutionary *Desmond* (1797), a narrative in which Charlotte Smith focuses not on love and courtship, but on the institutional implications of matrimony. Smith's text was informed by her personal experience of gender inequality, particularly within the context of coverture and children's inheritance rights. She described herself as having been 'sold a legal prostitute' to a very wealthy bidder in the person of a London merchant who wanted his grandchildren to be gentry; she turned to writing as a response to economic necessity and personal abuse by her husband.[27] In 1812 it is apparent that Lady Charlotte's political novel was also shaped by the influence of Mary Hays (1759/ 60–1843), the late eighteenth-century political radical who circulated in the same social milieu as Mary Wollstonecraft and became her cultural apprentice.[28] Although Campbell's novels were all published in a post-revolutionary context, they subvert cultural norms and closely resemble Hays's narratives in 'mingling autobiography with philosophy […] to make 'philosophy' more humanly comprehensive, socially useful and politically effective'.[29]

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[26] '*Feme sole'* refers to a woman's legal status before she entered into matrimony; the terms also applied after she was widowed. See introduction, n.65 for Catherine Packham's definition of '*feme covert'* as well as Anne K. Mellor above (1.1 n.20).

[27] See: Charlotte Turner Smith, *Ethelinde, or The Recluse of the Lake* [1790], ed.by Ellen Moody (London: Valancourt Classics, 2016) [Kindle Ebook rep. from 2nd edition], introduction, xv. Referred to hereafter as 'Ethelinde'. This edition referred to in all instances.

[28] According to Mellor, Mary Hays 'based both her novels, *Emma Courtney* (1796) and *The Victim of Prejudice* (1799), on Wollstonecraft's program for social reform'. Anne K. Mellor, 'Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman and the women writers of her day', in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. by Claudia L. Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002 p.143. Referred to hereafter as 'Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman'.

[29] See: Gary Kelly, 'Mary Hays and Revolutionary Sensibility', in *Women, Writing and Revolution 1790-1827* (Oxford: OUP, 1993), p.100. Referred to hereafter as 'Mary Hays and Revolutionary Sensibility'.

Given the provenance of *Self-Indulgence*, Andrew McInnes's analysis of the fiction which iterated Wollstonecraft's radical agenda during a period of counter-revolutionary fervour is of particular critical relevance for this chapter. For McInnes, novels by women writers of the 1810s, including Burney's *The Wanderer* (1814) — which Lady Charlotte revered greatly — 'struggle to keep Wollstonecraft at a distance, at the same time as using her feminist arguments to drive their social critique.'[30] McInnes's claim that women writers became progressively more committed to the idea of iterating Wollstonecraft's ideas, even as contemporary society rejected all attempts to revive or circulate Jacobin ideals, offers many possibilities for my argument: 'as the century progresses, the way in which women writers approach these divisions becomes more sophisticated, turning criticism of transgressive female characters onto the sexual double standard which exempts men's behaviour from similar scrutiny'.[31] I propose that, like Austen and Burney, Lady Charlotte simultaneously embraces and self-distances from her revolutionary predecessor; by adapting conventional fictional discourse, however, she proffers (under cover of the didactic mode) a far more radical agenda than any of her female contemporaries. In 1812 Lady Charlotte creates a new heroine who, after being commodified in marriage, manages to escape from the confines of coverture to reject men, matrimony and religion: *Self-Indulgence* thus reshapes the courtship genre to challenge the values of a culture which tolerated, and even encouraged, a man's sexual transgressions while judging and circumscribing the conduct of the women whom they exploited.

Because *Self-Indulgence* has remained out of circulation in this country since 1812, a plot summary now follows along with a brief commentary upon the novel's historical and cultural contexts, as well as the author's use of modes:

We join the novel when, in a stock sentimental situation, metropolitan banker's daughter – Sophia Dickens–is entering into a loveless marriage under pressure from self-motivated parents, greedy for financial gain and social advancement.[32] Her fiancé is the handsome but detached Irish

[30] McInnes, *Wollstonecraft's Ghost*, p.174. For Bury's reverential attitude towards Burney's novel, see also: thesis chapter 2 introductory section, p.85 ll. 9-12 and Amy Culley, ed., *Women's Court and Society Memoirs*, 9 vols (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2009-10). Part 1. Vols i-iv. Part II. Vols v-ix. Part 1. Vols i and ii [Lady Charlotte Bury] *Diary illustrative of the times of George the* Fourth (1838), ii 280-281. Referred to hereafter as 'Women's Court and Society Memoirs'.

[31] Ibid.

[32] It should be mentioned at this point that, possibly as a result of a lack of editorial control, *Self-Indulgence* is affected by several technical flaws: the epigraphs and chapter headings disappear after the first few chapters, for example, and the spelling of Sir Harry Carrisfort's surname

aristocrat, Granville Donneraile. The wedding ceremony takes place in 1806 in London, we are told, and the early, unhappy marriage scenes in the Donnerailes' Mayfair home are followed shortly by a backstory which chronicles the anti-hero's life as a grand tourist on the continent. We are informed by the omniscient narrator that, having given up his legal studies, Donneraile goes to France in 1802 where he meets and seduces the orphaned Roman Catholic Corissande de Montbazon who, as a fugitive from the Terror, holds clear appeal for a counter-revolutionary readership. It is possible that Corissande corresponds to the Regent's morganatic wife, the Roman Catholic Mrs Maria Anne Fitzherbert (1756–1837), to whom he was married in a secret ceremony on 15th December, 1785, and whom he forsook ten years later.[33] In a partial fictionalisation of Maria Fitzherbert's experience, Donneraile alternately woos and torments Corissande in France; first of all, he vacillates wildly and refuses to commit to her, then (after marrying her secretly on the continent), legally abducts her to England. At this point, we are told, 'It seemed then, for the first time, that she actually became his property' (*SI* ip.85).[34]

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changes to 'Carisfort' in the second volume of the text. Except when quoting directly from the text, this chapter uses 'Carrisfort' throughout.

[33] According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, morganatic marriage is 'a legally valid marriage between a male member of a sovereign, princely, or noble house and a woman of lesser birth or rank, with the provision that she shall not thereby accede to his rank and that the children of the marriage shall not succeed to their father's hereditary dignities, fiefs, and entailed property.' Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2023, April 16). morganatic marriage. *Encyclopedia Britannica*<https://www.britannica.com/topic/morganatic-marriage>.

[34] While the narrator does not state that Corissande has left the continent for England under duress, the combination of words and deeds at work beneath the conservative surface of the text suggest that she has been coerced. Far from voluntarily undertaking the journey as the wife of Donneraile, Corissande has benefited from very few practical options: the anti-hero manipulates then secures his quarry with a range of complex deceptions. He starts by grooming her and accusing her of coquetry (or 'coyness') only to abandon her cruelly when he returns to London to explore more financially lucrative possibilities. So effectively is Corissande shamed about crimes she has not committed that she self-recriminates and strives desperately to recover Donneraile's favour – all of which makes it abundantly easy for the anti-hero, when it suits him, to assume complete proprietorship over her. By choosing not to stereotype him as a villain, Bury follows in the footsteps of contemporary writers such as Mary Brunton (1778-1818) – a novelist who divides the focus of the narrative between the interiority and the actions of the errant male to educate the reader more effectively in the realities of libertinism. As opposed to deluding herself, Corissande (contrary to the tropes of the seduction novel) actually falls victim to masculine deception and self-misrepresentation: in the same way as Wollstonecraft's Maria had been manoeuvred into marriage by the self-motivated Venables, Donneraile's first wife has been 'placed in his power' by 'the sophistry of love' (*SI* ii p.62). The political point Bury strives to dramatise is that a man who married obtained full proprietorial rights over his wife: if he so wished, he could incarcerate or even traffic her under the legal terms of coverture. In *Self-Indulgence*, the anti-hero is thus able to shift Corissande around on a whim; well-rehearsed in the practices of libertinism and all-too-ready to assume the demeanour of a legally married man, he is able to exploit Corissande and Sophia for both financial and sexual reasons. In so doing, the

In order to unsettle the assumptions of the readership and demonstrate that the gendered legal system in England extended its injustices to women of all classes, Lady Charlotte punctuates her narrative with allusions to the highest profile marriage breakdown in the land: that of the Regent and his wife, Princess Caroline of Brunswick. It is possible to contextualise events at this point in the plot by cross-referencing the novel with Lady Charlotte's non-fictional memoir of life at the royal court: the *Diary Illustrative of the Times of George IV (Diary 1838)*.[35] In the first volume of this account, she records Caroline's poignant recollections of the royal wedding night of Wednesday 8th April 1795, during the course of which her husband consummated the marriage then fell unconscious:

> "Judge," said she, "what it was to have a drunken husband on one's wedding-day, and one who passed the greatest part of his bridal night under the grate where he fell, and where I left him. If anybody say to me at dis moment will you pass your life over again, or be killed, I would choose death".[36]

According to the *Diary 1838*, many exchanges of a similar timbre took place between Lady Charlotte and Princess Caroline in the period 1810–15. The royal marriage had been doomed from the outset by the Regent's self-interest and libertinism; as Lady Charlotte's novel discloses, any man who wished to marry simply in order to seize his wife's property, could do so with impunity at the time because of the prevalence of an unequal and gendered system of matrimonial law. It was as late as 1795, nevertheless, when George finally made a deal with Parliament to enter into matrimony and produce a legitimate heir in return for the payment of his colossal debts. He subsequently persecuted his wife in public, however, and maintained a rakish and libertine lifestyle which contributed to the early breakdown of the marriage. Princess Caroline, who managed to conceive before the brief union collapsed, gave birth exactly nine months after her wedding to a daughter: Princess Charlotte Augusta of Wales (7 January 1796–6 November 1817). In *Self-Indulgence*, the plot follows a similar trajectory: the moment Corissande bears a single child to her husband in London, Donneraile abandons her, but not before delegating responsibility for breaking the news of his bigamy to his dandyish friend and accomplice, Sir Harry Carrisfort

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narrative maintains, he is comprehensively aided by social mores, the statutes governing matrimonial law in England having been designed exclusively by men for the purpose of entrenching the advantages they enjoy by the mere virtue of their gender. See also: 1.3 n.75.

[35] [Lady Charlotte Bury], *Diary Illustrative of the Times of George the Fourth, Interspersed with Original Letters from the Late Queen Caroline, and from Various Other Distinguished Persons*, 4 vols (London: H. Colburn, 1838). Hereafter referred to as 'Diary 1838'.

[36] Bury, *Diary 1838*, pp.24–5.

(upon whom he also tries to foist her). Lady Charlotte recounts in the *Diary1838* that during her 'lying–in' Caroline received a message on 30 April 1797, via Lord Cholmondeley — George's chamberlain — which informed her of her husband's 'desire to live separately from his wife.'[37] Caroline recalls this cruelty with bitter stoicism: 'I left Carlton House and went to Charlton […] everybody blamed me' (*Diary1838,* i, 25).

In the novel, Donneraile next abandons Sophia, who soon afterwards receives a letter appealing for help from Corissande's faithful retainer, Pierre la Roche. At this point she, like Princess Caroline, is faced with her husband's emissary whom she forces to confess the truth. On learning that she is her husband's second spouse, she denounces him and altruistically sets off in search of Corissande so she can restore full rights to her as Donneraile's lawful wife. Sophia henceforth dedicates herself to supporting Corissande, helping her, in the first instance, to return to France after she has failed to earn the money to pay her own way. Both wives travel together with their children; their arrival is followed, soon afterwards, by the deaths of both Corissande and the son Sophia shares with Donneraile. After confessing to his crimes in a letter which instructs his father, Lord Donneraile, to recognise as heir the son he shares with Corissande, Donneraile commits constructive suicide by fighting to the death against Napoleon's army in Portugal. Sophia commits the rest of her life to overseeing the upbringing of Corissande's son in England.

1.2 The critical context

Self-Indulgence was published by G.R. Clarke in Edinburgh and in London by Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, & Brown. In the previous year, *Self-Control* (1811) by Mary Brunton (1778-1818) had been issued by the same publishing houses and was an instant bestseller ('three editions and 3,000 copies in six months').[38] Both of these sister Caledonians address gender issues in their debut novels: under cover of the moral-domestic genre, they also 'contribute to the debates about education in much of the fiction published at this time'.[39] Even more innovatively, I will contend, Lady Charlotte modifies the tropes which had popularised Brunton's commercially successful novel of high life to shape a politically subversive commentary upon legal injustice. The single surviving contemporary review of *Self-Indulgence* comments positively on the text,

[37] George James Cholmondeley, 1st Marquess of Cholmondeley (1749–1827). See also: 1.3 n.118.
[38] Kathryn Sutherland, 'Jane Austen and the invention of the serious modern novel', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, ed. by Thomas Keymer and Jon Mee (Oxford: OUP, 2004), pp.244–262 (p.257).
[39] Carol Anderson and Aileen M. Riddell, 'The Other Great Unknowns: Women Fiction Writers of the Early Nineteenth Century' in Gifford Douglas and McMillan Dorothy, eds. *A History of Scottish Women's Writings* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), p.181.

nevertheless, emphasising significant formal and imaginative similarities which exist between *Self Control* and *Self-Indulgence*: 'The title sufficiently indicates that the plan of it was suggested by a former work of the same kind, recently published in this city with almost unprecedented success'.[40] The article appeared in the *Scots Magazine and Edinburgh Literary Miscellany* in June 1812 and assures the reader both that 'the story is somewhat new, and is conducted with considerable interest' and that there will be no attempt 'to anticipate him by analysis of it' (*Scots Magazine*, p.449). This is intended to pique the reader's curiosity and boost sales by stimulating speculation: the reviewer's generosity indicates that Lady Charlotte's appraiser could have been known to her and was possibly a member of the Edinburgh social and literary milieu in which she circulated. The quality of the humour in *Self-Indulgence* (in the early representation of the vulgar, acquisitive Dickens family) along with the more 'serious' pervading tone and cast of the bad-marriage narration, receive pertinent critical attention: these are characteristics, we are told which 'exhibit our author's powers of composition' (ibid).The text is also described as being 'considerably superior to the ordinary class of such productions'; most significant of all for the case I am making for the novel's originality is the reviewer's acknowledgement that 'the story - is somewhat new and conducted with considerable interest' (ibid).

With particular shrewdness, the *Scots Magazine* singles out Donneraile's characterisation for special mention:

> In the hero of *Self-Indulgence*, we see exhibited a defect of character the most common, perhaps, to which human nature is liable. Without any propensities decidedly bad, he is yet unable to resist the impulse of the moment: whether it be the allurement of pleasure, the dread of shame, or the indulgence of ease. By giving way to these impulses, he is gradually seduced into a course of conduct decidedly criminal, and involves in irretrievable wretchedness, himself, and all those to whom he is most attached (*Scots Magazine*, ibid).

The reviewer here readily acknowledges the destructive effect that the dandy's conduct has on 'himself, and all those to whom he is most attached' (see above); consistent with contemporary attitudes towards gender, however, the focus is on the anti-hero's legal transgression in committing bigamy, not his moral misdemeanours: this is because, according to received standards of masculine conduct, bigamy was prohibited while rakish behaviour was permissible.

[40] [Anon.], *Self-Indulgence; a Tale of the Nineteenth Century,* Scots Magazine and Edinburgh Literary Miscellany, Jan. 1804–July 1817, pp.449-453 (p.449) [accessed 9 July 2017]. Referred to hereafter as 'Scots Magazine'. Subsequent references in-text.

Lady Charlotte will prove in the action of her novel that dilettantism, too, is 'decidedly criminal' (ibid.). *Self-Indulgence* thus attempts to correct received notions of morality and challenge the sexual double standard by characterising the 'winning rogue' of sentimental and picaresque fiction as a criminal who, far from stumbling into hapless scrapes, destroys the lives of 'the two victims' who find themselves inveigled or traded into marriage with him (*SI* ii 200).

In his choice of vocabulary, the reviewer makes a surreptitious connection between Donneraile's moral laxity and the conduct of the Regent; such a 'defect of character' is perfectly excusable, he postulates, because in men it is 'the most common' (*Scots Magazine*, ibid.). In other words, debauchery is now standardised in society because England is presided over by an exploitative libertine who populates his court with rakes, fortune hunters and dandies. In the characterisation of her anti-hero, Lady Charlotte both articulates her antipathy to the glorification of male sexual power and aligns herself with Jane Austen (1775-1817), Amelia Opie (1769–1853) and Maria Edgeworth (1767-1849): didactic authors who similarly perceived the problems in contemporary society, throughout the British nations, to originate in the corruptions of aristocratic court culture.[41] While the conservative *Scots Magazine* insists on excusing Donneraile's libertinism, Lady Charlotte counterclaims that this is an anti-hero who is not so much embellished by 'propensities decidedly bad' as defined by them (*Scots Magazine*, ibid.). Like Austen's Robert Ferrars and Brunton's Hargrave, he is morally dissolute and closely resembles the nation's dandy regnant, the Prince Regent: 'Boundless indulgence and an entire freedom from control, made him what he afterwards became — the most selfish of human beings'.[42]

While no other reviews of *Self-Indulgence* survive, Peter Garside's bibliographical history references a detailed plot summary (recast as 'a Brief Sketch') which appeared in the contemporary court circular and women's magazine, *La Belle Assemblée*, in July 1812.[43] What emerges most usefully from this piece — which amounts to little more than an extended puff — is the inherent problems the author of *Self-Indulgence* encountered in offering her subversive manifesto to a prosperous book-buying and circulating-library readership. As part of an attempt to navigate the sensitivities of a politically squeamish demographic, the reviewer in *La Belle Assemblée* softens Donneraile's crimes and glosses over the contentious political issues at the heart of the novel: the first transgression to be sanitised is the anti-hero's sexual compulsions. For

[41] See: Roger Sales, *Jane Austen and Representations of Regency England* (London: Routledge, 1994), p.77.
[42] Lady C.S.M. Bury, *The Murdered Queen!*, p.5.
[43] Garside, p.363.

La Belle Assemblée — like the *Scots Magazine* — he is not a predator who grooms then entraps his victim, but a fundamentally decent chap who is a victim of circumstance. Apparently deaf to the ironic narrative voice, *La Belle Assemblée* maintains that when Donneraile finds himself married to his first wife he is not in pursuit of sexual gratification but in a fix, which he intends to resolve at a later date:

> Donneraile hastened to avail himself of her consent, and they were united by a Roman Catholic priest. Donneraile was indeed aware of the illegality of the ceremony, but at the time it took place he did not mean to avail himself of it; and he took his bride to England, determined to reveal his marriage and present her to his family.[44]

While *La Belle Assemblée* hurriedly glosses over the nuances of the anti-hero's characterisation to make the novel more acceptable to a mainstream readership, Donneraile, worried about his inheritance, has no intention in the novel of formalising matters with his family. In *La Belle Assemblée* we also find that Donneraile's father, the next character to be rewritten by the reviewer's rhetorical pen, is suddenly no longer threatening to disown his only child if he refuses to marry Sophia Dickens for her money: the compulsion to 'chuse between a wife or a father's curse' (*SI* i p.24) no longer exists. Lord Donneraile's pursuit of financial gain is now refashioned as 'the wish of the Peer to unite his son to the daughter of a wealthy citizen, in order to secure to him that affluence which he could not otherwise enjoy'; the reviewer omits to mention, however, that to enjoy the said 'affluence', Granville Donneraile must first find a way of discarding his innocent first wife.[45] At this point in the novel, the anti-hero practises the same self-indulgence and irresolution that previously caused him, in the very process of seducing Corissande, to pick her up and drop her several times; instead of confessing to his crimes, however, he deadens his conscience with alcohol at the family's seat in rural Ireland. *La Belle Assemblée*, nevertheless, recasts him as 'the idol of the fashionable society in which the family lived'; far from plunging headlong into oblivion, he is one who 'merely suffered months to pass in a state of weak irresolution'.[46] *Self-Indulgence* may be centrally concerned with the destruction of women by illegal marriage and the laws of coverture; for the benefit of its politically orthodox readership, however, *La Belle Assemblée* insists that the text is merely a novel of improvement which succeeds morally because the anti-hero eventually receives a just and suitable punishment.

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[44] Anon., 'Brief Sketch of "Self-Indulgence." A novel'. *La Belle Assemblée*: *or Court and Fashionable Magazine* 6, Jul 1812; ProQuest p.20. Referred to hereafter as 'Brief Sketch'.
[45] *Self-Indulgence,* p.20.
[46] 'Brief Sketch', ibid.

Lady Charlotte would have been pleased, all the same, at the emphasis both reviews place upon the popular Gothic plot elements and didactic asides which suffuse the text; the readiness of the *Scots Magazine* to accredit 'habits of self-indulgence' to the anti-hero – and not the women in the novel — would have been more than gratifying. While Lady Charlotte's authorship was acknowledged amongst Edinburgh literati and by personal friends such as Walter Scott (1771-1832), Matthew Lewis (1775-1818) and Susan Ferrier, her novel does not appear to have attracted much formal critical attention outside the Scottish capital. Whig hostess and salonniere, Lady Holland, Elizabeth Vassall Fox (1770 –1845), is known to have written to her son on 9th July, 1826, that London society had been generally dismissive towards Lady Charlotte's first two publications; the author of *Self-Indulgence* and *Conduct is Fate* would have regarded the merest inclination on the part of the public to read her novels as a success, notwithstanding.[47] Although early nineteenth-century reviews of her corpus mainly focussed on the fiction she published with Henry Colburn after 1828, Lady Charlotte's publications and the contemporary novel of manners were acknowledged to have coincided on many points; I contend that her later texts (almost all of which ran to multiple editions) traced their descent directly from *Self-Indulgence* — a novel which, published only fifteen years after the death of Wollstonecraft, reactivated and disseminated revolutionary discourse to a politically and morally conservative middle-class readership by borrowing from, and successfully refurbishing, the contemporary courtship genre.

1.3 Bury's treatment of marriage problems and the heroine

While *Self-Indulgence* is energised by the author's determination to discredit the entrenched moral values of a culture which tolerated a man's debauchery but punished his victim, her concerns find egress in 1812 in the interrogation of abuses such as illegal marriage and bigamy, incidences of which doubled during the first two decades of the nineteenth century.[48] Amongst these cases, according to legal historian, Rebecca Probert, was an increase in 'a smaller but still significant number where the motivation for going through a second ceremony of marriage seems to have been the property of the second spouse'.[49] Judicial cases received extensive publication

[47] See: Alison Adburgham, *Silver Fork Society: Fashionable Life and Literature from 1814–1849* (London: Constable, 1983), p.121.

[48] In her study of Old Bailey trials Probert finds that the number of bigamous marriages to reach court doubled in first three decades of 19th century. During the1810s, additionally there were no cases in which it was claimed that second spouses knew. Rebecca Probert, *Double Trouble: The Rise and Fall of the Crime of Bigamy* (London: Selden Society, 2015), Table 2, p.25. Referred to hereafter as 'Double Trouble'.

[49] Probert, *Double Trouble*, p.12.

after reaching court, and Lady Charlotte's novel arises directly out of her awareness of a growing problem: with increasing frequency, men were entering into illegal second marriages, it was clear, not as a response to marital breakdown but because of the automatic monetary benefits which the laws of coverture conferred upon them.

The problem of bigamy, Probert maintains, originated mainly in the fact that when a marriage broke down there were few viable escape routes. Incidences in which there seemed to be some financial exploitation were clearly scams, however, deliberately fraudulent marriages accounting for around ten per cent of the total cases of bigamy from 1820 to 1850. Lady Charlotte thus begins her cautionary narrative by placing emphasis on the anti-hero's dandyish 'aversion to matrimony' (*SI* i p.22) and his determination to jettison his responsibilities as soon as practicable. During his continental tour, which takes place in the first volume of the novel, Donneraile agrees to marry Corissande out of purely sexual motives, soon reneging on the betrothal by claiming such pretexts as differences in nationality and religion and the need for his parents' consent — a permission he neither attempts nor (as will be discussed later) needs to obtain. Unlike his victim, he is clearly aware that new statutes had been passed into law during the previous decades; while the object of the legislation had been to standardise the matrimonial process and reduce the incidence of illegal marriage in England, the system, as the novel will show, served only to increase the opportunities available to men who wished to renege after entering into a legally binding commitment.[50] The novel's action is thus propelled from the outset by the author's efforts to raise women's awareness not only of the disempowerments of coverture, but of the chicanery of English legal codes.

Probert explains that after the passing of the Clandestine Marriages Act in 1753, English law did not recognize any marriage until 1836 other than one celebrated according to the rites of the Anglican Church (although there were exemptions for Quakers and Jews).[51] The Act had been conceived by Lord Hardwicke (1690–1764), the then Lord Chancellor, who had long been critical of clandestine marriage and wished to put an end to illegal practices. Viewing the problem exclusively from the point of view of the woman involved, Lady Charlotte confronts then discredits Hardwicke's Bill, claiming that the practice of bigamy and irregular marriage was still

[50] See: Ian Ward, 'Unnatural Mothers: Hardwicke's Children', in *Sex, Crime and Literature in Victorian England* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2015), p.96. Available from: ProQuest Ebook Central. [30 November 2022].
[51] Rebecca Probert, 'The Impact Of The Marriage Act Of 1753: Was It Really "A Most Cruel Law For The Fair Sex"?' *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 38.2 (2005), pp.247–262 (p.254). Referred to hereafter as 'The Impact Of The Marriage Act Of 1753'.

widespread in England long after the legislation had been passed. Modern historical research confirms that the incidence of illegal marriage increased as a direct consequence of the Act with up to a third of marriages between 1753 and 1836 considered illegal and void.[52] This was because, as Stone explains, after 1753 a marriage had to meet a significantly increased range of requirements to be legal. In the process of inveigling Corissande into marriage, Donneraile surreptitiously contravenes the Act's main mandate that unless the parties had achieved their majority, parental consent was required; his attempt to sabotage the union by neglecting to apply to his parents for consent nevertheless fails because, as the narrator points out, 'In the spring of the year 1802, Mr Donneraile became of age' (*SI* i 76). Donneraile's violation of Corissande's virtue both iterates sentimental and Gothic tropes and corresponds with strategies George employed in order to free himself from Maria Fitzherbert to marry Princess Caroline in 1795. He had been prohibited by the Royal Marriages Act of 1772 from marrying his first wife: because he was heir to the throne, he was required to obtain permission first from the monarch. While Lady Charlotte's anti-hero implicitly must concede on this point, George would eventually find, to his relief, that his escape from Mrs Fitzherbert was assured not by one, but two additional acts of parliament: the Act of Settlement of 1701 and the Act of Union of 1707, both of which prevented him from honouring his morganatic marriage because of her Catholic faith.[53] As the novel progresses, Donneraile will likewise deny the legality of his marriage to Corissande because the ceremony has taken place not in an Anglican, but a Roman Catholic Church.

Lady Charlotte was sufficiently concerned to make use of the *roman-à-clef* both to discredit the Regent's behaviour and to dramatise through fiction the problems caused by English law to women throughout society. As the novel will show, the legislation of 1753 aided and abetted duplicitous men by complicating, to the point of absurdity, the means of achieving a legal and valid matrimonial union. To make her political point, the author focuses upon the consequences and not the technicalities of the law, consciously rekindling for the purpose of jogging public memory the many other crimes and misdemeanours which had scandalised high society in the late-eighteenth century. Notorious deserter, Henry Farrer, for example, had feloniously married Mary Goldsmith in 1781: when he formed an adulterous liaison with Mary Eleanor Bowes in 1786, his wife, forced by economic extremity into prostitution, mounted a high-profile campaign against

[52] Lawrence Stone, 'From the Marriage Act of 1753 to 1868', in *Road to Divorce: England 1530-1987* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), pp.135-137. Referred to hereafter as 'Road to Divorce'. See also Kelly Hager, *Dickens and the Rise of Divorce*, p.57.

[53] Both the Act of Settlement of 1701 and the Act of Union of 1707 precluded anyone married to a Catholic from succeeding to the throne.

him for abandonment. While it is unlikely that Lady Charlotte would have been aware of the initial publicity, news of the court case could well have reached her when Farrer managed to obtain a divorce on the grounds of Mary Goldsmith's adultery in 1796 (the year of her own marriage).[54] Bury records in her *Diary 1838* that in 1797 Prince George, as if taking note of Farrer's success, subjected Caroline — the second of his unwanted wives — to a very public humiliation by compelling her to move out of her marital home in Carlton House in St. James's, leaving her daughter behind (i p.43)[55] . She was subsequently implicated perniciously in the 'Delicate Investigation' of 1806–7 when, to establish grounds for divorce, he alleged that she had had an illegitimate son. When Lady Charlotte records in the *Diary 1805–10* that she first met the Princess in September 1808, she expresses her surprise at the domineering demeanour of Caroline's mother ('having heard my mother often speak of her in terms of friendship').[56] Caroline's timidity consolidated what Lady Charlotte had already observed about the disempowerment of women by wedlock: it was a disenfranchisement which, besides dispossessing them of money and property, eroded their personal confidence as well as their status as citizens.

To evade the possibility of controversy and to circulate her agenda more widely, Lady Charlotte appropriated certain formal aspects of the fiction of well-known popular authors to make her novel appear politically orthodox. *Self-Indulgence* was published in the year in which Maria Edgeworth's best-selling national novel, *The Absentee* (1812), appeared. At this time Edgeworth was already an extraordinarily successful professional author; in recognition of her commercial flair, Lady Charlotte connotes moral orthodoxy by settling upon a single-word title for her novel. In a post-revolutionary context, codifications such as *Self-Control* (the name of Mary Brunton's bestseller of 1811) made a novel more marketable because it signified the writer's intervention in anti-Jacobin discourses which counterbalanced emotion and reason; Lady Charlotte thus targeted the market for educational fiction by entering into dialogue with the quotidian moral-domestic genre in which 'much of the content…matches the opening title pages'.[57] The novel's sub-title — 'a tale of the nineteenth-century' — also suggests verisimilitude and mimics the practices of Amelia Opie as well as Edgeworth herself (who both preferred 'tale' with its moralistic overtones

[54] See Wendy Moore, *Wedlock* (London: Wiedenfeld &Nicolson, 1988).
[55] According to the *Diary 1838*, Caroline moved first to The Old Rectory in Charlton, then Montague House in Greenwich, relocating again in 1808 to Kensington Palace. Amy Culley, *Women's Court and Society Memoirs*, i p.43.
[56] Bury, *Diary 1805–10*, p.111.
[57] See: Anthony Mandal, *Jane Austen and the Popular Novel: The Determined Author* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p.26.

to 'novel' with its dubious political connotations).[58] Lady Charlotte additionally signals the novel's moral purpose by introducing the text with an epigraph about the wisdom of self-restraint by eighteenth-century aristocratic dramatist, essayist and novelist, Mme.de Genlis: 'Heureux qui ne livre son coeur qu'a des sentiments doux et modérés et qui scait se garantir des passions violentes! ('happy is the one who favours a mild and equable temperament and endeavours to ward off violent passions!').[59] Her intention was to persuade readers that the work they had in hand was a cautionary tale about seduction; what they found instead was a subversive narrative based upon the abandonment and social problems experienced in England by a romantic French aristocrat — a figure whose characterisation as a victim of Robespierre's Terror, far from endorsing anti-Jacobin discourse, covertly challenges established orthodoxies. The underlying principle of — or key moment in — Lady Charlotte's proto-feminist novel also subverts the apparent didacticism of the text because 'self-indulgence' refers to the libertinism of men, not the moral weaknesses of women. Despite being orphaned by a state whose hostilities with Britain had only very recently ceased, Corissande's plight masks her fundamentally dissenting role as a married woman who, like the Regent's rejected wife, has been imported to England then disempowered by coverture and the statutes of English law. When Donneraile abandons his French wife in London, exploiting the chicanery of a gendered and unequal legal system in order to marry again for money, the reader, instead of being entertained, weighs the anti-hero's crimes against the scandals in which they originate. Far from making a moral example out of the seducer's victims, Lady Charlotte's novel endorses his exploited wives and, under cover of a popular narrative mode, forces her readership to re-evaluate the cultural frameworks which empower men in English society at their wives' expense.

The author's attempt to discredit English customs and laws by using the conventions of contemporary cultural discourse is audacious; despite the novel's technical inconsistencies, Lady Charlotte — confident in her camouflage — grounds the novel in reality, reanimating in her very opening pages the instantly recognisable events leading to the betrothal of George and Caroline. City banker, Mr Dickens, who 'longs for nothing else than to unite his daughter to fashion', (*SI* i 29) pressurises Sophia into accepting the first marriage proposal she receives. Caroline had similarly been coerced by her father to accept George's hand: 'he would not suffer me to slight

[58] Ibid.
[59] Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis, *Théâtre À L'Usage Des Jeunes Personnes* (Paris: M. Lambert and F. J. Baudoin, 1780), II, p.198. Own translation. Although the epigraphs and chapter headings disappear after chapter twelve (probably because of editorial oversight), Lady Charlotte references other works extensively in volume one.

it'.[60] To discredit and satirise the practice of commodifying women through arranged marriage, the novel opens as Sophia's father celebrates the betrothal 'in the full majesty of a new coat and wig' at the family's vulgar city home in '4, Wellborough Place, Islington' (*SI* i 33). *The Scots Magazine* had remarked upon the effectiveness of comedy as a device in Lady Charlotte's narrative; readers of the contemporary courtship novel would doubtlessly have been diverted also by the boisterous antics of Donneraile and his sidekick, Sir George Carrisfort (whose characterisation is possibly an allusion to George 'Beau' Brummell (1778–1840), the Regent's dandyish friend and president of Watchier's Club in St. James's). In a cross-over from contemporary fashionable culture into fiction, Donneraile duly invites his 'dear friend to dine with him at Watier's [sic]... then nobly dosed him with claret, till he forgot his cares under the table' (*SI* i 13–14). The anti-hero debauches himself in response to threats from his father—a sentimental plot device which raises the expectation that he will instead marry for love; in a more nuanced reworking of the trope, he is ultimately persuaded into marriage with the daughter of the wealthy, but vulgar, London banker by his fashionable, aristocratic mother, Lady Donneraile. Far from signifying affability, however, Donneraile's rakish conduct in the dining, gambling and drinking zone around St James's Square and Piccadilly is driven by a profound corruption that, far from ending in married felicity, will eventually end in tragedy for both of the innocent women he ensnares.

I contend that, because the author had been free of her abusive first marriage for only three years at the time of the novel's appearance, the characterisations at the heart of *Self-Indulgence* were shaped definitively by the author's lived experiences during the years 1795 to 1809. Second in seriousness only to the physical assaults she suffered at Col. John Campbell's hands was the

[60] *Diary 1838*, i p.32. In what could be interpreted as a subversion of contemporary courtship tropes, Sophia demands to get to know Donneraille before accepting him, shutting herself away in her prospective in-laws' library instead of allowing herself to be rushed to the altar. Far from allowing Sophia to delay marriage as a mark of respect for her autonomy, however, both families collude in her commodification. Mr Dickens even congratulates himself for having prepared his daughter for a life of ornament: she is, we are told by the ironising narrator, 'as frivolous as Nature, and a fashionable boarding school, could make her' (*SI* i p.1). While Edgeworth and Ferrier sanction a conservative education and upbringing for girls as a means of preparing them for matrimony, Bury critiques the materialism and corruption of both the mercantile and leisured classes by characterising Sophia as a reluctant bride and keen autodidact: in *Self-Indulgence*, education is both the heroine's means of buying time before matrimony and, even more crucially, escaping from it after the event. In suggesting that the heroine's father eventually prevails in his attempt to arrange his daughter's marriage, the narrative appeals to a politically conservative readership but simultaneously creates space for the author to protest under cover of the courtship mode against entrenched gender values which restricted girls' access to education and cut off their wider economic options.

alcoholism which consumed him during the course of their marriage. Lady Charlotte chronicles the circumstances of her husband's protracted and harrowing death in the private diary she kept throughout the marriage, and what emerges from her account is the fact that he died of his own excesses. At an inn in Edinburgh in 1809, where he eventually became bedridden, the remedy recommended by his physicians was 'the complete abstention from alcohol', a prescription which fills Lady Charlotte with alarm and dread.[61] An especially disturbing detail in her account is her repeatedly unsuccessful attempts to subdue her husband as he deteriorated: 'About two o'clock he began again to grow ill — again he called for brandy and water and with more restlessness and violence, he jumped out of bed and threatened to leap out at the window'.[62] Lady Charlotte's response at this point to the mandate, 'the only cure was a complete & total abstinence from all strong liquor' suggests that she had encountered this situation before: 'I begged of them to think what a violent mode of cure it was to take it away at once.'[63] Her account here points to the quotidian torments she suffered during what amounted to a period of matrimonial captivity; it was only in 1818, however, that it emerged that she had been silenced on the subject: 'never to mortal ear did I breathe his disgrace or my wretchedness 'till heaven had parted us'.[64] Only three years after John Campbell's death she uses fiction both to preface this harrowing disclosure and to caution other women about entering into wedlock: an institution which, once embraced, afforded them neither personal protection nor legal means of escape.

By transferring her autobiographical experiences to *Self-Indulgence*, Lady Charlotte enlightens and warns her readership about the dangers posed to inexperienced girls by acquisitive and predatory men. While her debut novel appropriates and adapts the narrative conventions of the contemporary courtship genre, its descent can be traced far more directly from the proto-feminist fiction of Mary Wollstonecraft and Charlotte Smith. To enhance her protest, Lady Charlotte constructs a narrative in which the anti-hero is deliberately made to resemble toxic, abusive husbands such as Venables in Wollstonecraft's *The Wrongs of Woman; or, Maria* (1798) and, as will be discussed later, Verney in Smith's *Desmond*.[65] In *Self-Indulgence* matrimony rewards neither Corissande nor Sophia for their virtue; as soon as she is married, Donneraile moves his

[61] *Diary 1805–10,* p.127.
[62] Ibid., p.125.
[63] Ibid., p.127.
[64] Letter to Eliza Gordon-Cumming from Lady Charlotte Bury, Florence, 10th Feb 1818. NLS, Dep.175, box 164/1.
[65] See: Mary Wollstonecraft *Mary* and *The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria,* ed. by Gary Kelly (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2009). Also: Charlotte Turner Smith, *Desmond*, edited by Antje Blank and Janet Todd (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1997).

French wife — with resistless force — to London, where he stashes her away on the outskirts in a villa in Richmond. He then retreats to his symbolically named Irish estate 'Montrevel', where, as noted above, he sinks into physical excess and dissipation. His conduct is nuanced, however: rather than remodelling Gothic villainy, Lady Charlotte relives her misery in marriage to represent the realities of alcoholism:

> In the evening, either exhilarated to wildness, or sunk to stupefaction by wine, the mere pleasure of the moment, or the indulgence of perfect indolence, alternately occupied the hours. In such a life, there is no time for reflection, no stimulus to noble or laudable pursuit; the mind becomes enervated, the body relaxed, and human nature degraded. (*SI* ii 113-4)

While the narrator here articulates a serious social message, the tone is deliberately sententious, Lady Charlotte punctuating the text with didactic asides to subsume her radical critique within the protocols of moral-domestic fiction. The text is shaped decisively, however, by her tacit conviction that the exaggerated villains of Gothic fiction do not prepare girls very effectively for their encounters with real men. As already noted, the *Scots Magazine* review traces the provenance of *Self-Indulgence* to Mary Brunton's *Self-Control*; as if anticipating Lady Charlotte's anti-hero, Brunton's seducer is simultaneously extreme and nuanced – he is 'the spoiled child of a weak mother, and he continued to retain one characteristic of spoiled children; some powerful stimulant was with him a necessary of life'.[66] We are told that Donneraile, similarly, is his father's sole heir; because he lacks the moral fibre required to thrive in retirement and domesticity, he thus gives up his legal studies in favour of dilettantism prior to embarking upon a grand tour. He is, Lady Charlotte's omniscient narrator informs us, 'a man, who felt as though he lost his existence when no violent emotion excited him to action […] Novelty was necessary to him' (*SI* i 121). The characterisation is further complicated, however, by the company Lady Charlotte's anti-hero keeps; his dandyism, we are told by the omniscient narrator, is of an 'assumed character'; (*SI* i 17) even if 'dissipation usurped the nobler feelings of nature in after life', he is, during the early scenes in fashionable Mayfair, 'unpolluted by such contamination' (*SI* i 94). Donneraile is initially absorbed by a frivolous and insincere leisured elite in the same way as women in the novel are casualties of seduction and abandonment; as a contrast, Maria Edgeworth's hero, Lord Colambre, serves a conventionally didactic role in *The Absentee* when he resists his mother's attempts to

[66] Mary Brunton, *Self-Control*, 3rd edn, 3 vols, (Edinburgh: Manners and Miller; London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, & Brown, 1811), p.208 <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/41196/41196-h/41196-h.htm> [accessed 14th January 2020]. Subsequent references in-text.

embroil him in a loveless marriage to the heiress Miss Broadhurst. He exemplifies good behaviour and is eventually rewarded in matrimony to Grace Nugent, the novel's heroine. While Donneraile agrees to marry the worthy Sophia, however, he does so early in the novel and to preserve his mother's idle lifestyle, not for love — all the while grumbling about his 'aversion to matrimony, to being tied for life' (*SI* i 22).

Lady Charlotte recreates Brunton's nuanced approach to villainy to educate the readership more effectively in the realities of seduction and fortune hunting. In *The Murdered Queen!*, one of several reincarnations of Lady Charlotte's *Diary 1838*, the author would go so far as to describe Caroline as 'a sacrifice to the debts of the prodigal heir presumptive'.[67] In *Self-Indulgence,* Sophia Dickens is initially dismissed by Lady Donneraile as a 'city miss': a necessary evil and 'nothing but a harmless and amiable play thing, whose wealth would be the means of supporting her and her son in the only sphere she cared, or indeed was calculated to move in' (*SI* i 42).[68] In the early stages of the novel, the heroine's nuptials are celebrated at the Donnerailes' fashionable Mayfair home in Park Street — an irony which would not have been lost on elite members of Lady Charlotte's readership because the Regent's marriage, when Prince of Wales, had taken place in Maria Fitzherbert's house at the same address. The locus possibly alludes also to *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), as Park Street is the domicile of ferocious Mrs Ferrars — a matriarch who goes so far as to disown her worthy elder son as part of an attempt to control his choice of bride. In *Self-Indulgence*, Lady Charlotte pays tribute to Austen's villainous mother in the person of the manipulative, moral-blackmailing and initially comic but ultimately destructive Lady Donneraile. Besides injecting the narrative with irony, the fashionable Mayfair backdrop also focuses attention on the systemic double-dealing which operated beneath the surface of elite society. According to Probert, the distance which separated a bigamist's first and second marriages was a reliable method of measuring the extent of his duplicity; the further he travelled between locations, the smaller the risk he ran of being detected (at a provincial assizes in the 1850s, for example, the average distance found to be travelled was twenty miles).[69] *Self-Indulgence* thus airs a serious but little-known problem: because libertines and misogynists in metropolitan high

[67] *The Murdered Queen!*, p.8.
[68] Lady Charlotte's familiarity with the Regent and his mother, Queen Charlotte (1744–1818), may well have generated the mother/son dynamic in *Self-Indulgence;* in *The Murdered Queen!*, especially, Bury is consistently vituperative about Queen Charlotte because of her failure to support Princess Caroline.
[69] See: Rebecca Probert, *Divorced, Bigamist, Bereaved?: the family historian's guide to marital breakdown, separation, widowhood, and remarriage: from 1600 to the 1970s* (Kenilworth: Takeaway, 2015), p.133. Referred to hereafter as *Divorced, Bigamist, Bereaved?.*
See also: Rebecca Probert, *Double Trouble,* pp.19–20.

society could afford to travel extensively and maintain establishments abroad, they could marry whomsoever, wherever and as often as they wished.

Despite the humour which glazes the novel's early scenes, Lady Charlotte was especially angered by what she witnessed at the royal court and considered the Regent himself to be the originator of many of the corrupt social practices which blighted elite society. Roger Sales observes cogently that, 'Most dandies were associated with the kind of sexual excess practised by the Prince Regent […] deep levels of misogyny […] permeated many forms of dandyism including public contempt for wife and ruination of spinsters' reputations.'[70] According to Flora Fraser, George's hatred of his wife had been enkindled by his inability to consummate the marriage on his wedding night; in a disturbance of the generic boundary between fiction and memoir, Donneraile, like the Regent, duly resolves at the outset of his second marriage that he will 'not be troubled by many forms, or much love-making' — that 'the lady may be immediately sent to the country' (*SI* i 24).[71] Donneraille's verdict on matrimony is that 'love is a bore — dullest of all dull trades,' and he soon exchanges domesticity with Sophia for 'the more enlivening sports of the field' (*SI* i 48). In *Self-Control,* Brunton's Colonel Hargrave similarly relieves ennui by attending race meetings in Edinburgh while Laura Montreville is in London engaged in battle over the payment of an annuity. While Hargrave beguiles the religiously devout Laura by comically purchasing 'Blair's sermons' (i 89), Donneraile seduces Corissande by mimicking her love of liberal philosophy and Romantic literature. Lady Charlotte follows earlier radical novelists who do not humourise or catechise about seduction, however: in Smith's *Ethelinde, or The Recluse of the Lake* (1789), Ellen Newenden is deceived into bad marriage by Woolaston's false protestations of love while Darnford's entry to the heroine's affections in Wollstonecraft's literary fragment, *The Wrongs of Woman,* had similarly been based on professions of ideologies he did not believe in. While 'Jane Austen responded positively to many of Wollstonecraft's feminist arguments without ever mentioning her by name', she outwardly presents a politically correct allegiance to counter-revolutionary discourse by judging and even punishing emotionally incontinent women such as Marianne Dashwood of *Sense and Sensibility*.[72] I will argue that, fifteen years after the death of Wollstonecraft, Lady Charlotte consciously enters into the counter-cultural conversation by blaming the seducer for the woman's downfall, not the seduced. Women do not succumb to men

[70] Sales, p.77.
[71] According to Flora Fraser, 'The Princess of Wales was…to hint most indelicately to the politician and diplomat Lord Minto that that the Prince was impotent'. Flora Fraser, *The Unruly Queen: The Life of Queen Caroline* (London: Macmillan, 1996), p.62.
[72] Mellor, 'Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman', p.156.

and become entrapped in marriage because they self-deceive or suffer from an unchristian and unladylike lack of self-control: both in her debut novel and the fiction which followed, 'fallen' and badly-married women do not self-delude but are the tragic victims of systemic misrepresentation practised by adversarial and acquisitive men.

When a woman entered into wedlock in England during the early nineteenth century she conceded control of anything personal or real which was not placed in the hands of trustees to her husband: her change of status from *feme sole* to *feme covert* meant she surrendered her legal status as well as her property. The novel's narrator is therefore at her most polemical when she alludes to the laws of coverture, asserting that a wife 'is not unfrequently considered as a kind of inanimate piece of household furniture, in whom mental qualities are wholly useless, except, indeed when the husband may happen to want to appropriate them to his own use' (*SI* ii 86). All of this recalls newly-married Maria's recognition of the enormity of the step she has taken in Wollstonecraft's fictional fragment: 'Marriage had bastilled me for life'.[73] With this utterance, Wollstonecraft's heroine reaches the understanding, too late, that she is 'fettered by the partial laws of society'.[74] The narrator argues a similar case in *Self-Indulgence*: married women in England were far more restricted than in any other Protestant country in Europe (the laws governing marriage even in the author's native Scotland, as discussed in the introduction, were far less draconian); Donneraile thus finds that after compelling Corissande (out of purely sexual motives) to leave her native France for London he now wields total control over her.[75] With the observation in *Self-Indulgence* that she 'actually became his property' (*SI* ii 85), Lady Charlotte transfers to the contemporary popular novel the protest of Wollstonecraft's disenfranchised heroine, Maria, who is impotent and frustrated when she attempts to protect her inheritance from her husband, 'a wife being as much a man's property as his horse, or his ass'.[76]

Lady Charlotte makes Wollstonecraft's politics newly available to a Regency readership by maintaining that a married woman's problems are not just financial and legal, however. In a culture suffused with religious bigotry and hypocrisy, a woman in Corissande de Montbazon's position soon becomes socially marginalised because of her ambiguous legal standing. When

[73] Mary Wollstonecraft, *Mary* and *The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria,* ed. by Gary Kelly (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2009), p.137.Referred to hereafter as 'The Wrongs of Woman', ed. Kelly'.
[74] Ibid.
[75] See: Amy Louise Erickson, 'Coverture and Capitalism', *History Workshop Journal*, 59 (2005), pp.1-16 <http://www.jstor.com/stable/25472782> [accessed 16th May 2020]. See also: Stone, *Road to Divorce*, p.377 and 1.1 n.34 above.
[76] *The Wrongs of Woman*, ed. Kelly, p.140.

Donneraile transports her to London, he initially installs her in the suburb of Richmond, where he cold-bloodedly introduces her to exclusive and fashionable social circles: 'the whole world should know that this all-perfect being was his slave' (*SI* ii 122). Not satisfied that the outskirts of London provide sufficient cover, however, he next displaces his wife to Southampton:

> As Rosevilla was too expensive, and too public for their present plan of life, they removed to Hampshire, and, in the neighbourhood of Southampton, found a small, but delightfully situated house, where some months more of felicity were yet given to love. (*SI* ii p.119)

In an appropriation of Austen's detached, ironic narrative voice, Donneraile's evasions are here couched in the lexis of domesticity; their new establishment is not clandestine and impoverished but 'delightfully-situated' if 'small' (ibid.). As if abduction and incarceration were not sufficiently damaging, he next self-glorifies and entrenches the reputational harm he has already inflicted upon Corissande by throwing open the doors of their domestic retreat to any and all of his leering cronies: 'Young men of ton, and of dissipated characters' (*SI* ii 122).

Lady Charlotte heaps misfortune upon Corissande not merely for political ends but, in part, as a riposte to the courtship novel which invariably mythologises marriage as the greatest remuneration for feminine virtue that can be bestowed. To further subvert the trope, the author harnesses elements of the *roman-à-clef* to embed her subversive political message within a recognisable political context. *Self-Indulgence* thus reminds elite members among the readership that, with George's marriage to Caroline pending, Mrs Fitzherbert had also been retired to a villa at Richmond in the closing decade of the eighteenth century. In the meantime, he transferred his affection in the summer of 1794 to Frances Villiers, Countess of Jersey (1753–1821) and, to compound his crimes, made rash promises to his new mistress: 'To appease this lady was a matter of no little difficulty: but the Prince at length succeeded by solemnly affirming that the new Princess, should be his consort, only in name'.[77] Brunton's rakish Hargrave similarly violates women's trust, pleasing himself with the imagined accolades he will receive once he has badgered Laura Montreville into subjection; this also recalls a period in George's debauched youth when he bragged 'of intrigues with women of quality whom he named publicly'.[78] By narrating ongoing events through the prism of immersive narrative, Lady Charlotte's novel exceeds Brunton's in political effectiveness: for contemporary women readers, Corissande becomes an emblem of

[77] *The Murdered Queen!,* ibid.
[78] E.A. Smith, *A Queen on Trial: The Affair of Queen Caroline* (Stroud: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1993), p.2. Referred to hereafter as 'A Queen on Trial'.

oppression, not a courtship heroine whose virtue will ultimately be vindicated. The helpless wife is thus commodified, degraded and rendered voiceless within marriage: as articulated in the words of Donneraile's accomplice; 'This Corissande is one of the most magnificent animals that ever walked the course' (*SI* ii 96). Lady Charlotte's polemical narrator, still coolly detached, confronts the reader here with the brutalising misogyny embedded in fashionable male conduct: 'let not the uninitiated in ton language start at the term 'animal'; the being compared to a horse, is one of the most sublime similes in the dictionary of modern gallantry'(ibid.).

The figurative imprisonment and enslavement of Donneraile's first wife in *Self-Indulgence* authenticates the substantive abuses sustained by women under the oppressions of coverture and forms part of Bury's conscious response to Wollstonecraftian discourse. Wollstonecraft's fictional heroine, Maria, is incarcerated within her own home when her husband tries and fails to peddle her to one of his associates; Ian Ward points out that in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) Arthur Huntingdon will, in the same way, attempt to rid himself of his unwanted wife by offering her to the predatory Walter Hargrave.[79] When Donneraile, Huntingdon's literary ancestor, similarly attempts to pimp his wife, Lady Charlotte actualises the realities of misogyny by channelling the protests of Wollstonecraft's literary associates also. In Smith's *Desmond*, for example, Geraldine Verney's husband commands her in a letter 'couched in the most positive and forcible terms he could devise' to travel from London to Paris where he traffics her to the reactionary (and therefore unsympathetic) Romagnecourt 'as a means of retrieving his affairs'.[80] The enormity of the situation, which both Smith and Lady Charlotte attempt to correct, resides in the fact that if a husband wanted to traffic his wife she had no protection. Ian Ward corroborates this view by affirming that, at this time, the mere act of 'hawking an unwilling wife to another man was not held in law to represent a form of mental cruelty'.[81]

Self-Indulgence critiques the extensive ways and means of legal escape opened up to exploitative men by focusing the reader's attention, through an enhanced level of realism, upon the enormity

[79] See: Ian Ward, *Law and the Brontës* (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2012), p.30. The episode in which Huntingdon rejects his wife in Anne Brontë's novel articulates to the full the hazards of marriage for women: '"My wife! what wife? I have no wife," replied Huntingdon, looking innocently up from his glass, "or if I have, look you, gentlemen: I value her so highly that any one among you, that can fancy her, may have her and welcome: you may, by Jove, and my blessing into the bargain!" Anne Brontë, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,* 3 v. (London: T. C. Newby, 1848), p.139.
[80] Charlotte Turner Smith, *Desmond*, 1997, p.300. Subsequent references in-text.
[81] Ward, ibid.

of women's powerlessness. The Mrs Fitzherbert narrative is thus embellished when Corissande bears a child to the negligent anti-hero as he is just on the brink of abandoning her. As noted above, Prince George had seized upon his unwanted wife's Catholic faith as the legal pretext upon which to dispose of her in 1794; in 1812, *Self-Indulgence* consciously re-enacts this outrage: 'the laws of this country had nothing to do with a wandering stranger, who willingly followed a man to submit to his power […] still less with a Roman Catholic' (*SI* ii 131). Donneraile, having married Corissande in France, believes himself to be thoroughly conversant with the provisions of the law; '"I had a d….. d old Roman Catholic priest to mutter some mummery, and kiss a few relics, which effectually satisfied her at the time, and made her quite happy"' (*SI* ii 160-61). When Carrisfort is later run to ground in Corissande's prison on the Isle of Wight by Pierre la Roche, her faithful retainer, he thus dismisses his supplications out of hand:

> The claims of a foreigner, a Roman Catholic, married only by a Romish priest, in another country, are not likely to avail against power and wealth, and the marriage sanctioned by his own country's laws to another woman; neither could I, as Mr Donneraile's friend, forward such a suit. (*SI* ii 156)

After the passing of The Clandestine Marriages Act, only marriages officiated in registered Anglican chapels, on certain days and at fixed times, and preceded by a reading of the banns, were legal. Seizing upon the opportunities made newly available, the anti-hero claims that his marriage to Corissande is invalid merely because it has taken place outside the Anglican Church. In the same way as George had deceived Mrs Fitzherbert, anti-heroic Donneraile has duped Corissande with false assurances, ensnaring her by means of bogus rituals without caring about the consequences.[82] In *The Murdered Queen!* Lady Charlotte duly denounces both the illegality

[82] Rebecca Probert's extensive investigation of the Clandestine Marriages Act and its implications enables us to comprehend more fully the way in which Bury's anti-hero takes advantage of the legal mandate: 'the ordained status of a Catholic priest did not secure the validity of marriages conducted according to Catholic rites.' (p.138) Probert cites a case decided in 1752— immediately before the Clandestine Marriages Act — in which the judge decreed that a ceremony of marriage conducted by a Catholic priest 'after the Romish ritual' was not legal. Donneraile's pronouncements bear an uncanny resemblance in tone and vocabulary to the verdict here delivered: 'I much doubt whether a marriage in England by a Romish priest after the Romish ritual would be deemed a perfect marriage in this country ... [t]he Roman ritual not being the same with ours, such a ceremony is nothing more than a contract.' (ibid.) Rebecca Probert, 'Marriage Law and Practice in the Long Eighteenth Century. The little-considered marriage practices of non-Anglicans', in *Marriage Law and Practice in the Long Eighteenth Century: A Reassessment* (Cambridge Studies in English Legal History, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp.131–165 <doi:10.1017/CBO9780511596599.005>.

and enormity of George's morganatic marriage: 'It was […] not only illegal, but subjected Mrs Fitzherbert, and all who assisted, to high pains and penalties'.[83]

Determined to raise women's awareness of their vulnerabilities in 1812, Lady Charlotte consciously corrects the commonly-held assumption that because the costs involved put divorce out of the reach of all but the very wealthy, bigamous practices were confined to the lower socio-economic classes. Historian Joanne Bailey finds that trials for bigamy were, indeed, most common amongst the economically-disadvantaged classes; the penalties sustained in the period 1753 to 1857 even tended to be lenient because concern centred more pragmatically on the financial welfare of the women involved than upon the crimes of the male perpetrators.[84] Pamela Sharpe has analysed cases of bigamy in Essex which occurred during the same period, her findings corroborating Bailey's that penalties were rarely severe even when the men concerned were found guilty. Sharpe goes even further, though, by explaining that this was because, in the interest of the public coffer, authorities sought primarily to save themselves from providing financial support; legal efforts tended less towards punishment than forcing the bigamous husband to shoulder the economic burden of both marriages. For this reason, the law even sought to discriminate positively in cases involving the subordinate classes: 'Overseers even occasionally validated an illegal marriage when it saved them from providing a woman with financial support.'[85]

For Lady Charlotte it was obvious that the practice of illegal marriage was increasing directly in proportion to the complacency of the society which tolerated it. The engineers of The Clandestine Marriage Act nonetheless refused to acknowledge that bigamy posed a different but no less severe set of problems for women of rank; *Self-Indulgence* is therefore energised by the author's conviction that the governing classes must be confronted with, and forced to solve, the problem they had created. In her lecture about the problem of bigamy during the nineteenth century to the Selden Society, Rebecca Probert duly illustrates the problem by citing several cases in which men seemed to have been motivated to enter into bigamous marriage solely by the property of

[83] Bury, *The Murdered Queen!*, ibid.
[84] Joanne Bailey, *Unquiet Lives: Marriage and Marriage Breakdown in England*, 1660-1800 (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge; New York, 2003), p.92. Referred to hereafter as 'Unquiet Lives'.1857 was the year in which The Matrimonial Causes Act was passed which made divorce a civil, rather than a parliamentary, process and (because cheaper) theoretically more accessible to women.
[85] Ibid., p.184. Pamela Sharpe, 'Bigamy among the Labouring Poor in Essex, 1754–1857', Local Historian, 24.3 (1994), pp.139–44.

the second spouse.[86] When Miss Mary Carr Burt married Thomas Connor in 1843, for example, he received £2,600 in money from his new wife and £400-worth of plate and furniture. Although the sums involved were modest, the duplicity was inordinate. In what had clearly become a common practice, Connor compounded his crime against the unwitting Carr Burt by inciting his existing wife to assist him. Carr Burt testified that she eventually realised her mistake and confronted the woman who had been pointed out to her as Thomas's existing wife; instead of reacting with horror and shame, however, she aided and abetted her husband by brazenly denying the fact.[87] While women in such situations tended more often to have been the victims rather than the perpetrators of fraud, the attitude towards their plight was usually one of denial.

Joanne Bailey maintains that, because he was supposed to set a good example, the penalties for any man of rank found guilty of bigamy were far more severe than for a felon such as Thomas Connor. Things looked very different from the elevated position Lady Charlotte occupied in English society, however. Before the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857, any man wishing to take a second wife by legal means would have been forced to sever ties with his existing spouse by applying for a parliamentary divorce — a recourse which was available to none but the wealthiest because of the considerable sums involved. Underscoring public misconceptions about the typical motivations of a bigamist was the widely held assumption that, because he would have been able to pay, a man of superior social status had no need to break the law.[88] *Self-Indulgence* thus points out that in the higher social circles, unscrupulous and predatory men who wished to abuse the system, did so in the knowledge that they would be enabled by systemic inconsistencies and legal precedent to cover their tracks: Hardwicke's marriage act, instead of erecting obstacles, supplied the semblance of legitimacy required whenever a man determined to embark on a second marriage without dissolving his first. As if to consolidate the point, it eventually emerges not only that Lady Charlotte's anti-hero has married Sophia as part of a financial arrangement: he has also been using money which rightfully belongs to his second wife to provide support to his first. When he mysteriously commands Harry Carrisfort to 'Manage the business for Godsake' and his accomplice duly passes Sophia's money on to the now destitute first wife, the bigamist is no longer the scapegrace of common lore; he is a criminal who 'humbuggs' his second wife 'with a cock and bull story' as he shamelessly lies and embezzles her money to cover his tracks. (*SI* ii p.182)

[86] Rebecca Probert, *Divorced, Bigamist, Bereaved?*, p.120.
[87] Probert, *Double Trouble,* p.12. See also: Old Bailey Proceedings, 6th July 1846, <https://www.oldbaileyonline.org/print.jsp?div=t18460706>, THOMAS CONNOR, 1407.
[88] Bailey, Unquiet Lives, p.186.

Compelled by the gravity of the situation, Lady Charlotte pushes the bigamy plot at the core of the novel to extremes, uncovering in the process another even more widespread abuse blighting the lives of married women: desertion. Donneraile initially grooms Corissande then abandons her, subsequently marrying her in France merely to secure his position against the threat of an imagined rival; he then imports her to England only to discard her again in Southampton. Lady Charlotte here confronts the reader with harsh contemporary realities by blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction. In the same way as Donneraile toys with Corissande, the Prince Regent relentlessly mistreated Mrs Fitzherbert when he casually recommenced relations with her several times before finally disposing of her, the narrator observing polemically of Corissande's ordeal, 'It is this passive state of suffering which is most difficult to endure, and is generally the fate of women to experience' (*SI* ii 14).[89] When Corissande, in common with both of the Regent's abandoned wives, is forced to move from place to place in the absence of her husband, she iterates the sense of hopelessness Mrs Fitzherbert later declared herself to have experienced; 'nothing is so desolating as to pursue, in idea, some dear loved object, through drear vacuity' (*SI* ii 139). Lady Charlotte immerses us in Corissande's misery to acquaint the readership with the heretofore unvoiced experiences of deserted wives, her narrative apparently emerging once again from her intimate knowledge of the royal court. According to Flora Fraser, Princess Caroline relished the experience of being the mistress of her own house during the early days of her separation and turned it to social advantage: in the *Diary 1838*, however, Bury contiguously describes Montague House in Blackheath, the Princess's next residence, as a melancholy and lonely place.[90] Whereas wedlock means confinement for women and a severe lack of options,

[89] Lady Charlotte's understanding of the abuse men inflicted on their wives and mistresses seems again to originate in her detailed knowledge of life at Carlton House as well as her own recent experience of matrimony. Prince George's conduct lowered standards of behaviour at the royal court and, as Lady Charlotte strives to show, this influenced social practices in fashionable society at large. Particularly poignant was the plight of the actress Dorothea Jordan (1761-1816) who was set aside in 1811 by the Duke of Clarence (who ascended the throne in 1830 as William IV). When she returned to the stage over anxieties about her own and her children's financial security, she forfeited the income she received as part of an agreement of separation and died penniless in France in 1816. Paul Ranger, 'Jordan, Dorothy [real name Dorothy Phillips] (1761–1816), actress,' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.* 23 Sep. 2004 < https://doi-org.soton.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/15119> [accessed 20 Jul. 2023]. It is worth noting that, after the death of the Regent's heir in 1817, the Duke of Kent (another rakish younger brother) also cold-bloodedly abandoned the woman with whom he had been living for over twenty years for a more viable match (see: Sales, p.67). Lady Charlotte reflects these abuses in the plight also of Bertha de Chanci – the heroine of her next novel, *Conduct is Fate.*

[90] See: Fraser (Flora), p.102. Lady Charlotte's first-hand account of the Princess's life at Blackheath contradicts received versions of events by uncovering a much more sombre view of Princess

their husbands enjoy unlimited freedom and, as the narrator points out polemically, 'require not the unshrinking firmness, the unbending fortitude, which is expected from almost every woman' (*SI* ii 14).

Whereas the didactic novelist of the 1810s catechises about the importance of patience, Corissande's suffering marks *Self-Indulgence* more definitively as a descendant of *Ethelinde* — a fiction which, as Ellen Moody notes in her introduction, 'contains a weight given to interior life' which does not feature in Charlotte Smith's later novels'.[91] Helen Small, on the other hand, alludes to the experience of the abandoned wife in *Self-indulgence* as 'little more than an attempt to enliven otherwise jaded material'.[92] In her interdisciplinary study of the figure of the love-mad woman*,* Small views Corissande as a lunatic who is no more than a device which provides 'a controllable narrative framework for thinking about revolutionary politics in a highly unstable political climate'.[93] While this is a useful context within which to evaluate the problems post-revolutionary authors encountered in challenging entrenched values and systems, Small overlooks an essential detail: Corissande's trauma is produced by poverty and social exclusion, not thwarted love. Before ultimately deserting her, indeed, Donneraile inflicts a deliberate and mortal blow upon Corissande's feelings:

> when he finally declared that he never would break his father's heart by declaring her his wife, then the nobleness of her nature spurned with indignant contumely the meanness of his, and she felt as if love had quitted her heart for ever. (*SI* ii 129)

Driven by economic necessity and social considerations rather than romantic spontaneity and the desire for 'political rebellion', Corissande flees to distance herself from her husband.[94] It is thus

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Caroline's life there: 'To-day I went to Blackheath by command. Her Royal Highness was in a low, gentle humour. I walked round her melancholy garden with her, and she made me feel quite sorry for her when she cried, and said it was all her own creation" meaning the garden and shrubbery," but that now she must leave it for ever, for that she had not money to keep a house at Blackheath and one in London also; and that the last winter she had passed there had been so very dreary, she could not endure the thought of keeping such a one again. I did not wonder at this. All the time I staid and walked with her Royal Highness, she cried, and spoke with a desolation of heart that really made me sorry for her, and yet, at the end of our conversation, poor soul, she smiled, and an expression of resignation, even of content, irradiated her countenance as she said, " I will go on hoping for happier days. Do you think I may?'" she asked me; and I replied, with heartfelt warmth, " I trust your Royal Highness will yet see many happy days."' *Diary 1838*, i p.261-2.

[91] Moody, ed., *Ethelinde*, introduction, p.xvii.

[92] See: Helen Small, Love's Madness: *Medicine, the Novel, and Female* Insanity, 1800–1865, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p.111.

[93] Ibid., p.113.

[94] Ibid., p.106.

difficult to make the figure of the abandoned wife in *Self-Indulgence* fit Small's wider proposal about gender disadvantages and the medicine of madness; the view that the novel is a national tale, which she shares with Anthony Mandal, nevertheless enables us to pay close attention the proto-feminist discourse embedded in the narrative. Focusing on the novel's continental and Romantic context in his wider discussion of fiction of the 1810s, Mandal identifies political resemblances between *Self-indulgence* and Staël's *Corinne* (1807) by virtue of the French heroine's resistance to an English oppressor; for Mandal, *Self-Indulgence* is thus 'an exaggerated re-enactment of *Corinne's* melodramatic elements'.[95] I will simultaneously endorse and develop this argument by showing that *Self-Indulgence* defines the deserted wife as a victim of coverture, the intensified realism of Corissande's torments marking the novel not only as a descendant of the sentimental genre, but as the forerunner of the novel of social justice. In contemporary courtship fiction, the seduction and death of Brunton's Jessy and Austen's 'Elizas' (*Sense and Sensibility*) are confined to inset narratives; *Self-Indulgence*, however — like *Ethelinde* and *Corinne* — brings the sufferings of the cast-off woman to the centre of the narrative. Far from appropriating sentimental devices merely to create an emotional effect, Lady Charlotte humanises the political plight of badly-married women like Princess Caroline to arouse indignation: she re-energises late eighteenth-century protests about gendered injustice not to heighten emotion for the purposes of education or entertainment, but to change readers' allegiances and generate cultural and political reform.

The ordeal at the centre of *Self-Indulgence* no doubt also originated in — and articulated — the experiences of married women well-known to the author such as Lady Caroline Lamb (1785–1828) – a society figure whose marriage ended in legal separation and scandal in 1825. In her memoirs, Lady Charlotte recalled conversing with Lamb about her adulterous and thwarted love for Lord Byron, expressing her concern about her 'poor mind' and 'fits of melancholy', and refusing to join in with the general opprobrium when news of the affair broke in 1812.[96] In another crossover between fact and fiction, Corissande, like Lady Caroline, is psychologically tormented by moral supremacists when her husband rejects her — a situation which Lady Charlotte pushes to its political conclusion when society ostracises and topples her over into destitution because of her ambiguous marital status. Although Corissande does not breach the terms of Hardwicke's Marriage Act when she agrees to marry Donneraile without his family's consent, she does cross a moral line; from the moment of her husband's desertion, she is

[95] Anthony Mandal, *Jane Austen and The Popular Novel: The Determined Author* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p.155.
[96] *Diary 1838*, iii p.335.

subjected to the pressure of public opinion and is forced into a downward trajectory. Lawrence Stone discusses shifting cultural attitudes in the third and final volume of his foundational study of divorce and separation, *Broken Lives* (1993), considering in depth the religious and political pressures operating on women across the period 1660–1857. His conclusions are based on a wide range of case studies which explain the operations of an unequal legal system and a double moral standard before and during the period spanned by Lady Charlotte's marriages and professional career. Amanda Vickery's study of eighteenth-century women's diaries and letters — *The Gentleman's Daughter* (1998) — iterates Stone's view of the cultural and systemic subservience imposed on married women during the period: 'a virtual industry proselytised the relative duties of the married female […] Obedience remained the indispensable virtue in a good wife'.[97]

Vickery's use of private and personal accounts, like Stone's case study approach, enables the modern reader to identify similarities between fictional representations in *Self-Indulgence* and historical figures; contemporary readers, Lady Charlotte hoped, would have been duly unsettled by the resemblances. Both before and after abandonment, Corissande suffers as much guilt about her failure to observe protocol as if she had succumbed sexually:

> To have yielded to her lover, and become his wife, while doubtful of ever obtaining his parents' consent, was a step that she must ever condemn herself for—it poisoned enjoyment—it embittered disappointment. (*SI* i 125)

When she and her son are finally forced into cheap lodgings in Dover, she is so physically broken by her efforts to provide for them economically, she is 'ill, degraded, wretched, her senses wandering, her beauty impaired by the violent fever that swelled her features' (*SI* ii 153). Far from imploding under the weight of self-imposed sensibility, Corissande's destruction is forced upon her by the social frameworks which kept women subjugated: external pressures, it is implied, which impose responsibilities upon her but withhold her independence. In her quest for equality for the sexes in the closing decades of the previous century, Wollstonecraft had introduced this idea by protesting that women were 'being denied rights while being held to duties, not least the duty to guard the one virtue held to be indispensable for women if they are to remain respectable: 'reputation for chastity' '.[98] Fifteen years after Wollstonecraft's death Lady Charlotte, instead of making Corissande the object of a cautionary lesson, confronts the readership with the injustices of an unequal and gendered society which punishes women for crimes they have not

[97] Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), p.59.
[98] Lena Halldenius, 'Feminist Republicanism', in *The Wollstonecraftian Mind*, eds. Sandrine Berges, Eileen Hunt Botting, Alan Coffee (London: Routledge, 2019), p.409. See also: Introduction, p.24.

committed; it is not the casualties of bad marriage who need reforming, she protests, but the exploitative men who marry them.

In this hybridised novel, Lady Charlotte re-animates sentimental tropes not merely to engage but to intensify, and more effectively immerse the reader in, a woman's experience of coverture; Corissande's distress, it can be argued, evolves aesthetically out of Ethelinde's 'wandering isolated condition' and 'severe depression, the result of believing Montgomery dead'.[99] Antje Blank and Janet Todd, editors of Smith's later novel, go so far as to connect the attempted suicide in *Desmond* of heroic Geraldine Verney directly to 'the destructive effect of society's exacting conceptions of feminine self-effacement'.[100] Lady Charlotte accordingly attempts to address and correct the problem of gendered moral tyranny ; because 'women's sexual lives were held to different standards than men's', she makes a contemporary political point out of earlier discourse — what E.J. Clery terms the 'already well-established novelistic tradition of "virtue in distress"'.[101] In the popular Gothic fiction of the period, Clery explains, the narrative 'revolves around this double standard, alternately condoning and deprecating, pointing on the one hand to the throne on which the heroine will be installed at the end of her trials, and on the other hand to the grave where one false step might, however undeservedly, lead her.'[102] Even though two decades had elapsed since the appearance of *Desmond*, society's 'exacting conceptions' make it all too easy for Corissande to convince herself that she deserves to be ruined: 'stained by supposed dishonour' (*SI* ii 135–136) she succumbs to moral duress and enters a terminal emotional decline. In another sense, *Self-Indulgence* rejects the tropes of the Gothic and supernatural novel — a tradition which involved simultaneously cautioning women about and making them responsible for the peril which threatens them; the author protests in *Self-Indulgence* that the situation is unjust and she refuses to blame women for their problems, instead placing responsibility firmly at the feet of the men (and other women) who abuse them.

To enhance the enormity of gender injustices embedded in society for a contemporary readership, Lady Charlotte recounts, through the prism of the *roman-à-clef,* several notorious recent abuses involving the Regent's legal and morganatic wives at the royal court. In her memoir, the author claimed that George deliberately disowned his crimes before wedding Caroline

[99] Moody, ed., *Ethelinde*, p.xii.
[100] *Desmond*, p.31.
[101] E.J. Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction*, *1762-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.121 <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511518997.009>. Referred to hereafter as 'The Rise of Supernatural Fiction'.
[102] Ibid.

(presumably before grasping the fact that he could have the union with Maria Fitzherbert legally annulled): 'At a later period, he did not scruple to deny "upon his sacred honour" that no such marriage had ever taken place!'[103] In *Self-Indulgence*, Lady Charlotte elaborates on this event when Donneraile disencumbers himself of Corissande by shunting her onto Harry Carrisfort. Carrisfort, when faced with the task of enlightening Corissande about her dilemma, vindicates Donneraile by claiming that his 'immense losses at play' had ruined his family,' and it is for this reason that he has had to marry Sophia Dickens — a girl whose father 'was happy to exchange wealth for *title'* (*SI* ii 142). At this point, Carrisfort moves Corissande away from Southampton to the Isle of Wight to secure his co-conspirator against discovery. This pivotal event again mirrors the mercenary and callous behaviour of the Regent towards his wife and mistresses and could even allude to verifiable historical events which took place in 1794. In order to free himself to pursue Lady Jersey, George informed Mrs Fitzherbert after nine years that their marriage was over, not in person, but by devolving the task to 'Captain Jack Payne, a naval officer and mutual friend of both'.[104] According to Flora Fraser, he would repeat this process several more times before deciding finally to relinquish the relationship.[105]

Lady Charlotte further embeds the misogyny underlining male behaviours by permitting us, at this point, to overhear Donneraile asserting (in conference with his accomplice) that abandoning Corissande is a matter of no consequence; 'Either yourself, or some other fortunate man, will console her entirely' (*SI* ii 161).[106] In 1812, her situation iterates the terrible circumstances which drove Henry Farrer's abandoned wife into prostitution; rather than succumbing sexually, however, Corissande takes a desperate decision: 'enough of recollection remained to urge her to quit a house where she felt she only lived on the charity of others; that abandoned by her husband, she was passed off by him upon another man, destined perhaps to pay for her existence by prostitution' (ii 143).[107] It is worth here noting, as a point of contrast, that in two of Charlotte Turner Smith's novels, adultery is the consequence not of lax morals but of economic need and disillusionment: Smith's narrator is therefore non-judgmental when Josephine de Boisbelle, a victim of arranged marriage in *Desmond*, enters into an adulterous affair with man of feeling, Lionel Desmond. In *Ethelinde*, Smith similarly chronicles the story of Victorine — the illegitimate

[103] *The Murdered Queen!,* ibid.
[104] Fraser (Flora), p.41.
[105] Ibid., p.200. Allen Horstman also affirms that, after resuming his relationship with Mrs Fitzherbert in 1799, George finally put her aside in 1809. A. Horstman, *Victorian Divorce*, 1st ed. (London; New York: Routledge, 1985), p.93 <https://soton.overdrive.com/media/4097067>.
[106] *Self-Indulgence*, ii, 161.
[107] Ibid., ii 143.

(and therefore socially-marginalised) daughter of a governess who is without financial support and faces a harsh dilemma: either enter a religious house or become the mistress of the heroine's brother. While Lady Charlotte's *Self-Indulgence* stops short of condoning infidelity, her memoirs attest to her personal sympathy for the women she had witnessed being used and rejected in full public view; she describes Mrs Fitzherbert, for example, as 'a most amiable and virtuous woman, lovely in her person, talented, and possessed of manners singularly fascinating.'[108] The destitute wife in *Self-Indulgence* chooses, nevertheless, to perish rather than live with a man out of wedlock, 'every faculty of her soul revolting against the idea of remaining one moment longer under the shelter of Sir H. Carisfort's roof upon such degrading terms' (*SI* ii 144). This sentimental and Gothic trope does not melodramatise but serves to intensify the realism of Lady Charlotte's bad-marriage narration; she denies Corissande the option of living with a man outside marriage because she understood that much of the literature written by revolutionary reformers had been marginalised in the early nineteenth century; in the introduction to the 1997 text, indeed, Janet Todd and Antje Blank observe that *Desmond* 'proved too radical for Cadell' and the effect of the novel's politics was to 'frighten off or repel various readers'.[109] I contend that the difficulty experienced by earlier revolutionary women writers in finding publishers for their work clearly explains — and vindicates — Lady Charlotte's political decision in 1812 to withhold the fictional option of life outside wedlock for desperate women, even when they have been failed so dismally by the institutions and structures which are meant — and assumed — to uphold them.[110]

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[108] Bury, *The Murdered Queen!*, p.7.

[109] Editors of *Desmond*. See also: Loraine Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith: A Critical Biography* (Basingstoke: MacMillan Press, 2001), p.190.

[110] It is necessary to point out that while *Self-Indulgence* fictionalises the lives of women known to Lady Charlotte as well as interrogating contemporary political issues, the narrative is punctuated by compromises and underscored by several logistical inaccuracies. Of these, the most serious resides in the fact that Donneraile's first wedding ceremony has taken place in France: this being the case, Corissande would have legally retained her financial independence after marriage because in the rest of Europe at the time, a wife did not automatically surrender her property to her husband. Realistically, then, even if Donneraile had deserted Corissande in England, she would have been neither financially destitute nor under pressure to find employment. Even more significantly, having taken place in a Catholic church in 1802, Corissande's marriage would not actually have been legal because it had been declared by revolutionary France in 1791 that 'the law considers marriage to be only a civil contract'; it thus followed that a civil marriage would be 'the only legally recognized form of marriage.' Rebecca Probert, 'Marriage in France', unpublished paper, Jan 2023, p.4. It is plausible that in 1812 Lady Charlotte was not fully conversant with the legalities; in *The Separation* (1830) however (a reworking of *Self-Indulgence*), she appears to relocate the action to London as part of a conscious strategy. When the Donneraile figure (reworked as 'Fitzharris') marries for the first time, the ceremony takes place in England, not France; in 1830 the author is thus able to protest without ambiguity against the systemic

It is at the point in the narrative when Donneraile fails to offload his first wife onto his accomplice that *Self-Indulgence* enters its most polemical mode. After fleeing Carrisfort, Corissande finds that her gender limits the types of work she can do; stranded in England due to the ongoing wars with France, she desperately undertakes 'a set of botanical drawings' to raise money to support herself and her child but, debilitated by trauma, she is physically unequal to the task (*SI* ii 191). Like Jemima, the attendant who befriends the main protagonist in Wollstonecraft's fictional fragment, Corissande finds at this point in the novel that she is unable to sustain herself economically. As Allen Horstman observes, 'Many women, Respectable [sic] and middle class, had few alternatives outside marriage as the professions were not very open to them and other jobs populated by women in the twentieth century did not exist or were all male'.[111] Channelling Wollstonecraftian discourse, 'which would have women enter the professions on a par with men', Lady Charlotte's novel connects again with Brunton's *Self-Control* in which, unusually for a courtship heroine, Laura Montreville professionalises as a painter but is compelled to forego meals in order to provide food for her father when he is unable to obtain an income for her.[112] Whereas Brunton's novel observes the fictional tradition of rewarding virtue when Laura subsequently (and improbably) obtains her annuity, Corissande is irrevocably undermined: 'During the time she resided in London, she had laboured with unwearied perseverance to earn a small-pittance to defray her journey: this she had amply succeeded in, but it was at the expence [sic] of the little strength she possessed, and which every day now robbed her' (*SI* ii p.187). When Donneraile finally discovers his wife in cheap lodgings in the port of Dover, her distress is presented in uncompromising detail; 'She sat upright in her bed; and the calm smile of evident unconsciousness went like a dagger to his heart. Her face was pale as monumental marble; her emaciated hands, almost terrific to behold, were clasped together; her eyes were raised to heaven' (*SI* ii 199). Lady Charlotte, like Mary Hays, seems to have realised that, to engage a

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injustices of a culture which automatically awarded a woman's husband the undisputed legal right to dispossess her of her property.

[111] Horstman, *Victorian Divorce* (1st ed.), p.461.

[112] Mellor, 'Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman', p.156. In discussing the decision taken by Scottish poet Anne MacVicar Grant (1755-1838) to professionalise as a poet, Pam Perkins considers contemporary fictional representations of women's endeavours in the workplace and the failure of Brunton's heroine to find work that is sufficiently remunerated: 'Mary Brunton's Laura (in *Self-Control* [1811]) assumes that she can sell her paintings for a reasonable, if not substantial, sum when she is reduced to poverty but then is horrified by the minimal payment that she is offered…'. Pam Ann Perkins, *Women Writers and the Edinburgh Enlightenment* (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2010), p.154. Referred to hereafter as 'Women Writers'. For further related discussion of women's employment in general see 2:4 for similarities between Bury, Brunton, and Burney and n.119 (same section).

reader, a novel had to portray authentic subjective experience: in a crossover between reality and fiction, she thus reminds elite members of her readership, through the dramatic presentation of Corissande as a French national in exile, about the enforced isolation in England of Princess Caroline in 1806.[113] Six years later, the author depicts the consequences for women of broken marriage in levels of detail which were unusual for a novelist during the period; in doing so, she not only gives the casualties of marriage breakdown a voice, but compensates for a fictional tradition which conventionally misled women and girls about the legal and economic realities of matrimony.[114] On the basis of her later novel, *The Disinherited* (1834), silver-fork scholar, Edward Copeland, duly implies the possibility — in the most significant intervention in the critical conversation to date — of connecting Lady Charlotte's fiction with the 'Condition of England' novel, observing that she 'breaks new ground' in her 'generous appreciation for the uncertain economic prospects of men and women who must live by their own hands, women especially'.[115]

Besides confronting readers with the economic and social problems encountered by the casualties of bigamy and desertion and correcting misapprehensions about the social reach of problems such as illegal marriage, *Self-Indulgence* protests, as already noted, that the incidences of women being manoeuvred into illegal marriage for their financial wealth was increasing. In her lecture to the Selden Society in 2013, Rebecca Probert discloses that in the 1810s, no cases of bigamy in which it was claimed the second spouses knew about the existence of a previous marriage are recorded in Old Bailey archives.[116] Such marriages, she points out, were often broken only when the second spouse discovered the invalidity of the union and sought to prosecute; in these cases, letters were the most common method of disclosure.[117] The message Corissande's humble guardian eventually sends to Sophia both hyperbolises the dilemma shared by Donneraile's wives and captures the plight of abused women in general:

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[113] See: Gary Kelly, 'Mary Hays and Revolutionary Sensibility', in *Women, Writing and Revolution*, p.95. By characterising Corissande as a continental exiled in Britain during the first decade of the nineteenth century, Lady Charlotte dramatises George's hostile conduct towards Princess Caroline following their separation in 1797. When, after three years of marriage, Corissande finds out about her husband's bigamy, it is 1806 and she is trapped in England by the Napoleonic wars: the year 1806, as noted above, was when Prince George had his wife accused of adultery by special parliamentary commission. The Treaty of Amiens — which permitted travel to and from the Continent had expired in 1802: when Princess Caroline tried to escape to Brunswick, she was prevented from doing so because from 1803 onwards, Britain and Prussia were again at war with Napoleonic France.

[114] See: Vivien Jones ed., *Women in the Eighteenth Century*, p.97.

[115] Copeland, *The Silver Fork Novel,* p.189.

[116] Rebecca Probert, *Double Trouble*, p.12.

[117] Ibid.

> Was it possible that a country, which he had ever been taught to think, piqued itself upon the equity of its laws, no less than upon its rigid morality, should yet afford no means of redress to a wronged woman? Yet this, he now was told, and this, he too fatally proved afterwards, was in fact the case. (*SI* ii p.157)

Corissande and Sophia's problems now reaching their climax, Lady Charlotte rhetoricises the novel's Wollstonecraftian protest that in England, marriage is an institution which, from the moment of her entrance into it, permanently imprisoned a woman. In the process of moving the problem centre stage, she self-distances by putting uncompromising truths into the speeches of a secondary character; she then intensifies the controversy by characterising the challenger as a Frenchman, preparing the way, in so doing, for even more radical transnational themes in *Conduct is Fate*. While the narrative harnesses a common fictional trope in using Pierre La Roche's letter to forewarn the heroine, the device also serves a serious conceptual purpose; far from dying from despair or killing herself after severing her connection with Donneraile, Sophia recovers her autonomy by reclaiming her status as *feme sole*. By placing her emancipation at the climactic point in the narrative, furthermore, Lady Charlotte debunks courtship mythology, rewarding the heroine not with the gift of a husband, but with the restitution of her independence from him. Enabled by the recovery of her former legal status as a single woman, Sophia quickly and efficiently arranges a very unladylike confrontation with her husband's sidekick, Carrisfort, during which she presses him for the truth: 'now answer me this the most important question to my future life. Am I, or am I not the wife of Mr Donneraile?"' (*SI* ii, 175). Consistent with his role as the accomplice to a criminal, Carrisfort coolly outlines the legal position to Sophia without a hint of remorse about Donneraile's conduct or his own complicity: '"no court of law would give it against you — in favour of a foreigner, who was only united by the Catholic rite"' (*SI* ii 176). As if speaking for all women victimised by self-serving men as well as on Corissande's behalf, Sophia here summarily rejects all attempts to implicate her in a conspiracy, and when she lashes out at the cult of vanity and self-vindication which typifies libertinism, it is a call to arms. Unlike Corissande, who accepts defeat when confronted with her husband's crimes, Sophia assumes legal agency and engages the enemy directly: 'The man whom I once called my husband, I tear from my heart for ever' (*SI* ii 176).[118]

[118] The narrative appears again to allude to events at the royal court when, in 1797, George used the services of a proxy to reject Caroline. Whereas Caroline succumbed to the vituperation levelled at her by members of the Prince's coterie, Sophia rebuffs Carrisfort and shames and forces her husband into making full restitution. See also: 1.1 p.42.

As a contrast to Jane Austen, 'whose response to Wollstonecraft is conservative and hard to pin down', Lady Charlotte shapes a narrative which refuses to reaffirm Christian morality for the readership; neither Sophia nor Corissande will consider reuniting with Donneraile once his bigamy has been discovered, nor will this innovative novel offer a reward to his blameless victims in the form of remarriage and additional children.[119] Whereas other women writers of the Regency took care to rehabilitate their spirited heroines within the orthodox discourse of domesticity, Lady Charlotte embraces revolutionary politics at this point in the novel by importing intact the figure of the rebellious wife from *The Wrongs of Woman*. Although in the early nineteenth-century novel of moral improvement 'the female philosopher figure from the 1790s, with her sexually and socially destabilising revolutionary background, is neutralised by either being killed off, disfigured, forced back into domesticity, or represented in a deliberately domestic manner', all of these strategies are rejected *Self-Indulgence*.[120] Once Lady Charlotte's unconventional heroine realises she is emancipated, she takes immediate action — 'justice pointed out her path' (*SI* ii 184) — setting off immediately to rectify her husband's crimes by finding his first wife and restoring her to her former status. When she finally traces the dying Corissande, she demands "what then are the materials which form the heart of that man that could abandon thee? could leave thee to misery, to want, to sickness' (*SI* ii 187) – a question directed rhetorically at men and answered by readers on behalf of all persecuted women.

While limited compensation was available to all victims of illegal marriage during the period, the restitution of a wife's rights did not usually meet with unadulterated success; as Rebecca Probert points out, 'it is difficult to believe that the mere fact of a court order would make a recalcitrant husband more willing to live with his wife. Some might have decided to make the best of the situation, marry the woman in the face of the church, and settle down to married life. Many did not'.[121] Given the dearth of possibilities, Sophia determines to find a better solution. The climax comes when Donneraile, confronted by his second wife, reveals what he believes to be his ultimate crime: that he has the certificates of his marriage to Corissande in his keeping but has been concealing them. After confessing in full, he takes the not-altogether uncharacteristic decision to decamp – but not before, under pressure from Sophia, restoring Corissande's legal rights to her. The enormity of Sophia's situation is enhanced, meanwhile, because Donneraile – on the counterfeit premise that he is her legal husband – has been able to appropriate and misuse her wealth. He thus has no recompense to offer his second wife but an apology and 'that part of

[119] Mellor, 'Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman', p.156.
[120] McInnes, *Wollstonecraft's Ghost*, p.97.
[121] Probert, 'The Impact Of The Marriage Act of 1753', p.253.

[her] fortune, which [he has] not squandered' (*SI* ii 225). As soon as she understands that she been exploited, however, Sophia reclaims her legal right to operate at the level of *feme sole* and indicts him as a bigamist. Innovatively, she also retains her status as heroine, the novel generating sympathy for her under cover of the didactic mode because she is, according to social norms during the period, the more wronged of the two wives. In understanding the circumstances which determine the public attitudes which frame the novel, the almost parallel case of Denby Hartwell — which preceded Hardwicke's Act — here provides useful context. Hartwell, a foot soldier who married in Flanders in 1707, wed for a second time on returning to England, knowing that his first wife was still alive in London. For Joanne Bailey, it is the cost to the second wife that was particularly severe; 'Bigamy was evil because, in addition to ruining the peace of families, it was especially harsh on innocent second wives. The unwitting second wife in this case was described as 'totally deprived of all Hopes of Happiness'.[122]

As noted earlier, Lady Charlotte already had detailed knowledge of the unhappiness which blighted the lives of second wives – even in cases, such as Princess Caroline's, where the legality of the second marriage was not disputed. The climactic speeches with which Sophia accuses her oppressors could have been activated by the progressive discourse in which the author participated at the royal court during the years spanning the novel's composition*;* according to the *Diary 1838*, Caroline, like her fictional counterpart, was anxious not so much on her own account as for the women who had fallen victim to her husband's self-indulgence:

> The Princess of Wales speaks highly of Mrs. Fitzherbert; she always says, "that is the Prince's true wife; she is an excellent woman; it is a great pity for him he ever broke vid her. Do you know I know de man who was present at his marriage, the late Lord B---d. He declared to a friend of mine, that when he went to inform Mrs. Fitzherbert that the Prince had married me, she would not believe it, for she knew she was herself married to him".[123]

In spite of her own wrongs, Caroline was not judgmental about the Prince's mistresses and Lady Charlotte clearly embraced the pity she expressed for his victims; the memoirs record many such instances of emotional generosity and the philanthropy Caroline extended to casualties of her husband's misdemeanours. Isabella, Marchioness of Hertford (1760–1834), for example, was the object of one of the Prince's frequent infatuations from around 1806:

[122] Bailey, *Unquiet Lives*, p.186.
[123] *Diary 1838*, i p.28.

> The Princess, in one of her confidential humours, declared she believed that "Lady Hertford was a woman of intact virtue" it is only a liaison of vanity on her part with my better half, but it will not last long, she is too formal for him."[124]

In the *Diary 1838*, again, Lady Charlotte also refers to the donation Caroline made of 1000 ducats, in a spirit of sorority, to Lady Oxford, a casualty of Lord Byron's libertinism, after hearing that Oxford was in financial distress in Naples. *Self-Indulgence* thus transfers the overwhelming sympathy and respect expressed by the general public towards the Princess to the voiceless victims of broken marriage in wider society. It is with a similar sense of altruism that Lady Charlotte's heroine renounces her bigamous husband in *Self-Indulgence* and rescues Corissande — the wife he cruelly abandoned. After forfeiting her own legal entitlement, Sophia coerces self-sacrificing Corissande into accepting the restitution of her status, even though this will eradicate the rights of her own son to wealth and standing:

> Sophia snatched up the child of Corissande, and placing him on the bed—" Oh! for this dear innocent," cried she, "revoke the rash resolve; think that he has a right to what you refuse." And yet, while she spoke, the thought of her own infant, whom she had left quietly sleeping in the next room, rose to her mind, and choked her utterance. (*SI* ii 211)

Lady Charlotte, as if finally conceding to contemporary market forces in the novel's closing sections, here aligns *Self-Indulgence* with the moral-domestic novel by placing her ultimate emphasis not on bad marriage, but on the issue of motherhood. At the same time, however, she prepares the reader to accept a proto-feminist alternative to the conventional solution by validating the unorthodox conduct of a compromised woman who refuses to fade away when her marriage falls apart. The novel thus breaks new ground in 1812 by offering up the figure of a new heroine who, by rejecting the injustices embedded within legal and social practices, reshapes and repurposes the dynamic of contemporary courtship fiction.

While *Self-Indulgence* is notable on account of its several formal innovations, it is the social critique at the centre of the narrative that differentiates the text most significantly from its contemporaries, particularly in relation to women's property rights. As discussed in my introduction, the sexual double standard, which underlined the gender injustices of matrimonial law during the period, clearly existed because of diverse inconsistencies embedded in early nineteenth-century culture; for the bigamously married woman, the novel discloses, an especially

[124] Ibid., p,25.

harrowing problem concerned the rights of the second family. When a husband deserted, the legal situation was complicated by the status of the children involved: if they were proven to be 'illegitimate', he could not be compelled to pay maintenance. Ginger Frost duly observes, in her chapter 'Strangers in the blood — custody, inheritance, and taxation', that 'when giving fathers custody of legitimate children, judges asserted that children's best interests were met by the parent who could provide for them'.[125] In the case of illegitimates, however, mothers had automatic custody rights but without any access to financial resources, a mandate which was determined by a sanctimonious 'desire to make women accept responsibility for their 'falls''; the practice was also underlined, Frost explains, by a slightly more pragmatic and less pious belief 'that a mother was the obvious guardian for fatherless offspring'.[126] Whatever the motivation, the effect was both discriminatory and retrograde, making mothers responsible for their offspring regardless of their economic ability to take on the burden of support. In the closing decade of the previous century, Clery points out, Wollstonecraft — herself the mother of an illegitimate daughter — had compared developments in Revolutionary France with the culture of domesticity in England and articulated 'her belief in Free union as authentic and enduring as legalised marriage'.[127] Enlightened attitudes in Europe meant greater social justice for women and this stoked Wollstonecraft's confidence, during her domicile in Paris, that her daughter would eventually 'take her place in society as an equal unaffected by prejudice'. *Self-Indulgence* responds in 1812 to the severity of the statutes regarding illegitimacy by dramatising the disenfranchisement of the heroine's son; so keen is Sophia's distress – and so implicitly great the economic and social sacrifice she is making on his behalf — that the reader is persuaded that the misogynistic and partial attitudes underlining the protocols should be reformed: that children born outside wedlock be granted 'the same inheritance rights as legitimate offspring'.[128]

In her critique of English cultural values, Wollstonecraft had observed that Jacobin law removed the stigma of illegitimacy by validating romantic love; while Lady Charlotte approved of developments in France which involved recognising the legal entitlements of the unwed mother and her children, she does not venture until a further ten years have elapsed to broach the possibility for badly-married women of relationships outside wedlock. In 1812, a culture of primogeniture, entailment and unchallengeable bequests meant an illegitimate child was deemed

[125] Ginger S. Frost, ' 'Strangers in the blood': custody, inheritance, and taxation', in *Illegitimacy in English Law and Society, 1860 –1930* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), p.36.
[126] Ibid.
[127] E. J. Clery, 'Mary Wollstonecraft: A Feminist Exile in Paris', *Litteraria Pragensia* 29 no. 57 (2019) <http://litteraria-pragensia.ff.cuni.cz/front.issue/detail/59> [accessed 20 June 2020], p.44.
[128] Ibid.

to have no family: the only possibility of recompense for Donneraile and Sophia's son lies in the gift of others. When the anti-hero in *Self-Indulgence* finally faces up to the problem he has created, the reader is likewise forced to acknowledge the enormity of the situation:

> I hope that, whichever of my children shall be robbed of the right, to which they have almost an equal right, but which cannot be divided, may be benefited by that fortune. (*SI* ii 225)

Donneraile's wish that the rightful heir will comport himself with a benevolence which he has personally proven himself to lack, is characteristically weak and puerile. His words imply his clear understanding that the essential function of inheritance law at this time was to entail and concentrate property via the paternal line 'and ensure its transmission to the next generation'.[129] According to Catherine Packham, the common-law obligation of primogeniture had formed the second of Wollstonecraft's key targets, after, coverture, in her attacks on property law, her concern centring in her first novel, *Mary* (1788), as will be seen in greater detail in chapter 3, upon the inequities of inheritance law which subordinated the economic interests of women to those of male inheritors.[130] Surprisingly, Lady Charlotte stops short at this point in the narrative, omitting to articulate a lesser-known but equally momentous truth: that illegitimate offspring were barred from inheriting the property not only of parents but also of wider kin. While the author resolves this further plot complication by killing off Sophia's son, she also forgoes the opportunity to address another enormity embedded within the mandate: the prohibition of passing maternal property on to children born outside marriage. In her historical study, Frost illustrates the problem by discussing several case studies of mothers who were balked of their wish to bequeath property to children born outside wedlock: Hannah Oakman, for example, had married John Cole in 1815, but they separated in 1824, and John died twelve years later. During the separation period, Frost explains, Hannah had lived with John Bridger Palmer and they had a son she called John Bridger Oakman. After Cole's death, Hannah and John Palmer married and Hannah inherited property from her father, hers during her life and then passed to her 'children'; after Hannah's death, her son sued for his share of the property, but his illegitimacy excluded him,

[129] See: Ruth Perry 'Family Matters', in *A Companion to Jane Austen* edited by Claudia L. Johnson and Clara Tuite (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2011), p.323.
[130] Catherine Packham, 'Property Law', in *Mary Wollstonecraft in Context, Literature in Context*, eds. Nancy E. Johnson and Paul Keen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp.207–14 (p.211) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/9781108261067.024>.

as, according to the Vice-Chancellor, 'there was no child of Mrs. Cole living at her death'.[131] For Donneraile's second son the ramifications of the law are particularly harsh because, as the son of an heiress, his potential inheritance — as well as his actual loss — is considerable.

Although the novel protests explicitly about legal inequities governing the economic affairs of bigamously married and deserted wives, Lady Charlotte goes to uncharacteristic lengths to circumvent the lesser-known controversy concerning the rights of illegitimate children to inherit maternal wealth. While surprising, her strategy might have originated in a reluctance to risk alienating readers any further; equally plausible is the idea that she was unaware of the law as it applied to children who had been born out of wedlock .The most likely explanation, I would argue, is that by eliminating Sophia's son, the author makes space in the novel to offer up an alternative response to the problem of bigamy, illegitimacy and children's inheritance rights. As a direct challenge to the moral conservatism of her target readership, Lady Charlotte reanimates Smith's enlightened solution to the inequitable statutes of matrimonial law: when Sophia's infant son dies, she takes the opportunity to re-enact the philanthropy of Geraldine Verney. The novel ends when heroic Sophia rejects men and matrimony, the narrative offering up an alternative to conventional marriage and motherhood when she altruistically adopts and safeguards the interests of the surviving child and heir — the son of the now-dying Corissande.

The alternative solution Lady Charlotte's narrative proposes to the problem of transferring wealth and property to illegitimate children is a rhetorical riposte to the courtship novel and involves pressuring a husband who deserts into making proper restitution. Under duress from Sophia, Donneraile thus implores his father, Lord Donneraile, to recognise the son he shares with Corissande as heir and devolve upon him wealth, status and titles irrespective of his legal rights. This does not signify the anti-hero's moral epiphany, however: after having tried and failed to take his own life, Donneraile next joins up then self-immolates fighting Napoleon 'on the plains of Talavera' in Portugal (*SI* ii p.249). At this point, the omniscient narrator is scathing about the self-pitying anti-hero: 'He had courted death because he had not courage to live a prey to remorse and insanity' (ibid.). According to Ellen Moody, *Ethelinde* was similarly motivated by Smith's loathing of 'the miseries and injustice rank-based hierarchies and admired male sexual power inflict on others'.[132] When the bigamist's father, Lord Donneraile, is finally confronted with the

[131] Frost, p.21. Although Frost's collection of essays generally examines the decades of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, her argument is relevant to our discussion because the case she cites here spans the period consecutive to the litigant's first marriage in 1815.
[132] Moody, ed., *Ethelinde,* introduction, p.x.

consequences of his tyranny, he decides to make amends to Corissande by capitulating to the considerable pressure Sophia has been exerting on her behalf:

> The difficulties she had expected to meet with in procuring to the little Granville, the restoration of his rights no longer existed. The proud and wretched Lord Donneraile, in mourning the untimely loss of his son, regretted the only being he had ever loved destroyed in part by his own fault. His pride was no less wounded in the prospect of leaving no scion of his noble stock to inherit his family honours; and when the orphan of Donneraile and Corissande was presented to him, he hailed him as the being that was to support his sinking house; and vowed to protect him, and make him worthy of the future greatness that was already destined for him. (*SI* ii 251-2)

Although events here appear to offer a reassuring plot resolution, the narrator's heavily ironic tone quashes all expectations of any reward or moral redemption. Because of the legal situation at hand, the narrative implies, security for women and their children lies in the gift only of men such as Lord Donneraile: a despot for whom (from the above extract), 'the prospect of leaving no scion of his noble stock to inherit his family honours' is unthinkable. This is dynastic pride, not altruism — the effusions of a fragile male ego which nourishes itself on thoughts of propagating a 'being' to be made 'worthy of the future greatness that was already destined for him' (see above). This solution, Lady Charlotte implies, offers the ultimate gratification to a narcissist and tyrant but little reassurance to those women who wished to pass on wealth to children born outside marriage — children who are prevented by the inequities of inheritance law from accessing property that was rightfully theirs.

To subvert the discourse of moral domestic fiction even more definitively, the heroine of *Self-Indulgence* retains her heroic status while rejecting religion after the death of her son. In another of the novel's narrative departures we learn that, instead of forming a pretext for the conventional moral improvement of the heroine, the mother's bereavement makes a radical new point:

> she thought herself marked by Providence to suffer undeservedly. The deepest and most concentrated gloom took possession for a time of her heart; and, wholly wrapped up in her own misery, she seemed to forget her trust in heaven, her command over her own feelings, and the sorrows of Corissande. (*SI* ii 244)

When the narrator claims that Sophia soon recovers from her 'mental darkness' after bereavement because of her 'excellent disposition', we are not convinced (ibid.). Neither do the

novel's closing scenes follow the conventional narrative trajectory which sees the heroine's triumphant union in matrimony; the narrative concludes instead with the return from France of Donneraile's heroic second wife after she has failed to prevent the death of his blameless first. There is no triumphant ending and she receives no reward: 'No husband, no father, no child, welcomed her to her home; at once she learnt the demise of her father and her husband' (*SI* ii 250). The narrative ends with the death of the father who first brokered the marriage between Sophia and Donneraile; we are told that Mr Dickens, who has rejected his innocent daughter during her absence because she has been slandered in public, dies of apoplexy brought on by choler. The narrative thus withholds all possibility of moral closure, protesting loud and clear to the end about gender inequities and gesturing, even, towards the later Victorian novel of social justice.[133]

Mellor observes cogently of the late-eighteenth and early- nineteenth centuries that 'Wollstonecraft's impact on the women writers of her day was incalculably profound. Whether individual writers endorsed Wollstonecraft's specific demands that women enter the professions on a par with men, that they be granted their own "representation" in Parliament, that they be entitled to the legal custody of their own children and to divorce at will, or disagreed with them, very few denied the validity of her key arguments.'[134] Because the inaccessibility of divorce remained the main source of married women's problems, Lady Charlotte strives, in 1812, to increase women's awareness of their vulnerability to male authority by immersing the readership in the problems experienced by a woman who, having married in socially egalitarian France is trafficked to England where she finds herself unable to escape her sexually–motivated, exploitative husband. Whereas 'both Austen and Burney utilise and disavow Wollstonecraft's

[133] According to Pam Perkins, Joan Glassel (1796–1828) refers a number of times to Lady Charlotte in her diary of 1818 (held at the NLS) which includes a passage in which Glassel appears to be engaged in an intriguing dialogue about moral doctrine – possibly with Lady Charlotte herself. Glassel asserts boldly that she is 'far from religious' and 'religion is not the governing principle of my life'. She also concurs 'heartily' with her silent interlocutor that 'however manly and philosophical our system may be there would to some of us be more attraction more influencing power in a gentler form at least'. Because Glassel does not address Lady Charlotte by name, we can only speculate: a possible and tantalising inference is that, for the author of *Self-Indulgence,* formal religion is neither engaging nor persuasive because it is esoteric and unfathomable — characteristics which both Glassel and her confidante associate with masculine tyranny. Joan Glassell's continental journal, 1818, NLS Acc. 8508, box 3, folder 41. NB: Perkins confirms that Glassel and Lady Charlotte were personal correspondents as well as being related by marriage (in 1820 Glassel married the youngest Campbell sibling, John Campbell — seventh Duke of Argyll from 1839). Pam Perkins, *Anne MacVicar Grant 1755-1838* (Alexandria: Alexandria Street Press, 2002), p.16 n.27.

[134] Mellor, 'Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman', p.156.

radical analysis of the cultural forces which shape individual character in society',[135] Lady Charlotte breaks new ground in the character of Sophia Dickens, a heroine who, having been forced into bigamous marriage, uses her newly recovered status as *feme sole* to readjust gender relations, overthrowing her oppressor and coercing him — and his father through him — to compensate both of the women in his thrall.

During the 1810s — a period which is normally regarded as an intermission in the campaigns by women to improve their legal rights — Lady Charlotte, using popular fiction as a tool, foregrounds the operation of a hidden but increasingly problematic social abuse: the practice of illegal marriage and increasing incidences of bigamy. Before Hardwicke's Act passed into law in 1753, it would have been a relatively straightforward matter to prosecute Donneraile because at this time an individual could be convicted of bigamy in England and Wales if the marriage which had taken place overseas was the first marriage. This was because the Bigamy Act of 1603 referred to the offence being committed by 'persons within His Majesty's dominions of England and Wales'.[136] Rebecca Probert confirms accordingly that if someone went through a ceremony in this jurisdiction and then married for a second time in France or the British nations, they could not be charged with bigamy; if the first marriage had taken place abroad, however, and they subsequently married for a second time in England or Wales, they could be.

I contend that while *Self-Indulgence* may lack the technical cohesion which characterises Austen's fiction, it is more than plausible that Lady Charlotte's novel was instrumental in raising women's awareness of The Clandestine Marriages Act and its legal implications. In response to extensive campaigning in the years which followed, three bills were passed between July 1822 and July 1823 as part of an attempt to redress some of the problems which arose directly out of it. Legislation passed in 1823 finally made it more difficult to annul a marriage on the basis that formalities had not been correctly observed; as explained by Probert, again, 'from November 1st, a marriage was only void if *both* parties had 'knowingly and wilfully' failed to observe the legal requirements. In other words, if both bride and groom knew at the time of their marriage that the banns had not been called correctly, then the marriage would be void; if only *one* of them was aware of the problem, the marriage would be valid'.[137] The effect of this act was that it would have been harder for a trickster such as Donneraile to extricate himself on a technicality once the marriage had been solemnised. While it was not until the passing of the Marriage Act of 1836 that

[135] McInnes, p.98.
[136] Probert, *Divorced*, *Bigamist, Bereaved*, pp.99-100.
[137] Ibid., p.113.

it was possible to prosecute a guilty party for perjury for 'knowingly and wilfully' deceiving a second party into illegally entering into wedlock, the pressure to convict individuals who married under a false name with intent to deceive continued to apply.

In considering the changes in women's legal standing which occurred gradually but cumulatively throughout the nineteenth century, Ben Griffin observes that, 'In the space of little more than thirty years legal and political privileges that had underpinned male power for centuries were either swept away or substantially undermined. How did this happen?'[138] Although his study focuses on the parliamentary (and necessarily masculine) mechanics of legal change, he emphasises the role of personal networks and organisational structures which made up the early women's movement; for Griffin, progress in improving legal frameworks can be attributed directly to the tenacity of those women who resisted structures which 'sought to regulate and control their lives'.[139] While unmarried mothers carried responsibility for more than three decades after the publication of Lady Charlotte's debut novel for the financial support of children born outside wedlock, England's Poor Law, which imposed the special burden, would be amended in 1844 to enable them to petition fathers for child support. Until then, as explained by Ginger Frost, enlightened judges and juries found ways around the law whenever possible: 'Rather than see unmarried mothers as 'lewd' women gaming the system, these reformers saw them and their children as victims of a legal regime that defied 'common sense' '.[140]

Alison La Croix and Martha C. Nussbaum go so far as to credit novelists directly with driving the reform of gendered legal injustice during the period: for them, the focus placed by fiction upon gender issues during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century period was directly instrumental in opening 'the eyes of the law to women's lives by means of artfully packaged vicarious experience'.[141] This was a political crusade which the debut novel of Lady Charlotte Campbell, as I have argued above, helped both to re-invigorate and progress.

[138] Griffin, B. (2012). ''Feminism' and the history of women's rights', in *The Politics of* Gender *in Victorian Britain*: Masculinity, Political Culture and the Struggle for Women's Rights. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.5 <doi:10.1017/CBO9781139057530>. Referred to hereafter as 'The Politics of Gender'.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Frost, p.43.
[141] LaCroix, Alison L., and Martha C. Nussbaum (eds), 'Introduction', p.6.

Chapter 2 *Conduct is Fate* (1822)

Written during the final years of the Regency and published anonymously in Edinburgh by William Blackwood (1776-1834), *Conduct is Fate* (1822) responds more consciously to the dynamic commercial context than *Self-Indulgence* had done in 1812 (see Introduction n.5 for full citations); Lady Charlotte's highly hybridised second text is consequently the most complex and generically diverse of her eighteen novels. In the ten years following the publication of *Self-Indulgence*, no progress had been made in reforming the marriage laws in England or improving married women's legal entitlement; Lady Charlotte therefore enhances men's cruelty in her second bad-marriage narrative and connects the problems which afflict the abandoned and separated wife at the centre of the text to persisting deficiencies in the legal measures which supposedly protected women's welfare. In *Self-Indulgence,* she had viewed the marriage of Caroline of Brunswick and the Regent through the prism of the *roman-à-clef* to raise awareness of the problems caused to women by men's adultery, libertinism and the widespread practice of bigamy; in 1822, she resumes her earlier political protest, and by focusing on the legal indissolubility of marriage and the especial problems faced by women who were forced out of the marital home, attempts to confront and change the allegiances of a politically powerful book-buying and circulating-library demographic.

Whereas *Self-Indulgence* had articulated the polemic of earlier, revolutionary women writers, *Conduct is Fate* commits to contemporary campaigns by women activists such as Anna Wheeler Doyle (1780–1848). Between 1820 and 1825 — years which spanned the period of debate prefacing the First Reform Act — Wheeler hosted an intellectual salon in London and associated with figures such as the utilitarian, Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), and James Mill (1773–1836), a reforming philosophical radical.[1] Wheeler, according to James Jose, was a galvanising figure who critiqued 'the misogyny of the dominant intellectuals of their time' and also 'understood women

[1] In the opinion of biographer Marie Mulvey-Roberts, it is Wheeler who 'can be said to be heir to Wollstonecraft's legacy rather than the better-known Mary Shelley'. Joanna Goldsworthy and Marie Mulvey-Roberts, 'Revolutionary Mothers and Revolting Daughters: Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley, Anna Wheeler and Rosina Bulwer Lytton', in *Woman to Woman: Female Negotiations During the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Carolyn D. Williams and others (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2010) *ProQuest Ebook Central*. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/soton-ebooks/detail.action?docID=3115948>, p.63. Referred to hereafter as 'Revolutionary Mothers and Revolting Daughters'. NB: Anna Wheeler was also known by the names 'Anna Doyle' and 'Anna Doyle Wheeler'. Unless quoting from a primary or secondary source, this thesis uses 'Anna Wheeler' throughout.

to be a social group whose unequal treatment required collective action to change it';[2] in 1825 she co-authored a book-length critique with the also Irish-born campaigner and feminist, William Thompson, in which they urged their readers, especially women, to rise up and seize their freedom.[3] Wheeler, according to Marie Mulvey-Roberts, was a socialist feminist who advocated a fundamental restructuring of society whereas Wollstonecraft, she suggests, is more 'conciliatory, compromising, and apologetic'.[4] This chapter proposes that while Lady Charlotte, in both of her first novels, follows Wollstonecraft in critiquing the system of matrimonial law in England, she also responds to Wheeler in 1822 by rejecting the institutional enslavement of women by the gendered proscriptions of companionate marriage: 'an "all-corrupting, and mutually degrading code"'.[5]

Like Wollstonecraft, Lady Charlotte was keenly aware of the sensitivities of the conservative reading public to unorthodox discourse; her engagement with contemporary marriage debates in the years 1817–22, which spanned the writing of *Conduct is Fate*, is therefore complex. As opposed to arguing for the overthrow of an entire political system, she places the emancipation of married women from the thraldom of coverture at the centre of her second novel; while attempting to conciliate her mainly conservative readers, she also broadens the political reach of the narrative by considering alternatives to matrimony and motherhood, including the possibility of love outside wedlock – an idea which Wollstonecraft had proffered in her fictional fragment, *The Wrongs of Woman* (1798). In *Self-Indulgence*, Lady Charlotte had both critiqued the practice of imposing financial penalties upon the victims of broken marriage and protested against the dearth of professional opportunities open to women of rank; *Conduct is Fate*, I will argue, embeds and progresses this agenda, raising problems in the process which would drive the campaigns of women activists for much of the nineteenth century.

In spite of her commitment to challenging both the statutory issues affecting the legal rights of women and the intransigent system of moral values which oppressed them, Lady Charlotte

[2] Jose, J. 'Feminist Political Theory Without Apology: Anna Doyle Wheeler, William Thompson, and the Appeal of One Half the Human Race, Women', Hypatia, 34.4 (2019), pp.827-851 (p.830). Referred to hereafter as 'Feminist Political Theory'.
[3] William Thompson [and Anna Doyle Wheeler] *Appeal of one half the human race, women: Against the pretensions of the other half, men, to retain them in political, and thence in civil and domestic, slavery: In reply to a paragraph of Mr. Mill's celebrated "Article on Government"* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown and Green, 1825). Referred to hereafter as 'Appeal of One Half'. See also: Dolores Dooley, *Equality in Community*, p.67.
[4] Goldsworthy and Mulvey-Roberts, 'Revolutionary Mothers and Revolting Daughters', pp.69-70.
[5] See: '*Appeal of One Half*', p.62 in Jose, p.839.

evaluated her literary practice and was keenly aware of the need to write for an audience even if, in 1822, she had not yet identified a particular reading constituency. She would no doubt have been aware of the critical reception eight years earlier of *The Wanderer; or, Female Difficulties* (1814) in which Frances Burney (1752–1840) had alienated the public by protesting too rigorously against English cultural practices. Melissa Sodeman notes that *The Wanderer* — Burney's last novel — had proved to be 'jarringly out of place in a literary marketplace that favoured tales, gothic narratives and fictions of moral evangelicalism'; she remarks, also, that the readership had been antagonised by the novel's reprisal of 'revolutionary debates that had long since lapsed'.[6] Public reaction notwithstanding, Lady Charlotte held Burney and her values in the highest esteem, and in response Princess Caroline's frivolous enquiry about *The Wanderer*, defined the novel as 'one of the standard works of fiction, which England is proud to claim, and which, in its own classical style of English purity, both as to language, and moral, and story, cannot be surpassed'.[7] Lady Charlotte evidently engaged positively with *The Wanderer* at a cultural level, as well as taking political inspiration from Burney's text: concerned by public attitudes, however, she is forced to navigate a precariously narrow path as she attempts to access the dynamic popular market. Carolyn Lambert observes of women writers during the mid to late nineteenth century, 'many of the activists campaigning for reform during the period struggled with the conflict between the need for judicial change and the cultural hegemony of daily life';[8] Claudia L. Johnson's analysis of female authorship during the period articulates Lady Charlotte's dilemma even more succinctly: 'How could authors use the urgently important subjects post-revolutionary polemics opened up to them without getting entangled in the inexorable binary oppositions that very polemic set into motion?'[9] Johnson's rhetorical question, which she answers in relation to Austen as well as her contemporaries, can be applied with particular relevance to Bury: 'To write

[6] Melissa Sodeman, 'Novel Anachronisms: Sophia Lee's, The Life of a Lover and Frances Burney's The Wanderer', in *The Sentimental Novel in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. by A.J. Rivero, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2019), p.194. Available from: ProQuest Ebook Central. [23 February 2021].

[7] Culley, *Women's Court and Society Memoirs*, ii, pp.280-281. See also: Culley, ii, p.446 (note to p.280). Princess Caroline firstly misspells the title when eliciting Lady Charlotte's response to *The Wanderer* ('What do you think of "The Waudour," by Madame D'Arblais?'); she then claims that Burney has 'forgot her English'. It is her mistress's flippancy that provokes Bury's Austenian defence of Burney's novel.

[8] Carolyn Lambert, *For Better, For Worse* (London: Routledge, 2018), p.2.

[9] Claudia L. Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p.19.

novels of social criticism, authors had to develop strategies of subversion and indirection which would enable them to use the polemical tradition without being used completely by it.'[10]

Progressive women writers, attempting to negotiate anti-Jacobin attitudes in a post-revolutionary society, faced the same problems their radical antecedents had experienced in the late-eighteenth century. Between 1792 and 1796, reviews of *A Vindication of the Rights* and Wollstonecraft's writing in general were positive, according to Nancy E. Johnson, focusing almost ubiquitously, upon her 'assessment of female education and consequent plans for reform'.[11] The adulation cooled after Wollstonecraft's death in 1798, however, because of the publication of a candid memoir by her husband, William Godwin (in which he had uncovered details about her stance on sexual and religious matters):

> She was a woman of high genius; and as she felt the whole strength of her powers, she thought herself lifted, in a degree, above the ordinary trammels of civil communities.[12]

Even during the revolutionary 1790s, it seems that a woman's radical ideology had only been permissible if her private conduct was defined by publicly sanctioned standards of decorum: for this reviewer of Wollstonecraft's work, the writer who had once been 'a woman of high genius' was discredited irrevocably by her religious views and violation of sexual taboos. She is not so much an enlightenment figure as a moral derelict who thought herself elevated 'above the ordinary trammels of civil communities'.[13] Gary Kelly observes that a similar backlash ensued after the publication of Mary Hay's *The Victim of Prejudice* (1799) and that the writers who followed understood that 'in the Revolutionary aftermath feminism of any kind would have to take more acceptable forms.'[14]

Andrew McInnes observes that, on the basis of reputation, writers of women's fiction in the decades which ensued had to eliminate from their material any hint of political or moral partisanship: in the 1810s, he proposes, *The Wanderer* and Austen's *Mansfield Park* are characterised by their clearly 'uneasy mixture of radical sympathy and conservative satire, held in

[10] Ibid.
[11] Nancy E. Johnson, 'Early Critical Reception', in *Mary Wollstonecraft in Context,* Literature in Context, eds. Nancy E. Johnson and Paul Keen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,2020), pp.41-49 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/9781108261067.005>.
[12] Anon., 'Memoirs of Mrs Godwin, Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Women: The Monthly visitor, and pocket companion', 3, *British Periodicals* Mar 1798, p.236-242 (p.242).
[13] Ibid.
[14] Kelly, 'Mary Hays and Revolutionary Sensibility', p.38.

suspension within a liberal solution.'[15] I will argue that, ten years after the publication of *Self-Indulgence* and twenty-five years after the death of Wollstonecraft, Lady Charlotte both re-invigorates revolutionary discourse and refreshes covert feminist political allegiances expressed in contemporary moral-domestic novels, using popular fiction as a platform to raise public awareness of, and recommend changes to, matrimonial law. For Lady Charlotte — as well as Austen — 'strategies of subversion and indirection' involved formally affiliating oneself to the didactic narrative mode; the conflicts between Lady Charlotte's proto-feminist political agenda and the tastes of the mass market she was attempting to woo subsequently emerged, as will be seen shortly, in the considerable formal problems which would characterise her generically diverse novel of 1822.[16]

It is clear that Lady Charlotte is keenly responsive to the commercial context in 1822, not only excavating the fiction of Gothic writers of the previous century but, for good and ill, bringing a kaleidoscope of narrative strategies to bear on her second novel. Amongst other reasons for casting her net as widely as possible, was her need to benefit from the financial profits of writing. An entry she made in the diary she kept between 1810 and May 1815, in which she documents the advice she has received from a literary friend to aim for a more entertaining style of fiction, strongly suggests she was aware of, and driven by, the demands of a popular readership: '"Novel readers do not care for prosing. You and I love it dearly, and all sorts of analysis of human nature; but the generality of persons desire only fine stories and events, and bustle, to amuse them. When they read a story-book it is for entertainment, not instruction, and nothing answers out of its place. Dry reflections are not palateable (sic) when one expects amusement."'[17] Besides attempting to respond to popular tastes, Lady Charlotte's text is also determined, as I will demonstrate, by her consistent commitment to offering a subversive political manifesto within the pages of her commercially-packaged tale. In *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762-1800* (1995) E.J. Clery observes, 'In the 1790s the idea seems to emerge, particularly among women

[15] A McInnes, *Wollstonecraft's Ghost,* p.101.
[16] Johnson (Claudia L.), ibid.
[17] Letter to Lady Charlotte Bury (possibly from Susan Ferrier), c. 4th January 1817: *Diary 1838*, iii, p.159. The letter is undated: we are told 'it does not appear that the journalist kept any notes until the beginning of November in 1817'. The (purportedly male) writer's name is also concealed, the possibility of the correspondent being Walter Scott probably precluded by the effervescent style and the third person reference to him a few lines later (at which point the writer also identifies her own gender and unmarried status). The provenance of the quotation is also strongly suggested by a letter included elsewhere in the volume in which Susan Ferrier complains of emotional drabness in Maria Edgeworth's *Patronage* (1814) — at which point the discussion enters into an even more animated discussion of the connection between publishing, marketing and profit.

authors, that romance, by its very inclusion of the marvellous or the apparently marvellous, can reveal the unpleasant truth about real life in a way impossible in the referential narratives of historians or realist novelists'.[18] *Conduct is Fate* duly mobilises the discourse of second-generation Gothic novels to emphasise the misogyny and corruption at work beneath the surface of elite society; six years after its publication, she responds with particular alacrity to Lady Caroline Lamb's scurrilous *roman-à-clef*, *Glenarvon* (1816).[19] Lady Charlotte borrows freely from *Glenarvon*, many of the elements identified in Lamb's novel by *The Augustan Review* in 1816 re-emerging uncannily intact in 1822: 'rebellion, adultery, seductions innumerable, murders, the midnight revels of assassins , broken hearts and infanticide'.[20] Lamb's novel had been commissioned by silver-fork publisher Henry Colburn to stimulate curiosity amongst the subordinate classes about the scandalous lifestyles of aristocratic fashionables; in 1822 Bury re-invigorates and circulates Wollstonecraft's political agenda by adopting and adapting the composite mode Lamb had popularised. She becomes a writer who, in the Gothic tradition, 'finds the appropriate discursive form for her social critique of the rape of women's humanity.'[21]

Although Lady Charlotte's fiction was shaped, primarily, by her determination to craft a radical, anti-patriarchy agenda which would be palatable to a politically and morally conservative readership, her need to benefit from the financial profits of writing compromised her second bad-marriage novel to some extent. I contend, however, that despite its technical flaws *Conduct is Fate* transcends its weaknesses: it is a dark, claustrophobic tale which, by subverting genres which chronicle the moral growth, courtship and triumphant marriage of the heroine, proffers alternatives to the conventional models of matrimony and motherhood embedded in moral-domestic narratives. In her debut novel, Lady Charlotte had dramatised the abuse of women by illegal marriage practices to disclose such corruptions of English matrimonial law as the limitation of the statutory rights of illegitimate children to inherit parental wealth: ten years later, she progresses her critique by uncovering the continuing erosion of married women's property rights as well as the difficulties they encountered in finding employment in a partial and unequal society. *Conduct is Fate* protests in particular, I will contend, against the cultural practice of humiliating and applying harsh moral codes to innocent and socially vulnerable women; as *Self-*

[18] E.J. Clery, 'Like a Heroine', in *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction*, p.129.
[19] Lamb had been married by arrangement in 1805 to William Lamb, later Viscount Melbourne and, as discussed in the previous chapter, had entered into a scandalous liaison with Lord Byron in 1812; when he cruelly abandoned and humiliated her, she vengefully chronicled the affair in this text – which quickly became a best-selling *roman-à-clef*.
[20] Anon., *Augustan Review***,** 3 (18), (Oct 1816), 350–354 (p.351).
[21] Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction*, p.116.

Indulgence had demonstrated, the gender injustices of matrimonial law during the period corresponded directly to the hypocrisies and inequities of the sexual double standard, a social abuse which arose directly out of the innumerable peculiarities and inconsistencies embedded in early nineteenth-century culture. In her second novel, Lady Charlotte protests with increased force about the victimisation of women by probing collective national memories about the recent destruction of Queen Caroline. While the dissent at the heart of this novel was energised by private anger, I will demonstrate that the narrative was shaped by the author's wider sense of gender injustice and that she used her fiction as a platform to redress the operation of a legal regime which continued to oppress and disempower women in English society well into the early years of the nineteenth-century.

2.1 Fictionalising biographical and historical events

Despite the explicit attempts made by the author to package her Gothic, bad-marriage polemic as positive moral instruction, the reader is not uplifted by this tale; in 1822, Lady Charlotte's writing is shaped by her ongoing knowledge of the marital problems affecting both Princess Caroline of Brunswick and other women in her social circle. Shortly after the publication of *The Wanderer* in 1814, Caroline succumbed to pressure from her husband and agreed to go into exile on the continent. She set sail for Brunswick from the Sussex coast on 8 August; Lady Charlotte temporarily left her employment as a lady-in-waiting in the following year, and, after meeting up with the Princess again in Italy, finally quit her post in May 1815.[22] She spent her time subsequently travelling in Europe; in charge of a large family of children, adolescents and young adults, she scandalised society on March 23rd 1818 by marrying, in Florence, the Reverend John Edward Bury (1790?–1832) — tutor to her son and fifteen years her junior. Correctly anticipating the domestic opposition this would inflame, she appeals for her children's support on 10th February 1818 by making a full and harrowing confession to the circumstances of her first marriage (discussed in chapter 1). Within the same letter she suggests the poignancy of her past and expresses a rhetorical confidence about the future: 'I shall not die — and feel that I have never lived — once at least I shall taste of happiness.'[23]

During the weeks preceding the marriage, Lady Charlotte implored her recently-married eldest daughter, Eliza, to rehearse to her increasingly hostile, unmarried siblings the rather plaintive

[22] Culley, *Women's Court and Society Memoirs,* p.xii.
[23] Letter to Eliza Gordon Cumming from Lady Charotte Bury, Florence, 10th Feb 1818. NLS, Gordon–Cumming Archive, Dep.175, box 164/1.

mantra, 'my mother is not happy — has never been happy — if she is now let us her children forgive what may now hurt our pride in the connection'.[24] Although Eliza supported her mother initially, her enthusiasm waned from 1821 onwards with the arrival of three half-siblings (one of whom died at birth). The rest of the children opposed the match from the outset and relentlessly assailed Lady Charlotte (now Bury) in the years which followed.[25] In her journal, one of Bury's, younger daughters, Harriet Charlotte Beaujolois — or 'Beaujolois' — Campbell (1801–1848), described the quarrel that erupted in 1818 between her mother and her eldest son, Walter Frederick Campbell (1798–1855): when Bury brushed aside his demand for caution and delay, he immediately cut off her allowance.[26] In this sense, *Conduct is Fate*, begun in 1817, responds to the author's continuing domestic problems as well as dramatising the difficulties she had experienced during her first marriage between 1795 and 1809. I will argue that while contemporary novelists such as Austen forbear to enquire too closely into the private experiences of unhappily married women, *Conduct is Fate*, written at a pivotal political and personal moment for the author, not only helps supply the deficit in our historical knowledge, but, as debates about matrimonial law revived during the 1820s, broke women's silence about their oppression within wedlock by the legal and financial proscriptions of matrimony.

While *Conduct is Fate* definitively shares with *The Wanderer* concerns about the mistreatment of socially marginalised women by members of their own class, polemicising the gendered injustices of coverture through fiction proved to be too radical a step for Burney. Eight years later, Bury adopts and adapts the protest of the novelist she so revered and in the process, makes Burney's objections much more forceful. During the period 1817-1822, years which spanned the writing of *Conduct is Fate*, Bury resolved to channel contemporary political events to arouse indignation and generate support — not just for the Regent's persecuted wife, but for badly married women in general. Her second narrative emerged out of a particularly personal determination to publicise the legal frameworks which had recently enabled George to sideline his wife and then dispossess her of her rightful status as mother and queen. The royal scandal reached its peak between 1816 and 1821 during which time — having safely expatriated Caroline — George ordered the

[24] Ibid.
[25] In his journal, Walter Scott described the Rev. John Bury as 'a thorough paced coxcomb' and 'an egregious fop'. See: *The Journal of Sir Walter Scott: From the Original Manuscript at Abbotsford*, ed. by C.D. Douglas, Cambridge Library Collection Literary Studies, June 2013 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp.293-31 (pp.289 and 300) <doi:10.1017/CBO9781139644907.019>.
[26] See Harriet Charlotte Beaujolois Campbell, *A Journey to Florence in 1817*. Ed. with notes by G.R. de Beer (London: G. Bles, 1951).

demolition of Montague House, the Princess's residence in Greenwich, leaving only the outline of her bath. In the same year the royal couple's daughter, Princess Charlotte, married Leopold of Saxe-Coburg-Saalfeld (1790–1865). According to Bury's memoir, Charlotte made a desperate plea to see her mother during the pregnancy which followed, but died in childbirth without having had her request granted. In the second edition of the *Diary 1838*, Bury claimed that George did not permit his wife even to receive notification of their daughter's death: she found out about it only when she saw a newspaper report in Naples four days later.[27]

The extent to which Bury's moral project was generated by the quotidian realities of dynastic marriage is all too evident in the close interface which exists between her private correspondence, her diaries and the fictionalised accounts she wrote during the period. Of particular relevance to *Conduct is Fate* is the author's response to a parliamentary speech delivered on 2nd March 1813, by the reformer, Samuel Whitbread (1765–1815), concerning the divulgence of allegations made against Princess Caroline during the 'Delicate Investigation' of 1806. The enquiry had been commissioned by the then Prince of Wales to probe rumours that Caroline had borne an illegitimate child during the early years of their separation; though the allegations were unproven, they served as a pretext to limit her access to Princess Charlotte and her reputation was severely tarnished. When the scandal resurged, Whitbread invoked public support for Caroline by comparing her plight to that of the late Queen Caroline Matilda (1751–1775), sister to George the third:

> Mr. W. called the house to the recollection of the cruel fate of the King's sister, the late Queen of Denmark, who had been unjustly imprisoned on a similar charge, and had died of grief at the early age of twenty-four. What protection had the Princess of Wales? Her father was dead—her husband had withdrawn his protection — she had therefore only the people of England to call upon; and Mr. W. now called upon them to protect an innocent, traduced, and defenceless stranger, the mother of their future Queen! [28]

Bury seems to have responded directly to Whitbread's rousing invocation, using her second novel as a political platform to garner support for badly-married women who, like Caroline, lacked family and friends. Queen Matilda had been wedded by arrangement to King Christian VII of

[27] In her memoir, Bury expresses her outrage at Princess Caroline's treatment by quoting from a personal letter which she received on the occasion: 'no official notice of the event was forwarded to the Princess of Wales […] she learnt it through the medium of a common newspaper!' *Diary 1838*, iii, p.244.
[28] *The Murdered Queen!*, p.307.

Denmark and was believed to have begun an affair with her husband's physician, Johann Friedrich Struensee (1737–72) which resulted in the birth of a daughter in 1771: Matilda was subsequently divorced by her husband and deported to Hanover, where she died at the age of twenty-four.[29] In *Letters Written in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*, Mary Wollstonecraft had indicated her awareness of the allegations levelled at Matilda by the establishment; instead of directing disapproval at the maligned queen and her love for Struensee, however, Wollstonecraft places blame on the husband who failed her: 'if she had an attachment for him, it did not disgrace her heart or understanding, the king being a notorious debauchee, and an idiot into the bargain'.[30]

It is apparent that for Wollstonecraft, Matilda was a victim of counter-revolution and the casualty of her social status and an arranged marriage — a situation which Bury imports into her second novel when the Swiss heroine, Bertha de Chanci, resists the attempts of her patrician aunts to manipulate her into matrimony with a corrupt nobleman's son who is 'destined to inherit the consequence and rank of his father' (*CF* i 174). In the 1820s, Bury implies not only that the existing system of coverture and the custom of marriage by arrangement were immoral and exploitative, but that the British class system was permeated by such practices. After reading a letter written by Caroline petitioning her husband, forwarded to George by Whitbread and leaked to the *Morning Chronicle*, Jane Austen likewise voiced her support for the Regent's persecuted wife on 16th February 1813 in a letter to her friend, Martha Lloyd: 'Poor woman, I shall support her as long as I can, because she is a Woman and because I hate her Husband.'[31] This is a sentiment which found its way into *Mansfield Park* (1814) — Austen's study of an aristocratic family which critiques, in microcosm, the mechanics of male domestic power during the Regency and, by extension, the cultural systems which oppress women more widely in society. A year after the Whitbread speech, Caroline's husband would accuse his wife of leaving England because she wished to pursue a dissolute lifestyle; in the *Diary 1838* Bury counterclaims that she had not left England in 1814 for any other reason than her inability to endure the increasing degradation and public humiliation of her marriage. The point that Bury makes in her novel was that a man like the Regent, empowered by the processes of a legal regime that discriminated against women, was

[29] See: *Notes on Letters Written in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*, ed. by Tone Brekke and Jon Mee (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2009), p.103.
[30] Ibid., p.57.
[31] D. Le Faye, Jane Austen's Letters (Oxford: OUP 2011), p.216. According to Amy Culley, it was Henry Brougham, Princess Caroline's Attorney-General, who 'orchestrated the publication of Caroline's letters to her husband demanding greater access to Princess Charlotte'. Culley, *Women's Court and Society Memoirs*, pp.405 (note to p.49). The Whig politician, Samuel Whitbread (1764-1815), also assisted Brougham in his campaign of 1813-14 on Caroline's behalf. Ibid., p.415 (note to p.137).

able to accuse his wife of adultery and, without substantive evidence, deny her the rights to which she was entitled as a wife and mother, all the while continuing with his own diverse extra-marital affairs.[32] Austen, although distancing herself from the objects of her scrutiny, had detailed through fiction the economic problems which blighted the lives of many disempowered women, punctuating her novels throughout the Regency with the financial minutiae of inheritance, dowries, and marriage portions; her political purpose is reanimated and intensified in *Conduct is Fate* when the heroine's adulterous husband, the Comte D'Egmont, attempts to exempt himself from the burden of his wife's support by accusing her of adultery. The practice of swindling brides who had no parents or responsible friends to safeguard their interests was commonplace; Bury — appropriating and challenging the assumptions of the courtship genre — progresses Austen's critique by focusing on the severe penalties inflicted upon women by guardians who withhold funds and whose husbands, with the full backing of the law, expel them from the marital home.

Princess Caroline's trial for adultery in 1820 both contextualises our understanding of the proto-feminist polemic of *Conduct is Fate* and corresponds with events narrated in Bury's memoirs. While *Conduct is Fate* skilfully blurs the boundaries between fact and fiction, the entries the novelist made in her journal during the period of Caroline's exile expres a clear sense of outrage at the ever-intensifying attempts made by the Regent and his followers to incriminate his unprotected wife. The outspoken Anne Seymour Damer (1748-1828), Bury's unorthodox first cousin, did not hesitate at this time to accuse the Regent and his coterie of misogyny and hypocrisy:

> I consider Her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales being sent abroad without a specific cause, as not only improbable but impossible, under our good laws; but I do fear and believe that some machinations, in the way of trial and investigation, are actually going on underhand, and that real or pretended proofs of misconduct will be brought forward against her. (*Diary1838* i p.220)[33]

As Damer had predicted, it was not long before George renewed his attempts to calumniate his wife. In 1820, he finally swapped his long-term mistress, Isabella, Marchioness of Hertford (1760–1834), for Elizabeth, Marchioness Conyngham (1769–1861). Because of these, and many other

[32] See: Leonora Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), p.150.

[33] Anne Seymour Damer continued to support Caroline after her exile and was one of the few society women to remain loyal to her during her trial for adultery. See: Jane Robins, *Rebel Queen*: *How the Trial of Caroline Brought England to the Brink of Revolution* (London: Pocket, 2007), p.301**.**

infidelities, he was unable to appeal to the ecclesiastical courts for a divorce; he solved the problem by having his wife tried for adultery instead. Caroline had moved to Lake Como on 16th July 1815, and in Milan she hired Italian soldier, Bartolomeo Pergami (1784–1842), promoting him swiftly to the role of chamberlain.[34] Circumstances such as these were highly propitious for a man as desperate as the Regent was to rid himself of his wife: the relationship with Pergami offered George the perfect chance to accrue the evidence needed to fuel a legal enquiry. With the most flagrant hypocrisy, he instructed a team of investigators, the 'Milan Commission', to scrutinise Caroline's lifestyle and relationships while she was abroad during the years 1816–1820. The outcome George desired was a parliamentary bill that would enable him to have his wife prosecuted and punished without a legal trial: she would then be deprived of her title as consort and the marriage dissolved.

Caroline claimed, with great prescience, that the Regent's attempts to rid himself of her would redouble after her daughter's death. [35] In *Conduct is Fate*, Lady Charlotte used the destruction of Princess Caroline as her point of departure as she endeavoured, through fiction, to uncover the operations of a society which discriminated against — and disempowered—women purely on the basis of their marital status. Bury's fictional villain therefore decides to disencumber himself of his wife as soon as possible after the marriage and, like George, is assisted by his wife's social isolation and legal vulnerability. When D'Egmont fails in the first instance to appropriate Bertha's inheritance, he settles instead upon abandonment dressed up as separation; *The Murdered Queen!* details numerous similar enormities, including the several attempts the Regent made to intimidate his wife into leaving the country on a permanent basis. Following George III's death on

[34] For Lady Charlotte's well-founded apprehensions about Caroline's relationship with Pergami, see Culley, i p.xii.

[35] Princess Charlotte died in childbirth on 10th November 1817 as Bury was in the early stages of writing her second novel. She poignantly and accurately outlined the probable consequences of the bereavement for Princess Caroline — a prediction which proved all-too true and which, fifteen years later, she would actualise faithfully in her most politically subversive novel, *The Divorced* (1837): 'The instant I heard the sad news, I thought of the poor Princess of Wales, and felt grieved from my heart at this blow to her every chance of happiness and support. It was more as the future queen's mother that she had a strong claim on the English people, than from her own position; and her daughter would, I feel convinced, have supported her to the uttermost; for not only would the good motive of affection for the Princess of Wales have actuated her in doing so, but certainly also the Prince Regent had rendered himself an object of dislike to his daughter, and she would, from the haughty nature of her disposition, have felt satisfaction in upholding the person whom he persecuted and disliked. The Princess of Wales may well now feel careless of life… She has no bribe to offer; and there are few who would undertake to wage war in her cause against her husband, who is all-powerful' (*Diary*, iii 237-8). Fifteen years after the publication of *Conduct is Fate*, Bury revisits these issues even more polemically in *The Divorced*. See: 3.5 n.120.

29 January 1820, for example, Lord Hutchinson had bribed Caroline with the sum of £50 000 per annum to 'renounce her title as Queen, refrain from using the name of the royal family of England, and never return to this country'.[36] Caroline's response, in a gesture of defiance, was to discharge her attendants and return immediately from the continent, arriving in England on June 5 to assert her intention to be crowned.[37] Because she refused to accept her husband's proposal, he unleashed legal proceedings against her; it was with reluctance, nevertheless, that the government agreed to introduce a special procedure in the House of Lords — the so-called 'Bill of Pains and Penalties'.[38] E.A. Smith, again, observes, 'Just as the arrival of Queen Caroline in 1820 stimulated a new outburst of popular radicalism in general, so the nature of the 'Queen's affair' promoted especial activity by women' — a crusade, I will contend, in which *Conduct is Fate* participated.[39] Women's anxieties in wider society were only heightened by Caroline's dilemma; 'on every count — deception, betrayal, abandonment, rejection and hatred — Caroline was a wronged woman whose plight sounded a chord of alarm and concern in the breast of every wife in the Kingdom'.[40] The publicity generated by the trial meant that even conservatives began to acknowledge the moral corruption which flourished unchallenged in high places; Bury took swift advantage of the general sense of outrage and used fiction as a tool to garner support for the victims, not the architects, of corrupt policies and practices.

The popular support Caroline received upon her arrival in England, chronicled again in the *Diary 1838*, was immense; as Jane Robins observes, 'the queen's cause was becoming so popular, and being taken up by so many people, that the radicals sniffed the possibility of, at the very least, causing serious damage to the government'.[41] By going into print, I will contend, Bury attempted to shift the allegiances of a morally conservative demographic away from established values; her hope was that by fictionalising her plight, she could present Princess Caroline as a figure who emblematised the problems of a completely disenfranchised sub class. For Bury's readership, the plight of the spurned Princess was already unsettling on many levels; the mandates of the partial and unequal legal system which oppressed her were clearly designed to effectuate the subjugation of women in general. Bury consciously surfed the wave of support following

[36] *The Murdered Queen!*, p.578. Hutchinson approached Caroline on 4th June 1820, approximately one month before her husband's coronation. See: Robins, p.116.
[37] This attempt to reclaim her legal and constitutional rights, however, was to end in humiliation and defeat. See: History of Parliament Online <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/periods/hanoverians/queen-caroline-affair-1820>.
[38] Robins, *Rebel Queen,* p.142.
[39] E.A Smith, *A Queen on Trial*, p.99.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Robins, p.94.

Caroline's indictment and arraignment, hoping that *Conduct is Fate* — written as the Milan Commission first swung into action and published shortly after the Princess's death — would both enlighten women about their predicament and galvanise support for the burgeoning campaign for judicial reform.

2.2 Bury's riposte to the courtship narrative

Ten years after her fictional debut and less than a decade after the final publications of Austen and Burney, Bury relaunched herself as a working novelist with an audacious programme of narrative innovations. What set her apart from courtship novelists of the period was the readiness and relentlessness with which she attempted to reform the morally squeamish book-reading public by confronting them with the prosaic inner workings of dynastic marriage. *Conduct is Fate* airs harsh domestic truths in public as a riposte to the courtship narrative which, without subjecting to scrutiny the quotidian realities and legal enormities of the institution, invariably recommended matrimony as the single worthwhile destination for women of moral virtue.[42] While Claudia L. Johnson observes that, in a post-revolutionary context, Austen's novel *Mansfield Park* 'adumbrates a phenomenon which has preoccupied modern feminists: the dependence of certain kinds of masculine discourse on feminine silence', Andrew McInnes suggests that the apparent political orthodoxy of both Austen and Burney enables them surreptitiously to articulate 'the need for gradual reform'.[43] I will argue that while female novelists certainly negotiated a hazardous course in 'the post-revolutionary landscape of early nineteenth-century politics, social reform and generic limitations', Bury differs significantly from these less ambiguously didactic novelists by refusing to bestow upon the heroine the deferred gratification of matrimony.[44] In *Conduct is Fate* she elects instead to articulate political dissent on the level of a married women's experience of desertion, moving the realities of broken marriage centre stage to subvert the moral-domestic mode.

In 1814, *The Wanderer* had proven itself to be uncharacteristically unpopular with Burney's readership because the author had seen fit to criticise the privileged classes for their self-interest and inhumanity. Despite the immense commercial success she had enjoyed during previous decades, her eclectic Regency novel had an alienating effect on public opinion; as well as its critique of moral corruption, it was, according to Melissa Sodeman, *The Wanderer's* interest in

[42] See Gillian Skinner, ibid.
[43] Johnson, ibid., p.112. McInnes, *Wollstonecraft's Ghost*, p.105.
[44] McInnes, ibid., p.101.

Wollstonecraftian discourse that was a cause of the novel's unpopularity.[45] Tara Ghoshal Wallace similarly observes that, 'The wrongs inflicted upon the problematic Maria re-emerge as the difficulties endured by the estimable Juliet';[46] in the year after the publication of Burney's novel, *The Edinburgh Review* duly dismissed Burney's social message with derision; 'The difficulties in which Burney involves her heroines are indeed '"Female Difficulties;" — they are difficulties created out of nothing'.[47] Eight years after the appearance of Burney's novel, *Conduct is Fate* is energised by a comparable determination to confront and solve the problems caused to women by their gender, not least amongst which, for Bury, are the reputational hurdles erected by male reviewers to prevent women crossing over from the domestic sphere into men's professional terrain.

The positive market response to Lady Charlotte's fiction in the Regency and post-Regency signifies that, to a large extent she succeeded in wooing the public where Burney had failed: the novels Bury published with Henry Colburn after 1828 were especially well-received, and critics, even of *Conduct is Fate*, were quick to draw comparisons between her works and the contemporary (and conservative) novel of manners. In 1822 Lady Charlotte strives to make *Conduct is Fate* marketable by embedding her subversive ideas within a more mainstream instructional mode: 'a genre which focused on the family constructed along the conservative, patriarchal model approved by cultural arbiters like Edmund Burke'.[48] Writers such as Mary Brunton and Jane Austen had used their novels' titles (*Self-Control* (1810), *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) and *Pride and Prejudice* (1812)) to forge connections between their narratives and the discourse of self-improvement; in the following decade Bury implied a similar dynamic with the dictum 'conduct is fate' in the hope of convincing circulating library selectors that the novel participated in contemporary cultural conversations about corrective religious instruction. In emulation of another successful contemporary novel, *Marriage* (1818) by Susan Ferrier, *Conduct is Fate* also opens with an epigraph — in this instance by Bishop Jeremy Taylor (1613–1677).[49] Literary agent,

[45] Sodeman, p.193.
[46] Tara Ghoshal Wallace, 'Rewriting Radicalism: Wollstonecraft in Burney's *The Wanderer*,' *Eighteenth-Century Fiction,* 24.3 (March 2012), 487–508 doi:10.1353/ecf.2012.0013, p.108.
[47] 'ART. III. *The Wanderer: or, Female Difficulties'*. *Edinburgh Review*, 1802–1929; *British Periodicals*, Feb 1815, vol 24, Iss.48, pp.320-338 (p.337).
[48] Olivia Murphy, 'Jane Austen's Critical Response to Women's Writing: 'a good spot for fault-finding?' ', in *The History of British Women's Writing 1750 –1830*, ed. by Jacqueline M. Labbe (Basingstoke: Palgrave, Macmillan, 2010), p.295.
[49] Susan Edmonstone Ferrier (1782–1854), popular Scottish novelist and Campbell family friend. Ferrier's father, James Ferrier, was estate manager and friend to the fifth Duke of Argyll, Bury's father. As a child, Ferrier was often taken on visits to the Duke's Highland seat at Inveraray where

Thomas Cadell the Younger (1773–1836), advertised Bury's text by simply quoting the epigraph in *The Monthly Literary Advertiser* (April 10, 1822): the same notification appears in the catalogue of 'works lately published' attached to religious journal *The Christian Observer* (September 1822). This is a radical novel which chronicles the elopement, abusive marriage and subsequent struggles of an enlightened Swiss woman, however: packaging *Conduct is Fate* as a Christian didactic tale was clearly a ploy which enabled Bury to pass the text off as instructional fiction and gain access to a lucrative market.

Bury's first two novels nevertheless commanded lesser acclaim and fewer sales than the texts she later produced for Henry Colburn: neither *Self-Indulgence* nor *Conduct is Fate* have been re-issued in England whereas *Flirtation* (1827) ran to three editions within a year of its first appearance. In her first two fictional texts she nevertheless succeeded in her objective of reviving arguments articulated by earlier, explicitly political writers, her levels of success in sustaining a dialogue with the readership during the post-Regency period documented by two of her contemporaries: the Whig hostess, salonniere and divorcee Elizabeth Vassall Fox, Lady Holland (1770–1845) and Rosina Bulwer Lytton (1802–1882), daughter of the women's rights activist Anna Doyle Wheeler.[50]

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she befriended both Lady Charlotte and Bury's niece, Miss Charlotte Clavering. Chadwyck-Healey, 'Susan Ferrier', *Literature Online Biography*, (Cambridge, 2006) https://literature.proquest.com. *Ferrier, Susan, 1782-1854.* 2018. Ann Arbor: ProQuest [accessed 9 July 2019].

[50] Bulwer Lytton, Rosina Anne Doyle Bulwer *née* Rosina Anne Doyle Wheeler, Lady Bulwer Lytton (1802–1882), novelist. Referred to hereafter as 'Rosina Bulwer Lytton' or 'Lady Lytton'. The friendship between Bury and Lady Lytton seems to have flourished during the early 1820s. Lady Lytton became a victim of high-profile marriage breakdown after marrying Edward Bulwer-Lytton (1803-1873) in 1827 (at that time simply 'Bulwer': Rosina Bulwer Lytton spelled her married surname without the hyphen used by her husband); she would later pen novels which bear striking similarities to Bury's fiction in their treatment of marriage, fashionable life and the legal and social standing of aristocratic married women during the period (see also 3.4 n.86). That Bury knew Lady Lytton socially is evident, amongst other sources, in letters written by Benjamin Disraeli who describes Lady Charlotte's presence to Sarah Disraeli at one of the Bulwers' London dinner parties on Thursday, 31 January 1833. Disraeli also refers to Bury as 'a perfect idiot', however, a comment that could have been generated by literary rivalry : her third novel, *Alla Giornata*, had coincided with his fictional debut, *Vivian Grey* (1826), and despite (or because of) significant coincidences between the two texts, rivalled Disraeli's in popularity. Bury's friendship with Lady Lytton and their joint support for Anna Wheeler is an even more likely motivation, however. Jose points that in 1833, Edward Bulwer's rejection of the early women's movement was consistent with his 'barely disguised contempt for his mother-in-law's views on women's rights (not to mention his friend Benjamin Disraeli's low view of her as a person)'. J. Jose, "Feminist Political Theory Without Apology: Anna Doyle Wheeler, William Thompson, and the Appeal of One Half the Human Race, Women," *Hypatia*, 34.4, (2019), pp.827-851 (p.847). Referred to hereafter as 'Feminist Political Theory Without Apology'. Unfortunately, Disraeli's motivations remain unclear because, as the editor's notes inform us, the 'lower part of this page is missing'. Benjamin Disraeli Letters: 1815-1834, Volume I, eds. John Gunn, John Matthews,

In a letter written by Lady Holland to her son on 9 July, 1826, she notes the publication of *Alla Giornata* (1826) and claims that Bury's first two novels had met with only a lukewarm reception. Pam Perkins observes that a similar ambivalence is evident in the correspondence of one of Bury's aristocratic Scottish associates: 'Her novels made some money for her, even though, as Elizabeth Mure wrote dismissively after reading one, '"people don't trouble themselves" about "any novels but Walter Scotts [sic] now…I think they are very right" (p.5. NLS Acc. 8508, folder 34, 2 May 1822)'.[51] Despite the grudging tone of these testimonials, London society at large had proven itself to be decidedly less than reluctant to consume Bury's texts; the tribute paid to *Conduct is Fate* four years after its publication by Lady Lytton (then Rosina Doyle Wheeler), would have particularly gratified her. For Lady Lytton, Bury's second novel is no inconsequential page-turner but a text which, characterised by moral seriousness, airs the important issues that will eventually energise her own political writings. In a letter written to Mary Greene on 23rd January 1826, Lady Lytton quotes Lady Caroline Lamb who, she explains, recently enticed her to visit by promising to bring Lady Charlotte along: 'I shall have […] Miss Stephens and all that you love of music and Lady Charlotte Bury'.[52] Lady Lytton here expresses a regard for 'the beautiful Lady Charlotte Campbell' which goes beyond mere sentimentality; she comments positively upon the author's moral purpose in *Conduct is Fate*, observing to her friend, 'she wrote a prudent novel two or three years ago called "Conduct is Fate" which I'm sure you've read'.[53] What emerges from this homage is the fact that in 1826, Bury inspired Lady Lytton even before she entered into her fateful marriage with the then Edward Bulwer in the following year; the relationship of these women would, in the next decade, be shaped by significant political and personal events, and, as discussed in more detail in chapter 3, drive their mutual determination to achieve political change.

No less suffused with positivity for *Conduct is Fate* is the single surviving contemporary review which appeared in the *Edinburgh Magazine and Literary Miscellany* in April 1822. Bury must have been especially gratified by the reviewer's hearty commendation of the conservatism which

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Donald Schurman, Melvin Wiebe (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1982), pp.232-233. See also*:* 3.1 n.9.

[51] Perkins, *'*Lady Charlotte'*,* p.5.

[52] Marie Mulvey-Roberts, *The Collected Letters of Rosina Bulwer Lytton* (London: Routledge, 2008), i p.14, n.24 & 25. Referred to hereafter as 'Letters of Rosina Bulwer Lytton'. The sorority that existed between these writers in the 1820s is indicated by the fact (one amongst several) that Lady Caroline Lamb introduced Edward Bulwer Lytton to Rosina, whom he would marry in 1827. Rosina Bulwer Lytton, *A Blighted Life: A True Story. With a new Introduction by Marie Mulvey Roberts* (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1994), p.xv.

[53] Mulvey-Roberts, *Letters of Rosina Bulwer Lytton*, ibid. NB: by 1826 Lady Charlotte's name had changed to 'Bury'.

veneers the narrative as she endeavoured, under cover of a conventional didactic mode, to enter publicly into contemporary debates for judicial change. The reviewer, entertained by the novel's Gothic excesses, saw little that was subversive in the publication; though still anonymous, Bury was given credit for her moderation, her morality and for possessing 'considerable powers of invention and fancy'.[54] According to the critic, the novel even achieves the correct balance between entertainment and instruction: 'it aspires to rank intermediate between the blood-and-thunder romances of the Ratcliffe [sic] School, and the sober plebeianism of the natural and matter-of-fact genus of the Novelists' (ibid.). Despite the facetiousness, Bury would have felt vindicated by this review; not only does the *Edinburgh Magazine* commend the text for its generic diversity, the levels of verisimilitude she achieved are also warmly acknowledged. There appears to be more than an overall willingness on the part of the reviewer to overlook her radical bad-marriage agenda, the novel ultimately drawing praise, as Bury had hoped it would, for its effectiveness as a work of moral instruction.[55]

It is because she succeeded in balancing her political agenda against the demands of the marketplace that the *Edinburgh Magazine* recommends Bury's novel to the book-consuming public; she would have been less gratified, however, at being styled 'the fair writer' (*Edinburgh Magazine* pp.430-431). The boorish attention paid by the reviewer to the novel's technical shortcomings and grammatical errors (to which he commits over half of the space available) would also have irked her; most perplexing of all is the tone in which he dismisses the heroine's marital difficulties by referring to her as 'a sentimental gouvernante' (*Edinburgh Magazine* p.431). This would have been especially frustrating because, in 1822, Bury would have been conscious of the wider critical context and the derisive response levelled by the *British Critic* at Elinor Joddrel, a proto-feminist figure in *The Wanderer*: 'The revolutionary spirit [...] is, fortunately for a bleeding world, now no longer in existence: few of our female readers can remember the egalité mania'.[56]

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[54] 'Conduct is Fate', 3 volumes, *Edinburgh Magazine and Literary Miscellany* (Edinburgh, 10, April 1822), p.430. *British Periodicals.* Referred to hereafter as 'Edinburgh Magazine'. Subsequent references in-text.

[55] The facetious reference to *The Earthquake* (1820), another Blackwood publication, suggests that the reviewer of Bury's novel in 1812 was its Scottish author, John Galt (1779–1839), an active member of the small literary coterie that thrived in Edinburgh at the time. Galt would go on to edit the new third and fourth volumes of the *Diary Illustrative of the Times of George the Fourth* in 1839.

[56] Devoney Looser, *Women Writers and Old* Age *in Great Britain, 1750–1850*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2008), p.40. According to Perkins, the *Edinburgh Review* article about *The Wanderer* is attributed by the Wellesley Index to William Hazlitt. This enhances the point I am making about the injurious effect many male reviewers had on the reputations and careers of women writers of the Regency and post-Regency: in 1827, as discussed in the introduction, Hazlitt would launch an

John Wilson Croker (1780–1857), one of the most vituperative and misogynistic of Burney's reviewers, used the novelist's status and age both to sidestep the gender issues at the centre of the novel and to invalidate the work's social dynamic: because it was commonplace for reviewers to patrol and marginalise the contributions of women writers, Bury would have paid close attention to such a critical assault and its implications for the reputation and sales of her sister author.[57] Devoney Looser concludes that early, negative responses spelled disaster for Burney's reputation in 1814: '*The Wanderer* was for years downplayed in (if not omitted from) discussions

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all-out attack on writers in Colburn's silver-fork stable – a momentum, once started, that would see Thackeray singling out Lady Charlotte's publications for particular criticism and ridicule (see n.62 below).

[57] See: John Wilson Croker's review in ART. IX.-The Wanderer; or Female Difficulties. 1814. *The Quarterly review,* 11.21, pp.123-130. In her discussion of the critical response to professional women's writing in major periodicals such as the *Edinburgh Review*, *British Critic* and *Anti-Jacobin*, Pam Perkins examines the trials and tribulations of Bury's fellow Scottish writer and personal friend, Anne Grant (1755–1838). Perkins explains that the critical practice of commending writers such as Grant for their innovations and narrative endorsements of conventional notions of femininity eventually gained them acceptance and changed perceptions of female authorship; Olivia Smith, whom Perkins references, proposes that conservative male critics, however, often 'attempted to undermine the substance of writing by disempowered groups, including women, by attacking their supposed failures of style' (p.257). Perkins concurs that while 'conservative reviewers' were prepared to make Grant allowances because of her 'penurious circumstances' (Bury would eventually help Walter Scott to obtain a pension for Grant towards the end of her life in Edinburgh), they still believed they 'had a 'duty to the public' to point out failures in her diction and prosody (*Annual*, 2 (1803), p.561)'(ibid.) While male reviewers at large clearly felt sufficiently empowered by their gender to voice 'doubts, as did *The Anti-Jacobin*, about whether or not Grant understood the 'genuine import' of all the words she used (*Anti-Jacobin,* 16 (Oct 1803), p.116),' masculine condescension about women writers' grammar errors, I suggest, has never been more heavy-handed than in Galt's review of *Conduct is Fate*. Pam Perkins, 'Reviewing Femininity: Gender and Genre in the Late Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century Periodical Press', in *Women's Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain, 1690-1820s: The Long Eighteenth Century,* The Edinburgh History of Women's Periodical Culture in Britain series, eds. Jennie Batchelor, and Manushag N. Powell (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), online edn, Edinburgh Scholarship Online <https://doi.org/10.3366/edinburgh/9781474419659.003.0017> [accessed 16 August 2023]. Perkins also points out that, underscoring reviewers' contempt, was a barely concealed prejudice against Grant's 'Scottishness' (ibid.). In an undated letter in the *Diary 1838*, Grant responds gratefully to Bury's admiration for her particularly Caledonian brand of Romanticism: 'I feel, dear {---}, gratified by the partiality which you express for my writings. You would, more than many others, be much influenced by the subject so often alluded to, of Highland scenery and manners. You could scarcely be impartial in this instance'. (*Diary 1838*, iv, 29). Grant's influence on Bury's writing is particularly evident in the second volume of *Conduct is Fate* where the novelist characterises highlander Katie Kilbride, a Wordsworthian figure, through the medium of Scottish songs and dialect.

of the history of the novel and of Burney's career'.[58] McInnes reasons, on this basis, that 'Women writing about the historical moment were seen as overstepping an implicit political boundary, breaching the fault line between literary and political public spheres'.[59] For Bury, it was fear of contempt that often determined the uncertainty in the modulations and cadences of her political voice; I will make the case, however, that while she was alert to, but not cowed by, the misogyny which still flourished unchecked in culture and society, she felt stoked in her determination to correct attitudes, and in *Conduct is Fate* both confronted and subdued the men who made it their business to circumscribe women's intellectual and literary endeavours , both on her own behalf and that of her sister authors.

Despite the critic's superciliousness, the author of *Conduct is Fate* needed the publicity conferred by the review; the circumstances surrounding the novel's publication suggest, additionally, that Bury would have known that she was lucky even to have got her novel into print. In 1820 Susan Ferrier had brought Bury's second novel to the attention of her own editor, the meticulous and staunchly traditional Edinburgh publisher, William Blackwood: in a letter in January he debates whether the narrative is even going to be 'acceptable to British readers who are not accustomed to a husband knocking down his wife, nor yet to some other traits of Continental manners' (the euphemism 'Continental manners' articulating Blackwood's reservations about the abuse to which the Count D'Egmont subjects his wife in the marriage scenes).[60] The publisher nevertheless signifies his respect for Bury when he concedes, 'Of all this [however] an author, and not a bookseller is the best judge'.[61] The reach of Galt's review was nevertheless considerable.[62] In the

[58] Devoney Looser, *Women Writers and Old* Age *in Great Britain, 1750–1850*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2008), p.41. Croker's misogyny also found egress in his characterisation of Burney as 'an aging, tawdry coquette'. Perkins, *Women Writers*, p.90.
[59] McInnes, *Wollstonecraft's Ghost*, p.100.
[60] Susan Edmonstone Ferrier, *Memoir and Correspondence of Susan Ferrier 1782-1854*, ed. by John Ferrier and John Andrew Doyle (London: John Murray, 1898), p.165<https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cbibliographic_details%7C4189605> [accessed 4 September 2023].Referred to hereafter as 'Memoir and Correspondence of Susan Ferrier'.
[61] Ibid.
[62] As already discussed, male reviewers such as Croker and Hazlitt had a deleterious effect on the reputations and careers of women writers during the long Regency (see 2.2 n.56): while Lady Holland (in London) and literati in Scotland felt free to gossip amongst themselves about Bury's novels in the early 1820s, Hazlitt voiced undisguised contempt in public about Colburn's authors in 1827 (the year in which Bury received her first commission from the publisher). While critical responses to her early texts are scarce, what survives is generally favourable; Carlyle would renew Hazlitt's attacks on novelists in Colburn's stable in a series of articles in the period 1833-4, however, and William Thackeray would later single out Colburn's women writers in particular for contempt. In a review published in *The Times* on 18 January, 1838, he protested vigorously about

twentieth century only two critical studies of Regency popular fiction discussed *Conduct is Fate,* the first of which inflicted equally severe damage on Bury's reputation; in 1936 Matthew Whiting Rosa referred in his influential monograph to the circumstances of the novel's publication by claiming inner knowledge of the editor's views: 'poor Blackwood was shocked'.[63] In her account of Bury's life and work in *British Romantic Novelists, 1789–1832*, *Dictionary of Literary Biography* (1992), Jacqueline Gray contradicts this assumption, however, asserting that the publisher 'expressed confidence that *Conduct is Fate* would become a commercial success'.[64] The fact that Bury was one of only five female authors whose fiction Blackwood ventured to publish during the 1820s, a period during which the bookselling trade was in serious decline, validates Gray's claim.[65] She concludes astutely that while the author of *Conduct is Fate* was no doubt aware of Blackwood's reservations, 'Domestic violence, nevertheless, became an important theme in Bury's novels.'[66]

2.3 The social, financial and legal consequences of broken marriage for women in *The Wanderer* and *Conduct is Fate*

Bury's second novel was evidently shaped by a far more complex relationship to the context which produced it than had applied to her fictional debut in 1812. In 1814, Burney had subtitled her novel 'Female difficulties', an iteration of the title of Wollstonecraft's literary fragment, *The Wrongs of Woman; or, Maria* (1798) to signify to the reading public that her heroine is not the princess cum queen-to-be of the courtship genre but a casualty of misogyny and prejudice. Eight years later, and treading warily, *Conduct is Fate* iterates Burney's plot; in 1822, however, Bury consciously foregrounds, instead of side-lining, problematic marital status as the source of the

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the graphic domestic violence inflicted upon the heroine by her husband in *Love* (1837)*,* and in his satirical sketch 'The Fashionable Authoress' (1841), targeted women writers such as Bury, Frances Trollope and Catherine Gore in the satirical figure of Lady Frances Flummery: her poetry is 'mere wind'; her novels, 'stark naught'; her philosophy, 'sheer vacancy'. W.M. Thackeray, 'The Fashionable Authoress' in *The Complete Works of William Makepeace Thackeray*, ed., 22 vols (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1869), vol XV, pp.410-422 (p.415). Thackeray would also aim particularly virulent criticism at the *Diary 1838*, all of which helped determine the trivialising and dismissive critical reception of Bury's writing for the next century and a half. See also: 2.3 n.95.

[63] Rosa, *The Silver-Fork School,* p.149.

[64] Jacqueline Gray, '*Lady Charlotte Bury,'* in *British Romantic Novelists,1789–1832*, ed. Bradford K. Mudge (Detroit: M.I. Gale, 1992), pp.55–68 (p.62).Gray does not acknowledge her source: it is likely to have been the above-mentioned letter in which Blackwood affirms his willingness to take on *Conduct is Fate*: 'I have already mentioned to you the high opinion I have of the talent displayed in it. I need not say that, commercially speaking, I would be happy to publish the work.' Ferrier, *Memoir and Correspondence of Susan Ferrier*, ibid.

[65] Garside and others, *The English Novel, 1770–1829*, p.90.

[66] Gray, ibid.

heroine's suffering. In so doing, I will argue, she attempts to recalibrate the tropes of moral-domestic fiction both to reshape the genre and stimulate public debate on the subject.

In *The Wanderer*, heroine Juliet Granville is an English-born aristocrat who, as she flees revolution on the continent, arrives destitute in England and is forced to rely on the charity of others. Melissa Sodeman's analysis of the novel duly links Burney directly with earlier revolutionary women writers: 'Burney's extended rehearsal of "female difficulties" draws narratively on the explosive mixture of politics and sentimentality that had typified polemical fictions like Wollstonecraft's *The Wrongs of Woman, or, Maria* (1798), Smith's *Desmond* (1792) and Mary Hays's *The Victim of Prejudice* (1799).[67] Sodeman continues, 'Burney uses Juliet's story to protest the cultural, legal and economic codes that fail to protect women even as she caricatures Wollstonecraft's revolutionary feminism through the figure of Elinor Joddrel' (ibid.). In *Conduct is Fate*, Bury challenges political systems directly, foregrounding the heroine's suffering to protest that social status, or, more accurately, its removal, is one of the main motivators of public hostility towards the casualties of broken marriage. A pivotal point of contrast with Burney's text, to this end, is the role played in *Conduct is Fate* by the institution of matrimony itself; in *The Wanderer* the heroine's marriage amounts to little more than a sentimental and Gothic plot device whereas in Bury's novel, the heroine's entanglement within the legalities of bad marriage is the main source her adversity.

What generates problems for the heroic Juliet in Burney's novel is her refusal to reveal her patrician identity. We learn only in the very last of the novel's five volumes that she has been forced into marriage in France for the sake of her £6,000 dowry and is running away from her French Republican (and necessarily villainous) husband (a melodramatic and shadowy figure known only as 'the foreigner' and 'the commissary'). When she flees to England, he discovers her destination and pursues her in the style of a Gothic villain using a combination of threats and blackmail to entrap her. Paradoxically, when the commissary attempts to abduct her, even characters who are sympathetic look on passively without coming to her aid; even more surprisingly, Burney's novel does not question the commissary's proprietary rights and Juliet fails to denounce her husband. Burney ultimately exempts the heroine from the necessity of resisting when her apologist and mentor, the gouty Sir Jasper Herrington, enquires on her behalf and discovers that the marriage, because it is forced, is legally invalid. Sodeman observes that although there had been a liberalisation of the laws of coverture in Revolutionary France during

[67] Sodeman, p.199.

the final years of the eighteenth century, women's legal rights began to be eroded once again as the nineteenth century progressed, and married women's problems began to re-emerge, a situation which Burney's novel implies but does not redress.[68]

In 1822, Bury fully availed herself of the aesthetic licence granted to her by Blackwood, going far beyond Burney's remit to protest loudly about the subjugations of coverture ('in common law what has been called "a kind of civil death" for women').[69] Far from functioning as a simple plot device or a Gothic trope, bad marriage in *Conduct is Fate* both generates and drives Bury's political narrative. Whereas Burney ends her novel of 1814 with the heroine's triumph in matrimony, *Conduct is Fate* instead opens with scenes of domestic abuse; although at risk of alienating the religious readership won over by Cadell, Lady Charlotte discloses within the first few pages of *Conduct is Fate* that heroic Bertha de Chanci's marriage has already taken place and she is now regretting her hasty actions. Far from presiding over her domestic realm in the style of a newly-crowned queen, Bertha endures mistreatment as husband D'Egmont 'poured forth vollies of abuse, and cursed the hour he had married' (*CF* i 8). By chapter 4, the newlyweds are in Paris where D'Egmont has figuratively and literally imprisoned his wife, menacing her all the while to surrender control of her property.[70] Bertha informs him , however, that under the terms of a guardianship, she is unable to access her inheritance: '"Till I am five and twenty I cannot touch my fortune … and if I attempt doing so, having married without my guardian's consent, I forfeit all title to it"'(*CF* i 43). Her husband's failure to strip her of her assets both inflames his cruelty and further solidifies the novel's connection to revolutionary discourse: 'The slavery was on her mind; she had debased herself by a voluntary acquiescence to it. The fetters were on her imagination, they weighed heavily on her heart, to the extinction of all mental freedom or enjoyment' (*CF* i 23).

The analogy that defines marriage as slavery was, by now, firmly embedded in the vocabulary of radical politics; in 1822, Bury harnesses the proto-feminist discourse emerging from William Johnson Fox's South Place Chapel in publications by activists such as Anna Wheeler both to advance the political cause and raise women's awareness of their vulnerabilities. In 1825, as explained by James Jose, Wheeler discussed Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* and later formalised and

[68] Ibid., p.202-3.
[69] E. J. Clery, 'Like a heroine', in *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction*, pp.115–130 (p.126).
[70] Bury's material may, once again, have originated in her biographical experiences. In the private journal she wrote in the period spanning November 1799 to July 1800 (held in the NLS and discussed in the introduction) she chronicles the unhappy first marriage of her mother, Elizabeth Gunning (1733–90), to the 6th Duke of Hamilton (1724– 58). Her personal experience of bad-marriage, as discussed in chapter 1, is recorded in correspondence with her eldest daughter and the *Diary 1805-10*.

disseminated her views about the plight of the married woman in *Appeal of One Half* (1825): 'At birth she was the property of her father (or guardian), and on marriage her body became the property of her husband, who was empowered to use it and command it at will. Hence "a domestic, a civil, a political slave... is every married woman"; marriage was little more than an institutionalized "white slave code"'.[71] As Helen McCabe explains, both Wheeler and — during the 1830s — Harriet Taylor-Mill ,would formalise their anti-marriage polemic in the years preceding the First Reform Act by claiming that there was a connection between 'women's lack of voting (and other political) rights; women's lack of economic and educational opportunities; marriage; and slavery' .[72] In response, *Conduct is Fate* joins progressive feminist discourse by applying an enhanced realism to the figure of the subjugated wife when she discovers 'Her plain attire, her face of care, her unknown state […] and her faculties in subjection to a tyranny that depressed their vigour, however much she strove to rise superior to its blighting effects' (*CF* i 33). To quash any lingering doubts about matrimony as a form of legalised slavery, the narrator opens the novel with scenes of domestic abuse which focus on the tyrannous D'Egmont — a Gothic villain who consolidates his power over Bertha by appropriating the language of the liturgy: 'women and children have only to obey' (*CF* i 38). Less than a decade after the publication of *The Wanderer*, Lady Charlotte's subversive novel serves up a husband whose misogyny finds egress not only in tyranny, but gratuitous sadism: 'He liked to inflict pain, because that implied power' (*CF* i 22). William Blackwood, whose attention had been drawn to Bury's text while she was already in the process of writing it, debates in his letter to Susan Ferrier of 18th January 1820 , whether the violence in the novel was permissible.[73] While Blackwood's concerns were subsumed by his ultimate confidence in the text's marketability, his enquiry seems less fastidious when we consider the literary environment within which it was published: during the long Regency, popular

[71] Wheeler and Thompson*, Appeal of One Half the Human Race,* pp.66-67, in Jose, "Feminist Political Theory Without Apology, p.836. The consequences of the *Appeal of One Half* for Bury's fiction will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 3; starting in the early 1820s, according to Dolores Dooley, Wheeler presided over a political salon in London and while it is not possible at present to establish a direct link between the two writers, it is more than likely that Bury was conversant with her theories if not through direct association, then through her friendship with Rosina Bulwer Lytton as well as through her reading and intellectual networking. As Dooley points out, women in liberal families often observed and discussed, even if they did not participate openly in, the debates emerging in the 1820s about marriage and women's status within it. See: Dooley, *Equality in Community*, pp.70-74.

[72] Helen McCabe '"Political […] civil and domestic slavery": Harriet Taylor Mill and Anna Doyle Wheeler on marriage, servitude, and socialism', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 29 (2), (2021), 226–243 (p.232) <doi:10.1080/09608788.2020.1750348>. Referred to hereafter as 'Harriet Taylor Mill and Anna Doyle Wheeler on marriage'.

[73] See: Ferrier, *Memoir and Correspondence of Susan Ferrier*, ibid.

novelists like Bury still had recourse only to a narrative tradition which, as Jones observes in her study of women's writing in the eighteenth-century, rarely depicted marital abuse in this level of detail.[74]

The main issue articulated by Bury's second novel is that the problematic institution of coverture, a mandate which applied to all marriages, was corrupted by values which tolerated and thus abetted the ill-treatment of women by the men who enchained them. Wives were legally powerless in England, irrespective of wealth and rank; Bury skilfully avoids controversy while critiquing the legal practice of disenfranchising married women, by displacing her anxieties onto a marriage which has been transacted on the continent. Under cover of the Gothic mode, then, *Conduct is Fate* progresses Bury's original objections to the Clandestine Marriages Act, the long reach of which enables Bertha's villainous husband, even in 1822, to defraud her into marriage for the sole purpose of exploiting her financially. As in *Self-Indulgence,* the heroine's husband soon relinquishes all semblance of fidelity and, by chapter 3 is flirting with his former love, Parisienne Sophie de Féronce, as Bertha looks on helplessly:

> As week after week glided away, Bertha became gradually convinced of what at first she had only feared, — that Sophie de Feronce was undermining the last feeble hold she possessed in her husband's affections. She saw and felt that, from that well known and natural, although disgraceful, quality in the human breast, the more he wronged, and the less she deserved his ill treatment, the more disagreeable she be came to him, till at length her presence seemed irksome. (*CF* i 41)

Using elements of the *roman-à-clef,* the novel here critiques the generalised abuse of women by fictionalising the Regent's systematic rejection and deliberate humiliation of his wife both before and during the years of the novel's composition. In 1793, two years before the betrothal and marriage to Princess Caroline had taken place and eight years after his morganatic marriage to Maria Fitzherbert, George had begun a relationship with Frances Villiers, Countess of Jersey (1753–1821). Far from relinquishing the affair out of respect to his prospective bride, he dented Caroline's dignity by arranging a very public face-to-face encounter between them — and this even before he had met the princess to whom he was affianced. When Caroline sailed to Greenwich from Germany on 30th December 1794, George did not even bother to welcome her, instead sending along Lady Jersey in the company of his confidant and dandy-in-chief, George ('Beau') Brummell (1778–1840). Whether or not an insult was intended, Bury records the

[74] See: Vivien Jones, *Women and Literature*, p.97.

exasperation she felt on first hearing Caroline's version of events: 'Why was Lady Jersey of all other persons, the one fixed upon, to escort Her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales to England?'[75] To emphasise the enormity of the outrage, the author also appended a footnote to her account: 'The nature of the Prince's connexion with Lady Jersey, was not even denied, but paraded openly, as something of which to be proud!!'[76]

Given the historical background in 1822, it is easy to understand why, instead of recommending matrimony, Bury's second novel protests forcefully against it. Conscious of the political and moral values of an orthodox readership, but nevertheless angered by the plight of members of her own family and other propertied women who had fallen victim to the laws of coverture, Bury again fictionalises gender injustice in England in terms of a marriage which breaks down in France. *Conduct is Fate*, however, makes its political point by placing emphasis, to an even greater extent than any of its proto-feminist antecedents, on the practice of discriminating legally between single and married women. Once D'Egmont's infidelity becomes clear, the social consequence of the rejected wife is eroded and this enables D'Egmont's mistress to brandish her legal and economic power over Bertha:

> The latter was aware that she captivated her husband by her beauty, her splendid appearance, the independence of her situation; that independence which gives a consciousness of power, and allows the mind its full play, to dazzle, to engage, to enslave, — while the shrinking subdued wife drew a melancholy contrast to this with herself. (*CF* i 33)

Bury here contrasts a woman's experience of institutionalised oppression with the legal, cultural and economic liberties enjoyed by her unmarried counterparts. As Lee Holcombe points out, 'Unlike single women and widows, who had the same property rights as men, except the right to vote, married women had no legal rights over property. Since property and status went hand in hand in English law, wives were reduced to a special status, subordinate to and dependent upon their husbands'.[77] In dramatising these injustices, Bury contends that a culture which ascribed

[75] See: *The Murdered Queen!*, pp.17-19.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Lee Holcombe, *Wives and Property* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1983), p.25. Texts such as Dorothy M. Stetson's *A Woman's Issue: the Politics of Family Law Reform in England* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1982) also details the history of women's legal rights between 1857 and 1970 as well as defining some of the constitutional implications of the practice of coverture. Frances A. Dolan's history of marriage, *Battered Women, Petty Traitors, and the Legacy of Coverture, Marriage and Violence: The Early Modern Legacy* (Philadelphia: University of

power and autonomy to women solely on the basis of their marital status promoted the interests only of spinsters and women who were legally unattached: their married sisters, by definition, were their legal inferiors. Amy Erickson observes cogently, 'the lesser-known flipside of coverture was that unmarried women, whether they had never married or whether they were widowed, enjoyed a position unique in Europe as legal individuals in their own right, with no requirement for a male guardian.'[78] Bury duly critiques the systemic inequities of marriage in the figures of the two single women in the novel: firstly Sophie Feronce, who has already been seen to be an ambitious flirt and the heroine's love rival, and Scotswoman Jane Oswald — Bertha's virtuous bosom friend. To divert the attention of readers subscribing to the Christian didactic tropes of the courtship novel away from the narrative's main political point — that wives are denied the rights to which spinsters have unquestioned access — Bury emphasises the contrast between Bertha and her unmarried counterparts through the prism of both sentimental and Gothic fictional modes. She thus characterises Sophie as a female misogynist who, corrupted by the excesses of French fashion, abuses her economic independence by seducing and eloping with the heroine's husband. In volume three, however, it emerges that D'Egmont has abandoned Sophie with their newborn child, at which point she re-enters the novel as a figure of vengeance who liberates Bertha (and other wronged women) from the clutches of D'Egmont's nefarious accomplice. While Sophie's transformation functions mainly to support the author's efforts to resolve the plot, Jane Oswald is a romantic, free-spirited Hibernian and 'child of nature' who is morally well- qualified to befriend the heroine. Like Sophie, however, Jane enjoys an unmarried status which amounts to economic independence as well as social freedom. When Bertha is later divested of a legacy left to her by her mentor, Alexis Beaumont, the omniscient narrator observes caustically that the privilege granted to women such as Jane Oswald is accessible only to a very few: 'Liberty and independence had given that open generous freedom to her character, and to her manners, which it is seldom the lot of women to possess' (ii 230). Even more subversively, the unfeminine conduct of Sophie Feronce diverts the attention of readers subscribing to the Christian didactic tropes of the courtship novel away from the author's main political point: that spinsters enjoy rights to which women of all marital statuses should have access, but are denied.

Pennsylvania Press Inc., 2008) explains that even if separation was possible during the early nineteenth century, women who walked out of marriage had rights to neither money nor children.

[78] Amy Louise Erickson, 'Coverture and Capitalism', *History Workshop Journal* 59 (2005), pp.1–16 (p.2) <http://www.jstor.com/stable/25472782> [accessed 16 May 2020].

Perhaps the most definitive way in which *Conduct is Fate* articulates its radical literary genealogy is in the attention the narrative pays to the economic realities of marital breakdown for women: in *Conduct is Fate* the heroine's problems are traced directly to their source: the legalities of the marriage which ensnares her. This was a harrowing but unacknowledged problem which affected significant numbers of women in the early nineteenth century; in *Conduct is Fate*, as in *The Wanderer*, the difficulties the heroine encounters in attempting to support herself financially after losing male protection form the bulk of the narrative. As has been seen in chapter 1, until the passing of the Married Woman's Property Act of 1870, when a woman entered into wedlock in England she ceded to her husband's control anything personal or real not placed in hands of trustees; Gillian Skinner cautions, however, that while the woman of substance commonly learned to bypass the laws of coverture during the period by setting up trusts, 'her most effective legal protection', the practice was fraught with difficulties.[79] Historian Lawrence Stone duly points out that among the propertied classes, women were commonly intimidated or wheedled by their husbands into giving up their ownership of property: 'women having power over their own property is in general of little avail — they are either kissed or kicked out of it'.[80] In the first-person retrospective narration which punctuates the novel's early-marriage and abandonment scenes, Bertha thus desperately describes to her mentor, Rémonville, the means by which her fortune has been protected legally from her acquisitive husband—an arrangement which will soon be shown to work against her.[81] In Switzerland, she explains, her aunts had ill-advisedly placed her inheritance in the hands of the Manverts, kinspeople and neighbours of the Chancis; her wealth is now controlled by the patriarchal 'Banneret de Manvert' whose son, Francois, she had been intended to marry. Like Wollstonecraft's fictional Maria and the heroine of *Self-Indulgence*, Bertha is viewed as a commodity: 'his father saw in the union certain comfortable arrangements respecting contiguity of vineyards and orchards, &c. which at once determined his approbation and consent'. (*CF* i 174)

[79] Gillian Skinner, 'Women's status', p.94.
[80] See Lawrence Stone, *Broken Lives,* p.18.
[81] As will be discussed shortly, Susan Moller Okin discusses the enquiries made by Courtney Stanhope Kenny, Lawrence Stone and Randolph Trumbach into the problems coverture posed specifically for women of property. See: Susan Moller Okin, 'Patriarchy and Married Women's Property in England: Questions on Some Current Views,' *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 17.2 (1983), 121–38. *JSTOR* <https://doi.org/10.2307/2738280 > [accessed 19 April 2023]. Referred to hereafter as 'Patriarchy and Married Women's Property'. According to Kenny, 'the common law ruling that the wife's property became the husband's prevailed in all cases in which no settlement made explicit provision to the contrary' (p.129).

It should be pointed out here that, like *Self-Indulgence*, *Conduct is Fate* is disrupted by several logistical inaccuracies which complicate the social message of the text. The most serious of these flaws resides in the fact that Bertha's wedding ceremony has taken place in France: theoretically, she, like Corissande, retains her legal status as *feme sole* after marriage because in the rest of Europe at the time, a husband was not automatically gifted his wife's property on their wedding day. In reality the marriage, which takes place in a Catholic church, is constitutionally illegal because, as already noted, civil marriage was the only valid means of entering into matrimony in France at the time: Bertha's marriage would, in fact, have been illegal in England also.[82] Bury may have decided, however, that because she was writing for the benefit of an English readership, a foreign setting would more effectively enhance the heroine's social alienation — that the novel's Gothic elements would caution women more effectively about the dangers posed by matrimony than a strictly realistic representation of events. Whether or not by design, Bury not only literalises the hazards of coverture for an English audience: she enhances the perils which surround the heroine by transferring anxieties about the systemic inequities of English matrimonial law to a marriage which has taken place in an unfamiliar, Roman Catholic country.

To further emphasise for a domestic readership 'the fears of the women of the middle classes, whose social standing was most unstable', Bury's novel re-animates both plot devices and the predator/prey dynamic of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794).[83] Clery observes that Ann Radcliffe, by regularly endowing her female characters with inherited fortunes, consciously foregrounds the ideological inconsistencies of the property laws relating to women of her time.[84] In this sense, the disenfranchised heroine of *Conduct is Fate* closely resembles Emily St Aubert, a lonely orphan who is preyed upon by villainous Montoni — a foreigner who begins by forcing her aunt to marry him. Montoni, Clery explains, 'has large gambling debts to pay off and threatens his wife in order to make her sign over some entailed estates to him. When she fails to comply, he has her

[82] Probert explains in her unpublished paper that 'In 1791 revolutionary France had declared that "the law considers marriage to be only a civil contract" and prescribed that civil marriage would be the only legally recognized form of marriage'. This was accompanied a year later by civil registration of marriages, as well as of births and deaths. Marriage, it was thought, was "a contract worthy of the keenest interest […] because it has individual happiness as its goal and also influences the power and splendour of Empires", with the aim of using the ceremony to create an emotional link between the citizen and the state being reflected in the incorporation of a degree of ritual, comparable to that of a religious ceremony'. Rebecca Probert, State and Law: Four Models for Regulating Marriage (unpublished chapter, 2023) p.4 <https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/bitstream/handle/10871/32265/CHM-Empires-State%20and%20Law_final.pdf?sequence=3> [accessed 5 December 2022].
[83] E. J. Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction,* p.128.
[84] Ibid., p.126.

imprisoned.'[85] This plot fails and he then attacks the heroine; after her initial resistance, she is forced into submission. Precluded by property law from inheriting her estates, Bury's Bertha de Chanci is likewise compelled to rely on either one or other of the very men who are trying to exploit her. We duly learn from Bertha's retrospective first-person narrator that the mysterious Polish Comte D'Egmont (or 'the Marchese') is planning a sinister assault on de Chanci terrain at Lausanne; he is, for this unspecified nefarious purpose, travelling under an Italian alias. While Bury doubtlessly makes use of Gothic tropes to widen the novel's appeal, the narrative raises serious political issues when, as Bertha is at her most vulnerable, Manvert chooses not to protect his dependant, but to manipulate circumstances to his own pecuniary advantage:

> I had had certain letters — I am not at liberty to say from whom — but, in short, to inform me, do you hear, Bertha, that he is now returned to Swisserland, where, it is said, he is about to marry a young person whose independent situation may assist him, by her pecuniary circumstances, with additional means to carry on his schemes." (*CF*, ii 44)

Bury's narrative here uncovers nothing more than an attempt on the part of Manvert, couched in the lexis of the stock guardian figure, to reserve Bertha (or her money, more accurately) for his son. Like Wollstonecraft, who, according to Clery 'has recourse in her fiction to the most melodramatic devices of the Gothic mode involving imprisonment, sexual tyranny and madness',[86] Bury shapes a heroine who resembles Emily St. Aubert in functioning only 'to serve as an instrument for the conveyance of property, whether by forfeit to a male relative-in-law whose status as guardian makes it impossible to resist his will, or as the merchandise of a profiteering marriage agreed between men.'[87]

Tara Ghoshal Wallace duly observes of the badly-married heroines who precede Bertha de Chanci, 'Both Maria and Juliet enter the text as they flee appalling men who have married them for their money'; in *Conduct is Fate* Bertha's refusal to wed Manvert junior exposes her to consequences of Gothic proportions when the patriarch, upon whom she is financially dependent, ruthlessly penalises her for resisting him.[88] Bertha is made especially vulnerable by the death of her kinswomen and ignorance of legal matters: 'They placed various papers before me. I signed some, and looked at others. And nothing gave me more anguish than listening to what I was told was the will of my dear aunts' (*CF* ii 40-41). When Manvert soon afterwards vacates his own property

[85] Ibid., p.118.
[86] Ibid., p.116.
[87] Ibid., p.120.
[88] Wallace, 'Rewriting Radicalism', p.108.

in order to take command over her affairs, the bewildered Bertha has still to grasp the full peril of her situation:

> The Banneret and his family were settled in the house with me; every outward circumstance appeared to me to go on in the same train; and, as I heard nothing more about affairs, I concluded myself to be the tranquil possessor of the little domain of Chanci. (*CF* ii p42)

Bertha still resists marriage to the Banneret's son despite Manvert's threats of withholding her inheritance; for this reason she soon falls prey irrevocably to the Marchese (though Bury, once again, avoids offending her conservative readership by implying that the heroine has succumbed, if only temporarily, to self-delusion thereby exempting the narrative from protesting too explicitly about her predicament).[89] It is clear, however, that she is primarily a victim of circumstance, the realisation finally dawning on her when she bitterly contrasts the benediction of her recently-deceased aunt with the reality of her present circumstances:

> "May these lands pass on unalienated to your children's children." "Not so," I said now in bitterness of heart; "Not so. All is changed". (*CF* ii p51)[90]

It was upon this basis that Anna Wheeler challenged the corruptions of legislative processes by advancing Wollstonecraft's critique in 1825: 'Marriage merely allows women to swap the despotism of a father for that of a husband'.[91] When Manvert offers Bertha no means of legal or moral appeal, the narrator observes polemically of men who are corrupted by power, 'In every station of life, power has a miraculous faculty of changing the disposition' (*CF* ii 48–49).

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[89] In her complex negotiation of moral protocols, Bury here permits the reader to savour one of the several opportunities on offer to catechise over Bertha's subjective behaviour: 'I chose to believe, because he charmed me, that he was pure as the light from heaven, and that his voice was the voice of truth itself' (*CF* ii p.28).

[90] The issue of culpability goes in and out of focus throughout the narrative as the author negotiates the thin line between didacticism and polemicism. Bury takes full advantage of the retrospective first-person narration which straddles the end of the first and the beginning of the second volumes to voice a subversive truth — that Bertha has not eloped, but has been abducted: 'The Marchese, without replying, as the noise of his pursuers approached, hurried me rapidly through the thickest of the wood. Nor did he slacken his speed till we reached the high road that led to Romont. Here a carriage was in waiting, - he placed me in it – ordered the driver to proceed; and with a rapidity which completely overpowered my senses, we continued to move rapidly for many hours' (*CF* ii p.56).

[91] Helen McCabe, 'Harriet Taylor Mill and Anna Doyle Wheeler on marriage', p.232.

The novels Bury published at fifteen and twenty-five year intervals after Wollstonecraft's death assiduously open up to public view the abuses perpetrated upon married women in private by over-empowered and extra-entitled men. The fictional events in *Conduct is Fate* recreate, in particular, the removal of Bury's authority and control over her personal affairs four years after her second marriage had taken place in 1818. Despite having been recently made aware, for the first time, of the unhappiness their mother had experienced when wedded to their father, Col. John Campbell, her children, as already noted, did everything in their power to prevent her re-marriage. This is likely because like any other husband, the Rev. John Bury would, under the terms of coverture, have automatically taken legal possession after marriage not only of his wife's person and identity but of the property she would otherwise have passed directly on to them. Bury both despairs over her children's self-interest and laments the fact that they have been led by their obtuseness to misconstrue the situation. As a widow and younger daughter, she has already been disempowered by English inheritance law: 'I have no money to give him. My fortune such as it is [-] a yearly pittance is so settle [d] on them that it is out of my power to wrong them even if I were base enough to wish it'.[92] In 1818 her eldest son carried out his threat to cut off the allowance he paid her, notwithstanding — a blow that was replete with financial and literary implications and which, thirteen years later, found Bury in a 'miserable state of utter destitution' and applying for relief to Caroline's Attorney-General, Henry Brougham.[93] In a letter of 10 November 1831, it emerges that, after being widowed in 1809, her entire income had consisted of the salary paid to her by Princess Caroline and a jointure of £250 per annum. She had thus been unable even to afford a house in which to accommodate her children (or, at least, one that was adequately gracious 'with reference to my station in life'); she had been forced instead, she complains, to rely upon the charity of Anne Seymour Damer and her uncle, Lord Frederick Campbell — both of whom had died in the intervening years.[94] Bury goes on to inform Brougham that her second husband had already used his entire private income to support her and her children; while funds were now running low, this was not (she assures us) because they lived in an

[92] Letter to Eliza, Lady Gordon-Cumming from Lady Charlotte Bury, Florence, 10th Feb 1818. NLS, Gordon -Cumming Archive, Dep.175, box 164/1.

[93] According to Perkins**,** 'Bury's ideas of what constituted poverty were more elastic than Austen's: her son did give her £750 per year'. Pam Perkins, *Lady Charlotte Susan Maria Campbell Bury,* p.5. Perkins also notes 'Bury's furious list of grievances against her son appears in a 20 December 1822 letter to Lady John Campbell; NLS Acc. 8508, folder 5.' Ibid., p.9, n.8.

[94] Bury, Lady Charlotte Susan Maria, (1775-1861), novelist to Brougham, Henry Peter, 1st Baron Brougham and Vaux (1778-1868), 10th November 1831. London: London University: University College London (UCL), Special Collections.14-31: letters, Brougham Papers passim. Lord Frederick Campbell (1729–1816), of Ardencaple, Dunbarton, and Coombe Bank, Kent.

extravagant style — just 'in the sober decencies of [her] rank'. Her eldest son, she discloses, had 'done something' for her, but 'in a way that has never been efficient and doled out in portions which rendered such largess merely of momentary use leaving me dependent on uncertain contingencies'.[95] While there appears to have been some difference between Bury's perceptions and the realities of her financial situation, she found herself less than a decade after the death of her first husband again without power and subject to masculine control; her riposte was to recast herself in *Conduct is Fate* as a heroine who both resists her tormentors and retains the moral high ground. Partly as a gesture of rebellion and partly to supply the deficit in women's knowledge about the laws which affected them, Bury gives full sanction to Bertha when she struggles against the patriarchal systems which oppress her. She even ventures into satire in her characterisation of the corrupt Banneret de Manvert, a 'magistrate' (*CF* i p.302 and ii p.46) whom she styles more in the persona of a petty local official than a corrupt nobleman suggesting, in the process, that the threat to women was not the preserve of predatory aristocrats. Appropriately, it is by invoking Wollstonecraft that the heroine most definitively and polemically rejects ubiquitous male authority: 'men always arrogate to themselves the right of judging for, and commanding us in every relation of our lives with them; they think they have a right to overrule our wills, and to make our fate; but there is a free will given to every individual by an higher power, which, at all events, exempts the mind from slavery'(*CF* i p.86).

Angered by the thraldom coverture imposed but conscious of the sensitivities and values of a morally orthodox readership, Bury displaces onto a marriage which disintegrates in France the problems caused to women of the higher social ranks in England. Like Wollstonecraft's Venables and Smith's Verney, the Comte D'Egmont is frustrated by his failure to seize the heroine's fortune after marrying her, and immediately resorts to physical and emotional abuse. It is on the basis of this self-surrender that Okin rejects the doctrinal foundation of coverture with its assumption that all men are trustworthy; for Okin, women in companionate marriage were disempowered

[95] Bury to Brougham, ibid. More work is needed to discover whether Bury's application for funds was successful; a few years later, the *Diary 1838* is punctuated ubiquitously by criticism of Brougham — this despite his having successfully defended Princess Caroline in 1820 and his subsequent support for campaigns to bring about political reform. He, in turn, responded to Bury's publication with an extremely negative critique in the *Edinburgh Review*, all of which attests to a decreasing reciprocity of regard and loss of mutual respect. It is tempting to claim that Brougham's response was shaped by the personal criticism the author directed at him in the *Diary 1838*: it should be remembered, however, that Bury's disclosure of private information about the Princess caused widespread outrage, and the author would be pursued tenaciously by critics such as W.M. Thackeray in *The Times* and *Fraser's Magazine* and John Wilson Croker in the *Quarterly Review*. See: Henry Brougham, Review of *Diary of a Lady in Waiting*, [by Lady Charlotte Bury], *Edinburgh Review* 67 (1838): 1-80. See also: 2.2 notes 56, 57 and 62.

because far too often, they surrender to the legitimacy of male rule without inquiry.[96] To startle the novel's mainly female subscribers into an awareness of the legalities which undermine them when they marry, Bury uses the third and fourth chapters in volume one to catalogue the numerous options freely available to men who wed but denied to the women they impound. Having consciously alerted the reader to the legal pitfalls of wedlock at an early point in the novel, the narrative goes on to connect all of the problems she subsequently experiences to this one fatal transaction. We learn early on that Bertha's husband can find no legal recourse: divorce is impossible because such an expedient will involve an act of parliament and, unlike the Regent, who had attempted to sue his wife for divorce in 1820, he has no access to public funds. In the first instance, therefore, D'Egmont decides to fabricate a charge of infidelity against Bertha. This is because before the twentieth century, as already noted, a wife's adultery was virtually the only pretext for divorce. The crime, once committed, breached a husband's rights of ownership over a woman's body and violated the idea of hereditary descent: for this reason, a single act of adultery by a wife was sufficient grounds for annulment. Most seriously of all, a woman could be compelled to forfeit all claims to property or children if proven guilty. When D'Egmont tries to liberate himself by initiating a series of encounters between Bertha and his friend and confidant, the narrator, far from sanctioning his authoritarian conduct, is scathing; 'He then, in language befitting a maniac, charged his wife with indulging a passion for Monsieur Beaumont' (*CF* i 20).

D'Egmont's attempt to implicate Bertha in adultery is followed by his mercurial yet well-informed decision to try one of the other options available. He toys briefly with the idea of ridding himself of his wife by using separation by private deed — a subsidiary but considerably cheaper stratagem than divorce, because his only commitment would involve paying her a basic income. Separation was a common means for persons of property and standing to break free of marriage: for a husband such as D'Egmont, the benefits of this course of action were twofold because, as explained by Stone, 'the slightest sexual slip on the part of his separated wife would allow him to stop payment of the maintenance allowance, and she would thereafter be socially humiliated and financially ruined'.[97] The disadvantage was that a private agreement would not enable a husband

[96] See: Susan Moller Okin, 'Women and the Making of the Sentimental Family', p.74. Okin also observes that many husbands, over-empowered by the laws of coverture, 'failed in their trust' by exploiting 'that 'frailty' which they ought to have protected'. Okin, 'Patriarchy and Married Women's Property in England: Questions on Some Current Views,' *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 17.2 (1983), pp.121–38 (p.134).

[97] Lawrence Stone, *Road to Divorce*, p.169. Joanne Bailey finds that women were often cheated out of money that was rightfully theirs by manoeuvring husbands: 'Unfortunately, in many cases alimony was neither a substantial nor secure income. We have seen that a few men ensured that

once and for all to dispose of his responsibilities; this was because a key clause in these agreements was 'an assurance that an allowance would be paid annually to the wife (usually up to or rather less than 1/3 of the husband's net income)'.[98] This arrangement, as usual, could be fraught with difficulties for women because men, who surveyed the legalities involved from a significantly better-informed position, could manipulate arrangements to their own advantage. Because a woman who lived apart from a husband who did not pay maintenance could sue him on financial grounds, D'Egmont, always one step ahead, announces graciously (before eloping with his mistress) that he will grant Bertha 'a small pension' (*CF* i 53). While the sum involved is deliberately meagre and insufficient to her needs, D'Egmont, by making this scanty and inadequate provision, both saves money and stays out of court.

While an abused woman who was forced out of her home during Wollstonecraft's lifetime by her husband's adultery could, in theory, obtain a divorce, she would (unlike a man in the same position) be obliged to claim additional aggravations such as cruelty, bigamy or incest. For a woman such as Bertha, the cost of counter-suing would have been prohibitive: according to Probert, a London judge estimated in 1844 that even an unopposed suit would cost £50 — and this could escalate to £800 if contested.[99] Because of the difficulty of proving the extra burden of guilt, as well as the expense involved, this option was unfeasible for most women; if a wife pursued her suit successfully, however, she could obtain alimony. Bertha, having been deserted by her husband, is legally entitled to have him compelled to return (though, as discussed in the previous chapter, this was an unappealing notion for a woman whose spouse had abandoned her). The devious husband in *Conduct is Fate* finally evades all responsibilities by iterating the abuses of Wollstonecraft's Venables as well as the unprincipled Donneraile: he denies the marriage has ever taken place. In 1822 the gendered power dynamic in *The Wanderer* applied with equal cogency to, and encapsulated, the political problematic of *Conduct is Fate*: 'The available means to female power are, then, always defined, by Burney's fiction, within the context of a social economy that privileges men over women.'[100]

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they ended any financial commitment to their separated wives by using evidence that they were adulterous to sue them for separation in the ecclesiastical courts.' Bailey, *Unquiet Lives,* p.181.

[98] Stone, *Broken Lives*, pp.19-20.

[99] See: Probert, *Divorced, Bigamist, Bereaved*, p.77. Probert points out, by way of context, that the sum of £50 would be equivalent in value to between £4,000 and £146, 000 today (depending upon how it was calculated). This is why informal separation, as opposed to separation *a mensa et thoro,* was the option favoured by most couples, an unsatisfactory situation which Bury's novel reflects.

[100] Kristina Straub, '*Camilla* and *The Wanderer:* Male Authority and Impotence', *Divided Fictions Fanny Burney and Feminine Strategy* (University Press of Kentucky, 1987, p.209

As discussed in chapter 1, the men who transacted irregular marriages in England were often guilty of perpetrating scams rather than responding to marital breakdown. As in *Self-Indulgence*, the slippery husband at the centre of Bury's second novel makes use of Hardwicke's Act to enter into wedlock with the heroine without first obtaining her family's permission: because of this, he is later able to declare that the marriage is null and void. It is only when the heroine later explains her situation to the liberal-minded Alexis Beaumont that we fully grasp the urgency of her situation:

> She related the outline of her story to Beaumont; told him that her marriage had taken place in an obscure village on the confines of Swisserland; and that the only crime her conscience reproached her with, was that of having married a man whose real name and situation she was a stranger to, and above all, having married him without the consent of her friends. (i p.54)

While Bertha's marriage is not bigamous, neither is it legitimate — not just because the underage heroine has proceeded without permission, but because she cannot substantiate her husband's true identity.[101] 'D'Egmont' is only one of the three or four pseudonyms used by the anti-hero; while his reasons for assuming aliases are otherwise obscure, the falsification enables him in this instance to secure anonymity — a deception which Bertha, as she laments too late, has been willing to overlook:

> Yet can it be that I have given myself to a man who doubts my attachment, - who deems me unworthy of all confidence, or is himself unworthy mine — whose very name I am ignorant of? (*CF* ii 59)

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt130hm9g.10> [accessed 21 September 2023]. While the legality of Bertha's marriage to D'Egmont is challenged at this point, Bury fails to clinch this plotline and in the novel's closing scenes the newly-widowed heroine inherits D'Egmont's wealth unopposed. This is one of several narrative inconsistencies and may have been caused by editorial oversight. Equally, the author may –as part of her effort to change attitudes – be making use of the tropes of the providential novel to enable a morally and socially transgressive heroine to prevail. See also: 2.5 n.123.

[101] In her extensive research of historical cases of bigamy in England, Rebecca Probert uncovers a surprising frequency in the incidences of men concealing their real identity to defraud women into marriage. Amongst these, she cites the cases in 1836 of 'John Steedman, who used an alias when he married a servant who had saved up the relatively modest but still attractive sum of £126.12s. 2d. and took this, along with her watch, when he married her […] and of Henry Bramall, who also used an alias and who took the money and clothes of one of his bigamous wives. (*Proceedings of the Old Bailey,* 27 Nov. 1848).' Probert, *Double Trouble*, p.12, n.42.

Probert observes cogently that the widespread practice of defrauding women of their property often began when men arrived at the altar under cover of an alias; 'It is difficult to think of innocent reasons for choosing to marry in a completely false name.'[102] D'Egmont ultimately guarantees the marriage will fail In *Conduct is Fate* by falsifying his identity; to make good his escape, he silences the heroine by threatening to withhold altogether the financial support to which she, as a separated wife, is legally entitled:

> We are nothing to each other, and on your peril, therefore, call yourself my wife. As long as you keep this secret, and do not persecute me, Monsieur Beaumont will supply you from time to time with a small pension. (*CF* i 53)

One of the most significant points to emerge from both of Bury's first novels is that married women in English society are fatally ignorant about matrimonial law; here, as in chapter 1, the exploitative spouse easily out-manoeuvres his wife by denying that a marriage has been transacted. The legislative system, designed by men to safeguard men's interests, clearly offers women very little protection; Bertha additionally falls victim not just to the anti-hero's duplicity but to her own lack of preparedness — a problem which, Mary Wollstonecraft protested, originated in the inadequacy of women's education. Bertha, like Corissande of *Self-Indulgence*, falls doubly foul of the laws of coverture because she marries a man who knows (or whose supporters know) how to manipulate the system: 'He had promised to remit a small sum annually, but this he had only promised, and there was too much reason to doubt the fulfilment of any promise made by such a person' (*CF* i 54).[103] After D'Egmont elopes with Sophie Féronce, the heroine is left destitute in the French capital; when, as he departs, he commits her to the guardianship of his friend, it is not even in her capacity as his legal spouse. At this point in the narrative, Beaumont, who, by virtue of his gender is far better informed about women's rights than the heroine, warns Bertha protectively against divulging her married status. Correctly

[102] To consolidate her point, Probert cites another case in which 'the son of the Earl of Harrington was clearly trying to conceal his marriage when he omitted the Christian name by which he was known and disguised himself as a labourer.' Probert, 'The Judicial Interpretation of Lord Hardwicke's Act 1753', *The Journal of Legal History*, 23.2 (2002), pp.129–151 (p.138) <https://doi.org/10.1080/01440362308539646>.

[103] Susan Staves directly traces to their husbands' evasions many of the difficulties experienced by women in sustaining themselves economically after separation: 'Just as now many husbands do not actually pay alimony or child support which they have agreed to pay or been ordered to pay, so in the eighteenth century many husbands who had agreed to pay separate maintenance allowances did not actually pay them'. Susan Staves, *Married Women's Separate Property in England, 1660–1833* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp.191-2. Referred to hereafter as 'Married Women's Separate Property'. See also n. 106 below.

suspecting that D'Egmont has somehow managed to invalidate the union, he allays Bertha's fears by alleging 'the excuse of the promised pension, which she would forfeit from Comte D'Egmont by a disclosure of this secret' (*CF* i 63). Beaumont, however, privately distrusts 'the legality of her marriage and was convinced, that, as Bertha de Chanci, she would be more respected than as the cast-off wife of a man of very doubtful character' (*CF* i 63).

2.4 Emotion as an instrument of reform

In a patriarchal society shaped and circumscribed by rigid moral values, it fell to the apologists of a liberal-minded sub-culture to discredit the practice of exonerating men for their exploitative practices while punishing their victims. At the end of the previous century, Mary Hays had prepared the ground for *The Wanderer* and *Conduct is Fate* by making a heroine out of the sexual victim in *The Victim of Prejudice* (1799).[104] Hays's heroine is cast upon a confrontational world by bereavement and bankruptcy, and thus finds herself tormented by unrelenting fears of unemployment and eviction; after her marriage breaks down, Bertha is likewise controlled emotionally by the very real possibilities of impoverishment and destitution. *Conduct is Fate* again elects to follow in the footsteps of revolutionary women writers by detailing the problems which afflict the heroine when she is forced onto the employment market, Bury's second novel perfectly illustrating the point that, 'a genteelly educated, unprovided and unprotected woman may, after every earnest effort to support herself, have no place in the economy at all'.[105] Whereas Burney forbears to attack institutional frameworks, Bury traces Bertha's predicament directly to the inequity in the law which dealt with men's and women's property rights; in the words of Wollstonecraft's haberdasher-cum-landlady, 'women have always the worst of it when law is to decide'.[106]

[104] See: Gary Kelly, *Women, Writing and Revolution*, p.37.
[105] Edward Copeland, *Women Writing about Money* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.56. While Copeland's study plays an important and valuable role in contextualising this research, it should be noted here that in *The Silver Fork Novel*, he overlooks *Conduct is Fate*, instead crediting *The Wanderer* as the originator of Blessington's bad-employment narrative, *The Governess*, (1839). I propose that Blessington is more likely to be indebted to Bury's more recently published broken-marriage novel, and that this is another instance in which her achievement has been obscured by the publications of better-known contemporary and later novelists. See: Copeland, *The Silver Fork Novel*, (p.179).
[106] *The Wrongs of Woman,* ed. Kelly, p.157. *Conduct is Fate* emphasises the point that women of property were often unnecessarily defeated by their own ignorance of the law, including in one little-known instance where a legally married woman could use the system to support herself financially without an allowance. This was because she could run up as many debts as she wished knowing responsibility for meeting her creditors fell automatically to her husband. Caroline

Whereas *Self-Indulgence* had critiqued coverture by uncovering the mechanics of two disintegrating marriages, *Conduct is Fate*, like *The Wanderer,* focuses its lens almost exclusively on the problems which afflict the heroine after she has been cast adrift. Andrew McInnes, again, observes that 'Burney grounds her evaluation of the social consequences of Britain's troubled response to the French Revolution on the level of an individual woman's experience of suspicion, gossip and ignorance, particularly within the realm of paid labour.'[107] Whereas Burney's omniscient narrative is punctuated by allusions to the problems afflicting the heroine ('the difficulty of obtaining employment, the irregularity of pay, the fear of bad appraisal and dismissal'), enhanced levels of realism in *Conduct is Fate* subjectivise Bertha's experience, the narrative consistently immersing the readership in the heroine's emotional trauma.[108] The first two volumes of *Conduct is Fate* extend understanding and suspend readers' judgment of the morally transgressing heroine by ubiquitously confronting them with the social and psychological practicalities of abandonment: when Bury's hero, Rémonville, finds Bertha lodgings with the Chatelains (a liberal-humanist French couple) she is understandably too troubled to enjoy this, the settled existence she craves:

> But could she enjoy this situation — could she enjoy these comforts when she knew that they again placed her under obligations not in her power to repay? and the imperious sense of its being a duty to relinquish them, deprived her of all power of profiting by their possession. (*CF* ii 74)

Bury here rhetorically invokes the vocabulary of social justice to underline the problems encountered by women who lose male protection; as soon as Bertha finds sanctuary, she is

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Norton, who will be discussed in detail in chapter 3, became incensed by her estranged husband's refusal to honour the deed of separation they had signed in 1848; she therefore exploited this law in 1853 by allowing a carriage repairman to sue him for non-payment. See: Mary Poovey, 'Covered but Not Bound: Caroline Norton and the 1857 Matrimonial Causes Act', *Feminist Studies*, 14.3 (Autumn, 1988), pp.467–485, (p.470). Referred to hereafter as 'Covered but Not Bound'. See also 3.5 n.107. Holcombe cautions, however, that if a husband was so-determined, 'He could claim that his wife had left him without good cause; that she had committed adultery after his separation; that he had paid her an adequate allowance, or that he had paid her the allowance they had agreed upon, even though it proved inadequate for her needs; that she had other means of support, or that she had earned money while living apart so that she had no need to pledge his credit…In each case the burden of proof rested not on the husband but on the creditor'. Holcombe, p.32. See also n. 103 above.

[107] McInnes, p.102.

[108] Frances Burney, *The Wanderer; or, Female Difficulties*, 5 vols (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1814), iii p.223. Referred to hereafter as 'The Wanderer' or 'TW'. Subsequent references in-text.

tormented by the changeability of her position. While Burney had also numbered loneliness and despair amongst the itinerant Juliet Granville's tribulations, her heroine appears strangely detached. In this sense, Jacqueline Labbe's observation of the sentimental fiction that went before bears particular cogency for *The Wanderer*: 'in these texts the heroines lack the support of a family: the lone, possible orphaned heroine is *the* central figure through which novelists of the Romantic period explore social injustice through suffering sensibility.[109] When sheltering at the home of vindictive Mrs Howel, for example, Juliet experiences the eviction Bertha dreads, but the event worries her mainly because it means moving to another household. Bertha's response to her homelessness is deeply subjective, however, which means she is unable to benefit from consolations even when they are on offer:

> she was afraid that by going to other people's houses, she should again incur all those evils of dependance [sic], which she deemed it more cruel to endure than any other. To be handed thus about like a bale of goods from one to another, scarcely to form a friendship before the tie was broken, and one of new and uninteresting kind was again to be had recourse to, filled her with despondency. (*CF* i, 85)

In this, the most technically cohesive section of the novel, Bury compels the readership to view English culture through the eyes of an overlooked sub-class, Bertha's fears literalising her point that matrimony, as an institution, neither serves nor protects women. The heroine, divested of male protection, is now commodified and disempowered; having lost both identity and caste, like Maria and Juliet before her, she is no more important to society than a 'bale of goods'(ibid.). The starkness of the imagery here invests the fear of dependency with emotion: for Bertha, homelessness implies a powerlessness which, for women of her class, is 'more cruel to endure than any other' (ibid.).

Despite the realism which enhances Bury's narrative in *Conduct is Fate*, the victimisation of the married heroine by a culture which refuses to recognise her moral value or individual legal status is a clear reanimation of Juliet's struggle in *The Wanderer.* In 1814, Burney had selected a title which defined the heroine in terms of her problematic peripatetic lifestyle; her difficulties are practical, though, and articulated by an author who has no obvious political axe to grind. While Juliet appears to be intellectually preoccupied by her difficulties, she maintains her emotional equilibrium; of her meagre leisure time at a milliners' shop, for example, *The Wanderer* alludes to

[109] Jacqueline M. Labbe, ed., *The History of British Women's Writing, 1750–1830* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p.297.

the heroine's 'solitude without books, and gloom of retirement without a friend' (*TW* iii 60). Inspired, nevertheless, by a novel which England can be 'proud to claim', as well as morals and a story which 'cannot be surpassed', Bury endeavours eight years later to progress the political message which Burney had tried, without total success, to articulate.[110] We learn, for example, that in her first lodgings in England, Bertha de Chanci 'felt as though she had dropped down among a set of new beings, and she looked around her with a cheerless sensation of being alone in the world' (*CF* ii 96); when she enters the domain of paid employment as a governess soon afterwards, her presence in society, while required, is not valued. In scenes which prepare the way for Charlotte Brontë's critique of gendered class divisions in *Jane Eyre* (1847), Bury's heroine finds herself present amongst, but not part of the *beau monde*: 'An immense crowd presented itself to her, with all that buz [sic] of sound so empty to one who is indifferent to every voice that creates it — so melancholy to one whose heart is saddened by humiliation or by sorrow' (*CF* ii, 99). While Bertha, like Juliet, drifts unproductively, the reader connects emotionally with the distress of Bury's heroine: Juliet's suffering is academic whereas Bertha is a recognisable and thus knowable character whose vulnerability, because it is every woman's, arouses terror.[111]

Conduct is Fate thus offers the reader a more uncompromisingly realistic view than *The Wanderer* of the economic subjugation of women marginalised by bad marriage and forced onto the labour market. Historian Joanne Bailey explains that for countless women who left, or were forced out of a marriage, the only recourse was low-paid employment of the sorts attempted by Burney's Juliet. The kinds of roles available to women were limited and casual, typically consisting of low-status work such as retail, nursing and dressmaking – all of which formed the lowest-paid, lowest-skilled

[110] Culley, *Women's Court and Society Memoirs*, ii, pp.280-281. See also: Culley, ii, p.446 (note to p.280).

[111] Unaccountably, Bury narrates with an intensity which suggests the kind of experience which had been within the reach of a writer like Wollstonecraft (who had worked as a governess) but outside her own. One of Bury's younger daughters, Beaujolois, noted that her mother was writing in the week of 6th August 1817, as the family was in the process of relocating from London to Florence in pursuit of a more economically viable lifestyle; travelling with them was their French governess, Mlle de la Chaux. According to Beaujolois's journal, Mlle Chaux dismayed the family with her depression and tales of suffering. It is more than plausible that Bury made these autobiographical accounts the source of the governess narrative in the novel: 'She has been violently ill and even now her health is not good. Misfortunes and losses have occasioned an attack upon her nerves and although her general appearance is almost the same as formerly I evidently see that her heart has suffered. The ills of the mind are not easily cured and may occasion physical ills. This is alas her case and often have I been moved to tears after hearing her talk over the last two years of her life which have been spent in solitude and suffering'. Harriet Charlotte Beaujolois Campbell, *A Journey to Florence*, pp.40–41.

parts of the economy and provided inadequate wages on which to support children.[112] We learn that Bertha, like Juliet, decides upon governessing because, as a refined woman of indeterminate status she ''knew not what other course to pursue in a foreign country, without any means of support' (*CF* ii, 107). Juliet, we learn, similarly 'had no means to form any independent scheme; no friends to promote her interest; no counsellors to point out any pursuit, or direct any measures' (*TW* ii 338). At the end of the eighteenth century Wollstonecraft had been deeply concerned with the lack of employment opportunities for women and issued a direct challenge in *The Wrongs of Woman* to contemporary idealists and moralists who trivialise the difficulties women experience in finding employment that will sustain them.[113] While Burney takes the baton out of Wollstonecraft's hand in *The Wanderer,* Bury intensifies the problem in *Conduct is Fate* when the heroine naively resolves to take on the burden of her own support:

> Cast off, in a manner, by every natural connection, she determined, henceforward, to live and die independent of them — to provide for her own existence — to suffice to herself. (*CF* i 59–60)

The first and most severe obstacle to the prosperity of both Burney and Bury's fugitive wives is their lack of definable social status. A woman who left, or was forced out of, her marriage, would have no rights or independence, and would therefore not be recognised in law any further than she would if she still co-habited with her husband; as a *feme covert* her identity, along with her property, was still absorbed into that of her husband. D'Egmont poses an insurmountable problem to Bury's heroine because he, like Wollstonecraft's Venables and Burney's commissary, has recourse both to the law and cultural mores. As Holcombe, again, explains, 'By depriving married women of property the law deprived them of legal existence, of the rights and responsibilities of other citizens, and thus of self-respect […] In short the law placed married women in the same category with criminals, lunatics and minors as being legally incompetent and irresponsible.'[114]

In 1822, Bury harnesses women's anxieties about their economic security by transferring her heroine's struggle from the private to the public domain. Bertha is saved from the streets of Paris only by the benevolence of Remonville, a French official and friend of Beaumont, whom the heroine persuades to find employment for her as a governess in England. *Conduct is Fate* particularises the horrors of governessing only alluded to by Austen in the sympathetic

[112] See: Bailey, *Unquiet Lives*, p.189.
[113] *The Wrongs of Woman* sees Jemima reduced to beggary, pickpocketing and prostitution.
[114] Holcombe, p.35.

characterisations in *Emma* (1816). Although Austen's Jane Fairfax is a secondary character she is, as observed by Linda Bree, a conventional heroine through her elegance and accomplishments; economically impoverished and, without the support of wealthy relatives, she is nevertheless in social jeopardy unless she inherits wealth or marries.[115] Claudia L. Johnson notes astutely that Jane's history 'would not be out of place next to Wollstonecraft's *The Wrongs of Woman; or Maria* and Burney's *The Wanderer, or Female Difficulties'.*[116] In *Conduct is Fate*, I will argue, Bury progresses Wollstonecraft's critique of women's work by moving the figure of Jane centre stage and re-imagining her story. According to Lorna Bracewell, Wollstonecraft protested against formal legal restrictions which forced women to function at the most subordinate levels in public-sphere employment; in *Vindication,* chapter nine, she placed particular emphasis on the tedium and indignity of the work of governesses: 'The few employments open to women, so far from being liberal, are menial'.[117] This is a protest which Bury iterates in an impassioned speech delivered to the heroine by the worthy Beaumont:

> You know not, you cannot know, the humiliations, the thousand torments, to which it will inevitably expose you, especially in England, where the master of the family invariably thinks more of his cook than of his children's governess; the salary which he willingly gives the former he grudges to the latter, and conceives that every mental perfection ought to be bought cheaply, while those of the senses are to be paid for at any price. In a Word, a governess is expected to possess every attribute of mind and manner which can enable her to qualify her pupils for the highest spheres, yet to be set apart herself from all society. This miserable non-descript of perfection is not to associate with the domestics belonging to the establishment, nor yet must she dare to mingle with the masters of the family. The person to whom the latter entrust their dearest interest, their children, is not fit society for them. (*CF* i 75-6)

Skilfully distancing herself from the object of her polemic, Bury here confronts the readership with the lived experiences of desertion for women of rank; although the details of a marriage breakdown in high society would have been much talked of and raked over when reported, the women involved subsequently often disappeared completely from view. There is consequently a

[115] Linda Bree, (2009). Emma: Word Games and Secret Histories. In A Companion to Jane Austen (eds C.L. Johnson and C. Tuite), p.139 <https://doi-org.soton.idm.oclc.org/10.1002/9781444305968, ch11>.
[116] Claudia L. Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, p.134.
[117] Lorna Bracewell, 'Gender and Social Theory', in *The Wollstonecraftian Mind*, eds. Sandrine Berges, Eileen Hunt Botting, Alan Coffee (London: Routledge, 2019), p.486 n.11.

scarcity of primary historical evidence relating to their economic experiences; Joanne Bailey, however, usefully examines the widespread problem of financial impoverishment in her study of broken marriage amongst women of lower economic status during the period. To avoid requesting poor relief, she explains, women were often forced to downgrade in terms of the quality and location of their living accommodation; they would also accrue debts or approach friends and neighbours for assistance. To illustrate her point she cites a typically harrowing case study:

> In 1743 Lois Miller included a petition for relief, dated from her husband's desertion, in the letter to her proctor instructing him about her restitution suit at Durham consistory court. It concluded that only the charity of her good neighbours prevented her from starving, even '[t]ho I endeavour to the utmost I possibly can with my hands, being never brought up with hard labour'.[118]

In Bailey's view, the pressures negotiated by women whose marriage broke down corresponded directly to the scarcity of checks and balances detailed by marriage legislation during the period. In response, Burney voiced contentious views in *The Wanderer* about the neglect of women's welfare through Elinor Joddrel – a character whom she ironises; following her lead, Bury, also makes use of a subordinate character to air subversive political ideas about gender. In *Conduct is Fate*, moreover, the heroine's mentor and eventual benefactor, Alexis de Beaumont, fends off the heroine's antagonists and rejects rigid moral codes on her behalf: he is an enlightenment figure who becomes a mouthpiece for the novel's subterranean feminist manifesto.

As this chapter will show more clearly in its next section, Bury characterises the novel's hero as a French national in order to distance herself from him; as the representative of a state whose hostilities with Britain had only very recently ceased, he articulates subversive truths on the author's behalf while her narrator maintains authority. In his warning to the heroine, Beaumont thus critiques English society by detailing the hazards of employment and the practice of snubbing governesses which was customary in households across the Channel: the narrative will soon actualise, to distressing effect 'the humiliations, the thousand torments' of governessing and the abuse of professional women in domestic situations ('especially in England' (*CF* i 75)). The 'mental perfections' alluded to by Beaumont – Bertha's continental elegance and fluency in French – may be endowments which 'enable her to qualify her pupils for the highest spheres'; they will also, as he predicts, be the means of commodifying her. Just as her French mentor had predicted, the

[118] Joanne Bailey, *Unquiet Lives*, p.191.

gentrified Farnboroughs of Bloomsbury soon turn her skills to profit: 'The talents she possessed were let out to hire, and, in fact, she was more a slave than those who work at some trade for mere subsistence' (*CF* ii p.92). When Bertha is again employed by a London lady of fashion for her ornamental accomplishments, she is demeaned and slighted for a second time: 'Lady Mayfield began to be tired of her when the novelty of her person, her manners, and her accent wore off' (*CF* ii p.190). In *The Wanderer*, Juliet encounters identical problems when the irascible Mrs. Ireton (another domestic despot) diverts herself by having her served last at table – an abuse Bury reanimates to explosive effect eight years later. As a paid subordinate, Bertha's presence at family meals in *Conduct is Fate* is a condition of her employment; when her jaundiced Bloomsbury mistress presently observes her husband, Lord Farnborough, attending her at table, she subjects Bertha to her personal contempt: 'I hate blue stocking ladies' (*CF* ii p.95). Next, through sheer vindictiveness, a maid contrives a story about a liaison with Lord Farnborough and when members of the Bloomsbury coterie take up the chase, Bertha's reputation is ruined. The heroine now has to find a new situation – a problem which is intensified because she faces being dismissed without a reference.

In 1814, Burney's Juliet discovers early on that none of her skills is viable as currency without access to a positive testimonial; Burney thus adds 'the daily menace of being dismissed' (*TW* ii p.307) to the pressures acting upon the single, unprotected woman struggling to survive in hostile English society. Most seriously of all, *The Wanderer* chronicles in detail the cumulative failure of the heroine to accrue sufficient earnings to provide even a basic standard of living: despite her proficiencies in music, acting, sewing, millinery and teaching, she is unable to make an income which will supply her with even basic necessities.[119] Ginger Frost explains that while the casualties of broken marriage often managed to sustain themselves for lengthy periods, low wages would often combine with other factors (conflicts with employers, in Juliet's and Bertha's cases) and destroy any progress they might have been able to make. A woman in Bertha de Chanci's situation, the reader begins to realise, was never entirely free from stress: however industrious and assiduous she may be, she is hobbled by her lack of status as a cast-off wife and if she suffered illness or became infirm, she could still be forced to request relief from the parish. The

[119] Perkins observes astutely that the failure of Burney's 'improbably multi-talented' heroine intensifies Brunton's account in 1811 of the economic problems faced by women without male protection. Lady Charlotte progressed this same dynamic in *Self-Indulgence* and, mobilised by *The Wanderer*, consciously details the heroine's plight to subversive political effect in *Conduct is Fate*. Perkins, *Women Writers*, p.155. See also: 1.3 n.112.

peril of her situation strikes Burney's heroine with full force when her first employer, a milliner, serves her with an eviction notice:

> The twenty pounds of Lady Aurora were nearly gone, in articles which did not admit of trust; and in the current necessaries which her situation indispensably and daily required. She feared that all the money which was due to her would be insufficient to pay what she owed; or, at least, would be wholly employed in that act of justice; which would leave her, therefore, in the same utter indigence as when she began her late attempt. (*TW* ii 138–139)

When Bertha de Chanci likewise faces destitution, she is compelled to confront the emotional, as well as the economic, consequences of marital breakdown:

> The small salary which she had earned by a three months' residence in her present situation afforded her the means of procuring a lodging; and, trusting to Providence for some new supply when this should fail, she set forth in quest of such an abode. (*CF* ii 138–139)

The novel of self-improvement is here punctuated by the vocabulary of social justice: all that stands between Bertha and destitution, as the narrator makes clear, are the wages 'which she had earned by a three months' residence' (*CF* ii p.138). Her ability to sustain her moral and social standing at this point in the novel is contingent upon her chance of 'procuring a lodging': she has only 'Providence' to depend upon and divine agency has already failed her.[120] When she snatches at an opportunity to take up another post with the effusive Lady Mayfield it is not a rational decision – just a strategy to stave off the terror of 'sleeping one night alone and unprotected in hired lodgings' (*CF* ii 144).

2.5 'Not fit society': the sexual double standard and Bury's transnational theme

In a modern metropolitan world, the unsisterliness of women is exceeded in severity only by the malevolence of misogynistic dandies to whom Bury, in an intensification of the heroine's plight, transfers the most extreme tropes of the Gothic novel. In *The Wanderer*, 'Juliet's economic misadventures reveal that economic vulnerability for women is automatically, sexual vulnerability

[120] Bury's next novel will complete the narrator's attempt in *Self-Indulgence* to downgrade religion when the narrator parenthetically dismisses the value of devotional funeral rites as 'the last melancholy, yet (to Christians) consolatory duties' (*TD* ii p.68).

— a lesson that Burney's heroines from Evelina on had inculcated'.[121] Burney's Juliet is thus marked out straightaway by libertine Sir Lyell Sycamore on account of her susceptibility: 'That she should appear, and remain, thus strangely alone in public, marked her, nevertheless, in his opinion, as, at least, an easy prey' (*TW* ii 129). The heroine is similarly menaced in *Conduct is Fate* by exotically named Carlovitz Troubetskoi, the henchman of the husband who deserted her and who represents (at one step removed, because of his Polish nationality) the corruptions of an identifiable fashionable metropolitan elite. D'Egmont, as Donneraile had done before him, devolves responsibility for disposing of his wife onto his accomplice: while Carlovitz resembles the opportunistic Carrisfort of *Self-Indulgence* in his readiness to exploit a woman's economic powerlessness in a foreign country, he exceeds him in villainy. Remodelling Gothic tropes to accentuate the menace that lurks amongst the fashionable streets of the metropolis, Bury's urban fiend attempts in vain to solicit sexual favours: '"where would you go? who would you go to? Your husband, as you call him, is eloped with Mademoiselle Féronce, — you are completely in my power, without friends or money to assist you' (*CF* i 50). The narrative is here heightened by melodrama when Carlovitz taunts Bertha callously about her husband — 'as you call him' (ibid.); it emerges that she has not only 'been living entirely at [his] expence'; she will also receive no legal redress (ibid.). In her second novel, Bury once again transfers her political agenda to a European setting; Bertha's retort is that she has nothing to fear because she is protected by law: 'I am in a civilized country, I can implore the protection of its laws, — you dare not infringe them' (ibid.). This episode both invokes Wollstonecraft's words and generates alarm in the reader: 'the laws of her country — if women have a country — afford her no protection or redress from the oppressor, unless she have the plea of bodily fear'.[122]

In England, an illiberal and intolerant society, men are weaponised by moral and legal authority and in the metropolis, villainous Carlovitz, like Lamb's dandyish Lord Glenarvon, relishes the power he enjoys by virtue of his maleness: 'he affected to laugh, [and] said he would leave her to the protection of those laws she so much relied on' (*CF* i 51). Carlovitz here punishes Bertha for rejecting his advances: while there is nothing new in the casting the villain's accomplice in the role of vengeful seducer, the use of melodrama in *Conduct is Fate* intensifies Carlovitz's cruelty to a level only seen in *The Wanderer* amongst contemporary realist narratives. To further jolt her female readership into recognising and understanding their vulnerability, Bury makes extensive use of the affluent metropolitan setting — not to satiate bourgeois curiosity, but to ground the

[121] See: Straub, p.207.
[122] *The Wrongs of Woman,* ed. Kelly, p.140.

action in a recognisable, urban context. When Corissande rejects dandyish Carrisfort's sexual and romantic advances in *Self-Indulgence*, he persists in pitying and offering her aid; in *Conduct is Fate*, Carlovitz not only punishes Bertha — he recruits other toxic fashionables to his cause. Forced to flee like Maria and Juliet before her, Bertha changes identity to avoid metaphoric and actual capture, the Gothic punctuating the society novel again at this point when Carlovitz writes to Bertha's domineering hostess claiming the heroine has 'laid a plan to inveigle her son [Beaumont] into a matrimonial connection' (*CF* i 67). On learning of Bertha's true marital status, Mme Beaumont, in a plot development which iterates *The Wanderer*, evicts Bertha from her lodgings; she does not stop there, however; to counter Bertha's legitimate claim to her son's bequest, she also calumniates her in wider society:

> on the plea that there was no such person existing as Mademoiselle de Chanci at the time her son wrote-his will; for that the person who chose to go by that name was, in fact, the wife of an adventurer, who called himself D'Egmont, although that name also was supposed to be assumed; but whatever the name was, Monsieur Beaumont evidently intended to leave his property to Mademoiselle de Chanci, not to a married woman. (*CF* iii 5)

The social justice narrative is here once again punctuated by fashionable fictional tropes to bring the heroine's intolerable plight within the comprehension of a cosmopolitan readership. Carlovitz next sabotages the heroine's escape plan, not by imprisoning or abducting her, therefore, but by ruining her reputation. Like Juliet, Bertha conceals her marriage in order to survive socially and economically; in a prejudiced and hostile society, the narrative implies, women will always be defeated by the inescapable inequities of a system which forestalls the attempts of socially marginalised women to sustain themselves. In the words of Lord Lyndhurst, who later introduced legislation which protected the property of separated wives as a precursor to the married women's property act of 1857, a woman separated from her husband, was 'homeless, helpless, hopeless and almost destitute of all civil rights […] She may be wronged in all possible ways, and her character may be mercilessly defamed; yet she has no redress.'[123]

[123] John Singleton Copley (1772-1863), friend of Caroline Norton and champion for equal treatment for women. In 1856, Lord St Leonard had, with similar success, proposed that the new legislation should extend to deserted wives. Stone: *Road to Divorce*, p.377. Because Bury ultimately fails to clinch this plotline, the heroine – in spite of all obstacles – eventually secures Beaumont's estate uncontested. See also: 2.3 n.100.

In 1822, having only recently testified for the defence at the trial of Princess Caroline, Bury committed herself to the early feminists' moral crusade by bringing harsh social commentary to bear on her tale of female hardship. In the *Diary*, she reveals she had been consciously motivated to reform women's morality during the years spanning the novel's composition after witnessing at first hand the continuing persecution of Caroline by her husband and his coterie: in 1822, the author thus engages directly with the problems caused by female misogynists to badly-married women who, like Caroline, attempted to find solace elsewhere:

> I am sometimes tempted to wish Lord H. F. had continued to love her, for I am sure, poor soul, had anyone been steadfast to her, she would have been so to them; and though, as a married woman, nothing could justify her in being attached to any man, yet it is a hard and a cruel fate, to spend the chief part of one's existence unloving and unloved.[124] How few can endure the trial! It requires strong principle, and a higher power than mortals possess, to enable them to bear such a one; and when I hear women sitting in judgment on the Princess, (many of them not entitled by their own conduct as wives to comment on the behaviour of others,) and declaiming against her with unchristian severity, some from a feeling of self-righteousness others from political or party motives, "it is all I can do to forbear from telling them how unamiable I think such observations." (*Diary 1838* i 265)[125]

Bury here articulates a sense of personal outrage about the sexual double standard, taking deliberate aim at the countless sycophants who populated the royal court: flatterers whose loyalty was not morally motivated but driven by misogyny and political partisanship. She is deeply concerned by the duplicity of those women who readily committed adultery themselves but, on the slightest suggestion of transgression by another woman, relentlessly pursued and calumniated her. Bury's willingness to risk moral exile as an author by rejecting gendered orthodoxies signifies a previously overlooked interface between her non-fictional writing, her

[124] See: Culley, *Women's Court and Society Memoirs*, p.12. Lord Henry Fitzgerald (1761–1829), son of the Duke of Leinster was reputedly the princess's lover at this period, but as Bury laments, 'By October 1810, whether frightened of the Prince's displeasure, or regretting his neglect of his family on the death of one of his sons, he stopped seeing the Princess, who thought his behaviour "very shabby"'. See also: <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1790-1820/member/fitzgerald-henry-1761-1829> [accessed 26 February 23].

[125] This entry was probably made around the year 1814, just before Caroline's flight to the continent. Although undated, reference is made within the same sequence of entries to Wellington's recent triumph in the Peninsular Wars (1807–14).

second novel and the fiction of her radical literary antecedents. In Wollstonecraft's *The Wrongs of Woman*, for example, the author justifies adultery in the novel's courtroom scenes while the wider narrative is punctuated by the treachery of mistresses, stepmothers and employers towards their subordinates. This was a discourse which had originated in the very title of the novel, the term 'wrongs' referring not only to hardships inflicted upon women by men but also those crimes they commit against each other. Clare Brant discusses the role fear of publicity often played during the era in preventing women of Bertha's class even from accessing funds they were legally owed: 'reputation helped restrict economic options for non-working-class women'.[126] Anne Clark, similarly points out that, for both middle and upper-class women, defamation cut off marriage options and security within marriage (p.102)[127] while Straub's observation that 'in *The Wanderer* women are economically debased, socially humiliated, and psychologically maimed' clearly points to the role played by novelists of the period in uncovering the victimisation of women by members of their own sex.[128] Claudia L. Johnson supplements Straub's commentary by observing: 'In contrast to *The Mysteries of Udolpho,* which places Emily under the roof of three different men, *The Wanderer* exposes Ellis/Juliet to the rule, or rather, the violent whim, of three women — Mrs. Maple, Mrs. Howel, and Mrs. Ireton — and each is more insolent, ill-judging, and tyrannical than the next.'[129] From the moment of her eviction onwards, Bertha, like Burney's Juliet, is pursued relentlessly by the woman with whom she has sought refuge. Whereas Juliet's indeterminate social standing is what inflames the heroine's employer in *The Wanderer,* the source of the landlady's hostility in Bury's novel is Bertha's status (or lack of it) as a forsaken wife:

> Madame Beaumont appeared bitterly enraged against Bertha, whose name she stigmatised in all societies, and against whom she pursued her suit with redoubled vigour. As the story became daily more the subject of conversation, Bertha could not be seen without being pointed at, and she almost determined to give up the legacy, in order to avoid the publicity to which it exposed her, and the man to whom she was unfortunately united. (*CF* iii 9)

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[126] Clare Brant, 'Speaking of Women: Scandal and the Law in the Mid-Eighteenth Century', in *Women, Texts and Histories 1575–1760* eds. Clare Brant and Diane Purkiss (London: Routledge, 1992), p.248. Referred to in Vivien Jones, ed., *Women and Literature*, p.102.
[127] Anne Clark, 'Whores and Gossips: Sexual Reputations in London170-1825', in *Current issues in Women's History*, ed. By Arina Angerman and others (London; New York: Routledge, 1989), pp.231–48. Referred to in Vivien Jones, ed. *Women and literature,* p.102.
[128] Straub, p.185.
[129] See: Claudia L. Johnson, *Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender, and Sentimentality in the 1790s--Wollstonecraft, Radcliffe, Burney, Austen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,1995), p.177. Referred to hereafter as 'Equivocal Beings'.

Conduct is Fate here progresses Burney's critique of female misogyny by immersing the readership in the realities for women of social destitution; the risks to Bertha's reputation are so severe at this point in the novel, indeed, that she nearly relinquishes Beaumont's bequest, the only real means of financial sustenance available to her. At the heart of *Conduct is Fate* is the Wollstonecraftian protest that women's efforts to support themselves can be too easily sabotaged by a culture which arbitrarily places value on women's sexual and moral 'desirability' whilst completely neglecting their potential to develop economic independence. It is a society, Bury protests, in which adverse publicity routinely inflicts punishment upon marginalised women not because they have erred, but because the culture that oppresses them is built upon discrimination and misogyny.

While Burney does not pursue Wollstonecraft's belief that female misogyny originated in the problems caused to women by marriage, Bury makes a point of characterising the heroine's most persistent tormentor as a widow, a class of women whose financial and personal social status was often precarious. Mme Beaumont is clearly guilty of misogyny but she is also motivated by apprehension about her own security — a particularly female anxiety which was rooted in the exorbitant and unequal demand exerted upon women to maintain an untarnished moral reputation. The economic security of a widow during the early nineteenth century depended upon her moral irreproachability (a problem which would be enhanced, as will be seen in chapter 3, by the passing of the Dower Act in 1833). Before the passing of the Act, a wife who lost her husband automatically received one-third of his estates during the remainder of her life but this mandate applied only to a widow who had not committed adultery. In Wollstonecraft's fictional fragment, Maria had found that, as the victim of broken marriage, she cannot even access decent lodgings because she lacks a reference: 'I could not, without a reference to some acquaintance, who might inform my tyrant, get admittance into a decent apartment—men have not all this trouble'.[130] Her first landlady, 'the haberdasher', duly evicts her because Venables has published a notice which threatens to punish anyone 'harbouring' his wife with 'the utmost severity of the law'.[131] While the haberdasher complies with this edict because of pressure from her own husband, Maria's second landlady delivers her straight into Venables's hands, all-too readily believing what he has to say about her. When Burney's Juliet first arrives in England she is similarly abused because of her status as an outsider: economically destitute, she is forced to appeal for charity and receives nothing apart from what is provided by the chivalrous Harleigh

[130] *The Wrongs of Woman,* ed. Kelly, p.150.
[131] Ibid., p.151.

and an English Admiral. Her refusal to align herself with a particular tribe means, however, that she is shunted from one aristocratic household to the next, experiencing abuse and insults wherever she goes.[132]

In *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787), Wollstonecraft argued that women who were subjugated by their husbands in turn tyrannise their servants, 'for slavish fear and tyranny go together'; in the England of *Conduct is Fate*, Bertha is duly defined by her refugee status and for this reason becomes a convenient scapegoat for landladies and the women who employ her.[133] It is significant that Burney is less willing than Lady Charlotte to ascribe blame to patriarchal institutions; in her view, the heroine's problem is not a culture which is corrupted by misogyny but 'a society held together by force and fear'.[134]

Besides immersing the readership in the problems of women victimised because of their marital status, Bury attempts to correct attitudes in 1822 by advancing a transnational agenda — a pro-European discourse which Burney and Owenson had also recently articulated in *The Wanderer* and *France* (1817) respectively. As noted in the preceding section, the figures of Beaumont and 'guardian angel Rémonville' (*CF* ii 104) enable Bury to reject rigid social mores by reincarnating Austen's mentors as French humanists — moral progressives who view English standards of behaviour through the prism of transnational cultural norms. Both Bury and Burney's heroines are frequently protected by compassionate continentals: in *The Wanderer*, the heroine's only real friend is her confederate, the fugitive French aristocrat, Gabriella. They thus compare the customs of English society with those of the British nations, France and the wider continent and from this platform critique such problems as gender inequality, the sexual double standard and institutional deficiencies affecting the legal rights of married women. Bury's Swiss heroine arrives alone,

[132] In *The Wanderer* the heroine initially appears to be a French refugee in flight from Robespierre's terror, a misconception which arises out of her determination to conceal her real identity (it is not until the fifth and last volume that we learn of her true status as a British national and the forced marriage which has precipitated her cross-Channel flight). In the interim, Burney's heroine finds that those members of the English aristocracy upon whom she relies for assistance delude themselves all-too readily about her ethnicity, marital status, nationality and caste, subjecting her, because of their partiality and prejudice, to unrelenting persecution. Instead of catechising, however, Burney attempts to correct attitudes by narrating from the marginalised victim's point of view.

[133] Mary Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters with Reflections on Female Conduct, in the more Important Duties of Life* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1787), p.63.

[134] See: Margaret Anne Doody, 'Burney and politics', in *The Cambridge Companion to Frances Burney*, ed. by Peter Sabor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.99.

however, and when she first glimpses London early in volume two, she is favourably impressed by its apparent bounty and affluence:

> When Bertha crossed Westminster Bridge, she observed, through the dense fog, by a kind of brazen sun light, those various objects of which this country of commerce and wealth displays…opulence from all parts of the world- all these excited in Bertha an exclamation of genuine wonder and amazement. (*CF* ii p.104-5)

Her initial impressions will strike an increasingly ironic note as the novel progresses, however: London's material abundance will soon be shown to mask a profound moral impoverishment and the heroine will be subjected to incessant hostility. As part of her strategy to reassess English and continental values, Bury reanimates the traditional mentor figure not to uphold, but to subvert established moral codes; in her second novel, she thus exchanges Burney's conforming Harville for the liberal and secular humanist figures of Alexis Beaumont and Remonville — Frenchmen who unequivocally support the socially-compromised heroine. Instead of renouncing her, Beaumont secures lodgings for her by deceiving his mother about Bertha's marital status: Remonville likewise challenges received standards of behaviour when he saves Bertha from Carlovitz by vacating his lodgings for her. Even more significantly, when he succeeds in finding her a teaching position, it emerges in an exchange between Bertha and her new employer that Remonville has rejected codes of English propriety on her behalf:

> On her expressing some surprise that Sir George and Lady Farnborough should have received her thus, almost unrecommended, he explained that Monsieur de Rémonville had unceasingly spoken of her in the highest terms of approbation; "and," he added, "[…] your manners and countenance confirm these reports." (*CF* ii, 87–88)

Kathryn Hughes emphasises the importance of the governess's moral probity to those families who occupied the most elevated positions in the social hierarchy; 'As a stand-in for her pupil's mother it was essential that she provide a model of perfect Christian lady hood'.[135] Remonville boldly and selflessly risks his own position by vouching professionally for a morally-compromised woman of ambiguous social standing: in permitting him to retain his heroic status while subverting proscriptive social practices, Bury thus breaks narrative and moral taboos. As Britain had mostly been at war with France during the production of her first two novels, this transnational agenda could even have been considered traitorous; contemporary readers, aware of the enormity of vouching for a woman in these circumstances, are nevertheless forced to

[135] Kathryn Hughes, *The Victorian Governess* (London: Hambledon Press, 1993), p.48.

reconsider their priorities. Regardless of the risks involved, Remonville awards Bertha the highest of all accolades and she gains access to narrow English circles.

2.6 Pushing boundaries: love beyond marriage

At the end of the previous century, the heroine in Wollstonecraft's *The Wrongs of Woman* — legally, emotionally and physically violated — deliberately sought, and found, consolation with another woman: in *Ethelinde*, (1789), Charlotte Smith had narrated similarly counter-cultural stories by focusing on 'women's sexual vulnerability to the advances of men who behave generously to them financially and emotionally'.[136] In 1812, however, Bury had denied the possibility of adultery or co-habitation to the victimised women at the centre of her bigamy narrative. In the following decade, however, *Conduct is Fate* endeavours to progress revolutionary agendas; when Bertha de Chanci leaves France to take up employment in London, it is not, we learn, for financial reasons alone, but because she now loves and is loved by Rémonville. In 1822, however, any violation of moral convention must be cast as a source of shame and struggle:

> it was long before the voice of duty could be heard amid the conflict of the passions; but though weak, she was not regardless of principle… each tear shed over the remembrance of Rémonville was criminal in the sight of Heaven. (*CF*, i, 68–69)

Bury here rhetoricises the novel's contravention of religious norms in the lexis of established Christian discourse. In *The Wanderer*, Juliet similarly meets and falls in love, in the course of her flight, with a man she cannot marry because of her compromised position, Burney's novel initially appearing to revive debates first broached in earlier revolutionary fiction. Juliet is an exemplary heroine, however, and her virtue never wavers whereas Bertha, like her radical fictional forbears, fights hard against temptation. While Bury does not judge the heroine when she is forced to seek comfort and companionship outside her marriage, Bertha must all the same be seen to acknowledge and repent if she is to retain the reader's sympathy.

Despite Burney's readiness to criticise the conduct of the governing classes in *The Wanderer*, she otherwise forbears to challenge moral orthodoxy and denies any possibility for the hero of a union with Juliet; when Harleigh learns of her existing marriage, he relinquishes all hope, knowing at the same time that she is the 'victim of forced marriage' (*TW,* v. book ix, p.49). Claudia L. Johnson duly complains that the 'ludicrously elaborate lengths to which the novel goes to clear Ellis/Juliet from the faintest whiff of transgressiveness … indicates an anxiety about offending the

[136] Moody, ed., *Ethelinde,* introduction, p.x.

same received notions the novel seems to protest.'[137] It is only when Harleigh has seen the commissary safely deported that he is prepared to launch his suit (see *TW*, v. pp.47–51). Burney thus cleaves to existing social mores, recommending, instead of rejecting, the institutions which entrap women like Juliet and Bertha as 'the appropriate props for a women's standing in society'.[138] Claudia L. Johnson goes on to complain that *The Wanderer*, paradoxically, tries to *'*protest the effects of social injustice while making sure that the social structures, customs, and attitudes that produced them remain intact'.[139]

Burney's political reticence and Lady Charlotte's redemptive, and female-centred, alternative for socially-compromised women could be better understood by appraising other non-canonical novels of the 1810s which address, but do not resolve, the problem of women marginalised by marital status. Maria Edgeworth's *Patronage* (1814), for example, starts off promisingly, chronicling the attraction which arises between the hero of the novel, Sir Godfrey Percy, and Miss Maria Hauton — the daughter of a divorcee whose initial characterisation as a woman of moral integrity discredits conventional notions concerning female adultery. Maria Hauton remains a secondary character, however, and as the novel progresses, the omniscient narrator's support for her weakens. Edgeworth finally commits to orthodox morality (which claims that female adultery— like a faulty gene— is an inherited personality trait); after Miss Hauton is married off by arrangement, she is seen fulfilling her destiny when she runs away with another man. In Sydney Owensons's *Florence Macarthy* (1818), divorce similarly signifies moral corruption in a woman. Here, the hero (Walter Fitzaldem) has been dispossessed of his property and title by an uncle — the late Marquis of Dunore — the narrative interrogating, amongst other complex ethical issues, which moral qualities are necessary to the class which governs. Owenson answers her own question by claiming that the hero's usurping cousins are incapable of operating as landowners because they descend from Lady Emily de Vere, a beautiful but flawed (because adulterous) noblewoman: they do not qualify for entry to the establishment because their ancestry is tainted by divorce. Burney similarly denies the possibility for the heroine of any relationship outside marriage, which again frustrates Claudia L. Johnson: 'Rather than stretching our notions of what a woman can do without sacrifice to propriety, she tightens the stranglehold of propriety itself.'[140]

[137] Johnson, *Equivocal Beings*, p.168.
[138] Sodeman, p.202.
[139] Johnson, ibid., p.170.
[140] Johnson, ibid., p.169.

While Burney held back in 1814, it is the fourth novel of Jane Austen, written between February 1811 and June 1813, that articulates one of the most directly polemical contemporary narrative responses to the injustices of the sexual double standard. As discussed above, Austen had clearly been troubled in 1813 by the persecution in public of Princess Caroline by her husband and his coterie; before the publication of *Glenarvon* in 1816, Austen punctuates her morally instructive narrative — *Mansfield Park* (1814) — with penetrating insights into patriarchal systems and the culture of misogyny which prevailed. When Maria Bertram is automatically divorced by her husband and condemned to social disgrace and exile after the discovery of her adultery with Henry Crawford, Austen's comment about the sexual double standard is bitter and ironic:

> That punishment, the public punishment of disgrace, should in a just measure attend *his* share of the offence is, we know, not one of the barriers which society gives to virtue. In this world the penalty is less equal than could be wished; but without presuming to look forward to a juster appointment hereafter, we may fairly consider a man of sense, like Henry Crawford, to be providing for himself no small portion of vexation and regret.[141]

Austen here conceals her anger in the lexis of rational and judgmental narration to pacify a morally conservative readership. The reader is troubled, however, because the seducer walks free while his victim is publicly shamed and socially marginalised: 'The inequality of society's treatment of men and women allows Henry, and Rushworth, to avoid the public disgrace attendant on Maria's behaviour.'[142] Austen necessarily self-distances from Maria Bertram by characterising her not so much as an unsympathetic character as a villainess; she also circumvents criticism by submerging her interrogation of moral hypocrisy within a secondary plotline. Austen thus appears to offer endorsement neither to the transgressing woman nor the society which exonerates her seducer: this short but heavily ironic passage subtly destabilises universally held assumptions about English values, Austen's interventions preparing the way for what Claudia L. Johnson terms a 'decrease in reticence'.[143] In discrediting the most profoundly venerated tenets of didactic fiction, Austen is characteristically restrained; as Johnson goes on to observe, however, this is an author who placates the disciples of courtship fiction as she probes contentious issues

[141] Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*, ed. Claudia L. Johnson (Norton: London; New York, 1998), p.318.
[142] McInnes, p.130.
[143] Claudia L. Johnson, '"The 'Unfeudal Tone of the Present Day"', in *Mansfield Park and Persuasion*, ed. Judy Simons, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997), p.163.

and 'persistently subjected its most cherished mythologies to interrogations from which it could not recover.'[144]

When Austen broke women's silence on the subject of the sexual double standard in 1814, her protest was heard clearly by the writers who followed. While Bury firmly commits in 1822 to progressing Austen's critique, the reformist energy of *Conduct is Fate* can perhaps be associated even more definitively with *Glenarvon*, Lady Caroline Lamb's scandalous and best-selling *roman-à-clef* which had appeared in 1816. Lamb and Bury were linked by the position they occupied as aristocratic wives within the metropolitan social elite as well as their determination to challenge entrenched attitudes towards gender; by 1822, both were published authors who shared concerns about dynastic marriage and the injustices perpetrated upon women by the enormities of coverture.[145] Even before the Regency, Lamb (a self-avowed disciple of Wollstonecraft) had positioned herself within the coterie of 'liberal-minded women who […] stand up for the rights of the sex and wear our [their] shackles with dignity'.[146] Both she and Bury had first -hand knowledge of the catastrophic social and economic implications of marriage breakdown for women within the inner circles; as has already been seen in chapter 1, Bury had readily absolved Lady Caroline of immorality for entering into a very public and scandalous affair with Lord Byron in 1812. In the non-fictional account of life at court she wrote in the years 1810-1815, she ascribed responsibility for Lamb's infidelity not to Lamb herself, but to Viscount Melbourne, the husband who neglected her. In Bury's opinion it was not Lady Caroline but her husband who precipitated the affair: *'*as he is careless of her, her disposition which is naturally *aimante*, leads her to attach herself to others'.[147] Leigh Wetherall-Dickson observes astutely that Lamb was forced by the social ostracism she had suffered to view her environment from the periphery; six years later, Bury supports her sister author by surveying women's lives from a similarly marginalised and non-judgmental perspective.[148]

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[144] Ibid.

[145] See: Leigh Wetherall-Dickson, 'Authority and Legitimacy: The Cultural Context of Lady Caroline Lamb's Novels', *Women's Writing*, 13.3 (Oct 2006), pp.369–391 (p.369).

[146] In his biography of Lord Melbourne, Mitchell substantiates the widely held understanding of Lamb as a follower of Mary Wollstonecraft: 'In 1809, she read Mary Wollstonecraft's Vindication of the Rights of Women (sic) and became a convert'. L.G. Mitchell, *Lord Melbourne* (Oxford; New York: OUP, 1997), p.85 and n.59 p.289 citing Chatsworth, MSS papers of the 6th Duke of Devonshire, folder, 966, Lady C. Lamb to Duke of Devonshire (19 May 1822).

[147] *Diary 1838,* iii p.394.

[148] See: Wetherall-Dickson, p.370.

Having experienced, or at least witnessed at close quarters, the dismantling of women's reputations, identities and well-being by the ferociously reactionary and retrogressive operations of a metropolitan elite, both Bury and Lamb endeavoured to challenge and enlarge conventional notions of propriety through fiction. When the heroine is betrayed early in Lamb's debut novel by misogynistic dandy, Lord Glenarvon (a plotline which reimagines the author's illicit relationship with Lord Byron in 1812), she is automatically ostracised by the *ton*:

> Those who act with rigid justice here below – those who take upon themselves to punish the sinner whom God for inscrutable purposes one moment spares, should sometimes consider that the object against whom their resentment excited is soon to be no more. Short-lived is the enjoyment even of successful guilt. An hour's triumph has perhaps been purchased by misery so keen, that were we to know all, we should only commiserate the wretch we now seek to subdue and punish.[149]

While Austen's conventionally judgmental narrator had been restrained on the subject of Maria Bertram's adultery, Lamb brooks no criticism of the fallen woman in *Glenarvon*, directing her indignation instead at the London fashionables who torment her. For Lamb, the heroine's infidelity is not caused by sexual incontinence but by the moral and legal institutions which imprison her. While the force of her polemic is perhaps diminished by sentimentality and self-pity, her critique of the systemic vilification of women by toxic London fashionables re-emerges intact within a decade in *Conduct is Fate*. Wetherall-Dickson, again, observes that Lamb's representation of the Whig elite concerns 'the moral and political bankruptcy of her sphere of existence'; I will go further by suggesting that the novelist's critique centres on gender issues, not 'the effectiveness of the Whigs as politicians'.[150] Gary Kelly observes that Lamb tried to give her novel of passion a 'public and political dimension', the characterisation of the heroine as a national [Irish] figure serving to emphasise the 'polarization of values between the individual, national , rural, and authentic, and the merely social, fashionable metropolitan (and cosmopolitan), and relative'.[151] While Lamb's extravagance of feeling proved too extreme for Bury, *Glenarvon*, as Kelly points out, transcended moral codes ; the novel also anticipated *Conduct is Fate*, I will demonstrate, by articulating a profound hostility to the operation of the sexual double standard and the moral prudishness of other women. Though Bertha seems, like Lamb's Calantha Delaval and Wollstonecraft's Maria before her, to have colluded in her seduction, Bury iterates

[149] Lady Caroline Lamb, *Glenarvon* (London: J.M. Dent [Everyman Edition], 1995), p.310.
[150] Wetherall-Dickson, ibid.
[151] Gary Kelly, *English Fiction of the Romantic Period,* p.186.

Wollstonecraft's protest that women often fall prey to men because they are under-educated and without familial support. Bertha also anticipates many of Bury's subsequent heroines in proving to be susceptible to temptation; the speech she addresses to her French mentor both subverts the apparent conservatism of the text and defines the author's creed:

> The fate of a human being is involved in her conduct; that conduct is often erroneous, frequently blameable, but not such as to make her wholly unworthy of your esteem. (*CF* i 123)

Bury here offers a bold validation of Lamb's stance by confronting the reader with the sexual double standard at work in a world still dominated by patriarchal values and political systems. What Bertha de Chanci implies in these words, despite her sententious tone, is that her efforts to maintain her moral and social standards have been rejected: like Burney's Juliet she has found, moreover, that the main agents of this sabotage are members of her own class. In this novel, and in society, the punishments meted out to women who resist bullying men are neither correct nor justifiable; this is a counter-cultural idea which Lamb's heroine enacts when she 'transcends fashion and the hypocritical moral values operated as a system of power by wealthy women in London and their emulators in the provinces'.[152] In *Glenarvon*, however, it is only in death that Calantha can finally escape from 'the merely social world dominated by the values of men'.[153]

Tacitly endorsing *Glenarvon*, Bury goes further than any of her contemporaries by proffering earlier revolutionary discourse, in a deliberately unfiltered form, to a morally conservative readership whose values she sought to rehabilitate. In the contemporary novel of education, according to McInnes, both Austen and Burney, 'struggle to…articulate the need for gradual reform because the post-revolutionary political environment remained highly suspicious of 'Jacobin' philosophical ideals'.[154] A strongly motivating force for these necessarily widely diverging narratives was the authors' wish to avoid accusations of Jacobin excess — an anxiety which, according to Flora Tristan, was still alive and well among 'so-called "progressive" women'.[155] As has been seen, *Glenarvon* disrupts this trend by consciously discrediting orthodox morality; in confronting the misogyny of the elite classes, however, Lamb had alienated instead of reforming the establishment at the centre of her critique. *Conduct is Fate* responds by compelling readers to

[152] Kelly, ibid.
[153] Kelly, p.187.
[154] McInnes, ibid., p.101.
[155] Flora Tristan (1803–44), French activist for women's rights. Barbara Hardy, 'Epilogue', in *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.248. See also: Goldsworthy and Mulvey-Roberts, p.67.

suspend judgement — immersing them in the experiences of the ostracised woman and eliciting their sympathy even as the heroine thinks about committing adultery with her mentor. Unlike Harleigh who accepts Juliet's existing marriage in *The Wanderer,* Bury's Remonville maintains his pursuit of the married heroine without forfeiting his status as hero. Closely resembling Smith's Lionel Desmond, Remonville is a man of feeling who, motivated by a disinterested generosity and altruism, prioritises the heroine's welfare over his own:

> he felt he would not exchange his situation for one of more personal convenience; while Bertha, in the protection of a person whom she knew, (for this knowledge is surely intuitive,) would have laid down life for her sake, enjoyed that soothing but dangerous state of confidence and calm which would only require permanency to make it perfect happiness. (*CF* i 78)

Unlike Lamb's polemical narration, Bury articulates the subjective experience of prohibited love in such a way as to sway the reader's view of Bertha and her visceral need for comfort and security. In the novel's final, Gothic section, Remonville haunts Bertha in the persona of a pilgrim at the Italian convent where she and Jane Oswald have taken refuge, a direct allusion to events in *Desmond* which involve the hero in a covert surveillance when the married heroine is exiled abroad by her hostile and abusive husband. Smith endorses Lionel Desmond's actions, entering energetically into the revolutionary discourse that recasts adultery as deliverance when he takes it upon himself to ease the pain of Geraldine Verney's bad marriage. Bury's narrator elicits an identical sympathy from the reader for Remonville, rhetorically casting his pursuit of the heroine as selfless altruism: 'To have saved Bertha the agonies it inflicted, what would he not have endured? What would he not have relinquished?' (*CF* iii p.253).

In creating a non-conformist hero and heroine, Bury surreptiously re-animates Smith's moral project under cover of the didactic and Gothic modes; she would thus have been highly gratified by the review which appeared in *The Edinburgh Magazine* recommending *Conduct is Fate* both for its moderation and its morality. In spite of the all-pervasive sneering, the reviewer staunchly refuses to take advantage of the opportunity offered by Bury's narrative to be offended, breezily viewing the heroine's thoughts of infidelity not as a moral enormity but as 'a little sprinkling of adultery.'[156] Whereas Lamb's anti-fashion novel had bludgeoned the readership — 'To love, in defiance of virtue is insanity, not guilt' — Bury wins sympathy for the disempowered and marginalised woman at the heart of *Conduct is Fate* by particularising the operations of a social

[156] *Edinburgh Magazine and Literary Miscellany* (Edinburgh, 10, April 1822), p.430.

system which stacks the odds of survival against her.[157] The novel's ultimate lesson is highly subversive: no matter how virtuous and deserving she is, Bertha will not be rewarded in the style of a courtship heroine. The novel here confirms the dynamic which underscores the narrative as a whole: for married women in contemporary society, conduct *isn't* fate.

2.7 'Mistress of her own little property'. Widowhood and humanist alternatives

While Bury's shape-shifting response to literary trends appears to have been approved of by critics and readers alike, her serious social and moral agenda almost sinks, at times, under the weight of event and complex inset narratives in the novel's final volume. Sodeman sees the similar generic diversity of Burney's novel as a strength: for her, *The Wanderer* is 'more outré and inchoate, more accommodating of female feeling and desire, and more ideologically conflicted than the fiction that succeeded it'.[158] Claudia L. Johnson, on the other hand, complains that Burney's 'critique gets strangled in the plethora of the novel's counterexamples, and the novel's very immensity impedes rather than extends insight' — a criticism, I contend, which can also be levelled at *Conduct is Fate*.[159] In one of several awkward transitions, for example, the Gothic mode intersects with the society novel at the beginning of volume three when Bury's heroine, finally enabled by Beaumont's legacy, returns to Paris and then experiences vilification because her husband has been indicted for the murder of her benefactor. When she flees to avoid social disgrace, the narrative exchanges social commentary for travelogue — a ploy which caused Susan Ferrier a certain degree of anxiety: 'Some of the descriptions are beautiful, but there is too much of them to please the generality of readers'.[160] Bertha is eventually reunited by pure coincidence with her husband, who is now dying melodramatically in a monastery in Italy — a conventionally Gothic backdrop for the grand finale. Bury's eclectic narrative navigates many thoroughfares before arriving at its destination: when the heroine is finally widowed (having rather too readily shriven her husband) she rejects Remonville, embarks upon the religious life then opts instead to return to Switzerland and live in social interdependence with her cousin, Esther Manvert. Volume three is additionally flawed because it is overburdened by explanation as the author fastidiously attempts to resolve the plot. What finally emerges successfully from this clash of modes, however, is a new, proto-feminist trope: the woman who survives marital abandonment, is

[157] Lady Caroline Lamb, *Glenarvon* [Everyman Edition], p.232.
[158] Sodeman, p.204.
[159] Johnson, *Equivocal Beings*, p.170.
[160] Ferrier, *Memoir and Correspondence of Susan Ferrie*r, p.157.

widowed then rejects her romantic lover in order to live in financial and emotional community with the support of other women.

In the plot's climactic event we see Bury's final — and not entirely satisfactory — attempt to affiliate the novel to more mainstream fiction. Here all passion is spent and D'Egmont's irreligious deathbed scene is made to serve a conventionally didactic purpose. Bertha righteously forgives the husband who married her for her money then abandoned her for his lover — at which point, the narrator insists persuasively, she is rewarded with serenity and security:

> Bertha knelt by the couch of her dying husband, and offered up the most fervent prayers in his behalf, nor rose till, calmed and strengthened by the sacred communion, she felt that she would be enabled to sustain whatever trials it was yet the will of Heaven to impose upon her. (*CF* iii 245)

Bertha's dutiful vigil at the bedside of the husband who harmed her so grievously assimilates the narrative within the conventions of mainstream educational fiction, her wifely devotion punctuated all the while by a combination of self-recrimination and Shakespearean hyperbole: '"behold in this illusion a frame worn out by mental suffering, a mind overthrown by self-indulgence and unchecked passions! In myself I view a victim of romantic phantasy, and obstinate self-will, alike betraying and betrayed"' (*CF* iii 337). At the same time, the final volume of *Conduct is Fate* intensifies the closing scenes of *Self-Indulgence* in which the heroine eventually catches up with her errant husband, confronts him with his crimes and demands restitution. Whereas Donneraile's attempt to make amends comes too late in the plot, Bury offers her earlier husband and wife the chance of reconciliation all the same. In *Conduct is Fate* the author advances then withdraws the possibility when D'Egmont, too deranged to accept Bertha's wifely overtures, dies unshriven and tormented by his abuses: 'I treated her cruelly. I murdered her peace' (*CF* iii 252). Bury continues to toy with the idea of a conventionally didactic ending, nevertheless, claiming that Bertha will now devote herself to religion: 'to that source whence only such natures can find relief or compensation for their blasted hopes, namely, under the influence of religion, and in the exercise of duty' (*CF* iii 351). The heroine's piety is but a device, however, which masks the novel's subversive proto-feminist ideology. As if ultimately responding to Wheeler's submission in *Appeal of One Half* that women should battle for their rights in society by founding a female co-operative, Bertha de Chanci progresses the destiny of Bury's earlier heroine not only by rejecting matrimony

and religion, but by establishing a feminist community which will offer social and political alternatives to the patriarchal systems which have worked so relentlessly against her.[161]

Bury summarily rejects the conventions of the courtship genre in the novel's closing scenes, thwarting expectations raised by the death of the heroine's husband that she will wed courtly lover, Remonville. By means of an elaborate backstory it is revealed that Remonville, in an audacious coincidence, is in fact D'Egmont's half-sibling (thus Bertha's brother-in-law). This frustrated love plot first subverts then endorses the novel's cursory didacticism, the narrator ultimately upbraiding the dejected Remonville for 'cherishing this fatal passion, in despite of every law, moral and divine' (*CF* iii 342). Burney, on the other hand, had permitted Juliet to wed the hero as soon as she is liberated from her husband – an event which frustrates Melissa Sodeman: 'Juliet's story, which retreats into romance as her identity is revealed to long-lost relations and her inheritance restored, plays out a desire for old forms to reassert themselves.'[162] Far more subversively, Bury rewards Bertha not with matrimony, but with a proto-feminist and humanist alternative to the relationships which have sustained her so ineffectively before, during and after marriage.

When Bury's heroine prevails, it is not for passing tests and growing morally in the manner of the heroine of a courtship novel or a bildungsroman but in the capacity of a Gothic heroine who, by means of tenacity and virtue, self-liberates and vanquishes her male oppressors. When the timely death of Manvert finally releases Bertha's property, she eschews the wealth she inherits upon her husband's death and elects instead to reunite with her cousin, Esther Manvert, in her Swiss homeland.[163] Just before Bertha's marriage, Esther's father had evicted the heroine from her home using his daughter as a proxy; '"I grieve that the unpleasant task of giving you this information should devolve on me […] and I trust that you will not hate me for being the unwilling means of giving you this sad detail"' (i 48). Hating her task but seizing the opportunity to soften Manvert's cruelty, Esther closely resembles Eleanor Tilney in Austen's posthumously published *Northanger Abbey* (1818). Both women adapt and elevate the female friendships of the sentimental mode, protecting each other compassionately while men self-sustain. Like her

[161] See: Ophélie Siméon 'Goddess of reason': Anna Doyle Wheeler, Owenism and the rights of women, History of European Ideas, 47.2 (2021), pp.285-298 (p.285) <https://doi.org/10.1080/01916599.2020.1798625>.
[162] Sodeman, p.200.
[163] As discussed above, when the legality of the Bertha's marriage to D'Egmont is earlier raised by Beaumont, Bury fails to clinch this plotline, and she inherits D'Egmont's wealth unchallenged after his death (see: 2.3 n.100).

revolutionary antecedents, Bury contends that the men who should safeguard women put their own interests first: that the responsibility for women's legal welfare has to be shouldered too often by women themselves. When Sophie Feronce makes an appropriately melodramatic re-entrance in the final volume it is thus in the role of vicarious protector who restores justice by dispatching Carlovitz with fire and bandits. Sophie here reincarnates Elinor St. Clare in Lamb's *Glenarvon* — another discarded mistress who arises, phoenix-like, from the ruins and fights for national freedom. When Sophie tracks down Carlovitz, she drags him to a fiery death, figuratively purging the novel on behalf of all women who have fallen victim to male oppression. As in *Glenarvon*, the vanquished becomes the vanquisher and women who resist the systems which oppress them are seen to prevail.

Bury ultimately resolves the plot in the tone of an omniscient, didactic novelist. While assuring us that the heroine has learned from her mistakes, however, there is no marriage or sudden restoration of fortune:

> By the death of the Banneret Manvert, she was now become mistress of her own little property, and thither she preferred returning, to availing herself of the more splendid establishment which, as the widow of Zarinski [another of D'Egmont's aliases], she might have laid claim to. Thither also Jane accompanied her; and the amiable Esther de Manvert was there to receive and welcome Bertha with tears of delight. (*CF* iii 349)

Conduct is Fate, like *Self-Indulgence* before it, subverts both the discourse of contemporary advice manuals and deflates the claim advanced by the moral-domestic and courtship novel that the only true aspiration for a woman is 'romance, marriage, and maternity'.[164] Instead of resolving the plot with reconciliation or the triumph of a frustrated romance, Bury permits Bertha to choose her own destiny. Neither Burney nor Owenson (in *Florence Macarthy*) had managed to find a solution to the heroine's predicament of genteel poverty other than (re)marriage or the recovery of a lost inheritance; Clery observes that even during the previous century, 'while Radcliffe was free to vindicate the feelings of her heroine in the providential happy ending, Wollstonecraft struggled to balance realism and hope and finally left the outcome of her narrative undecided.'[165] In *Conduct is Fate*, Bury resolves these dilemmas when the heroine finally repossesses what is already hers: 'she was now become mistress of her own little property, and thither she preferred returning' (*CF* iii 348). Sodeman's observation that *The Wanderer* succeeds as a novel of social protest because it

[164] Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader 1837–1914* (Oxford: OUP, 1995), p.43.
[165] Clery, *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction,* p.128.

'draws narratively on the explosive mixture of politics and sentimentality that had typified polemical fictions' perhaps applies with even more accuracy to *Conduct is Fate*.[166]

According to biographer Daisy Hay, Wollstonecraft had 'made clear her belief that society would only be reformed when all women had the opportunity to follow her example without incurring criticism'.[167] I contend that Bury took the baton out of Wollstonecraft's hand, and in *Self-Indulgence* and *Conduct is Fate* makes robust, if sometimes ungainly progress as she negotiates the arduous, hazard-strewn route towards emancipation. While Bury's literary peers attempted to solve the problem of broken marriage by finding another husband for the heroine, *Conduct is Fate* ultimately follows Wollstonecraft by permitting Bertha to secure her own future; the novel ends with Bertha's further empowerment as she figuratively and literally rejects the misogynistic societies which have oppressed her and returns instead to the continent and her native Switzerland — the birthplace and domicile of enlightenment thinking.

There is no doubt that it was, to a greater or lesser extent, Bury's anger about the political defeat and personal destruction of Princess Caroline at the end of the Regency that re-energised her reformist ardour and mobilised her second broken-marriage narrative in 1822. By the time the Regent ascended the throne in 1821, he was notorious for the mistreatment of his wife and, suffering from gout and obesity, parodied mercilessly as Nero, Henry VIII and 'Swellfoot the Tyrant'. Because she had refused the terms offered to her by her husband, the Princess was arraigned for adultery and her trial, which went ahead in August 1820, saw Lady Charlotte Bury called as a witness for the defence. Caroline was acquitted when Henry Brougham mounted a brilliant rebuttal;[168]she was nevertheless refused entry when the coronation of George IV took place a year later at Westminster Abbey. Popular support for Caroline appears to have dwindled thereafter, possibly because graphic details about her private life had emerged in witness testimonies at the trial; within a month of the coronation she was dead, but her political standing had already been greatly curtailed.[169] To George's great relief, the remains of the Princess-finally-

[166] Sodeman, p.199.
[167] Daisy Hay, *Dinner with Joseph Johnson: Books and Friendship in a Revolutionary Age* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2022), p.326.
[168] See: Culley, *Women's Court and Society Memoirs*, i, p.405 (note to p.49).
[169] See: <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/periods/hanoverians/queen-caroline-affair-1820> [accessed 18 October 2023].

Queen were taken back to Brunswick because she had, before her death, expressed a wish to be buried there.[170]

On the occasion of the first reading of the Bill of Pains and Penalties in the previous year, Bury received a letter which protested that, compared with Caroline, Anne Boleyn had received justice at the hands of her husband.[171] The inscription placed on Caroline's coffin, at her own behest, read, 'Caroline of Brunswick, the injured Queen of England!' The implication was that not only had she been dispossessed of her rightful status as consort but, locked into marriage, she had been rejected then tormented to death by her self-serving husband.[172] In placing the highest- profile wronged wife in the nation at the heart of her second novel, Bury harnesses contemporary political events to caution her mainly female readership about the legal privileging of men at the expense of the women they married. In 1812, she had focused on the widespread practice of bigamy with associated problems such as desertion and the abuse of women's property rights. Ten years later, *Conduct is Fate* intensifies her critique of a culture which not only discriminated against married women in favour of their unmarried counterparts, but consistently punished them for transgressing moral codes while excusing the sexual crimes of the men to whom they were tethered. Most significantly of all, Bury advances the political agenda of Mary Wollstonecraft and Charlotte Smith in *Conduct is Fate* by particularising the chicanery of the statutes governing matrimonial law and the social and economic consequences encountered by the victims of marital breakdown. Bury may well have harnessed the vogue for Gothic and sentimental fiction in her second publication to appeal to a mainstream audience; what is less debatable is the fact that *Conduct is Fate* launched her on a political trajectory which would increase in momentum during the 1830s and culminate, fifteen years later, with the earliest literary representation of a woman's subjective experience of marital dissolution: her landmark novel, *The Divorced*.

[170] Christopher Hibbert, *George IV: Regent and King* (Reader's Union Group of Book Clubs: Newton Abbot, 1975), p.205.
[171] *Diary 1838*, ii p.319.
[172] See: Davidoff and Hall, p.154.

Chapter 3 *The Divorced* (1837)

3.1 The historical, political and literary context

In her chapter 'Breaking Apart: the early Victorian divorce novel', revisionist critic Anne Humpherys defines the early divorce narrative as a genre which is contextualised by the debates leading up to the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857. Humpherys remarks that while divorce became a significant issue in novels during and after the 1880s, 'many of the themes and narrative methods of these later divorce novels are adumbrated in the early fictional attempts to examine — through the lens of divorce — issues raised by unhappy marriages and the inequality of women under the law.'[1] She goes on to discuss fifteen novels published between 1837 and 1869, including works by Anne and Charlotte Brontë, Charles Dickens, George Eliot and Ellen Wood, and singles out Lady Charlotte Bury's text, *The Divorced* — not only because it is the earliest fiction to focus on the issue but also because it is 'the only nineteenth-century divorce novel […] which is solely concerned with the second marriage'.[2] The third and final chapter in this thesis affirms and goes beyond Humpherys's proposition by contending that Lady Charlotte not only discredits the values of a society which sees divorcees stripped of their economic security and social standing, but that she inaugurates a literary genre by upholding a woman who leaves a worthy husband to remarry for love. In aggregating the author's antecedent concerns about women's welfare, *The Divorced* marks Lady Charlotte Bury both as an early nineteenth-century advocate for the reform of the statutes governing married women's legal rights and a cultural pioneer whose achievements have yet to be widely acknowledged and evaluated.

Despite a resurgence of literary critical interest in the popular fiction of the early nineteenth-century, Humpherys's study stands alone in recognising the cultural and literary importance of *The Divorced;* additionally, the position Lady Charlotte's novel occupies in relation to contemporary political campaigns in the 1830s has still to be assessed. In 1995, Elaine Chalus commented in her review of E.A. Smith's *A Queen on Trial* that 'women's involvement in the Queen Caroline Affair was not fruitless, even though it did not result in changes to the status of

[1] Lady C.S.M. Bury, *The Divorced* (1837) — see Introduction, n.5 for full citation. Referred to hereafter as 'The Divorced' or 'TD'. Subsequent references in-text. Anne Humpherys, 'Breaking Apart: the early Victorian divorce novel', in *Victorian Women Writers and the Woman Question*, ed. Nicola Diane Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.42. Referred to hereafter as 'Breaking Apart'.
[2] Ibid., p.48.

women or in the development of an early-feminist movement'.[3] While Chalus goes so far as to acknowledge that for women, 'the vindication of the Queen emphasized the justness of their actions', historian Kathryn Gleadle's research into the early women's movement has uncovered a far more significant egress in the shape of the campaigns which followed.[4] Gleadle has established that formal efforts to address and rehabilitate a system of matrimonial law which oppressed and discriminated against married women began not — as is commonly thought — in the 1840s and 50s with Barbara Leigh Smith (1827–1891) and the early suffragists, but in the 1830s with the generation which preceded them.[5] These initial debates, which spanned the decade in which Bury's capstone novel was published, disputed the purpose of matrimony and generated the formation of the early marriage reform movement at South Place Unitarian chapel in Finsbury. This group evolved under the ministry of William Johnson Fox into a progressively liberal political institution and, by the early 1840s, was attracting 'both young intellectuals and an older generation of 'literati''.[6] According to Gleadle, they numbered among their apologists such figures as William Godwin and James Henry Leigh Hunt (1784–1859) who, 'on account of their social and political connections, provided a direct line to the radicalism of the Mary Wollstonecraft set'.[7]

The fiction Bury published at this time appears to have engaged consciously with this emerging political dialogue, 'much of which discourse found its way into contemporary fiction'.[8] This may be accounted for, in part, by her friendship with Lady Lytton, daughter of early-feminist and regular South Place Chapel orator, Anna Doyle Wheeler.[9] Of particular relevance to provenance of *The*

[3] *E. A. SMITH, 'A Queen on Trial. The Affair of Queen Caroline',* Book Review by Elaine Chalus, *Parliamentary History*, 14.2 (Jan 1, 1995), p.234.
[4] Ibid., p.236.
[5] Kathryn Gleadle, *The Early Feminists. Radical Unitarians and the Emergence of the Women's Rights Movement,* 1831-51(London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995), p.44. Referred to hereafter as 'The Early Feminists'.
[6] Ibid., p.38. William Johnson Fox (1786–1864) became an advocate of freer divorce on the grounds of incompatibility and had circulated his views in an article published in *The Monthly Repository* in 1833. His motives were not entirely non-partisan, however, as he left his wife in 1834 for Eliza Flower (1803–1846). See: R. K. Webb, "William Johnson Fox (1786-1864), preacher and politician. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 23 Sep. 2004 <https://doi-org.soton.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/10047>.
[7] Gleadle, *The Early Feminists*, p.38.
[8] Carolyn Lambert, *For Better, For Worse* (London: Routledge, 2018), p.2.
[9] As discussed in my introduction and previous chapter, Lady Lytton moved in the Holland House circles frequented by Lady Caroline Lamb, where she associated also with Lady Charlotte Bury. Their continuing familiarity is evidenced in a letter written to Sarah Disraeli (1802-1859) by Benjamin Disraeli on Thursday, 31 January 1833 (see 2.2 n.50), which, as pointed out above, describes Bury's presence at one of the Bulwers' dinner parties in London: 'Last night a small and agreeable soiree in the Library at Bulwers after a dinner party. Lady Charlotte Bury, Gally Knight,

Divorced was the formation of a committee at the Chapel in 1833 for the establishment of a 'Practical Moral Union of the Women of Great Britain and Ireland, for the purpose of enabling them to attain a superior physical, moral and intellectual character'.[10] Gleadle explains that the object of this group was to 'highlight the present inequalities facing women in jurisprudence by raising their awareness of the laws which concerned them'.[11] Moral Union writers such as 'Vlasta' (the pen-name of Anna Wheeler) were persuaded of the fact that 'if women were aware of their insignificance in the eye of the law, some of the decrees which disgrace our statute book would not only be dead letters, but absolutely repealed'.[12] As discussed in my introduction and the previous chapter, collaborative work between Wheeler and William Thompson in 1825 resulted in the *Appeal of One Half* — a challenge to utilitarians who looked for universal happiness but excluded women, half the human race.[13] In this chapter I will make the case that, motivated in particular by the problems faced by divorced and twice-married women in contemporary society, Bury joins the political drive to redress legal injustice; energised also, no doubt, by the spirited public lectures Wheeler delivered at the Unitarian chapel in Finsbury in 1829, she formulated fictional narratives which both widened the spread, and enhanced the appeal of the emancipatory arguments originated by women activists just before and after the First Reform Act of 1832.

As part of the argument I am making for the topicality and radicalism of *The Divorced*, this chapter considers the significant new opportunities for re-assessing Bury's political development during

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Mrs Leigh, my friend Lady Stepney, who turns out to be a very young old woman indeed, and appeared in the longest ringlets, the Fitzgeralds, Webster etc., etc. Miss Bury, by name Blanche, was also there. Very young, but a model for a sculptor and cold as marble'. Letter to Sarah Disraeli from Benjamin Disraeli, 31st January 1833, London. Disraeli, B 1982, Benjamin Disraeli Letters: 1815-1834, Volume I, University of Toronto Press. [accessed 20 September 2023]. Bury's ongoing friendship with Rosina Bulwer Lytton is also documented in a letter written in Gloucester on 22 January 1835, in which Lady Lytton refers to exchanges with 'Lady Charlotte' about the impending marriage of Lord Arthur Lennox (1806–1864): 'Lady Charlotte told me some time ago that Ld. Arthur had only £400 a year – but I had a note from her this morning – in which she say's [sic] – they have Love enough to make up the deficiency – Ah! How often this is the case before hand'. Mulvey-Roberts attributes the reference 'probably' to 'Lady Charlotte Butler (1809–46)'. The fact that Lennox was about to wed Adelaide Constance Campbell (1804–88) on 1 July 1835, makes the identity of Lady Lytton's confidante much more likely to have been Lady Charlotte Bury — Adelaide's mother. See: Marie Mulvey-Roberts, *Letters of Rosina Bulwer Lytton,* p.117 n.1. See also: thesis introduction, n.12.

[10] Gleadle, *The Early Feminists,* p.117.

[11] Ibid., pp.117-118.

[12] See: Dolores Dooley, *Equality in Community*, p.83. See also: Siméon, p.294.

[13] See: D. Dooley, 'Wheeler [née Doyle], Anna (1785?–1848), philosopher', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2009) [retrieved 20 August 2023].

the 1830s offered by two critical works which have appeared subsequent to the publication of Anne Humpherys's study of 1999. The first, Kelly Hager's acclaimed discussion of divorce in the period 1837–54, *Dickens and the Rise of Divorce: The Failed-Marriage Plot and the Novel Tradition* (2010) traces the progress of bad-marriage narration specifically in Dickens's early novels and has the potential to validate the new readings offered by this chapter of Bury's concurrent publications. Hager sees as problematic the tendency of scholars to overstep the bad-marriage narrative in favour of the courtship genre: a practice, she proposes, that originates in *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1857) — Ian Watt's seminal early twentieth-century critique of fiction which, since the middle of the last century, has specified the courtship plot as the defining model for studies of eighteenth and nineteenth-century literature.[14] By pointing out that the courtship plot has driven other narratives to the outer edges of the literary conversation, Hager has correctly diagnosed a problem with conventional critical approaches; in her view, 'our adherence to the traditional understanding of the courtship plot' means we have 'overlooked the crisis of marriage' in the genre.[15] Hager proposes slightly more problematically, according to Vranjes, that the 'bad-marriage' novel is a genre which can only be defined in terms of 'narratives which are tucked into the plots as shameful secrets or warnings, thus leaving the reader oblivious to the fact that those marriages are actually driving the plots'.[16] While Hager's critique pays long overdue attention to a marginalised genre, the focus placed upon Dickens's elusive narrative strategies sidelines polemical Bury once again: as Vranjes observes: 'It is difficult to demonstrate the existence of a tradition as prevalent and long as the one for which Hager makes a case by offering, as proof, a part of one author's oeuvre, even if that author is of Dickens's caliber'.[17] I will contend that in *The Divorced*, Bury not only foregrounds failed marriage, but challenges the institution of matrimony in its entirety; as a contrast to Dickens who, out of a fear of offending, masks his desire for legal reform by mispresenting the hero's marital discontent as thwarted self-fulfilment, Bury is determined that her landmark novel will openly contentious issues at a judicial level. Far from obscuring her concerns, *The Divorced* is defined by the heroine's destruction by legal and social injustice and as such, both anticipates and outpaces Dickens's more conciliatory moral project.

[14] See: Hager, *Dickens and the Rise of Divorce*, pp.4-5.
[15] Ibid., p.10.
[16] Vlasta Vranjes, "*Dickens and the Rise of Divorce: The Failed-Marriage Plot and the Novel Tradition*, by Kelly Hager/*The End of Domesticity: Alienation from the Family in Dickens, Eliot, and James*, by Charles Hatten", *Victorian Studies* 53.4 (2011), pp.763–66 (p.764) <https://doi.org/10.2979/victorianstudies.53.4.763>.
[17] Ibid., p.765

By similarly diverting our gaze away from the courtship plot, Carolyn Lambert's collection of essays, *For Better, For Worse* (2018) provides further useful context as well as advancing our understanding of the marriage-centred narratives which postdate *The Divorced*. Lambert proposes that, instead of focusing exclusively on the rituals of courtship, fiction published by women across the Victorian period frequently navigated 'the gap between the ideal of life in the domestic citadel and the reality of the economic struggle for survival'.[18] In her introduction, she usefully considers the historical and political context and the attempts made by women writers during the period to subvert and challenge the patriarchal marriage laws; of particular relevance to this chapter is the recognition she accords to the petitioner Caroline Norton (1808–77) and her role in the campaign for legal reform.[19] Lambert's collection is not without problems, however. Like Hager, her interest lies not in recovering the bad-marriage fiction of explicitly polemical writers, but that of novelists who explore 'the deep structure of the institution of marriage in a nuanced way'; that is to say, of writers who 'subvert the cultural hegemony and indirectly attack the injustices they faced within marriage.'[20] While Lambert readily acknowledges the importance of such texts in helping 'to shape thought, to pose questions and to proffer answers', she, like Hager, overlooks Bury's use of narrative in provoking indignation and generating reform.[21] This is especially perplexing because both critiques readily acknowledge problematic marriage as the driving force in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) and the role played by Anne Brontë's novel in anticipating several reforms of the marriage law. While Lambert admits that in the period under discussion, her collection only 'represents a tiny sample',[22] it is nevertheless disappointing that, in attempting to raise the profile of alternative fictional modes, she includes conventionally didactic

[18] Lambert, *For Better,* p.2.
[19] Caroline Elizabeth Sarah Norton (née Sheridan), later Lady Stirling-Maxwell (1808–77), writer and political petitioner, was the granddaughter of the playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751-1816). See: Fraser (Antonia), *Caroline Norton*, p.4. The association between the Sheridans and Campbells spanned several generations with Caroline's father, Tom Sheridan (1775-1817), visiting Inveraray Castle throughout Lady Charlotte's youth at the invitation of the fifth Duke (see: Lindsay and Cosh, pp.295, 298 and 308). An entry in Lady Sydney Morgan's journal dated 3rd April 1835, also places Lady Charlotte alongside Caroline at a dinner in Cheltenham just before the break-up of the Norton marriage: 'Last night at Lady Stepney's—met the Milmans, Lady Charlotte Bury, Mrs Norton, Rogers, Sidney Smith and other wits and authors'. Lady Sydney Morgan, *Lady Morgan's Memoirs: Autobiography, Diaries and Correspondence*, 2nd edn revised, 2 vols (London: Wm. H. Allen & Co., 1863) p.396 <https://lordbyron.org/monograph.php?doc=LyMorga.1863&select=II.chap24> [accessed 23 December 2023]. See also: thesis introduction, n.12.
[20] Lambert, *For Better,* p.15.
[21] Ibid., p.11.
[22] Ibid., p.15.

writers such as Frances Trollope (1779–1863) and overlooks the more directly polemical, pioneering Lady Charlotte Bury.

This chapter argues for the acknowledgement of Bury's political significance because the novels she wrote in the 1830s enter publicly into contemporary debates by attempting to raise women's awareness of their legal subjection to coverture. In positing this claim, I also demonstrate how the substantive legal challenge to male authority which characterised both *Love* and *The Divorced* in 1837 corresponds closely to the complaints of activist Harriet Hardy Taylor (1807–58) — referred to hereafter as 'Harriet Taylor-Mill' — in the eleven political pieces she published between 1831 and 1834.[23] In the 1830s, Taylor-Mill joined the general early-feminist protest that 'historical relationships which allowed men to tyrannise over women (and, often, other men) are still prevalent today, and persist in marriages; in women's education; in the lack of opportunities afforded women outside of marriage; their lack of legal, political, social and economic rights; and in fathers' control over their daughters.'[24] In late February 1832 Taylor confessed, 'I have tried to write something for the *Monthly Repository* about the education of women that focuses on a girl's education'.[25] She goes on to iterate the Wollstonecraftian complaint that married women

[23] See: Ann P. Robson, Mill [*née* Hardy; *other married name* Taylor], Harriet, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <https://doi org.soton.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/38051>. While history traditionally credits the philosopher and politician John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) with articulating the first formal demand for gender equality, debates for marriage reform started much earlier. In the mid-Victorian era, Mill's treatise, *The Subjection of Women* (1869), attacked the principles of coverture and advocated women's rights. What has recently emerged (through the efforts of biographers) is that the roots of his views can be traced back to the 1830s and his first encounters with the writer and women's rights advocate Harriet Hardy Taylor. Although she had been married to the dissident John Taylor at the time of their first meeting in 1831, the political and philosophical rapport generated by the meeting was such that she professionalised as a journalist in the same year, and in so doing, formalised her commitment to liberal thought (ibid.). According to Helen McCabe, ' 'Harriet Taylor-Mill' was, of course, never known as that: she was Harriet Hardy, then Harriet Taylor, then Harriet Mill. I use 'Taylor-Mill' here to save confusion with the Wollstonecraft (and feminist) scholar Barbara Taylor.' Helen McCabe, 'Harriet Taylor', in *The Wollstonecraftian Mind*, eds. Sandrine Berges, Eileen Hunt Botting, Alan Coffee (London: Routledge, 2019), p.257, n.1. This thesis will follow McCabe by using 'Taylor-Mill'. Another of Taylor-Mill's biographers, Jo Ellen Jacobs, observes, 'She wrote eleven pieces for the Monthly Repository (one in 1831 and ten in 1832)'. See: Jo Ellen Jacobs, *The Voice of Harriet Taylor Mill* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).
<https://doi-org.soton.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/38051>. William Johnson Fox biographer, R. K. Webb, usefully makes a direct link between Taylor-Mill and Fox's congregation at South Place. See n.6 above.

[24] McCabe, 'Harriet Taylor-Mill and Anna Doyle Wheeler on marriage', p.234.

[25] In 1827, Fox became sole editor at the *Monthly Repository* and in 1831, he cut the magazine's explicit ties with Unitarianism by buying the paper, which had been making a loss. According to Jacobs, Harriet approved in her letters of the journal's movement away from its traditional

cannot achieve autonomy without the necessary economic resources: 'It is clear marriage cannot be abandoned without women having first financial independence and that financial independence requires equality in education'.[26] In a letter dated April 1833 Harriet notes of William Bridges Adams's 'On the Condition of Women in England' in the *Monthly Repository*[27] that the piece 'abounds in parallels with my own thoughts'.[28] In 'The Dissenting Marriage Question,' Taylor-Mill also formally challenges the practice of coverture within marriage and writes about the problem of domestic abuse as well as women's sexuality.[29] In 1851 she married activist and politician John Stuart Mill (1806–73), and he later published the view that systems which supported matrimonial law were corrupt because coverture 'conferred domination, not on a single ruler or ruling class but on the whole male sex'. This, according to biographers, was an iteration of beliefs expressed by Harriet during their early encounters.[30] In the *Oxford Dictionary*

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religious content and when Fox pressed her for contributions, she complied readily. Jacobs, *The Voice of Harriet Taylor Mill*, p.56. For Kathryn Gleadle, the changes Fox implemented had lasting significance for the women's movement: 'Fox began to develop an influential coterie of writers, intellectual and artists. He took over the *Monthly Repository* in 1831, and under his proprietorship it became a leading organ for feminist ideas'. Kathryn Gleadle, *Radical Writing on Women*, 1800–1850 (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p.199. Referred to hereafter as *Radical Writing*. Fox continued as editor-proprietor until 1836, when the magazine was briefly owned and edited first by Richard Henry Horne (1836–7) and then James Henry Leigh Hunt (1837–8). *Monthly Repository* in *Wikipedia* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ > [accessed 24 October 2022].

[26] Jacobs, *The Voice of Harriet Taylor*, ibid.

[27] Adams, William Bridges [Junius Redivivus], 'On the Condition of Women in England', *Monthly Repository* Vol 7 (73) (1833), pp.217–231.

[28] Jacobs, p.78. According to Jacobs, Taylor-Mill's views on women's education, marriage and divorce were used in the journal by both William Fox and William Bridges Adams for anonymous articles — items which they also self-attributed. See: Taylor-Mill, Harriet, 'The Dissenting Marriage Question', The Monthly *Repository*, Vol 7 (73) <https://archive.org/details/sim_monthly-repository_183301_7_73/page/228/mode/2up>. It is likely that Taylor-Mill's controversial views on marriage, which appeared here in 1833, revitalised Bury's denunciation of the double standard: 'Whatever it may be in effect, marriage is in legal form a bargain, a covenant, in which one of the principal stipulations is the observance of personal fidelity on both sides. No one will deny that chastity is a good thing, and in the case of the female, the penalty of transgression is rigidly exacted. But is it so with the male? Does he not stray about the world and sin with impunity, and is not the honour of the female impugned if she does but step across the threshold of her lord? Is it not the essence of a bargain, that there be two parties to it, and if one transgress, is not the other absolved? Legally, it is so. But what is the morality of the matter? That in the male the breach of this covenant is scarcely considered an offence, and in the female, it is visited with remorseless and unsparing severity. Is not this a most base and unmanly act of oppression? All the answer which will be given by the males is, 'We, having the power, have thus decreed it.' Ibid.

[29] Ibid., p.141.

[30] According to Harris, John Stuart Mill tells us in his autobiography that though his conviction regarding the equality of the sexes was a product of his earliest engagements with political subjects, it remained an abstract idea before his relationship with Harriet Taylor[-Mill] began. See:

of National Biography Anne P. Robson is duly confident in attributing the shaping of John's Stuart Mill's polemic to his wife: 'There can be little reason to doubt that it was she who convinced Mill that the complete equality of the sexes before the law — the argument later developed in *The Subjection of Women* — was the next immediate and essential rung on the ladder to the hoped-for heaven that was their shared vision.'[31]

This chapter will suggest that the detailed and innovative critique of women's rights sustained in *The Divorced* confirms Bury's ongoing engagement with — and increasingly energetic response to — the proto-feminist discourse appearing in the *Monthly Repository* and other publications in the early to mid-1830s. In *The Exclusives* (1830), for example, her narrator — far from commending the woman who submits to male authority — dismisses her with intense irony: 'Who but a woman can glory in being a slave?'[32] Later that year, she goes even further in *The Separation* (1830):

> Men do not wish their victims to die-no, nor live in agonies either, perhaps; but they would rather they were not quite happy; that testifies an emancipation from subjection — an independence, in short, which is the last thing any man is inclined to concede to any woman.[33]

By immersing her readership emotionally in the plight of the victimised society wife, Bury not only made Taylor-Mill's radical views more accessible to the popular and conservative book-buying public: she shaped a new literary genre. As Robson explains, '…periodicals such as *The Monthly Repository*, with its limited audience, adopted a polemical, rather than a didactic approach which is likely to have alienated the classes whose morals the campaign was attempting to reform.'[34] I propose that when, in 1837, Bury revealed her identity formally for the first time with the publication of *The Divorced*, it was with the intention of exploiting the reputation she had built up as a member of Henry Colburn's silver-fork stable earlier in the decade. Moreover, by humanising and subjectivising the problems experienced by a woman who is outlawed then destroyed because she has married for a second time, Bury responds robustly to Harriet Taylor-Mill's

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Jose Harris, "Mill, John Stuart (1806–1873), philosopher, economist, and advocate of women's rights". *Oxford National Dictionary of Biography.* 23 Sep. 2004 <https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-18711> [accessed 18 December 2020].

[31] Robson, 'Taylor-Mill', ibid.

[32] *The Exclusives*, (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1830), iii, p.209.

[33] *The Separation*, (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1830), iii, p.116.

[34] Robson, ibid.

invocations about the sexual double standard. According to Helen McCabe, Taylor-Mill denounced the hypocrisies and tyrannies of a culture which upheld 'the domestic subjection of women' and voiced her commitment to the idea that the injustice 'will be acknowledged to be as monstrous an infraction of the rights and dignity of humanity, as slavery is at last'.[35]

3.2 The role of high-profile criminal conversation cases in the 1820s and 30s

The Queen Caroline Affair of 1820, which saw George IV thwarted in his attempt to obtain a divorce, has been identified as an event which ignited widespread fury on women's behalf and generated calls during the post Regency for the fundamental reform of social and political institutions. During the fifteen years which elapsed since the publication of *Conduct is Fate*, the problems caused to married women by the constraints of coverture remained entrenched; during the same period, controversy concerning the injustices of married women's legal standing received an opportune and thorough stoking through the publicity surrounding several new high-profile court cases. At the centre of the turmoil were three women connected to Bury in the 1820s and 30s through their elite social network: Emily Nugent, Marchioness of Westmeath (14 July 1789–21 January 1858), Caroline Norton and Lady Rosina Bulwer Lytton. Lady Emily Anne Bennet Elizabeth Cecil, the second daughter of the 1st Marquess of Salisbury, was, according to historian Diane Urquhart, another of the nineteenth century's most prominent but now-forgotten divorce law reformers.[36] Emily had married George Nugent, Lord Delvin in 1812; the union had foundered at the outset, however, because George already had an Irish mistress and an illegitimate child, both of whom he refused to relinquish. When Emily sought a separation in 1821 based upon her husband's adultery aggravated by cruelty, she failed to gain either custody of — or even access to — her daughter.[37] The shock of subsequently reading in a newspaper in 1823 that George had threatened vexatiously to counter-sue on the grounds of infidelity drove her into a state of collapse.[38] With remarkable tenacity, Emily nevertheless refused to accept the terms of coverture which awarded automatic custody of her children to her husband: despite her

[35] See: McCabe, 'Harriet Taylor-Mill and Anna Doyle Wheeler on marriage', p.233.
[36] Urquhart, D. (2020) "The Failings of the Law: The Cases of Talbot and Westmeath", in *Irish Divorce: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp.44–62 (p.62) <doi:10.1017/9781108675536>.
[37] See Janette Rutterford, 'A pauper every wife is, Lady Westmeath, Money, Marriage, and Divorce in early nineteenth-century England', in *Women and Economics in Victorian Britain,* ed. by L. Dalley and J. Rappoport (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2013), p.42.
[38] Stone, 'Westmeath *v.* Westmeath. The wars between the Westmeaths, 1812–1857', in *Broken Lives,* p.311.

resistance, which involved entering into a clandestine correspondence with her daughter, it was impossible for her to arrange more than one isolated meeting with her in the ensuing years, and she achieved that only 'by stealth in 1825.'[39] According to Stone, Emily's experience caused her to 'feel passionately about the need to reform the current laws concerning divorce, married women's property, the protection of an innocent mother's right to the custody of her younger children and the abolition of the criminal conversation action'.[40] She would go on to crusade for women's rights, authoring '*A Narrative of the Case of the Marchioness of Westmeath'*[41] in the year of the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 – a tract which protested against the hypocrisies of the sexual double standard, called for the improvement of married women's entitlements and demanded 'justice for a suffering class'.[42]

According to Urquhart, the legal challenges that followed the Westmeath matrimonial split indicate that Emily was inspired by the 'recipe' of English reformer Caroline Norton whom she supported with her efforts to get the Infant Custody Bill passed in 1837 and 1839.[43] Caroline, the granddaughter of celebrated playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751–1816), had entered into wedlock with the Honourable George Chapple Norton (1800–1875) in 1827. They were mis-matched, however, and after enduring nearly a decade of domestic abuse, Caroline was forced out of the marital home in 1835. In 1836, after George Norton had attempted and failed to have William Lamb, Prime Minister Lord Melbourne, convicted of having sexual relations with his wife, Caroline found, as had the Marchioness of Westmeath, that she had lost all legal entitlement to

[39] Urquhart, p.53.
[40] Stone, ibid., p.338. Shanley explains the operation of the crim. con. action as follows: 'In a case of criminal conversation, a husband charged another man with adultery with his wife, and, if the defendant was found guilty, the husband recovered "damages." The action for criminal conversation could only be initiated by men, not women. It reflected the notion that a husband in some manner owned his wife's affection and sexual services, that she was his property, but a wife did not have a similar legal claim on her husband.' Mary Lyndon Shanley, 'What Kind of a Contract is Marriage?: Married Women's Property, The Sexual Double Standard and The Divorce Act of 1857', in *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law in Victorian England, 1850–1895* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989), p.24. Referred to hereafter as 'Feminism, Marriage and the Law'.
[41] Emily Anne Bennett Elizabeth Nugent (Marchioness of Westmeath), *A Narrative of the Case of the Marchioness of Westmeath*, (London: James Ridgway,1857).
[42] Stone, *Broken Lives*, p.341.
[43] Urquhart, pp.56-7. The marchioness of Westmeath may have been known to Bury through her court connections as she was 'Lady of the Bedchamber' from 1818 to the new Duchess of Clarence (later Queen Adelaide); Emily's close association with Caroline Norton as she campaigned for changes in the statutes governing child custody law provides an even more likely connection. See: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/irish-divorce/failings-of-the-law-the-cases-of-talbot-and-westmeath/D6400B15D242BDA8C1D836BD69669463 - FN-fn-240>.

her children. One of the most pernicious implications of coverture which persisted into the 1830s and beyond was the removal of a woman's maternal rights: Norton biographer, Diane Atkinson, observes that all through the pre-Victorian era, 'people assumed that on the breakdown of a marriage a mother had the custody of her children until they were seven years old, but this was not the case'.[44] Like Nugent before him, Norton availed himself of his custodial rights with malice and alacrity in equal parts; Caroline refused meekly to accept things as they stood, however, and embarked immediately upon a campaign to get the law changed.[45]

According to Mary Shanley, newspaper reports on the Nortons' trial, as well as pamphlets authored and issued by Caroline Norton herself, offered shocking insights to the English reading public into the laws regulating marriage.[46] They also, she continues, 'gave impetus to the first organized feminist effort to challenge the laws governing marriage'.[47] The enormity of the problem was enhanced, Atkinson explains, 'by a curious anomaly in the law' which meant that a woman who bore children outside wedlock had full custodial rights, 'but from the moment of their birth children born in marriage were the father's'.[48] Caroline Norton found out in 1836 that even if a woman was driven out of her home by violence, her husband could keep their children; she would not even have the power to withhold full rights to supervise their subsequent upbringing from 'a woman with whom her estranged husband had committed adultery'(ibid.). In Heilmann's view, the resistance mounted by women such as Norton and Nugent was instrumental in advancing the process of legal reform: 'The stark nature of differences around marriage law began to undergo changes during the latter half of the century, influenced by prominent cases

[44] Diane Atkinson, *The Criminal Conversation of Mrs Norton* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2013), p.251. As observed by Amanda Vickery, a married woman's 'legal personality was annihilated at the altar'. Amanda Vickery, 'No Happy Ending? At Home with Miss Bates in Georgian England', *Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal,* 37 (2015), pp.134–151 (p.136).
[45] December 1836 duly found Caroline Norton at her brother's estate at Frampton Park, Dorchester, at work on her pamphlet *Observations on the Natural Claim of a Mother to the Custody of her Children as affected by the Common Law Right of the Father* (1837). Wasting no time, she writes first to the Countess of Kirkby on the subject of her separation from her children: 'I am very anxious to support by as many, and as strong cases as possible I intend — to publish immediately, (of course not in my own name), it is high time women at least knew that the law allows the Father to take children of any age — even at the breast — and gave [sic] them over to strangers'. C. S. Norton, *The Selected Letters of Caroline Norton*, ed. by R. Nelson and M. Mulvey Roberts, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2020) <https://doi-org.soton.idm.oclc.org/10.4324/9780367814731>. Referred to hereafter as 'Letters of Caroline Norton'.
[46] Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage and the Law,* p.23.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Atkinson, ibid.

such as that of Caroline Norton'.[49] With this claim in view, I will go beyond Humpherys's definition of the early Victorian divorce novel by contending that Bury not only used fiction to reform moral attitudes towards women's adultery: she also confronted the legal double standard as it applied to the problems of marital violence and child custody. My third chapter will thus argue that she published *The Divorced* as part of a collaborative attempt to advance women's burgeoning political cause— that, in breaking moral and narrative taboos, she consciously supported the efforts of contemporary activists to reform the statutes governing mothers' rights over their children.

Under the terms of coverture, both wife and children 'belonged' to the husband to do with as he pleased: George Norton had thus acted well within his remit in 1836 when he maliciously denied Caroline access to their three young sons. At the time of the Nortons' separation, the youngest of their children was only two years old, and Caroline would not be permitted to see them again until Christmas 1841.The children were not the only motivating factor, however, when her husband decided to sue Lord Melbourne for committing adultery with his wife: as has already been seen in the abuses inflicted by the Regent upon Princess Caroline, the usual route taken by a married man who wished to unshackle himself legally was to have his wife convicted of adultery. While George Norton, like Princess Caroline's husband, failed in his attempt to obtain a divorce, the criminal conversation action severely impacted both women because the scandal generated in court was disseminated far and wide by the British press. Caroline Norton made her misery clear in a letter she wrote to Melbourne on Friday, 8th July 1836, in which she describes the anguish of 'public ribaldry and exposure' that has made her 'appear a painted prostitute in a Public Court before a jury of Englishmen'.[50] Caroline was ostracised by society despite having been exonerated in court and this left her with a severely diminished sense of self. As in the Marchioness of Westmeath's case, the social cost was high for a woman implicated in separation and divorce proceedings and for Caroline Norton had egress in 'nervous feelings of social exclusion, [and] spotting slights in tiny social incidents' — problems which were, according to

[49] Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn, 'The Victorians, Sex, and Gender', in Juliet John, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Literary Culture*, Oxford Handbooks (2016; online edn, Oxford Academic, 2 June 2014), pp.161–177 (p.167) <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199593736.013.002>. Referred to hereafter as 'The Victorians, Sex, and Gender'.

[50] Norton, *Letters of Caroline Norton*, pp.215-16. See also: Karen Chase and Michael Levenson, 'The Trials of Caroline Norton: Poetry, Publicity, and the Prime Minister', in *The Spectacle of Intimacy: A Public Life for the Victorian Family* (Princeton, N.J.; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), p.38.

Antonia Fraser, 'to become an important part of her emotional make-up'.[51] For a woman, Norton protested, 'the "very fact of the publicity" counts as her disgrace'.[52] In their assiduous analysis of the case, Chase and Levenson survey the implications of Norton's sufferings in terms of the wider social and cultural contexts: 'What Norton saw with bitter clarity was that her legal vindication in the criminal conversation case brought by her husband counted for little when set against the guilt of public attention.'[53] It was the legal implications of the trial that were most damaging for Caroline, however, since her husband, having failed to obtain a divorce, retained complete rights over her person and her property.[54] Incongruously, given the personal context, her fiction is reticent on the subject of women's equality; as a contrast to her lobbying practices, Norton foregrounds women's' 'innocence', not gender injustice in her fiction, while 'her heroines' quests for vindication most frequently take the form of passive waiting'.[55]

During the period in which her marriage was disintegrating — and immediately preceding the publication in 1837 of Bury's *The Divorced* and her ironically named bad-marriage novel, *Love* (1837) — Norton published her novella *The Wife* alongside *Woman's Reward* (1835) in a three-volume collection. In their discussion of *The Wife*, Chase and Levenson observe that 'a central aspect of the book's polemical mission is the effort to show that domestic cruelty, poetic extravagance, and Tory traditionalism stand in deep and frightening congruity'.[56] *The Wife; and Woman's Reward* sold few copies but received positive reviews despite Norton's subversive gender politics, Frederick Marryat (1792–1848) commending Norton especially for the novel's espousal of a 'deep moral, evolved in the most pleasing manner' as well as 'the most elevated

[51] Fraser (Antonia), p.103. According to Nelson and Mulvey-Roberts, the case brought Norton such notoriety that 'the flow of society invitations dried up, former acquaintances refused to talk to her, she lost her editorial positions and was prevented by the King from attending Court functions'. Norton, *Letters of Caroline Norton*, p.7.
[52] Chase and Levenson, p.39.
[53] Ibid., p.24.
[54] Like the Marchioness of Westmeath, when Norton returned briefly to her husband to try to rescue the marriage, she was considered to have condoned his actions and was thus unable to divorce him on the sole ground of cruelty. It was for this reason that Norton now saw her predicament, along with that of women such as Emily Nugent, as emblematising the legal prejudice and misogyny entrenched in the national consciousness. See: Stone, 'Westmeath *v.* Westmeath. The wars between the Westmeaths, 1812–1857', in *Broken Lives*, p.320. See also: Urquhart p.57.
[55] Nicole Fluhr, 'The Letter and the Law, or How Caroline Norton (Re)Wrote Female Subjectivity', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 2.1 (Spring 2009), pp.37–55 (p.41).
[56] Chase and Levenson, p.32.

ethics'.[57] Chase and Levenson explain that whether or not the novel achieved commercial success, Norton's 'deliberate determination to turn her own problems into a political cause' is immediately apparent in the intensity of the heroines' suffering.[58] Despite the conventional didacticism which glazes the text, Norton refers directly to Bury in *Woman's Reward* as 'a graceful and gifted authoress': the fact that she engaged with Bury's objections to the assumptions made about women by fashionable society is here clearly documented.[59] Norton also implicitly approves of the subversive political dynamic which characterised Bury's novels: having recently been appointed editor to *The English Annual*, she followed up on this public endorsement of her sister author with an effusive 'memoir' in 1836.[60]

3.3 Reforming the sexual double standard

It is clear that *The Divorced,* published at a climactic moment in the history of women's struggle for political rights and social justice, breaks new ground by transferring moral responsibility from the divorced woman to the practitioners of the misogynistic codes of behaviour which destroy her. During the mid to late 1830s, as she was vilified in public, George Norton's embattled wife focused in her campaigns on the legal contradictions underwritten by a sexual double standard which exonerated an adulterous man from blame while subjecting a wife who erred to catastrophic financial and social penalties. Bury's determination to support Norton was almost certainly re-energised by Harriet Taylor-Mill's critique of married men's hypocrisy and the injustice of the double sexual standard which had appeared in *The Monthly Repository* in 1833: 'Does he not stray about the world and sin with impunity, and is not the honour of the female impugned if she does but step across the threshold of her lord?'[61] Particularly problematic to those women who wished, or were forced, to leave their spouses during the period were political figures such as Lord Auckland (1784–1849), a zealot who maintained that divorcees belonged to a class of women whose demeanour and 'attractive habits of life would be well calculated to

[57] 'The Wife, and Woman's Reward. 1835'. *The Metropolitan Magazine, 1833-1840* 13.50 (Jun 1835): pp.39–40 <https://www.proquest.com/historical-periodicals/wife-womans-reward/docview/5727423/se-2> [accessed August 20, 2023].
[58] Chase and Levenson, p.40.
[59] See: C.E.S. Norton, *The Wife and Woman's Reward*, (London: Saunders and Otley,1835), p.204.The personal connection between Bury and Norton is also recorded in Marie Mulvey-Roberts's selection of Caroline Norton's letters (see 3.4 n.90). See also: 3.1 n.19 above.
[60] 'In 1832 she became editor of the monthly *Court Magazine and Belle Assemblée* and three years later of a literary annual'. Norton, *Letters of Caroline Norton*, p.7.
[61] Taylor-Mill, Harriet, 'The Dissenting Marriage Question', *The Monthly Repository*, Vol 7 (73) <https://archive.org/details/sim_monthly-repository_183301_7_73/page/228/mode/2up>.

fascinate and corrupt the pure mind of others'.[62] The logical conclusion — and one that proved fatal to women's autonomy because it denied them validity as individuals—was that 'private divorces' endangered 'public policy and morality'.[63] Mary Shanley explains in detail the rationale which underlined the partial and unjust system of marriage legislation: 'In rejecting the parliamentary practice of granting a divorce *a vinculo* to at least some women, the Royal Commissioners made an absolute distinction between male and female adultery. This distinction, as Keith Thomas has argued, was based on 'the desire of men for absolute property in women.''[64] What was implied by the mandate was that married women should tolerate an adulterous husband, irrespective of the severity or frequency of his crimes, while he in turn should never exonerate an adulterous wife no matter how trivial or fleeting her misdemeanours. In 1836, Norton, no doubt supported and encouraged by women such as Bury and Lady Lytton, embarked upon a public campaign to discredit the practice of subordinating women on the basis of their gender: she eventually petitioned parliament about the patriarchal marriage laws and the sexual double standard, and, according to Mary Poovey, was instrumental in shaping The Matrimonial Causes Act in 1857: 'The logic behind the sexual double standard emerges most clearly, not in the legislators' arguments, but in the complaints of Caroline Norton, the out-of-house petitioner whose pamphlets on divorce helped shape the course of legislative reform.'[65] Misogyny was embedded by cultural attitudes in a legal system which discriminated shamelessly against women by gifting the moral high ground to their husbands: while Norton lobbied parliament, Bury, similarly enraged by the sexual double standard, called out systemic hypocrisy and injustice through the medium of fiction.[66] In *Love*, the second of her novels to appear in 1837, the narrator complains loudly when the heroine is vexatiously threatened with divorce by her uncouth husband:

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[62] Stone, *Road to Divorce*, p.343.George Eden, 1st Earl of Auckland, GCB, PC (25 August 1784–1 January 1849) was an English Whig politician and colonial administrator who served in the Melbourne administration. 'George Eden, earl of Auckland'. Encyclopaedia Britannica <https://www.britannica.com/biography/George-Eden-Earl-of-Auckland> [accessed 22 August 2022]. According to Stone, Auckland lobbied for thirty years for the passage of an 'anti-adultery bill', denouncing the whole system of Parliamentary divorces as 'a code of adultery for the privileged classes'. Stone, ibid., p.336.

[63] Urquhart, p.51.

[64] Keith Thomas, "The Double Standard," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 20 (April 1959), pp.195-216, in Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage and the Law*, p.38.

[65] Poovey, 'Covered but Not Bound', p.469.

[66] For more information about the discriminatory practices underlining divorce law see: Constance Rover, *Love, Morals and the Feminists* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), in Shanley, ibid., p.43.

> 'Oh, miserable estate of woman! Whose very virtues make her shrink from having those virtues questioned before the multitude, how is it that in cases of quarrel between married persons, the wife is invariably the sufferer? A woman must bend to the storm, brave it she dare not'. (*Love* p.151)

Bury clearly felt fewer apprehensions than Norton about protesting publicly against misogyny within marriage; in *Love*, she bolsters Norton's implied criticism of male authority in *The Wife;* and *Woman's Reward* by confronting the readership with (or even cudgelling them emotionally about) the moral subordination of women. In this lament — one of several to punctuate the text — Bury polemicises loudly about the inequities of gender attitudes, drawing back the curtain on the inner workings of a marriage to signify support both for Norton's parliamentary campaigns and the efforts of activists such as Harriet Taylor-Mill to overthrow the tyrannies of institutionalised sexism.[67]

As an alternative to Norton's proselytising fictional narratives, *The Divorced* immerses the reader in the public shame and social ostracism a woman experiences when she remarries after leaving her first husband. We first encounter the divorcee at the centre of the novel as a figure who, far from enjoying the prestige her divorced status supposedly provides, must marshal all her resources to keep her persecutors at bay. She is beset, we are told, by people 'who idly or wantonly trifled with the reputation of their fellow-creatures and shed abroad the venom of detraction': such people, it is self-reflexively implied, as those who habitually devour the *roman-à-clef* (*TD* i p.31). Far from denouncing her, the narrator blames Lady Howard's problems on her gender, her dilemma, she maintains, exacting an inordinate level of sacrifice: 'a meekness and a passive courage surpassing all courage, save that of woman's' (ibid.). The narrative thus balks the reader of the anticipated revelation and immediately debunks the misogynistic mythology surrounding divorcees and their families. In this sense, Bury contradicts Humpherys' view that the early divorce novelist strives both to maintain the status of the heroine as an innocent who is capable of unlimited self-sacrifice and to reward her with love and happiness: as observed by

[67] Notwithstanding Bury's clear engagement with contemporary political debates, Edward Copeland not only omitted *The Divorced* from his literary genealogy in 2012 but identified Blessington's *Victims of Society* (which appeared after Bury's publication) as the novel which responds most directly to the 'criminal conversation trial of Caroline Norton then in process'. Copeland, *The Silver Fork Novel*, p.178.I will contend in this chapter that the visceral abuse at the heart of Caroline's marriage to George Norton was first re-enacted in Bury's *Love,* an intervention which has still to be acknowledged in another of the under-studied novels in Bury's corpus.

Theodore Hook in his affirmative review of the novel in 1837, 'Other writers have painted the fall — she has painted the fallen'.[68]

Far from galvanising the predisposition of a middle-class readership to disapprove of aristocratic conduct, *The Divorced* rejects cultural mores by articulating, from the viewpoint of a divorcee, the quotidian experience of shaming and social marginalisation for a female entrapped by her marital status. We enter the novel just as Alice Talbot, Lady Howard's innocent daughter, has been forcibly separated from her friend, Fanny, by Lady Harcourt (Fanny's mother and the first of the novel's three moral supremacists). We are informed that Alice has been denied the company of her playmate because she is the unwitting progeny of an unhallowed alliance, and a distressing scene ensues in which Lady Howard attempts in vain to console her daughter: 'Lady Alice continued to sob and weep, leaning on her mother's breast, and causing her such anguish as none but those under the same awful, and pitiable circumstances can know' (*TD* i p.7). Far from permitting her to bask in the glow of an illicit second union, the divorcee's consciousness of her conduct blights her entire existence; '"the moment so long dreaded seems fast approaching. My children are to know their mother's crime"' (*TD* i p.34). This is clearly not a lifestyle the reader can envy Bury protests, presenting, to this end, the twice married woman's suffering in visceral terms which explode moral absolutism: 'The child's tears were fire-brands to the mother's heart' (*TD* i p.7).

In offering up a 'sinner' as heroine, *The Divorced* definitively overturns conventional literary tropes: at the centre of the novel is a moral outcast who, as she succumbs to institutionalised legal problems and social persecution, reforms us morally by compelling our pity and compassion. Contrary to the claims of dogmatists, this is no love nest, but a bed of thorns:

> Very terrible was the pillow, which should have been that of rest to Lady Howard, and the more so, because she had no one being to whom she dared unburthen her sorrow. (*TD* i p.34)

A society that styles a mother as a criminal and persecutes her blameless child, it is implied, is a society which needs to face the enormity of its own moral systems and reform them; as Theodore Hook acknowledges, 'No dangerous guise is flung around the early progress of passion'.[69] Far from consolidating received moral and social practices by discrediting the divorcee at the centre of the

[68] Theodore E. Hook, 'The Divorced', *The New Monthly Magazine and Humorist*, 49.195, (Mar 1837), pp.443.
[69] Hook, ibid.

text, Bury's 'second marriage' narrative inaugurates a new genre which rejects 'the entire ideological order that the legal and sexual double standard supported'.[70]

In *Conduct is Fate*, Bury had challenged received moral standards in the voice not only of the heroine's mentor, Beaumont, but also of Remonville, a courtly lover whose French nationality permits the author, seven years after the Battle of Waterloo, to voice subversive ideas about English society while keeping herself at a distance. In *The Divorced*, Bury once more inverts social mores, this time in the characterisation of malevolent Miss Agar — the most toxic and sustained of her female misogynists. Bearing more than a coincidental resemblance to a misanthropic figure notorious in contemporary fashionable society (Miss Margaret Vaughan, probably the most troublesome of Caroline Norton's many tormentors), Miss Agar has crossed no conventional moral boundary: she is a highly effective society scandal-monger and mischief-maker, however, and by ironising her through the conventional trope of frustrated spinsterhood, Bury forces the narrow-minded dogmatists of a misogynistic elite to self-scrutinise. Miss Agar is caricatured as a thwarted old maid, not for being unmarried, but for the malevolence she bears towards the heroine who, she deludes herself, has balked her of her chance to marry Lord Vernon (Lady Howard's first husband). In the same way as Miss Vaughan had pursued Caroline Norton's husband and set about dismantling the family in the period 1834 to 1836, Miss Agar maliciously and relentlessly attempts to wreck the Howard family unit.[71] A blackly humorous figure, she personifies public clamour and is probably the most complete of the many Wollstonecraftian female misogynists populating Bury's fiction.

Bury intensifies the villainy of Miss Agar in *The Divorced* by casting her not just as an anti-heroic character but as a grotesque who adumbrates the villainesses of Dickens's emerging social justice novels. She is not only a 'painted mummy' (*TD* i p.83) and 'a disinterred corpse' (*TD* i p.105) but, 'unloving and unloved', she is welcome nowhere: the narrator assures us, nevertheless, that 'there she was, in renewed rouge and wrinkles at every fresh scene of festivity' (*TD* i p.82). In *The Wife*, Norton similarly, but with remarkably less success, attempts to actualise the predatory and calumniating face of fashionable society for the reader; her ill-chosen strategy is one of direct

[70] Mary Poovey, 'Covered but Not Bound' p.471.

[71] Miss Margaret Vaughan was a wealthy, middle-aged spinster who had been pursuing George Norton since 1834 (she had 'expressed in 'a thorough love letter' her passion for him'). The object of her affections, however, merely dismissed her as 'this antique faux pas'. Fraser (Antonia), p.57. Margaret Vaughan died on 20th November 1836 having failed in her attempt to dislodge Caroline from her position as George's wife. She did, however, consolidate the damage by leaving 'her estates at Kettlethorpe and Whitley to Norton'. Norton, *Letters of Caroline Norton*, n.2 p.261.

address: 'Young girl, of whom do you speak, and of what do you accuse her in those vague words? Of what?'[72] As her sales would attest, Norton's tendency to make extensive use of confessional narrative would only alienate the readers she was trying to convert. Learning from her example, Bury, two years later, succeeds in engaging the attention of readers whose attitudes she was trying to correct, not by catechising, but by displacing her political views onto secondary protagonists: agents of misogyny whom she blackly humourises and whose misconduct grips us and forces upon our attention the cruelties embedded within normative behavioural codes.

In *The Divorced*, Lady Charotte further uncovers the menace which lurked beneath the surface of fashionable life by serving up, and then intensifying, one of the most common of silver-fork tropes: the coming-out ball. In this section of the novel, Bury again raises then balks the expectations of an inquisitive, socially-aspirational reading demographic, this time by switching focus from the trappings of wealth and finery at Almack's ballroom in St. James's to the experience of calumny suffered by the divorcee's innocent daughter. In her divorce narrative (as in all of the novels Bury wrote for Bentley and Colburn) the ballroom is productive only of misery, not glamour and prestige. Miss Agar — one of the most fully realised of Bury's *intriguantes* — duly disrupts Alice's debut by forcing the truth of her birth upon her: 'the idea filled her with malicious pleasure, to think that she should be the first person to make her parent's crime known to her' (*TD* i p.89). By cannily making this former belle of the ball an irredeemably unmaternal and unmarriageable figure, Bury prepares even the most staunch moralist to reject her: 'Strange, that such a demoniac spirit should dwell in woman's form'(ibid.).[73] Not satisfied with destroying Alice's peace of mind, however, Miss Agar next crushes her hope of marrying suitor Colonel Leicester, by convincing another of the novel's uncompromising matriarchs, Lady Leicester, to forbid the match; the villainess achieves her end by insinuating that the marriage has already been settled, secure in the knowledge that this will entrench Lady Leicester's opposition to the union. We laugh in spite of ourselves when we overhear the villainess's nefarious gloating: 'I have given her some nice nuts to crack," she said mumbling as she hopped downstairs' (*TD* i p.200). More darkly, we are made to feel we are in the presence of evil as she plans her attack on the Howards: 'the object of all her maternal solicitude had come to the determination of proving how far Alice would sacrifice the love she bore her mother to that with which he had inspired her' (*TD* i 201). Unlike Norton, whose homilies irked and fatigued the reader, Bury creates a darkly ironic and compulsive

[72] C.E.S. Norton, *The Wife* and *Woman's Reward*, 3 vols (London: Saunders and Otley, 1835), iii p.81.

[73] While Miss Agar does manage to destroy the Howards, she fails to secure the affections of the heroine's forsaken first husband and is punished with isolation and obscurity.

character in Miss Agar, a faded figure of fashion whose malevolence engages our attention then forces us to weigh up and reject as corrupt the values by which it is underscored.

In *The Divorced*, the vilification of women marginalised by marital separation and divorce proves to be something of a national sport in which both genders and all strata in society participate. As we have seen in chapter 2, it was assumed in the early decades of the nineteenth century that adulteresses inherited their vices and then passed them on to their daughters like a genetic disease: neither a woman who committed infidelity nor her daughter would therefore qualify for entry to the establishment. In order to correct perceptions, Bury reverses conventional narrative tropes by dividing her characters into two subversive categories: those who respect and pity the fallen woman (with whom we sympathise) and those who insult and persecute her. In *The Divorced*, the society narrative goes so far, even, as to appropriate the tropes of the Gothic novel and discovers Miss Agar, like Carlovitz Troubetskoi of *Conduct is Fate*, ingeniously and relentlessly seeking out every possible opportunity to exploit the heroine's vulnerabilities. When the initially sympathetic Colonel Leicester, egged on by Miss Agar, pursues Alice Talbot, he does so with a full knowledge of her history; he is soon corrupted, however, and all too readily affiliates himself with the anti-heroine's self-professed piety and covert misanthropy. Subversively, it is not conventional villainy but his failure to reject received standards of behaviour which defines him as the novel's anti-hero; in an ironic reworking of *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) in which the ultimately heroic Mr Darcy struggled 'in vain' to suppress his love for Elizabeth Bennet, Colonel Leicester, in *The Divorced*, will resist Lady Alice successfully. We learn that, after engaging her affections, Leicester makes every effort to jilt her; 'He determined to conquer his attachment; to cease from an intercourse which would be as dangerous as it would be dishonourable' (*TD* i p.181). The self-interested suitor even finds his prospective in-laws compelling, the narrator informing us that 'despite his good resolves to avoid the family, he found himself living perpetually with them' (*TD* i p.183). Most insidiously of all, we learn that Leicester's prejudice is deeply rooted in the moral impoverishment of his own mother; unlike Darcy, who reassuringly defies domineering Lady Catherine de Bourgh, Leicester is only too willing to conform to the wishes of the tyrannical matriarch. Like the society that they represent, Lady Leicester and her son cast the state of divorce as a kind of disease or infection:

> He is thinking of the Leicester blood being polluted by that of Lady Howard, the divorced. He is thinking of the world's whisper - the taunt of the insolent, the sneer of the prudent, the avoidance of the principled, and thinking of these things, with the inflexible honour of his mother's instructions. (*TD* i p.153)

The Divorced here inverts received standards of behaviour by associating Leicester's prudence with contempt and cruelty and his moral inflexibility with outdated notions of 'honour'; to consolidate her point, the narrator evaluates contemporary modes of behaviour by fleshing out the experience of the heroine's worthy but bereft first husband, Lord Vernon. When Laura elopes, Vernon's reaction is one of grief, not outrage: his family, however, wish him to reject his wife and, motivated by resentment, we are told, 'aggravated his feelings by the severity and cold-bloodedness of their unbending maxims' (*TD* i p.235). Whereas Vernon will eventually consent, with relief, to the building of bridges between Laura's sons, Leicester will be punished with celibacy. *The Divorced* definitively resists the tropes of moral-domestic fiction by depriving the novel's ultimate moral supremacist of the rewards habitually meted out to the virtuous: 'Thus were Lady Margaret's hopes of family honours cut off, and her old age was sterile and joyless' (*TD* ii p.244).

In *The Divorced*, the author aims her disapproval at dogmatists, not at the divorcee herself; encouraged by the positivity of the reviews which the novel received, she extended the reach of her narrative realism in *Love* by fictionalising scenes of domestic abuse in the Norton and Bulwer Lytton marriages. When Lady Herbert's husband rebukes her for recognising divorced Lady Falkland, the heroine's former friend, he hypocritically claims that anxiety for their daughter's reputation is a reason to end the relationship. His wife's reply is explosive, however:

> 'I shall obey you, Francis, nor should I have thought of taking Sarah to live in intimacy with poor Mrs. Falkland, although I think her a less objectionable person than many with whom we associate every day; she committed one flagrant act which placed her without the pale of society, and her punishment followed her crime; but she did not cheat her husband by wearing the mask of affection for him, whilst she loved another.' (*Love* ii 77)

Here, Bury articulates — and thus validates — her morally corrective manifesto in the voice of the heroine. In *The Divorced*, the reader is likewise prevailed upon, but this time it is through the utterances of the malevolent but plain-speaking Miss Agar:

> 'there are in the world many such cases, and that they are treated more or less leniently, according to the wealth, the influence, the widespreading connections of the parties.' (*TD* i p.128)

It is a truth universally accepted, the gossiping classes imply, that the rejection or acceptance of the divorced woman is based not upon her moral value, but on how much money she has – a speech articulated in *The Divorced* by the novel's most villainous character, but aimed unambiguously at the morally orthodox readership. As Susan Wolfson explains in her discussion of

Austen's villainesses, 'the device of containing laudable critiques in illaudable characters is a common rhetorical manoeuvre – getting the argument said under cover of discredit'.[74] *The Divorced*, again appropriating Austen's technique, here educates readers in a new liberal system of moral standards by holding up a glass: a mirror which reflects back at them the image of Miss Agar, the personification of the destructive hypocrisy at work beneath the conservative surface of fashionable life.

As the above example demonstrates, our approval is ultimately earned not by dogmatists like Colonel Leicester for his adherence to orthodox moral codes, but by those characters who oppose them. We are angered when, after vacillating wildly at Alice Talbot's expense, Leicester rehearses all of the insults which society has to inflict on the divorcee and those who associate with her: 'the idea of being pointed at as the bold man who had ventured upon the daughter of the divorced, made him shudder' (*TD* i p.201). Too selfish to surrender his quarry but perplexed at the thought of losing caste, Leicester ultimately seizes upon the idea of exploiting the laws of coverture: as the husband of Alice Talbot, he would be legally entitled to limit her social interactions and even imprison her if he so wished.[75] We view the solution he fixes upon with a sense of moral outrage and are guided by Alice's response when she answers his proposal:

> 'if my mother exacted of us that you should never see your mother but in my presence, never appear with her in public, never, in short—' 'Never, in short, be as a daughter to my own mother. Colonel Leicester, I am surprised how you should tamper with me thus, or suppose that I could listen to you for a moment.' (*TD* ii p.34)

The narrative here appropriates the tropes of the moral-domestic novel — not to progress the courtship between the anti-hero and the heroine's daughter, but to validate women who resist male authority. Ruth Perry observes in her discussion of the courtship narrative, 'it must be noted that morally impeccable heroines always cast their lot with the consanguineal rather than the nuptial principle — proving their moral worth by siding with families against upstart lovers, tying themselves voluntarily by promises to the parental generation, ironically, as a prelude to

[74] S.J. Wolfson, 'Re: Reading Pride and Prejudice: "What think you of books?"', in *A Companion to Jane Austen*, eds., C. L. Johnson and C. Tuite (Chichester, U.K.: Malden, MA, Wiley-Blackwell, 2009) p.117 <https://doi-org.soton.idm.oclc.org/10.1002/9781444305968.ch9>.
[75] Bury actualises this idea five years later in *The Manoeuvring Mother* (1842) — a bleak reworking of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) in which four of the Wetheral girls' five marriages end with imprisonment (figurative and actual), separation and death.

marriage'.[76] Bury subverts literary convention both to offer up the child of divorce as the novel's moral lantern and, in her rebuke to the villain, to propose a new, alternative system of morality:

> "never—never should a child give up its mother for any consideration whatever…the man who could ask such a sacrifice of a daughter, must have been unworthy of the love he sought". (*TD* i p.204)

The reader is here confronted with the moral standards of a culture which upholds the unambiguously unchristian at the expense of the morally irreproachable. When Leicester is eventually persuaded out of the match by his rigidly pious mother, it is they who emerge as the novel's villains, not their quarry. In *The Divorced*, Bury's imperative is voiced in terms which recalibrate moral values and form a new trope: 'Alice Talbot's heart was a pure and undefiled temple, from whence the incense of prayer might always ascend. If ever human heart was a fitting altar for communion with Heaven, hers was that heart' (*TD* i p.103).

It is not just the characterisation of the heroine's daughter that disrupts narrative and social convention, however: the divorcee's second husband, according to Anne Humpherys, also represents one of the most significant generic departures in the fiction of the period. In all other texts where the original marriage fails, she explains, it is because of a 'brutal or inadequate spouse'; in Bury's novel, however, the heroine chooses her second husband because he is as 'noble and good' as her first.[77] Humpherys less boldly attributes the eventual diminishment of Charles Howard's love for his wife to 'his own weak character rather than the divorce'[78]. She nevertheless acknowledges that the unequal and gendered sexual double standard at work forms a major source of his pain: 'the world have so decided the question of wrong and right, as to make the man, in such cases, immaculate, the woman, impure: though the one is thrust out of society, the latter is courted and well received' (*TD* i p.45). Humpherys concludes that the novel's ultimate achievement lies in creating sympathy for the divorcee (who is given 'many of the traits of a conventional heroine') and that it is at this level of operation that the characterisation of the second husband is at its most instrumental: his decline, Humpherys asserts, is 'depicted with such sophisticated psychological insight that it creates even more sympathy for his wife'.[79]

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[76] Ruth Perry, "Privatized marriage and property relations," in *Novel Relations: The Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and* Culture, 1748–1818 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp.190–235 (p.234) <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511484438>.Referred to hereafter as 'Privatized marriage'.
[77] Humpherys, 'Breaking Apart', p.49.
[78] Ibid., p.48.
[79] Ibid.

Chapter 1 has already discussed *Self-Indulgence* in terms of the interior life of the errant husband and his sidekick — innovative characterisations which remodel the adulterous but nuanced and sympathetic Sir Edward Newenden in Smith's *Ethelinde*. In *The Divorced*, Lord Howard accordingly places high value upon his wife's sacrifices initially, but by the time the novel opens he is far from enjoying the spoils of his conquest. This is a society, the novel protests, in which the divorcee and her second husband are not punished equally and while Lord Howard maintains a social existence and is still recognised by his family and friends, his wife — to his mortification — is universally shunned. We approach the novel, having been promised a scurrilous *roman-à-clef,* only to discover a mother who is crippled with anxiety about their children and a husband who is terminally frustrated because he has failed to have her 'again partially, if not generally received in society' (*TD* p.108). His resentment drives him to the brink of insanity and he swings manically between self-reproach — ''I am the responsible one, after all, dearest Laura" (*TD* i p.40) — to emotional abuse:

> 'a pretty story, indeed to have one's honour in the keeping of such a woman as you, madam…Here my children are degraded, looked down upon, because they are yours…d—and I too am the husband of a divorced woman'. (*TD* ii p.121)

The reader's moral certainty falters when faced with the complexities of Charles Howard's dilemma. Of the divorcee's husband we learn:

> He was a proud man and a proud father, and he had much reason to be gratified; but some malevolent whisperers occasionally were heard… How these few broken phrases, and others of a similar nature more or less offensive, wounded and irritated him! (*TD* i p.79)

Lord Howard's volatility is soon intensified, moreover, by anger and hurt pride on behalf of their suffering daughter. In another reversal, he relocates the family mercurially from Grosvenor Square to Worthing and checks them in at the 'Steine Hotel' (named with heightened irony after the residence in nearby Brighton where the Regent had installed Mrs Fitzherbert after their illegal marriage in 1785).[80] The stigma of divorce follows them even there, however; 'He had written his

[80] Steine House had been built in 1804 for Maria Fitzherbert by George, Prince of Wales after they married illegally in 1785. By using the name 'Steine' for the Howards' hotel, Bury heightens the irony of their situation because Maria Fitzherbert, although illegally married, was courted and celebrated in Brighton because of her proximity to royalty. See: Rachel Knowles, *Regency History: Mrs Fitzherbert* <https://www.regencyhistory.net/2011/10/wives-and-mistresses-of-george-

name down, and his daughter's, at the Pavilion, but no notice whatever was taken of him or of Lady Alice' (*TD* i p.183); he finally concedes defeat but is nevertheless 'mortified at being shut out from the court' (*TD* i 187).[81] It is from the malevolent Miss Agar's lips, once again, that the plain truth flows: 'when a man has married a divorced woman, he knows she cannot be received at court, and at best is only smuggled into society, like a piece of contraband goods' (*TD* i p.195).

Fifteen years earlier, the moral and social enormity of commodifying tarnished society wives had generated the discarded wife's ordeal at the centre of *Conduct is Fate*. Separated from her husband and homeless in the metropolis, Bertha de Chanci is no more significant than 'a bale of goods' (*CF* i, 85); even more severely compromised by divorce, Bury's later heroine is not only surplus to requirement but illicit merchandise — booty, even: 'a piece of contraband goods'. The couple who have hazarded all for love do not live happily ever after: they experience only the hostility directed at them by a morally impoverished public determined to exact indiscriminate retribution. Largely unhampered by the insecurities which had diminished Caroline Norton's fictional endeavours, Bury confronts readers in 1837 with the ramifications of the sexual double standard by narrating from the interior viewpoint of both spouses. To arouse further indignation, she articulates, in the voice of the repellent Miss Agar, the wilful moral myopia which causes society to target one party to a divorce with especial severity: 'it is the poor foolish woman in these cases who suffers' (*TD* i p.97). Rather than seeking to sanction received standards of behaviour, *The Divorced* invokes contemporary political discourse to challenge the counter-revolutionary and entrenched prejudices of an exclusive, metropolitan elite. By assenting to a corrupt and patriarchal code of conduct which exonerates men while seeing women punished 'with remorseless and unsparing severity', the establishment is guilty not only of hypocrisy but indiscriminate abuse: in this landmark divorce narrative, Bury mobilises early feminist discourse to demonstrate that the culturally accepted practice of destroying the divorcee, her husband and

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iv.html> [accessed 10 March 2022] and *Steine House* in *Wikipedia* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SteineHouse> [accessed 20 November 2019].

[81] The court referred to (rather anachronistically) is the Marine Pavilion – a household established in Brighton by the Prince of Wales in the 1790s. In 1837 – the year of Queen Victoria's accession – the ironic spectacle of Brighton society courting the infamous royal adulterer while rejecting the morally worthy but socially subordinate Howards, would not have been lost on the reader. See: Christopher Hibbert, "George IV", in *Oxford National Dictionary of Biography* <https://doi-org.soton.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/10541>.See bibliography for full citation.

her second family, is to collectivise and endorse corruption in society at large. It is, indeed, 'a most base and unmanly act of oppression'.[82]

3.4 *The Divorced* and child custody campaigns of the 1830s

As pointed out by Caroline Norton during the campaigns which frame Bury's novel, the children born within wedlock at this time became the property of their fathers at birth; countless mothers consequently compelled themselves to stay in marriages with men who had become adulterous or abusive out of mortal fear of losing their children. Stone substantiates these claims by observing, 'an abnormally high proportion of those couples who obtained a Parliamentary divorce during the period were childless. When there were children, however, the most painful consequence of divorce for an adulterous wife, whether remarried or not, was her total separation from them.'[83] Even more frequently, Bury claims, the decision was completely taken out of the mother's hands. Finally seizing her chance in 1836, Miss Vaughan had taken advantage of Caroline's absence to encourage, aid and abet George Norton in separating from his wife; when Caroline returned from a visit to her sister in early April, she found that he had taken the children away from their Westminster home in Storey's Gate to her tormentor's house at 1, Berkeley Street.[84] In so doing, George Norton had acted completely within the law: in one easy motion he both separated Caroline from her sons and, enabled by the processes of coverture, assumed complete legal proprietorship over them.

Yet another high-profile infant custody battle of the 1830s that shaped *The Divorced* was that of Lady Rosina Bulwer Lytton and her husband, Edward. In 1831, Lady Lytton had been forcibly separated from her first-born child, Emily Elizabeth, when Edward Bulwer Lytton (then plain 'Bulwer') had had the child sent to a wet nurse; after his wife left home in 1836 because of his philandering, he took custody of both of their children.[85] While Lady Lytton's debut novel, *Cheveley*: *Or, The Man of Honour* (1839) postdates both *The Divorced* and *Love,* it bears more than coincidental similarities to these narratives in its treatment of wedlock, fashionable life and

[82] Harriet Taylor-Mill, 'The Dissenting Marriage Question', The Monthly *Repository*, Vol 7 (73) <https://archive.org/details/sim_monthly-repository_183301_7_73/page/228/mode/2up>. See also: 3.1 n.28.
[83] Stone, *Road to Divorce*, p.340.
[84] See Fraser (Antonia), p.59 and Atkinson, p.156.
[85] See: Andrew Brown, Lytton, Edward George Earle Lytton Bulwer [formerly Edward George Earle Lytton Bulwer], first Baron Lytton (1803–1873), in *Oxford National Dictionary of Biography*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/17314>. Known commonly as Lord Bulwer Lytton, he was an English novelist and politician who served firstly as a Whig MP (1831-41) then as a Tory (1851-66).

the legal and social standing of aristocratic married women.[86] Clearly at stake in *Cheveley* is the issue of men's legal empowerment within marriage, particularly the mandate that compelled women to 'devote their lives to […] their children, without ever being able to obtain one single conventional or legal right over them'.[87] In *Cheveley*, Lady Lytton modestly fictionalises herself as the heroic Lady de Clifford, while the novel's chief villain, Lord de Clifford, is a thinly veiled version of the author's husband. In what is clearly a *roman-à-clef*, Lady de Clifford — like Lady Lytton herself — is psychologically abused by all of her in-laws and when her husband subjects her to a graphic and violent assault, her courtly lover, Lord Mowbray, steps in and empowers her economically by making her his sole legatee. Mowbray — thought to be modelled upon Lord Melbourne (who aided Caroline Norton by means of a similar arrangement) — sweeps Lady de Clifford's scruples away by recounting a tale in which a man obtains a separation from his wife by framing her for adultery. In this inset narrative we learn that, like the author herself, the woman has no brother or father to protect her, and because their attorney has 'played so completely into the husband's hands', he takes her children away unopposed.[88] *Cheveley*, then, is both autobiographical and directly polemical about men's appropriation of power, Lady Lytton

[86] Lady Lytton [Baroness Bulwer Lytton], *Cheveley; or, the man of honour*, second edition (London: Edward Bull, 1839), i p.276. Referred to hereafter as 'Cheveley'. The likelihood of Bury having joined with contemporary women writers during the 1830s to lobby for a change in the laws governing marriage comprises a central plank in this research. As has been seen, she had published both *The Divorced* and *Love* in the years spanning the marriage breakdowns of Rosina Bulwer Lytton and Caroline Norton. Although *Cheveley* postdates these publications, Mary Greene, a friend of Lady Lytton's and one of her most regular correspondents, affirms in a letter of 1836 that after Rosina had separated from her husband that year, she started writing *Cheveley* 'while she was staying at the farmhouse of Mrs Shaw at St Doloughs, near Dublin'. Marie Mulvey-Roberts, *Letters of Rosina Bulwer Lytton*, i p.121 n.1. Lady Lytton, herself, confirms in a letter of 27 January 1853 (in the same collection), that she had started work on the text as early as 1836. Significantly, for this research, she also claims that the novel took her less than three months to complete: 'I beg to state that 'chevly' was written in two months, and four days - from the time of its commencement, which may perhaps account for, without however atoning for its innumerable defects' (ibid., ii p.16). These letters establish the fact that Lady Lytton's immediate response to the breakdown of her marriage and the removal of her children was, in solidarity with Bury and Caroline Norton, to voice her protests through the medium of publication. While these documents do not prove they collaborated directly, the letters provide useful primary evidence about the provenance of Lady Lytton's debut novel and bolster the case I am making that these women at least worked in parallel during the years before the Infant Custody Act passed into law in 1839.

[87] Lady Lytton, *Cheveley; or, The Man of Honour*, 3rd edn, 3 vols (London: Edward Bull, 1839), i p.276. Referred to hereafter as 'Cheveley'.

[88] Lady Lytton, *Cheveley; or, The Man of Honour*, 2nd edn, 2 vols (New York: Harper, 1839), ii p.32.

observing caustically that it is 'the indissoluble manner in which they invariably uphold and support each other' which enables them to collude in their oppression of women.[89]

The sorority between Caroline Norton, Bulwer Lytton and Bury is referred to explicitly in a letter Caroline wrote in the depths of despair over her children on 28th June 1836 to her brother Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1809–88):

> About Miss Vaughan, the Cowells to whom I have written – will tell you much – I think also Mrs Bulwer Lytton & Lady Charlotte Bury probably know, & could prove things she has said - will tell you much. Especially the speech "something will soon come out about Mrs Norton" which is an indirect threat.[90]

Norton clearly felt sufficiently familiar and secure with both Bury and Lady Lytton to approach them directly for assistance in resisting George's calumniating co-conspirators. Bury responds powerfully on Caroline's behalf by casting Miss Vaughan in the fictional role of chief villainess and mischief-maker in *The Divorced*, a strategy which paid off when a conservative reviewer in *The Monthly Review* firstly acknowledged the novel's veracity then praised the author for serving up 'numerous portraits of commonplace flutterers'.[91]

In *The Divorced*, then, Bury comes to Norton's aid, firstly promising revelation then offering up a divorcee bereft of children and beleaguered by strangely familiar enemies. This no doubt galvanised Norton who subsequently prevailed in her campaign to protest against laws that had defeated even wives and mothers like Emily Nugent: a friend who had historically fought unsuccessfully to regain custodial rights to her children. Norton's first move, according to Mary Shanley, was to mine her social network and recruit figures to the cause such as Sir Thomas Noon Talfourd (1794–1854), serjeant-at-law and Member of Parliament for Reading, through whose agency a Bill was soon introduced into the House of Commons.[92] The purpose of the Bill was to empower judges, in the event of marital breakdown, to award access of children under sixteen to either of the parents and custody of children under seven to mothers.[93] The Bill received its first reading on 25th April, 1837 and a second reading was scheduled for May 24th. Chase and Levenson explain that what intimidated moralists and legislators at the time about the movement for legal

[89] Ibid., p.49.
[90] Norton, *Letters of Caroline Norton*, p.208.
[91] Anon., 'Book review', *The Monthly review* 1.4 (Apr 1837), British Periodicals, pp.603-607 (p.604).
[92] See: Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage and the Law*, p.25.
[93] Ibid.

reform was the widely held notion that by permitting divorced and separated wives to retain their children in the event of marital breakdown, women would leave their husbands *en masse* and family life — the foundation upon which society was built — would break down. They explain that on its first reading, the reluctance of post-Georgian powerbrokers to pass the infant custody act was entrenched by misogyny— by the conviction, in particular, that granting custody of their children to mothers who left their marital home would encourage them to seek out adulterous relationships. It was for this reason, according to a stinging satire which appeared in the *British and Foreign Review*, that the 'morality-mocking bill' was really entitled 'A Bill to facilitate Separations, Seductions and Adulteries', the assumption being that 'its passage will destroy the one sure bond keeping alive the fragile faith of dissipated wives'.[94] Unhappily married women were effectively being held hostage by their gender, the opposition to the act raised by conservative moralists amounting to little more than the blackmail of married mothers. The enormity of the campaign was exacerbated by its hypocrisy: during the same period, unmarried mothers, although classified as adulteresses, were allowed automatic and unquestioned custody to their (illegitimate) children. These women thus maintained greater control than their married counterparts because their status as *feme sole* ironically placed them outside the reach of the patriarchal legislature which sought to tyrannise them.[95]

As opposed to the only other fiction to broach the issue during the period — Catherine Gore's *Mothers and Daughters* (1831) — *The Divorced* successfully dramatises the enormity of permanently and forcibly separating mothers from their children by insisting on the heroic status of the divorcee.[96] Bury consciously supported Norton in her efforts to get the law changed: we are thus notified in the very first chapter of *The Divorced* that Lady Howard has been forced to surrender Lord William Stuart (the issue of her first marriage); when she learns by chance of his

[94] Chase and Levenson, p.42.

[95] The anomalies of the statutes meant that legal processes were highly prejudiced against the economically subordinate classes, however, attracting criticism for their 'differing class constructions of motherhood' from early feminist Catherine ('Kate') Barmby (? 1817-53). In her essay *The Poor Law Amendment Act* (1834), Barmby protests against the social injustice of placing responsibility for supporting illegitimate children upon their mothers: 'The mother, in the highest circles of life, when separated from her husband, in accordance with the law of divorce, may have all intercourse with her children denied to her, however free from suspicion her conduct may have been; while, in consonance with the New Poor Laws, the wretched creature, deficient, perhaps, in her morals, destitute of food and shelter, and, with these, of everything that can render the society of her child aught but a torture, is commanded to fulfil her maternal duties'. Catherine [Barmby], 'Woman and the Laws', *New Moral World,* 5.36 (29 June 1839), p.562 in Gleadle, *Radical Writing*, p.105. The clause would be repealed in 1844.

[96] As in Edgeworth's *Patronage*, Gore's divorcee of 1831 is a minor and non-heroic character who disappears from the reader's view once the crime of adultery has been committed.

twenty-first birthday celebration, it is only by reading about it in a morning newspaper. Later in the novel, the heroine's reunion with her son is staged to maximum dramatic effect, their encounter occurring impersonally and ironically on a beach in Worthing:

> Lady Howard looked up at Lord Stuart, his likeness to his father, mingled with a likeness to herself, and that indescribable yearning of nature towards an offspring, which every mother knows, told her that he was her child—her first-born and forsaken son.' (*TD* i p.162)

Bury's political fervour and willingness to remodel existing fictional modes had been activated both by Norton's plight as a powerless and innocent woman bereaved of her infant sons and her understanding of the shame and ostracism experienced by other high-profile casualties of divorce. As discussed in my introduction, Lady Elizabeth Webster, a divorcee upon whom Lady Howard is likely to have been based, had tried but failed in 1799 to prevent her estranged husband, Sir Godfrey Webster, from taking her daughter from her, staging 'a mock funeral with an empty coffin' to delay the eventuality.[97] Three years later, she was forced to surrender custody and didn't see her daughter again until she was married in 1816 — an event which Bury reimagines to maximum dramatic effect in the encounter between Lady Howard and her estranged son. Instead of proselytising, however, Bury's narrator tackles the enormity of the problem by appealing directly to the conscience of 'every mother' reading the novel:

> when she beheld Lord Stuart, she remembered he was her first-born - she had forsaken him, she had injured him, and a long-repressed flood of overwhelming tenderness, such as can be felt alone for one that is most dear and most injured, now burst forth, and nature claimed her right (*TD* i p.167).

Like 'many of the activists campaigning for reform during the period [who] struggled with the conflict between the need for judicial change and the cultural hegemony of daily life', Bury must claim both innocence and guilt for the heroine: while compelling, the heroine's 'long repressed flood of overwhelming tenderness' for her elder son is thus complicated by the author's protest that 'she had forsaken him, she had injured him'.[98] In spite of its sporadic catechising, however, *The Divorced* ultimately directs approbation away from the heartless practitioners of orthodox moral codes to the object of their opprobrium: by 1837, the author has both 'learned to write

[97] Stone, *Road to Divorce*, pp.341-2.
[98] Lambert, *For Better*, p.2.

novels of social criticism' and 'developed effective strategies of subversion and indirection…to use the polemical tradition without being used completely by it'.[99]

I contend that Rosina Bulwer Lytton joined the child custody debates by consciously adopting Bury's contentious politics when she embarked upon the writing of *Cheveley* in 1836. Although she was primarily motivated by feelings of revenge, according to Mulvey-Roberts, Lady Lytton emphasised her plight as a mother robbed of her children by aligning herself, in the novel's introduction, with late-eighteenth century radical novelist Charlotte Smith (possibly one of several stratagems inspired directly by Bury's narrative technique). This was not her only inspiration, however: in the year before the breakdown of the Nortons' marriage, Lady Lytton exults over her friendship with the lobbyist and pamphleteer, describing an audience with Caroline Norton as 'an honour!!!'[100] While the relationship would eventually sour, Lady Lytton eagerly anticipated a successful outcome for Norton's Bill in 1839. Especially gratifying was the idea of thwarting her controlling and misogynistic mother-in-law: in a letter dated 24 February 1838 she duly wonders 'how her hopeful and worthy son and scion will feel when "The Custody of Infants Bill" passes — as pass it will — and when he as a doer of dirty work and scavenger general to the present administration must vote for it!'[101]

By using the *roman-à-clef* as a lens, Norton, Bury and Rosina Bulwer Lytton severally attempt to expose and critique the systemic injustice and oppression of women in England during the post-Regency under cover of a popular fictional genre. In prosing excessively about her own dilemma Norton succeeded mainly in alienating readers and her efforts in the field of fiction stalled in the mid-1830s. The reception of Norton's novels, however, renewed Bury's awareness of public reluctance to confront private truths; while deliberately thwarting the expectations of revelation raised by Henry Colburn's puffing, she engaged afresh in 1837 with the issues at the heart of Norton's texts and eventually succeeded — where Norton had failed — in arousing indignation and pity for the persecuted wives and bereft mothers who populated pre-Victorian society.

3.5 Economic matters: inheritance law, widowhood and the divorcee's double bind

In the preceding sections I have established ways in which Bury's divorce novel dramatised the abuses of a culture which permitted separated and divorced women to be legally dispossessed

[99] Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*, p.19.
[100] Mulvey-Roberts, *Letters of Rosina Bulwer Lytton,* i p.44.
[101] Ibid., i p.212.

not only of their status and reputation, but of their children also. This part of the chapter will examine in greater detail the ways in which men, empowered by a corrupt and partial legal system, were also able to appropriate the property and wealth which rightfully belonged to their wives.[102]

According to Catherine Packham, Wollstonecraft had exploited and extended the discourse of human rights as part of her attempt to focus attention on the abuses and injustices underlining the existing property regime.[103] Particularly problematic, in her view, was the practice of coverture: a man's entitlement to appropriate the wealth brought to a marriage by his wife or acquired subsequently. In 1851 Harriet Taylor-Mill would raise the problem of economic disenfranchisement again in her protest against women's inability to access divorce — a situation which would not, she claimed, 'arise if women were entitled, not just to divorce, but to the degree of financial autonomy that an effective separation from an abusive husband requires'.[104] Whereas legal separation permitted the husband to retain control of a woman's property, formal divorce, as in the case of Lady Howard's first marriage, could theoretically mean the ending of the husband's power: unfortunately, this was an arrangement that did not afford any meaningful security to the former wife. As explained by Okin, if a woman left her husband without what was considered 'sufficient cause', she was not able to make any financial claims on him because even after the marriage had been dissolved, the mandate did not restore to her the legal status of *feme sole*. Divorced women continued to be circumscribed by the laws of coverture; as Okin observes, 'This anomalous situation of being an outlaw continued, for the wife, even after she obtained a divorce a mensa'.[105] The heroine in Bury's novel, who has voluntarily left a dutiful husband for a lover, is therefore unable to demand either support or access to other sources of finance. Okin, again, expresses her caustic opinion about this arrangement by citing the Victorian academic and

[102] Bailey pinpoints the misogyny embedded in patriarchal systems by critiquing the contemporary critical response to *The Hardships of the English Laws in Relation to Wives:* 'English wives did not merit more egalitarian property rights, as in Roman civil law, because their inconstancy and extravagance required that they be protected from themselves'. Bailey, 'Favoured or oppressed?', pp.352-3 doi:10.1017/S0268416002004253.
[103] Catherine Packham, 'Property Law', in *Mary Wollstonecraft in Context,* Literature in Context, eds. Nancy E. Johnson and Paul Keen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp.207–14 (p.209) <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/abs/mary-wollstonecraft-in-context/property-law/A14546458323D725357549CA7B1C2987> [accessed 22 October 2023].
[104] Ian Ward, 'The Case of Helen Huntingdon', *Criticism*, 49.2 (Spring 2007), pp.151–182 (p.164).
[105] Okin, 'Patriarchy and Married Women's Property', p.137.

politician, Courtney Stanhope Kenny: 'she lost her money by marrying her husband, and her credit by leaving him.'[106]

The lesson the author intends us to take away is that for Lady Howard, and by extension every other married woman in the country, the partial legal statutes which determine their chances of social and economic survival are loaded entirely against them. The readership soon learns, by witnessing the heroine's experience of social exclusion, that the mechanism conferring grounds for divorce operated to a double standard; since the sole rationale for divorce in England at the time was a wife's infidelity, it followed that women who married for a second time would be subjected to severe social ostracism as well as economic penalties. Because Caroline Norton's husband had been unable to prove his case in the criminal conversation trial which he had brought in 1836, she remained legally bound. If the jury had found for him, she would have been able to detach herself formally and even remarry; ironically, she would then have suffered equally severe consequences in every other respect. In the event, while Caroline managed to separate and secure a financial arrangement from George, her reputation was so damaged by the fallout that she suffered as much ignominy as if Lord Melbourne had been convicted at trial.[107] Shanley again observes, 'Even if a defendant was legally declared "not guilty," no wife was considered "innocent" after such a proceeding'.[108] The question of women's property was thus relentlessly entwined with her 'character' and in the year following the trial, Bury attempted to support Norton by confronting the reader, through fiction, with the hypocrisies of a sexual double standard which always discriminated against a woman's legal interests in favour of her husband's.[109]

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[106] Ibid., p.138. Courtney Stanhope Kenny (1847–1930) was a lawyer, legal historian and reformer. Elected Member of Parliament for Barnsley in 1885, he introduced a bill to reform the laws of primogeniture. A. L., Goodhart, and Richard A. Cosgrove. "Kenny, Courtney Stanhope (1847–1930), jurist. "Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. September 23, 2004. OUP. Date of access 29 Sep. 2023, <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-34287>.

[107] As part of the separation agreement, George was obliged to pay Caroline a maintenance allowance (though she had, on several occasions, to have this legally enforced). He was also able, like all married men during the period, to avail himself of the earnings his wife accrued through her career (in Caroline's case, as a professional writer). See: 2.4 n.106 above and Poovey, 'Covered but Not Bound', p.469-70.

[108] Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law,* p.24.

[109] For Shanley's discussion of 'the sexual double standard implicit in the differing in grounds for divorce' see: Mary Lyndon Shanley, '"One Must Ride Behind": Married Women's Rights and the Divorce Act of 1857', Victorian Studies, 25.3 (Spring 1982) pp.355–376 (p.356). Referred to hereafter as 'One Must Ride Behind'.

In *The Divorced*, the heroine becomes hopelessly ensnared by the intricacies of the system: as opposed to the wife who has confronted separation or abandonment, Lady Howard encounters a particularly insidious double bind when she is both divorced and widowed. Whereas it had become customary during the previous century in the event of divorce for a husband to settle an annuity upon his former spouse, by the time *The Divorced* was published, changes to the system had been forced through by religious and political campaigners. Previously, the husband of a woman who left had to provide her with an income which correlated both to the size of her marriage portion and her situation in life — an arrangement which had been intended to afford her both independence and security. Stone explains, 'At first sight, this grant to an ex-wife of an annuity for life without strings appears as an act of generosity, especially if the wife was proposing to cohabit with or marry her lover'. In the 1780s, opponents of divorce, led by Lord Thurlow, started to complain that such settlements did, indeed, amount to little more than condoning infidelity; the dilemma was resolved with a mandate which satisfied orthodox moralists but meant the payment of a divorcee's maintenance annuity would depend henceforth upon her remaining chaste and unmarried.[110] By 1833, Stone explains, the arrangement had become standard legal practice; of especial significance for this project is the timing of the legislation. The change in the terms which granted to the divorced wife an unconditional life annuity to one dependent on her remaining celibate took place sometime between 1811 and 1830 — years which spanned the period in which Bury formulated some of her most politically subversive novels.

In the closing decades of the previous century, Wollstonecraft and other radicals had protested against the plight of under-schooled girls and denounced the neglect of women's education as a form of slavery 'perpetrated upon women by men and by the conventions of society at large'.[111] For Wollstonecraft, social systems meant that women were 'led by their dependent situation and domestic employments more into society' than education — a problem Bury had closely interrogated in the helplessness of the abandoned wife in *Conduct is Fate*.[112] Like Bertha de Chanci, Lady Howard is a helpless victim not only of established cultural systems but of her own

[110] Stone, *Road to Divorce,* p.345. Lord Thurlow, Stone continues, had declared in the 1780s that the divorce maintenance grant was 'an encouragement to immorality' (ibid.).
[111] Moira Ferguson, 1992. 'Mary Wollstonecraft and the Problematic of Slavery', *Feminist Review,* 42 (1992), pp.82–102 (p.83) <https://doi.org/10.2307/1395131>.
[112] Lisa L. Moore, Joanna Brooks, and Caroline Wigginton, 'Mary Wollstonecraft (1759 –1797)', in *Transatlantic Feminisms in the Age of Revolutions,* eds. Lisa L. Moore and others (Oxford: Oxford Academic, 2012), p.268, online edn, 3 Mar. 2015 <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:osobl/9780199743483.003.0047>.

lack of preparedness, a problem embedded firmly in the misogyny of hegemonic discourse. As discussed in chapter 2, women's difficulty in comprehending opaque terminology was 'one of the most common of financial barriers if their funds were being withheld'[113]: it is thus implied, but not explained in Bury's divorce novel, that if the heroine had made an appropriate contract before her first marriage, it would have been possible for her to have her property returned to her.[114] Accordingly, when Laura alludes to her dilemma early on in the plot, it is only in passing: her essential ignorance, which was very common amongst women of the propertied classes, according to Brant, means she fails fully to grasp the peril which threatens her. In the year before the passing of the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857, Lord Lyndhurst (1772-1863) – parliamentarian and friend of Caroline Norton — roundly denounced society on account of its dereliction of duty towards the casualties of broken marriage:

> from the moment of separation the wife is almost in a state of outlawry. She may not enter into a contract, or, if she does, she has no means of enforcing it. The law, so far from protecting, oppresses her. She is homeless, helpless also, hopeless, and almost wholly destitute of civil rights.[115]

Lord Lyndhurst was particularly concerned about the issue of marriage breakdown from the point of view of women's property rights and proposed that any wife whose marriage was dissolved should be treated thereafter as *feme sole*.[116] Lawrence Stone duly notes the seismic shift in attitudes which was taking place as the campaigns for judicial change progressed: 'even in the conservative House of Lords, there were peers like lords Lyndhurst and Brougham, who felt very strongly about the injustice of the legal inequality of wives, and agreed with Lord Lansdowne when he said he would rank England among 'the least civilized and most barbarous states. Certainly she occupies a condition which is inferior to that which prevails in any other modern country'.[117]

As if the withdrawal of the divorce maintenance grant by 1833 was not problematic enough, the economic precariousness of women in Laura's position was further entrenched by the passing of the Dower Act that year. Before the passing of the Act, as discussed in chapter 2, a widow who had not committed adultery automatically received one-third of her husband's estates during the

[113] Clare Brant, ibid.
[114] See: Erickson, 'Coverture and Capitalism', pp.4-5.
[115] Shanley, 'One Must Ride Behind', p.370.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Stone, *Road to Divorce*, p.378.

remainder of her life, an arrangement with which her spouse could not legally interfere. As historian Susan Staves explains, the reform of dower legislation 'allowed legal intellectuals to feel that they had corrected an error but preserved for individual women no socially enforced rights; an individual woman got nothing except what her own husband privately elected to bestow.'[118] Through the prism of her divorce narrative, Bury warns her female readership that a woman's economic survival now hinged entirely upon the good opinion of the men who controlled her. A culture of primogeniture, entailment and strict settlements in the early-nineteenth century meant in reality that while a woman in Lady Howard's position could achieve financial stability through wedlock, the position she held was extremely tenuous: the heroine's sudden recognition that her financial wellbeing is determined entirely by the ever-dwindling regard her husband bears towards her, compels our pity. Soon after her divorce, the heroine and her second husband laugh off threats of disinheritance from her adoptive uncle, General De Lacy, but we are appraised of this only when it is too late in the plot for the heroine to take action; the narrator will soon comment sardonically on the deficiencies of the system through the figure of the prosaic and ironically named family lawyer, Mr Grey. Grey, we are told, is a hireling — a mere bureaucrat who, far from endeavouring to succour Lady Howard, typifies those 'who always come forward upon such occasions' (*TD* ii p.187) to read the letter of the law. As the judicial process traces its slow but sure trajectory, it is men — the architects and enforcers of the statutes — who fail the women they are meant to protect; in the meantime, the narrator observes caustically, 'the widow lies insensible upon her bed of despair, or the orphans lift their hands for bread, or the broken heart sits down in silence to die' (*TD* ii p.188).

If the plot heaps untold misery on the adulterous couple and their children, Bury's intention (to the disgust of one contemporary reviewer) is polemical, not didactic. The system of primogeniture that existed at the time of the novel's publication, we soon learn, operated as effectively as a mechanism of oppression upon women as the legalities of coverture; Bury's narrative therefore protests loudly against a system of patrilineal inheritance which promoted the financial well-being of men at the expense of their wives, sisters and mothers. As Ruth Perry explains, because inheritance law had been preserved intact in English law since the eighteenth century, women who remarried often fell afoul of the laws of coverture (even, we infer, after the death of a second husband); 'Although marriage settlements had been used from the sixteenth through the early eighteenth century to protect women's financial interests in marriage, by the early eighteenth century this legal device was being turned to a different use — to concentrate and

[118] See: Staves, *Married Women's Separate Property,* p.49.

entail property in the male line'.[119] The only significance at this time of a wife's land and money was that it enlarged her husband's estate; women's individual interests were thus subordinated to the enhancement of the wider family's coffers. For Perry, the problems caused by these practices were particularly gendered: 'This redistribution of family resources left women, in particular, with less access to capital than ever before and at a terrible disadvantage in the new economy.'[120]

It is the financial injustices for women embedded in the economic and legal situation in England which drive the latter stages of Bury's plot. When the Howard heir, Lord Talbot, plunges into emotional turmoil and consumption on discovering the truth about his birth, he commits constructive suicide: '"since, I say, that secret has been known to me, I have never had a wish to live"' (*TD* ii 42). While Talbot's death occurs early in the novel and is reported only at second hand, the calamity soon visits catastrophic economic consequences on the heroine. Laura's second husband has been predeceased by his heir (see below: 3.5 n.120) and at the same time as his sanity crumbles, his hostility for his wife increases. Misanthropic Miss Agar, discerning the peril of Laura's situation, anticipates her undoing with unnecessary eagerness; '"if he dies, the title and estates will descend to a distant relative of Lord Howard who never would speak to Lord Howard, since his runaway marriage"' (*TD* i 231). Following the death of Lord Talbot, Miss Agar, now gloating, unambiguously confronts the heroine – and the reader through her – with the seriousness of losing an heir for the twice-married woman without family:

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[119] Perry, '*Privatized marriage'*, p.214.

[120] Ibid., p.213. This was a situation that Bury's first cousin Lady Mary Coke *née* Campbell (1727–1811) discovered through hard personal experience. Coke, who served alongside Bury as a lady-in-waiting at the court of Princess Caroline, had married the dissolute and disreputable Edward, Viscount Coke (1719–1753) — son of the Earl of Leicester — in 1747. She soon involved both of their families in legal action by denying conjugal relations to her husband; following a period of practical imprisonment on the Coke estate at Holkham, Norfolk, a settlement in 1750 allowed her to live thereafter with her mother. Mary's husband died in 1753, and six years later, with the death of her father-in-law, the earldom became extinct because Edward Coke had predeceased him. As Mary had had no children with her husband, the Coke family estate, including Holkham Hall, went directly to Edward's cousin. Rubenstein, Jill. "Coke [née Campbell], Lady Mary (1727–1811), letter writer and noblewoman." Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. September 23, 2004. Oxford University Press. Date of access 7 Oct. 2023. Despite Coke's seniority, her relationship with Bury and her family was close and the Campbells attended to her welfare assiduously. In a letter to his younger son on 14th March 1801, for example, Lady Charlotte's father sends his 'best love' to Coke, along with the caution 'whom I hope you do not neglect'. Duke of Argyll to Lord John Campbell, Inveraray, 14th March 1801, John Douglas Sutherland Campbell, Duke of Argyll,1845–1914, *Intimate society letters of the eighteenth century*, p.446. See also: Introduction n.49 above.
<https://archive.org/details/intimatesocietyl02argyuoft/page/444/mode/2up?q=coke> [accessed 6 September 2023].

> "I was sorry to hear of Lord Talbot's death; it loosens your hold over his father; and if you survive Lord Howard, he might have protected you in advancing years, when people begin to find old friends drop into the grave, and new ones become scarce: but perhaps you may yet have another heir." (*TD* ii p.108)

Miss Agar's counterfeit concern both revives memories of the problems suffered by Princess Caroline after the loss of her daughter in 1817 and alludes to the ubiquitously held, if tacit, understanding of the divorcee's legal vulnerability in the event of a second marriage breakdown (see: 2.1 n.35). If widowed, Laura's only chance of economic survival will be the protection which her fragile position as the heir's mother will afford her. The heroine will shortly be overwhelmed and, as the narrative incrementally uncovers the details of her husband's deterioration, the novel plumbs the depths of tragedy.

As noted in chapter 1, the common-law obligation of primogeniture had formed the second of Wollstonecraft's key targets after coverture in her attacks on property law. Her concern centred in particular upon judicial inequities which marginalised the economic interests of women in favour of their male relatives. As explained by Catherine Packham in her appraisal of legal issues in Wollstonecraft's fiction, the writer's first novel, *Mary* (1788) confronts 'the consequences of the common-law practice of primogeniture, by which the eldest son was the privileged inheritor of an estate. In addition to the evident inequity, and the tendency of primogeniture to accumulate rather than distribute wealth, it is clear that it also debases family relations, evident both in the neglect of Mary by her parents during her elder brother's lifetime, and in her subsequent arranged marriage'.[121] In *The Divorced*, Bury similarly dramatises the area of operation for property law which abolished, in sole favour of male inheritors, the rights of both divorced and widowed women to inherit. As Okin observes, 'a brief recollection of many of Jane Austen's late eighteenth-century female characters should serve to remind us of just how many 'genteel' women must have been severely burdened due to the fact that their families' property had been entailed to or was otherwise inherited by their male relatives.'[122] After the death of their father in *Sense and Sensibility*, for example, the family estate (because Mr Dashwood has only a life interest) is inherited by the son from his first marriage at the expense of the daughters of his second. The second (and therefore legally subordinate) family are 'cast out into the world, dispossessed of their beloved Edenic home, to begin again with an income on the edge of what

[121] Packham, 'Property Law', p.212.
[122] Okin, 'Patriarchy and Married Women's Property', p.127.

was considered to be a civilised existence'.[123] While a similar threat hovers over Bury's heroine, the judicial processes of matrimonial and inheritance law mean Laura's disenfranchisement is egregious: the heroine in *The Divorced* neither benefits from dower nor retrieves her standing as *feme sole* — even after her husband's self-destruction (as had done another of Bury's cousins, Anne Seymour Damer, when she was widowed after her estranged husband's suicide).[124] In a culture suffused with hypocrisy and misogyny, the rights of a woman in Lady Howard's position are cancelled irrevocably by her status as a divorcee. This was because, as Susan Staves explains, when women were widowed after an elopement, they were legally compromised and economically disenfranchised by their misconduct: 'a wife was mandated to lose her entitlement to dower if she eloped and committed adultery; eighteenth-century jointures defeasible upon remarriage could bar dower'.[125] In other words, until the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857, a woman who married for a second time was mandated to lose all of her entitlements because of her divorced status. What was implied clearly by the legislation was that she was a criminal in all but name.

[123] E.J. Clery, *Jane Austen: The Banker's Sister* (London: Biteback Publishing, 2017), p.139.
[124] Anne Seymour Damer had separated from her husband after seven years of marriage. Her husband, the Honourable John Damer (1744-1776), became inextricably financially involved as a consequence of squandering his patrimony and subsequently committed suicide in the Bedford Arms, Covent Garden. Bury observes of her cousin, 'at his death she despoiled herself of everything to pay his debts, as far as her means allowed, even to the very diamond buckles of her shoes'. [Anne Seymour Damer], *Journal of the Heart*. Edited by the authoress of "Flirtation", [Lady Charlotte Bury] (Philadelphia: Carey and Lea, 1830) p.6. See also: Alison Yarrington,' Anne Seymour Damer: A sculptor of 'republican perfection'', E. Eger, ed. *Bluestockings Displayed: Portraiture, Performance and Patronage, 1730–1830*, pp.81-99 <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511667428>. Her husband's death had in theory released her from the shackles of coverture, so when Damer assumed total responsibility for her husband's finances, it might have been because of pressure exerted by her father-in-law, Joseph 1st Lord Milton (1718-1798). See: <https://www.history of parliament online.org/Research/members/1754-1790/Damer, Hon. John (1744-76)> [accessed 16 March 2024]. In *The Divorced*, Lady Howard inherits nothing from her second husband because he dies intestate (as opposed to bankrupt like Damer's husband; fictional Lord Howard is also predeceased by his heir whereas the Damers had no children). Equally seriously for Bury's heroine, the Dower Act had been passed in 1833 which meant that a widow was no longer guaranteed a third of her former husband's income. Lady Howard is financially ruined after the dissolution of her first marriage also, as will be discussed soon in greater detail, because if a woman left her husband without what was considered 'sufficient cause', she could not make any financial claims on him. Bury's heroine is shown to have fallen victim to an insidious double bind, because after her divorce , she neither benefits from maintenance nor recovers her status as *feme sole* (unlike Damer, again, who had been estranged from her husband before his death, but not divorced).
[125] Staves, *Married Women's Separate Property*, pp.36-37.

While challenging religious dogma and negotiating political conflict over women's moral status, Bury articulates, and discredits, commonplace assumptions in the speeches of villainous Miss Agar. The reader, antagonised and inflamed by Miss Agar's hypocrisy, is outraged when she discloses the heroine's backstory to the morally rigid Lady Leicester (and her son through her - the real target of her connivance). We learn that, like Lady Falkland (the divorcee at the margins of the narrative in *Love*), Laura chose not to conceal her affair with Lord Howard because she could not tolerate deception: 'noble she was, for she could not bear to go on living in a state of duplicity under her husband's eyes' (*TD* i p.94). Bury once again puts unpalatable truths about gender inequities into the mouth of the novel's most morally repellent mischief-maker, Miss Agar's ecstatic gloating personifying public clamour and once again disrupting moral certitudes. When the heroine subsequently defends herself to Lord Howard, the lover for whom she sacrificed herself, we willingly suspend our judgement:

> 'You charge me with a crime, of which you were the author, and in which you share, although the customs of society exonerate the man from all penalty in our case, and place it solely on the woman'. (*TD* ii p.122)

For women who marry badly, this speech implies, matrimonial law and cultural practices are more severe in England than in Scotland, the U.S. or any other Protestant country in Europe. Bury's narrative here changes public allegiances by consciously immersing the reader in the heroine's problems; emotionally affected by her plight, we adjust our own values and critique instead the moralists who persecute her.

In *The Divorced*, a capstone novel in which the political substance of Bury's entire corpus is aggregated, it is clear that the heroine's legal and social ruin arises directly out of her disadvantaged position as a woman. In 1833, Harriet Taylor-Mill had iterated Wollstonecraft's complaint that women cannot obtain power in marriage without financial independence.[126] When Lord Howard takes his own life, we experience the heroine's helplessness vicariously as she waits for his 'agent' (*TD* ii p.189) to complete his investigation:

[126] See: Taylor-Mill, Harriet, 'The Dissenting Marriage Question', The Monthly *Repository*, Vol 7 (73) <https://archive.org/details/sim_monthly-repository_183301_7_73/page/228/mode/2up>. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, Taylor-Mill's views were used in *The Monthly Repository* by both William Fox and William Bridges Adams, but these articles were either self-attributed or published anonymously.

> Mr Grey's next duty was to search Lord Howard's papers in order to ascertain if he had left a will…but after a most minute investigation, none whatever was found — all therefore, devolved to the heir. (ibid.)

The inescapable dilemma in which Laura finds herself is proclaimed by Mr Grey with the objectivity and finality of a judicial sentence: not only is there '"no provision whatever made for [her] on Lord Howard's estate"' (ii p.190), she inherits nothing from General De Lacy either (she has 'forfeited all claims upon him' and he has 'left her totally unprovided for' (ii p.191)). While it is not explained at this point, it is understood that she can look forward to receiving no assistance at all from her first husband because she lost her entitlement to financial support after choosing to leave him. Members of her second husband's family, in the meantime, have all disowned her. The irony at the heart of Laura's situation is compounded when she hears from her enemies that the beneficiary of Lord Howard's estate is 'a strange miser who lives on potatoe [sic] parings, somewhere in the north of England' (i p.232). At the end of *The Divorced*, Laura has been failed both by family and the judicial system: 'The miser had sold Howard House, the roof under which they lived and suffered. He had shut up the greater part of Howard Castle, living only in two rooms' (*TD* ii p.242). By investing the situation with irony, Bury rejects the didacticism of the moral-domestic novel: because of the chicanery of marriage and inheritance law in England, the narrative demonstrates, the well-being of married and divorced women can be neither earned nor bestowed upon them.

Lady Howard's circumstances are so confounded by a partial and gendered system of inheritance law that her situation, as the divorced wife of a nobleman, causes her as many difficulties as if she had been an impoverished and obscure spinster. While the families and friends of such historical figures as Emily Nugent, Mary Coke and Caroline Norton had been able to secure their economic futures by means of legacies and investments, the reader is confronted with the total destruction of the heroine in the closing stages of *The Divorced.* This contrasts with the relative positivity of Bury's earlier novel, *Conduct is Fate*, in which Bertha de Chanci is able eventually to access money which has been placed in trust by her family. The heroine in *The Divorced* ends up a childless widow without wealth, shelter or adequate resources to procure either. Whereas Bury had striven in *Conduct is Fate* to embed her subversive ideas within a more mainstream instructional narrative, she does not assuage the reader's anxieties by obscuring the extremity of the heroine's sufferings in her landmark novel of 1837. When the heroine finds that the system of inheritance law which protects the interests of her husband's family works relentlessly against her, the reader is brought close to the trauma of eviction by means of reported speech: 'she must leave Howard House immediately, such being the orders given him by his new client' (*TD* ii p.190). Forced out of

the family home and in need of lodgings, the heroine steals out of Howard House after dark to avoid the humiliation of being seen by servants. To emphasise her political point, Bury here subjectivises the heroine's suffering:

> When first she found herself in the open street alone, at night-fall, a strange feeling of desolation came over her (*TD* ii p.192).

The narrative here attempts to jolt us into an even greater understanding of the marginalised wife's destitution by immersing us in her lived experience of eviction: 'she saw the remnants of her wardrobe placed in a hackney coach, and she took up the jewel-box, her only means of subsistence' (*TD* ii p.197).

Because no progress had been made in improving women's employment opportunities in the fifteen years since the appearance of Bury's second novel, the heroine of *The Divorced*, existentially thwarted by her class and gender, fails to achieve economic independence after losing male protection. In *Conduct is Fate*, Bertha, like Burney's Juliet, decides upon governessing because she ''knew not what other course to pursue in a foreign country, without any means of support' (*CF* ii, p.107). In 1837, the divorcee's plight iterates the economic dilemma of Bury's earlier heroine;

> She now thought she would perform any labour, whether of head or hands, or both, of which she was capable; but who would employ her, an unknown? Or, if known, known as a divorced woman! (*TD* ii p.208)

Whereas Bertha de Chanci is enabled to gain employment as a governess when the liberal-minded Remonville provides her with a reference, Lady Howard's solitary efforts are blocked irrevocably by her compromised moral status as a divorced (and therefore adulterous) woman. While selling drawings offers her, and women like her, the possibility of an income, she knows it is unlikely to provide sufficient support:

> The shops are overstocked with such merchandise, and many a clever sketch lies in the shop window for months, without obtaining a purchaser, till, at length, the disappointed artist takes it away, soiled, and rendered useless. (ibid.)

The Divorced iterates and intensifies the author's earlier anxieties about women's welfare in scenes which appear to respond to the newly emerging social justice narratives of Charles Dickens. While silver-fork revisionist critic Cheryl A. Wilson's somewhat understated view in 2012 is that Bury 'gently comments on gender roles, family expectations and their influence upon an individual's ability to achieve a happy ending', Copeland, in the same year, acknowledges the

subversive energy which characterises Bury's antecedent narrative, *The Disinherited* (1834) — a novel which, he acknowledges, 'breaks new ground'.[127] In *Self-Indulgence* Corissande struggled with the physical demands of manual labour; in *The Disinherited* Bury iterates the problems of economic disenfranchisement by detailing the attempts of an impoverished patrician to professionalise as a painter:

> 'there are so many artists of celebrity whose names are already known in the great world, which alone ensures success, that, as for those who have only their own merit to recommend them, it is quite a hopeless case.'[128]

In the following decade, in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), Helen Huntingdon, who flies her abusive, alcoholic husband, does manage to support herself and her young son by sending paintings to London to be sold. Like Helen, the heroine in *The Disinherited* is eventually permitted to marry the man of her choice but only after suffering the detailed and harrowing financial consequences of the father's suicide; in 1837, however, there is no chance of such an outcome and the beleaguered heroine remains a moral and social outcast. As Bury's social justice narrative reaches its dramatic climax, Wollstonecraft's anxieties re-emerge alongside Taylor-Mill's protest—which would be formalised in '*Enfranchisement of Women*' (1851) — that 'neither women nor men need any law to exclude them from an occupation'.[129]

In Heilmann and Llewelyn's view, the chances of survival were bleak: 'The start of the Victorian age saw limited opportunities for women: girl, then woman; wife and mother; spinster (possibly), governess, widow—but all these served as middle-class positions; for the working classes the choices, even for married women, were often a lot starker and included prostitution'.[130] While Stone acknowledges the precariousness of existence for women in the higher social ranks during the period, he regrets the scarcity of primary material and the restrictive effect this has upon historians' ability to evaluate the private experiences of divorcees. Although the plight of outcast women in elite society is difficult to quantify historically, the heroine's experience in *The Divorced* corresponds closely to modern historical accounts of life for her social subordinates. According to Leonora Davidoff and Catherine Hall, for example, the economic ramifications for, and lived experiences of women who lost dower, could be especially harrowing:

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[127] Wilson, *Fashioning the Silver Fork Novel*, p.15. Copeland, *The Silver Fork Novel,* p.189.
[128] *The Disinherited* and *The Ensnared*, 3 vols (London: Richard Bentley, 1834), i p.107.
[129] Jose, 'Feminist Political Theory', p.842.
[130] Heilmann and Llewellyn, 'The Victorians, Sex and Gender', p.166.

> when women were left without support, often also without a home and social place, they might be particularly vulnerable. Often they were left with partial income such as an annuity, too low to support a respectable lifestyle no matter how circumscribed. Such women were forced to move from one friend or relative to another, caring for children, nursing the sick, giving a hand in the shop, acting as a companion to an elderly aunt or uncle.[131]

More recently, Amanda Vickery has enquired closely into the private lives of economically insolvent women: 'Single women of very narrow income had to be brave, realistic, and resilient to craft a life. Their living conditions were generally worse than those of the other great category of lone women: widows. Spinsters lived in markedly more confined circumstances, likely as single-room boarders.'[132] Stone, again acknowledging the scarcity of primary sources, assumes on the basis of 'scattered evidence' that 'some divorced and aristocratic wives were successfully reintegrated and accepted by most of high society, although shunned by some and gossiped about by most. Others, however, were forced to live lonely and isolated lives in the countryside or abroad, and did not attempt to be seen in London society'.[133] *The Divorced* was written to raise awareness of the humiliations endured by a particularly overlooked class of disenfranchised women during the era, the novel unsettling our moral certainties when even the family governess quits her post for the sake of her reputation: '"we are told not to meddle with pitch, lest we be defiled thereby"' (*TD* i p.11). Later, Lady Howard will similarly be demeaned by another social inferior, a pawnbroker who, after forcing her to identify herself, segregates her from the other women in his shop lest she contaminate them. The heroine's degradation is compounded, finally, when she relocates to prosaic lodgings in Orchard Street in bourgeois Marylebone. At this point Bury's visceral account is deliberately graphic and Dickensian: 'the door was thrown open, whence there came out that mixture of a damp smell, with the remains of eating, which is so sickly and oppressive' (*TD* ii p.195). The heroine's downward trajectory finally ends when she is reduced to selling her last gem within the environs of a London pawnbroker's:

> "One hundred pounds," thought Lady Howard, "would make me comfortable for a length of time. One hundred pounds to the houseless and destitute seems a large sum; to the great and rich, those who have never known penury, nothing." (*TD* ii p.221)

[131] Davidoff and Hall, p.285.
[132] Amanda Vickery, 'No Happy Ending?' At Home with Miss Bates in Georgian England', *Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal*, 37 (2015), pp.134–151(p.143).
[133] Stone, *Road to Divorce*, p.344.

In this passage, the collective 'those who have never known penury' is a deliberate swipe at the readership. Women like Lady Howard, the author implies, suffer want and degradation beyond the reach of most middle and upper-class imaginations; the penalties society imposes upon the blameless and socially ostracised woman extend far beyond what the rigidly pious, themselves, could possibly endure.[134] As her suffering intensifies, Bury refuses to resolve the narrative and thus withholds the reassurance and affirmation the reader craves; in her ground-breaking social justice novel, she instead protests loudly on behalf of women who, like Lady Howard, suffer public vilification in society for 'crimes' they have not committed only to become at once invisible and all too soon forgotten.[135]

Bury's chief purpose in particularising the difficulties encountered by the victims of divorce is to raise women's awareness of their vulnerability in marriage and to support the petitions of contemporary political campaigners for changes in the law. While the narrative spares the heroine the ultimate horror of prostitution with the timely re-introduction of her first-born son, Lord Stuart, there is no attempt made to reassure the reader by offering her religious redemption or remarriage. In the closing scenes, as elsewhere in Bury's fiction, the narrative is punctuated with didactic asides to propitiate the reader ('such is often the portion of those who, like Lady Howard, forsake their first husband — their first duty' (*TD* i p.213)); in this, the most politically explicit of her novels, however, the bereaved mother dies a godless and embittered death thoroughly resenting the loss of her second family. With a final twist, the ironically named 'Beauchamp Villa' in Richmond, bestowed upon her by her surviving son, is demolished to make way for a 'brew house' (*TD* ii 242). Even more tragically, the razing of her home takes with it the

[134] Amanda Vickery's investigative work has uncovered substantial historic evidence of the problems caused to women in Lady Howard's position by a culture based on expansive social networks and hierarchical structures. Particularly poignant is her account of Ellen Weeton Stock (c.1776-c.1844), the married governess and activist who was forced to live as a spinster in Lancashire in the 1820s having been 'estranged from her violent husband and beloved daughter'. Bury's fictional account corresponds with Vickery's description of the daily humiliations endured by impoverished and socially isolated women: 'Living alone was weary, dreary work, while heating, lighting, washing, and eating for one was costly. Ellen was even scorned by the butcher, who refused her tiny cuts of meat' (Vickery, ibid.).

[135] In conventional silver-fork novel, *Mothers and Daughters* (1831), Catherine Gore melodramatises the distress of adulteress Lucy Barringhurst — a secondary character — and the reader views and benefits morally from her 'fall' through the responses of the novel's virtuously married heroine; 'Lady Robert Lorton dejectedly ascended the narrow staircase of an obscure retreat in the neighbourhood of Kensington – entered a darkened chamber- and seated herself beside a sofa, on which reclined the wasted and languid figure of the once lovely Lady Barringhurst.' Catherine Gore, *Mothers and Daughters* (London: H. Colburn and R. Bentley, 1831), ii, p.128.

very last vestige of her existence: 'The cedar, with one or two myrtles and ilexes, alone remain by which its site can be remembered' (ibid.). In its finale, the novel is torn between the competing modes of tragedy and absurdity and, in ending on a bleakly modernist note, anticipates the narratives of far more definitively dissident bad-marriage writers such as Thomas Hardy in the later nineteenth century.

3.6 Subsequent political developments and the legacy of *The Divorced*

As I have been arguing here, *The Divorced* is Bury's attempt to change the moral standards of an unequal and unjust culture through fiction; it is also a novel which was written to support the activism of her political contemporaries as debates about married women's legal status surged in the mid-to-late 1830s. Lord Lyndhurst asserted during the campaign to pass the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 that a woman who was separated from her husband was 'at the mercy of her enemies. Is that fair? Is that honest? Can it be vindicated upon any principle of justice, or mercy, or of common humanity?'[136] Lord Mulgrave similarly described her as 'driven from the protection of her family, from the society of her friends, and deprived of the notice and estimation of her whole circle of acquaintance'.[137] Also in 1857, The Earl of Malmesbury complained that 'the public showed their feelings by turning their back upon the guilty.'[138]

Lady Howard's annihilation is complete after her husband takes his own life in despair at the loss of Alice Talbot — who dies of consumption complicated by disappointment in love. While melodramatic, her end is hastened by the profound anguish and pity she feels for her mother:

> "This, then, is the reason she never goes out; this, then, is the reason no ladies visit her, and that my name is so carefully written on the cards which are left at our door. Oh! how my heart bleeds for her disgrace and humbling; how much more should we, her children, be kind to her; how much more does she require our love; and papa, too, I wish he were never cross to her; he ought not to be cross to her; for how miserable it must make her, that he, for whom she forfeited all, should be for an instant harsh. This, then, is the reason of her mournful looks; this, then, is the cause of her weeping so often — poor dear mamma! —" and Alice Talbot's heart did indeed bleed. (*TD* i p.117)

[136] Lee Holcombe, *Wives and Property*, p.101.
[137] Stone, *Road to Divorce*, p.343.
[138] Ibid.

In this key speech, Bury reconfigures established notions of morality: through Alice Talbot's eloquent deliberations, the figure of the ostracised woman is finally validated and a less rigid code of ethics proffered. Bury has created a new style of heroine in the divorcee's daughter and holds her up as a liberal-humanist alternative to the religious dogma advanced by characters such as Ladies Leicester and Harcourt. Elsewhere in the novel, Lord William Stuart articulates a synonymous discourse in which entrenched attitudes, misogyny and social taboos are challenged. After having met and bonded with his half-brother, Henry Talbot, on the continent, he asks rhetorically on behalf both of his half-siblings and all victims of divorce, 'Why should such cruel contradictions destroy all the social affections? Why should it offend my father that I love my mother and her children?' (*TD* ii p.88).

One unnamed reviewer in *The Athaeneum* agrees early in 1837 that the divorcee at the centre of Bury's novel is no moral outlaw; she is, instead, a 'patient enduring creature who has fallen from her high estate, though married to her betrayer'.[139] In March of the same year, Theodore Hook even more gratifyingly gave the robust approval Bury had been striving for. While the reviewer's objectivity, as editor of the *New Monthly Magazine* and *Humourist*, could be questioned (given that the publication had been launched by Henry Colburn in 1814 to puff his own authors), Hook's appraisal is measured as well as staunch. Far from denouncing Bury for the novel's partisan treatment of an adulterous marriage, he singles out the author's candour for commendation: 'The Divorce" [sic] is a subject which needed to be treated as Lady Charlotte has treated it'.[140] In Hook's review, disapproval is not directed at the 'pennyless' [sic] woman but, according to the teachings of a principled and upstanding authoress, at 'the immoral world' which subjects her to 'scorn and contempt'.[141]

Not all appraisals were glowing, however. In the following month an article appeared in *The Monthly Review* which attempted to restore public notions of propriety to their conventional standard. For this critic, the heroine's divorce and remarriage is a 'bold outrage' and the fact that the 'the guilty pair' do not morally contaminate their offspring means the narrative does not deliver 'the proper lesson to be taught'.[142] The novelist ultimately fails, he maintains, because she does not 'teach by giving to virtue its due rewards and to vice its chastisements'.[143] The reviewer's willingness to acknowledge the veracity of the novel would undoubtedly have gratified Bury,

[139] *Our Library Table.* The Athenaeum; Feb 25, 1837; 487; British Periodicals p.135.
[140] Hook, p.443.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Anon., 'Book review', *The Monthly Review,* p.604.
[143] 'Book review', ibid.

nevertheless; in conceding both that 'the story may have had actual occurrences for its origin', and that she demonstrates 'an uncommon acquaintance with the world in the higher walks of life', he unwittingly acknowledges Bury's success in shaping an innovative and eloquent political critique.[144]

It is the moral certitude and dogma of *The Monthly Review* and its subscribers that Bury's narrative seeks to unsettle. Accordingly, it would have been Hook's tribute to the divorcee's daughter that provided the affirmation that the novelist sought. Hook concludes that, far from emblematising the debasing consequences of women's adultery, the daughter at the centre of the novel is a characterisation which perfectly defines moral rectitude and virtue: 'The gentle and affectionate disposition, the sensitive and romantic temperament, are supported by strict and high principle'.[145] For Hook, this figure also attests to the integrity of the author: 'No person who did not deeply feel what her sex can and ought to be, could have embodied so delicate and yet so noble a conception as the character of Alice Howard.'[146] This double validation attests to the author's supreme competence in confronting the reading public with its own prejudice and misogyny. For Hook, Bury's divorce narrative breaks social and moral taboos for political ends: it is 'a subject which needed to be treated as Lady Charlotte has treated it'.[147]

As the marriage debates of the 1830s approached their climax, Bury's innovative text raised the profile of women whose lives were blighted by institutionalised misogyny as well as uncovering and challenging the frameworks erected by men to circumscribe and control them. We can trace Bury's influence on Caroline Norton's campaigns beginning in 1836 when she lobbied against the laws which gave a father undivided custody over his children. In 1837, Norton published '*Separation of Mother and Child by the Law of Custody of Infants'*; when the Infant Custody Bill failed on its first readings, she published another polemical pamphlet under a pseudonym in 1839: A *Plain Letter to the Lord Chancellor on the Infant Custody Bill,* copies of which were sent to all members of Parliament. It was Caroline Norton's 'great victory' that the Bill successfully went through both Houses and passed into law in August 1839, giving women who separated from their husbands and who were not guilty of adultery the right to custody of under seven year-olds and access to any child under sixteen.[148] In 1856 Lord Lyndhurst went on to introduce legislation,

[144] Ibid.
[145] Hook, ibid.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Ibid.
[148] Andrzej Diniejko, 'Caroline Norton: A Biographical Sketch' <https://victorianweb.org/authors/norton/biography.html> [accessed 10 March 2022]

as a precursor to the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857, which protected the property of separated wives; at the same time, Lord St Leonards successfully proposed that the legislation should extend to women who had been deserted by their husbands. The campaign would receive official sanction in 1869 with a prose tract by the parliamentarian, John Stuart Mill, 'The Subjection of Women', in which he asserted, 'Marriage is the only actual bondage known to our law. There remain no legal slaves, except the mistress of every house'.[149]

The Divorced succeeds as a novel of dissent because it immerses us in the historical, social and cultural contexts which produced it. The narrative thus ends as it had begun by affirming the veracity of the events chronicled; 'Let it not be imagined that this history is a fiction, or an exaggerated description of the consequences which accrued from Lady Howard's crime. The events here recorded, cannot be entirely effaced from the remembrance of the present' (*TD* ii p.244). This chapter has shown that women such as Caroline Norton and Rosina Bulwer Lytton actively sought Bury's sympathy and support as they fell victim to the injustices of matrimonial law and she successfully provided a platform for their protests through the medium fiction. As observed by Lawrence Stone, 'All that these women wanted, and which between 1835 and 1885 they succeeded in obtaining, was access to the courts for all wives, legal protection for their property, right to child custody, and a limited right, in extreme cases, to full divorce'.[150]

We have seen how Hook defined *The Divorced* as a masterpiece of verisimilitude: 'Who shall deny the truth of the picture? None who knows society as it now exists'. In 1936, even Matthew Whiting Rosa — one of Bury's most determined detractors — described *The Divorced* as 'her best work'.[151] With the single exception of Anne Humpherys, Bury's landmark novel has nevertheless been relegated by scholars to the literary margins. What this chapter has attempted to show is that as the debates of the 1830s approached their climax, Bury's innovative text progressed campaigns to improve women's legal standing by raising the profile of those whose lives were blighted by institutionalised misogyny and the systemic inequities of English matrimonial law. The particular and unique role Bury played in progressing cultural and legal changes in England was validated by Routledge when *The Divorced* was re-issued in an unchanged version in 1858 - a year

[149] Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, 2nd edition (London: Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer, 1869), p.147.
[150] Stone, ibid., p.363.
[151] Matthew Whiting Rosa, *The Silver Fork School* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), p.154.

after the passing of the Matrimonial Causes Act.[152] As Mary Shanley astutely observes, 'The small band of feminists who carried on the agitation for these reforms stimulated a reform movement of great significance for the legal status of married women, and their efforts provoked a reconsideration of marriage which was central to the development of feminist thought in the later nineteenth century'.[153]

[152] See: Humpherys, 'Breaking Apart', p.48. Two years later, *Love* was reissued by the same publisher.

[153] Shanley, 'One Must Ride Behind', p.356. In 1857, with the Matrimonial Causes Act pending, Lady Lytton published details of her husband's philandering and abuse in a tract entitled 'Appeal to the Justice and Charity of the English People ''Lady Bulwer Lytton's Appeal to the Justice and Charity of the English Public'' ' (1857). He responded within days by having Rosina incarcerated in an asylum. She was released after only a few weeks following a public outcry, but the episode (which marked the high-water mark of a husband's power) moved the question of men's legal domination over women centre stage. See: Marie Mulvey-Roberts, "Lytton, Rosina Anne Doyle Bulwer [née Rosina Anne Doyle Wheeler], Lady Lytton (1802–1882), novelist." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.* 23 Sep. 2004 [accessed 4 March 2024]. Following the passage of the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857, which allowed civil divorce in England for the first time, Wilkie Collins used the notoriety generated by Lady Lytton's case to focus public attention on the legally-endorsed practice of imprisoning uncooperative or outspoken women in his best-selling novel, *The Woman in White* (1859).

Conclusion

This thesis has proposed that Lady Charlotte Bury is one of the most significant yet overlooked women's rights activists of the early nineteenth century. In three chronologically arranged chapters, I have attempted to shift entrenched critical views by redefining Bury's novels as matrimonial reform literature rather than silver-fork or courtship fiction. My project has also attempted to correct the tendency of modern studies to confuse Bury's politically-charged, often polemical narratives, with the fiction of more recognisably silver-fork (and therefore conservative) novelists, such as Catherine Gore (1798–1861) and Marguerite Gardiner, Countess of Blessington (1789–1849).While silver-fork critic, Edward Copeland, broke with critical tradition in his influential monograph of 2012 by making specific reference to the political innovations in Bury's fiction, her work has been the subject of no significant scholarly interventions since. This project thus attempts to complete and extend Copeland's critical analysis by re-situating Bury's literary production within the historical and cultural context as well as proffering a feminist, revisionist view of her novels.

A retrograde step was taken early last year, when, as noted in my introduction, the derision directed so destructively at Bury by Matthew Whiting Rosa in 1936 was resurrected in *The First Celebrities*: P.J. Bowman's provocative account of five 'Georgian celebrities' which characterises her as an intellectual lightweight who ventured into fiction out of purely financial and narcissistic motives. This thesis has rejected this and other reductionist readings by demonstrating that, far from merely pursuing acclaim as an aristocratic author of *romans-à-clef*, Bury used the conventions of popular fiction to discredit, not to celebrate, the values of her class. Through a close examination of *Self-Indulgence* (1812), *Conduct is Fate* (1822), and *The Divorced* (1837), I have argued that, in each of the first three decades of the nineteenth century, she supported the campaigns of both previous, and contemporary, women activists for the reform of matrimonial law. Referring extensively to historical and political frameworks, I have contextualised these novels by showing that while unhappily married women of Bury's generation could sue for divorce, in theory, women of property and rank were far more likely to fall victim to improvised deeds of separation or even abandonment. Even more perniciously, those women who were desperate enough to circumvent the rigours of coverture by seeking love outside marriage, would often be forced into the public eye by their husbands through the legal process of criminal conversation. As Bury's landmark divorce novel of 1837 has shown, whether or not they were enabled to remarry by the legal dissolution of a marriage, women who endured the emotional and social problems which followed frequently disappeared entirely from public view. These are the women, often known personally or related to the author, to whom Bury's novels give a voice.

By dramatising their unseen private experiences, she not only reanimates the narrative strategies of Mary Wollstonecraft's fictional fragment, *The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria*: she populates her novels with the historical figures of forgotten abandoned, separated and divorced women and, by appealing to the collective conscience, changes the allegiances of the demographic whose values she wanted to reform.

I ended chapter 1 by quoting Ben Griffin, a historian who, in the course of tracing the legislative processes which improved women's rights as individuals, is awestruck by the activists who campaigned, petitioned and lobbied parliament during the period. Issues such as women's ownership of property, their custodial rights as mothers and even their ability to access divorce were all publicised, scrutinised and subjected to new statutes which passed into law within the space of only thirty years. Griffin marvels how, after centuries of unchallenged male power, separated women could, at last, seek redress against abusive or negligent husbands and even sue them for financial maintenance: the 'legal and political privileges that had underpinned male power for centuries were either swept away or substantially undermined.' How, Griffin asks, did all of this happen?[1]

At its heart, this project has attempted to provide an answer to Griffin's question by establishing that Bury used her novels during the first half of the nineteenth century as a platform to support women's efforts to change the laws affecting their rights. In the course of the discussion I have considered the social and legal issues which framed her novels, sourcing, amongst others, 'law and literature' texts such as *Subversion and Sympathy: Gender, Law, and the British Novel* (2013). In this analysis, lawyers Alison L. La Croix and Martha C. Nussbaum discuss ways in which 'the novel participated in legal change by dramatising problems that the law needed to address', going so far as to assert that 'divorce law was substantially reformed during the mid-nineteenth century […] in part as a direct result of the impact of novels'.[2] Whilst evidently not claiming sole agency for Bury in achieving the legal reforms outlined here, I have shown decisively that she issued a direct challenge in her publications to the politically conservative establishment, and that her fiction consciously attempted to raise women's awareness of the legal chicaneries of coverture by confronting them with women's lived experience of marriage. My project embeds its revisionist approach to Bury's fiction by drawing on the research also of E.J. Clery, Vivien Jones and Claudia L. Johnson along with other feminist scholars who have enhanced our understanding of women's

[1] Ben Griffin, ''Feminism' and the history of women's rights', in *The Politics of* Gender, p.5 (same source, already cited).
[2] La Croix, and Nussbaum, 'Introduction', *Subversion and Sympathy*, pp.9,15.

writing by recovering and reinterpreting the work of the revolutionary women writers who preceded her. To further clarify our understanding of the social and gender inequities by which Bury's novels were framed, I have also accessed the publications of social historians Lawrence Stone, Amanda Vickery, Joanne Bailey and Ginger Frost as well as legal specialists such as Susan Moller Okin, Ruth Perry, Ian Ward and Susan Staves. Of especial importance to the case I have made that Bury's fiction articulates a fundamentally proto-feminist, political message is the scholarship of Rebecca Probert — a matrimonial law historian who, besides analysing the individual legal dilemmas experienced in England by married women during the period, discusses the relative freedoms enjoyed by their European counterparts in unpublished material to which she has generously allowed me personal access.

I have argued that far from merely 'pandering to the desire for romantic novels about high society', Bury used her fiction as a platform both to raise awareness of the systemic inequities which marriage implied for women and to progress previous and contemporary campaigns to reform these injustices.[3] In my first chapter I thus engage in detail with her literary response to the revolutionary discourse of late eighteenth-century proto-feminist writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft, and Charlotte Smith: authors who publicly confronted the economic and social problems caused to women both within wedlock and when a marriage breaks down. In my second chapter I demonstrate that because there had been no improvement in women's legal entitlements in the ten years which intervened between her first and second novels, *Conduct is Fate* centralises the problems caused to women by the indissolubility of matrimony. This chapter also traces the increasingly polemical trajectory of her fiction as well as referring to the activism during the 1820s of early feminist orator and apologist, Anna Doyle Wheeler. Wheeler was one of several radical campaigners attached to the Unitarian church who sought to improve women's legal standing by harnessing the literature of progressive fictional and non-fictional writers during the 1820s and 30s. My third chapter focuses on the most politically significant novel Bury published during her career, *The Divorced* — a narrative in which the author appears to respond to, and support, the protests of another writer and women's rights activist, Harriet Taylor-Mill. In this landmark text, I have argued, Bury breaks with narrative and social convention by focusing on the struggles experienced by an aristocratic woman during the second marriage after a divorce: as observed by Anne Humpherys, 'In all other early divorce novels, when the wife leaves her husband she essentially drops out of the story, even as she disappears from people's

[3] *The New Biographical Dictionary of Scottish Women*, 2nd edn, ed. by Elizabeth Ewan and others (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), pp.66–107(p.66) *JSTOR* <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctv2f4vh1g.16> [accessed 27 June 2022].

conversation.'[4] By focusing on Bury's formal innovations in *The Divorced*, this chapter argues that she consciously challenged moral and narrative taboos to make a political point; I have duly argued that the novel was shaped by contemporary high-profile infant custody battles involving society figures such as Caroline Norton (1808–77) and Wheeler's daughter, Lady Rosina Bulwer Lytton (1802–1882), both of whom campaigned for changes in the law after falling victim, respectively, to their husbands' domestic violence and adultery. To arouse pity and indignation about the humiliations endured by a particularly overlooked and vilified class of disenfranchised women, Bury also provokes alarm in *The Divorced* by confronting the seismic erosions of widowed and divorced women's property rights which had passed into law between 1811 and 1833. In 1837, Bury thus inaugurates a genre and, by eschewing the conventions of the romance, Gothic and composite novels of her early career, uses fiction to campaign for changes in moral attitudes towards divorcees and widows and to protest against the legal and economic frameworks by which they were oppressed.

This research has attempted to change critical perceptions by redefining Bury's achievements within the context of a more polemical literary tradition than has been previously allowed. To emphasise the political relevance of her fiction, I have surveyed significant new opportunities offered by two critical works which appeared subsequent to the publication in 1999 of Anne Humpherys's study of the pre-Victorian divorce novel. Of especial relevance to this project, and of strategic importance for the genealogy of nineteenth-century fiction in general, is Kelly Hager's acclaimed 2010 study of divorce in the early novels of Charles Dickens.[5] As I have argued in chapter 3, Hager sees the tendency of scholars to overstep bad-marriage narratives in favour of the moral-domestic genre as problematic — a practice, she proposes, that originates in Ian Watt's seminal text, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (1957): a work that has, since the middle of the last century, specified the courtship plot as the defining model for studies of eighteenth and nineteenth-century literature.[6] In the same decade, Carolyn Lambert similarly forbears to discuss the courtship narrative in *For Better, For Worse* (2018), considering instead the attempts made by women writers during the period to subvert and challenge the patriarchal marriage laws.[7] While Lambert readily acknowledges the importance of such fictional works in helping 'to shape thought, to pose questions and to proffer answers', she resembles

[4] Humpherys, 'Breaking Apart', p.48.
[5] Kelly Hager, *Dickens and the Rise of Divorce: The Failed-Marriage Plot and the Novel Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2016).
[6] Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1857).
[7] Carolyn Lambert, *For Better, For Worse* (London: Routledge, 2018).

Hager in excluding earlier and more subversive novelists from her study.[8] As chapter 3 points out, while both of these scholars challenge our understanding of the marriage-centred narratives which post-date *The Divorced*, they are linked, and also limited, by featuring only those writers who avoid controversy by surveying 'the deep structure of the institution of marriage in a nuanced way'.[9] These are important studies, nevertheless and, as Hager points out, her 'taxonomy of the failed-marriage plot' strives to include 'the 'Gothic bigamy plot' and the sensation novels of the 1860s as well as the plot that reveals the impoverished legal status of wives (most notably in novels by crusaders like Mary Wollstonecraft and Caroline Norton)'.[10] Both of these critiques are a clear attempt to revise existing critical discourse and, as such, are as welcome as they are long overdue.

Any attempt to accommodate the 'failed-marriage' novel within the literary canon is certainly replete with critical possibilities and should, in my opinion, form the point of departure for any future study of Bury's fiction. Indeed, one of the most significant issues that I have encountered in undertaking this research is the lack of a relevant critical corpus: this is a problem, however, which might also open up substantial academic opportunities. That Bury's prose narratives have been much-neglected since her early successes in the 1820s and 30s, this thesis leaves little room to doubt; a survey of this project's bibliography will also attest to the fact that her novels have been marginalised by modern criticism because of the position they occupy in the space between the late-Romantic and Victorian eras – a period which, to iterate the words of Michael Sadleir, consists of 'the output of upwards of fifteen still neglected years'.[11] As far as the fictional genre is concerned, there has certainly been a tendency to view the 1820s and 30s as an isolated, elitist niche which creates a 'void' between Scott and Dickens (as described by 1980s silver-fork critics Engel and King) – an assumption, I would argue, which has severely curtailed the body of scholarship that might otherwise have been created.[12] In her review of 2007, Susanne Schmid accordingly welcomes Harriet Devine Jump's early twenty-first century collection of silver-fork novels precisely because it 'remedies such gaps in the cultural memory'.[13] What remains

[8] Lambert, *For Better*, p.2.
[9] Ibid., p.11.
[10] Hager, pp.25-26.
[11] Sadleir, *Nineteenth-Century Fiction.*
[12] Elliot Engel and Margaret F. King, *The Victorian Novel before Victoria* (London: Palgrave Macmillan,1984), p.9.
[13] Schmid, S. (2007) "Silver-fork Novels, 1826–1841, gen. ed. Harriet Devine Jump. Vol.1: Thomas Henry Lister, Granby: A Novel (1826), ed. Clare Bainbridge; Vol.2: Letitia Landon, Romance and Reality, ed. Cynthia Lawford; Vol.3: Edward Bulwer Lytton, Godolphin. A Novel, ed. Harriet Devine Jump; Vol.4: Marguerite, Countess of Blessington, The Victims of Society, ed. Ann R. Hawkins &

unaddressed, however, is the persisting invisibility of the era: as Schmid points out, 'these in-between decades do not even have a period label of their own'.[14] This gap in critical discourse nevertheless provides an opportunity – and surely even requires us – to reconsider previously neglected writers of the post-Regency. Far from occupying a cultural wasteland, Bury's fiction both participated in, and drove, debates during a period of unprecedented social upheaval. While acknowledging that she focuses upon gender politics in the years immediately preceding and following the First Reform Act of 1832, rather than upon the democratic and electoral rights of middle-class men, this thesis contends that a re-evaluation of her novels is long overdue. During a period which is conventionally regarded as an interlude – both in the history of the novel and the drive by women campaigners to achieve improved legal rights – Bury's fiction supported, shaped, and was in turn shaped by, some of this country's most dynamic cultural debates and seismic political events.

What then, can future scholarship offer the novels of Lady Charlotte Bury? Across the three chapters of this thesis I have rejected the definitions of Bury's fiction offered by traditional criticism, proposing instead that a fresh approach to literary genealogy could offer significant new possibilities for writers who have failed to fit into one category or another. While the early activism which forms the backdrop to Bury's publications has, until recently, been overshadowed by the achievements of the women's suffrage movement which followed, our understanding of the period could be significantly enhanced by further enquiring into the interface between Bury's novels and the writings of her political contemporaries and vice versa. Kathryn Gleadle, one of the very few historians to have studied the personal networks and organisational structures which made up the early women's movement, shows, alongside Helen McCabe, Jo Ellen Jacobs and Ann P. Robson, that in a period normally regarded as an interlude in women's political campaigns, the debates involving the nature and purpose of marriage were generated in particular by members of William Johnson Fox's Unitarian church in Finsbury. This early precursor to the women's movement, she contends, not only drove a century of legal and social activism, but as discussed in my second and third chapters, both framed and made use of contemporary writing in fictional and non-fictional modes. Along with biographical studies of radical early feminist Anna Doyle Wheeler by Marie Mulvey-Roberts, Menaka Philips, James Jose and Dolores Dooley, Gleadle's

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Jeraldine R. Kraver; Vol.5: Rosina Bulwer Lytton, Cheveley; or, The Man of Honour, ed. Marie Mulvey-Roberts; Vol.6: Catherine Gore, Cecil: or, The Adventures of a Coxcomb, ed. Andrea Hibbard & Edward Copeland", *Anglia*, 125.1 (2007), pp.156-158 (p.157) <https://doi.org/10.1515/ANGL.2007.156>.

[14] Ibid., p.156.

historicist interventions offer particularly important opportunities for future study; while revolutionary women activists of the eighteenth century have benefitted from extensive examination at the hands of critics, Harriet Taylor-Mill and Anna Wheeler — along with other early feminists — have received far less attention. This means that, along with the scarcity of critical material, Bury's fictional reanimation of late eighteenth-century revolutionary discourse along with her political response to, and role in progressing, the efforts of contemporary women's activists, has still to be acknowledged.

Bury's fiction was a product of the literary and historical context in which it was written: no scholarship yet exists, however, which uncovers the connections between her proto-feminist, bad-marriage novels and the culture and events which shaped them. I have found during the course of this research, indeed, that many of her novels are now all but obsolete. While the BL has made *The Roses* available via its website and reissued *The Lady of Fashion* (1856) as part of its series of Historical Print Editions in 2021, other texts can be sourced only online (digitised in large part by the efforts of Hathitrust Digital Library, Project Gutenberg and Google books during the last decade or so).[15] This scarcity of primary material, indeed, attests to Bury's near extinction as a novelist and has created several logistical problems for this research; while Oxford and Cambridge Universities hold one copy apiece of *The Two Baronets. A Novel of Fashionable Life* (1864), for example, the text is accessible to the general public at only one other repository in Britain — the British Library — from whom I had to purchase an expensive reprographic copy. I have since accessed holdings there to make my own photographic version of *The Wilfulness of Woman* (1844) — another valuable primary text which is unavailable elsewhere in this country and cannot, as yet, be accessed online.[16]

The *Diary Illustrative of the Times of George the Fourth (Diary 1838)*, which became Bury's greatest commercial success and has been used extensively as a primary source by historians of the Regency, remains the only work authored by Bury to have been reproduced in its entirety in the modern period. Routledge reprinted excerpts from the *Diary 1838* in both 1993 and 2010 as part of a collection of biographies edited by John Mullan and others: the *Diary 1838* is not discussed in either edition as an autonomous text, however — only as a source of support for the

[15] See: Lady Charlotte Bury, *Lady of Fashion,* (London: Goodpress, 2021).
[16] Bury, *The Wilfulness of Woman,* 3 vols (London: Colburn, 1844). By the same author [posthumously]: *The Two Baronets. A Novel of Fashionable Life,* 1 vol (London: Routledge, Warne and Routledge, 1864).

biographical analysis of Walter Scott.[17] In 2009 the critical conversation took a significant and welcome step forward when the *Diary 1838* was re-issued in two volumes by Pickering and Chatto and edited by Amy Culley. In this fully-annotated scholarly version, Culley refreshes our understanding of Bury's role as a writer by authenticating both identities and events in her anonymised, non-sequential and chronologically inconsistent journal.[18] Further nuanced, intertextual readings of Bury's unpublished literary and non-fictional writings could both raise our critical awareness and greatly enhance the profile of this understudied writer, as well as helping us to reposition her body of work within the historical continuum.

An almost equally valuable primary but unpublished text which has, again, enabled me to discuss authoritatively the provenance of *Self-Indulgence* as well as Bury's autobiographical experience of marriage between 1795 and 1809, is a private journal written during the period of her first marriage in the years 1805–10. As discussed in my first chapter, the Hartley Library at the University of Southampton has made available a copy of the transcript compiled by Mary Isabel Fry currently held, along with the source document, in the Huntington Library. While the *Diary 1805–10* evidences ways in which Bury used her rank and knowledge of exclusive society to evaluate political and gender issues during the period, the journal remains unpublished and has thus never received a full critical appraisal. Another private diary, begun in 1799 and held in the NLS, similarly provides invaluable biographical insights. Amy Culley's view of the *Diary 1838* can be applied with equal relevance to Bury's earlier, unpublished memoirs: 'the Diary's status as an alternative form of history has not yet been addressed'.[19]

While Pam Perkins makes valuable use of archival material in her insightful discussion of Bury's poetry in 2002, further enquiry into Bury's diaries — which, between 1799 and 1815, form an

[17] John Mullan, Ralph Pite, Fiona Robertson, Jenny Wallace, *Lives of the Great Romantics, Part II, Volume 3 Keats, Coleridge and Scott by their Contemporaries,* 2nd edn (Abingdon, Oxford: Routledge, 2010). In Routledge's *Historical Resources Series*, editors Ghislaine McDayter and John Hunter include amongst their selection of extracts reprinted from nineteenth-century memoirs newspapers and literary journals etc. passages from two of Bury's novels. Volume 2 includes excerpts from *The Maneuvring Mother* (1842) and *The Lady of Fashion* (1856) while *The Maneuvring Mother* (chapter 13) features again in Volume 3. Across three volumes, the editors focus upon women's lives in the context of their gendered education, the young woman's entrance onto the marriage market and her experience of normative femininity as a wife and mother. See: Ghislaine McDayter and John Hunter, *Flirtation and courtship in nineteenth-century British culture*: *Female Power and the Rules of Courtship*, 1st edn, 3 vols (Abingdon, Oxford: Routledge, 2022), vols 2 and 3.

[18] See: Amy Culley, *Women's Court and Society Memoirs,* 4 vols (Pickering & Chatto: London, 2009).

[19] Culley, p.2.

almost uninterrupted narrative — could afford highly constructive opportunities for probing the provenance of her fiction as well as uncovering further political networks and connections. My individual research at the NLS has so far disclosed some of Bury's extensive correspondence with cultural figures in Edinburgh and London during the years of her first marriage and afterwards; I have also availed myself of the National Archives Discovery search engine to locate holdings at the British Library, University College London and other major repositories. While further enquiry could solidify our understanding of Bury's political and moral creed and form a basis for future discussion, additional unstudied material no doubt remains concealed.[20] Several recent publications have marked an upsurge in interest in the women who campaigned for the reform of matrimonial law in the early nineteenth century. In her study of 2021, Ophélie Siméon, for example, has built upon previous scholarship relating to Anne Wheeler,[21] while a new biography of Caroline Norton was published by Antonia Fraser shortly after the appearance in 2020 of a collection of her letters edited by Marie Mulvey-Roberts.[22] The decision taken in 2021 by English Heritage to commemorate Caroline Norton's domicile of over three decades in Chesterfield Street also attests to a new-found willingness in the modern period to commemorate the lives and work of the early campaigners. While these interventions are welcome, they are long overdue and point to the timeliness — and also the thorough appropriateness — of extending and developing the research here offered into Bury's neglected corpus.

Bury's life and writing evidently offers a wide variety of possibilities for further enquiry. Some of the more recently-published biographical works referenced in this project — by W. Willmott Dixon[23] and Lady Constance Russell,[24] for example — consist of engaging

[20] According to editors at the Orlando Project, 'The most scandalous and arguably the most interesting selections of her diary remain almost unknown' — a compelling claim which invites further scrutiny. Brown, Susan, Patricia Clements, and Isobel Grundy, eds., "Lady Charlotte Bury Profile" Orlando: Women's Writing in the British Isles from the Beginnings to the Present, Cambridge University Press, 2022 <https://orlando.cambridge.org/index.php/profiles/burych> [accessed 28 October 2023].

[21] Ophélie Siméon, 'Goddess of reason': Anna Doyle Wheeler, Owenism and the rights of women, History of European Ideas, 47.2 (2021), pp.285-298 <https://doi.org/10.1080/01916599.2020.1798625>.

[22] Antonia Fraser, *Caroline Norton: A 19th-Century Heroine Who Wanted Justice for Women* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2021). C. S. Norton, *The Selected Letters of Caroline Norton*, ed. by R. Nelson and M. Mulvey-Roberts, 1st ed (London: Routledge, 2020) <https://doi-org.soton.idm.oclc.org/10.4324/9780367814731>.

[23] W. Willmott Dixon, *Queens of Beauty, and their Romances*, 1st edn, 2 vols (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1907).

[24] Lady Constance Russell, *Three Generations of Fascinating Women and other sketches from Family History* (London, New York and Bombay: Longmans, Green and Co., 1905).

but mainly anecdotal accounts; Bury's private non-fictional writings would certainly benefit from a more rigorous and comprehensive biographical study. What has emerged even more clearly from this research, however, is the importance of recovering Lady Charlotte's work and literary reputation and a conviction that her novels should now be reissued in the form of new critical editions supported by scholarly notes. The *Diary Illustrative of the Times of George the Fourth*, written in the years 1810 to 1815, was published in two volumes in 1838 then reissued in 1839 in a four-volume edition with a preface by John Galt[25]; the text underwent further revisions during the author's lifetime with an early twentieth-century edition, published by J. Lane and edited by Archibald Francis Steuart, finally appearing in 1908.[26] While Bury's novels were re-issued regularly in this country until around the mid- nineteenth century (and for several subsequent decades in Europe and the USA), there have been no further British editions apart from those which appeared from 1831 onwards under the auspices of series such as Richard Bentley's Standard Novels or, after 1835, Henry Colburn's Modern Standard Novelists.[27] As I pointed out in my introduction, a golden opportunity was missed in 2005 when Harriet Devine Jump, underestimating the depth and breadth of Bury's political project, omitted her from her collection of six newly-issued Colburn titles: *Silver Fork Novels, 1826–1841.*[28]

It is clear that a comprehensive consolidation of Bury's work which traces her reading, cultural and political affinities and biographical experiences would generate material for a number of subsidiary enterprises for both literary scholars and historians: the most critically important consequence of my research, however, would involve readjusting critical perceptions by including this overlooked woman writer in a more generically diverse literary genealogy. While Lisa Surridge

[25] [Lady Charlotte Bury], *Diary Illustrative of the Times of George the Fourth, Interspersed with Original Letters from the Late Queen Caroline, and from Various Other Distinguished Persons*, 4 vols (London: H. Colburn, 1839).
[26] Lady Charlotte Bury, *The Diary of a Lady-in-Waiting: being the Diary Illustrative of the Times of George The Fourth, interspersed with Original letters from the Late Queen Caroline and Other Distinguished Persons/by Lady Charlotte Bury*. Edited with an introduction by A. Francis Steuart.(London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1908). An interim edition, published by John MacQueen, also appeared in 1896: Lady Charlotte Campbell Bury, *The court of England under George IV. Founded on a Diary interspersed with letters written by Queen Caroline and various other distinguished persons* (London: John MacQueen, 1896).
[27] *The Divorced*, for example, appeared as a Routledge Railway 'Yellowback' in 1858. Lady Charlotte Susan M. Bury, *The Divorced* (G. Routledge and Company: London, 1858).
[28] Harriet Devine Jump, ed. *Silver-fork Novels, 1826–1841*, 6 vols (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2005).

maintains in *Bleak Houses: Marital Violence in Victorian fiction* (2005) that the sensation novel was only one of several genres, including realist fiction and newspaper journalism, that both influenced and were influenced by marriage law legislation throughout the nineteenth century, Bury's early willingness to confront the legal oppression of women in marriage still goes unrecognised.[29] She also remains uncredited for articulating social issues iterated later by realist authors such as Anne Brontë, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, and Thomas Hardy. As this thesis has demonstrated, Bury responded to early campaigns to improve women's legal rights by adapting and circulating the polemic of revolutionary women writers by whom she is predated; using fiction as a platform, she also inaugurated a new literary genre by making the commentaries of contemporary women activists more persuasive and politically effective. Should this research generate one outcome, the most instrumental in completing our understanding of the evolution of the nineteenth-century novel and the history of marriage reform would be the re-issuing of one or more of the eighteen works of fiction authored by Bury which have remained uncirculated for nearly two centuries.

It has been the purpose of this thesis not only to re-appraise, but to celebrate, Bury's political and cultural achievements; she is a writer who endeavoured to progress the cause of women's emancipation in the early nineteenth century by raising public awareness of gender injustice through fiction. I have attempted to demonstrate that, in publicising a problem, Lady Charlotte was instrumental to the campaigns for achieving improvements in women's legal and political rights: in her ground-breaking fiction she both progressed the attempts of earlier women writers to shift attitudes and supported contemporary political activism for changes in the statutes governing matrimonial law. It was the efforts of these early nineteenth-century feminists which generated a reappraisal of the legal systems framing wedlock; by dramatising the problems experienced by the victims of broken marriage, Lady Charlotte helped drive a movement for reform which became central to the development of feminist thought in the later nineteenth century.[30]

[29] Lisa Surridge, *Bleak Houses: Marital Violence in Victorian Fiction* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2005).
[30] See Shanley, ibid., p.356.

Appendix A Plot summary: *Conduct is Fate* (1822)

When the first volume of *Conduct is Fate* opens the omniscient narrator informs us that the heroine, Bertha de Chanci, is already married to an abusive nobleman, the Comte D'Egmont. By chapter four D'Egmont has eloped with a Parisienne leaving Bertha destitute in the French capital and dependent on D'Egmont's altruistic friend, Alexis Beaumont. Having been rejected by Bertha, Machiavellian dandy and accomplice, Carlovitz Troubetskoi, writes to Beaumont's mother, with whom Bertha has found a refuge, to inform her that Bertha is not only separated from her husband but is attempting to seduce her son. Bertha is thrown out into the street by Mme Beaumont and saved only by the kindness of Remonville, a French government official. After Bertha resides temporarily in the lodgings Remonville vacates for her, she moves in with his friends, the Chatelains, where she enjoys the settled existence she craves. However, afraid of abusing their hospitality, Bertha asks Remonville to use his contacts to obtain teaching work for her in England. Remonville complies and she exerts herself to take up a governessing post in London. This is all the more necessary because Bertha finds she now loves, and is loved by, Remonville.

The first five chapters of volume one and from chapter five in volume two to chapter three in volume three, consist of an omniscient bad-marriage narration which frames a first-person retrospective. This functions not so much to enlighten and warn Remonville about the heroine's past, as to appeal to the sympathies of the reader. In her retrospective narrative, the heroine describes how her peaceful life in rural Switzerland was disrupted by the Gothic arrival of the mysterious 'Comte Barberini' (in reality, Comte D'Egmont, a Polish nobleman who, in the initial stages of the plot somewhat irrelevantly impersonates an Italian Count and a French national). After Bertha's Swiss kinspeople, the Manverts, introduce fashionable Sophie de Feronce to the Chancis, D'Egmont makes a declaration of love to Bertha then, terrified by an unexplained encounter in the woods with a mystery Glenarvon-like villain (Carlovitz), he disappears abroad.

Volume two opens with a continuation of the 'story within a story'. D'Egmont presses a betrothal on naïve Bertha, then abducts and marries her in Dortan in eastern France, not realising that her fortune has been placed in trust until she is twenty-five. This marks the end of Bertha's account, and a return to omniscient narration and the dilemma now faced by the heroine in Paris as an abandoned and penniless wife. Bertha's first post in England as governess is with supercilious Lady Farnborough. The heroine is soon slandered about her relationship with Lord Farnborough, forced to quit her post and immediately taken to Scotland with her next employer — the fashionable and superficial Lady Mayfield. The second half of volume two consists of a detailed

travelogue during which the Mayfield party tour Scotland in the grand style. Bertha is here befriended by child of nature Miss Jane Oswald, together with whom she leaves Britain to take possession of a property she has inherited from D'Egmont's friend, M. Beaumont, who has recently been murdered by her husband.

When volume three opens, Bertha is fleeing Paris in the company Jane Oswald to avoid being called upon as a witness after her husband's indictment. Bertha's circuitous route eventually takes her to a religious sanctuary in Italy — scene of her husband's death. Finally, there are two more retrospective narratives, a Gothic adventure which centres on the complex and melodramatic interconnections between D'Egmont, Remonville, Carlovitz and his eclectically-characterised assistant, Sophie Feronce — an ambitious flirt/adulteress, Gothic villainess, rebel leader and freedom fighter in the style of Lamb's Elinor St. Clare. Remonville is ultimately divided from Bertha when they discover, through backstories narrated by Padre Michele and nun Natalie (D'Egmont's estranged parents), that Remonville is D'Egmont's half brother (and Bertha's brother-in-law). Her bosom friend, Jane Oswald, initially commits herself to Bertha but later marries 'a Briton', while Bertha turns down the wealth she inherits upon her husband's death, electing to return to Switzerland to live the rest of her life with her cousin in reflection and tranquillity.

Appendix B Plot summary: *The Divorced* (1837)

The characters:

- Lord Vernon
- Laura, Lady Howard – former wife of Lord Vernon
- Lord William Stuart, their son (whom Laura is forced to surrender)
- Charles, Lord Howard – Laura's second husband
- Lord Henry Talbot and Lady Alice Talbot – the children of Laura's second marriage
- Colonel George Leicester – Lady Alice's prospective husband
- Lady Margaret Leicester – his morally intransigent mother
- Miss Agar – socialite and female misogynist
- Fanny Harcourt – friend of Alice Talbot and eventual wife of Lord William Stuart
- Lady Harcourt – moralist and mother of Fanny Harcourt

The Divorced begins with a faux news bulletin, 'ESCLANDRE IN HIGH LIFE', in which Bury documents 'the elopement of a beautiful and noble lady, the wife of the Marquis of V-n, with the Earl of H-d' in the style of an anonymised nineteenth-century gossip column. The narrative begins two decades after the elopement, however; contrary to our expectations, our first encounter with Lady Howard, the divorcee at the centre of the novel, reveals her to be a recluse consumed by personal guilt and apprehension over the future of her children.

We enter the novel when a bewildered Alice Talbot — Lady Howard's daughter — rushes into her mother's drawing room saying she has been denied the company of her playmate, Fanny, by Lady Harcourt (the first of the novel's three moral supremacists). Alice is ignorant of the fact that she is the progeny of an illicit union, and harrowing scenes follow in which Lady Howard self-recriminates while attempting in vain to console her daughter. Lady Howard's torments are soon aggravated when the heroine learns, from reading a morning newspaper, of the twenty-first birthday celebrations of Lord William Stuart – the son she shares with her first husband, Lord Vernon. Lord Howard, the second husband for whom she has sacrificed her reputation and general well-being, all the while torments and reproaches his wife for withholding the truth of their children's birth from them, threatening her – through frustration – with separation and the removal of her second family.

In the meantime, the Howards' son, Lord Henry Talbot, returns from a grand tour and reveals he has befriended Lord William Stuart in Rome, though neither of them is aware at this point that they are half-brothers. When Talbot describes Lord Stuart to his mother he alludes to his

melancholy state of mind and presses her for an explanation. Alarmed and ashamed, she tells him of the divorce of Stuart's parents but without revealing her own involvement. Talbot expresses horror on Stuart's behalf and this confirms Laura in her intention of keeping Talbot in the dark about his own birth. When Talbot is subsequently told the truth by one of his friends at Almack's ball room, he is thunderstruck and vows to shun society by going abroad again. During the same event, Lady Harcourt enlightens her daughter, Fanny, about the circumstances of Lord Talbot's birth in the hope of diverting her attention away from him and onto his brother, Lord Stuart. Fanny, however, feels nothing but pity for the Talbot children.

The action moves to another ballroom scene and Alice Talbot's debut where we discover Lord Howard's difficulties in gaining acceptance for his daughter in high society. In attendance at the ball is the novel's chief villainess — Miss Agar — a thwarted old maid who falsely believes she has been balked by the heroine of her chance to marry Lord Vernon (the heroine's first husband). When Lord Howard's back is turned, Miss Agar seizes the opportunity to ruin Alice's debut by forcing the truth of her birth upon her. While Alice is traumatised by the news, she resolves to spare her mother's feelings by not disclosing her newly-acquired knowledge of the family's disgrace.

Soon afterwards, Alice meets Colonel Leicester and falls in love. We learn immediately from Lord Howard, however, that Leicester's mother is a rigid moralist who will probably not allow her son to marry the daughter of a divorcee. He decides to protect his family from further insult by taking them to Worthing, only to be followed there by Alice's enamoured suitor. We are given minutely detailed access to Leicester's thoughts and learn that he callously continues his pursuance while secretly deciding he cannot marry Alice for fear of polluting the Leicester family line.

The Howards' failure to escape fashionable London in Worthing is further complicated when the family encounter Lord Stuart and his father, Lord Vernon, on the beach. Because Laura's emotional outburst causes Lord Howard to leave her in disgust, Lord Vernon pities her and suspects she is being mistreated by her second husband. Everyone concerned maintains an air of insouciance and Lord Howard moves the family on to Brighton where they receive further rebuffs at the royal court there. In the meantime, Leicester maintains his pursuit despite his aversion to the idea of marrying the daughter of a divorcee.

To ensure that she succeeds in destroying Alice's happiness, Miss Agar next pays a visit to Colonel Leicester's mother, Lady Margaret Leicester, in 'Grosvenor'. Lady Margaret is another of the novel's moral supremacists and is easily persuaded by Miss Agar to forbid the match between Alice Talbot and her son on moral grounds. Although under pressure from his mother, Leicester is

still unable to relinquish Alice, so he proposes marrying her on condition that she separates from her mother. Alice refuses. Conversations between Leicester and his mother are followed by increasingly fraught exchanges between Laura and her husband, who, frustrated at their lack of progress with the suit, accuses her groundlessly of inflaming the situation.

We next witness Stuart forcing his father, Vernon, to confess the truth of his birth – an experience Lord Vernon finds cathartic. It is with his blessing that the two half-brothers go on to meet up, acknowledge and embrace each other – although both are now in pursuit of Fanny Harcourt. Harassed and overwhelmed by his family's disgrace, however, Talbot's physical health declines, despite the best efforts of the surgeon despatched by Lord Vernon to save him.

The focus switches back to London where Miss Agar continues to alienate Lady Leicester from the Howards. Lady Leicester and her son continue to manoeuvre and vacillate at Alice's expense without managing to conquer their prejudice against the Howards. Lord Talbot dies in Paris in the meantime — an event which is Miss Agar flags up as the prelude to Laura's certain undoing. As the relationship between Lord and Lady Howard declines still further, Lady Alice dies from consumption complicated by disappointment in love and the anguish and pity she feels for her mother. The loss of their second child goads the heroine's husband into madness and he renounces Lady Howard altogether. He then takes his own life but, because he dies intestate, she must relinquish their home into the ownership of the Howard heir. The heroine inherits nothing from her adoptive uncle, General De Lacy, because he has cast her off; she receives nothing from her first husband because of her elopement and members of her second husband's family disown her. She is therefore forced into lodgings in bourgeois Orchard Street and, because no one will employ a woman of questionable morality, is forced to pawn her jewellery.

At this point Lord Stuart, now married to Fanny Harcourt, re-enters the novel and rescues Laura by installing her in a villa in Twickenham where she dies a godless and bitter death grieving over the loss of her second family. We learn that Col. Leicester does not marry and when he and his mother return from abroad, they live a chilly, lonely existence without descendants. Miss Agar, rebuffed by Lord Vernon, is reduced to living in a succession of seaside boarding houses while Lady Howard's villa is demolished to make way for a brewery. The miser who inherits the Howard property, we learn, shuts up Howard House and goes to live alone in a few rooms at Howard Castle.

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