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Anxious Expressions: Remote Relationships in the Canning Correspondence Network 1760-1830

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

School of Writing, Publishing and the Humanities, Bath Spa University

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Ethics, Data and Copyright Statements

Ethics Statement

Following initial supervisory ethical discussion, full ethical approval from the Bath Spa University Ethics Panel was not required. The research has been conducted in line with requirements in place at the time of this decision. Should you have any concerns regarding ethical matters relating to this study, please contact the Research Support Office at Bath Spa University (researchsupportoffice@bathspa.ac.uk).

Data Statement

No new datasets were created during the study

Copyright Statement

This copy has been supplied on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from this thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement. I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that my thesis is original and does not to the best of my knowledge infringe and third party's copyright or other intellectual property right.

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Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my Grandad, Jim Smith, who passed the month before submission, and was following my progress with great interest. This one is for you Grandad, I know you would be so proud.

Abstract

This is the first in-depth study of familial anxiety in the long eighteenth century. Focusing on the letters of one family, the Cannings, this thesis explores the emotional expressions of anxiety across the lifecycle, from 1760 to 1830. Though the Cannings are not representative of all families, the extensive archives of around 1500 letters, from fourteen members of the family, mean that various perspectives and relationships are presented. The Cannings also had many reasons to be anxious: death, hardship, reputational concerns, war, and familial rifts were some of the challenges they faced across this seventy-year period, as well as more everyday anxieties. The thesis uses Hitty and Mary Anne Canning's lives as the backbone to explore courtship and early marriage, pregnancy, parenthood, growing up, later life and death and grief. It aims to consider how anxiety operated within remote relationships during this period, particularly adopting history of emotions methods to uncover the nuances within remote familial relationships. This study demonstrates how anxious language and tone was an important linguistic tool in correspondences and was used to renegotiate familial relationships in a variety of situations.

It affirms that anxiety existed across the lifecycle and across all relationships in different strengths, and that social and familial relationships were crucial in the expressions of various anxieties. These anxieties largely remained constant across the time period covered but were expressed in idiosyncratic ways, dependent on familial relationship, age and social and individual contexts. Thus, context is inherently important for understanding the nuances of emotional expressions in letters. Most importantly, this thesis shows how anxiety was used to express other emotions, most notably grief and love. Overall, it argues that more attention should be paid to the everyday expressions of anxiety, not just considering anxiety in relation to mental health.

Introduction

In 1760s London, George Canning Sr. led a profligate life. The eldest son of Irish landed gentry, George was there to study law, but he neglected his studies. Instead, he racked up substantial debts, was more interested in literature and Whig politics, and had a penchant for the opposite sex, indeed, he admitted himself that he had a 'vehement desire for sexual gratification'.[1] Accordingly, his father agreed to pay off George's debts if he signed over his inheritance to his younger brother, Paul, effectively disinheriting him. This cost George his right to the Garvagh estate worth 'fifteen hundred pounds a year' and left him with an income of only £200 a year on which to survive.[2] It was a decision that shaped the family's future irrevocably.

George's life changed course, from one of certainty, to one of uncertainty. He tried to make money through his translations of the *Anti-Lucretius* and through playing the lottery with his new paramour 'darling', Peggy Arbuckle, but his debts once again increased.[3] It is here that the Canning letters open, with George Canning Sr. writing to his brother, Stratford, unburdening his anxieties around Peggy's lack of contact with him on her return to Ireland in late 1766.[4] In February 1767, George wrote that it was 'next to impossible' to write about the events of the end of 1766, without acknowledging that 'what I have said' would make his brother 'anxious' about him.[5] In this letter, George proceeded to recount the slow

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[1] British Library (BL), Add MS89143/3/1/1, George Canning to Mary Anne Costello, July 26th 1767.
[2] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/1, George Canning to Mary Anne Costello, July 20th 1767; BL, Add MS89143/3/1/54, Mary Anne Hunn, to George Canning, January 27th 1803, p. 42. For the 188 page letter from January 1803, page numbers will be provided throughout for specific information.
[3] Peggy Arbuckle was a well-to-do Irish woman with whom George had some kind of romantic relationship.
[4] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/3, George Canning Sr. to Stratford Canning, February 20th 1767.
[5] *Ibid*, February 20th 1767.

exchange of letters between himself and Peggy's brother regarding his and Peggy's courtship, noting his 'single apprehension' was his 'present undoubtably inadequate circumstances' in regard to his finances.[6] George's relationship hung in the balance as Peggy was wooed by another gentleman with means and George was left with his 'fate most intricately involved in it'.[7] When it became apparent that Peggy had left him, in early 1767, the letters show that Stratford's letters were an 'entertaining and agreeable' solace from a life full of anxiety about an uncertain future.[8] What follows is captured in an archive of over 2400 familial letters, from fourteen members of the Canning family.

George's letters to Stratford highlight the centrality of anxious language in long eighteenth-century letter writing, especially at points of transition. It was a social emotion in letters, communicating feelings of love, affection, and care as well as anxiety and fear. This study analyses letters to understand how people communicated and how anxiety was both an expressed emotion and used as an emotional tool to socialise, persuade, and negotiate in relationships. As Susan Broomhall asserts, 'No relationship, be it created by ties of blood, marriage, social need or economics, can be devoid of emotional content'.[9] I amend Broomhall's statement to state that no relationship can be devoid specifically of anxiety as anxiety is an emotional state born from the uncertainty of relationships, both good and bad. No relationship is static, unchanging, or certain. Where there is love, friendship and kin ties, there is fear of loss and an anxious state of uncertainty about whether this may occur. This

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[6] *Ibid*, February 20th 1767.
[7] *Ibid*, February 20th 1767.
[8] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/3, George Canning Sr. to Stratford Canning, February 20th 1767; August 9th 1767.
[9] Susan Broomhall ed., *Emotions in the Household, 1200-1900* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 1.

is not always evident in everyday life but it becomes more prominent when our relationships become remote and distant.

This link between anxiety, distance, and communication is not unique to the Cannings. Whilst this thesis focuses on their letters during the long eighteenth century, in a contemporary pandemic and post-pandemic world where distant relationships and remote communications have become ever more important and anxiety rates have risen, questions have inevitably been asked about connections between familial relationships, anxiety levels and distance.[10] Today, we can video chat with family and friends, unable to touch them but luckily for us, able to see them. Social media has become a double-edged sword, an essential means for communication but also a pit of 'doomscrolling', negative comments and distressing news, all of which are said to be contributing to growing levels of anxiety in all age groups across the UK.[11] Yet this is not the only time in history where people have been kept physically apart. Aside from situations such as prison, people have been migrating across the world for centuries, with more frequent mobility across social groups occurring

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[10] Examples include Daisy Fancourt, Andrew Steptoe and Feifei Bu, 'Trajectories of Anxiety and Depressive Symptoms During Enforced Isolation due to COVID-19 in England: a Longitudinal Observational Study', *The Lancet Psychiatry*, 8.2 (February 2021), pp. 141-149; Emily Long *et al.*, 'COVID-19 Pandemic and its Impact on Social Relationships and Health', *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 76.2 (2022), pp. 128-132; Elizabeth Dorrance Hall *et al.*, 'Changes in Family Communication During the COVID-19 Pandemic: the Role of the Family Communication Patterns and Relational Distance', *Communication Research Reports*, 39.1 (2022), pp. 56-67. See also news articles such as Tiffany Wen, 'How Coronavirus has transformed the way we communicate', *BBC Worklife*, 9th April 2020 https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20200408-coronavirus-how-lockdown-helps-those-who-fear-the-phone [Accessed 09/03/23] and Bianca Nobilo, 'Coronavirus has stolen our most meaningful ways to connect', *CNN*, 2020, https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2020/06/world/coronavirus-body-language-wellness/ [Accessed 09/03/2023].

[11] See Anna Vannucci, Kaitlin M. Flannery and Christine McCauley Ohannessian, 'Social Media Use and Anxiety In Emerging Adults', *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 207 (January 2017), pp. 163-166; Betul Keles, Niall McCrae and Annmarie Grealish, 'A Systematic Review: the Influence of Social Media on Depression, Anxiety and Psychological Distress in Adolescents', *International Journal of Adolescents and Youths*, 25.1 (2020), pp. 79-93 for examples of studies on this.

from the eighteenth century. Whilst we appear to be struggling with lockdowns and distant relationships, it raises the question - how did people cope with the emotions of remote relationships in the past?

Letter writing is arguably the long eighteenth century's closest equivalent of social media and texting. Clare Brant notes that eighteenth-century '[l]etters were the central form of communication in a world of denser contacts…[and] extended contacts – contacts thinned out by distance through empire, business, travel and separations'.[12] Both eighteenth-century letter writing and today's social media have significant uptake across their societies, connect various individuals across the world in a web of relationships and share notes, messages, pictures and even other people's messages. Letters, like social media, straddle the lines of private and public communication, lingering in the gap between the equivalent of today's direct messaging or 'DMs' and public 'wall' or 'timeline'.

Despite research stating that social media creates anxiety, many individuals now use it to share anxieties, ask for advice and promote talking about worries and concerns.[13] Similarly, you may hear the advice to 'write yourself a letter, detailing all your worries and then you will feel better' with many suggesting that you burn or get rid of the letter afterwards.[14] This sharing in a written space gives perspective, clarity and cohesion to muddled thoughts and

[12] Clare Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 1.
[13] Examples of recent research done on tackling anxiety include Amir Adam Tarsha, 'The Role of Existential Therapy in the Prevention of Social Media-Driven Anxiety', *Existential Analysis*, 27.2 (2016), pp. 382-389, Brian A. Primack *et al*., 'Use of Multiple Social Media Platforms and Symptoms of Depression and Anxiety: A Nationally-Representative Study Among U.S. Young Adults', *Computers in Human Behaviour*, 69 (2017), pp. 1-9; Heather Cleland Woods, '#Sleepyteens: Social Media Use in Adolescence is Associated with Poor Sleep Quality, Anxiety, Depression and Low Self Esteem', *Journal of Adolescence*, 51 (2016), pp. 41-50.
[14] Examples include Harvard Health Publishing: Harvard Medical School, (2019), https://www.health.harvard.edu/healthbeat/writing-about-emotions-may-ease-stress-and-trauma [Accessed 25/07/19] and Michael Smith, 'To Reduce Stress and Anxiety, Write your Happy Thoughts Down', *The Conversation*, 12th July 2018, https://theconversation.com/to-reduce-stress-and-anxiety-write-your-happy-thoughts-down-99349 [Accessed 25/07/19].

concerns. Due to its similarities, and indeed its differences to how we communicate today, research into eighteenth-century letter writing and anxiety is important for considering how anxiety can be created, expressed, and relieved by networks of personal relationships.

In response, this thesis will aim to address several questions using the Canning correspondence. Whilst familial letters more generally will contain varying levels of anxiety, the Canning letters display a variety of anxieties across the lifecycle. The main question asks: What can we learn about distant, epistolary relationships through examining anxiety in the long eighteenth-century letters of the Canning family? From this, several sub questions emerge. Was anxiety a common feature in letters and if so, how was it expressed? Are individuals anxious across different stages of the lifecycle and if so, how? Who do people communicate their anxieties to and why? Is anxiety used as an emotional tool?

To answer these questions, this thesis provides the first extensive critical analysis of the Canning Family correspondence from 1760 to 1830. It explores their expressions of anxiety throughout the lifecycle to understand the nuances of remote relationships, how they operated, were maintained and renegotiated. It takes the eighteenth century as its starting point, the era when people began to travel more, both domestically and internationally, as transport improved, colonies were established, and war was un-ending. By analysing the letters, together with other primary sources, the thesis seeks to understand how social, personal, and epistolary anxieties shaped the emotional expression of anxiety in letter writing. It will also show how the language of anxiety was used as an emotional tool, to persuade, negotiate, and maintain relationships. These anxieties reflected familial position, gender and social class and how individual correspondences interlinked and influenced emotional exchange. In a broader sense, this thesis will look at the importance of the letter

for connecting and reconnecting elite families to society and each other in a myriad of circumstances. Ultimately, this thesis reveals that anxiety was ever-present in remote relationships, particularly at points of transition into different life stages or familial roles, and its expression reveals different levels of affection, intimacy, familiarity, and opportunity.

The Canning Family Archive

To give the project a manageable scope, I am using one family's correspondence as a case study, with reference to other manuscript and printed material. This thesis will take readers into the epistolary world of the Canning Family, a well-connected gentry family, between 1766 and 1831.[15]

The Cannings originated from Bristol, distinguishing themselves as merchants and moving within local politics during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Their wealth and status changed when Thomas Canynges moved to London in the mid-fifteenth century, became Sheriff and Mayor, and married an heiress, obtaining the estate of Foxcote in Warwickshire in the process.[16] It was in 1618, when his descendent George Canninge was granted the manor at Garvagh by James I in Derry, that their family moved to Ireland.[17] By the time that George Canning Sr. was gallivanting around London in the 1760s, the Canning family firmly considered themselves Irish gentry, moving in the polite circles of Protestant Dublin society. It was a heritage that made George Canning Sr.'s father, Stratford 'Counsellor' Canning, extremely proud. Counsellor Canning (1703-75) himself was a lawyer and landowner,

[15] The family trees in Appendix One and Appendix Two further detail the relationships between the correspondents on the Canning and the Patrick side of the family.
[16] Wendy Hinde, *George Canning* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1973), p. 11.
[17] Giles Hunt, *Mehitabel Canning: A Redoubtable Woman* (Royston: Rooster, 2001), p. 10.

managing that same manor at Garvagh his ancestor had acquired in the previous century, with an income of £3000 a year across this and several smaller holdings.[18] Like many of his ancestors, including his own father, he too married an heiress, Letitia Newburgh (d.1786), in the 1720s which allowed for the building of a 'pleasing Palladian country house' on the estate.[19]

Counsellor Canning's attitudes and values reflected his gentry position: he prized independence, self-government and virtue in his sons and duty, virtue, and obedience in his daughters.[20] Above all, he wanted suitable matches for his children to carry on the family legacy. He was considered tyrannical by several of his children through his desire to control their actions, a view which shall be explored through the first chapter of the thesis. It is this desire to preserve and promote his family's interests and dynasty, and the drastic measures he takes in disinheriting his sons to do so, which lies at the heart of the Canning Family story which this thesis explores.

Counsellor Canning and Letitia had seven children. The eldest, Mary 'Molly' Canning (d.1770) married clergyman Henry Barnard, the son of the Bishop of Derry in 1763, a marriage which Counsellor Canning had approved but after several quarrels, her siblings were forbidden to see her. Only a few of her letters have survived. They are to her brother George Canning Sr. (1735-1771), once he too had fallen from his father's favour. George Canning Sr. was the eldest son, and as such, was heir to the Garvagh estate. As noted at the

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[18] Julian Crowe, *George Canning is my Son* (London: Unbound, 2021), pp. 15-16.

[19] Hunt, *Mehitabel Canning*, p. 10.

[20] See Matthew McCormack, *The Independent Man: Citizenship and Gender Politics in Georgian England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005); Henry French and Mark Rothery, *Man's Estate: Landed Gentry Masculinities, 1660-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (Yale and London: Yale University Press, 1998); Soile Ylivuori, *Women and Politeness in Eighteenth-Century England: Bodies, Identities, and Power* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019) for some examples of studies discussing eighteenth-century gentry and gender values.

beginning of this chapter, after racking up several gambling debts, George was disinherited and married in 1768 Mary Anne Costello (1747?-1827), noted as a pretty but penniless girl from a cloth merchant family whose father, Jordan Costello, lost all his money as the business collapsed.[21] She had been staying in London with her maternal grandfather, Colonel Guy-Dickens, to try and obtain some inheritance for her family, when she met and married George. Theirs proved to be a poverty-stricken marriage, which this thesis discusses through Chapters One and Two.

They had several children who died young, with only their son, George Canning (1770-1827), surviving into adulthood. After being adopted by his Uncle Stratford and Aunt Hitty Canning at the age of six, he obtained an excellent education at Eton and Oxford before he became a central figure in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century politics. He was the shortest serving Prime Minister of the UK, dying in office after 119 days, until Liz Truss took his title in 2022. He left the largest number of letters behind, with 1712 of these addressed to his mother and two of the three surviving archives, in Leeds and The British Library, are built around his correspondence with his family, making him an important influence on the shape and survival of the Canning letters.

Upon Counsellor Canning's eldest son George Canning Sr.'s disinheritance, George's younger brother, Paul Canning (1743-84) became heir, and whilst no correspondence survives in these archives directly from him, he is mentioned in various letters as someone who was difficult to trust, as it felt that he was performing to both his siblings and their father to keep

[21] Crowe, *George Canning is my Son*, pp. 9-15; Hunt, *Mehitabel Canning*, pp. 9-11.

his inheritance. He lived up to Counsellor Canning's expectations, marrying an heiress, Jane Spencer, and their son, another George Canning, became a Baron as the 1st Lord Garvagh.[22]

Another sister, Letitia, died young and another, Frances 'Fan Can' Canning (1741-c.1830) remained unmarried, becoming a favourite aunt of the next generation of Cannings and whilst not many letters have survived, there is evidence that she wrote to several of her nieces and nephews semi-regularly. The final sister was Elizabeth 'Bess' Canning (c.1740-1826) and she married first Westby Perceval and later Reverend William Leigh. They became George Canning's guardians after the death of his uncle Stratford Canning Sr. (1744-1787). Stratford was the youngest child of Counsellor and Letitia Canning and was also disinherited for making an unsuitable marriage with Mehitabel 'Hitty' Patrick (1749-1831), who was a merchant's daughter and although they had some wealth, they derived their money from profession rather than landownership, which was not deemed suitable to meet Counsellor Canning's requirements for Stratford's wife. They had five surviving children, Harry 'Hal' (1774-1841), Elizabeth 'Bess' (1776-1838), William (1779-1860), Charles (1784-1815) and Stratford 'Stratty' (1786-1880), of which Bess, Stratty, and to a lesser extent, William, are key correspondents in the Canning letter network.

Hal, the eldest, inherited his father's place within the merchant banking business though this later failed and later in life, he was Counsel General at Hamburg. William was a tutor and later Reverend. Both initially struggled to find their places in the world. Charles sadly died at the Battle of Waterloo, in 1815, as the Duke of Wellington's Aide de Campe. Stratty

[22] Hunt, *Mehitabel Canning*, p. 9.

became a diplomat, becoming very successful and even being made a peer in 1852, though he never reached his desired heights in domestic politics.[23]

Daughter Bess was a sickly child, with the letters often showing her mother's concern for her delicate health. Her correspondence with her mother details a vivacious girl with wit and a talent for telling a story, as well as her education and preparations for a future as a wife and mother, which she eventually obtained when she married George Barnett in December 1805, at the age of 29. Surviving letters discussing in Chapter Five between Bess's daughter Harriet and her maternal grandmother, Hitty, detail a continued close, loving relationship between Bess's family and Hitty as the years progressed.

From the various correspondents, this thesis centres around two branches of the family. Both stem from two of the brothers, George Canning Sr. and Stratford Canning, mentioned above, and their disinheritance. The first branch of the family centres around Mary Anne Canning who was George Canning Sr.'s widow, after his death in 1771, early in their marriage.[24] The second branch of the family was headed by Mehitabel 'Hitty' Canning, who settled in England after her marriage to Stratford Canning. Here she raised their children and her nephew George Canning after Stratford's death in 1787. Due to their positions as key correspondents within the family network, the thesis structure follows the lives of Hitty and Mary Anne and uses their lifecycles as the backbone of the thesis, starting with their courtships in the 1760s and early 1770s until their elder years in the 1820s and 30s.

Due to their disinheritance, George Canning Sr. and Stratford Canning Sr. had to find work to support their families and both moved to London. Whilst Stratford, who as a younger son

[23] *Ibid*, pp.183-190, 283, 318, 344-346.

[24] Mary Anne is also spelt Mary Ann in some correspondence and other sources. I chose to use Mary Anne as this is how she signs her name at the end of most of her surviving letters.

was always destined to provide for himself and his family, prospered in a merchant banking business with partner Mr Borrowes, George Canning Sr. tried his hand at law, being a wine merchant and a writer and making ends meet in the process. However, through the Canning's political connections, both brothers were staunch Whigs, with George Canning Sr. aligned with the more radical John Wilkes and Stratford Canning with Charles James Fox. Stratford socialised with the Devonshire House and Crewe House Sets, including the Sheridans, with whom he and Hitty became intimate friends, the Duchess of Devonshire, Lady Bessborough, Mrs Crewe and Madame Bouverie. Thus, they were still part of the elite of society.[25]

The scope of this thesis examines two generations of the Canning correspondence almost in its entirety. The family letters are located between three main archives: Bath Record Office, The British Library and West Yorkshire Archive Service (Leeds) and consist of over 2400 letters, which date between 1766 and 1831, largely between fourteen correspondents in an epistolary familial network. Mothers, daughters, sons, cousins, aunts, uncles, nephews, nieces, and friends all feature, with many members taking on multiple roles and identities. Tables 1 and 2 below show the distribution of the 2408 letters between these fourteen correspondents and the spread across the decades between 1760 and 1830.

[25] For further details on the Canning family, see Crowe, *George Canning is my Son*; Hunt, *Mehitabel Canning*; Hinde, *George Canning*

Sender/Recipient	Amount of letters and dates of coverage
Stratford 'Counsellor' Canning to Stratford Canning Sr (2 include passages from Letitia Canning, Stratford's mother in her hand)	7 (1766-1770)
Stratford Canning Sr. to Stratford 'Counsellor' Canning	3 (1767)
Stratford Canning Sr. to Mrs Patrick (Mehitabel's mother)	1 (1767)
George Canning Sr. to Stratford Canning Sr.	18 (1766-1770)
George Canning Sr. to Mary Anne Canning (née Costello)	85 (1767-1768)
Stratford Canning Sr. to Mary Anne Canning	8 (1769-1773)
Stratford Canning Sr. to John Beresford	4 (1771-1772)
Mehitabel Canning to Mary Anne Canning	6 (1771-1774)
Mary Anne Canning to Stratford 'Counsellor' Canning	9 (1771-1773)
Mary Anne Canning to John Beresford	2 (1772-1773)
Mehitabel Canning to Elizabeth Canning	52 (1789-1827)
Elizabeth Canning to Mehitabel Canning	149 (1787-1827)
Elizabeth Canning to Betty Ticknell	1 (1789)
George Canning To Elizabeth Canning	103 (1788-1817)
Mehitabel Canning to Stratford 'Stratty' Canning	22 (1809-1826)
Mehitabel Canning to Eliza Canning	2 (1827-1831)
Mehitabel Canning to Eliza Canning's father	1 (1829)
George Canning to Mary Anne Hunn (also known as Canning and Reddish)	1712 letters (1780-1827)
Mary Anne Hunn to George Canning, including the 188 page letter-memoir	14 (1786-1814)
George Canning to Rev. William Leigh	25 (1787-1793)
George Canning to Elizabeth 'Bess' Leigh (including some addressed to the whole Leigh family)	65 (1787-1820)
George Canning journal entries to the Leighs (which have been bound as a letter journal)	22 bundles of entries, plus a set of rules (1793-1795)
Elizabeth Sheridan to Mehitabel Canning	36 (1784-1792)
Richard Brinsley Sheridan to Mehitabel Canning	2 (1787-1792)
George Canning to Stratford 'Stratty' Canning	4 - these were copies of sent letters to Stratford (1809)
George Canning to Mehitabel Canning	13 (1788-1793)
Stratford 'Stratty' Canning to George Canning	25 (1808-1809)

Elizabeth Canning to Stratford 'Stratty' Canning	12 (1809-1817)
George Canning to Mr Adair	7 (1809)
Mary 'Molly' Barnard to Mary Anne Canning	1 surviving, (1769)
Mary 'Molly' Barnard to George Canning Sr.	1 surviving, (1769)
A Wolf to Mary Anne Canning	1 (1785)
Stratford 'Stratty' Canning to Henry Canning	1 (1812)
George Canning to Frances 'Fan Can' Canning	5 (1786-1821)
Mehitabel Canning to Harriet Barnett	6 (1817-1823)
Harriet Barnett to Mehitabel Canning	2 (1821)
Mehitabel Canning to William Canning	2 (1823-1829)
Stratford 'Stratty' Canning to Elizabeth Canning	1 (1831)
Total	2408

Table 1: Distribution of the number of Canning Family Network letters by sender and main/named recipient

Decade	
1760s	112
1770s	33
1780s	324 (193 from George Canning to his mother Mary Anne Canning)
1790s	567 (417 from George Canning to his mother Mary Anne Canning and does not include letter journal)
1800s	510 (436 from George Canning to his mother Mary Anne Canning)
1810s	456 (396 from George Canning to his mother Mary Anne Canning)
1820s	406 (378 from George Canning to his mother Mary Anne Canning)
Total	2408

Table 2: Distribution of Canning Family Network letters by Decade.

Due to the higher weighting of letters from George Canning to his mother, I have highlighted here how many in each decade relate to this specific sender/recipient relationship, to make the overall pattern of correspondence slightly clearer. This leads to an unevenness in the representation of George Canning in the archives, though it does demonstrate the care and attention that his mother took to save even brief notes that he sent her of a few lines. George/Mary Anne's letters notwithstanding, the spread is relatively even across the other decades, with notable exceptions in the 1770s, where there was a gap between the marriage of Stratford Canning and Mehitabel 'Hitty' Canning and their children and George Canning being able to correspond in the 1780s and in the 1820s, when Hitty Canning's advanced years meant that she was writing less. The patterns of the letters also reflect when the family were away from the family home, which was most common across the 1760s, 1780s and 1790s. This is also when many of the pivotal moments of the family occurred, such as the disinheritance of both George and Stratford and their subsequent marriages, the effects of the deaths of George and Stratford, and their children growing up, who learnt to write through familial correspondences. This archival collection thus reflects wider trends noted by Henry French, Mark Rothery and others that surviving letters often constitute periods of change or significant events more than periods of stability.[26]

The surviving letters between correspondents is also telling of who the archival collections have survived around. The main collections at the British Library and West Yorkshire Archive Service centre around George Canning, whilst the archive at the Bath Record Office centre

[26] See James Daybell and Andrew Gordon, 'Introduction' in *Cultures of Correspondence in Early Modern England*, eds by James Daybell and Andrew Gordon (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennslyvania Press, 2016), p. 10; Henry French and Mark Rothery, 'Male Anxiety and the Younger Sons of the Landed Gentry, 1700-1900', *The Historical Journal,* 62.3 (2019), pp. 967-996, p. 969.

around Mehitabel Canning and Elizabeth Sheridan. Thus, Table 1 also shows how archival practices have shaped the surviving distribution of the correspondence network.

Until now, the Canning correspondence has only been used for biographical purposes. The multiple biographies of George Canning, the most famous Canning relative, focus on his political career, and to a lesser extent, his intellectual and literary prowess.[27] Due to the proximity of their publication to Canning's death, these works are deferential, anecdotal and do not present balanced accounts of their subject. Similarly, the biographical account of Stratford Canning, written immediately upon his death in 1888, follows a similar pattern. These early biographies use the familial letters infrequently. Harold Temperley's 1905 biography *Life of Canning* and Wendy Hinde's 1973 biography are more substantial but again leave lots of room for Canning's familial life to be examined.[28] Julian Crowe's biographical study of George Canning's mother, Mary Anne, offers the most comprehensive biographical interpretation of Canning, though it is presented almost entirely from Mary Anne's perspective. This biography makes extensive use of the family letters and provides the first detailed discussion of Mary Anne's correspondence. The wider family are captured in Giles Hunt's *Mehitabel Canning: A Redoubtable Woman* (2001). However, as Hunt himself acknowledges, 'only a small part of the letters are printed'.[29]

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[27] These include Anon, *A Biographical Memoir of the Late Right Honourable George Canning, Prime Minister of Great Britain* (Brussels: J. Gardiner, 1827) written in the wake of Canning's death; A G. Stapleton, *The Political Life of George Canning, 1822-1827* (London: Longman, 1831); Robert Bell, *The Life of the Rt. Hon. George Canning* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1855) and Frank Harrison Hill, *English Worthies – George Canning* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1888).
[28] Harold Temperley, *Life of Canning* (London: J. Finch and Co., 1905); Hinde, *George Canning*.
[29] The work takes large extracts from the letters and publishes them in between biographical prose written by Hunt. However, only a very small selection of the letters are utilised in this way. See Hunt, *Mehitabel* Canning, p. 2.

Eighteenth-Century Culture and Society

The period which this thesis covers is one of social, economic, cultural, and political changes and shifts. It specifically focuses on 1760 to 1830, as this period includes the majority of the surviving letters, and follows two generations closely, encompassing all significant life events of the family.[30] These include the disinheritance of George Canning Sr. and Stratford, George Canning Sr.'s and Stratford's death, Mary Anne's struggle to provide for her family, the illness and death of Eliza Sheridan, Hitty's efforts to secure futures for her family, George Canning's entrance into politics, Bess's struggles to find a husband and Stratford 'Stratty' Canning's posting overseas as a diplomat. However, the thesis does reflect on wider developments across the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries where appropriate for context.

This limits the scope of the project to a manageable scale. This era also witnessed the social and political crises of the American Revolution (1765-1783), The Regency Crisis (1788-89), the French Revolution (1789-1799) and the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815). Considering these events, anxiety is an important and recurring feature in eighteenth-century primary material more generally.[31] There were concerns over national identity, 'Britishness' and the effeminacy of men as numerous satirical prints depict this need to covet British values against those of the French such as *The Contrast* (1793).[32] The print signals that British

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[30] Letters in the collections that are missed are from relationships such as that between George Canning and his wife and George Canning and his children which are not examined in this thesis as they deviate the focus from the central relationships of Hitty Canning and Mary Anne Canning. They have been briefly examined for context but not included as key source materials.

[31] Oxford University Press, 'anxiety, n.' *OED Online*, (June 2019) [Accessed 1 August 2019], https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/8968.

[32] See Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), especially the Introduction and Sally O'Driscoll, 'What Kind of Man do the Clothes Make? Print Culture and the Meaning of Macaroni Effeminacy', in *Studies in Ephemera: Text and Image in Eighteenth-Century Print*, eds by Kevin Murphy and Sally O'Driscoll (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2013), pp. 241-79.

liberty was associated with principles such as morality, religion, loyalty, justice and happiness and French liberty with perjury, atheism, treason, injustice and misery.[33] That so many patriotic songs emerged in this period, such as 'Rule Britannia', 'God Save the King' and 'Jerusalem', demonstrates there was an anxiousness to cement British values and practices.[34] This crisis over identities provoked anxieties over women in the public sphere, anxieties around social status, and the instability of the classes. Individuals wrote about the anxieties of wars, upheavals and riots, anxiety over death, health, travel, separation, money, family, education, women involved in public affairs and, importantly for this thesis, their anxieties over the mechanics of letter writing.[35]

These anxieties reflect the instability of a society undergoing a rapid pace of commercial, societal, technological, and industrial developments. As Roy Porter has concluded: 'the eighteenth century marked a distinctive moment in the making of modern England'.[36] The emerging society was capitalist and consumer driven, with an international outlook but it was also elitist, inegalitarian and hierarchical.[37] Society fashioned strict social rules, and

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[33] Thomas Rowlandson, *The Contrast*, 1793, etching with hand colouring, The British Museum, London, Image Number 1861,1012.47.

[34] Richard Taruskin, 'Chapter 14 The Symphony Goes (Inter)National' *in Music in the Nineteenth Century* [online], (New York: Oxford University Press), [Accessed 25/07/19] https://www.oxfordwesternmusic.com/view/Volume3/actrade-9780195384833-div1-014009.xml; Olive Baldwin and Thelma Wilson, 'Leveridge, Richard', *Grove Music* Online, (1st January 2001), [Accessed 25/07/19], https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.bathspa.idm.oclc.org/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000016511?rskey=eQF4YI&result=1; Robert N. Essick, 'Blake William (1757-1827), engraver, artist, and poet', *Oxford Dictionary of National* Biography, (22nd September 2005), [Accessed 25/07/19], https://www-oxforddnb-com.bathspa.idm.oclc.org/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-2585?rskey=pqQot4&result=6#odnb-9780198614128-e-2585-div1-d1733641e2520; Edward Cave, ed., 'A Song for two Voices. As sung at both Playhouses', *The Gentleman's Magazine: and Historical Chronicle, Jan.1736-Dec.1833,* 15 (October 1745), p. 552.

[35] The Canning letters cover all of these anxieties in varying detail. For other examples see Elizabeth Montagu Correspondence Online, (2023) https://emco.swansea.ac.uk/home/ [Accessed 11/04/2023]; University of Birmingham, *Social Bodies* (2023) https://socialbodies.bham.ac.uk/ [Accessed 12/04/2023].

[36] Roy Porter, *English Society in the 18th Century*, (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 2.

[37] *Ibid*, p. 2.

desirability was based on your adherence to these rules as well as wealth, class, and reputation. Technological advances in print culture, and the rapid growth of letter writing for personal and business use, meant that societal anxieties and concerns were communicated on a scale not previously seen and in a variety of different methods, another commonality with today's society.

Alongside the rapid expansion of print culture, attitudes to emotions, what they were and how to control them, developed. This was driven by the secular thought of the Enlightenment, alongside traditional and developing religious beliefs and practices. Contemporary historian and philosopher, David Hume wrote in his *Treatise of Human Nature* (1740) that 'the skin, pores, muscles and nerves of a day-labourer are different from those of a man of quality: so are his sentiments, actions and manners'.[38] Hume referred here to nerve theory, which G.J. Barker-Benfield states rose in prominence during the eighteenth century whilst belief in humouralism was on the decline.[39] Nerve theory was the belief that feelings and 'passions' were connected to the mind and the nervous system and that these could be refined and cultivated through societal standards, education and conventions. Born of Newtonian and Lockian thought, it was prevalent alongside sensibility but also a central element of it.[40] Hume saw sensibility and the refinement of nerves as class based. Though Fay Bound Alberti notes that it was 'primarily restricted to the middling and

[38] David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature: Being an Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects,* Vol.2 (London: John Noon, 1740), p. 225.
[39] G.J Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 25.
[40] For a detailed history of nerve theory, see George S. Rousseau, *Nervous Acts: Essays on Literature, Culture and Sensibility* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), especially the Introduction pp. 1-80.

upper classes', it is a relevant ideology for the study of middle class and gentry families, which concerns this thesis.[41]

The culture of sensibility has been linked by scholars to the idea that 'it led to aesthetic refinement and civic responsibility'.[42] Barker-Benfield has noted, the cult of sensibility 'was coterminous with other [cults]; a cult of feeling; a cult of melancholy; a cult of distress; a cult of refined emotionalism, a cult of benevolence'.[43] It thus advocated heightened emotional expression, directed by reason, control, morality and benevolence, which interlinked with nerve theory. Perceived to have a more fragile and delicate sensibility, women were seen as more emotional and in need of social control. Therefore, the culture of sensibility embedded itself in gendered notions of motherhood, consumer culture, societal behaviour and letter writing and advocated through both print culture and personal correspondence.[44]

Another important social and technological shift pertaining to this thesis was in postal practices. Throughout this period, the postal service grew alongside literacy rates, better and increased infrastructure, and technological developments. Joan DeJean notes this expansion as she wrote that 'every penny post improved the conditions for sending and receiving letters, thereby making letter writing available to new publics…and making the process accessible in new ways to those already accustomed to it'.[45] Despite these progresses, postage remained expensive during the long eighteenth century, only truly

[41] Fay Bound, 'Emotions in Early Modern England, 1660-1760: Performativity and Practice at the Church Courts of York', PhD thesis, University of York, 2000, pp. 12-14.
[42] Rousseau, *Nervous Acts: Essays on Literature,* p. 15.
[43] Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility,* p. xix.
[44] See Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility,* especially Chapters 2 and 4.
[45] Joan DeJean, '(Love) Letters: Madeline de Scudéry and the Epistolary Impulse', *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 22.3 (Spring 2010), pp. 339-415, p. 400.

becoming more affordable with the introduction of the Penny Post in 1840.[46] For well-connected eighteenth-century individuals, a frank facilitated free postage, something MPs, their close family and friends were afforded access to. The Cannings, who travelled in political circles, took advantage of this facility, firstly as close friends of MP Richard Brinsley Sheridan and his wife, and later, through George Canning, who became an MP in 1794. Despite the expense of postage, there are few hints of economic factors hindering the sending of letters, either showing the ease of procuring franks or that postage was deemed an essential expense. This expansion in the postal service and literacy rates caused Jurgen Habermas to call the eighteenth century 'the century of the letter'.[47] It is this growing in letter writing practices that foregrounds the network of letters examined in this thesis.

These extensive social changes caused various anxieties across the lifecycle. Thus, this thesis considers courtship and marriage through to old age, following how Hitty and Mary Anne Canning and their parents, children, and grandchildren express anxieties to each other and how their relationships change at different points in the lifecycle. Susan Whyman wrote that 'Like Jane Austen, the [seventeenth-century] Verney correspondents use their "little bit (two inches wide) of ivory" with "so fine a brush" that we are able to observe social mores and to interpret silences'.[48] These sources too offer profuse and diverse exchanges which give a glimpse into how one family interpreted both everyday life and observed the biggest events

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[46] See Alvin F. Harlow, *Old Post Bags* (London: D. Appleton and Company, 1928), especially Chapter XIX: The Era of Cheaper Postage.

[47] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), p. 48.

[48] Susan Whyman, *Sociability and Power in Late-Stuart England: The Cultural Worlds of the Verneys, 1660-1720* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 4. Whyman quotes from Jane Austen's letter to James Edward Austen from 16th December 1816 where she writes 'How could I possibly join them on to the little bit (two Inches wide) of Ivory on which I work with so fine a Brush, as produces little effect after much labour?' See Jane Austen, *Jane Austen's Letters ed.by Deirdre le Faye*, 4th edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 337.

of the era, such as the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. Restricting the focus to one family has allowed for close textual analysis and to gain insight into the intricacies of anxious expressions unexamined in broader studies.

Historiography

Whilst I examine various historiographies of life cycles across the thesis, in examining familial anxieties through correspondence, this thesis draws upon the wider fields of family and relationships, gender, emotion and letter writing. Though now widely criticised, Lawrence Stone's influential work *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800,* published in 1977, brought needed attention to the eighteenth-century family and their relationships. Stone's argument that the eighteenth century saw the emergence of a loving, affectionate nuclear family and marriages based on love and mutual affection, invoked the debate on whether family structures, relationships and sentiments changed or remained stable or static, a debate which was fiercely contested on both sides.[49] In particular, Stone argued that this period saw the emergence of the modern nuclear family 'at the expense of neighbours and kin'.[50] Despite its continued usage as a term, this thesis agrees with the many scholars that believe that 'the category of "the nuclear family" [is] too static and narrow in view of life-course changes, too unrepresentative in view of the complex kinship

[49] Scholars such as Phillipe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, Translated from the French by Robert Baldick (New York: Vintage Books, 1962); Edward Shorter, *The Making of the Modern Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1977); Randolph Trumbach, *The Rise of the Egalitarian Family: Aristocratic Kinship and Domestic Relations in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York: Academic Press, 1978) supported discontinuity and others such as Alan MacFarlane, *Marriage and Love in England: Modes of Reproduction, 1300-1840* (Oxford and New York: Blackwell, 1986); Ralph Houlbrooke, *The English Family, 1450-1700* (London and New York: Longmans, 1984); Linda Pollock, 'Rethinking Patriarchy and the Family in Seventeenth-Century England', *Journal of Family History*, 23.1 (1998), pp. 3-28 supported continuity.

[50] Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (London: Penguin, 1977), p. 22.

relationships that could exist in families mainly due to death and remarriage'.[51] This study moves beyond the nuclear family, in accordance with Naomi Tadmor, to assert that historians should understand how eighteenth-century individuals understood the concept of the family, especially as these relationships changed over time.[52] It supports Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall's assertion that 'the variability of family forms cannot be overstressed; there is no essential 'family', but always 'families'.[53] The Canning letters are a familial letter network made up of several households of 'family' members, as suggested by the Canning letters themselves.

Understanding embedded social and gender codes is vital to understand familial relationships and roles. A prevalent theory of eighteenth-century gender roles, separate spheres theory, interlinks with the progression/continuity debate. Its early exponents such as Jürgen Habermas and Stone argue that men were active in the public sphere, as citizens of the state, while women were relegated to the private sphere of the domestic home. Later studies such as *Family Fortunes* (1974) and 'From Golden Age to Separate Spheres?' challenged these ideas, introducing the notion that women did exist in the public sphere, albeit in roles which were still in keeping with feminine values of the day.[54] These include canvassing for family members in politics and philanthropic activities.

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[51] Naomi Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England: Household, Kinship and Patronage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 6.
[52] *Ibid*, pp. 10-11.
[53] Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), p. 31.
[54] See Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes* and Amanda Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History', *The Historical Journal*, 36.2 (Jun 1993), pp. 383-415.

Alongside this, historian Lawrence Klein reassessed the use of binaries to 'tidy up' social groups and theories, suggesting that the public/private binary was too simplistic to appropriately denote the complex structures and behaviour of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[55] Klein refined one of Amanda Vickery's arguments that even if one can prove that the discourse of separate spheres was hegemonic, one would need to argue how women were 'in public' and yet still 'private' and how this reflects male thinking. He argues that scholars need to pay attention to the gendered language of space to consider arguments around separate spheres.[56] The gendering of expectations, public spaces and the space of the letter are all important considerations for this thesis.

Separate spheres theory is intrinsically linked with the rise of the cult of domesticity, the notion that women should be concerned with running the household and raising children in the domestic home. Expressed through conduct literature, sermons, and images and in line with the desired characteristics of sensibility, this ideology presented the epitome of domestic woman, advocating heightened emotional expression directed by a level of reason, control, morality, selflessness, and benevolence. The cult of domesticity was not an eighteenth-century invention. Whilst the rise of print culture and its consumption has led to a significant amount of surviving primary material detailing this ideology during the eighteenth century, Susan Kingsley Kent used earlier didactic literature to demonstrate that the idea of women being in the 'private sphere of the home' and to embody 'qualities of proper women' was a prevalent discourse by the beginning of the seventeenth century.[57]

[55] See Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres?', especially pp. 383-400; 412-414 and Lawrence Klein, 'Gender and the public/private distinction in the Eighteenth Century: Some Questions about Evidence and Analytic Procedure', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 29.1 (Autumn 1995), pp. 97-109.
[56] Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres?', pp. 383-400, 412-414.
[57] Susan Kingsley Kent, *Gender and Power in Britain, 1640-1990* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 11-13.

Therefore, the eighteenth-century societal emphasis on the cult of domesticity requires a different explanation.

It was eighteenth-century societal anxieties, such as the effeminacy of men, concerns over national identity and of a growing commercial and consumptive society that led to the refinement and reinforcement of this ideology through didactic literature, portraiture, and print culture.[58] Alongside, Enlightenment thoughts on passions, nerve theory and education debates, and the church, the tension between male and female was heightened at this time of uncertainty and change. Judith Butler's work on gender performance, especially *Gender Trouble*, argues that gender is performative.[59] This idea is key in understanding how letters were also vehicles for the performance of gendered ideals and expectations, and this thesis presents various ways in which this performance is created by and through anxieties.
We see these tensions in the letters of the Canning family; of being the 'ideal' mother, of retaining virtue and chastity, and of succeeding in political and commercial worlds. These tensions, revealed in the personal anxieties of the Canning correspondents, reflect the societal anxieties of the period and led to an influx of prescriptive social practices on familial emotional expression and management. Emotional expression was shaped by societal and gendered standards, which in turn were shaped by societal anxieties. Indeed, these anxieties around needing or even wanting to perform gendered roles, especially by women, also self-perpetuate this gendering of spaces and behaviours. How this is presented through letter writing that shall be a focus in this thesis.

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[58] For details of these societal anxieties, see Kingsley Kent, *Gender and Power in Britain*, pp. 57-59, 61-66, 82, 102, 126, 146.
[59] See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1999), especially p. xv.

As such, this enquiry is intrinsically bound with the study of eighteenth-century emotion. Whilst one can trace the intersection of family and relationships with emotions back to studies such as Stone's, it is more recent studies such as Joanne Bailey's *Parenting in England 1760-1830* (2012) which begin to analyse familial emotions in-depth. A seminal work in this area, Bailey concentrated on parental emotions and maintained that parenthood appears static over time through the fixed domains of 'emotion, provision, discipline and instruction' yet within these categories, practices, terminology and expression of emotions are historicised and more fluid.[60] Though Bailey's work does examine anxiety, it naturally concerns itself with parental anxiety and so offers scope for further research into familial anxieties more generally. In terms of parental anxieties, Bailey does connect motherhood to the cult of domesticity and the 'ideal mother' trope but does not conduct an in-depth study of its effects on maternal anxieties. Bailey acknowledged that there is further work to be done on 'women's own sense of being a mother[?]' and 'motherhood experienced as a personal identity?'.[61] These are areas that this thesis will continue to explore by examining the maternal performance through the correspondence.

Whilst Bailey offers a broader study of parental emotions, Broomhall and Jacqueline van Gent's 2009 study of the Nassau family siblings takes a case study approach in order to examine detailed emotional expression within a family group.[62] Their article considers how

[60] Joanne Bailey, *Parenting in England, 1760-1830: Emotion, Identity and Generation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 248.
[61] *Ibid,* p. 5.
[62] Examples of more recent works which refer to Stone's central arguments are Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster, eds, *The Family in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Bailey, *Parenting in England* pp. 10,19; Jennine Hurl-Eamon, *Marriage and the British Army in the Long Eighteenth Century: 'The Girl I left Behind Me'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 153.

the use of emotions, more specifically emotional language and actions, created, maintained and established power within sibling relationships.[63] Broomhall and van Gent argue for familial 'hierarchies of power' affecting emotional expression and this thesis will build upon their findings to include a wider variety of familial relationships, extending their analysis to consider how societal and personal anxieties affected emotional expression and familial power dynamics.[64] Broomhall and van Gent have more recently expanded their work to examine the Nassau family dynasty as a whole but concerns identity, dynasty and relationships to power rather than a continuation of their excellent work on emotional expression.[65] Their decision to use a case study displays a successful method to analysing familial emotional expression against familial dynamics and is the method adopted by this thesis.

Studies on anxiety as an emotion within a particular epoch have largely been focused on the modern era, that is from the mid-nineteenth century to the present.[66] Whilst Joanne Bourke's work focuses on fear rather than anxiety, she does address both throughout her work. Peter N. Stearns focuses on anxiety in the twentieth century, a period often dubbed 'the age of anxiety', which is slightly misleading. It is better to think of it as an age of anxiety, as there are other epochs preoccupied with its anxieties. Indeed, the eighteenth century is arguably also an 'age of anxiety' as it is a period of great change and uncertainty and one

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[63] See Susan Broomhall and Jacqueline van Gent, 'Corresponding Affections: Emotional Exchange Among Siblings in the Nassau Family', *Journal of Family History*, 34.2 (April 2009), pp. 143-165. This article is a precursor to their book *Dynastic Colonialism: Gender, Materiality, and the Early Modern House of Orange-Nassau* (2016) but as this focuses more on dynasticism, gender, power and materiality, their earlier article is more directly relevant to this thesis.

[64] Broomhall and van Gent, 'Corresponding Affections', p. 158.

[65] See Susan Broomhall and Jacqueline van Gent, *Gender, Power and Identity in the Early Modern House of Orange-Nassau* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016).

[66] Notable works include Joanne Bourke, *Fear: A Cultural History* (London: Virago, 2005) and Michael E. Parrish, *Anxious Decades* (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994).

where anxiety is beginning to be explored by philosophers and Enlightenment thinkers, mainly in relation to ideas of sympathy, sensibility and as a negative emotion.

Surprisingly, for an age that dealt with such changes and instability, there is little written directly on the experiences of everyday anxiety or worry for individuals or groups in the eighteenth century. Many studies such as Vickery's *The Gentleman's Daughter*, and more recently, Bailey's *Parenting In England* and Jennifer Buckley's *Gender, Pregnancy and Power*, determine some of the anxieties of families at various stages of the life cycle as well as social concerns.[67] However, anxieties are not the focus of these studies, nor do any of them explore anxiety as a felt emotion or mood in-depth, and so, whilst present, are not analysed beyond the fact that they indicate the presence of anxiety.

This thesis deals with several types of anxiety alongside familial, everyday worries. The first area for research is epistolary anxiety. These are anxieties that are connected with the letter genre. Studies on epistolary anxiety tend to form part of larger studies of correspondence and literary critique and so deserves more singular attention from scholars. Studies such as Gary Schneider's *The Culture of Epistolarity* (2005) and Aleksondra Hultquist's chapter from 2015 on Eliza Haywood's novels highlight the basic worries regarding the sending of letters, evidencing this through discussions of the receiving and sending of letters in correspondence. However, neither study looks at how this impacted the writing of letters nor how relationships between the correspondents affected the intensity of this anxiety. Crucially, they do not take into account societal or personal anxieties in the crafting of

[67] Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, pp. 7-15, Chapter 3; Bailey, *Parenting in England*, esp. pp. 37-39; Jennifer Buckley, *Gender, Pregnancy and Power: The Maternal Imagination* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 92, 107, 141.

letters. It is these societal and personal anxieties that affected how letters were used as a form of emotional management and where my thesis expands on this preliminary research.

The second area is societal anxieties, especially in relation to gender. Works examining this demonstrate that anxieties are present in other types of sources such as satirical prints, didactic literature and other forms of life writing such as diaries. Examples of studies on this include Linda Colley's *Britons: Forging the Nation* which examines anxieties over national identity and women in the public sphere and Barker-Benfield's *The Culture of Sensibility* which examines concerns over the weaker sensibilities or 'nerves' of women.[68] An important work linking societal anxieties and gender is Kingsley Kent's *Gender and Power.* Her study attests that societal anxieties link to worries about the effeminacy of men and virtue amid a need to establish a British national identity in the face of wars and revolutions.[69] This thesis aims to build upon this by looking at how the gendering of these societal anxieties affected emotional expression and familial roles within the Canning family. Linking personal experience to these larger societal anxieties is currently examined mostly in discussions of 'feminist' rhetoric of printed works such as Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*.[70] Thus, despite history on eighteenth-century societies demonstrating a desire to control emotional expression, how individuals and groups were affected by, and managed, anxiety remains an area requiring further study, an area which this thesis will address.

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[68] See Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation*; Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility.*
[69] Kingsley Kent, *Gender and Power in Britain*, p. 28, 58-49, 62-64, 146.
[70] Inna Volkova, '"I have looked Steadily Around Me": The Power of Examples in Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*', *Women's Studies*, 43.7 (Oct 2014), pp. 892-910, p. 892.

The study which *has* begun to address anxiety in eighteenth-century families is Henry French and Mark Rothery's 2019 examination of the anxieties of younger sons of gentry families. This looks at societal anxieties, especially relating to masculinity, within familial correspondences. Their concept of 'emotional economy' is the idea that emotion, in this case anxiety, was utilised to generate action or shape and control behaviour and deployed 'emotional challenges and expecting commensurate emotional reactions'.[71] As their study examines anxieties at a particular life stage, for a particular familial group, this thesis builds on their examination, to consider anxieties across the lifecycle, including the transition into adulthood, allowing for a wider perspective on the expressions of anxieties within familial letters across life stages. My analysis also allows for discussion over generational differences, and the emotional relationships between different familial roles.

Anxiety

A key challenge with this thesis has been defining the term 'anxiety'. In twenty-first century society, when an individual uses the term, you might immediately think they are discussing a mental health condition. Daniel Freeman and Jason Freeman suggest that 'large – and perhaps increasing – numbers of people' believe 'anxiety is a major problem', specifically discussing the increase in those disclosing an anxiety mental health disorder.[72] They were writing in 2012 and these numbers have only increased.[73] Media coverage has also

[71] French and Rothery, 'Male Anxiety and the Younger Sons', pp. 982-983.
[72] Daniel Freeman and Jason Freeman, *Anxiety: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 2.
[73] See MHFA England, *Mental Health Statistics*, (2020) https://mhfaengland.org/mhfa-centre/research-and-evaluation/mental-health-statistics/ [Accessed 06/04/2023]; World Health Organisation, *COVID-19 Pandemic Triggers 25% increase in prevalence of anxiety and depression worldwide*, (2nd March 2022) https://www.who.int/news/item/02-03-2022-covid-19-pandemic-triggers-25-increase-in-prevalence-of-anxiety-and-depression-worldwide [Accessed 06/04/2023].

increasingly focused attention on these figures, perpetuating the notion that we are currently in an 'Age of Anxiety'.[74] This builds on Sara Ahmed's observation that the existence of fears and anxieties within different time periods and cultures are connected to 'rapid transformations and innovations' leading to a loss of familiar 'old structures and values' and a sense of uncertainty about the future.[75] This thesis does not dispute these ideas but advocates for a broader understanding of anxiety as an emotional state. It is not solely a pathological condition but exists on a sliding scale of intensity. We all experience anxiety regularly. As Freeman and Freeman rightly state, 'no one goes through life without experiencing anxiety from time to time'.[76] Indeed, 'everyday anxiety is as natural - and beneficial – as any other emotion'.[77] This is not just true of the present but also the past, though the experience, utilisation and expression is rooted within its historical context. Eighteenth-century understandings of anxiety tend to be rooted in discussions of nervous diseases.[78] Heather Beatty's study, which charts what could be considered an eighteenth-century history of mental health, discusses anxiety and fear as part of that argument. However, her study concentrates primarily on the medical history of nervous diseases and not the emotions themselves; where they are considered it appears to be as symptoms connected to melancholy, hysteria, or hypochondria.[79] Notably, anxiety was often a descriptor of diseases manifesting in women, such as hysteria or illnesses of the female

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[74] Examples include Arwa Mahdawi, *We live in an age of anxiety – and we can't blame it all on Trump*, (2018) https://www.theguardian.com/society/commentisfree/2018/aug/07/anxiety-modern-era-straws-dogs [Accessed 06/04/2023]; Alice Thompson, *Who can lead us out of this age of anxiety?*, (7 Jun 2022), https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/who-can-lead-us-out-of-this-age-of-anxiety-djmcqvzhb [Accessed 06/04/2023].

[75] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), p. 72.

[76] Freeman and Freeman, *Anxiety*, p. 1.

[77] *Ibid*, p. 2.

[78] Daniel McCann and Claire McKechnie-Mason, eds, *Fear in the Medical and Literary Imagination, Medieval to Modern: Dreadful Passions* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 3-5.

[79] See Heather R. Beatty, *Nervous Disease in Late Eighteenth-Century Britain: The Reality of a Fashionable Disorder* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012).

organs.[80] As shown by Daniel McCann and Claire McKechnie-Mason, this link between fear and illness continues into the present day, for as they note 'nothing occasions dread quite like…illness'.[81] This was particularly the case in the early modern period, when anxiety and fear were connected with physical malady. Anxiety belonged to a group of emotions including melancholia, which were understood to be the result of an excess of black bile in the body, as per the four humours theory. An imbalance of the humours signalled disease, thus there was an entwining of emotions and disease in early modern medicine.[82] Though humoral theory was largely sidelined in medical practice in favour of nerve theory by the mid-eighteenth century, the humours as a medical practice and links between emotion and the body persisted into the early eighteenth century with thought connecting the mind and body through the mechanical system of nerves.[83] Whilst this thesis is not concerned directly with the medical thinking around anxiety, it provides an important backdrop to my broader definition of anxiety in the eighteenth century, in particular how it was embodied.

Anxiety was described as both connected through the body but also the mind and nerves. Like the eighteenth-century writers in Karen Harvey's work on the body and the wider *Social Bodies* project of which she is Principle Investigator, words such as spirits denoted 'that the person and their health were a product of flows that connected the corporal and the emotional'.[84] The idea that the body and mind were connected by nerves and that nervous

[80] *Ibid*, pp. 7-11, 15, 22, 36-32, 53, 89-91.
[81] McCann and McKechnie-Mason, *Fear in the Medical and Literary Imagination*, pp. 3-5.
[82] Allan Ingram and Clark Lawlor, '"The Gloom of Anxiety": Fear in the Long Eighteenth Century' in *Fear in the Medical and Literary Imagination, Medieval to Modern: Dreadful Passions*, eds by Daniel McCann and Claire McKechnie-Mason (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 55-78, p. 56.
[83] Beatty, *Nervous Disease*, pp. 10-11.
[84] Karen Harvey, 'Epochs of Embodiment: Men, Women and the Material Body', *Journal of Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 42.4 (Dec 2019), pp. 455-469, p. 461.

ailments were 'owing to an uncommon delicacy or unnatural sensibility of the nerves' gained prominence in the eighteenth century following Thomas Willis' research in 1667 which identified that the connection between the brain and the body was through these nerves.[85] John Locke's ideas built on this, arguing that individuals learnt through sense experience which carried these sensations to the mind through the nerves and how a person's feelings and thoughts are intertwined and affected each other for 'to be happy or miserable without being conscious of it, seems to me utterly inconsistent and impossible' for conscious thought, according to Locke, influenced bodily reactions and feelings.[86] Importantly, during the eighteenth century, nerve theory was refined and built upon by Hume and Adam Smith, whose works on sympathy and sentiment expanded the idea of nerves into the concept of invoking feeling in another person, and thus nerves were partly responsible for human compassion and empathy.[87]

An important observation within these letters is that anxiety was seen as an emotional state connected to happiness, sadness, and physical and mental states of others and the stronger the relationship, the stronger the anxieties could be. By this, I mean that there were understandings on how it could be a motivator for a change in behaviour, used to illicit a specific response or to generate sympathy. This links understandings of anxiety to the wider philosophical understandings of sympathy.

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[85] Robert Whytt, *Observations on the Nature, Causes, and Cure of Those Disorders Which Have Been Commonly Called Nervous, Hypochondriac, or Hysteric,* 2nd Ed. (Edinburgh: T. Becket, 1765), p. iv; Beatty, *Nervous* Disease, p. 10.
[86] Beatty, *Nervous Disease*, p. 11; John Locke, *The Works of John Locke in Four Volumes*, Vol.1 (London: H.Woodfall, 1768), esp. pp. 27-30, 43-45.
[87] Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, pp. 72-73; See also Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiment* (London: A. Millar, 1759).

According to Ryan Patrick Hanley, there is a consensus that the eighteenth century was 'the age of sympathy'.[88] Luigi Turco provided three definitions of the term within eighteenth-century philosophy: sympathy as 'mechanical communication of feelings and passions', as a 'process of imagination, or of reason, by which we substitute ourselves for others' and our 'delight in the happiness and sorrow in the misery of other people'.[89] Importantly, as Luigi Turco notes, these denote that sympathy linked the happiness and sadness of others to our own state of happiness and sadness.[90] Thus, the concept of sympathy meant that individuals were self-interested in the emotions of others.

An important observation within their analysis was that sympathy was linked to proximity, both physically and emotionally. For Hume reflected that 'the stronger the relation is betwixt ourselves and any object, the more easily does the imagination make the transition, and convey to the related idea the vivacity of conception, with which we always form the idea of our own person'.[91] Hanley suggests that sympathy was a direct response to the development of widespread social and geographical mobility, the creation of communities of strangers compared to the local, intimate communities of the early modern period.[92] In this sense, for Hanley, the concept of 'neighbor [sic] love' was replaced with sympathy as a social concept for displaying neighbourly love. This notion of sympathy deepened in more intimate relationships such as familial and romantic bonds, and anxiety was at the heart of these types of expressions. This connection between nerves, sympathy and anxiety is

[88] Ryan Patrick Hanley, 'The Eighteenth-Century Context of Sympathy from Spinoza to Kant', in *Sympathy: A History*, ed. by Eric Schliesser (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 171-198, p. 172.
[89] Luigi Turco, 'Sympathy and Moral Sense, 1725–1740', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 7.1 (1999), pp. 79–101, p. 79.
[90] *Ibid*, p.79.
[91] Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature,* p. 76.
[92] Hanley, 'The Eighteenth-Century Context of Sympathy from Spinoza to Kant', pp. 173-174.

embedded within the cultural phenomenon of sensibility, discussed above, and its emphasis on expression of emotion. This thesis will demonstrate how anxious expressions convey ideas around sympathy, as they were vehicles for care, concern and relationship building. Thus, it appears that anxiety was intimately connected with the concept of showing sympathy in the eighteenth century.

Beyond the medical, eighteenth-century definitions tended to focus more on what we would now term 'worries' or 'concerns', everyday anxieties which we deal with across our lives and it is here that I offer a definition of anxiety from how the letter-writers understood anxiety according to their correspondences. The dictionary's contemporary and modern definitions of anxiety are very similar. Whilst the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it as 'worry for the future or about something with an uncertain outcome', Samuel Johnson's dictionary defines anxiety as 'trouble of mind about some future event' and 'solicitude' as well as 'Depression, lowness of spirits'.[93] So both connect to ideas of uncertainty and what we would term today as worry or concern. Neither define anxiety primarily in pathological terms, what we would refer to today as anxiety as a mental health condition. Whilst this definition did exist by the end of the eighteenth century, this thesis is more interested in understanding how families communicated their everyday worries and anxieties and how anxiety manifested itself into the daily lives of individuals and families in Georgian Britain.

Anxiety also refers to being 'careful'. Care too means 'anxiety, concern' and connects anxiety to feelings of love, affection and friendship.[94] This links with how the letter writers

[93] Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* Vol I (London: W. Strahan, J. and F. Rivington; J. Hinton, 1770), p. 156; Oxford University Press, 'anxiety, n.'.
[94] Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, Vol I, p. 156.

understood anxiety, with it more wide ranging that just 'trouble of mind about some future event' and played with the strength of the anxiety expressed to convey feelings of love, affection, and sympathy. This builds on the medical understandings of anxiety and its embodiment. As noted by French and Rothery, symptoms of anxiety, can 'manifest as either physiological…or psychological', arguably both.[95] The Canning letters evidence shared understandings of what they conceive of as anxiety, especially that it denoted feelings of love and care or concerns over losing something or someone they care about.[96]

Epistolary anxieties also play an important role in indicating anxieties within distant relationships and the importance of maintaining correspondences as a means of not just maintaining but valuing the relationship. It is important to not immediately assume that anxiety was an unpleasant emotional experience. Indeed, that it was written about so frequently in the letters shows that it served an important social purpose, which this thesis demonstrates. I have written elsewhere how letter-writers taught children the art of distance epistolary rhetoric, of which mastering anxious expressions to convey other emotions such as annoyance, anger, frustration, grief, and affection, as well as anxiety were central.[97] This is not to suggest that the feelings of anxiety are formulaic but that the understanding and use of anxious expressions as a form of social or 'feeling rhetoric' was learnt through the writing and sending of familial letters.[98] This suggests that the Cannings were aware of the anxieties around sending and receiving letters, and indeed their letters

[95] French and Rothery, 'Male Anxiety and the Younger Sons', pp. 977-978.
[96] *Ibid*, pp.977-978.
[97] See Rachel Bynoth, 'A Mother Educating her Daughter Remotely though Familial Correspondence: The Letter as a Form of Female Distance Education in the Eighteenth Century', *History*, 106.373 (December 2021), pp. 727-750.
[98] Bailey used the term 'feeling rhetoric' to describe emotional language manipulation in this way. See Joanne Bailey, 'Think Wot a Mother Must Feel: Parenting in English Pauper Letters c.1760-1834', *Family and Community History*, 12.1 (2010), pp. 5-19, p. 11.

are crafted to either assuage these anxieties, highlight them or use them as emotional tools within relationships.

Anxiety itself appears in the letters over events, behaviours and feelings which involved uncertainty and a lack of a sense of the future where everything will be alright. Thus, topics such as marriage partners, professions, illness and the potential for death, finances, old age, identity, reputation, and expectations from various sources all had the potential to raise anxieties in the Canning letters, and within the letters of other elite families.

The love letters between George Canning Sr. and Mary Anne Canning depict most clearly in the letter collection the shared understanding of the embodiment of anxiety. They depict descriptions of hearts panting, time watching and a restlessness and an inability to concentrate on anything.[99] Both also note their ill-health in mind and body, or just in mind, in their letters in response to their anxious feelings, suggesting that their anxieties are manifesting as physical ailments and their conveyance of this was another known shared indicator of anxiety. Indeed, as discussed above, whilst there were noted connections between the mind and body, there was also an understanding that the body and mind were separate but connected, in that one could have a troubled mind whilst maintaining a healthy body.[100] However, the lack of physical discomfort in connection to mentions or interpretations of anxiety in the letters as a collection suggests either that its bodily effects were left to the imagination or, more likely, the writers wrote with a shared understanding of the bodily effects of anxiety. This supports Thomas Dixon's observation that it is not just

[99] See BL, Add MS89143/3/1/2, especially George Canning to Mary Anne Costello, July 26th 1767. For a wider discussion on the anxieties in these letters, see Chapter 1 of this thesis.
[100] Karen Harvey, 'Epochs of Embodiment', p. 463.

'any old bodily arousal' which constitutes an emotional response but one which accompanies 'a mental representation, or belief' that turns the experience into an emotion.[101]

Finally, the letters also typify the connection between expressions of anxiety as expressions of love. The stronger the need to convey loving feelings, the stronger the anxieties are displayed in the letters. This is not just peculiar to romantic love but other types of love including familial and friendship and the other Canning letters, whilst not always being explicit or as strongly expressed, draw upon this shared understanding of anxiety and the rest of this thesis demonstrates how this operates within various familial relationships and stages of life.

Alongside this, anxiety is utilised in the letters as an emotional tool. Letters were important spaces for 'doing emotional work'.[102] That anxiety was expressed so often also suggests that letters were an important space to share anxieties, through who these were shared with depended on the relationship, closeness, and context. Indeed, some of the Canning letters, such as Hitty's letters to her daughter Bess in 1792, when her intimate friend Elizabeth 'Eliza' Sheridan was dying, appear to suggest that they were important outlets for anxieties which she was unable to physically express at Eliza's sick, and later death, bed. The Canning letters thus suggest that it was understood that sharing anxieties through letters was a way of relieving them, as well as a way of signifying various intimacies within relationships.

[101] Thomas Dixon, *The History of Emotions: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), p. 50.
[102] William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 104; Arlie Russell Hochschild, 'Emotion Work, Feeling Rules, and Social Structure', *American Journal of Sociology*, 85.3 (1979), pp. 551-575, p. 551.

Anxiety was also utilised in the letters to shape relationships, through persuasion and demand, and the letters demonstrate how anxiety was employed for these ends. In a similar way to one of our uses of the term in the contemporary world, the Cannings would write that 'they were anxious to hear…' indicating that they wished for a reply to alleviate their anxiety and placing the responsibility for this in the hands of the recipient(s).[103] Thus, the letter writers understood through epistolary socialisation that certain words, phrases, and actions would illicit certain responses. This reflects Karen Harvey's similar discussion on sympathy, which was built through 'a framework of patterns of enquiry, report and response', which was part of a culture of care, of which anxiety was a part.[104] In a similar way to those around anxiety, these frameworks were often used strategically. Whilst this is partly formulaic, and individuals often repeated phrases in their letters, including in the Canning letters, this does not necessarily mean that they were empty phrases but rather established a shared feeling rhetoric, to achieve a variety of end means within the correspondences.

Methodology

As has been established, anxiety manifests in several ways within the letter collection. The anxieties shared within the letters are mostly individual or familial anxieties, though some of these are reflections of wider societal anxieties. For example, both Hitty and Mary Anne's letters convey anxieties around being a 'good' mother, anxieties which come from wider societal anxieties on what a 'good' mother was and concerns over women and their place in

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[103] Karen Harvey, 'Sympathy in Practice: Eighteenth-Century Letters and the Material Body', in *Letters and the Body, 1700-1830: Writing and* Embodiment, eds by Sarah Goldsmith, Sheryllynne Haggerty and Karen Harvey (New York and London: Routledge, 2023), pp. 151-181, p. 152.
[104] Harvey, 'Sympathy in Practice', p. 158.

society. Thus, the anxieties found within the letters are influenced by wider familial and societal contexts, as well as individual relationships.

When identifying anxiety in the letters, I took several approaches, two of which build on the method of analysing emotion words. Emotion words are useful in helping us to chronicle emotional change and are extremely important in analysing expressions of emotions. Indeed, Jean Starobinski argues that they are so important, the history of emotions 'cannot be anything other than the history of those words in which the emotion is expressed'.[105] Whilst I do not entirely agree with Starobinski, as material analysis is also a valid form of method and is also utilised to a lesser extent, this thesis concentrates on the use of textual analysis.

The first approach was to look for the word 'anxiety' or 'anxious' within the letters themselves. These appeared frequently throughout the letters, though were not the only indication of anxiety. Indeed, use of the term 'anxious' also denoted a demand for information, affection or reciprocation of feeling from the recipient(s) in order to relieve the anxiety of the writer.

The second was to look for connected emotion words, including 'desire, fear, unease, dread, distress, love, affection' and also emotion words which might indicate or cause anxiety such as 'wretched, unhappy, inferior, dismayed, annoyed, unfortunate, dreadful, angry' or relieve it such as 'happy, relieved, pleased, delighted, content'. Words, phrases, or behaviours

[105] Jean Starobinski, 'The Idea of Nostalgia', trans. William S. Kemp, *Diogenes*, 14.53 (1966), pp. 81-103, p. 82.

which indicated the embodiment of anxiety were also included, such as 'tears, palpitations, heart, thoughts, restlessness, kisses and panting'.

The meanings of these related words could change over the eighteenth century. For example, the use of related term 'uneasy' had several meanings across the long eighteenth century, according to work by Harvey, but its connections with 'anxiety' and a 'concerned mental state' are seen across the century, with Harvey noting that the term was more explicitly referring to this definition by the end of the nineteenth century.[106] Thus, I utilised dictionaries and other printed primary materials to consider where emotion-words related to anxiety.

The third and most common method came through the wider reading of the letters as a narrative. For as Susan Whyman notes, 'as we become familiar with characters…patterns take shape' and 'eventually, we grasp the rhythms of daily life and see how cognitive ideas and behaviour evolve' and these 'decode writers' anxieties.[107] Through this, and what Clifford Geertz calls 'thick description', a building narrative emerges and the anxieties between the lines of the letters are revealed. For it exists within the tapestry of the writing and the contexts, familial, local, and national, as well as through singular expressions and emotion words. This is how for example George Canning's anxieties regarding his mother are revealed through his carefully planned trip for his infant children to meet with her in the early 1800s or how Mary Anne's letters to her father-in-law are about more than just money

[106] Harvey, 'Epochs of Embodiment', pp. 463-464.
[107] Whyman, *Sociability and Power in Late-Stuart England*, p. 8.

worries but her anxieties around her and her children being accepted into the wider Canning family.

Moreover, unlike in modern times, fear in the eighteenth century was also equated with anxiety. Johnson's dictionary defines fear as 'to be anxious' as well as 'to be afraid', suggesting that for eighteenth-century individuals, fear was synonymous with anxiety and could potentially be used interchangeably.[108] Whilst some scholars such as Joanne Begiato and Bourke refer to the differences between anxiety and fear, the letters examined in this thesis support Johnson's definition that fear and anxiety were synonyms in this period, and no specific distinction is made, at least in everyday usage. Due to this, the thesis refers to both expressions of anxiety and fear as we would consider them today under the term 'anxiety'. That is, it will consider both situations 'an immediate, objective threat' (fear) and 'an anticipated, subjective threat' (anxiety).[109] It supports Bourke's notion that anxiety and fear were created by groups in the past; that is, a group could decide that they can '*believe* themselves capable of assessing risk or identifying a (supposed) enemy'.[110] Both contemporary definitions of anxiety and fear suggest that this distinction is not yet pronounced in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and so both terms will be used interchangeably.

This approach to identifying anxiety relies on understanding one collection of letters in-depth, especially the familial and social contexts. Studies of eighteenth-century letters typically follow a thematic approach, examining one subject and consulting a variety of

[108] Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, Vol I, p. 387.
[109] Bourke, *Fear: A Cultural History*, p. 201.
[110] *Ibid*, p. 203.

correspondences.[111] This study takes a different approach, one utilised by Whyman and Broomhall and van Gent, who examine one family's correspondence network in-depth.[112] That the structure of the thesis follows the lifecycle, from courtship and marriage, pregnancy, parenthood and childhood, through to old age, with a thematic chapter on death, as this is present throughout the life course affords the project three key strengths.

Firstly, it allows for a comparison of the same group of individuals across various life stages, demonstrating continuities and changes across both historical time and generations. This structure allows for several generations to be presented. Hitty Canning and Mary Anne Hunn (Canning née Costello) are the backbone to the narrative as all the letters and relationships connect through them in some way and allows for the comparison of two sisters-in-law who led very different lives after their marriages. This includes as many of the surviving letters as possible and provides the cut off points of 1760 and 1830. 1760 is when the letter collection begins and 1830 is the year of the last letter from Hitty, a year before she died. Mary Anne had already died in 1827.

Secondly, the use of a case study to examine emotional expression is useful for understanding the impact of wider social, historical and familial events and experiences on everyday life in the eighteenth century for the Canning family.[113] This reflects Brant's assertion that personal letters reflect, 'in miniature', wider society.[114] It also shows how

[111] Some examples from an extensive list include Sally Holloway, *The Game of Love in Georgian England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Bailey, *Parenting in England*; Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture*; Susan Whyman, *The Pen and the People: English Letter Writers 1660-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Leonie Hannan, *Women of Letters: Gender, Writing and the Life of the Mind in Early Modern England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016).
[112] See Whyman, *Sociability and Power in Late-Stuart England*; Broomhall and van Gent, *Gender, Power and Identity*.
[113] See Whyman, *Sociability and Power in Late-Stuart England*, p. 4.
[114] Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture*, p. 5.

societal shifts on emotional responses over the period also impacted upon the shape of emotional expressions, as these change according to context. Broomhall's case study of the Nassau family correspondence proves that letters 'exchanged among siblings and relatives…allow us to explore how gender inflected their epistolary negotiations of relationships and discourses with their correspondents'.[115] This included 'opportunities to advance familial politics' which were 'in part shaped by collective and individual understandings of men and women's roles within families and how these could be enacted and expressed through correspondence'.[116] This case study approach allows for close textual and material analysis of correspondences to understand how the Canning family dynamics, as well as societal and cultural ideas and practices impacted upon their emotional expression and family relationships.

Thirdly, it presents a method for conducting an emotional analysis of a familial archive. Whilst not the only way to navigate through familial letters, it charts chronological, thematic, and generational expressions and uses of anxiety across milestones in the lifecycle, familial events and change, and everyday experiences of distance, enriching our understandings of everyday relationships across the period under consideration. This approach advocates for the importance of historical and familial context in analysing familial letters. It creates a strong narrative which underpins the historical analysis and presents an intertwined relationship between biographical and historical analysis. Societal and familial contexts are central to my analysis and so I utilise Geertz's 'thick description' to

[115] Susan Broomhall, 'Letters Make the Family: Nassau Family Correspondence at the Turn of the Seventeenth Century,' in *Early Modern Women and Transnational Communities of Letters*, ed. by Julie D. Campbell and Anne R. Larsen (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), pp. 25-44, p. 25. See also Broomhall and van Gent, 'Corresponding Affections' and Broomhall and van Gent, *Gender, Power, and Identity*.
[116] Broomhall, "Letters Make the Family', p. 25.

contextualise the emotional exchanges and show how the Canning's familial and social context were intrinsic to their distant communications, how they expressed emotions and the nuances of their conversations.[117] More widely, detailed understandings of familial and social contexts reveal subtleties of emotional exchanges, some of which could be taking place ten, twenty or even thirty years after certain influential events and conversations.

Despite the wealth of this collection, it is not infallible and, like archival correspondence more generally, it can be problematic. The letters examined are incomplete, with some of the correspondence being one-sided, limiting the extent to which I can examine some of the relationships within the network. Some of the members (outside the fourteen main correspondents) do not have any surviving letters at all. Furthermore, many topics are based on face-to-face conversations, prior knowledge, or coded information and so a third-party reader can be barred from the intimate details of the contents. Finally, letters, like all ego-documents, are crafted objects and their reliability must be questioned.

The correspondence itself has aided me in uncovering the perspective of the missing half of some of the correspondence. The eighteenth-century practice of writing with the reader in mind, recaps elements of the previous letter received and offer enough detail, either alone or in conjunction with other letters, to infer the conversations and perceived emotions of many of the missing letters. For those correspondents for whom no letters have survived, their words and emotions can often be discovered through the paraphrasing of their letters to other correspondents, or their voice is found in the odd postscript. Whilst not ideal, it does invite comment on their epistolary relationships with surviving correspondents. The

[117] For a comprehensive overview of 'Thick Description', see Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 3-30.

use of other primary and secondary sources enables the verification of facts, ascertaining their reliability. Cross examining the letters with each other, and other sources, provides context and enables the decrypting of most of their content on the few occasions where the letters alone are difficult to understand. This mostly negates the issues mentioned above, though some gaps are unavoidable.

The main childhood and adolescent letters which survive are from Bess and George Canning and this has limited the source base for discussing these experiences of anxiety within the family. This has also led to some of the same letters being analysed within Chapters Three and Four, but from the perspective of the mother and child respectively. These two chapters therefore speak to each other, to provide a fascinating insight into two sides of the same correspondence.

Whilst the Cannings are idiosyncratic in their specific emotional expressions of anxiety, their letters represent wider anxieties of the elite in eighteenth century society. As a family who straddle the boundaries of the gentry and wealthy middling sorts, their anxieties are influenced by wider societal processes and frameworks including those around letter writing, sensibility, identity, status and expectations, and emotional expression and thus the letters call attention to the anxieties of elite families. This is firmly demonstrated through anxieties around stages of the lifecycle, different types of familial relationships and the uses of anxiety as an emotional tool as seen in other elite letter collections, indicated in Table 3, and a variety of printed primary sources such as letters, books, newspapers, printed letters, satirical prints, poetry, conduct literature, sermons and treatises.

Collection of letters	Published or manuscript
The Canning Family Letters	Manuscript, though some have also been published such as George Canning's letter diary and excerpts in named biographies. All quoted material is from the manuscript sources excepting the letter diary.
The Sheridan Correspondence	The letters from Elizabeth Sheridan to Mehitabel Canning were manuscript. The remaining were database transcriptions and published materials.
Lord Chesterfield's letters	This edition published in 1776
Jane Austen's Letters	This edition published in 2011
Anne LeFroy's Letters	This edition published in 2007
The Noel and Milbanke Letters	This edition published in 1967
Letters from Frances Brawne to Frances Keats, 1820-1824	This edition published in 1936
Various individual manuscript letters	Social Bodies Database which provides digital manuscript versions and translations
Various individual manuscript letters	Electronic Enlightenment Database which provides digital manuscript versions and translations
Various individual manuscript letters	Elizabeth Montagu Correspondence Online which provides digital manuscript versions and translations
Johnson Family Letters	Manuscript
Love letters from 'J.H' and Humphrey Senhouse III to Catherine Wood, 1763 and 1768	Manuscript
Letters between Elizabeth Reading and Edward Leathes, 1771-72	Manuscript

Table 3: The print status of the letters used throughout the study

These letter collections, both manuscript and printed, were used to discuss elements of commonality, difference and context to the Canning Family correspondence. In particular, they highlight the shared anxieties around familial roles, life stages, distance, health, money, relationships and the shared frameworks of the letter writers in constructing the emotions within these letters.

The printed eighteenth-century primary materials highlighted above were designed to be circulated in the public sphere, reflecting societal values, concerns and practices from a variety of perspectives and motivations. Importantly, easier methods of achieving publication meant that an array of views were expressed, published and consumed. Thus, they reveal the changing and varying views on eighteenth-century societal ideals and their implementation, demonstrating that there were differences but also a wider consensus for model standards and frameworks. Furthermore, they have aided in the identification of anxiety within the letters, through common emotion words, phrasing or situations. These demonstrate the wider typicality of both the anxieties expressed within the Canning letters and the societal frameworks for emotional expression.

This thesis employs history of emotions methodologies to analyse the Canning letter archives. Rob Boddice noted in 2019 that '[t]he History of emotions, now a major focus in the discipline of history, has taken off in the last decade' and it is still a growing field.[118] Yet there is no consensus on what 'emotions' are. As William Reddy notes, despite the development and growth of research, 'disagreements persist' as to how to define

[118] Rob Boddice, *A History of Feelings* (London: Reaktion Books, 2019), p. 9.

emotions.[119] Neuropsychologists Peter Ekman, Wallace V. Friesen and Phoebe Ellsworth concur with Reddy's point, signifying that this is an interdisciplinary issue.[120]

This is further problematised by the lack of the term 'emotion' historically: past societies referred to 'passions', 'nerves', 'sensibilities', 'sentiments' and 'affects', and the choice of whether to use historical terminology.[121] Though it existed previously, and is present in the Canning letters, the term 'emotion' only became widely used in the nineteenth century.[122] I have chosen to use the term 'emotion' throughout this thesis as it covers from 1760 to 1830, during which time the term fell into more common usage. This is also a linguistic choice, to reflect the changing meanings of emotion, passions and affects. Whilst, as McCann and McKechnie-Mason point out, 'passions' is the most historically accurate term within eighteenth-century discourse, particularly in philosophy, it is easily confused with the contemporary meaning of passions, that of intense emotion or fervour.[123] Whilst anxiety can be an intense emotion, and indeed, the Canning letters demonstrate this, it is fundamentally an everyday emotion, existing on a sliding scale of intensity. Moreover, in contemporary society, anxiety described in the term of 'passions' could suggest a closer link with pathological anxiety, associated with poor mental health, and I wish to present a broader view of anxiety than this, to demonstrate how anxiety exists in the everyday, not just in the extreme. Finally, 'emotion' is the term utilised by the most texts engaging with

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[119] Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling*, p. ix.
[120] Paul Ekman *et al.*, *Emotion in the Human Face: Guidelines for Research and an Integration of Findings* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1972), pp. 7-8.
[121] Barbara H. Rosenwein and Riccardo Cristiani, *What is the History of Emotions?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018), p. 2; See also Thomas Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological* Category (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp.2-10, 13-19.
[122] Rosenwein and Cristiani, *What is the History of Emotions?,* pp. 2, 9.
[123] McCann and McKechnie-Mason, *Fear in the Medical and Literary Imagination*, p. 8; Oxford University Press, 'anxiety, n.'; Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, Vol II, p. 142.

such studies, and across disciplines and genres and for such an interdisciplinary field, common terminology is helpful for wider dissemination of these ideas, across fields.[124] This passage by Barbara H. Rosenwein and Riccardo Cristiani fittingly summarises the complications with defining emotions:

> How do we know – ironic as it may seem – that an emotion is an emotion?... What makes those words, gestures, and the concepts they embrace "emotions"? Are we born with them? Or do we learn them? [125]

Rosenwein and Cristiani have identified two conceptual questions surrounding emotions: are we born with emotions or do we learn them? There are two dominant perceptions of emotions: universalism, where emotional facial expression transcended cultural and historical divides, and social constructivism, which suggests that emotions are socially constructed. The divergence between universalism and social constructivism has been well documented by academics.[126] Critics of universalism, such as Benno Gammerl, Phillip Nielsen and Margrit Pernau, problematised this approach, for if this universalist approach was entirely true, then expressions of emotion would fully transcend historical and cultural divides which is not the case.[127] However, anthropologist and historian Reddy's criticism of the social constructivist viewpoint is equally valid. For, as he argues, 'the strong constructionist stand is one that views the individual as fully plastic, and it is one that, as a

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[124] McCann and McKechnie-Mason, *Fear in the Medical and Literary Imagination*, p. 8.
[125] Rosenwein and Cristiani, *What is the History of Emotions?*, p. 2.
[126] Examples include Barbara Rosenwein, p. 2; Catherine Lutz and Geoffrey M. 'Introduction' in *Anger's Past: The Social Uses of An Emotion in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Barbara Rosenwein (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), pp. 1-8, p. 2; Catherine Lutz and Geoffrey M. White, 'The Anthropology of Emotions', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 15 (1986), pp. 405-436, p. 406; Rob Boddice, *The History of Emotions* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), p. 47.
[127] Benno Gammerl, *et al*., 'Introduction' in *Encounters with Emotions: Negotiating Cultural Differences Since Early Modernity*, eds by Benno Gammerl *et al*. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2019), pp. 1-36, p. 3.

result, cannot provide grounds for a political critique of any given construction'.[128] In other words, if our values, thoughts and views are socially constructed, then one cannot critique a socially constructed society as any opinion will itself be socially constructed.[129]
This thesis positions itself towards social constructivism, whilst acknowledging that the concept of feeling is universal, the interpretation, expression and understanding of emotion is bound by cultural and historical contexts. Context is especially important in determining emotional expressions, bodily interpretations and expressions, for as Geertz observes, an eye movement could be a twitch or a wink and that wink itself could communicate several things.[130]

Due to the nature of the letter as part of a 'conversation', there was performativity, in the sense that a letter is crafted for a purpose.[131] Indeed, letter writing manuals, which stressed the naturalness and ease of conversation, aimed to direct the performance of letter-writers. As Bruce Redford suggests, the eighteenth-century letter, indeed this could be extended to all letters, were a performance or 'act'.[132] He suggests that this was achieved through a variety of techniques to create 'substitutes for gesture, vocal inflection, and physical context' which Stephanie Clayton notes creates 'an epistolary performance that is a constant adjustment of voice and mask, text and subtext'.[133]

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[128] William Reddy, 'Against Constructionism: The Historical Ethnography of Emotions', *Current Anthropology*, 38 (1997), pp. 327-51, pp. 327-329.
[129] Rosenwein and Cristiani, *What is the History of Emotions?*, p. 34.
[130] Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, pp. 3-30.
[131] See Brant, *Eighteenth-Century* Letters, p. 24.
[132] Bruce Redford, *The Converse of the Pen: Acts of Intimacy in the Eighteenth-Century Letter* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987), pp. 1-2.
[133] Stephanie Clayton, '"For the Love of Ink": Patronage and Performance in the Eighteenth Century', PhD Thesis, Cardiff University, 2019.

Similarly, Brant also notes that ‘epistolary performances’ were ‘self-fashioning’, which Melanie Bigold argues were a way of ‘both creating and viewing textual representations of oneself’ and these differed depending on the relationship of the writer and recipient, the purpose for which the letter was written and whether it was likely to be read aloud or seen by others.[134] In terms of emotions, this connects to Gammerl’s notion of ‘emotional styles’, in which emotional expression is shaped by the space and those within that space.[135] Thus, this thesis is concerned with the emotional practice of letter writing and in particular, as Rob Boddice puts it, ‘the way in which those words are “mobilised”’ and what individuals ‘do with, through and because of those words’.[136] This links to three key methods: Reddy’s ‘emotives’, French and Rothery’s emotional economy Monique Scheer’s emotional practices.

The way that letter-writers choose to express their anxieties shaped the feelings of both the letter writer and the recipient(s), ‘sometimes very significantly’.[137] Reddy has termed these expressions as ‘emotives’. Emotives such as ‘I am anxious’ or ‘I am uneasy’ are particular examples found within the Canning family letters. The vocabulary and frameworks were not just used to express anxiety but, as Sally Holloway notes for her study of love, also ‘shaped and influenced their understanding and experience’ of anxiety as an emotional experience.[138] This ’performative act’ of emotion, central to Reddy’s ‘emotives’, is

[134] Brant, *Eighteenth-Century* Letters, p. 24; Melanie Bigold, *Women of Letters, Manuscript Circulation, and Print Afterlives in the Eighteenth Century: Elizabeth Rowe, Catherine Cockburn, and Elizabeth Carter* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 13-14.
[135] Benno Gammerl, ‘Emotional Styles – Concepts and Challenges’, *Rethinking History*, 16.2 (2012), pp. 161-176, p. 164.
[136] Boddice, *The History of Emotions*, p. 120.
[137] Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling,* p.103.
[138] Sally Holloway, ‘Romantic Love in Words and Objects during Courtship and Adultery, c.1730-1830’, PhD Thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2013, p. 25.

developed by French and Rothery within their concept of ‘emotional economy’ which builds on both ‘emotives’ and ‘emotional styles’. This emphasises the language and ‘articulation of emotion’ but relies on a shared knowledge of expected reaction or emotional response.[139] The Canning letters, among other familial letters, show that this ‘cultural script’ was taught in part through familial correspondences and examples of this can be seen in Chapters One, Three, Four and Six particularly.[140]

These shared frameworks for understanding and expressing anxiety within a multitude of situations are seen within printed primary materials such as satirical prints, letter-writing manuals, didactic literature, novels, medical literature and periodicals, and as such, contributed to what Scheer terms the ‘emotional practice’ of letter writing and expressing anxiety within that practice. This practice includes both ‘intentional, deliberate action’ and ‘habituated behaviour executed without much cognitive attention paid’ through learnt practices and builds on Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus*.[141] Alongside the printed literature, socialisation through family and familial correspondences, friends, writing masters and other educators would also influence the embedded practices of expressing anxiety within letter writing practices until it became instinctive or perceived as a natural response. These are what Katie Barclay terms ‘performed practices’.[142] In particular, the letter writers ‘allow their readers, even when physically absent, to understand how

[139] Ruth Barton, ‘Dearly Beloved Relations? A Study of Elite Family Emotions in Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth-Century Northamptonshire’, *Family and Community History*, 23.1 (2020), pp. 55-73, p. 57.
[140] French and Rothery, ‘Male Anxiety Among Younger Sons’, p. 980; Linda A. Pollock, ‘Anger and the Negotiation of Relationships in Early Modern England’, Historical *Journal*, 47.3 (2004), pp. 567-590, p. 573.
[141] Monique Scheer, ‘Are Emotions A Kind of Practice (and is That What Makes Them Have a History)? A Bourdieuian Approach to Understanding Emotion’, *History and Theory*, 51.2 (May 2012), pp. 193-220, p. 200.
[142] Katie Barclay, ‘Performance and Performativity’ in *Early Modern Emotions: An Introduction*, ed. by Susan Broomhall (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), pp. 14-17, p. 14.

emotions were experienced in the body' and also to evoke emotional states within the recipients, for a number of purposes such as communicating affection, mobilising action or alleviating anxieties.[143] For the way a letter writer shapes emotions in a letter is different to if they held a physical conversation. Moreover, the emotions are shaped differently depending on the recipient(s) of that letter. The letter writers are also using 'communication practices', particularly when describing to others the physicality of letter writing or the spaces in which they write.

In this way, the letters are both performative, in that they convey various selves and can be persuasive and utilised for various purposes but they are also vehicles for conveying real emotion for they convey what Ella Sbaraini denotes their 'emotional reality', the 'realness of someone's affective experiences, as captured in a particular moment'.[144] Indeed Reddy's 'emotives' are linguistic expressions within which emotion and their expression are entangled, thus they voice emotion. Moreover, context, coupled with such a vast corpus of letters, also aids the understanding of whether emotion is feigned. For example, because Mary Anne is trying to defend her position as a mother to her son George and persuade him to her point of view using various emotional frameworks does not mean that her feelings are not real. In fact, through writing the letter, Mary Anne's emotions and convictions become stronger, as the writing of the letter brings to the fore her emotions surrounding the situation. Indeed, whilst Mary Anne set out to defend her decisions, the act of writing the letter has dictated the way that has been expressed. Setting out to write a letter itself

[143] Kate Davidson *et al*., 'Emotions as a Kind of Practice: Six Case Studies Utilizing Monique Scheer's Practice-Based Approach to Emotions History', *Cultural History*, 7.2 (2018), pp. 226-238, p. 229.
[144] Ella Sbaraini, 'Feeling Suicidal in Eighteenth-Century England, 1750-1850', PhD Thesis, University of Cambridge, 2023, pp. 46-47.

conjures emotional responses as part of the practice of letter writing, especially epistolary anxieties. The writing of the letter itself can often be dictated by navigating these, preventing them or alleviating them, as numerous examples throughout this thesis will demonstrate. This sits in line with Scheer's concept that emotions 'are performed because they "do something": they both communicate the self and create it'.[145]

This thesis also draws on Carol and Peter Stearns' highly influential article 'Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards' (1985), particularly at the beginning of chapters to consider societal expectations regarding anxiety across the lifecycle. Building upon earlier work on emotions management by Arlie Hochschild, they devised the term 'emotionology' to differentiate 'emotional standards of a society' from 'emotional experiences of individuals and groups'.[146] This is achieved because emotionology centres on the premise that 'cultural values set common standards against which the self and others are defined and judged' and various behaviours were prized or undesired in different societies.[147] In other words, basic emotions did not change but how they were allowed to be expressed did, as dictated by societal and cultural views, ideals and conventions.[148] As already mentioned above, alongside the extensive Canning archive, I will be analysing various letters, books, newspapers, printed letters, satirical prints, poetry, didactic literature, sermons, and treatises. Designed to be circulated in the public sphere, they reflect societal values, concerns, and practices from a variety of perspectives and

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[145] Barclay, 'Performance and Performativity', p. 15. For the overall theory, see Monique Scheer, 'Are Emotions a Kind of Practice'.

[146] Peter and Carol Stearns, 'Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards', *American Historical Review*, 90.4 (October 1985), pp. 813-36, p. 813. See Hochschild, 'Emotion Work, p. 551.

[147] Bailey, Parenting in England, p. 8.

[148] Hochschild, 'Emotion Work', p. 1; Rosenwein and Cristiani, *What is the History of Emotions?,* p. 30; Boddice, *The History of Emotions*, p. 59.

motivations. Importantly, they reveal the changing and varying views on eighteenth-century societal ideals and their suggested implementation, showing that there was not a consensus for model standards. Easier methods of achieving publication meant that there was an array of views published and consumed.

Though I shall be utilising print culture and other materials to determine emotional standards and ideas, I shall not do so unproblematically. For emotionology's weakness, as Rosenwein argues, is that it accepts that societal standards of emotion, as seen in prescriptive sources, reflected how people felt.[149] This is an issue which has previously befallen other areas of historical enquiry, most notably separate spheres theory which is continually being revised.[150] This thesis instead uses conduct literature to contextualise the emotional expressions within the Canning family, presenting them more as frameworks within which idiosyncratic expressions of anxiety took place.

Layout of thesis chapters

Chapter One examines courtship and marriage, particularly focusing on the love letters from George Canning to Mary Anne Costello. It analyses anxiety in the love letter, understanding how the language of anxiety was central to the language of romantic love and how it signalled sincerity, interest, love, and affection and combined with epistolary anxieties surrounding the writing and sending of letters. It builds on work by scholars such as Holloway and Barclay to understand how romantic love and anxiety were understood to be

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[149] Barbara Rosenwein, 'Worrying about Emotions in History', *American Historical Review,* 107.3 (2002), pp. 821-845, p. 824; Rosenwein and Cristiani, *What is the History of Emotions?*, pp. 30-31.
[150] An example of this is separate spheres theory, where Amanda Vickery's influential article 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres' details how prescriptive sources are being relied upon unproblematically to describe actual practice. See Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres?'.

intertwined in the eighteenth century, influenced by the emergence of sensibility as a feeling rhetoric. This chapter also examines the role of the family in courtship and the anxieties of changing attitudes towards marriage between different generations. This also shows how familial power structures utilised anxiety to manipulate other family members and how intergenerational differences are highlighted through examining the lifecycle through the eighteenth century.

Pregnancy was an anxious time for expectant parents and their families, across all the stages of conception, pregnancy, and birth, and this is the focus of Chapter Two. Concentrating on the pregnancies of Mary Anne Canning and Joan Canning, the chapter argues that pregnancy and childbirth amplified and created other anxieties for individuals and families, relating to their own situations. It presents pregnancy as a point of reflection, for both men and women, and takes a gendered approach to the consideration of who sent letters and communicated news and for what purpose. It reveals that pregnancy could be a reflective moment, with letters from this period used to create parental identities using anxious rhetoric and as a space for identity crises, where anxieties could be expressed and considered and solutions and/or alleviations formulated.

Parenthood is the focus of chapter three. Whilst fatherhood is briefly considered, it is only in context to ideas of motherhood as the Canning fathers were dead before any surviving letters between parent and child took place. This chapter examines Hitty and Mary Anne's letters after their husbands' deaths, how this affected their anxieties and how they renegotiated their maternal identities. Both widows were sisters-in-law, yet they led very different lives. Hitty was left in a comfortable financial situation and the first section examines how she used anxious language to communicate a variety of emotions and states

to her daughter as well as how she used anxiety as an emotional tool to assert authority, power and give instruction. The second section considers Mary Anne and her turbulent situation after her husband died in debt. This section considers how she also used anxiety as an emotional tool in order to create intimacy with her son and renegotiate her maternal status and identity in line with societal conventions on motherhood. Anxiety here was not just a state of emotion but also an emotional and linguistic performance.

Chapter Four moves on to consider the child's perspective by discussing the anxieties of eighteenth-century children and adolescents, an area with little current research. Their learning practices are explored, showing that anxiety was a central part of the language rhetoric used by children and adolescents to express their deference and love towards their parents. This chapter also highlights the learning of distance epistolary rhetoric, and how children negotiated the rhythms of the postal service and the inherent epistolary anxieties of sending and receiving letters. The second half focuses on the anxieties of growing up and entering the adult world, with adolescents showing anxieties about their future responsibilities from what we today might term young adolescence. This is framed in anxious terms through discussions around the development of identity, independence, success, and responsibility.

This leads into the transitions of adulthood for the adolescents and old age for their parents, in Chapter Five. Key to this chapter, is the contextual differences in which this generation of Canning children were entering adulthood, compared to their parents whom we see courting in Chapter One. Bess finds it hard to succeed in the marriage market due to the lack of beaus in the period of the Revolutionary Wars while George had to contend with society's harsh views towards his fallen actress mother and his desire to succeed in parliament and

marry an heiress. Thus, the anxieties of success in adulthood are explored, alongside the importance of familial and societal context in framing the specifics around such anxieties.

The other thread is the discussion of Hitty and Mary Anne's transitions into old age and the development of the anxiety of loneliness, both by the aged and their families. Importantly, this chapter shows how their parental anxieties endure, and their desire to remain central to the lives of their children and grandchildren. Anxiety plays out again through changing identities and familial roles and the need to remain useful and independent. Mary Anne utilised her letters to argue her relevance to her grandchildren's lives, a role which, sadly, she was not truly able to fulfil. This ends the chapters considering the lifecycle from marriage to old age.

As death is not a period of the lifecycle but is a significant part throughout it, the final chapter is thematic and considers death across the lifecycle. It argues that anxiety is an important emotion in the study of death and grief. It considers how anxiety manifests and is expressed before, immediately after and beyond the loss, and how letters were intrinsic in demonstrating how this anxiety was expressed, both as an emotion and as an emotional tool. Anxiety again indicates care and love but also uncertainty for the future without the deceased and is prominent in the renegotiation of relationships and the preservation of what we would now describe as mental health.

Overall, this thesis proves that anxiety is present across the lifecycle, at different levels and strengths, and that its expression, whilst the language changes and is adapted to different circumstances, is continuous in its expression of love, affection and representing other, often associated emotions. Ultimately, it demonstrates that where there is love, there is a

fear of loss and anxiety is ever-present where love and affection are felt. More broadly, it shows that whilst the Canning anxieties are expressed idiosyncratically, contextualised by their own familial and social contexts, these represent broader anxieties concerning elite eighteenth-century families.

Chapter One – For Better, For Worse: The Anxieties of Courtship and Early Married Life

The prospect of marriage was daunting. In 1756, Eliza Haywood, under the pseudonym Mira, warned that

> marriage, therefore, which is the great business of our whole lives, - the business on which our all depends, ought chiefly to be attended to; - we then enter into a new scene of action, and every former attachment, inclination, and pleasure, must subside, and give way to that infinitely more important aim of fixing our happiness where we have fix'd our fate.[1]

Considering that only 5% of those of marriageable age did not marry in the 1750s, it was a decision upon which many an individual's happiness would depend.[2] The Cannings were no different. The various letters which have survived in the archives, those between Counsellor Canning and his sons, as well as the set of love letters between George Canning Sr. and his future wife, Mary Anne, present the centrality of anxiety to the courtship period. For as Amanda Vickery points out 'there was, quite literally, no going back'.[3] It is therefore unsurprising that courtship and early married life were the start of an anxious period in the lives of many men and women.

With such an important decision came a multitude of sources giving advice on the perils and anxieties of love and courtship. Advice about economic prudence, avoiding rakes, how to woo and how to write love letters was abundant. The only universally consistent message in mid-eighteenth-century conduct literature was that affection was central to a happy

[1] Mira [Eliza Haywood], *The Wife* (London: T. Gardner, 1756), p. 6.
[2] John R. Gills, *For Better, For Worse: British Marriages 1600 to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 110.
[3] Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (Yale and London: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 39.

marriage.[4] Lawrence Stone's contested theory that by the eighteenth century there was a growing emphasis on companionate and loving marriages comes from an analysis of these types of sources.[5] However, it is less that there were no companionate marriages before the eighteenth century but rather the amount of discourse surrounding marriage increased with the rise of print culture and the collective anxieties concerning social order.

Marriage was regarded as an essential institution of society, vital for sustaining societal standards. In 1694, John Locke attested that 'the *first society* was between man and wife' and they were the foundation of the family unit.[6] Extrapolating from this point, he then argued that the family is where future citizens are raised and educated to take their place in '*political society'*.[7] Locke concluded that any threat to matrimony threatened the stability of the state. 'Ambitious' marriages were causing concern as a leading cause of adultery, separation, and divorce, threatening moral and social standards.[8] To safeguard societal values and alleviate concerns over the institution of marriage, love was purported as the key to longer and happier marriages.[9]

[4] Example conduct books include *The Art of Courtship; or the School of Love* (London: printing-office in Bow-church-yard, c.1775), pp. 14-16; Thomas Gisbourne, *Enquiries into the Duties of the Female* Sex (London: T. Cadell, 1799), pp. 268-269. See also a compilation of advice books as a pocket library: *The Lady's Pocket Library Containing 1. Miss More's Essays, 2. Dr. Gregory's Legacy to his Daughters, 3. Lady Pennington's Unfortunate Mother's Advice, 4. Marchioness of Lambert's Advice of a Mother to her Daughter, 5. Mrs Chapone's Letter on the Government of Temper, 6. Swift's Letter to a young Lady newly married, 7. Moore's Fables for the Female Sex* (Philadelphia: R. Folwell, 1794), p. 120.
[5] Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (London: Penguin, 1977), pp. 216-232.
[6] John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (London: A. Millar, H. Woodfall, 1764), pp. 262-265.
[7] *Ibid*, pp. 262-265.
[8] Susan C. Law, *Through the Keyhole: Sex, Scandal and the Secret Life of the Country House* (Stroud: The History Press, 2015), Introduction.
[9] Katie Barclay, *Love, Intimacy and Power: Marriage and Patriarchy in Scotland, 1650-1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp. 87-89, 112; Chris Roulston, 'Space and the Representation of Marriage in Eighteenth-Century Advice Literature', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 49.1 (Spring 2008), pp. 25-41, pp. 25-26, 29-30. Some example conduct books include *Matrimony, Pro and Con: or the Resolve* (London: M. Cooper, 1745), pp. 2-3; *A Bachelor's Reflections on Matrimony* (Glasgow: Brash and Reid, 1797), pp. 2-4. See also *Matrimony: A Letter to Young Gentleman and Ladies, Married or Single* (London: W. Domville, 1768).

Yet this emphasis on love and affection only served to increase anxiety. Despite numerous sources inclining towards companionate marriage, choosing a partner was not necessarily based on affection and romantic feelings. However, neither was it wholly clinical and contractual. After lengthy examination, historians consider eighteenth-century marriage to be, as Tadmor terms it best, a 'grey area, in which both sentiment and prudence interplayed'.[10] Yet this grey area is suggestive of the uncertainty, and of the lack of clarity, that led to contemporary confusions and anxiousness. Individuals juggled expectations for economic security, social advancement, and familial and dynastic expectations. Katherine Binhammer argues that the eighteenth century was the root of modern love, where love became a problem to try and be solved.[11] I agree that it was an enigma, one that needed to be decoded and ascertained over time if happiness was the end object.

This was further complicated by the conflation of love and affection within eighteenth-century discourse and romantic literature, despite affection being a more complex term during the period.[12] Affection was a moralistic emotion, virtuous and connected with social good and arose 'from cognitive appraisals of the world' and notions of religious love.[13]

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[10] Naomi Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England: Household, Kinship and Patronage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.193. For historians who hold this view see Sally Holloway, *The Game of Love in Georgian England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Alan Macfarlane, *The Culture of Capitalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 128; Alan Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England: Modes of Reproduction, 1300-1840* (Oxford and New York: Blackwell, 1986), Introduction and Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster, eds, *The Family in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 1-17.

[11] See Katherine Binhammer, *The Seduction Narrative in Britain, 1747-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 11 for a lengthy discussion of understanding what love was in the eighteenth century.

[12] Seth T. Reno, *Amorous Aesthetics: Intellectual Love in Romantic Poetry and Poetics, 1788*-1853 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019), pp. 171-173; Emma Mason, *Women Poets of the Nineteenth Century* (Hordon: Northgate, 2006), pp. 14, 18.

[13] Susan J. Matt, 'Introduction: What were Emotions? Definitions and Understandings, 1780-1920' in *A Cultural History of the Emotions in the Age of Romanticism, Revolution, and Empire*, ed. by Susan J. Matt (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), pp. 1-16, p. 2.

Whilst love was an emotion with potentially selfish and sinful consequences, affection was seen as a more 'socially productive' feeling.[14] By placing them together, writers were referring to both their animalistic, instinctive 'lust' or 'love' and socially and morally conscious 'affection' which together signified romantic love. However, the terms were often used synonymously, making these distinctions unclear, especially after the move towards more natural, artless language in letters and literature from around the 1780s.[15]

With such uncertainty, how did couples negotiate their anxieties regarding matrimony? Couples could fear rejection, protecting their reputation and the motives of partners within the relationship. Some might be trying to please parents; others could be concerned about trying to show enough anxiety in their correspondence. In the eighteenth century, couples used the period of courtship to navigate this path to marriage. This is examined by an ever-growing field, with works from Alan MacFarlane, Fay Bound, Chris Roulston, Clare Brant, Martyn Lyons, Ellen K. Rothman, and Christopher H. Johnson. All examine love letters as part of their studies and whilst some note the communication of suffering, or the pain of love, none specifically discuss how anxiety plays a central role in love letters or the expression of love.[16] It is this which this chapter will focus on.

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[14] *Ibid*, p.2.
[15] Reno, *Amorous Aesthetics*, pp. 171-173.
[16] Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love*, pp. 300-304; Fay Bound, 'Writing the Self? Love and the Letter in England, c.1660-c.1760', *Literature & History*, 11.1 (2002), pp. 1-20, pp. 1-14 in particular; Roulston, 'Space and the Representation of Marriage', pp. 25-26; Clare Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 93-96; Martyn Lyons, 'Love Letters and Writing Practices: On 'Ecritures intimes' in the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of Family History*, 24.2 (1999), pp. 232-240, pp. 233-237; Ellen K. Rothman, *Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), pp. 10-20; Christopher H. Johnson, *Becoming Bourgeois: Love, Kinship, and Power in Provincial France, 1670-1880* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), especially pp. 19-30.

Indeed, several of these studies depict the very anxieties which concern this chapter. For example, Rothman's study of American courtship practices actually presents an anxious narrative of the courtship between Mary and Ephraim, where Mary expressed concerns over her worthiness and Ephraim was concerned around the strength of his love for Mary.[17] Rothman's narrative presents an anxious couple but does not detail how anxiety was used within a courtship to communicate fears and worries, to ask for reassurance and to create intimate bonds between the courting couple, as this thesis argues.

Lyon's discussion of nineteenth-century love letters also depicts an anxious Fred and Frances communicating across two continents until they could be reunited and married. Lyons even states that the letters demonstrate the perils and efforts of maintaining a regular correspondence, noting that when this regularity collapsed briefly from Fred's end, Frances was 'crestfallen'. [18] As this chapter shows, these gaps in regular correspondences caused anxieties around health, commitment, and strength of feeling yet the anxiety around why it was disrupted is not discussed in Lyons article.

Most recently, Sally Holloway's important 2019 study on the 'Georgian game' of courtship examined love letters to demonstrate notions of love practices and identified that anxiety was part of the ritual of courtship, as love letters 'brim with declarations of impatience and apprehension' to create an emotional connection between a couple.[19] Whilst this chapter supports many of Holloway's observations regarding love letters, I more boldly affirm that anxiety was central to the language of love and extend Holloway's analysis to consider the

[17] Rothman, *Hands and Hearts*, pp. 18-20.
[18] Lyons, 'Love Letters and Writing Practices', pp. 233-237.
[19] Holloway, *The Game of Love in Georgian England*, p. 48.

difficulties of writing the love letters due to the strength of the emotions trying to be conveyed. The detailed analysis of one couple also allows for the detailed examination of a courtship and teases out the relationship between a couple's context or background and their anxieties within a courtship.

Other studies, such as Katie Barclay's *Love, Intimacy and Power in Eighteenth-Century Scotland*, look at the centrality of patriarchy in courtship practices. Barclay discusses how men did not lose authority but renegotiated it to incorporate notions of romantic love and sensibility.[20] This chapter aligns itself more with Holloway's analysis of female power in courtship and argues that women held a degree of control during the process. However, whilst Barclay underestimates female agency, her arguments for male authority are crucial for understanding the delicate power balance between the sexes, one that hinged on exchanges of anxious expression and alleviation to communicate love, sincerity, and commitment.

Courtship letters reveal how anxiety placed a crucial role in the expression and performance of love. These letters did not just 'create emotional intimacy', they were a space to discuss fears and worries about commitment and sincerity, and to test a partner's ability to alleviate them. Ultimately, it was an important bridge between intention and an official engagement.[21] Sometimes letters offered an opportunity to bring to the surface or acknowledge underlying concerns. Other times, writers portrayed themselves as having exaggerated fears or worries, to demonstrate romantic feelings and get a positive response

[20] Barclay, *Love, Intimacy and Power*, pp. 70-95.
[21] Holloway, *The Game of Love in Georgian England,* p. 2.

from their recipient. Using the Canning Family letters from 1766 to 1774, this chapter will examine the courtship and early marital anxieties in four overlapping areas. Firstly, it will consider the role of the family in courtship practices. The second section shall focus on how anxious expressions were communicated, relieved, or accentuated. Thirdly, the role of anxiety in the power balance between the genders will be examined before finally demonstrating how the initial anxieties of matrimony played out in the early years of marriage. This will show how the language of anxiety was central to the language of love and practices of intimacy.

Familial Relations and Courtship

Anxieties surrounding courtship existed long before a love letter was penned. Courtship often began with securing familial approval. Marriage prospects could be a source of tension within families as the Canning letters from the 1760s/1770s exemplify. It was Edward Peach's parents' disapproval of gentlewoman Elizabeth Reading's lack of dowry that prevented their courtship in 1769.[22] Mary Anne Costello wrote that she requested the advice of her guardian over her various proposers and their prospects throughout the 1760s before her eventual courtship and marriage to George Canning.[23] The Canning letters represent the extreme end of parental power and subsequently the mixture of anxieties expressed. Nevertheless, they highlight how anxiety was an important linguistic tool for negotiations of power and influence between family members, especially over marital prospects.

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[22] Celia Miller, *The Amiable Mrs Peach* (Norwich: Lasse Press, 2016), pp. 2-4.
[23] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/54, Mary Anne Hunn to George Canning, January 27th 1803, pp. 16-28.

Stratford 'Counsellor' Canning had two main requisites for future wives of his three sons: a fortune and a title. If the chosen girl could not provide both, she was deemed unsuitable in his eyes. Counsellor Canning constructed ideas about his familial identity and expectations from the family's marriage practices. He had married well: his wife Letitia Newburgh (m.1734) of Ballyhaise County Cavan provided a title and enough money for him to build a 'Palladian country house on the Canning family estate at Garvagh, Country Londonderry'.[24] His father too, had married an heiress and so Counsellor Canning had grown up with the understanding that marrying for titles and wealth was normal practice for their family.[25] Other people in the circumscribed Dublin gentry society contributed to his attitude because their sons also married well in the 1750s and 1760s and indeed, this notion of a 'good' marriage is seen through various gentry family letters of the period.[26] This placed social pressure on Counsellor Canning, who deemed it important that his sons followed suit, so that his standing in the community would be upheld. It is evident that he, like many parents of gentry standing, calculated his parental success through the fortunes and behaviours of his children.[27]

Counsellor Canning's letters show that some eighteenth-century parents still wanted to control their children's marital prospects. Stone argued that the eighteenth century saw the rise of 'affective individualism', with parents allowing their children more choice with their

[24] Giles Hunt, *Mehitabel Canning: A Redoubtable Woman* (Royston: Rooster, 2001), p. 10.
[25] John Lodge, *The Peerage of Ireland: or,a Genealogical History of the Present Nobility of that Kingdom* (Dublin: James Moore, 1789), p. 336. Mary Anne Canning's father too boasted of his supposed descendance from an Italian knight who married the King of Connaught's daughter. See Julian Crowe, *George Canning is my Son* (London: Unbound, 2021), p. 10.
[26] Hunt, *Mehitabel Canning*, p.10; Henry French and Mark Rothery, *Man's Estate: Landed Gentry Masculinities, 1660-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 191-191.
[27] French and Rothery, *Man's Estate*, p. 214.

spouse and a growing emphasis on marrying for love.[28] It appears that Counsellor Canning's children were more of this mindset. Indeed, Katie Barclay's observation that parental permission remained important, but was more likely to promote conflict than obedience, is played out in the case of the Cannings, for the wills of the sons were very different to that of their father.[29]

To understand the Canning courtship practices, I will first consider parental authority and parent/child relations in the process of choosing a marriage partner. In 1766, Counsellor Canning sent his youngest son, Stratford, on the Grand Tour to sever the romance between him and their neighbour's daughter, Mehitabel 'Hitty' Patrick. Whilst not stated directly in the letters, the exchange from August 1769, showed that any mention of the Patricks by Stratford fuelled Counsellor Canning's 'Suspicion' and a need for specific details. It appears any interaction worried him. Ultimately, Stratford had to confirm that 'no secret Intercourse has been carried on'.[30] Through his watchful letters, Counsellor Canning attempted to assert his authority over Stratford and his life choices. In this instance, Counsellor Canning's parental anxieties affected his son's courtship. His actions also reveal how parental authority could limit the power of choice. As Joanne Begiato observes of the eighteenth century: '[y]outh has long been recognised as a period of lack of control, when the juvenile male has not yet fully learned to master temptations and control or channel emotions' and Counsellor Canning's behaviour likely came from these wider beliefs.[31] In his eyes, Stratford had to learn self-control. The Grand Tour provided 'the ideal education' in this self-

[28] Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage*, pp. 149-151, 216-220.
[29] Barclay, *Love, Intimacy and Power*, p. 77.
[30]West Yorkshire Archive Service: WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2323] Stratford Canning to Stratford 'Counsellor' Canning, August 12th 1769.
[31] Joanne Begiato, *Manliness in Britain, 1760-1900* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), p. 35.

management as well as in taste, refinement, and manhood to prepare Stratford for meeting a better match later on.[32] The Grand Tour mitigated a second concern, that of idleness. In the eighteenth century this was deemed sinful and, according to Begiato, 'a long-standing moralistic trope insisted that male youths work or exercise' to avoid it'.[33] It was Stratford's first step in becoming a man.[34]

Counsellor Canning's approach was parenting through fear. He was the authoritative father as opposed to the figure of the tender, indulgent father which was prevalent in the latter half of the eighteenth century.[35] While Counsellor Canning's letters indicate that he did not embrace the new notions of tender fatherhood, they do show devotion and attention to the raising of his children. This is further evidence that 'hegemonic norms' were not always adopted by all generations or fully responsive to changing ideals.[36] However, as Joanne Bailey noted, the opposite of the tender father was the indifferent one and so Counsellor Canning's attentiveness would have still been in line with notions of good fathering in the mid-eighteenth century.[37] Yet despite his assurances that he wrote the letters 'from the greatest regard for you, and the tenderest concern for your safety', Canning was considered tyrannical by all his children, and subsequent biographers.[38] Yet, as E. Gordon and G. Nair have observed, these letters indicate a specific 'snapshot' in the life of Counsellor Canning

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[32] Jeremy Black, *Italy and the Grand Tour* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 1.
[33] Begiato, *Manliness in Britain,* p. 35.
[34] Sarah Goldsmith, *Masculinity and Danger on the Eighteenth-Century Grand Tour* (London: University of London Press, 2020), pp. 2-3.
[35] Joanne Bailey, 'Paternal Power: The Pleasures and Perils of "Indulgent" Fathering in Britain in the Long Eighteenth Century', *The History of the Family*, 17.3 (August 2012), pp. 326-342, pp. 326-328.
[36] French and Rothery, *Man's Estate,* p. 189.
[37] Joanne Bailey, '"A Very Sensible Man": Imagining Fatherhood in England, c.1750-1830', *History*, 95.3 (July 2010), pp. 267-292, p. 278.
[38] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2323], Stratford 'Counsellor Canning' to Stratford Canning Sr, December 27th 1766.

and his son, and so his general attitude towards fatherhood cannot be fully gleaned.[39] His children grew up with the rise of sensibility, becoming adults at its height in the 1750s and 1760s and they appear to have embraced the tender father as their ideal of fatherhood whereas Counsellor Canning's understanding of his role was likely based on previous ideals from the 1740s of authority and care. Nevertheless, these letters do confirm that familial tensions appeared at points of important changes for the family, in this case marriage.[40] It is an example of how generational disagreement and changing social attitudes caused rifts in familial relationships.

In line with Henry French and Mark Rothery's thinking, Counsellor Canning's 'tyranny' was likely a purposeful approach to cause his children anxiety, to toughen them up and retain their respectability through polite behaviour, what they term 'emotional economy'.[41] They refer to emotion words loaded with the significance of success or failure, used to express parental anxieties about their child's future.[42] Counsellor Canning's letters to Stratford did this through his instructions and behavioural advice, suggesting that not to follow his guidance would lead to disappointment and disapproval. In this sense, they are reminiscent of the infamous letters written by Lord Chesterfield to his own son.[43] One such occasion was in 1766, when Canning read Stratford's letter about his growing friendship with a French Abbe. He immediately advised his son of what he would do:

> I neither would quarrel with nor put my trust in any one of them [abbes], where I could possibly avoid it. Converse with them I would, as among them these are Men

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[39] E. Gordon and G. Nair, 'Domestic Fathers and the Victorian Parental Role', *Women's History Review*, 15.4 (2006), pp. 551-559, pp. 556-7.
[40] See Barbara Crosbie, *Age Relations and Cultural Change in Eighteenth-Century England* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2020), especially pp. 1-16, 155-201.
[41] French and Rothery, 'Male Anxiety Among Younger Sons', p. 978.
[42] *Ibid*, p.981.
[43] See Philip Dormer Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield, *Lord Chesterfield's Advice to his Son, on Men and Manners* (Dublin: J. Williams, 1776).

> of Sense + knowledge from whom improvement is to be had, but then I should endeavour to learn from them what I cou'd…yet I wou'd never let them know [my sentiments] upon things of importance.[44]

Counsellor Canning's continued use of the word 'I' suggests the authority of his advice. This is further compounded by his later chastising of Stratford's 'laugh and joke' about religion as there was no 'greater offence'.[45] Counsellor Canning presented some of the potential consequences for Stratford if he did not heed his advice and curtail his friendship with the Abbe. He used language as an 'emotive', to instil anxiety into his youngest son to gain his compliance.[46]

This emotional practice was combined with another, that of affirmation and approval. In one such reply to Stratford, Counsellor Canning wrote at length that Stratford's letter 'not only gave me great pleasure from the account of your safe arrival there, but from the sentiments it contain'd, so agreeable to my wishes + the opinion I had always conceiv'd of you'.[47] This approach relied on Stratford desiring his father's good opinion, built through Counsellor Canning's parenting approach that his children fear him and crave his good opinion. Stratford was living up to his father's expectations, a sign that his behaviour was to his father's liking and that he was taking his advice. However, this passage also likely expresses Counsellor Canning's true feelings of relief at the 'safe arrival' of his son.[48]

[44] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2323], Stratford 'Counsellor Canning' to Stratford Canning Sr, December 27th 1766.
[45] *Ibid.*
[46] William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 101-105.
[47] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2323], Stratford 'Counsellor' Canning, to Stratford Canning Sr., July 15th 1769.
[48] Sarah Goldsmith's study of the dangers of the Grand Tour suggest that there was a real chance that Stratford could have faced difficulties on his journey. See Goldsmith, *Masculinity and Danger* for further details.

In return, Stratford's letters depict a subservient attitude towards his father. This is suggested through an anxious tone. In one such letter, revealing that he had spent too much money whilst abroad, Stratford's wording and tone suggests that he feared his father's wrath:

> With the greatest Impatience have I waited the arrival of every Packet since I came to into this Country [Holland] … but having yet received none, I can hold no longer, as every day's Delay make your Silence even more afflicting; I can find no Method of accounting for it, but by the tormenting Supposition that it proceeds from your Displeasure at my having exceeded the Bounds you prescribed me in Expence; as the Vexation of having incurred your Disapprobation by my Conduct is most grievous to me, & as I think your goodness to me (did not Duty render it doubly incumbent on me) requires, that I should leave nothing undone on my part to clear it up to you & reconciliate your good Opinion; I take this Opportunity to tell you my Trouble & to endeavour to exculpate myself … I dread that my Fears may be come to pass, I explained to you at the Time, what was the Cause of it, I told you how I was deceived; I was as open to you upon the Occasion, as I could be to the nearest & greatest Friend, & that Friend bring a Father, as I thought, such a Connection required … I have received from the several drafts I have made £285.6.3 English, I fear the Expences of Exchange &c. have increased that Sum too much upon you, but that, it has not been possible for me to avoid, could I have made it less, I should have done all in my Power, it would have been my Duty, but it was impossible … I left home without a second wearable Coat, so that I flatter myself you cannot think I have been extravagant in this … but unfortunately in many Places, a man is judged of by his Dress, & if that is not good & conformable to the Taste of the Country, he is taken to be judged accordingly. Ye sole Desire has been to appear as a Gentleman, not as an adventurer, a Character universally dreaded & despised; & that cannot be done for nothing in a strange Country … I must leave it wholly to that same Goodness to choose his method of making me pay for that; it is but just that I should suffer for what may have been my own fault … Believe me, my dear Father, I would rather live upon Bread & Water, suffer any thing my Constitution could bear, than knowingly be the Cause of your smallest uneasiness. What is there I would not do to make you easy? Without thinking you so I can enjoy nothing; perhaps this moment I labour under your Displeasure; the anxiety of such a Thought is not to be expressed; surely without some such painful Reason you would not keep such a long Silence, knowing, what Pleasure your Letters give, what Pain, the withholding them … Donet keep me in Suspence, tell me your Desire, Obedience shall follow it…[49]

[49] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2323], Stratford Canning Sr to Stratford 'Counsellor' Canning, October 12th 1767.

Whether Stratford was really this anxious is difficult to ascertain. As French and Rothery have determined, the younger sons within gentry families 'were a nexus of anxieties' as they were born into privilege and wealth but faced an uncertain adulthood, unsure of how they were going to maintain this status.[50] Stratford was likely facing uncertainty of his ability to attain a full masculine identity, find the right marriage partner and maintain his lifestyle, all whilst treading the careful path his father wished him to follow in order to maintain the family's reputation, and the approval of his father. His eldest brother, George, had already been disinherited for a poor match and rising debts in London by time this letter was written, so Stratford would have been painfully aware of his father's attitude towards disobedience and frivolous spending, both of which led to George's exclusion. Here, Stratford knew the same fate could await him if he disobeyed his father's wishes.

Stratford's letters to his father depict a subservience so strong that they showed him siding with his father in 1768 over his brother, George's, 'unsuitable match'. This is particularly striking as letters existed between Stratford and George suggest a close relationship between the two of them during this period. Stratford emphasised that whilst his father 'suffered from the misconduct of my Brother in London', it also gave Stratford

> real pain…what has he not lost, to forfeit the Favour of so good a Father… I shall obey you strictly in every possible command; Principle, Gratitude and Duty require my Obedience to you, and my reason tells me, I can never do so well as when I follow your instructions, which I shall ever receive with Deference and Thanks. [51]

[50] French and Rothery, 'Male Anxiety Among Younger Sons', p. 968.
[51] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2323], Stratford Canning Sr to Stratford 'Counsellor' Canning, May 25th 1769.

Despite this, Stratford continued to write to George, and there are several surviving letters from George to Stratford which confirm a close, intimate relationship still existed between the brothers.[52] Stratford himself was quick to say that he would obey his father 'strictly in every possible command' yet in a few short years, he too sacrificed his relationship with his father for a loving marriage. Stratford's contradicting behaviour suggests that this letter is more a performance to mollify his father rather than one based entirely on anxiety and fear. Indeed, Stratford's behaviours of overspending and marrying for love are inconsistent with the deep subservience that this letter conveys, revealing its performative nature. It could also be simply that love overtook his need for an inheritance and, as a younger brother, he was already expected to earn a living so the loss might have seemed less important.

This letter particularly goes beyond mere learned epistolary practices of submission and deference, commonly seen in letters from children to their parents to include emotional practices.[53] Stratford's actions suggest he felt obedience, but he utilised several anxious expressions to amplify his subservience towards his father and in doing so achieved the desired performance of humility, obedience, and loyalty. Thus, felt feelings and the performance of their expression were entangled within his letters. He would take any punishment to avoid his father's pain, communicating that he feared his father's wrath so much, any other pain was more bearable. Counsellor Canning was so far in control of Stratford that only his word had the power to dispel his son's anxiety completely as his next

[52] See BL, Add MS89143/3/1/3, George Canning to Stratford Canning, 1768-71 letters.

[53] Emily C. Bruce '"Each Word Shows How Much You Love Me": The Social Literary Practice of Children's Letter Writing (1780-1860)', *Paedagogica Historica*, 50.3 (2014), pp. 247-264, pp. 250-260. For further discussion of emotional practices see Monique Scheer, 'Are Emotions A Kind of Practice (and is That What Makes Them Have a History)? A Bourdieuian Approach to Understanding Emotion', *History and Theory*, 51.2 (May 2012), pp. 193-220.

letter demonstrates: 'A letter my aunt has been so good as to write to me, & which I receive a few days ago, has calmed my Tears a good deal, but it depends upon you alone to banish them entirely'.[54] Stratford pandered to his father's need for control and authority and this letter is the result. Whether he truly was in such awe of his father during these years is indeterminate, though there is a sense through their letter collection that Stratford was anxious to stay in his father's good graces, especially while he was on the Grand Tour, as he was financing his trip. However, despite a genuine sense of anxiety at the root of this letter, the performance has been deliberately heightened to appeal to Counsellor Canning's desired traits in his sons: obedience, deference, and loyalty. This was how their relationship was conducted through letters prior to Stratford's rekindled feelings for Hitty Patrick. Though he had youthful attractions for his future wife, it is also likely that Stratford was unable to comprehend his brother's anxious decision between familial affection and duty and feelings of love. At the time he could only understand his brother's actions as an irrational decision against his father's wishes. Their correspondence unveils how emotional practices played out within familial relationships at points of conflict or importance for the family.

Courtship was not as black and white as Stratford conceptualised it and it is this 'grey area' between love and duty that caused anxieties and familial tensions.[55] His own courtship battles with his father began whilst he was on the Grand Tour. Both Stratford's and his father's letters show that he was in contact with and writing to the Patricks, Hitty's parents,

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[54] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2323], Stratford Canning Sr to Stratford 'Counsellor' Canning, November 3rd 1768.

[55] For details of the 'grey area' see Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England,* p. 193.

while he was travelling.[56] Indeed, when Counsellor Canning began to suspect that Stratford was courting Hitty Patrick again, the changing dynamics this precipitated in their relationship was reflected in their letters. In 1769 Stratford received an angry letter from his father, asking directly if he was courting Hitty Patrick again. At first, we see the same, servile Stratford:

> I can assure you, your suspicions are totally groundless; I have not entered into the smallest Engagement with any one person of the Family you mention, I shall not, nor have I ever thought of doing it without your concurrence … I would rather lose my life than be the cause, the willing cause of any unhappiness to you … life would be to me little worth preserving for without enjoying your regard and confidence, I can never have any happiness.[57]

Stratford was so anxious to evade his father's temper that he suggests his life is worth less than maintaining his father's happiness. His performance is still one of fear, one of desperation to please. However, the next day, Stratford reassessed his feelings and wrote again to his father.

> the reperusal of your letters this morning has had a very different effect from what their first reading had last night … by entering into particulars, I knew I should be forced to own a weakness which I had almost forgot myself, and which I meant should die a secret in my breast … A long continued intercourse with the same Object by being in the same house, had the effect upon me so natural to youth and inexperience, as to make me like the person with whom I was the most intimate, and sometimes made me wish for a connection with her of a more serious nature. I saw early the absurdity of my wish, for I suspected that you would have disapproved it … As to any matrimonial connection with Miss P, you now know all I ever did think of it.[58]

[56] Examples include WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2323], Stratford 'Counsellor Canning' to Stratford Canning Sr, December 27th 1766.
[57] *Ibid*, Stratford Canning Sr to Stratford 'Counsellor' Canning, August 11th 1769.
[58] *Ibid*, August 12th 1769.

From this point, Stratford never used the anxious and servile tone again, adopting a more assertive and stronger one to defend his position. He confirmed his youthful feelings for Hitty and there is a sense of resentment of his father's continued distrust in his decision making through the line 'I saw early the absurdity of my wish'. Stratford's lack of anxiety shows his conviction in his version of events, in his own opinion and his defence against his father's distrust. Both anxious expressions and a clear lack of anxiety were powerful emotional practices to negotiate familial relationships. They had the power to maintain them, rebalance them but also cause cracks, especially when it came to discussions of trust, honesty and integrity. The stability of these relationships was especially important during the tense negotiation of parental power and romantic attachment. Though not all parental/child dynamics were as extreme as this, it highlights the anxious tension between parental wishes and authority and that of the child's through the shift in loyalty from parent to lover.

Anxious language could also be utilised during the courtship process to persuade family members to support a courtship. There is evidence from studies such as Nicole Eustace's discussion of love and power, that letters, and even love letters, were written to other family members, to demonstrate sincerity, commitment, and approval.[59] Most of these studies consider letters written by men. Women too wrote letters during courtship and engagement to influence their position and gain approval. Just a few years prior to their marriage, in 1771, Hitty used her ties with Stratford to begin writing to her future sister-in-law, Mary Anne Canning, Stratford's

[59] Nicole Eustace, '"The Cornerstone of a Copious Work": Love and Power in Eighteenth-Century Courtship', *Journal of Social History*, 34.3 (Spring 2001), pp .517-546, especially pp. 517-518, 529-535.

late brother George's wife. Whereas Stratford used a deferential tone from fear, Hitty used an anxious tone for personal motives:

> I cannot sufficiently thank you + our Friend for giving me this opportunity, of anticipating a personal Acquaintance with you. Your great Merit, to which I am not a Stranger, has often made ^me^ wish to be ranked among the number of your Friends, which I hope from this time will be accomplished. The Esteem of worthy People is always desirable, which makes me anxious to secure a place in your's: though I have not the vanity to ask it on my own account, but for the sake of one whom I dare say you highly value. I consider as a very particular Favor [sic], your admitting me to be one of your Sponsors, + most willingly accept of this distinguishing mark of your Regard. Permit me dear Madam, to assure you, that I am very solicitous for your Welfare and sincerely wish you all the Comforts + Satisfactions, so much Goodness entitles you to. I hope soon to hear of your Recovery, about which believe me to be very anxious.[60]

Hitty utilised the language of anxiety to demonstrate the strength of her desire to begin a correspondence and friendship with her future sister-in-law. Her use of words such as 'your admitting me', 'distinguishing remark' and 'very particular' suggest the intimacy and honour of such a connection and Mary Anne's power to bestow it. Hitty's anxious tone is designed to convince Mary Anne of her humility, modesty and suitability as a new sister, and partner for Stratford. Based on the way which she understood the world around her, Hitty believed she needed to court her prospective sister-in-law, for Mary Anne's opinion may have been critical for Hitty's future happiness. Thus, Hitty's emphasised Mary Anne's 'great Merit' and 'Esteem', which she had learnt of and admired, from Stratford. Not only did Hitty gratify Mary Anne, but she also hints that it was Stratford 'our Friend' who gave Hitty 'this opportunity, of anticipating a personal Acquaintance with you'. Stratford had become very close to Mary Anne, providing for her and his nephews after the death of his eldest brother, George. Hitty's motives, therefore, may have been to cement her role within the family. In

[60] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/4, Mehitabel Patrick to Mary Anne Canning, October 17th 1771.

this way, Hitty used anxious expressions as a tool of persuasion to create intimate bonds. Another letter, between brothers George and Stratford in 1768, states that 'Molly [George and Stratford's sister] set out for Ireland with her Husband … Mary Anne & she are in every sense Sisters: which, if possible, increases my affection to the former as well as to the latter'.[61] It is likely that Hitty wanted to establish a sisterly bond with Mary Anne as a way to please Stratford, into considering her the best choice for marriage. For once Mary Anne established the correspondence, Hitty dropped the deferential tone.

Hitty is just one example of how women could utilise correspondence with other family members for the benefit of sealing their courtship. John Keats's fiancée, Fanny Brawne established a friendship through correspondence with Keats's sister in 1820, just after their engagement.[62] Reverend's daughter Elizabeth Reading convinced her uncle, William Nelson, to write to her parents to support her engagement to Edward Leathes in 1771. Nelson was also mentioned as supporting the match in a letter that Elizabeth wrote to her parents upon her elopement with Leathes in 1774.[63] Leathes too wrote a letter to his new mother-in-law, to assure her that he intended to make her daughter happy, likely in the hope that he could convince her to support the new couple.[64] Thus, letters were an important strategic tool in allaying anxieties about potentially unsuitable matches and persuading family members of the suitability of the match.

[61] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/3, George Canning to Stratford Canning, June 9th 1768.
[62] Frances Brawne, *Letters from Frances Brawne to Frances Keats, 1820-1824*, edited by Fred Edgcumbe (New York: Oxford University Press, 1936), the 1820 letters particularly.
[63] Miller, *The Amiable Mrs Peach*, pp. 6, 13.
[64] *Ibid*, p.13.

George Canning and Mary Anne Costello: The Anxieties of the Courtship Ritual

The mid-century Canning relationships have thus far highlighted the parental anxieties surrounding marriage and the effect that a child's marriage would have on the standing of the family as a whole. George's position as the eldest son meant that his match was particularly important to Counsellor Canning for, as Susan Whyman asserts, 'birth order and gender clearly affected choice'.[65] George's 'unsuitable match' is unknown.[66] Due to her unsuitability in the eyes of Counsellor Canning, as the eldest son, George was promptly disinherited, losing his right to the Garvagh estate worth 'fifteen hundred pounds a year' and subsequently only received a £200 annuity.[67] However, this relationship was not to be and George then went onto court an equally unsuitable lady, a penniless widow's daughter, Mary Anne Costello and they began exchanging love letters.

In 1803, reflecting on their courtship to her son, George, Mary Anne revealed that she and George Canning Sr. lived very close to one another in London and so could have met each other rather than conducting their courtship through letters. But George had something to prove, 'there was always in his Conduct, as in his Countenance, a sort of melancholy dignity which it seemed almost impiety either to arraign or to distrust' and this was best achieved through love letters.[68] Mary Anne's reflection signals that these love letters were not just performances but highly emotional objects, fraught with real anxieties about provision,

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[65] Susan Whyman, *Sociability and Power in Late-Stuart England: The Cultural Worlds of the Verneys, 1660-1720* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 112.
[66] It could have been 'precious Peggy', first mentioned in a letter from George to his younger brother Stratford, in 1766 but as George was disinherited years before, it is unlikely they were courting for six years, only for her to be seduced by another man shortly after this letter was written.
[67] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/2, George Canning to Mary Anne Costello, July 20th 1767.
[68] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/54, Mary Anne Hunn to George Canning, January 26th 1803, p. 29.

pride and self-worth. Love letters were an important balance between performance and emotion, which the rest of this chapter explores further.

It is no accident that Holloway calls her study of eighteenth-century courtship 'The Game of Love'.[69] Like two birds dancing around one another in a wooing ritual, courtship letters were a performance. The male's assertions of love and devotion weaved in and out of the letters, in an attempt to impress the female and get her to formally accept his suit. Whilst Henri Lefebvre argues that 'even the most ordinary and seemingly pragmatic letters are, in some sense, performances', the genre of love letters have several specific tropes which demonstrate its performative nature.[70] While, as Vickery notes, '[T]here was no single model of romantic presentation', there was 'something of a standard, fashionable repertoire'.[71] This, Bound argues, was often found through literary sources and didactic literature, which individuals used to shape conventions and modes of expression to make sense of their own experience of love.[72] Holloway highlights several recurring features of the form of the love letter, including a need to demonstrate honesty and sincerity, keeping up correspondence regularly and including lengthy postscripts.[73] Writing heightened, tense, anxious passages was also central to the performance of love letters and so individuals had to harness the emotional power of language, especially that of anxiety, in order to create this performance.

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[69] See Holloway, *The Game of Love in Georgian England*.
[70] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), p. 121.
[71] Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, pp. 44-45.
[72] Bound, 'Writing the Self?', pp. 1-4, 12-14.
[73] Holloway, *The Game of Love in Georgian England*, pp. 48-55.

The vocabulary of love 'provided an overarching framework' within which the language of anxiety was central.[74] Contemporaries commented on this interplay between love and anxiety. '*Love* is never free from *Fears*' said 'your LOVE' in an example letter from the 1756 edition of *The Complete Letter-writer*.[75] *The Dictionary of Love* (1754) too noted that '[a]nxiety, is a symptom inseparable from the lovesick'.[76] Both these books suggest that not only was anxiety present but it was expected. There was also an acknowledgement that as love grew, so did anxiety. For 'as my Love grew more outragious [*sic*], my Apprehensions about you were more distracting', wrote the anonymous 'your LOVE'.[77] The all-consuming nature of love was actually its interplay with anxiety and it is this that was presented as the expression of this engrossing feeling. Whilst Clare Brant argues that lovers needed to learn the 'languages of happiness and hurt', they also needed to be well versed in the language of anxiety, for it was this that was so entangled within the heightened expressions of love found in love letters.[78]

However, this language could be deemed formulaic as an anxious tone and vocabulary were part of courtship practices. *The Dictionary of Love* in particular mocked the 'fashionable repertoire', arguing that a suitor would only need to acquaint themselves with the right words to win over their partner, rather than focus on compatibility and mutual affection.[79] They saw 'loyal subjects to the empire of love' whom 'ever pay their tribute of anxiety' as merely performing the language of courtship to woo their partner. Thus, vocabulary

[74] *Ibid*, p. 7
[75] *The Complete Letter-writer: or, new and polite English secretary* (London: S.Crowder and H.Woodgate, 1756), p. 92.
[76] *The Dictionary of Love* (Dublin, 1754), p. 25.
[77] *The Complete Letter-writer*, p. 92.
[78] Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters*, p. 94.
[79] *The Dictionary of Love*, p. 25.

pertaining to apprehension was a central part of the courtship practice and to expressions of love itself. Expressions of anxiety were both performed and 'felt', with these 'felt' anxieties mainly present in the subtext of the performance.

In order to understand the thread of anxiety running through the letters, how the writers used emotive words to portray these feelings must be considered. Love letters were a space which a couple utilised to ultimately decide whether to marry, so crafting this correspondence was an important task. When lovers articulated their feelings of love, they chose language that was 'beyond a simple *expression* of emotion'.[80] A successfully written letter had the ability to provoke certain emotive reactions. For example, George received a letter from Mary Anne, provoking a reaction which caused him to write 'I have hurried over [your letter], & leave it to you to judge how I feel. You who have inspired the sensation can best explain it'.[81] George acknowledged that Mary Anne's words caused an immediate response in him. As discussed in the introduction, Reddy referred to these 'emotion claims' as 'emotives' as they 'inevitably alter, sometimes very significantly' the feelings that were being expressed, both for the writer and the recipient'.[82]

Letter writers communicated their anxiety of waiting for the post in their return correspondences, as a method of expressing their love for them. Love letters took this further. George wrote that 'Five o'clock came, & brought no account in answer to my message…[w]hat horrid Phantoms assailed my Imagination! A Thousand terrors crouded [*sic*] on my mind. In vain did I call my reason to my assistance. What but the worst of ills

[80] Holloway, *The Game of Love in Georgian England*, p. 7.
[81] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/2, George Canning to Mary Anne Costello, October 30th 1767.
[82] Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling*, pp. 101-105.

could occasion her delay!'[83] George concluded that 'I never knew how well I loved you till that moment'.[84] George acknowledged to Mary Anne through this statement that he recognised that '[a]nxiety is a symptom inseparable from the lovesick' and that he recognised the strength of love for her through the strength of his anxious feelings.[85] George showed that a love letter was the only cure for his anxieties as when his laundress returned, he 'did not pay the least attention to her answer', instead, he was enthralled to see Mary Anne's letter to confirm her good health.[86] Bound argues that this type of suffering was a key motif within love letters but it is more than mere suffering; it is also the uncertainty of the reciprocity of feeling, an invitation for the recipient to put the writer out of their misery through a definite confirmation of their feelings. Bound herself notes that this is 'over-blown emotional discourse' without fully considering the purpose to which this discourse was being put within the love letters themselves.[87] For whether George really was sitting in 'agonising tension' is unknown but he wanted Mary Anne to understand that his anxiety communicated his love for her.[88]

Whilst the expression of anxiety is dramatic, heightened and designed to show the agony of waiting, it reflects real concerns over the reasons for the writer not replying. A regular correspondence was expected between couples, as this demonstrated commitment to the relationship and cemented the importance of each missive to its recipient. Holloway has demonstrated the significance of the courtship letter as an object of love, deeming them

[83] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/2, George Canning to Mary Anne Costello, October 26th 1767.
[84] *Ibid*, October 26th 1767.
[85] *The Dictionary of Love*, p. 25.
[86] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/2, George Canning to Mary Anne Costello, October 26th 1767.
[87] Bound, 'Writing the Self?', pp. 6-7.
[88] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/2, George Canning to Mary Anne Costello, October 26th 1767.

‘treasured possessions’ and this status meant that they were often kept.[89] Thus, missing, or waylaid letters, late letters or miscarried letters caused concerns over the strength of affection, commitment and sincerity of a union. So, in September 1767, when George began a letter to Mary Anne: ‘I was sure of finding a letter on my return, yet have been disappointed’ he made sure to let her know the emotional consequence that this had on him.[90] He claimed he was ‘utterly unfit for any other kind of application, than putting pen to paper by way of conversing with you, & indeed not very well qualified even for that pleasing employment’.[91] By acknowledging how his anxiety about the absence of a love letter rendered him unable to do anything else, George underlined how much Mary Anne’s love letters mean to him. Despite anxieties, he could still put ‘pen to paper’ to write to Mary Anne, the only person who could alleviate them.

The letter writing process did not just lead to anxious waits for letters. They often caused misunderstandings. This could cause individuals to question the love of their partner and at such a fragile time of the courtship, before anything was settled, this was often unnerving. Brant suggests that ‘[e]xpressions of love get entangled in questions of language’ and this leads to anxieties around communication and misunderstanding.[92] Having received Mary Anne’s letter discussing that she was in low spirits, George immediately thought the worst: ‘Why does my lovely Girl Suffer her Spirits to forsake her? Does she repent of what has happened since the middle of last month?’[93] His reaction demonstrates the delicate

[89] This references that the love letter was a token of affection in its own right, as well as other objects such as locks of hair, snuff boxes and jewellery. See Holloway, *The Game of Love in Georgian England*, p. 2 and Chapter ‘Love Tokens’, pp. 69-92.
[90] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/2, George Canning to Mary Anne Costello, September 29th 1767.
[91] *Ibid*, September 29th 1767.
[92] Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters*, p. 95.
[93] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/2, George Canning to Mary Anne Costello, August 28th 1767.

beginnings of courtship, where the couple were liable to misunderstandings and anxious thoughts. It is clear that George immediately jumped to the conclusion that Mary Anne's low spirits were a result of her regret over their courtship, which began in July 1767, just over a month earlier. His imagination was triggered by his fear that the courtship would fail, a general concern with courting men.[94] This was exacerbated by the courtship practice of female modesty, where women did not commit early to their feelings regarding a partner. George was still unsure of Mary Anne's position in September that year pleading that '[i]f you do not love me, Mary Ann, do not flatter me: let me know the extreme of my misery at once: I am very weary of life if you are weary of loving me. If you do love me, be confident as I am'.[95] George sought reassurance that his courtship efforts were not in vain by expressing his ongoing deep-seated concerns brought about by the epistolary silence suggesting that to know the outcome 'at once' is better than to live through the anxiety of not knowing. He communicates the extreme pain of the anxiety he endured. This reiterates that the courtship period is one of anxiety, for both partners, as each await the outcome of their ritual of love.

Gender Interplay in the Courtship Ritual

Courtship was a balancing act and men did not hold all the emotional power. Women had the authority to judge their male suitor's performance and decide whether to accept his hand. Therefore, whilst expected gendered behaviours meant that men held overall control over the development of the courtship, women retained a degree of agency. The role of

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[94] See Holloway, *The Game of Love in Georgian England*, pp. 58-59, 62-63; Nicole Eustace, '"The Cornerstone of a Copious Work", pp. 524-531.
[95] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/2, George Canning to Mary Anne Costello, September 21st 1767.

performance is crucial in the discussions of authority and so this section explores the complexities of gender and power within courtship letters.

Whilst both genders had many reservations about entering marriage, women had the added anxieties of considering the importance of their reputation, virtue and security.[96] This was stressed in various forms of literature such as this poem from 1760:

> Beauty must watch its Foes with cautious Fear,
> For all its Foes, like trusty Friends, appear
> To what Temptations, are the Fair expos'd?
> With what illusive Snares, are they inclos'd?[97]

The poem warned that young, virtuous women, here referred to as 'Beauty' should be careful of the opposite sex and their intentions. A woman could end up with a ruined reputation from succumbing to 'illusive Snares' or falling foul of the 'Temptations' of unsuitable men. Thus, women should judge men with 'cautious Fear' and learn to differentiate a gentleman from a rake, the emotional performance from the genuine courtship. Yet how was a young woman able to discern the truth given the performative language of romance?

Women were restricted in their choices during courtship. This need for women to be cautious during courtship has led to historians agreeing that women's love letters were more reserved in their emotional outbursts. They were modest as declarations of love led to

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[96] Examples of these female anxieties can be found in Anon, *The Art of Courtship; or, the School of Love* (London: Aldermary Church-Yard, 1750); *The Lover's Instructor: or, the Whole Art of Courtship* (London: J. Cooke, 1767), p. 4 in the tale of Slyvia; *A New Fortune-Book. Being a New Art of Courtship* (Cirencester, Samuel Rudder, 1770), p. 2 and Amanda, 'Thoughts on Courtship and Marriage', *The Lady's Magazine*, February 1772, pp. 65-67 to name a few.

[97] Thomas Marriott, *Female Conduct,* 3rd Edition (London: W.Owen, 1775), p. 16.

anxieties of their reputation being in danger.[98] Binhammer argues that both the rake Lovelace and friend Anne Howe in *Clarissa* (1748) believed that 'once love first enters, once the first step has been taken, all is lost'.[99] Importantly, the novel's subtitle in the 1748 edition notes the 'Distresses that May Attend the Misconduct Both of Parents and Children, in Relation to Marriage'. Here, Samuel Richardson offers a further note of warning, which could relate to caution over declaring feelings and the potential danger to reputations.[100] Binhammer's argument can be applied more generally to indicate that the characters of *Clarissa* suggest once a woman had admitted her love in a love letter, her reputation could be ruined unless it ended in marriage. As women only held the power of refusal until they admitted their love, it explains their reluctance to do so.

Societal expectation also lessened this power. Mary Anne, as a penniless woman, may show agency in choosing her spouse, but she was bound by society's expectation that she must marry for economic security. This is demonstrated in the plot of *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* as Betsy has a choice of suitor due to her suitable financial situation and good looks but 'she has no choice *but* to marry'.[101] Due to these restrictions, it is unsurprising that Barclay argued that 'love was clearly understood to remove women's power' in her study of elite eighteenth-century women.[102]

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[98] See Holloway, *The Game of Love in Georgian England*, pp. 60-63 and Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, pp. 53-54.

[99] Binhammer, *The Seduction Narrative in Britain*, p. 29.

[100] Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa. Or, the History of a Young Lady*, *Comprehending the Most Important Concerns of Private Life ; And Particularly Showing the Distress that may Attend the Misconduct Both of Parents and Children, In Relation to Marriage*, Vol.7 (London: S. Richardson, 1748). The subtitle is on the front cover of this edition.

[101] Kristine Jennings, 'The Sign of a Woman: Femininity as Fiction in *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*', *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 47.2 (Autumn 2014), pp. 39-58, p. 42.

[102] Barclay, *Love, Intimacy and Power,* p. 89.

Despite this, women did hold some agency during courtship, even if it was simply the ability to reject their suitor. Women chose whether to grant their 'love' and confirm the success of the suit. Whilst Barclay is correct in determining that love removed women's power, in that a declaration of love stripped women of their agency during courtship, women did have a certain degree of authority until their 'love' was granted. The lower the female's class status, the less restrictions there were on their choice of husband. Elite marriages had the added restriction of dynastic expectations whilst those below the aristocracy often had more freedom to choose a partner based on feelings as well as prospects. Love letters show that women used courtship processes, and specifically courtship letters, to ascertain if men were suitable, testing their sincerity, honesty and reliability as well as finding out their views on love and marriage.[103] George and Mary Anne's courtship demonstrates this balance of authority as he recognised the power that she had over him, demonstrated in his comment to her: '[y]our voice is to fix my fate'.[104] He understood that Mary Anne held the control over whether to accept George or to dissuade his advances. George asserted not just the emotional importance of this decision but also the black and whiteness of the situation for 'there is no medium: I must be either supreme – be miserable, or superlatively happy'.[105] It is his use of the word supreme, here meaning the extreme ends of sadness and happiness, that indicates his position. George put pressure on Mary Anne to wield her power correctly for she had the power to influence George's emotional state. This power is echoed in Eliza

[103] Holloway, *The Game of Love in Georgian England*, p. 63.
[104] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/2, George Canning to Mary Anne Costello, July 26th 1767; Mira [Eliza Haywood], *The Wife*, p. 6.
[105] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/2, George Canning to Mary Anne Costello, July 26th 1767; Mira [Eliza Haywood], *The Wife*, p. 6.

Haywood's opening quotation above that individuals were 'fixing our happiness where we have fix'd our fate'.[106]

Due to this balance of power, the male had to impress the female during the courtship ritual. With so many conduct books on the right way to behave and express oneself, Barclay rightly suggests that people often had difficulties in ascertaining between true emotions and emotional performances.[107] As discussed above, women were fearful of a lost reputation if they made the wrong choice, so were cautious in assessing their suitor.[108] Indeed, some studies such as Mary and Ephraim from Rothman's study on American courtship, centred around the female's indecision.[109] It was the male's role to convince their partner of their genuine intent. In short, a suitor's challenge was to alleviate her anxieties upon entering marriage with him. Love letters provided a platform for men to do this. George utilised this opportunity to persuade Mary Anne that 'My sole Object at present is domestick felicity; the only Partner I desire in it is my Mary Ann...delay not, my ever lovely, ever to be my beloved Mary Anne, delay not to give me that inestimatable Security'.[110] This letter, written at the beginning of their courtship, not only presented marriage to Mary as George's 'sole Object' but put forward an anxiousness to establish a formal engagement and to be married. From the outset, George placed an emphasis on marriage being his only focus in an attempt to communicate that his commitment to her was serious and to relieve her worries about her reputation and the magnitude of the commitment.

[106] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/2, George Canning to Mary Anne Costello, July 26th 1767; Mira [Eliza Haywood], *The Wife*, p. 6.
[107] For further information, see Barclay, *Love, Intimacy and Power*, p. 111.
[108] Anon, *The Art of Courtship; The Lover's Instructor*, p. 4, *A New Fortune-Book*, p. 2 and Amanda, 'Thoughts on Courtship and Marriage', pp. 65-67.
[109] Rothman, *Hands and Hearts*, pp. 18-19.
[110] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/2, George Canning to Mary Anne Costello, July 26th 1767.

Women also needed to find out the material and economic prudence of their suitor. As a penniless widow's daughter, Mary Anne had nothing to bring to the union but her love and so her financial security rested entirely on her future husband. George's love letters display underlying fears that Mary Anne would deem him unable to provide for her as he argued his financial situation over a fifteen-page letter in July 1767. A letter this long was an unusual occurrence, and its length suggests that George wanted to explain his position in detail. He laid out his prospects and economic difficulties to an extent and his thoughts that there would be a familial reconciliation which would restore his fortunes. These difficult passages were interspersed with reminders of his love and even his sexual desire for Mary Anne. In short, George was apprehensive about losing Mary Anne's favour.

His anxieties were well founded: women could not marry for love alone.[111] George's disinheritance placed him at a disadvantage; with no steady career to fall back on, he needed to argue his case. There are two conversations going on here: one that reassures Mary Anne of his financial viability and another that threads through the letters reminding her of his feelings for her. Moreover, Mary Anne's grandfather was in negotiation with a Mr Rush for her hand and so George had the added pressure and unease of competition.[112] However, George's letters display a lack of nervousness. Adopting an assured tone he argued that 'an industrious & steady attachment to the profession [of law], besides the amendments which immediately attend it, must in some little time effect a reconciliation, &

[111] Laura E. Thomason, *The Matrimonial Trap: Eighteenth-Century Women Writers Redefine Marriage* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2013), p. 5.
[112] Mary Anne informs her son George about Mr Rush being in negotiations for her hand. These ended soon into Mary Anne and George's courtship. BL, Add MS89143/3/1/54, Mary Anne Hunn to George Canning, January 23rd 1803.

consequently reinstate me in my natural rights of paternal inheritance'.[113] His confidence stemmed from his belief that Counsellor Canning would restore his inheritance once George was established in a career at law.[114] Whether he actually believed this or not, George dropped any use of the language of anxiety in order to stress the strength of his belief.

George's justification then switched to the importance of Mary Anne in his future career success. He reasoned that it was, 'no new remark' that the emotions and manners of men were tempered by women.[115] He wrote that 'nothing but the possession of my lovely Mary Anne, the Sweets of her Conversation, & the soothing comforts in her power to bestow, can be effectual to calm the turbulence of unruly passions, & to reduce my mind to that placid state of settled tranquillity, which is essential to success in any pursuit'.[116] Here, George tried to persuade Mary Anne that it is her power as a woman that can calm his 'unruly passions', suggesting that he either believed or played upon the view that women could soothe the temperament of men.[117] By doing this, George placed the responsibility onto Mary Anne, for their future financial situation. Only she could assuage his emotions in order for him to settle into a profession 'where even the most mundane tasks would be a pleasure, if it meant the happiness of his wife'.[118] George presented Mary Anne's female traits as the means to tame him, suggesting he believed this would entice Mary Anne. As the 'Regulatress of [George's] hopes & spirits', George argued that Mary Anne has no need to

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[113] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/2, George Canning to Mary Anne Costello, July 26th 1767.
[114] *Ibid*, July 26th 1767.
[115] *Ibid*, July 26th 1767.
[116] *Ibid*, July 26th 1767.
[117] Examples include Thomas Gisborne, *Enquiries into the Duties of the Female* Sex (London: T. Cadell, 1799), pp. 10-20; Marriott, *Female Conduct,* p. xxviii, 28-30; See also Dorothée Sturkenboom, 'Historicizing the Gender of Emotions: Changing Perceptions in Dutch Enlightenment Thought', *Journal of Social* History, 34.1 (2000), pp. 55-75, p. 69.
[118]BL, Add MS89143/3/1/2, George Canning to Mary Anne Costello, Innocent's Day (December 28th) 1767; July 26th 1767.

be anxious as she was the mistress of her own fate. This correspondence demonstrates how anxiety operated as a linguistic tool of persuasion within romantic letters.

However, George's suit demonstrates that anxiety was not useful in the persuasion of material or practical considerations, only in assurances of love, affection and commitment to the union. He strove to fight off the competition and ended his defence with a story about the then current Attorney General of Ireland, Mr Tisdall who had been in a similar situation to George. It was likely included to show Mary Anne a real-life success story to end any doubts that George would be able to provide for her in the future:

> Mr. Tisdall had no fortune, & therefore, despairing of a formal consent, Miss Singleton leaped out of a window into his arms. Made happy at home by the Woman he loved, he applied himself with the strictest attention to business, by which he had acquired, though always an expensive man, an income of several thousands a year.[119]

George used assuring and active language such as 'Miss Singleton leaped' and 'he applied himself with the strictest attention', highlighting the lack of anxiety and the determination felt by the pair upon eloping together. Miss Singleton showed no fear about marrying Mr Tisdall. This could be read as a desperate attempt to convince Mary Anne of his affections - George could have simply made this story up. But it does show the lengths that he felt he needed to go to secure them. The complexities of anxiety within love letters show their centrality to courtship practices in the mid-eighteenth century.

[119] *Ibid*, July 26th 1767.

However, it was not just material anxieties that George had to negotiate. He also had to write to Mary Anne to convince her of his love, sincerity, honesty, and commitment. Whilst Lubomir Lamy is partly correct in suggesting that society provided a 'script' to inform their experiences of love and courtship, in that love letters have recurring features and form, it left the expression of these ideas open to personal interpretation.[120] Such was the importance of the love letter in courtship that the crafting of a love letter was presented as a trial to be endured for love. Whilst other studies have examined the role of the postal service in dictating the 'trial' of writing love letters, they do not examine the anxiety of writing them.[121] George often wrote of his difficulties in crafting his letters to Mary Anne. In one such letter to her in May 1768, he confided: '[i]n discharge of my duty to the sole Possessor of my Heart, I have taken up the pen, though much at a loss how to employ it'.[122] George acknowledged the importance of his 'duty' to romance Mary Anne with emotive language and willingly undertakes the trial for her, despite having supposedly nothing to say. Letters were often written for the sake of sending them to loved ones, to reassure them of their affection rather than for any enlightening contents.[123] This strengthens the notion that the love letter was used as a vehicle for warding off anxieties regarding lack of commitment and reinforced feelings of love in their recipient.

[120] Lubomir Lamy, 'Beyond Emotion: Love as an Encounter of Myth and Drive', *Emotions* Review, 8.2 (April 2016), pp. 97-107, p. 99.
[121] Holloway, *The Game of Love in Georgian England*, p. 49.
[122] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/2, George Canning to Mary Anne Canning, 9th May 1768.
[123] Hitty wrote to Bess that 'though I had nothing much to communicate' she wrote 'merely to please you, and keep your little mind at ease'. See WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], Mehitabel Canning to Elizabeth Canning, March 18th 1789; Willemijn Ruberg notes that Bishop Synge comments to his daughter that it was a mature skill to write a long letter about nothing and to master 'talking on paper'. See Willemijn Ruberg, 'Epistolary and Emotional Education: The Letters of an Irish Father to his Daughter, 1747-1752' *Paedagogica Historica*, 44.1-2 (February-April 2008), pp. 207-218, p. 211. See also Susan M. Fitzmaurice, *The Familiar Letter in Early Modern English: A Pragmatic Approach* (Amsterdam: John Benjamin's Pub. Co., 2002), p. 5.

George laid out his intentions for his love letters: they would be honest, concealing 'not a Circumstance in any sort relating to me, nor a Simple thought that harbours in my breast'.[124] Yet his first letter immediately claimed that his anxiety hindered him from communicating his love, announcing that

> My Heart panting with the most poignant anxiety for an event, whereon the happiness of my Life most absolutely depends, I take up the pen to explain my sentiments to the arbitress of my Fate, as clearly & precisely as that anxiety will permit.[125]

Even in telling her that the letters are difficult to write he was performing a courting ritual. Anxiety is presented here again as an overwhelming emotion, rendering the writer handicapped in their ability to think and write clearly. Again, we see how it is employed to impart feelings of love. In this period, the heart was already associated with emotions, especially romantic feelings.[126] The heart was also specifically connected to panting. Johnson's dictionary defines 'pant' as 'to palpitate, to beat as the heart in sudden terror', 'to have the breast heaving, as for want of breath' and 'to want, to wish for'.[127] By referring to his 'panting' heart, George communicated that his 'poignant anxiety' was due to the strength of his feelings of love, or perhaps his sexual feelings as well, implying that they was so overwhelming that he was almost unable to breathe. In this he was also expressing his desire. Desire meant 'with eagerness to obtain or enjoy', 'to wish, to long for, to covet' 'to ask, to intreat'.[128] In writing about the anxiety of his heart, and stressing that his happiness

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[124] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/2, George Canning to Mary Anne Costello, July 26th 1767.
[125] *Ibid*, July 26th 1767.
[126] For further discussions on the historical connections between the heart and emotions, see Fay Bound Alberti, *Matters of the Heart: History, Medicine, and Emotion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), especially Chapter 1.
[127] Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, Vol II, p. 134.
[128] *Ibid*, Vol I, p. 281.

‘most absolutely depends’ on Mary Anne’s response, George asked for reassurance and presented his eagerness to obtain Mary Anne as his wife. For someone who was struggling to write ‘as clearly & precisely’ as he would have wanted to, George managed within the first two lines of his letter to tell Mary Anne of his desire and love for her, as well as to construct a picture of his own potential anxieties and vulnerability.

Blaming anxiety for the poor expression of feelings demonstrated sincerity and honesty and George is likely using this as a strategy here as his letters are very well written and literary. George appealed to Mary Anne’s good nature and understanding: ‘when you reflect on the cause of that embarrassment which gives them birth’ he presumed she would ‘excuse tediousness’ and ‘readily pardon inaccuracies’.[129] Here George suggests that Mary Anne herself understood the ‘cause of that embarrassment’, love, and understanding these feelings will enable her to understand why his writing is not free from inaccuracies. Whilst Holloway points out that lovers wrote their love letters on their best paper and carefully copied them out in fair hand, their contents were not necessarily as perfectly formed.[130]

Whilst grammatical errors were forgiven, inconsistencies in address and expression led to accusations of insincerity and false feelings. George advised Mary Anne that ‘Some of my letters have been faulty. My intention has been uniform since I first addressed you, but agitation & tumult will vary the Style- if one writes from the Heart’.[131] He used his ‘agitation & tumult’ of the trial of writing love letters to defend any contradictions or variations in his expression. He defended that ‘[a]n Hypocrite indeed may keep his style unvaried through

[129] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/2, George Canning to Mary Anne Costello, July 26th 1767.
[130] Holloway, *The Game of Love in Georgian England*, p. 53.
[131] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/2, George Canning to Mary Anne Costello, October 29th 1767.

fluctuating passions'.[132] George argued that an imperfect letter was more honest in its attempts to communicate love than a perfectly crafted one because it displayed the trials of trying to write about real feelings. This view that imperfections in love letters communicated more honest, real feelings ranges wider than just George himself. According to *The Dictionary of Love*, 'the great art of love-letters is to have none. They are not worth a farthing, when they are well, that is artfully, written'.[133] Simply, it stated that a well-crafted love letter was deemed to focus on perfection of form rather than communicating real feelings of love and affection, which then questioned the sincerity and integrity of its author. George emphasised that his letter's imperfections displayed his sincerity and honesty, likely hoping to alleviate any fears of Mary Anne regarding his suit.

Whilst flawed writing was a sign of 'honesty', the writer had to consider the fragile balance between presenting honesty through imperfections and diverting too far away from the expected form of the courtship letter. George's letter to Mary Anne on August 20th 1767 reveals she scolded him for over flattery, so much so that he confessed that he was 'afraid of opening up the Sentiments of my Heart to you … I am resolved that this letter shall not contain a single syllable that may be construed into Flattery'.[134] The courtship letter was a tightrope between professing love and avoiding over-flattery, which appeared insincere. This 'test' of Mary Anne's caused friction in George's efforts to woo her. He complained: 'It is very cruel of you to kindle a desire in me, which I cannot satisfy', concluding that 'I can therefore trust myself with the pen no longer' as the only way to avoid any flattering

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[132] *Ibid*, October 29th 1767.
[133] *The Dictionary of Love*, p. 75.
[134] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/2, George Canning to Mary Anne Costello, August 20th 1767.

language.[135] His firmness to comply with her request, even though it meant not writing, demonstrates his defence of his sincerity and integrity of feeling and his desire to please her.

George went further and presented the love letter as a form which did not, and could not, communicate the strength of his feelings. His rhetorical question, 'Do I not love you beyond the power of expression?', stated that the strength of his feelings could not be written, they were beyond language, and so no love letter could do them justice.[136] By writing that he was restricted by language in the expression of his feelings, he attempted to impress on Mary Anne the magnitude of his emotions. George intended to communicate his overwhelming, 'violent' emotions through the restraints of the love letter. His linguistic performance suggests that he found the love letter a limiting form for his feelings, yet his writing style was very polished and composed, showing off his literary prowess and revealing that this admission was all part of his courtship performance.

George outlined this in another letter to Mary Anne:

> [F]rom the first moment of my seeing you, I felt myself much too strongly affected to regulate my conduct by the Strictness of form: art I would not use, or if I would I could not: the emotions of my heart are by far too violent to submit tamely to continued restraint; if they have ever betrayed me into any improper excess, I beg, & shall study to deserve your forgiveness. But such is the curse of a too keen Sensibility…Order or Method I am too much agitated to hope for: take the facts as they occur, & the Sentiments as they rise: & give full credit, (for if there be truth in Man you may) to the authenticity of the one, & the Sincerity of the other.[137]

[135] *Ibid*, August 20th 1767.
[136] *Ibid*, October 28th 1767.
[137] *Ibid*, July 26th 1767.

George, like other men in courtship letters, freely discussed love and other feelings.[138] However, his language shows a frustration with trying to convey his passions and 'too keen Sensibility' through 'Order' or 'Method'. He stated that courtship letters 'regulate my conduct by the Strictness of form: art I would not use', to impress upon her his struggles to restrain his 'violent' emotions and a desire to be free to express his emotions outside of societal restraints for courtship. However, George realised that his outburst might scare Mary Anne, and he anxiously adds that he will 'beg' 'to deserve your forgiveness'.[139] He was willing to submit to the 'Strictness of form' and 'shall study' to do so, for Mary Anne but emphasised that his 'agitated' state would give rise to unorganised and not artfully constructed thoughts, which show the authenticity of his feelings.

The negotiation and alleviation of anxiety during courtship were important indicators of the ability to ease fears during marriage. The letter extract above implies that George was impatient to be married to Mary Anne so that he could be free of the frustrating restraints in displaying his feelings to her, which could only be achieved appropriately through marriage. This ability to relieve anxieties appears to be an important part of the selection process for a marriage partner as George was looking for 'a Sensible, delicate, & tender Female Friend, in whose fond & faithful breast I could freely, securely & confidently repose my cares & anxieties… to meet by mere accident with One…was…a blessing once possess'd, which I can never part from without losing together either my life or my senses'.[140] George

[138] Examples are found in NRO, BOL2/4 Letters between Elizabeth Reading and Edward Leathes, 1771-72 and CRO D/SEN 5/5/1/9/1/1 and 5/5/1/9/1/5 Love letters from 'J.H' and Humphrey Senhouse III to Catherine Wood, 1763 and 1768. See also Holloway, *The Game of Love in Georgian England*, particularly 'Love Letters' pp. 45-68.
[139] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/2, George Canning to Mary Anne Costello, July 26th 1767.
[140] *Ibid*, September 13th 1767.

suggests that his ideal partner could ‘repose my cares & anxieties’, suggesting that Mary Anne’s role as his wife was to take care of him and his needs. This echoes his earlier arguments that Mary Anne would soothe his temperament, which would allow him to concentrate on his career. Indeed, Brant observes that ‘love-letters express love; they also express demand and need’ and George was trying to convince Mary Anne of his needs here, both as his wife but also his sexual needs which he was repressing until she was ready to commit.[141] It appears that soothing anxieties was an important attribute for a wife, fitting in with conduct book ideals on the role of the woman in relation to her husband in matrimony. That George deemed Mary Anne the only one who could relieve him of his concerns demonstrates that he believed her suitable for the role of his wife.

However, it was Mary Anne who held the agency over whether to accept George or not. Vickery states that romantic partnerships could still be ‘subject to considerable delay and constraint’, even by the mid-eighteenth century, and this was reflected in courtship correspondence.[142] Vickery highlights that this was due to financial settlements and ‘the dawdling pace of business’ rather than indecision over setting a date for marriage yet this was why Mary Anne was holding up the marriage. Likely due to his frustrations in wanting to be with Mary Anne ‘in Body and Mind’, George showed an impatience with her indecision over matrimony. He patiently waited for Mary Anne’s final judgement as he openly acknowledged that ‘Heaven has reserved my doom for your final decision’.[143] Nevertheless, this did not stop him repeatedly asking Mary Anne ‘[w]hen shall it be my happiness to give

[141] Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters*, p. 93.
[142] Vickery, *The Gentleman’s Daughter*, p. 5.
[143] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/2, George Canning to Mary Anne Costello, July 26th 1767.

thee fresh proofs of [my love] every day, every night, if possible every hour?'[144] George's repetition displays not just his commitment to marriage but his anxiety and impatience for it, for 'every hour' that passed was one where his feelings were restrained. His letters convey weariness and frustration with her self-doubts as he can 'scarce forgive the cruel insinuation' that Mary Anne repeatedly suggested that George 'might possibly be wearied with your delightful Letters. Must I repeatedly assure you that, next to your presence, they are the balm of my Soul, & the comfort of my Life?'[145] The modest concerns of a woman during courtship tested the man's patience and commitment, and his ability to accept that his spirits will 'now rise or fall only at your command'.[146] George displays a tiredness with the ups and downs of courtship, and its anxious wait for completion. It is unsurprising that Amanda Vickery attests that 'courtship was an invigorating challenge to manhood' as marriage was the only prized relief from a lengthy, anxious courtship.[147]

George married Mary Anne in May 1768. In line with common courtship practices, Mary Anne appeared coy, unwilling to fully commit to a date of marriage until the last moment and we do not see the moment of acceptance in the letters themselves. Nevertheless, George had succeeded in convincing her of the sincerity of his suit.

The Realities of Early Marriage

Female agency and authority which existed in courtship dissipated after marriage and George and Mary Anne's experience was a common one. An article in the *Lady's Magazine*

[144] *Ibid*, January 8th 1768.
[145] *Ibid*, October 28th 1767.
[146] *Ibid*, October 18th 1767
[147] Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, p. 56.

by a contributor named 'Amanda' acknowledged the shock that this could cause unassuming women:

> The wife now discovers that the lover, transmigrated into a husband, is quite another kind of animal: while in the former, he adored her charms, idolized her beauty, and admired her as the mistress of perfection, he now in the latter regards her as a mere woman…Mortifying discovery this, to the woman who has been used to nothing but implicit obedience from her lover. She thinks she still has a right to expect the same.[148]

The wife now saw the man behind the courtship performance as he no longer had to win her over. She now had to obey him.[149] Mary Anne recounted her relationship with George Canning Sr. in her lengthy 188-page letter-memoir, in 1803.[150] This letter-memoir was written to present Mary Anne's life story to her adult son, George, so he could understand why she gave him up to his aunt and uncle. Reflecting on their brief marriage in this letter-memoir, Mary Anne told her son George that 'it seems as if we were all under the influence of some illusion, that obscured our Judgements & fetter'd our actions'.[151] George had charmed Mary Anne and her friends, relieving them of any anxieties that his conduct may have produced about his propriety but he was a very different man to Mary's courting lover. His failures and ostracization from his family took its toll on George mentally. There is a sense of regret in Mary Anne's reflective letter-memoir, that her life hardships started with her decision to marry George, yet she still acknowledged that she loved him and blamed his family's treatment of him for their situation.

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[148] Amanda, 'Thoughts on Courtship and Marriage', pp. 65-67.
[149] *Matrimony: A Letter to Young Gentleman and Ladies,* pp. 18-19; Lady Sarah Pennington, *An Unfortunate Mother's Advice to her Daughters* (London: J.Walter, 1784), pp. 95-96; Barclay, *Love, Intimacy and Power*, especially 'Marriage within Scottish Culture', pp. 41-69; Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus, eds, *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1997), p. 12.
[150] Hereafter referred to as the letter-memoir.
[151] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/54, Mary Anne Hunn, to George Canning, January 27th 1803, p. 28.

Familial relations remained important for negating anxieties after marriage. George wrote to his brother Stratford about the difficulties he had with being emotionally separated from his family. He communicated his anxieties to Stratford, likely due to the frosty relationship he had with his father, and his brother's understanding of their father's 'tyrannical' nature.[152] George used his letter as a space to reflect on his relationship with his father: 'it amazes me, that a spark of affection should yet warm my breast for a Father, who against the voice of nature, Justice & Right Reason… has been so many years aiming at, & has so nearly…effected my absolute ruin'.[153] Stricken by his father's unwavering stance, his letter lists the many anxious hardships he endured due to Counsellor Canning's lack of compassion.[154] George's anxiety was actually desire, to reconnect to his family as his marriage appears to not have quelled this wish: family was more than just the nuclear family formed by marriage. There was no mention of this hardship and suffering in his courtship letters to Mary Anne, nor that he was struggling with debts and issues with his creditors. It was an anxiety only revealed upon marriage. Now George revealed to Mary Anne that he was 'overwhelmed by distresses of various kinds – his mind was shook from its Grand Centre by degrading and lowering circumstances…extreme poverty which included even the want of bread'.[155] Mary Anne did not even have enough money to give 'a guinea' to share with her impoverished mother, leading to feelings of despair of unfulfilling her filial duty towards her. This sense of anxiety is very different from that of courtship, it is one of promises unfulfilled, hardships that had to be traversed and ones that seemed truly endless.

[152] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/3, George Canning to Stratford Canning, August 9th 1768.
[153] *Ibid*, August 9th 1768.
[154] *Ibid*, August 9th 1768.
[155] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/54, Mary Anne Hunn to George Canning, January 27th 1803, p. 29.

Anxieties from courtship became realities. Courtship was a game and marriage revealed the smoke and mirrors to the real problems and anxieties underneath.

Sadly, their marriage was very different to that which George had promised Mary Anne. Despite having a happy marriage, she acknowledged that his provision was less than satisfactory: while ‘he had reasons with which I should be satisfied – and I was determined to wait his time … however, truth obliges me to confess, [it] never arrived with the degree of satisfaction I had a right to expect’.[156] If Vickery is correct in ascertaining that ‘A gentleman’s’ honour lay ‘in the reliability of his word’ then George had failed to uphold his honour.[157] He had promised to support Mary Anne financially but all he had given her was debt, near poverty and precarity. A few years later, this situation was sadly exacerbated by George’s death in 1771. Despite this, their marriage was happy, with Mary Anne supporting her husband’s difficult situation. She reflected that George ‘died as he lived – the victim of inhuman & unnatural desertion by those to whom he still felt not only duty – but – affection! I find the recollection too much to pursue and I must pause-’.[158]

Stratford and Hitty’s marriage, on the other hand, was far more successful. Stratford became a partner in a bank and so they had no worries for money and their relationship was loving and their ideas compatible. However, he too never reconciled with his father and felt the effects of a broken familial relationship. The Cannings had had their challenges making it to the altar. Once they finally made it, it reframed familial relationships permanently.

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[156] *Ibid*, p.29
[157] Vickery, *The Gentleman’s Daughter*, p. 54.
[158] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/54, Mary Anne Hunn to George Canning, January 27th 1803, p. 29.

To conclude, this chapter makes a particular historiographical intervention as it demonstrates how layers of anxiety and fear characterised courtship and early marriage. Indeed, expressions of anxiety were central to love and courtship practices, especially within love letters and changes how we interpret the language of love. There were the underlying fears of rejection, reputation, and motives and finally there were concerns over the love letter form itself. The courtship process began with the anxieties of parents over their child's matrimonial decisions and this led to tensions between parental expectations and a loving marriage. During courtship, expressions of anxiety were a key element of the language of love. This allowed couples to demonstrate the strength of their feelings through performance. However, whilst the elements of courtship were well known, its expression was personal and men demonstrated their struggles to write about their feelings and the anxiety that this 'trial' was causing them. Whilst this served to further strengthen their appearance of commitment and sincerity, it also reflected underlying fears of a rejected suit. Women held a position of power within courtship which diminished upon marriage, mostly concerning the selection of her spouse and as such, men had to impress her. Indeed, a particularly important aspect of this chapter is showing the trials and tribulations of a courtship through letters in detail and how anxiety was rooted in several parts of the experience, adding to our understandings of how love letters and courtship operated and was experienced in the eighteenth century. Ultimately, courtship was centred on individual concerns over marriage and whether these anxieties could be negotiated successfully. For those that married, anxiety did not dissipate after marriage and the mask of the courtship performance could reveal unwelcome anxieties which couples now had to embark upon together.

Chapter Two: Pregnancy and Childbirth Anxieties

Writing to her intimate friend, Hitty in 1787, Eliza Sheridan noted that she had seen 'Mrs Hunn, G. Canning's Mother' and noted a dramatic change in her appearance: 'I cannot tell you my Dear Woman how shock'd I was, when I look'd on her, & saw how wretched, & miserable, her Vices have made her – She was very big with Child, and thinner older'.[1] Here, Eliza Sheridan connected pregnancy to Mary Anne Canning's other concerns: her 'Vices', her work and her ageing appearance. Her comments give a glimpse into Mary Anne's life as a provincial actress, a profession which she began in 1774. She did not have the money for a period of confinement which meant that she was forced to work until she gave birth. Thus, her pregnancy was the physical embodiment of her anxieties and struggles for work and money. In short, it shows how pregnancy and childbirth existed alongside other anxieties, issues, and stresses and hints that the pregnancy itself could be causing both physical and mental strain.

That pregnancy itself caused anxieties is evident through a variety of letters. Anxiety was associated or 'stuck', to use Ahmed's term, to conception, pregnancy, and childbirth in eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century England.[2] The process of conceiving, carrying, and birthing a child was fraught with anxieties for various family, friends, and community members. Letters and diaries were littered with concerns over miscarriage, the mother's ailments, the fear of dying in childbirth and even whether one could get pregnant at all. For

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[1] Bath Record Office (BRO), fl1536-1572, Elizabeth Sheridan to Mehitabel Canning, July 11th 1786; December 8th 1787.

[2] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), p. 4.

example, the elite Noel-Milbanke correspondence network frequently discussed their miscarriages, difficult pregnancies, and deaths in childbirth. The Noel-Milbankes were landed gentry, with the members connected to several baronetcies. Their intimacy often meant that they discussed these matters euphemistically. For example, Judith Milbanke communicated her miscarriage to her Aunt, Mary Noel: 'you will guess what, without my mentioning it'.[3] Similarly, Reverend's daughter Elizabeth Leathes voiced her fears in a letter to her parents in 1775, about 'the approaching awful period', anxious that her father would accompany her mother during the confinement, 'for fear anything should happen…for Life is very uncertain at such Dangerous times'.[4] As these examples show, there is varying but plentiful evidence of the anxieties of pregnancy within letters.

Scholars have also documented childbearing anxieties within letter networks, notably in works by Amanda Vickery and Sarah Fox. Their studies use female letter networks primarily in the Lancashire/Yorkshire area to demonstrate how the various stages of conception and pregnancy were communicated through letters and diaries generally acknowledge that it was an anxious experience.[5] Fox in particular highlights that all classes demonstrated anxieties surrounding childbearing, suggesting that anxiety connected to pregnancy and childbirth was widely felt and expressed. Joanne Begiato examines some pregnancies anxieties through the consideration of the language of medical and mental uncertainty in familial letters, stating how size was used to determine gestation, but also how sharing

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[3] Malcom Elwin, ed., *The Noels and the Milbankes* (London: Macdonald, 1967), Judith Milbanke to Mary Noel, December 28th 1777, p. 87.
[4] Norfolk Record Office (NRO), BOL 2/24/13/1, Elizabeth Leathes to her parents, April 9th 1755.
[5] See Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (Yale and London: Yale University Press, 1998), Chapter on Fortitude and Resignation; Sarah Fox, *Giving Birth in Eighteenth-Century England*, (London: University of London Press, 2022), Introduction.

lessened the uncertainties of pregnancy.[6] Thus, all current research and source material attest that this was an anxious time in the lifecycle.

Whilst the Canning correspondence also evidences anxieties of pregnancy and childbirth, it also conveys how childbirth augmented and created other anxieties for individuals and families, relating to their personal circumstances. These anxieties were hidden and not necessarily connected directly to pregnancy and childbirth but were heightened during this poignant moment in the lifecycle. Eliza Sheridan's letter above placed pregnancy alongside many concerns of ageing, thinning and misery, all of which were exaggerated by the development of Mary Anne's pregnancy and eventual childbirth. Through this perspective, Mary Anne's pregnancy was a central part of her more general anxieties and concerns about money, health, and reputation.

This chapter intends to consider the relationship between pregnancy, childbirth, and anxiety more holistically. It argues that by looking at anxieties during pregnancy and impending childbirth, the tensions of choice, economic difficulties, friction within relationships and identity become amplified. It also examines the differences between genders to consider which anxieties are being discussed and what this conveys about pregnancy as a point in the lifecycle. It reveals that pregnancy is a point of reflection, uncertainty, and difficulty within the lives of the Canning family, both for the men and the women. It will take a gendered approach. Firstly, it will examine George Canning Sr. and his son George Canning's letters about their wives' pregnancies, to understand their impact on male identities. Secondly, it

[6] See Joanne Begiato, '"Breeding" a "Little Stranger": Managing Uncertainty in Pregnancy in Later Georgian England', in *Perceptions of Pregnancy from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century*, eds by Jennifer Evans and Ciara Meehan (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 13-29.

will look at Mary Anne Canning's anxieties during her pregnancy and some of the challenges that women could face at this time. Finally, it reflects on the lack of letters from Hitty Canning, during the periods of her pregnancies, considering why there are silences in the archive from a woman who gave birth to seven children and utilising the primary material to speculate on the reasons for this.

The Anxieties of Pregnancy for Men: Writing about Pregnancy

Awaiting the birth of what would turn out to be a daughter, Letitia, George Canning Sr. ended his August 1768 letter to his brother, Stratford, with the postscript:

> P.S. Mary Anne, who makes home a paradise to me, in the midst of the most urgent & menacing embarrassments, as well as the most [large ink stain] indignant reflection, desires me to present to you her best Sisterly Love - & does not desire me to tell you what I add of myself – that in some Six or Seven months I may possibly have a Son – may he live to prove more gentle than his Grandspie & happier than his Father.[7]

These few lines reveal a myriad of information to the informed recipient. George's announcement reveals that he and Mary Anne discussed announcing the birth. That other husbands, such as labourer John Shaw in 1819, also asked their wives for permission to share the news of their pregnancy suggests that George and Mary Anne's discussion on when to announce the pregnancy was not unusual and that this practice continued into the nineteenth century.[8] However, the letter gives a sense that George was debating whether to disobey Mary Anne and inform Stratford of the news of her pregnancy. That he squeezed

[7] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/3, George Canning to Stratford Canning, August 9th 1768.
[8] Begiato, '"Breeding" a "Little Stranger"', p. 20.

the announcement into the top of his letter, the last available white space, tells us of his decision.

George's letter presents uncertainty over Mary Anne's pregnancy. George's decision to defy Mary Anne's wishes tells of his excitement at the prospect of becoming a father. However, his excitement is tempered by the anxiety which is seen in the last line that George hopes his son is 'happier than his Father', a reflection of his current difficult financial and familial situation, particularly his poor relationship with his own father.[9] It is likely that George did not wish to burden Mary Anne with his fears over his ability to be a father and his broader personal issues. That there were six or seven months to go meant that it may not have been clear whether Mary Anne was pregnant. Most women were only sure that they were pregnant at the 'quickening', which happened around three or four months into the pregnancy.[10] This uncertainty is suggested through the use of terms such as 'I may possibly have a Son', and that Mary Anne did not wish for him to make the announcement.

Even if Mary Anne's pregnancy did take, there was still the real possibility of miscarriage. Whether feared or welcomed, miscarriages appear to be infrequently discussed in eighteenth-century letters, with more evidence from the early nineteenth century, either because they have not survived or they were discussed verbally.[11] Yet eighteenth-century midwifery and pregnancy manuals, and physicians' case notes attest to their commonality.[12]

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[9] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/3, George Canning to Stratford Canning, August 9th 1768.

[10] Fox, *Giving Birth*, p. 23.

[11] Though some women were relieved to have a miscarriage due to the size of their brood, this thesis concerns itself with those anxious about having a miscarriage.

[12] See Linda Pollock, 'Embarking on a Rough Passage: The Experience of Pregnancy in Early-Modern Society' in *Women as Mothers in Pre-industrial England*, ed. by Valerie Fides (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 39–67, pp. 49-59; John Maubray, *The Female Physician, Containing all the Diseases Incident to That Sex, in Virgins, Wives and Widows* (London: Stephen Austen, 1730), pp. 125-126. Case notes are found in Jennifer

This lack of written evidence may explain the scarcity of research into eighteenth-century miscarriage.[13] Those accounts that do exist, reveal, to varying degrees, the anxieties, concerns and beliefs surrounding miscarriage and are often from the point of view of women. Judith Milbanke's letter to her Aunt, Mary Noel, which discussed Judith's longing for a child, suggests a need for privacy when discussing her feelings regarding her suspected pregnancy being false by writing that 'you will guess what, without my mentioning it' further indicating their intimacy as well as her trust in discussing personal, and what Judith believes are nonconforming, feelings.[14]

Whilst George and his brother Stratford Canning were spared any lengthy anxieties over infertility, the fear of miscarriage hidden within this discussion between them evidences that men also shared their worries over the potential for a miscarriage. George's decision to indicate his anxieties to his brother rather than Mary Anne is likely due to common beliefs espoused in many conduct manuals that anxiety or fright could cause a miscarriage.[15] This suggests that anxiety was seen as a stressful emotion, which for pregnant women could manifest and harm the growing foetus. In his work *The Female Physician* (1730), English

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Evans and Sara Read, '''Before Midnight she had Miscarried'': Women, Men, and Miscarriage in Early Modern England', *Journal of Family History*, 40.1 (2015), pp. 3-23, pp. 11-12.

[13] The main research done on eighteenth-century miscarriage is from Mark Jackson, "'Something More Than Blood': Conflicting Accounts of Pregnancy Loss in Eighteenth-Century England' in *The Anthropology of Pregnancy Loss: Comparative Studies in Miscarriage, Stillbirth and Neonatal Death* ed. by Rosanne Cecil (Oxford and Washington, DC: Berg, 1996), pp. 197–214. Such studies exist for the seventeenth century for which more written evidence has been unearthed. For seventeenth-century studies on miscarriage, see Evans and Read,'''before midnight she had miscarried'''; Pollock, "Embarking on a Rough Passage'; Shannon K. Withycombe, 'Slipped Away: Pregnancy Loss in Nineteenth-Century America', PhD thesis., University of Wisconsin, 2010.

[14] Elwin, *The Noels and the* Milbankes, Judith Milbanke to Mary Noel, 28th December 1777, p. 87.

[15] Examples include Maubray, *The Female Physician*, p. 75; Nicholas Culpepper, *A Directory for Midwives: or, a Guide for Women, in their Conception, Bearing, and Suckling their Children* (London: C. Hitch and L. Hawes, 1762), p. 316.

physician John Maubray noted that pregnant women are 'prudently to avoid all Apprehensions of *Fears and Frights*, and not to be *surpriz'd* at any thing she hears or sees'.[16]

That this concern still circulated in the later eighteenth century is also seen in the correspondence of Judith Milbanke's sister, Sophia. In a dry remark, she utilised the concept to suggest that 'her Ladyship [Lady Gould] I think ou[gh]t not to stir out of her own house as she is almost frightful enough to make the sight of her be of bad consequence to *us fatning* [sic] Ladies'.[17] This was also thought to cause what we now refer to as premature birth but was sometimes regarded in the eighteenth century as a late miscarriage, an incident where the infant rarely survived.[18] To avoid such severe consequences, Maubray stated that the pregnant woman ought to avoid 'all *Family Tumults* or *Domestick Storms*: For there never ought so much as a Cloud to appear in [her] Conjugal Society; since all such unhappy Accidents strongly affect the growing Infant'.[19] Anxieties, melancholy and distress were all to be avoided, with the pregnant mother to take care as the growing baby was like 'the tender Blossom of Trees, which are easily *wafted* or *shaken off* by the least Accident of *Wind* or *Rain*'.[20] Maubray's manual also suggests the fragility associated with the pregnant mother: she was to be safeguarded to protect the developing infant.[21] Whether in jest or in serious tones, that anxiety or fright could induce miscarriage continued to be stated in manuals and expressed in letters into the nineteenth century.

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[16] Maubray, *The Female Physician,* p. 75.
[17] Elwin, *The Noels and the* Milbankes, Sophia Curzon to Mary Noel, 6th July 1778, p. 113.
[18] Maubray, *The Female Physician*, p. 128.
[19] *Ibid*, p. 77.
[20] *Ibid*, p. 74.
[21] *Ibid,* p. 77.

Therefore, to protect Mary Anne and his baby, George shared his anxieties with the next closest person to him - his brother Stratford. The brothers were still writing to each other whilst Stratford was on the Grand Tour despite George being cut off financially and emotionally from the family. Stratford knew the underlying context of George's fears regarding their father and George's financial situation. He was George's closest confidante besides his wife. Their intimate correspondence provided him with a space and place to express his concerns without burdening his expectant wife and potentially endangering the baby.

It was not just George who wrote of his concerns regarding his wife's pregnancy and risk of miscarriage. Aside from the earlier letters from the Noel-Milbankes, Jennifer Evans and Sara Read argue that seventeenth-century diaries suggest miscarriage is a 'joint concern' between both expectant parents.[22] However, men did not always discuss the 'joint concern' with their wives and used other outlets for their anxious thoughts. In 1709, American planter and lawyer William Byrd wrote in his diary that his wife 'had a pain in her belly' which they were worried signalled a miscarriage.[23] Two weeks later, when he wrote that 'I was out of humour at my wife's climbing over the pales of the garden, now she is with child', it is likely he was concerned that it could harm the baby, This concurs with pregnancy manuals which advised that pregnant women undertake no exercise for the first few months, and then no rigorous exercise, and no heavy lifting.[24] Indeed, Maubray's manual actually specifies not to walk in gardens, suggesting that this advice was known in both

[22] See Evans and Read, '"before midnight she had miscarried", pp. 7-8.
[23] William Byrd, *Diary Extracts, 1709* in Linda Pollock, *A Lasting Relationship: Parents and Children over Three Centuries*, (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1987), p. 25.
[24] Maubray, *The Female Physician,* p. 76.

America and Britain in this period.[25] That Byrd was concerned over his wife's climbing shows that these beliefs were, at least on some level, believed and precautions taken. Importantly, Byrd used a diary rather than a letter. This indicates that he wanted to write out his concerns privately, with his displeasure released in the diary and kept from his wife. This again suggests that George was not alone in thinking that familial disagreements, anxieties, or stresses could harm the unborn infant but that they were not always born out in letters due to their being no recipient of suitable intimacy or the desire to keep these thoughts more private than a familial letter would allow for.

It may also indicate how general writing and recording practices influenced where anxieties were shared as Byrd was a prolific diarist whose personal life was extensively recorded in code throughout his adult life. George on the other hand, like all the Cannings, had no surviving diaries and was known for his literary and epistolary prowess, as well as his strong desire to be connected to his family, so the letter appears a natural choice as a space for him to share his concerns. Thus, George's letter indicates that daily recording practices could contextualise where anxieties were shared, to whom and why.

Once the time of birth was approaching, men often wrote letters communicating their concerns over their wives' health. Before the birth of his second child in 1770, George Canning Sr. wrote that '[p]oor Mary Anne is in a truely pityable Situation scarce able to support her enormous Burden, & totally uncertain as to the time of her relief, which I pray to God may be speedy, & happily effectual in every sense'.[26] Though a record of George's feelings from Mary Anne's first birth has not survived, that George was still concerned over

[25] *Ibid*, p. 75.
[26] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/3, George Canning to Stratford Canning, April 10th 1770.

Mary Anne during her second pregnancy evidences that anxieties were not exclusive to first-time parents. George was clearly invested in Mary Anne's pregnancy right until the birth. Men were not just interested in finding out if they were to become a father but how the pregnancy was developing and of the health of their wives.

Once again, George chose to write to Stratford, rather than share his concerns with Mary Anne, which does follow the advice of the literature that the pregnant woman was not to be burdened with anxieties, especially when the wife was preparing herself for the trial of childbirth.[27] George's reference to Mary Anne's size suggests the imminence of her labour, despite George's assertion that she was 'totally uncertain' as to when she would reach 'the time of her relief'. George's description that Mary Anne was 'scarcely able to support her enormous burden' provides a visual image of Mary Anne's circumstances and expresses how much he believes the child is affecting Mary Anne. George's use of the term burden could also reflect Mary Anne's anxieties over her ever-nearing childbirth and the dangers this could bring, suggested further by his prayer for a 'speedy, & happily effectual' birth'. His addition of 'happily' emphasises that George's intended outcome is the successful birth of his child and for Mary Anne's survival, closing off any other possible interpretations in his 'prayer' to God, the only one believed to have any influence over the outcome of the birth. George was not the only one to refer to size in discussing anxieties. Pregnant gentlewoman Bessy Ramsden wrote that she was 'a monster in size' which led to 'great apprehensions I shall drop to pieces before I am ready for the little stranger'.[28] Another expectant mother, Elizabeth Leathes, wrote that her 'much increased size' made her 'apprehensive that I shall

[27] Maubray, *The Female Physician*, pp. 75-76; Martha Mears, *The Pupil of Nature; or Candid Advice to the Fair Sex* (London: printed for the authoress and sold at her house, 1797), pp. 113-114.
[28] Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, p. 100.

be confined sooner than I first expected'.[29] Begiato argues: 'the discussion of size could be an acceptable way to express and share the anxiety of pregnancy' suggesting that these anxieties were not to be discussed openly.[30] Whilst size is used here as the indicator as to how far along the pregnancy was, the Canning letters suggests it also indicated a panic of unpreparedness and that the ordeal of childbirth was nearer than first expected.

George's short passage conveyed to Stratford a multitude of concerns, reflecting the many outcomes he was likely imagining. These feelings are not out of place with the contemporary expressions of familial emotion in male letters from this period as men wrote of their 'uneasiness', 'fretfulness' and that they were 'vexed' over their wives' condition and wished to be kept informed of 'any particulars' over the approaching birth.[31] The vague language in other male accounts suggest that this uncertainty and concern was common.[32] As it happens, little George was born to Mary Anne and George Canning the very next day, on 11th April 1770.

Baby George, upon reaching adulthood, had these same concerns over the ill health of his wife, Joan in the early 1800s. George's anxieties also stem from the uncertainty as to when the birth would take place. Writing to his cousin Bess in 1802, George fretted about Joan's 'illness' which 'I thank God, though often very uncomfortable, is not often alarming…being of the same kind as that in January last – only so much more premature, that the consequence of whenever the Event may be, cannot I trust be to her personally very materially detrimental. The most painful thing is the Event's continuing doubtful so long –

[29] Begiato, '"Breeding" A Little Stranger"', p. 18.
[30] *Ibid*, p. 19.
[31] *Ibid*, p. 14.
[32] *Ibid*, p. 14.

now a full week'.[33] The length of the suspense is cited here as exasperating the anxiety felt over Joan's condition, suggesting that it was less the pregnancy that concerned George but the lack of indication as to when Joan's suffering would end, as it was affecting her health. Whilst George was likely concerned about his wife's survival, there is also a sense of love and care underlying this passage, as George wished to see his wife's suffering come to an end, suggesting again that anxiety was an expression of enduring love.

At this moment, George wrote to his cousin Bess and this is significant as it reveals how the context of relationships impacted upon the discussion of anxieties. Bess's and George's relationship resembled one of siblings, both having grown up together in the same household. Bess still lived in her family home and her letters were often read by the entire household, including George's aunt, Hitty who raised him. There are no surviving letters to suggest that he ever wrote of his fears to his mother regarding his wife or indeed his close family, the Leighs. Thus, his anxieties were to people intimately connected to him who would have understood why he did not write to his mother upon such an occasion. Indeed, as Chapter Five will reveal, Bess and Mehitabel were his confidantes for many of his underlying anxieties regarding his mother. More broadly though, this passage shows how men continued to use letters to express their anxieties into the nineteenth century, and why they might express them to certain individuals.

Both George Canning Sr. and young George Canning's letters evidence that the uncertainty of the timing of birth was a common concern in letters. Yet while George Sr. used language of size, young George's letter also suggests that the language of time was another

[33] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], George Canning to Elizabeth Canning, May 4th 1802.

euphemistic way to discuss anxieties with words such as ‘continuing’, ‘a full week’, ‘so long’ and ‘premature’. These terms not only indicate uncertainty in relation to the timing of the birth but that Joan’s second pregnancy appears to be ‘premature’ in comparison to her first. Women too recorded differences between pregnancies and the timings in diaries, often reflecting that differences between pregnancies could cause alarm.[34] This demonstrates that each individual pregnancy had its own ailments, timings, and progression. Whilst the first pregnancy offered naïve parents-to-be a multitude of twinges and unknowns to dwell upon, subsequent births could be just as anxiety-inducing as the first. Pregnancy did not just produce a bundle of joy but a bundle of anxieties as well.

The Anxieties of Pregnancy for Men: Personal Issues and Identity Crises

After he married Mary Anne in 1768, George Canning Sr. struggled to maintain a profession or generate a regular income. His relationship with his family in Ireland remained strained and with an annuity of only £200 a year, money was tight. Concurrently, Mary Anne fell pregnant three times within three years, between 1768 and 1771. This section explores how Mary Anne’s pregnancies influenced George’s behaviours and amplified his failures to provide for his family as well as many of his ongoing anxieties of self-identity, money, and his fractured relationship with his family.

The opening passage of the previous section showed how George expressed his anxieties to his brother about potentially becoming a father. Yet, delving deeper into George’s life, this same small passage conveys how the prospect of fatherhood triggered a personal crisis. It

[34] See Elizabeth Wynne’s and Elizabeth Fry’s diary entries in Pollock, *A Lasting Relationship*, pp. 38, 45.

contains references to a myriad of other apprehensions and reveals how pregnancy was a point of reflection that could open further anxieties on identity, duty, finances and 'success'. Whilst French and Rothery note that late adolescence and early adulthood were the subjects of many surviving letters of gentry families, I argue that pregnancy was also a critical point for the discussion and reflection of masculine ideals, as well as concerns over transitioning into the next phase of life and taking on a new identity.[35] For George, pregnancy was the point in which he contemplated becoming a father and this shaped his emotional expressions of his situation to renegotiate his masculine identity as he took on a new familial role.

George may have been concerned about becoming a father due to the difficulties he had with his own father and his brother Paul, the replacement heir. His own feelings of being wronged by his family are revealed in this letter to Stratford as a source of constant bitterness, a sign that George was not fully content being physically and emotionally estranged from his family in Ireland. During the years before his marriage to Mary Anne, George was still receiving letters and visits from his brothers, Paul and Stratford. Thus, ties to his immediate family in Ireland were maintained, even though the relationship between father and son remained strained. It was Counsellor Canning's letter in 1767, asking George, first to emigrate to America, and then later to surrender his inheritance to Paul for the return of payment of his debts and £200 a year, which caused the bitterness that remained with George right up until his death.[36] George's letters also suggest that this caused a rift between himself and his brother Paul, with George convinced Paul was performing to both

[35] Henry French and Mark Rothery, 'Male Anxiety and the Younger Sons of the Landed Gentry, 1700-1900', *The Historical Journal,* 62.3 (2019), pp. 967-996, pp. 967-969.
[36] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/54, Mary Anne Hunn to George Canning, January 27th 1803, p. 20.

him and their father but 'acting under the direction' of his father's will at times.[37] Indeed, in her later letter-memoir of 1803, Mary Anne compared Paul's behaviour to that of Blifil in *Tom Jones*, the villain whose actions are hypocritical.[38]

Earlier in the same letter, in which he squeezes in his pregnancy announcement, George dwelled on the concept of natural feelings between family members:

> My affection for my nearest Relations is so deeply implanted by Nature in my bosom, that I trust it can never be thence rooted out. Even in the hand of cruel & tyrannical oppression, though it has almost rent my heartstrings, has not prevailed to eradicate it…it amazes me that a spark of affection should yet warm my breast for a Father, who against the Voice of Nature, Justice & Right Reason (not to speak of Benevolence Tenderness & Mercy), has been so many years aiming at, & has so nearly, (perhaps in the opinions of some people, completely) effected my absolute ruin.[39]

Here, George blamed his family, specifically his father, for his near 'absolute ruin' and took little personal responsibility for his situation, suggesting that if his father possessed natural 'Benevolence Tenderness and Mercy' towards his son, he would have aided George. This passage indicates George's perspective on his financial and familial situation, presenting himself as the victim of a lack of familial tenderness and support which he felt was his natural right. If French and Rothery are correct that 'happy' marriages were based on both emotional and financial means, then it can be inferred that George saw Counsellor Canning as trying to ruin his chances of a happy marriage through his decision to restrict George's allowance to £200 a year.[40] This context proves important for how these passages from this

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[37] For further details on George's suspicions, see BL, Add MS89143/3/1/3, George Canning to Stratford Canning, February 20th 1770.
[38] See James E. Evans, 'Bilfu as Tartuffe: The Dialogic Comedy of *Tom Jones*', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 27.2 (1990), pp. 101-112.
[39] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/3, George Canning to Stratford Canning, August 9th 1768.
[40] Henry French and Mark Rothery, *Man's Estate: Landed Gentry Masculinities, 1660-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 192.

1768 letter to Stratford communicate George's anxieties which have been triggered by the news that he was going to become a father. The letters centre George's family as the cause of his inability to achieve full masculine autonomy and 'happiness'. In this way, this passage demonstrates how pregnancy amplified existing anxieties and tensions as well as created new ones.

The fundamental ideals of fatherhood from around 1750, as outlined by Joanne Bailey, were 'emotion, provision, instruction and discipline', and she argues that these were expressed within the emerging discourse of sensibility, which reconfigured notions of fatherhood around feeling.[41] The passage above immediately engages with fatherly emotion. George's letter to his brother, seen through the two passages referenced in this chapter, already displays parental anxiety towards the unborn child. As Chapter Three will discuss, expressing anxiety towards your child's wellbeing and nurturing was considered evidence of devoted, loving parents, thus George was already communicating desirable parental emotions towards his unborn child. This suggests that parental feelings were expressed from conception, not just from birth, an idea that supports the use of emotional rhetoric in the few discussions of miscarriage within letters such as those from Judith Milbanke to her Aunt as well as George's fears over the potential miscarriage of his child.[42] Through the line 'may he live to prove more gentle than his Grandspie & happier than his Father', George's concerns centre around presenting himself as a loving, caring father, immediately positioning his style of fathering as opposite to his father, Counsellor Canning's.[43]

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[41] Joanne Bailey, '"A Very Sensible Man": Imagining Fatherhood in England, c.1750-1830', *History*, 95.3 (July 2010), pp. 267-292, pp. 274-275, 286.
[42] Elwin, *The Noels and the* Milbankes, Judith Milbanke to Mary Noel, December 28th 1777; January 8th 1778, pp. 87-89.
[43] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/3, George Canning to Stratford Canning, August 9th 1768.

However, George's anxiety could also reflect societal ideals about the relationships between fathers and children. In hoping that his 'son' would be different from both his father and himself, George's letter signals how he wants to behave as a father, to raise a gentle and happy child. In this sense, this letter begins to touch upon French and Rothery's observation that gentry letters 'tended to illustrate behavioural ideals as much as any "reality", describing how fathers, mothers, or sons wanted to behave, or thought they should behave, or thought they had behaved, instead of analysing errors, failings and weaknesses'.[44] It also shows George's awareness, like his father before him as discussed in Chapter One, that children reflected their fathers 'values or capabilities' and George's personal woes may have caused reflection on his ability to raise a child without his own failures being visibly embodied within the child.[45] There is a sense of learning taking place, of how perceived past mistakes could be rectified in the future through the emerging new bond between father and child.

Whilst George was keen to express his emotional bond with his unborn baby, he was less responsible in the other fundamental areas of fatherhood which could be performed before the baby was born. One of the cornerstones of eighteenth-century masculinity and fatherhood was familial provision. As Karen Harvey argues, the realm of the home 'was not separate from the world outside the domestic' as the home was so closely linked to material and financial means.[46] George's letter to his brother tells of his 'embarrassments', referring to his money troubles. George firmly places the blame upon himself as the intended

[44] French and Rothery, *Man's Estate*, p. 34.
[45] *Ibid*, p. 223.
[46] Karen Harvey, *The Little Republic: Masculinity and Domestic Authority in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 11.

breadwinner of the family unit and importantly, absolves Mary Anne of any blame, writing that she made home a 'Paradise'. Reflecting on the Canning's situation, George Canning Sr. could be considered a failure. According to the 1747 manual, *Art of Governing a Wife*, the good husband was 'careful of providing for the house'.[47]

The failure to maintain a position of provision caused anxiety and distress. William Jones, another eighteenth-century father with a limited income, apprehensively wrote that with the 'uncertainty of my employment' and another child on the way, 'I seem oppressed with an insupportable load of cares and anxieties'.[48] Importantly, Jones emphasised that it was his wife's financial calculations as 'according to *her* estimate, we shall not be able to support our dear family of nine children, even if we adopt a plan of the utmost prudence and economy…'[49] In the *Lady's Magazine* from 1783, Mrs Grey, a 'Matron' replied to a letter discussing female fortunes upon entering marriage with the opinion that 'there is something like cruelty in bringing children into the world, without being able to provide for them, to pay for their education, &c.'[50] Unable to hold down a job, and with mounting debts, George could not support himself and his wife, let alone a child and could not fulfil his primary duty as paternal head of the household to provide for his family.

A growing family was still secondary to George's personal pride as the former heir to the Garvagh estate, an identity he was either unwilling or unable to fully shed. This is clear in his handling of the family's finances. In her letter-memoir, Mary Anne wrote to her son that his father George Canning Sr. could not look upon young George's face without anguish as 'he

[47] *The Art of Governing a Wife, with Rules for* Batchelors (London: J. Robinson, 1747), p. 3.
[48] William Jones, 1789 and 1797, in Linda Pollock, *A Lasting Relationship*, p. 59.
[49] *Ibid*, p.59.
[50] Mrs Grey, 'The Matron No.CXX', *The Lady's Magazine*, March 1783, pp. 129-130.

felt that he had wronged him'. In doing so she painted her husband as a loving father, struggling with difficulties to fulfil his role in providing for his family, right up until his death.[51] Yet during George's first year of life, George Canning Sr. was offered a seat as an MP, if he supported the government. George did not politically align with the government. Siding more with radical John Wilkes, he refused, unable to change his beliefs to earn a living. He was then offered a posting abroad as Governor of Grenada for £800 a year but he also refused this, citing the unbearable hot weather.[52] It is unclear whether he disliked the jobs offered to him or if it was still pride and a firm belief that his inheritance would eventually be restored but his commitment to his writing and literary career is likely an important factor. Alongside this were inferences that George still acted as if he had money and a reluctance to admit how desperate the family's money troubles truly were. The family moved to Queen Anne Street, an aspiring neighbourhood, in 1769, and George insisted on having a manservant, as his presence would have suggested that the Cannings had money.[53] Thus, there were tensions between George's personal pride and his obligations towards his family. This highlights the complexities of individual identity versus familial obligations for men, especially those influenced by pride.

There is also the sense that George was unable to govern himself or take up the responsibilities as head of the household, both key markers of gentry respectability and masculinity. George's lifestyle during Mary Anne's three pregnancies was not dissimilar to the bachelor life that he was living before his courtship and marriage, suggesting that he had not embraced the concept of head of a family with its financial and familial obligations

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[51] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/54 , Mary Anne Hunn to George Canning, January 27th 1803, p. 34.
[52] Julian Crowe, *George Canning is my Son* (London: Unbound, 2021), p. 45.
[53] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/54, Mary Anne Hunn to George Canning, January 27th 1803, p. 34.

and rather acted on impulse. When he was sent to London in 1757 to get over a love affair and to train as a lawyer, he 'neglected his legal studies in favour of poetry, politics and women'.[54]These early years of marriage were characterised by the Cannings being on credit. Whilst this reflects the more general practice of supplying credit and loans, George had been borrowing money for years before his marriage. It is likely a result of Counsellor Canning keeping his funds deliberately low to try and curb his libertine behaviours.[55]

There was also a sense of tension in their marital relationship over their expectations of each other. George chose his own personal business over having dinner at home on several occasions. He wrote to Mary Anne that as it was the first occasion that he had 'baulked your expectation of seeing me at home' he wrote that he was unable to make dinner. He caveated this with 'on future occasions, I shall not probably be so ceremonious', suggesting Mary Anne was not always aware when her husband would miss dinner.[56] This might indicate the behaviour of eighteenth-century husbands but possibly also indicates George's inability to adjust to family and domestic life. This was despite writing to his brother, Stratford, of his happiness in the domestic state.[57] It could reflect his freedom within the marriage to maintain many of his bachelor habits. In this sense, George still acted, with what William Stafford termed, that 'freewheeling irresponsibility associated with young men, at liberty to follow their inclinations and appetites…free from the pressure of obligations'.[58] The pregnancy announcement suggests that George now felt the weight of his

[54] Crowe, *George Canning*, p. 17.
[55] Crowe, *George Canning*, p. 19; BL, Add MS89143/3/1/54, Mary Anne Hunn to George Canning, January 27th 1803, p. 30; See Julian Hoppit, 'Attitudes to Credit in Britain, 1680-1790', *The Historical Journal*, 33.2 (June 1990), pp. 305-322.
[56] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/2, George Canning to Mary Anne Canning, date unknown but likely to be mid-late 1768.
[57] Crowe, *George Canning*, pp. 37-38.
[58] William Stafford, 'Gentlemanly Masculinities as Represented by the Late Georgian *Gentleman's Magazine*', *History*, 93.309 (2008), pp. 47-68, p. 60.

responsibilities in a way that he did not when he was a childless married man, emphasising pregnancy as a point of reflection and, in this case, crisis.

In this sense, pregnancy appeared to provide an, albeit fleeting, change in George's behaviour. As Davidoff and Hall argue, men's 'sense of self' derived from exercising power over women and children.[59] George now presented himself as head of the family, using his position to defy his wife to make the announcement. He also frames it in terms of his own masculinity. I have already discussed his presentation of his fatherly feelings through his use of 'I' rather than 'we' but George's eagerness to share the pregnancy news also projects a sense of his own virility. Due to the struggles that he had in other aspects of his masculinity, as noted above, his virility was one area in which he could assert his authority and position. George showcased the one area in which he was an immediate success, Letitia being conceived mere months after George and Mary Anne's wedding. For George, this little passage emphasises the masculine traits that he could control: his display of fatherly values, his control over his wife's will and evidence of his virility. George begins to display a sense of responsibility due to his impending role as a father, though it did not appear to be consistent or long lasting.

Neither George's financial nor familial prospects improved after Letitia's birth. With such uncertainty, it is unsurprising that George continued to reflect on his own financial and familial position with trepidation during Mary Anne's second pregnancy from 1769 to 1770. A few months before his son, George, was born he turned to his brother, Stratford, stating that:

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[59] Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850*, revised ed. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), pp. xxx, 17, 21, 31, 89, 195, 211, 229.

> it gives me much concern that the Straits to which I have long been reduced by unnatural Family Conduct, & which cannot barely continue without increasing every day, put me so far below the level of Equality with you, as to disable me, at the same time that I give you thanks for your long Letter of the 15th…My Pen is the Sole Fortune now in my possession, & the first of Duties directs me to endeavour to apply it in the most efficacious manner for the advantage of my poor self & of what is far dearer to me than that much maltreated Being.[60]

George's impending role as a father cast a shadow on his role as provider, that 'first of Duties', a role that thus far he has failed to maintain with any success. It is important to note that George was not idle, a trait to be avoided as it was associated with young, immature boys, but he did not invest his time in the best manner, concentrating on his writing and trying to establish subscriptions for his works rather than settling down into a profession or job, many of which he tried and failed to sustain, like or even undertake, due to his pride.

Interestingly, he believed himself 'below the level of Equality' with his brother. Such a statement coming from the eldest child shows how far George believed he had fallen, though blamed 'unnatural Family Conduct' rather than his own inability to work at a profession. As seen in his courtship letters from Chapter One, George was an accomplished writer who believed that this was all he had left to provide his family with an income. George noted that 'upon reading over my Letter, I think the Style harder than I could wish to use, but it is difficult to assume a soft one, while things press so hard on every side'.[61] George did not attempt to hide his anxious and melancholy state, with the weight of financial burden upon him. This anxiety was likely heightened in order to emotionally impress his dire circumstances and subtly ask for assistance. His writing to Stratford in this manner may well have also been prompted by the news that his father had now replied to

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[60] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/3, George Canning to Stratford Canning, February 20th 1770.
[61] *Ibid*, February 20th (Section written on February 22nd) 1770.

his letter stating that 'my Father has not favoured me with any kind of answer to a Request which I thought it my Duty to make to him', that was to be the godparent, or 'Sponsor' to George's child.[62]

From this correspondence and rejection, George expressed a sense that he had ruined his children's inheritance, especially that of his eldest son, George. A note written just before his death comments on his desire that George should claim the inheritance he was unable to resecure for him. Thus, pregnancy may have also been especially poignant to George as he reflected on the fact that his children would not enjoy the lifestyle that he was born to and, on a deeper level, still expected to receive. He demonstrates a sense of guilt that his own choices had impoverished his future children's futures. Here, George already equated notions of 'success' and 'happiness' with the future prospects of his unborn children, extending French and Rothery's observation that parents connected their 'happiness' to the success of their children to that of unborn or future children as well.[63] This could be in line with gentry fathers 'bolstering their own identity by emphasizing their "dynastic" concern for the next generation' but more likely alludes to George's sense that his disinheritance affects more than just himself, communicating a new sense of responsibility through feelings of guilt, shame and anxiety.[64]

It could be due to these feelings that George's letters show a continual desire to re-establish familial ties throughout the three years that Mary Anne was pregnant. Baby's Letitia's birth in March 1769, indicates how pregnancies and births could also be utilised to try and resolve

[62] *Ibid*, February 20th 1770.
[63] French and Rothery, *Man's Estate*, p. 220.
[64] *Ibid*, p. 220.

familial tensions. That they named her Letitia, indicates how this birth was intertwined with the family politics. Letitia was the name of George's mother and in naming their daughter after her paternal grandmother, George and Mary Anne appear to have attempted to remind the Cannings of their natural blood ties, despite the frosty familial relations.[65] They also hoped to have George's father as a godfather to Letitia, as Mary Anne's letters indicate that George believed this to be what was due to his father as paternal grandfather but this did not materialise. It demonstrates how pregnancies and birth could also be utilised to try and renegotiate familial roles and alleviate tensions and anxieties within familial relationships.

Though familial relations were never reinstated, George's letters evidence his continual desire for his son to claim his rightful inheritance. Writing to him just before his death in 1771: 'You are born, my dear George, with all my Rights and all my wrongs upon your head: Assert my Rights, avenge my wrongs'.[66] French and Rothery note that 'even in the 18th century, then, "happiness" was associated with mutual emotional support, and the concerns of the nuclear family and the household'.[67] For George's familial situation suggests unresolved tensions, materially, financially and emotionally, which played a significant part in his claimed unhappiness in the latter years of his life.

Women and Crisis during Pregnancy: The Anxieties of Mary Anne Canning

[65] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/3, George Canning to Stratford Canning, August 9th 1768; BL Add MS89143/3/1/54, Mary Anne Hunn to George Canning, January 27th 1803, p. 33; Crowe, *George Canning*, p. 38.
[66] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/3, The words are written on a piece of paper in the collection of letters.
[67] French and Rothery, *Man's Estate*, p. 194.

Whilst there are ample surviving letters from eighteenth-century women discussing the anxieties of pregnancy and childbirth, the Canning women were largely silent in their correspondences. As seen in the earlier sections, George spoke for Mary Anne on updates of her pregnancy and used this to discuss his own anxieties, both of the pregnancy and more generally.

Hitty, George and Mary Anne's sister-in-law and a prolific letter writer, had seven successful births: Henry 'Hal' (1774), Stratford (1775; died 1776), Elizabeth 'Bess' (1776), (William 1778), George (1780; died 1780), (Charles 1782) and Stratford (1786).[68] These pregnancies, which took place over a twelve year period, represent a striking absence in surviving letters from Hitty, despite a few letters surviving from before her first pregnancy and many from after her husband died in 1787. She wrote to Eliza Sheridan from the mid-1780s and their correspondence included discussions about her children, though there is no mention of her pregnancies. Thus, direct references were scarce. Whilst this might signal lost letters from Hitty, Mary Anne's surviving letters only touched upon her pregnancies by George Canning, yet most of them were written in, or revisited, this period in her life.

The references that Mary Anne Canning's letters contain reveal the traumatic experiences that she dealt with alongside her third pregnancy, causing stress and anxiety for the future of her and her children. The pressures, anxieties and issues which surrounded the pregnancy impacted the feelings and experiences of the pregnancy and birth itself and Mary Anne's story and her correspondences provide fruitful ground to explore one way in which

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[68] All these Baptism Records and Death Records for Stratford (1775) and George (1780) are held on Ancestry.co.uk (2023), https://www.ancestry.co.uk/discoveryui-content/view/1217119:60526 [Accessed 20/05/2021 and 08/04/2023] Jane Canning is also listed in some places as a sibling and occasionally as George Canning's (1770-1827) sister, neither of which are correct.

this was the case. Fox begins to address this when she notes that birth was a subjective experience as she comments that 'what, to an observer, may be a "natural" or "ordinary" birth, for the woman at its centre may be emotionally and physically traumatic'.[69] Mary Anne's experience broadens these concerns when looking at experience to consider the context in which both the pregnancy and birth took place.

Furthermore, Fox asserts that birth was a process, with various stages of preparation and activity. [70] By looking at birth in this way, Fox argues that it 'redirects our attentions to the birthing woman and the rich networks of friends, family and neighbours that were crucial to the management of birthing'.[71] This chapter extends this argument to consider pregnancy as part of this process and that pregnancy and birthing were all part of this same process, with different 'linked and flexible' stages.[72] The following section focuses on anxieties to show the impact that pregnancy had on other situations, issues and anxieties, for the pregnant woman still lived and experienced everyday life during her pregnancy. It is this figure that Mary Anne represents in her letters: the pregnant woman experiencing life's hardships at a critical time in the lifecycle. It focuses on two separate incidents to demonstrate how letters reveal the tensions pregnancy inflicted on marital relations and how the negotiation of familial roles which Fox argues takes place upon the birth of a child, can begin before the birth.[73]

Pregnancy revealed some of the anxieties which caused tensions within the marital relationship as well as the tensions of the multiple identities of wife and mother. An

[69] Fox, *Giving Birth in Eighteenth-Century England*, p. 17.
[70] *Ibid*, pp. 7-8.
[71] *Ibid*, pp. 7-8.
[72] *Ibid*, pp. 7-8.
[73] *Ibid*, p. 8.

interesting anxiety and resulting tension which arose from Mary Anne's pregnancies is that of Mary Anne's milk. Baby George's care was shaped by baby Letitia's death. According to Mary Anne's letters, she 'suckled' Letitia for near six months, until around September when it was decided that she should be weaned. A servant 'who had attended [Letitia] from birth', had 'been herself a mother' and had promised complicit obedience' to Mary Anne's instructions on feeding Letitia 'fed her too much' and Mary Anne believed this 'clogged' her 'necessary operations': in other words caused Letitia constipation. This same servant 'gave her improper food' whilst Mary Anne and George were out 'against the Standing Order' and three days later Letitia died.[74] This episode meant that Mary Anne and George no longer trusted any servants to look after their future child, George, with whom Mary Anne was pregnant.

This incident was allocated more space in the letter than both George and Thomas's births and infancies combined, highlighting that Mary Anne either felt it important to convey the events to George or that she indulged her own sense of victimisation through this incident, a tone that she carried through the entire 188-pages. It could also have been mentioned due to its impact on Mary Anne and George's relationship, their parenting of George and their relationship with George's sister, Mary 'Molly' Barnard. A month before George's birth, Molly Barnard wrote to Mary Anne and included the following towards the end of the letter:

> the milk of the healthiest woman upon Earth is in a state of corruption from the moment she is with child, and therefore Deem'd by every Body the most pernicious thing a child can take, for tho it may not be the immediate cause of their Death, it may lay up store of misery for them, and no one can tell when or in what shape it may break out.[75]

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[74] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/54, Mary Anne Hunn to George Canning, January 27th 1803, pp. 36-37.
[75] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/4, Molly Barnard to Mary Anne Canning, March 24th 1770.

Molly's letter reflected advice in many conduct manuals at the time such as that by Hugh Smith. That Mary Anne's milk may have lacked nutrition or become 'corrupt' in some manner when she became pregnant again whilst still suckling Letitia, meaning that Letitia was not receiving all the nutrients required to sustain her.[76] She took this seriously, something confirmed in the letter-memoir as Mary Anne expressed that Molly's letter 'harrowed up my soul'.[77] There is a suggestion that this still haunted her even over thirty years later. Both Mary Anne's letters written in the early 1770s and her 1803 letter-memoir state that she had left the marital bed for one in the nursery in order to prevent another pregnancy whilst she was breastfeeding George. The anxiety over Mary Anne's breast milk not only demonstrates how family members passed on pregnancy and birthing practices but also presents Mary Anne as a concerned mother determined to live up to ideals of motherhood that emphasise the importance of breastfeeding and her distress over the effects of her milk on her children.[78]

Yet Mary Anne's letter-memoir records there was a tension between her duties of wife and mother. That she chose to neglect her marital bed to preserve her milk displays a strong motherly devotion and care which echoed contemporaneous ideals of self-sacrifice, care, and attention towards children. However, Mary Anne records that George wanted Mary Anne to himself for 'I was all his wishes sought' but Mary's letter strongly suggests that Letitia's death and Molly Barnard's letter influenced Mary Anne's thinking: 'our child might be injured either by the ignorance or disobedience of a servant' but 'I could not always be in

[76] Hugh Smith, *Letters to Married Women* (London, 1769), p. 79.
[77] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/54, Mary Anne Hunn to George Canning, January 27th 1803, pp. 36-37.
[78] Fox, *Giving Birth*, p, 81.

the act nursing without withholding from its father every social comfort'.[79] This situation became amplified by George's personal issues of family, finances, and his melancholy, or low spirits, in the eighteenth century. Mary Anne recorded in her letter-memoir that George:

> looked piteously in my face, & said Am I still to be deserted? – My Heart was smote severely, and I ask'd him what was to become of George? – he replied that I had Two Georges, but it seemed One was to be sacrificed to the other – His Bed was lonely, he said, and his thoughts unfit for Solitude – horror froze my blood.[80]

As a recollection, Mary Anne may have heightened the situation, but her comments display how the desire to not get pregnant was at the centre of a tension between two familial identities: that of wife and mother. Despite utilising Letitia's death as reason for withholding herself from her husband, Mary Anne expressed that she knew 'that I had no right to found the exercise of one duty upon the breach of another'.[81] She risked alienating her husband to feed her baby or poisoning and killing her child to comfort her husband and return to the marital bed. Though George's thoughts could simply be sexual, his history of melancholy and susceptibility to what we would now refer to as depression suggests that it could also be mental comfort George required. By returning to her husband, we know Mary Anne decided to risk her baby's health to comfort her husband and stop his 'thoughts' from taking over him. The fear of becoming pregnant during breastfeeding her newborn child caused Mary Anne to neglect her wifely duties in favour of dedicating herself to her motherly role, demonstrating the many competing and sometimes incompatible identities of both men and women in the family. Mary Anne's situation shows the complexities of child-rearing on

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[79] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/54, Mary Anne Hunn to George Canning, January 27th 1803, p. 48.
[80] *Ibid*, January 27th 1803, p. 53.
[81] *Ibid*, January 27th 1803, p. 48.

marital and familial relations as families navigated through new responsibilities and adapted existing ones.

This incident also affected wider familial relations with Molly Barnard. Molly and Mary Anne had a strong relationship especially through sharing maternal experiences: 'that of a sister, a friend & a Christian'. Molly had experienced the loss of several of her children and she later died just after giving birth to a stillborn child.[82] Thus, Molly's tone was likely informed by her experiences. Mary Anne told her son George in her letter-memoir that Molly's letter:

> hinted that my milk had probably injured the infant's constitution, and requested, particularly, as we had promised for an interest in the next, that I would not attempt to suckle it, unless I could determine to do it justice – I was severely afflicted and could not conceal it -Mr C thought her expression harsh + told her so she apologised and time assisted her tender efforts at atonement for the pain that she had given me, and we went on in our correspondence as usual.[83]

Mary Anne expressed that she was upset about Molly's letter to her husband who took it upon himself to reproach his sister for making his wife distressed. George's actions could come across as selfish in these extracts from Mary Anne's letter-memoir given that he risked contaminating his child's milk for sexual gratification and whilst he admonished his sister for upsetting his wife, he may have also been expressing his annoyance that her letter led to his wife withholding sex from him. However, it is more likely that George was defending his wife in this instance. For whilst Mary Anne presented herself as a selfless mother devoted to successfully raising her son and George as an obstacle to overcome, George did adhere to the separation for almost nine months. He therefore did try to place the child's needs

[82] *Ibid*, January 27th 1803, pp. 36-37.
[83] *Ibid*, January 27th 1803, p. 48.

before his own and most manuals noted that children could be weaned from nine months, although they recommended twelve. However, Mary Anne returned to the marital bed before George was weaned. The selfish image of George could have been displayed by Mary Anne as she capitulated and returned to the marital bed, thus risking baby George's milk. As this letter was designed to showcase how she was a 'good' mother to George, presenting herself as stuck between two duties could lessen criticism of her parenting. This one incident reveals a multitude of anxieties, duties, responsibilities, familial negotiations, and constructions of identity which individuals would encounter, in different ways, in everyday life in the years of childbearing.

Mary Anne's troubles worsened as only months after returning to the marital bed, she became pregnant and then George Canning Sr. died, on baby George's first birthday. This plunged her immediately into poverty whilst pregnant and anxious about the nutritious qualities of her milk. Whilst George Sr was alive, there was always a hope that either he would reconcile with his family, or he would be able to settle into a profession. Failing this, he received that £200 a year from his family. However, upon his death, the dire straits of the Cannings' financial situation came to a head. Whilst George's debts died with him, Mary Anne found all the furniture was rented and there was no money for her and her son, and future child, to live upon.

Situations such as Mary Anne's reveal the importance of family in the raising of children, especially for those in financial difficulties. Upon the death of the breadwinner in particular, familial relationships were renegotiated and not always to the benefit of all family members. Mary Anne's letter-memoir reflected the family's financial issues '[w]hen my dear George expired' as dire:

> [I] was not in posess'd of three guineas in the world, nor had I even a Bed to lye on, that I could call my own…it would be necessary for me to quit the House – the Furniture was not paid for…I forget what was done for my dear Stratford did it all.[84]

This extract tells of Mary Anne's money troubles, including finding out that all the furniture had been rented and now had to be returned to settle George's debts. However, the most telling recollection here is Mary Anne's mention of her brother-in-law, Stratford. Familial relationships changed and altered over time, with different family members taking on different responsibilities for the good of the family. In the wake of his brother's death, Stratford took on the role of head of the household in many ways by providing a small income for Mary Anne, finding new lodgings for the growing family, and becoming an important confidant to Mary Anne to help her negotiate with his family for financial assistance, including writing to them himself on the subject.

Stratford also took on a more caring role towards the family. His letters show great concern for Mary Anne's personal health. In one such letter, dated 17th June 1771, Stratford regretted hearing that Mary Anne is ill and begged her to 'keep yourself up for your Child's sake, he calls upon you to do so –' and made her promise to come to dinner, likely to make sure that she is eating well: she was taking to not eating in the wake of George's death, which would be damaging for the baby as well as for Mary Anne.[85] Stratford's letters appear to be influenced by the concept of 'regimen', found in many medical texts discussing pregnancy and, as Fox summarises was 'often discussed in relation to diet and nutrition, but also encompassed the key impact of environment on the body through sleep, routine and

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[84] *Ibid*, January 27th 1803, pp. 57-58.

[85] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/4, Stratford to Mary Anne, June 17th 1771.

exercise'.[86] That Stratford takes on the responsibility to look after Mary Anne shows how he had fully embraced the role of pseudo-head of the household and this demonstrates how familial support was crucial in times of crisis.

Mary Anne's situation also tells of the importance of the right familial support. She had Stratford's support but he was careless with money as 'he was the slave of his Affections'.[87] She had the support of her own family but they were penniless and her aunts and uncles, though friendly, did not offer any financial assistance. Mary Anne utilised her letter writing abilities and her powers of persuasion to try and convince her estranged father-in-law to support his son's family further than his offer of £40 a year, which would barely cover their rent.

Counsellor Canning's initial letter to Mary Anne is telling of his relationship with her:

> Madam, My son Paul has informed me of the death of his Brother, and that he has left a Son whose name is George. My intention at present is to give you forty pounds a year, not more; and this in England, not in Ireland. I send you enclos'd a bill for twenty pounds, wch I could not conveniently send to you sooner; and as soon as it may be convenient for one, I will send you another for twenty more. My next remittance after this last mention, will be in next November for the like sum of twenty pounds. I am madam your most obedient Servant'.[88]

The note is polite and impersonal and does not distinguish Mary Anne from a business acquaintance or vendor, communicating that she was not considered his family and was not to be addressed in a familiar manner. In issuing the money in two instalments, Counsellor Canning perhaps also lacked confidence in Mary Anne's money management. This context is

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[86] Fox, *Giving Birth*, p. 11.

[87] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/54, Mary Anne Hunn to George Canning, January 27th 1803, p. 51.

[88] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/4, Stratford 'Counsellor Canning' to Mary Anne Canning, April 25th 1771, copied into letter from Mary Anne Canning to John Beresford, May 26th 1771.

important for understanding the tone and language of Mary Anne's response as it directly confronts this impersonal style.

The tone in her opening letter 'Honoured Sir' shows both deference to his social position but also the motive behind her letter to thank him and persuade him to do more.[89] As a man of pride, whose social and financial status was key to his sense of self, Mary Anne's obsequious opening was an emotional strategy to begin her persuasion for financial assistance. Her choice to refer to her brother-in-law, Stratford, as 'my brother Stratty' conveyed a sense of shared intimacy between Counsellor Canning and herself: they were family and they shared intimate familial bonds, not just through George but also through Stratford.[90] This line of familial ties continues through the letter as Mary Anne wrote that she intended to use the £20 enclosed 'to pay the Expenses of my Beloved Husband's funeral'.[91]

Mary Anne utilised her letters to try and negotiate her position as George's widow and the mother of Counsellor Canning's grandson. The letter from Counsellor Canning states that £40 would be sent every six months for little George's upkeep. Mary Anne framed her request in the interest of her children, saying that 'I have not right to expect any thing more for I brought Him [George] nothing but Happiness' and reiterated that their relationship was based on love.[92] Though it was just 'three short years', Mary Anne then acknowledged that she:

> gave you nothing but a George, allow Sir a wretched mother to express her Joy in the pleasure She thinks you seem to feel in having still a George, the only Comfort I can

[89] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/4, Mary Anne to Stratford 'Counsellor' Canning, May 2nd 1771.
[90] *Ibid*, May 2nd 1771.
[91] *Ibid*, May 2nd 1771.
[92] *Ibid*, May 2nd 1771.

> taste must be in preserving him, for you…in Him restore to you & His Honour'd Grandmother your long lost Son! [93]

Though admitting that she could not expect anything for herself, Mary Anne still utilised language to plead for the importance of George's happiness in his marriage. Mary Anne then used her son, George, in an emotional strategy to appeal to Counsellor Canning's familial feelings and sense of pride in his dynasty: he was his son who could be remoulded in the image of his father, suggesting that Counsellor Canning would have a worthy successor in his grandson, in place of his father who failed to live up to expectations. This builds on her and George Sr.'s beliefs in George's wronged position, and that little George deserved what his father ought to have had.

This line of thinking links to John Locke's notion that a child was a 'blank canvas' to be shaped by society through education and parental guidance.[94] Interestingly, this opening letter does not allude to Mary Anne's pregnancy, despite it being discussed with George in the April before he died. It focuses on the tangible, the present, the existing, rather than a potential child which could miscarry at such an early stage in the pregnancy. There was also no way of knowing if it would be a boy or a girl and Mary Anne's argument in this letter presents her son, George, as Counsellor Canning's heir, in his father's image. The second child of unknown sex would carry less weight in such an argument, and Mary Anne appeared keen to make it clear that she did not want to take any money for herself. By neglecting to mention her pregnancy then, there is a suggestion that although parents performed parental feelings before birth, the child was not considered a separate entity in

[93] *Ibid*, May 2nd 1771.

[94] John Locke, *The Works of John Locke in Four Volumes*, Vol.1 (London: H.Woodfall, 1768), esp. pp. 27-30, 43-45.

its own right until later in the pregnancy, when it was more formed and the mother grew in size, evidencing a developing child. The early stage of this pregnancy, when this letter was written, may have impacted upon how the pregnancy was viewed. Upon receiving no reply to this letter Mary Anne then wrote again and here acknowledged that she now had 'children, both born and unborn' and that she was 'obliged by duty' towards them to ascertain the future support she would receive for them from the Cannings.[95] This was at the end of June, when she was at least three months gone and would have started to show or have clear symptoms of pregnancy, supporting this idea of when a baby was considered a future child.

Mary Anne's lack of acknowledgement in her first letter could have also been due to her expressed belief that she would die in childbirth, and was unsure if the infant would survive for she expressed confidence that 'sometime in October I look for a peacefull Grave'.[96] This belief was confided in a letter dated the 26th May 1771 and addressed to George's friend John Beresford, an Irish politician and barrister. Whilst most mothers did contemplate the possibility of death, Mary Anne was less concerned, indeed she almost welcomed death in her letter. At the same time, she expressed deep concern for the future of her children with a family who had barely acknowledged them during their parent's lifetime.

John Beresford became an important confidant. As George's intimate friend, he knew of the difficult relationship George experienced with his family. In Beresford, Mary Anne had an ally and someone willing to help her achieve her goals. Mary Anne's efforts, then, were to

[95] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/4, Mary Anne to Stratford 'Counsellor' Canning, June 21st 1771.
[96] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/4, Mary Anne to John Beresford, May 25th 1771.

secure a safe future for her living son and try to reconcile the Cannings to raising him in a loving and giving environment, in line with contemporaneous ideas of loving, devoted parenting. Both letters express ideas of love, devotion, care, and a sense of impending death but their styling, contents and emotional expression were influenced by the addressee and the motives of writing to them.

The importance of the addressee in determining emotional expression is also evident in Hitty Canning's first letter to Mary Anne. Written around the time of Mary Anne's expected due date, in October 1771, Hitty's letter used Mary Anne's pregnancy to further her own courtship with Stratford, as discussed in Chapter One. But it also alludes to the importance placed by Stratford on Mary Anne's emotional wellbeing during her pregnancy and beyond. Given that she was close with, Molly Barnard, Stratford's sister, who had died in October 1770, Stratford encouraged Hitty to establish a relationship with his sister-in-law. This was also beneficial for Hitty who was courting Stratford and knew of his good opinion of Mary Anne, within whom she saw an ally in her quest to become his wife as previously mentioned. The use of intimate phrases such as 'Our Friend' in reference to Stratford communicate that a commonality had already been established between them. Hitty was also careful to share that she was 'not a Stranger' to Mary Anne's 'great Merit', implying that it was an attraction to her in a potential friend. The very next part confirms this, when Hitty then desired 'to be ranked among the members of your Friends'.[97]

Hitty ended the obsequious letter with a reference to Mary Anne's lying-in, which began in October 1771, the date of the letter. Hitty's note that 'I hope soon to hear of your Recovery,

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[97] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/4, Hitty to Mary Anne, October 17th 1771.

about which believe me to be very anxious' treats Mary Anne's condition like an illness in a similar way to George Canning with his wife, Joan. It likely shows care and concern for Mary Anne getting through the birthing process unharmed.[98] Here, Hitty's anxiety is used as a polite tool to establish a correspondence with an apparent intimate of her intended, Stratford, and receive a 'distinguishing mark of your Regard' for the sake of her courtship with Stratford, which had hit some stumbling blocks due to Counsellor Canning's disapproval.[99] Anxiety was not just an expression in connection with pregnancy but also an emotional strategy to serve the writer's interests and influence relationships within a familial circle.

Mary Anne's pregnancy lasted until 23rd December 1771, despite her thinking that the baby was to be born in October and 'to the utter astonishment of the accoucher [*sic*] (who had begun to doubt my being pregnant at all) and to everybody about me, the hardfated Orphan was born not only alive but one of the finest Boys that ever existed!'[100] Mary Anne's account is laced with maternal feeling towards her deceased child in her letter-memoir. Her account of surviving a prolonged pregnancy also included a story of a Lady Tavistock who did not survive her similar case because she was left 'nothing to do'. Mary Anne stated that she survived despite being convinced that she would follow her husband to the grave in childbirth as she 'was born to a harder fate'.[101] Her pregnancies, especially her third, were managed through a myriad of anxieties and stresses and, though a more extreme example, reflects how pregnancy was conducted alongside everyday life, with its ups and downs.

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[98] *Ibid*, October 17th 1771.
[99] *Ibid*, October 17th 1771.
[100] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/54, Mary Anne Hunn to George Canning, January 27th 1803, p. 61.
[101] *Ibid*, p. 61.

By examining the context of childbearing, the place of pregnancy within the lives of those in the eighteenth century can be better understood. This chapter has looked at pregnancy as a point of crisis for both men and women and the shaping of both familial and individual roles and identities. In doing so, it highlights how anxiety at times of birthing were not just those associated with the pregnancy itself, such as miscarriage, birth complications and fear of dying in childbirth, although these are evidenced in the Canning letters. These coexist alongside more general anxieties and amplifies them creating new challenges and tensions for both the marital couple and their extended family.

Chapter Three: Motherhood, Anxiety, and Identity

When eighteenth-century parents were fortunate enough to have children, there were expectations that lifelong parental anxieties would take hold. In 1792, conduct book writer, William Braidwood, stressed that parenting was a 'laborious affair' with the 'toil of body, and anxiety of mind it occasions'.[1] He argued that mothers especially should have worried about their children's education, provision, discipline and especially their health. Above all, they should have valued a loving, tender relationship with their children, underpinned by anxiety, care and attention.[2] With such expectations, it is not surprising that one story in the *Lady's Magazine* suggests that anxiety was the punishment of loving, caring parents.[3]

Various forms of didactic literature sought to aid parents, especially mothers, by advising them on 'good' parenting behaviours, while at the same time, promoting that parents should be anxious, with the literature creating new anxieties through inconsistent and sometimes conflicting advice.[4] Examples include advice on breastfeeding, Lockean versus Rousseauian ideas of child-rearing and also advice on topics such as marriage and education for women, all of which featured in societal debates in this period.[5] Letters in particular

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[1] William Braidwood, *Parental Duties Illustrated from the Word of God, and Enforced by a Particular Account of the Salutary Influence Therein Ascribed to the Proper Government of Children* (Edinburgh; J. Robertson, 1792), p. 51.
[2] *Ibid*, p. 51.
[3] R. Soliman, 'Matilda; Or, the Fair Penitent', *The Lady's Magazine*, 12, September 1781, pp. 455-456.
[4] Peter Stearns discusses this in relation to twentieth century literature but this is evident through eighteenth-century literature as well. See Peter N. Stearns, *Anxious Parents: A History of Modern Childrearing in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), p. 1; Vivien Jones, 'The Seductions of Conduct: Pleasure and Conduct Literature' in *Pleasure in the Eighteenth Century*, eds by Roy Porter and Marie Mulvey Roberts (London: Palgrave, 1996), pp. 108-132, p. 110.
[5] Jones, 'The Seductions of Conduct', pp. 124, 127. Locke believed that children were a blank slate, with their natural tendencies to be moulded and shaped by others, notably their parents, while Rousseau believed that children should be left to guide themselves through their natural instincts to gain independence of thought. In short, it was a debate around nature (Rousseau) vs nurture (Locke). See John Locke, *The Works of John Locke in Four Volumes*, Vol.1 (London: H. Woodfall, 1768), pp. 43-46; John Locke, *The Works of John Locke in Four Volumes*, Vol.4 (London: H. Woodfall, 1768), pp. 20-22; Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Émile*, *Translated by Barbara Foxley* (London: Dent, 1974), pp. 11-17.

evidence these kinds of parental anxieties and the Canning letters were no exception. As seen in Chapter Two, parental anxieties began before birth, with concerns rooted in financial, material, and familial contexts. Post-birth, letters between parents and children reveal a lot of emotion work at play, to negotiate these relationships which influence and construct the self, identity, family, and future security. Anxiety forms a central part of these negotiations through correspondence.

Whilst parental anxiety was widely espoused by literature in this period, it is not specific to parents of the long eighteenth century, as works by Peter Stearns, Joanne Bailey, and Clodagh Tait attest.[6] Nevertheless, this does not suggest that parental anxiety was, or is, ahistorical. Just as Bailey notes this for parental characteristics more generally, expectations and cultural contexts changed and influenced anxious expressions and indeed parental anxieties were tied to cultural and societal ideas and beliefs.[7] Importantly, the role of the parent was also connected to notions of the self and other identities and there were tensions and anxieties about managing these different selves in the long eighteenth-century context.

The mother in particular was a celebrated role in eighteenth-century society and prescriptions for the 'ideal' mother both encouraged anxiety to be demonstrated but also caused anxieties in trying to conform to an impossible set of behaviours and values, some of which contradicted each other. Mothering has been examined through many lenses including Kate Retford's study on portraiture, Amanda Vickery's examination of the

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[6] See Stearns, *Anxious Parents*; Joanne Bailey, *Parenting in England, 1760-1830: Emotion, Identity and Generation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 37-39; Clodagh Tait, 'Worry Work: The Supernatural Labours of Living and Dead Mothers in Irish Folklore', *Past and Present*, 246.15 (December 2020), pp. 217-238.
[7] Bailey, *Parenting in England*, p. 2.

experiences of mothering in *The Gentleman's Daughter* and most notably Bailey's seminal study *Parenting in England*, which is the first to seriously consider the emotions of mothering in this period.[8] However, Bailey examines anxiety in broad terms. Whilst she evidences letters that demonstrate anxiety and promotes that it was seen as a 'form of biological programming', this study intends to take her ideas further. By considering how anxiety underpinned several maternal emotions, it shows that mothers did not just use anxious language to 'talk about parenting in the same way that guilt is a way to discuss being a working mother in the twenty-first century'.[9]

Mothers also used anxiety to self-fashion positive identities of their parenting and to reinforce their authority and a child's obedience at a distance. Whilst Hitty used this to prove her maternal skills, Mary Anne used it to defend her parenting. This mirrors Kate Gibson's findings in her study on extra marital relationships. Gibson proves that letters could be utilised to self-fashion extra marital relationships as legitimate, loving and committed, using marital language and behaviours.[10] Thus, this chapter demonstrates how Gibson's observation around the self-fashioning of extra-marital relationships also applies to the defence and presentation of alternative parenting methods.

Whilst this historiography is particularly useful for providing a framework of analysis to examine mothering within domestic spaces, this chapter discusses what it meant to mother

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[8] See Kate Retford, *The Art of Domestic Life: Family Portraiture in Eighteenth-Century England* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006); Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (Yale and London: Yale University Press, 1998); Bailey, *Parenting in England*.
[9] Bailey, *Parenting in England*, p. 37.
[10] See Kate Gibson, '"I Am Not on the Footing of Kept Women": Extra-Marital Love in Eighteenth-Century England', *Cultural and Social History*, 17.3 (2019), pp. 355-373.

whilst not being in the same physical space. Distance added another layer to the anxieties of mothering. The home was the site of domestic and parental care in the eighteenth century.[11] Barclay in particular highlights that 'natural affection' was presented as an 'innate human instinct' but that it was 'practiced as a form of duty displayed in provisioning, education and physical care of the child', all aspects which were difficult or removed in a distant, epistolary relationship.[12] This state of absence and separation were important in terms of the discursive practices of mothers, shaping the language and expressions of parenting at a distance.

In particular, parents used what Henry French and Mark Rothery describe as 'emotional economy', that is the means by which emotional words were used to negotiate power and influence behaviour within relationships.[13] As Linda A. Pollock notes, individuals deployed 'emotional challenges', expecting corresponding emotive reactions.[14] Anxiety was a key emotion, expressing familial love and an important emotion in the giving and receiving of regard. This places anxiety as central to maintaining loving parent-child relationships, for Bailey places love as 'the most profound emotion that was identified with being a parent' in

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[11] For examples, See Karen Harvey, *The Little Republic: Masculinity and Domestic Authority in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), Introduction; Marilyn Francus, *Monstrous Motherhood: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Ideology of Domesticity* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2013), Introduction.

[12] Katie Barclay, 'Natural Affection, Children and Family Inheritance Practices in Children and Youth in Medieval and Early Modern Scotland' in *Children and Youth in Premodern Scotland*, eds by Janay Nugent and Elizabeth Ewan (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2015), pp. 136-154, pp. 136-40. See also Sherrin Marshall, '"Dutiful Love and Natural Affection": Parent-Child Relationships in the Early Modern Netherlands' in *Early Modern Europe: Issues and Interpretations*, eds by James B. Collins and Karen L. Taylor (Hoboken NJ: Wiley, 2008), pp. 138-152.

[13] See Henry French and Mark Rothery, 'Male Anxiety and the Younger Sons of the Landed Gentry, 1700-1900', *The Historical Journal,* 62.3 (2019), pp. 967-996, pp. 967, 980, 995. See also Ruth Barton, '"Dearly Beloved Relations"? A Study of Elite Family Emotions in Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth-Century Northamptonshire', *Family and Community History*, 23.1 (2020), pp. 55-73, p. 56.

[14] Linda A. Pollock, 'Anger and the Negotiation of Relationships in Early Modern England', *Historical Journal*, 47.3 (2004), pp. 567-590, p. 588.

the long eighteenth century.[15] This chapter extends Bailey's work on the 'feeling' parent by looking at some of the emotional strategies utilised by the Canning women in their presentation of their mothering. It argues that their expressions of anxiety were an important strategy for portraying and constructing their maternal identities within letters as well as maintaining and negotiating their intimate relationships with their children at a distance. Thus, it looks at the tangle of anxiety as a felt and performed emotion. This builds on my recent article on female distance education, which examines how Hitty Canning negotiated educating her daughter through letters, to look at the Canning mother/child relationship more broadly and placing anxiety at the centre of my historical enquiry.[16]

When women were absent from their children, how did they use letters to renegotiate their role as mother? To consider this question, after giving an overview of eighteenth-century maternal ideologies, this chapter will focus on the letters of two women from the Canning family, both with different material and financial fortunes. Importantly, it will focus more on how these women portrayed their mothering and crafted their maternal identities through anxiety than the mothering itself. It will first outline the maternal discourses within which these parent-child relationships existed. Secondly, it will consider how Hitty Canning used her letters to discuss and manage anxieties regarding the care, education and discipline of her daughter, Bess. Thirdly, I shall show how Mary Anne self-fashioned her maternal identity through her letters and her decision to take to the stage before finally looking at how over anxiety and paranoia in remote parenting could damage parent-child relations.

[15] Bailey, *Parenting in England*, p. 22.

[16] See Rachel Bynoth, 'A Mother Educating her Daughter Remotely though Familial Correspondence: The Letter as a Form of Female Distance Education in the Eighteenth Century', *History*, 106.373 (December 2021), pp. 727-750.

This will prove how anxiety was not just a parental emotion but one which was also used to negotiate intimate relationships at a distance.

Maternal Discourses

Both women's letters demonstrate that their parenting was influenced by various concurrent maternal ideologies from the mid-eighteenth century, a period which Vickery notes particularly glamorised motherhood.[17] Whilst historians debate the timings of this discourse, all agree that it was commonly espoused by the 1770s and was firmly entrenched by the 1780s, meaning it encompassed both Hitty and Mary Anne's careers as mothers.[18] These ideas emphasised that the good mother was self-sacrificing, affectionate, nurturing and was responsible for the knowledgeable, moral and religious education of her children in their early years.[19] Her business in life was domestic affairs: running the household, tending to her children and being a model to others.

This maternal discourse emerged at a point of several debates and concerns. Chapter One briefly discussed that the move towards the promotion of companionate marriages came from an emphasis on parents to raise the nation. This also came from concerns over population declines in the mid-to-late-eighteenth century.[20] Economists such as Adam Smith argued that a growing population was vital for economic growth, to generate labour and increase trade and spending.[21] Parents and the family were seen as intrinsic to social

[17] Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, Chapter on Fortitude.
[18] For a debate on the timings of this discourse, see Francus, *Monstrous Motherhood*, pp. 1-2.
[19] J.J. Popeil, 'Making Mothers: The Advice Genre and the Domestic Ideal, 1760-1830', *Journal of Family History: Studies in Family, Kinship and Demography*, 29.4 (2004), pp. 339-350, p. 340.
[20] Lisa Forman Cody writes that 'a census bill was easily passed in 1800' introduced due to increased state concerns on population information. See Lisa Forman Cody, *Birthing the Nation: Sex, Science and the Conception of Eighteenth-Century Britons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 271.
[21] Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, Vol. 1 (London: A.Stradel and T.Cadell, 1799), especially pp. 131, 133, 140, 151, 284-285, 371, 380, 388. See also Cody, *Birthing the Nation,* p. 18-21.

stability as they were considered essential to the creation of a strong, patriotic society.[22] Families raised the next generation, and it was the responsibility of the parents to turn them into virtuous, exemplary citizens.[23] Linked to population growth were the growing concerns over women participating in the public sphere and abandoning their roles as mothers and wives as it provoked the question of how this future population would be raised. Prints such as 'Political Affection' referenced the neglection of children and domestic duties, in this case by the Duchess of Devonshire, as she publicly campaigned for Charles James Fox in the infamous Westminster election in 1784.[24] Similarly, divorce cases often focused on issues of maternity and disregard of the consequences of the adulteress's actions on her children.[25]

To combat this, the focus of the role of mother shifted from child birthing to also incorporating the importance of child-rearing, especially the mother caring for her children herself.[26] Maternal discourse lauded motherhood as a full-time occupation, a responsible member of the community raising the next generation.[27] No longer were women expected to simply garner accomplishments to obtain a husband. Now, women were to be educated in domestic life, with their learning rooted in Christian morality, sincerity, and affection. Not

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[22] See Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), especially Chapters 6 and 7; Bailey, *Parenting in England,* pp. 101-102; Ruth Perry, 'Colonizing the Breast: Sexuality and Maternity in Eighteenth-Century England', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 2.2 (October 1991), pp. 204-234, pp. 206-210.
[23] John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (London: A. Millar, H. Woodfall, 1764), p. 262-265
[24] Thomas Rowlandson, *Political Affection*, 22nd April 1784, The British Museum, London, Image Number J,2.128 [Accessed 10/09/20]; Amanda Foreman, 'A Politician's Politician: Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire and the Whig Party' in *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England*, eds by Elaine Chalus and Hannah Barker (London and New York: Longman, 1997), pp. 179-204, pp. 184, 187, 204.
[25] Susan C. Law, *Through the Keyhole: Sex, Scandal and the Secret Life of the Country House* (Stroud: The History Press, 2015), pp. 108-112.
[26] Kate Gibson, 'Mothering Illegitimate Children in Late Eighteenth-Century England', *Past and Present*, 246.15 (2020), pp. 117-144, pp. 3, 123.
[27] Beth Fowkes Tobin, '"The Tender Mother": The Social Construction of Motherhood and the *Lady's Magazine*', *Women's Studies*, 18.2-3 (1990), pp. 205-221, pp. 208-209.

only did this give women a respectable role of power within the domestic sphere, but it also encouraged sensible language and behaviour to become embedded within parent/child relationships as a way of expressing tenderness and affection. By emphasising a woman's role as wife and mother, this 'patriot to the nation' was given an important civic, but domestic role to produce future citizens and focus on family, household, and domestic life.[28] Therefore, the family and parenthood, especially motherhood, were not just social concepts but also economic and political ones.

This domestic ideology was cultivated alongside sensibility, noted in the introduction as a cultural shift which advocated heightened emotional expression directed by reason, control, morality, selflessness, and benevolence and celebrated the 'feeling' parent.[29] These new ideals promoted tenderness rather than authority in discipling children, with Bailey's research highlighting that the 'tender' parent was lauded in not just prescriptive literature, but life writing such as letters, diaries and memoirs from affectionate children.[30] Tenderness was defined by Johnson's dictionary as 'compassionate, anxious for another's good' and 'careful not to hurt', with tenderness central to Johnson's definitions of parental love.[31] Thus, anxious expressions were demonstrations of tender, loving parents and important indicators of parental love.

[28] Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation*, pp. 239-240.
[29] Bailey, *Parenting in England*, pp. 27-28.
[30] *ibid*, pp. 27-28.
[31] Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, Vol. II (London: W. Strahan, J. and F. Rivington; J. Hinton, 1770), p. 32 (love) and pp. 420-1 (tender and tenderness). For a discussion on the tender father see Joanne Bailey, '"A Very Sensible Man": Imagining Fatherhood in England, c.1750-1830', *History*, 95.3 (July 2010), pp. 267-292, pp. 276-279.

The ‘tender’ parent was also represented in novels, periodicals and paintings as well as prescriptive literature, all emphasising the embodiment of parental emotions, seen through loving gazes and affectionate embraces.[32] Figure One depicts the 1780s portrait of Hitty Canning and her daughter Bess and they can be seen in a tight embrace, Bess looking happy and content in her mother’s arms.[33] The image suggests intimacy, echoing Bailey’s observation that ‘in ideologically closing off the family from the wider world, [domestic discourse] elevated the place of the parent-child relationship within the snug family circle’.[34] That Hitty had such a portrait painted shows her awareness of these new ideas regarding mothering and her desire to demonstrate her embodiment of these practices. Like many others, Hitty showed through this painting that being a loving mother was her *raison d’etre*, her central identity.

[32] See Retford, *The Art of Domestic Life*, Introduction; Bailey, *Parenting in England*, p. 27.

[33] George Romney, *Mrs Stratford Canning and Her Daughter*, oil on canvas, c.1780-1786, Fyvie Castle, Scotland. Photograph used as source taken by Rachel Bynoth, 2019.

[34] Bailey, *Parenting in England*, pp. 8-9.

Figure One: George Romney, *Mrs Stratford Canning and her daughter*, oil on canvas, c.1780-1786, Fyvie Castle, National Trust for Scotland. Photo Credit, Rachel Bynoth, 2019

There was significant importance placed on 'feeling' these parental emotions, especially anxiety. As early nineteenth-century writer John James wrote in *The Family Monitor:*

> Parents should be most deeply impressed and affected with a sense of the importance of the station they occupy in the domestic constitution. Their state of mind should be the very opposite of that light and frivolous indifference; that absence of all anxiety, which many of them manifest...it is indeed an awful thing to be a parent, and is enough to awaken the anxious trembling inquiry in every heart.[35]

The quote acknowledges the 'awful' job of being a parent, referring to the huge responsibility placed on parents to raise children, as well as the constant anxieties surrounding this task. James presented the unfeeling, neglectful parent as the antithesis of the loving, anxious one. Indeed, *The Family Instructor* warned that neglectful parents 'may justly be reproached by their children, not with neglect of their duty only, but with their being without natural affection; and consequently can by no means expect suitable returns of affection from their children'.[36] Thus, there was an anxiety to maintain good relationships with children, in order to attain the 'highest place in the[ir] affections'. In turn, this would lead to the child's natural obligation to care for 'the best of parents' in their old age.[37] It is little wonder that this anxiety to be considered 'the best of parents' is expressed strongly throughout the Canning's women's letters as it was central to ideas of future planning and expectations.

The importance placed on physical mothering in the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, by those such as James, make it unsurprising that the Canning letters

[35] John James, *The Family Monitor* (London: Oliver L. Sanbourn, 1832). pp. 92-94.

[36] Daniel Defoe, *The Family Instructor, In Three Parts,* Vol.XVI (Berwick-Upon-Tweed: W.Phorson, 1787), p. 49.

[37] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/5, George Canning to Mary Anne Reddish, October 19th 1782; For examples see obituaries in John Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Nichols, Son and Bentley, 1812), pp. 379, 494.

communicate the tensions and worries about being a good parent.[38] As Lynn Adams observes, 'the ideal of true motherhood demanded that women be constantly there for their children; it implied a commitment to domesticity and was therefore incompatible with the demands of the labour market. The new motherhood was a full-time job'.[39] Thus, the absent or 'spectral' mother raises questions about whether women could attain an ideal in reality as an abundance of letters from mothers and children in the archives speak to common periods of separation.[40] Due to the seeming incompatibility of absence and good mothering, many women revealed a 'narrative of frustration' as they were 'confronted by an ideology in which they were bound to fail'.[41] The next section examines these frustrations but also the functioning of mothering at a distance. For as James himself stated "Lord, who is sufficient for these things?"[42]

The Anxieties of Motherhood - Keeping Up Appearances

Maternal letters depict the entangled feelings and performance of motherhood and central to this was anxiety. Hitty Canning's letters particularly demonstrate how mothers could utilise their correspondences with their children to instruct, care for, and worry about their children as well as maintain that important loving, intimate relationship at a distance. Hitty's correspondence with her daughter, Bess, utilised 'emotional economy'.[43] Whilst French and Rothery have examined this idea through the correspondence of younger gentry sons with their families, this section will focus on the letters between a mother and daughter and

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[38] Periodicals, Letters, Diaries, Memoirs, Novels, Satirical Prints all show these concerns. See also Bailey, *Parenting in England*, pp. 175, 188, 191, 222-241.
[39] Lynn Abrams, *The Making of Modern Woman* (London: Pearson Education, 2002), p. 103.
[40] Francus, *Monstrous Motherhood*, p. 171.
[41] *Ibid*, p. 5.
[42] James, *The Family Monitor*, pp. 92-94.
[43] French and Rothery, 'Male Anxiety Among Younger Sons', pp. 967, 980, 995.

discuss the similar and different anxieties that this relationship reveals. It will consider how Hitty employed anxiety as an emotional tool to maintain an intimate relationship with her daughter and how anxiety was central to the performance of motherhood through letters. It will demonstrate how anxiety permeated the main, stable parental characteristics, which Bailey lists as 'love, provision, discipline, and instruction'.[44] Importantly, it will show how these traits intertwined in different situations.

Hitty married Stratford Canning, George Canning Sr.'s youngest brother in 1773, at which point 'all contact ceased' between Stratford and his tyrannical father, Counsellor Canning. Like his brother, he too had been disinherited. Theirs was a marriage of affection but their blissful life was cut short as, five children and fourteen years later, Stratford was dead. In Chapter Two, I noted that there were few surviving letters in the archive from Hitty during the years when Stratford was alive, meaning that their children's early years were undocumented. This changed once Hitty's husband died. Hitty's letters reveal a widowed mother's conflicting duties as both mother and provider. Despite being a widow with five young children, she had all the benefits of material and financial wealth left by her industrious husband, as well as familial assistance from her mother and siblings. This enabled Hitty to visit London in 1789, to settle her husband's business affairs and search for a new, permanent home for her family.

There are sixty-nine surviving letters between Hitty and Bess which cover the period from Hitty's trip to London in 1789 to 1793, when Bess reached the age of sixteen and came out

[44] Bailey, *Parenting in England*, p. 2.

into Bath society.[45] Their correspondence reveals how Hitty utilised emotions and emotional language to negotiate, influence and gain authority. At first glance, her letters to her daughter, Elizabeth 'Bess' Canning, simply contain various updates on activities in London, gossip on the Ton, and concerns over the health and education of her children. Whilst these topics may seem mundane, further consideration reveal Hitty's clever use of anxious language to maintain an emotional bond with her daughter and present her mothering as kind and tender in letters, many of which were viewed and read out to other family members and friends.

Love was shown through maternal care. Engagement with care practices in letters was particularly important for those mothering at a distance, for as already noted Gibson has argued that mothering was believed to 'require maternal presence' as it moved from childbearing to child-rearing. Consequently, mothering required the physical care of offspring. Yet distance was an everyday part of mother/child relationships during the eighteenth century and Hitty's letters demonstrate how this maternal care was administered at a distance, through the topic of health.[46] Bess was a particularly sickly child, according to the letters, with a weak constitution, and provided ample opportunities for Hitty to stress her care for her daughter through her anxiety. During her stay in London in 1789, Hitty did not just ask after Bess's health but suggested practical steps to remedy any issues. A typical exchange between the pair: Bess wrote of 'stitches in my stomach' and that it was 'rubbed' and she took some 'Camphor'.[47] As a mother's primary duty was to take care of her children, Hitty's response was shaped by both distance and absence:

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[45] These letters can be found in Bath Record Office and Leeds. See BRO, fl2111-2308; WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169] letter collections.
[46] Gibson, 'Mothering Illegitimate Children in Late Eighteenth-Century England', p. 3.
[47] BRO, fl2111-2308, Elizabeth Canning to Mehitabel Canning, February 15th 1789.

> what can be the meaning of those stitches you complain of? I desire you will mention it to Mr Pankhurst, and take whatever he recommends. I have seen Norris for a few minutes, he asked most kindly for you, and is very anxious that you should take the Bark, provided no Cough or tightness on your chest remains – So I would have you speak to Mr. P- about it and let me know what he says - - when I see Norris again, I will get directions about preparing the Bark.[48]

This extract highlights some of the difficulties in caring for an ill child at a distance. As mothers were reliant on children's descriptions of their ailments, details to make a diagnosis could be difficult to ascertain as time lags between sending letters and receiving letters were at least a day apart. As Bess was recovering from a cold, according to a letter sent a few days earlier, Hitty's opening line could be a request for further information on Bess's illness but its rhetorical nature lends itself more to a statement of exasperation regarding her lack of control she was able to exert over the situation, due to the distance between them as well as concern over Bess's continued ill health and new symptoms.

Hitty's reaction also depicts an awareness of her expected role as carer to her daughter. This letter was dated the day after Bess's, a break from their usual pattern as Hitty's letters were usually dated two days later. This suggests the urgency with which Hitty expected these instructions to be fulfilled and a need for a quick resolution to alleviate her questions and anxieties surrounding Bess's condition. The depth of her care and attention is communicated through Hitty's decision to consult a doctor in London, and then asking Bess to consult the doctor in Brighton as well as providing instructions to communicate the doctor's opinion. Her letter became a mediation of the physical care that she was unable to provide, evidencing the steps she takes to mitigate the distance as much as she can.

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[48] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], Mehitabel Canning to Elizabeth Canning, February 16th 1789.

At the same time as expressing care, anxious language was often employed to give instructional advice. Through their letter writing, mothers exercised some agency for they could use letters to give advice and direction.[49] In this passage, the terms 'anxious' and 'desire' are strong suggestions that Bess should comply with Norris's suggestion, showing how this terminology did not always indicate an emotion but an instruction. That the doctor was 'anxious' suggests that he would remain so until Bess followed his advice. In the same way that Maria Cannon wrote that the seventeenth-century Lady Katherine Paston was concerned she could not influence her son's diet or health away from home, so too Hitty employed anxious language to alleviate her concerns and reassert her maternal authority.[50] Anxiety here is both a motivator for the speed of actions but also employed linguistically to show care and attention towards Bess and maintain a power balance of instruction and compliance.

Hitty also used this emotional rhetoric to discipline Bess. As discussed further in Chapter Four, as an adolescent, Bess was beginning to affirm her independence and craft her own power within the family unit. In one such case, from the 12th March 1789, Bess appeared upset:

> So you left me without a letter, very well madam how should you like to be served so? Do I ever miss writings I have a great mind not to send this and see what you will say only I do not like to bear malice against my best friend. But if you do it again, I shall certainly leave off writing and let you see who writes the longest letters and oftenest, my Aunt and GM or me. Now I have told you my mind here is a kiss and we will be friends.[51]

[49] Clare Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 60.
[50] Maria Cannon, 'Families in Crisis: Parenting and the lifecycle in English Society, c.1450-1620', PhD Thesis, Northumbria University, 2015, p. 53.
[51] BRO, fl2111-2308, Elizabeth Canning to Mehitabel Canning, March 12th 1789.

This passage shows how epistolary relationships relied heavily on the fulfilment of expectations and the economy of 'regard'.[52] As Pamela Clemit argues, the economy of regard was a two-way process, giving approbation and affection in order to receive it.[53] Here, in a similar sense to the love letters in Chapter One, these familial letters signalled love and affection. At face value, Bess's emotional language suggests anger, mockery, and frustration. However, Bess used anxiety here as a playful tool, to banter with her mother over the lack of letter. Bess's teasing hierarchical address of 'madam' suggests that the absence of a letter from her mother disrupted the chain of regard, leaving a sense of uncertainty and making her displeased. Hierarchical language such as this can indicate real displeasure or annoyance in these kinds of familial relationships rather than indicate hierarchy and power relations but Bess used it more to playfully assert her position.[54] Concurrently, Bess also used the familiar term 'my best friend' to evoke guilt in her mother for forgoing her responsibility based on this relationship based not on duty but mutual fondness and commitment. In Bess's child-like way, this letter exemplifies how children could temporarily gain emotional power through manipulation of their mother's dependence on them for their identity and social positions and achieve this through copying and developing the emotional strategies from their parents' letters.

Hitty's response illustrates how tender mothering was administered through using letters as educational and disciplinary tools. As I have argued elsewhere, distance created the chance for mothers to instruct children on distance epistolary rhetoric, including setting

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[52] Pamela Clemit, 'The Signal of Regard: William Godwin's Correspondence Networks', *European Romantic Review*, 30.4 (2019), pp. 353-366, pp. 353-355.
[53] *Ibid*, p. 355.
[54] *Ibid*, p. 353-355.

expectations, managing emotions, and understanding writing conventions.[55] Softened with her tender endearment of 'dear little heart', Hitty utilised this occasion to calm Bess's anxieties whilst also administering discipline and instruction. For:

> Il ne faut pas grander, le cher petit Coeur. Car favois tant de lettres à ècrire il y a trois ou auatre jours, qu'absolutement. Je n'avois pas le turns de vous faire mes Compliments jusqu'à present. Je vous prie done de me pardonner pour cette fois - & Je me comporterai mieux pour l'avenir. I wish my dear Bess you would send me a French exercise in every letter as Darian comes here three times a week, I could get him to correct them for you – in that case, I would excuse your translating so much for Phillip…[56]

Hitty used her letters to teach Bess about how to negotiate distant relationships and control the anxieties which distance brought of uncertainty of delivery, affection and the misunderstandings this could bring. Her calm, firm, but loving, reply displays little anxiety and focuses on reassurance and authority. Hitty's tone is one of instruction, telling Bess to control her emotions and 'not scold' for a delay of a few days, explaining that as she had 'so many letters to write' it 'takes three or four days' to reply to her. Her rational explanation sets more realistic expectations within their epistolary relationship but also underscores the importance of patience and sympathy within correspondences. This reflects Bailey's observation that 'parents were to restrain their offspring's emotions without destroying them', with Hitty's letter exemplifying how this practice was embedded within a mother and daughter relationship.[57] Yet, Hitty goes further, displaying an awareness and acceptance of Bess's feelings, and that it was Bess's communication of her feelings which needed practice and self-discipline. *Moral Essays* stressed that parents should 'be all that is decent, wise, and

[55] Bynoth, 'A Mother Educating her Daughter Remotely'.
[56] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], Mehitabel Canning to Elizabeth Canning, March 12th 1789. This passage is translated as 'One must not scold, dear little heart. Because I have so many letters to write, it will take three or four days. I have not had the chance to give my compliment to you until now. I beg your pardon this time. I will behave better in the future. [Translated by Rachel Bynoth (then Smith 20/02/17]
[57] Bailey, *Parenting in England*, p .83.

good, in their presence' for they will 'see all this in your actions'.[58] Hitty therefore displays an awareness that Bess will learn, not just from what she said, but how she communicated it. This passage typifies not only how Hitty presented herself as a good, loving mother, through everyday interactions at a distance, but how a lack of anxiety from parents could also be important for good parenting.

Whilst Hitty's language invoked a lack of anxiety in the passage above, in other instances it was central to her disciplinary strategies, especially to achieve compliance from Bess. In 1789, Hitty was 'a little angry with [Bess] for not answering Betty Tickell's Letter'. Rebuking her for the omission she counselled: 'if you indulge that foolish mauvaise hônte, you will never make a figure in the World, and every little Miss Will take advantage of it, and fancy herself your superior'.[59] This passage shows the difficulties in maintaining obedience at a distance. Whilst Hitty did have control over her children, this power waned through epistolary exchange as parents were not physically present to supervise their children constantly. It shows that maintaining good emotional relationships did not always gain obedience from the child to their parent and that distance required further negotiations. To combat this, Hitty evoked anxious and guilty feelings in Bess. As French and Rothery demonstrate, fostering anxiety was welcomed as a tool to shape and mould children's behaviour.[60] Bess's lack of fortune meant that it was her accomplishments, manners and conduct that would secure her a husband, thus Hitty stressed the importance of Bess's dedication to her education to achieve this end goal. This is particularly clear in Hitty's

[58] A.M, ed., *Moral Essays, chiefly collected from Different Authors*, Vol 2. (Liverpool: J. M'Creery, 1796), p. 78.
[59] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], Mehitabel Canning to Elizabeth Canning, April 2nd, 1789.
[60] They demonstrate this in relation to sending children to Public School which was to 'toughen' them up. See French and Rothery, 'Male Anxiety in Younger Sons', p. 978.

comments on Bess's potential future social status. Furthermore, this strategy instilled family values, behaviours, and expectations, attaching achievement and discipline to future happiness for the family as well as for Bess herself.

That Hitty was both aware of how she disciplined her daughter and the more public nature of their correspondence is evident in her decision to use French. This showed off some of Bess's accomplishments and learning, and meant that Hitty's speech reinforced the benefits of self-discipline and commitment to improvement, both central concepts of virtue in the eighteenth century.[61] While Brant is correct that mothers did carry some agency through letter writing, as Hitty demonstrated, it was not always easy to illicit obedience and letters reveal the epistolary practices parents utilised to maintain a loving authority over their children. The 1789 letters in particular depict that there was an important balance between emotional connection and using emotions to instruct and discipline children at a distance.

When Hitty left home once more in 1792, she struggled to balance her own anxieties about her performance as a mother to her children. Whilst in 1789, she left sort out familial affairs, in 1792 she left her children by choice to care for her dying friend, Eliza Sheridan, Hitty's intimate friend of many years. The tensions between her roles of mother and friend are evident in a passage from May 1792, when she had been away for a few weeks:

> The thoughts of being so long absent from you all, is very distressing to me, and yet I know not how to propose quitting this dear Woman, whose Life is hanging by a thread – yet she may I think last, many Months – and under that idea, I would not hesitate to leave her, under the promise of returning…but whenever I talk in this manner to Doctor Bain, he says I ought not to go for he by no means is of opinion that she can hold out many Weeks – What do you all think of this matter, pray let me know.[62]

[61] Soile Ylivuori, *Women and Politeness in Eighteenth-Century England: Bodies, Identities, and* Power (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), pp. 94, 118, 208, 237.

[62] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], Mehitabel Canning to Elizabeth Canning, May 1792.

Hitty's anxious language implies that she felt guilt in leaving her family to tend to Eliza. Whether or not she felt guilty, the performance of guilt presented her as an anxious mother, torn between her duties as parent and friend. This is heightened by the uncertainty of how long Eliza's illness would last, making a decision difficult. Accordingly, her letter, from which this extract is taken, has an anxious tone which signalled a need for reassurance from all her family, not just Bess, that she was right to stay with Eliza. By consulting her family, Hitty emphasised her maternal care and devotion and her concern, showing that their needs came first. Bess's younger brothers were at an age where physical parental love created and strengthened bonds of trust, love and care.[63] This is evidenced by Bess's letter to Hitty which reported: 'the boys came home to breakfast yesterday quite well, they seemed to miss you very much, Stratty said to me after keeping silence some time, I wish poor mother was here, and his eyes filled, to comfort himself he began kissing me'.[64] Hitty's youngest child Stratty, who was only eight years old, used Bess as a substitute for his mother given that he was unable to engage with epistolary language of embodied affection at this age. By being away from home, Hitty was depriving her children of this chance to create those tender bonds and this is portrayed as central to her dilemma. To try and alleviate this, Hitty sent 'a thousand kisses' in her letters, including this one, to her young sons, William, Charles, and Stratford.[65] Whilst it is very likely that this emotional language had its basis in 'felt' emotions, it also shows Hitty to be a mother whose thoughts are centred around her children.

[63] Bailey, *Parenting in England*, pp. 21, 31, 47, 51.
[64] BRO, fl2111-2308, Elizabeth Canning to Mehitabel Canning, May 9th 1792.
[65] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], Mehitabel Canning to Elizabeth Canning, May 1792.

While showing parental anxiety was expected, it was also to be controlled, 'tempered with the antidotes of fortitude and resignation to prevent parental over-anxiety'.[66] Hitty's letters from 1792 demonstrate her over-anxious desire to know everything that was going on at home. Whilst this indicates her devotedness in her duties as a mother to care for her children, Bess's letters make it clear that she considered her mother's anxiety as fanatical. Her letters as a sixteen-year-old show how Hitty had successfully embedded the emotional practices she taught Bess in the 1789 letters, and now Bess was able to engage with these to temper her mother's concerns. She stated Hitty's over-anxiety by writing one week after Hitty had left:

> Now, my dearest mother, I am going to tell you every thing we have done since last Friday, do not stop me to ask questions for I will tell you all in good time. So sit still and hold your tongue, nothing out of the common way happened till Saturday.[67]

Bess's firm reply reveals her understanding of Hitty's need to know how her family was doing in her absence. Unlike Hitty's emotional responses, Bess used a curt, straightforward almost disciplinary, tone. This tone is similar to that which Hitty used when Bess was learning to control her emotions and writing overanxious letters frequently to her mother in 1789. Now the roles have been reversed. Bess used her learnt emotional practices from her childhood to gain authority over her over-anxious mother. Anxious language was not just a parental tool to instruct and discipline children but also to teach them to utilise it for themselves within their own letters, a skill which Bess successfully demonstrates here.

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[66] Bailey, *Parenting in England,* p. 39.
[67] BRO, fl2111-2308, Elizabeth Canning to Mehitabel Canning, May 9th 1792.

Although Hitty had the material comforts of money, a stable home environment and her mother and sister to care for her children in her absence, her letters reveal how anxiety was an important tool for remote parenting, both for maintaining emotional relationships and continuing maternal duties through correspondence. Hitty's parenting shows her awareness of the judgement of others and that the success of her parenting would be evaluated through her children's achievements, manners, and behaviour. When she or they were away from home, she made sure to continue to parent through letters, providing that anxious love of affection, and attention that was expected of mothers in the late eighteenth century. Despite her absence, she was very much still present as a mother.

The Defence of a Mother

Hitty's maternal identity was crafted through her letters employing the performance of mothering. Other letters, such as those by Austen's friend Anne Lefroy, suggest that this maternal self-fashioning was often performed through correspondence. However, not all were granted the material and financial means to parent their children in the same way as those with some sort of economic security, particularly Mary Anne Canning. As Vickery notes, 'shelter is an animal need. Homes promised security, retreat, rest, warmth, food, and the basis for both a family life and full participation in social life'.[68] As seen in Chapter Two, when George Canning Sr. died on 11th April 1771, Mary Anne was left with two young children, destitute. In this way, George's death is highly significant as Tanya Evans observes that 'Women rarely chose to separate themselves from men because so few, rich or poor,

[68] Amanda Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 2.

could survive without the financial support of their fathers or husbands'.[69] Her life from this point is recounted in her own words, in her letter-memoir from 1803. Whilst it may seem chronologically illogical to begin this section with Mary Anne's letter-memoir, this document details the early events in Mary Anne's life and are crucial in understanding the context of the 1770s events. It also evidences the centrality of motherhood to Mary Anne's sense of identity and her future prospects, and how she used anxiety as a rhetoric to craft her maternal self, both at the time of these events and in her later reflections in 1803.

This letter-memoir was, in essence, a defence of her parenting of her son, George Canning, to argue for her 'natural' right to be part of his family. It stemmed not just from her anxieties over her identity as a mother but also her success as one too, especially in George's eyes. As William Cobbett attested in *Advice to Young Men*, 'you must act your part well; for they may, by your neglect, your ill-treatment, your evil example, be made to be the contrary of blessings; instead of pleasure, they may bring you pain; instead of making your heart glad, the sight of them may make it sorrowful; instead of being the staff of your old age, they may bring your grey hairs in grief to the grave'.[70] Mothers, to some extent, worked within some sense of self interest, as producing a 'bad' child would bring misfortune, both to the parent's future in old age and to their reputation as a parent. Therefore, emotional maternal feeling and practical material interest are interlinked. Whilst Cobbett wrote this specifically arguing for mothers to not rely on servants to raise their children, it resonates more widely with mothers parenting at a distance.

[69] Tanya Evans, 'Women, Marriage and the Family' in *Women's History, Britain 1700-1850: An Introduction*, eds by Elaine Chalus and Hannah Barker (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), pp. 57-77, p. 66.
[70] William Cobbett, *Advice to Young Men and (incidentally) to Young Women* (London: The Author, 1829), pp. 249-250.

Many studies of motherhood in the eighteenth century tend to focus on those with financial means or poor working-class mothers unable to look after their children.[71] There has also been a lot of work examining illegitimate children, by scholars such as Barclay and Gibson.[72] However, little attention has been paid to those distressed widows who found themselves destitute upon the death of their spouse. Raised in the middle and upper classes, these women, such as Mary Anne, used anxiety and maternal values to shape a positive, conforming maternal identity in the face of idiosyncratic circumstances. In this sense Mary Anne's letters evidence how maternal and financial provision shaped mothering practices for distressed gentlewomen.

Mary Anne employed her letters as tools to self-fashion her maternal identity. This was in defence of her feelings as a maternal mother, one who parented differently to the societal expectations outlined at the beginning of this chapter, especially in terms of physical parental attention and care. This use of letters to validate alternative relationships reflects Gibson's aforementioned work on extra-marital affairs, where these women used marital language to present their extra-marital relationships as marital ones.[73] This section extends Gibson's observations around the crafting of extra-marital relationships to demonstrate how Mary Anne also used letters to justify and defend her parenting practices, providing an

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[71] Examples include Bailey, *Parenting in England*; Joanne Bailey, 'Think Wot a Mother Must Feel: Parenting in English Pauper Letters c.1760-1834', *Family and Community History*, 12.1 (2010), pp. 5-19; Francus, *Monstrous Motherhood*; Tanya Evans, *Unfortunate Objects': Lone Mothers in Eighteenth-Century London* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).
[72] See Katie Barclay, 'Love, Care and the Illegitimate Child in Eighteenth-Century Scotland', *Transactions of the RHS*, 29 (2019), pp. 105-125; Kate Gibson, *Illegitimacy: Family and Stigma in England, 1660-1834* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).
[73] See Gibson, '"I Am Not on the Footing of Kept Women"'.

example of how women of no material or financial means could still present themselves as 'good' mothers, in line with maternal values and behaviours.

This was achieved using anxiety as an emotional practice, linking it to sympathy, tenderness, and sacrifice. Chapter Two discussed how Mary Anne utilised her letters to ask for provision for her growing family, a request which was barely answered. Mary Anne's miseries and the distress and 'pain' that she expressed in regard to George's shame towards her is affected by her life's story and the experiences of her life. It is an excellent example of Boddice's observation that a person's past affects how they feel in the present moment.[74] Thus, Mary Anne's past was central to her expression and construction of her maternal identity at different points in her life. This section will establish how Mary Anne used emotional and maternal language to craft a positive motherly identity, whilst using her letters as a vehicle to communicate her pain and suffering. It will first consider her defence of her decision to go onto the stage before examining her communication of the decision to give George up to his aunt and uncle's care when he was six years old.

It was January 27th 1803. Mary Anne Hunn sat down to write the first section of what would become a 188-page letter to her son, George Canning. Her six-month endeavour attempted to tell him her entire life story, from her Grandfather's birth at the turn of the eighteenth century to the present year of 1803. It emphasises that the turning point was the death of her husband, George Canning Sr. Her 'packet' begins to hint at the frustrations of being an eighteenth-century mother, without a stable, financial situation, home, and an increasingly

[74] Rob Boddice, *Pain and Emotion in Modern History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 2.

questionable reputation. It speaks of her ostracisation from her family, her former husband's family particularly and the misery that her life has been:

> My beloved George
>
> At last I have acquired courage to sit down to the task which I have so long meditated…I have no notes to refer to, no documents but those which are engraven on my Heart – but as Truth will be my CornerStone – I trust the fabric cannot be very defective – I will consult only my memory and my unshaken love of Probity [morality] - I will assert no falsehood – conceal no necessary Truth – I have nothing to <u>hope</u> – <u>that</u> is for ever past! – nothing to fear – I <u>have</u> suffer'd the worst that could befall me – I have lived – bitter fate! to know that my George – my boasted Son – He whose affection soften'd the most poignant of my sorrows – whose virtues and abilities gratified my pride, whilst his tenderness and duty filled my fond heart with rapture
>
> [Page 2]
>
> – He is ashamed of his mother! – thinks it contamination to suffer his wife to visit her, and has made her a Grandmother without a Grandmother's delight, withholds his Children from the Embrace of nature, and visits her himself – as Benevolent men give alms to worthless Mendicants [Beggars] – not for their sake but Heavens – not as well bestowed- but well done. All this I have endured and yet I live – live and inspire envy in those who see not my Heart, nor feel the gushing Torrents which from vein to vein when I reflect upon the vicissitudes of a life thro which misfortune has [inserted been] furnish'd like guilt – yet in which no vicious Action has been mediated or undertaken for any own gratification or to the injury of a fellow creature – thro which I have been the victim of other people's vices- Of unfeeling and inhuman neglect, or of selfish and narrowminded probity - - to illustrate these assertions, it will be necessary to go so far back that I scarcely know where to begin – I <u>must</u> retrace Five & Thirty years to take in my entrance into your Father's family – from which I did not, as you have been taught, <u>separate</u> myself, - but from which I was driven with a barbarity which is scarcely paralleled – [75]

This opening to Mary Anne's letter-memoir reveals that her relationship with her now thirty-three-year-old son, George, was difficult and complex. After he was adopted by his aunt and uncle in 1776, George did not see his mother in person until he was sixteen years old, conducting a frequent epistolary correspondence with Mary Anne for the rest of his

[75] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/54, Mary Anne Hunn to George Canning, January 27th 1803, pp. 1-2.

childhood. George married in 1799 and had two children by 1803, but Mary Anne was kept away from them. It was this that prompted this letter-memoir, and her desire to recount her life story to her son, to defend her actions and try and repair their relationship.

In this opening passage, Mary Anne communicates both physical and emotional pain at both her son's behaviour towards her and events throughout her life. Johnson's dictionary connects pain to several states such as punishment, toil and even childbirth. Importantly, he connects it with 'uneasiness of mind; anxiety' and that 'to pain' someone was to 'afflict; to torment; to make uneasy'.[76] Painful is also connected to being 'miserable' and Johnson's entry for 'to suffer' specifically mentions 'to feel with sense of pain'.[77] In this sense, Mary Anne's letter is one which expresses a lot of pain. Mary Anne's passage uses terms such as 'suffering', 'victim' 'neglect' and the term 'endured', all words connected to aspects of these eighteenth-century definitions of pain. It also connects directly to anxiety in terms of an underlying sense of uneasiness that she is not certain what her son thinks about her and how he feels about her.

She also presented her pain as inherently maternal. Bailey notes that it was 'inadequate parents' that were 'strangers to the pleasing sensations, the delicate emotions, that filled a parent's breast'.[78] Bailey's study demonstrates that parents expressed heightened emotions and suggested that these feelings were inherently parental, and this is what Mary Anne echoed here. Her sensibilities and sense of feeling are communicated through her reference to the 'gushing Torrents which from vein to vein' flow, implying the embodiment of her pain

[76] Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, Vol. II, p. 131.
[77] *Ibid*, p. 394.
[78] Bailey, *Parenting in* England, p. 33.

and suffering. However, it was her suggestion that she had 'suffered the worst that can befall me' through her son's shame and his inability to continue to soften her sorrows which connects her pain to her maternal identity. Here, she argued that she could only feel these feelings towards George because she was his mother.

Mary Anne's letter-memoir then turned to her decision to become an actress. Actresses in the eighteenth century were public figures and as such their personal lives were intertwined with the characters that they played on-stage. As Elaine M. McGirr and Laura Engel explain, it was the age that invented celebrity…and the age that witnessed an explosion of performance opportunities, both private and professional, for all women'.[79] And by the mid-eighteenth century, women could make careers from acting.[80] It offered Mary Anne a chance for economic agency and to continue parenting her children.

A letter written to one of Mary Anne's aristocratic friends, the Viscountess of Nuneham, in 1774, exemplifies her use of maternal language to generate sympathy but also shows her strengthening resolve over her decision:

> Circumstances as I then was the faculties of mind and body almost absorbed in a lethargy of sorrow, it is not surprising that I did not consider the subject very accurately. I wrote to him thanked him, & said little more. This however, was so far of service that it rous'd my mind, and restored in some measure the power of thinking. My dear boy, just beginning to talk of that father he had for ever lost, & another infant expecting to be born, called upon me to plead their cause: I did so, but without success, I remonstrated, sollicited, tried every effort to touch his heart, or to alarm his pride, yet so as to lay no claim in my own right, but theirs: nay either for them, rather to be than demand. He replied but it was to tell me that I had

[79] Laura Engel and Elaine M. McGirr, eds, *Stage Mothers: Women, Work, and the Theater, 1600-1830* (Lanham: Bucknell University Press, 2014), p. 7.
[80] Felicity Nussbaum, *Rival Queens: Actresses, Performance, and the Eighteenth-Century British Theater* (Philadelphia and Oxford: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), p. 7.

> nothing to expect from him. Again I tried, and still I tried in vain. He reasoned upon the justice of refusing me support because I had not brought his son a portion.[81]

Mary Anne's tone is performative and very obsequious, using a 'feeling rhetoric' to try and evoke sympathy for her situation.[82] She used maternal language to appeal to the Viscountess, suggesting that she would understand her feelings as motherly. Having outlined before this passage that her husband had left her in poverty, she indicated that she was a victim of her father-in-law's lack of compassion. Whilst Mary Anne acknowledged that her 'faculties' had been clouded by 'lethargy of sorrow', she attested that it was naturally the cause of grief for her husband that she saw only the good in Counsellor Canning's offer. Through this, Mary Anne self-fashioned herself as a woman of good heart and gratefulness. In contrast, she firmly placed the blame on Counsellor Canning, using sensible, heightened language to frame him as the cause of her misfortune. This 'distress' rhetoric is also adopted by the labouring classes, as Bailey notes in her study, in their appeals for charity.[83] Similarly, Evans shows how poor, lone mothers in eighteenth-century London used this discourse to argue for their children to be accepted into the Foundling Hospital.[84] Mary Anne's letters evidence that this was a known linguistic strategy not just for the labouring poor but the distressed gentlewoman, to evoke sympathy and aid for the plight of her and her children.[85]

This letter shows how Mary Anne tailored her anxieties in her letters to her audience. Whilst she emphasised her role as George Canning Sr.'s wife and mother to his children to her

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[81] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/4, Mary Anne Canning to the Duchess of Nuneham, January 4th 1774.
[82] Bailey used the term 'feeling rhetoric' to describe emotional language manipulation in this way. See Bailey, 'Think Wot a Mother Must Feel', p. 11.
[83] *Ibid*, p. 11.
[84] Evans, *'Unfortunate Objects*', especially Chapter 5: '"Unfortunate Objects": Petitioners to the Foundling Hospital', pp. 98-126.
[85] See Bailey, *Parenting in England*.

father-in-law to try and stir his feelings, her letter to the Viscountess stressed her desire to continue in the role of mother, her primary social and familial duty. Thus, Mary Anne framed her decision to take to the stage as one undertaken for her children. For:

> If my sons have rights, justice will make good their claims; if they have not, they will at least have the knowledge of their situation ascertain'd; and I, in bringing it to a trial, will have the satisfaction of knowing that I have done a widow'd mother's duty. With this view I have made the great sacrifice of a private to a public life, that I might keep my children in the face of the world in opposition to every effort that has been made to plunge them in an obscurity where friendship herself might forfit & leave them.[86]

This was a letter based on an introduction and a desire to thank the Viscountess. Upon George Canning Sr.'s death, his acquaintance George Macaulay got his wife to secure £50 from Queen Charlotte, to aid Mary Anne in her plight. The Duchess of Ancaster delivered it and became instrumental in discussions on what Mary Anne could do for a career to provide for her family. The Viscountess was a friend of the Duchess of Ancaster and subsequently supported Mary Anne's venture onto the stage. With a mixture of motivations and reasons for this letter's existence, the clearest thread is Mary Anne's maternal rhetoric, likely designed to evoke sympathy to her plight. Here, her defence is laced with anxiety about her position and her identity as a 'widow'd mother'. By framing her decision to take to the stage as a 'great sacrifice', Mary Anne displays her good motherly qualities as she referred to the maternal discourse of sacrifice, devotion, and care to her children, at the cost of her own feelings and desires. Mary Anne could craft the same story to appeal to different audiences, using the distress rhetoric to emphasise her maternal instincts and behaviours, depending on the type of support and sympathy required. However, she consistently communicates

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[86] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/4, Mary Anne Canning to the Duchess of Nuneham, January 4th 1774.

her steadfastness in her position and her maternal feelings, suggesting that writing about her feelings were bringing them to the surface and strengthening her resolve.

Through these correspondence opportunities, mothers such as Mary Anne could manipulate the concept of maternal love to reinforce a positive self-identity, both for themselves and others, and defend their choices as in the best interests of their children, even if these choices could appear selfish. Mary Anne lived within a patriarchal society where there were limited ways for a woman to earn a respectable living. This sentiment was echoed in the letter-memoir in which she defended that she could not be a governess, as her sibling in-laws Stratford and Hitty Canning suggested, as it was beneath her social position, and would take her away from her children. Indeed, with most of the occupations suggested to her, Mary Anne would have been unable to look after her children and so she made a choice to make 'the great sacrifice of a private to a public life' in order to continue her primary duty as mother to her children, George and Thomas Canning.[87] That Mary Anne makes such a point of her 'sacrifice' communicates her lack of desire of the fame which actresses could obtain by the 1770s and her concerns about how her personal life would now be open for public comments. For as Laura Rosenthal notes, actresses were commented upon, discussed and painted, with their lives open to the public for comment and scrutiny.[88] Thus, Mary Anne's letter to the Viscountess reflected the image that she was trying to self-fashion: the mother determined to do 'a widow'd mother's duty' by whatever means available to her and turned

[87]*Ibid*, January 4th 1774.

[88] Jessica Munns, 'Celebrity Status: The Eighteenth-Century Actress as Fashion Icon', in *Women, Popular Culture, and the Eighteenth Century*, ed. by Tiffany Porter (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2012), pp. 70-91, pp. 75-77.

her decision to take to the stage into one laced with self-sacrifice, devotion, necessity and love for her children, the very characteristics of the ideal mother.

Years later, in the letter-memoir, Mary Anne continued to emphasise both her ignorance of the stage and her concerns over having her private life scrutinised in public. She recounted to her son, George, that she was 'totally unacquainted with….the stage except the general & indiscriminate censure which it had been usual to bestow upon the professors'.[89] Whether she was truly this ignorant of the profession is debatable, as this was written thirty years after she took to the stage so the passage of time and the changing nature of the stage may have influenced her viewpoint, but it demonstrates her desire for her son to understand that she too held concerns over her reputation. Indeed, she emphasised that her decision was based on her belief in the protection from the Duchess of Ancaster and David Garrick.[90] A letter from Hitty to Mary Anne in 1774 supports this as Hitty queried whether the Duchess and Garrick could truly protect Mary Anne from the dangers of the stage.[91] Though there are debates on how widespread this attitude was, the association of loose morals and prostitution 'stuck' to the job of actress until the twentieth century.[92] Whether Mary Anne truly took to the stage believing that her sponsors would protect her is debatable but her letter-memoir does show that Mary Anne was aware of societal beliefs associated with actresses and was keen to emphasise to her son that she took precautions to protect her reputation.

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[89] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/54, Mary Anne Hunn to George Canning, January 27th 1803, p. 73.
[90] *Ibid*, pp. 74-76.
[91] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/4, Mehitabel Canning to Mary Anne Canning, January 16th 1773.
[92] McGirr and Engel, *Stage Mothers*, p. 1; Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), p. 4.

Indeed, Mary Anne's reputation was central to Stratford and Hitty's concerns regarding Mary Anne entering the acting profession, as her reputation could affect their own. They reacted 'with great dislike', in Mary Anne's words, to the plan, despite its support by the Duchess.[93] That Stratford was willing to lay down £700 in 1772, which he could ill afford, according to Hitty, to help Mary Anne become a partner in a business with the 'Miss Gowers', shows the extent to which he wanted her to avoid the stage.[94] In 1773, when the discussion over Mary Anne's future was further advanced, neither Stratford nor Hitty supported Mary Anne with her decision to take to the stage, deeming it unrespectable, shameful and risky for neither 'the Duchess's recommendations or Mr G-'s Favor + Protection can wholly exempt you, I really shudder at the Thought of you putting this Scheme in Execution'.[95] Though they did not break with Mary Anne after she took to the stage, their relationship became strained. It finally broke once she began a sexual relationship outside of marriage with actor and Bristol theatre owner, Samuel Reddish. From 1775 onwards, Stratford and Hitty insinuated that Mary Anne went onto the stage for selfish reasons, to indulge her own pleasures and believed her the orchestrator of her own ruin. Mary Anne's letter-memoir spoke out against their view, in an attempt to persuade her son, George, of her motherly intentions upon taking to the stage.

Once she entered the acting profession, Mary Anne became both actress and mother, creating a new family structure with a female breadwinner. Her juggling of the roles of working woman and mother were not unique. As H. Brook has noted, even many late-

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[93] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/54, Mary Anne Hunn to George Canning, January 27th 1803, p. 74.
[94] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/54, Mary Anne Hunn to George Canning, January 27th 1803, pp. 75-76; Julian Crowe, *George Canning is my Son* (London: Unbound, 2021), pp. 62-63.
[95] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/4, Mehitabel Canning to Mary Anne Canning, January 16th 1773.

eighteenth-century middle-class women faced the reality that economic work needed to be balanced with the ideal roles of wife and mother.[96] But Mary Anne also had to contend with the tensions that the role of a money-earning actress created in terms of motherhood and sexuality. As McGirr and Engel attest, 'the actress-mother is a highly visible example of the overlap between the domestic and the erotic, the professional and the private'.[97] However, many plays were abundant in maternal iconography in this period, taken from classical and Christian traditions.[98] This could be part of the motivation and attraction for Mary Anne to the role of the actress: she could act out the part of mother whilst performing and living the part off-stage. It was a role she was already playing in real life and her maternal performance in her letters extended into her acting roles.

Whilst some actresses, most notably Sarah Siddons, negated this by intwining their maternal identities with their acting identities, Mary Anne's letters do not suggest that her acting career was intwined with her role as a mother, as she argued in her letter to the Viscountess.[99] Ellen Malenas Ledoux shows how presentation on the stage was important to the reputation of the actress, with Siddons refashioning the role of actress to be a working mother, whereas actress Mary Robinson was cast as the mistress of royalty, forever associated with her performance as Perdita.[100] Siddon's self in particular was successful due to the attention she paid to her reputation, both on and off the stage, in crafting her maternal image. It was Mary Anne's failure to maintain her virtue which led to the fall of her personal reputation and the break with Stratford and Hitty Canning. Concurrently, unlike

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[96] Helen Brooks, *Actresses, Gender, and the Eighteenth-Century Stage: Playing Women* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 132.
[97] McGirr and Engel, *Stage Mothers*, p. 5.
[98] *Ibid*, p. 9.
[99] Brooks, *Actresses, Gender and the Eighteenth-Century Stage*, p. 118.
[100] McGirr and Engel, *Stage Mothers*, p. 32.

Siddons, Mary Anne did not craft her performances around her maternity or her need to mother but the letters reveal that the part of Jane Shore was adopted to reflect Mary Anne's personal turmoil with the Cannings. Thus, she built her career around her own tragic circumstances rather than her maternal being. Whilst her letters heavily assert that Mary Anne took to the stage for her children, her mediocre career focused on her personal tragic circumstances. This adds credence to Stratford and Hitty's view that she took to the stage for her own pleasures a position Mary Anne was defending herself against.

Whilst Mary Anne decided to juggle a career as an actress with her maternal duties, ultimately unsuccessfully, her letters do not evidence feelings of guilt for her potential failures but maintain a tone of conviction. Her defensive stance, both in her 1770 letters and her letter-memoir, communicates her need to fully justify her decision to take to the stage and to take up a relationship with Samuel Reddish out of wedlock. Her primary objective was to persuade her son that all her decisions were taken with him in mind, to renegotiate their relationship and allow her a place in his family life. However, despite her adamant stance that she did this entirely for her children, the letters reveal that Mary Anne's career was also a chance for her to play out her tragic circumstances on-stage, a role she was already playing through her letters and through her use of sympathy discourse. Thus, Mary Anne's letters were an important space for maternal performance and the negotiation of her multiple identities as mother, victim, widow, and actress. Whilst she claimed to tell the truth in her letter-memoir, she presented her emotions within a crafted perspective which shaped her life story to emphasis a maternal narrative.

By 1776, after several suggestions to do so in the intervening years, Stratford eventually agreed with Mary Anne that he would become George's guardian (George's younger brother, Thomas, had died a few years previously) and oversee his education, paying for it through George's inheritance from Counsellor Canning, granted upon the latter's death in 1775. Sadly, except from a brief visit in 1777, Mary Anne and George were apart for the rest of his childhood and the next section details the complexities of parenting entirely through letters.

The Anxieties of Co-Parenting at a Distance

Mary Anne was a mother to several living children, yet her letters suggest that her relationship with her son, George, was central to her identity as a mother. However, this relationship could be distant and unfulfilling for both mother and son, filled with epistolary anxieties and frustrations. This suggests that there was more at stake for Mary Anne personally than just her status as a mother and her feelings towards her son. Her connection with George maintained her connection to the Canning family, the family, in her view, which had tried to cast her out. Mary Anne had given up George for a better education and better prospects in his career, and their relationship was a way for her to not only continue to parent and love George at a distant but to influence George's sense of duty towards her as he matured. Mary Anne and George's relationship influenced not just Mary Anne's maternal identity and feelings but her material and financial future. Thus, material identity was central to the promotion of Mary Anne's interests and was created around the values of duty, natural affection, and familial connection.

It is important to understand the tangle between the performance of motherhood with the felt feelings which lie behind it, through the context of individual circumstances. The events examined in the above section demonstrate the different foundations for Mary Anne and George's relationship as mother and son. As George was now under Stratford Canning's guardianship, Mary Anne was not only parenting at a distance but that she was also co-parenting with her sister-in-law and brother-in-law, Hitty and Stratford Canning, the relatives that adopted George. Mary Anne and her son corresponded throughout the rest of her life, amassing an archive of over 1,000 letters, with those surviving almost entirely from George to his mother. The childhood letters between them evidence the uncertain foundation upon which their relationship was built and negotiated and how their relationship evidences Mary Anne's anxieties surrounding George's feelings towards her and her uneasiness of what George was learning through his aunt and uncle. This section demonstrates how Mary Anne negotiated the uncertainties of her relationship with her son by trying to illicit reassurance and comfort from him.

Mary Anne was not alone in using letters to express motherly anxiety towards her son. Anne Lefroy for instance took care to share to her son, Edward, in 1804, how his letter 'affected me very much' but

> be assured I am most perfectly convinced of your affection for me & most grateful for it, but I have so placed all my worldly hopes & happiness upon my Children loving me, that I am too easily hurt, if in the slightest degree I suspect I am lessened in their opinion…but be assured my dear, dear, Child, I reflect with inexpressible delight on your conduct & on certitude of your principles – continue what you now are & you will always be one of the best comforts of your anxious & affect:te Mother AL'[101]

[101] Helen Lefroy and Gavin Turner eds, *The Letters of Mrs Anne Lefroy: Jane Austen's Beloved Friend,* (Winchester: The Jane Austen Society c/o Sarsen Press, 2007), p. 147, Anne Lefroy to Christopher Edward Lefroy, January 31st 1804.

This extract displays typical felt anxieties of a mother from the long eighteenth century, shaped by modes of expression and convention as espoused in conduct books and other printed sources, as discussed earlier in the Chapter. Anne worried about Edward's opinion of her and anxiously sought to preserve their good relationship. Anne's emphasis on maintaining his conduct and principles also reveal underlying anxieties. Would Edward continue to behave and retain the familial values and principles taught to him before his departure? The extract also reveals the relief Anne gained from her correspondence. Edward was 'one of the best comforts' due to his excellent behaviour, alleviating her initial worries that he was unruly or ill mannered. As his mother, Anne would have been responsible for his early education and so his behaviour would reflect on her abilities as a mother as well as upon himself. Instead, her anxieties were soothed with a sense of pride and helped Anne to endure the separation, continue parenting at a distance and maintain a familial bond with her son.

Whilst Mary Anne's anxieties mirror Anne Lefroy's, her letters with her son did not alleviate her concerns, reflecting the unstable nature of her relationship with her son and her role in parenting him and this is where context proves important for understanding the complexities of epistolary relationships. Mary Anne was not George's physical carer after 1776 and so Mary Anne was not the only one influential in shaping George's values and behaviours. Moreover, she believed George's guardians, Hitty and Stratford, held false views about her and fed them to George. Indeed, Mary Anne's letters reflect her paranoia regarding George's true feelings towards her: she can never truly accept his words in his

childhood letters that he loves her and respects her.[102] Though Anne too shows that the opinion of her child means everything to her, she acknowledged the security in knowing that Edward's words reflect his behaviours towards her. Mary Anne, not knowing George's physical behaviours and expressions, was unable to truly trust his written words, words which could have been written as much from duty as from affection.

Those few surviving letters from Mary Anne to her son demonstrate this need for reassurance of his affection and love for her. They evidence how she used emotional rhetoric to illicit compliance in terms of her requests and to demonstrate expected behaviours and feelings towards her. One letter from 1788 is particularly telling

> as neither time nor absence, have, thro so many years, been able to weaken the ties, or blunt the sweet sensations of the natural affections, so let me hope that no obtrusive charms which youthfull pleasures can administer to your opening views, shall rob a doting mother of the long near'd prop her fancy form'd for her declining days; and proudly built upon her darling sons unshaken duty and affection.[103]

While Mary Anne used flattering language towards 'her darling son', her words also suggest a sense of insecurity and anxiety over their future relationship. At this significant eighteenth birthday then, Mary Anne was reminding George of his duties towards his mother, both now in remaining her 'prop' and in the future as the comfort of her old age. Her use of terms 'may it ever remain so' speak of a desire and wish for their relationship to continue into her 'declining days' of old age, so that their long, loving relationship would manifest in George also undertaking his duty to care for his mother. This demonstrates her expectations that she has raised George in a loving, caring manner and expects, as J.J.Popiel notes, that

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[102] BL, Add MS 89143/3/1/5, George Canning to Mary Anne Reddish, 1780-1785.
[103] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/54, Mary Anne Hunn to George Canning, April 11th 1788.

George would feel obliged to care for her in her old age in return.[104] This was written at a point in their relationship where George's feelings towards his mother were reflecting those of his aunt and uncle: that he was ashamed of her and kept her at a distance whilst still determined to lift her out of acting, a profession he now looked upon with distain. Mary Anne then used this letter to reconsolidate their relationship and seek reassurance that her son's 'unshaken duty and affection' was indeed still unshaken and she still had a sense of security as she aged.

Indeed, Mary Anne's correspondence with George throughout his childhood repeatedly suggests that Mary Anne was uneasy about George's opinion of her. There are no surviving letters from Mary Anne before George was sixteen but his many letters during this period have all been saved. Young George's letters to his mother reveal how their correspondence exposed both to what Bourke refers to as 'power relations', that is the ability to assert control over the emotions of another.[105] However, whilst one could assume that Mary Anne would assert the emotional influence over George, their letters strongly suggest that it was George that held the control. Mary Anne's letters belie her own uncertainty of her identity and social position as George's mother and that her continued emotional confidence in their relationship was directly connected to George's next reply.

The depths of her need for reassurance are connected to two main challenges within their relationship. Firstly, they not only had to negotiate anxieties within their relationship but also epistolary anxieties. Mary Anne's constant travel between provincial theatres often

[104] Popiel, 'Making Mothers', pp. 345-346.
[105] Joanne Bourke, 'Fear and Anxiety: Writing About Emotion in Modern History', *History Workshop Journal*, 55.1 (2003), pp. 111-33, p. 125.

caught George out, and many of his letter covers between 1780-1788 have redirected addresses on them. Their letters were filled with apologies for silences, worries over a lack of letters and frequent concerns over the affection within their relationship, particularly from Mary Anne. Though we can ascertain these difficulties in the contents, without the material evidence discussing and showing the postal processes, it would be much more difficult to understand the impact of the postal service in creating further emotional distance between them. This compounded the anxieties that Mary Anne and George experienced as outlined above, as a lack of letters could denote anger or annoyance.

These frustrations concerning the postal service were also compounded by the second challenge: the opinions and influence of Stratford and Hitty Canning, who had adopted George in 1776. Mary Anne had to establish parental bonds and emotional ties at a distance, negotiating not just a lack of physical affection and postal practices but also the negative opinion of Stratford and Hitty Canning, who thought her selfish, sacrificing her position as mother to adopt the socially precarious position of actress 'in order to gain her own pleasures'.[106] She also rebuffed their assistance to get her a respectable position as a governess in a household, a decision which they continued to use to blame Mary Anne for her situation. They did not see her as a good role model for George and George's letters to Mary Anne show that their opinions of Mary Anne were being passed onto George. It is this 'poisoning' that Mary Anne blamed for George's increasing distance and dislike towards her. This view was a particular attack on her parenting for, as Bailey asserts, 'indifferent parents betrayed both sensible and Christian ideals. They sought pleasure in the "world" rather than

[106] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/5, George Canning to Mary Anne Canning, 1785.

in domestic retirement'.[107] It is this 'poisoning', this view of Mary Anne, which formed the basis for her brief appearance in biographies of George Canning: the sub-standard mother, an actress with a poor reputation that was a burden on her son. It is this casting that Mary Anne's letter-memoir attempted to overcome. Whilst subsequent biographers suggest she did not throw off this image, Mary Anne certainly succeeded in presenting a more complex picture of eighteenth-century motherhood, and the challenges of parenting at a distance.

However, Mary Anne's paranoia at the Cannings' influence over George spilled into their own epistolary relationship. George's childhood letters reveal constant defences to soothe his mother's heightened anxieties about his affection towards her. One plea exhibits an amazed tone as George penned that 'you could not surely suppose that I would willingly have given you such anxiety and be the Cause of so much trouble to you Yes indeed I wrote to you at Exeter' when a letter to her had miscarried.[108] Instead of considering that the letter had miscarried, a likely scenario as Mary Anne moved around often to perform in various provincial theatres, she immediately reproached George for his lack of attention towards her. On another occasion, Mary Anne's angry suspicions even led to George having to explain his honesty and integrity towards his mother:

> adjured as I am by you to be explicit, nothing could make me deceive you for a moment – I assure you, upon my honour, no word or Conversation ever passed between my Uncle & me which did in the least either directly or indirectly influence or point out those questions I asked you.[109]

[107] Joanne Bailey, *Parenting in England*, p. 36.
[108] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/5, George Canning to Mary Anne Canning, July, October 1783.
[109] *Ibid*, October 5th 1785.

Mary Anne's suspicious queries insinuated by George's reply suggest her continued insecurities towards George's opinion of her, and the affection he felt for her. This letter in particular places the Cannings at the heart of Mary Anne's distrust, with her letter-memoir revealing her fear that they had 'poisoned' her son's natural affection towards her.[110] Not only does this display some of the difficulties of co-parenting at a distance in this period, it also suggests how trust was built differently through distance than through physical relationships, an area which would merit further research.

Even more importantly, these fraught relations evince that George's acceptance of Mary Anne as his mother was central to her identity and it was a point on which she was most anxious. Whilst Mary Anne used maternal language to self-fashion a positive maternal identity and her love for her son, her letters to George reveal that she did not take on some of the important elements of maternal parenting. Likely due to her need to establish and maintain a relationship with George, Mary Anne rarely disciplined him or gave him advice. Parental letters usually provided advice on various aspects of life, emotional management or future prospects. This role lay with Hitty, his aunt who adopted him, and the letters between them show that she took on this loving disciplinarian role which was expected of mothers. In contrast, Mary Anne's correspondence was full of news and loving remarks: her letters emphasis her anxiety simply to maintain their relationship and be loved by her son as his mother. Their letters show how their relationship centred around Mary Anne's desire to be George's mother and loved as George's mother rather than her actually mothering him at a distance, like Hitty does with Bess earlier in this chapter. Neither did Mary Anne show a

[110] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/54, Mary Anne Hunn to George Canning, January 27th 1803, pp. 165-167, 180-181.

particularly great deal of interest in George's educational accomplishments at Eton or promptly reply to his letters and respond to his requests, suggesting that she was a far more spectral figure than she envisioned herself. It was a relationship based on her perceived maternal identity and present and future desires and feelings.

This chapter has not necessarily thought about mothering as it was but rather how it was presented by mothers themselves to craft a maternal identity for their sense of self, social standing, and reputation. It has examined the anxiety of mothers, in different circumstances, and considers how they used their correspondences to self-fashion positive maternal identities. Hitty's letters play upon the solid foundation of her relationship with her daughter, adapting her language and tone to suit the epistolary form and exhibiting tender mothering in her letters. She used anxiety both as an emotional response and as an emotional tool for authority, compliance and negotiation. Through their correspondence she not only displays but emphasises the maternal ideals espoused through didactic literature and societal culture, impressing how through her absence she was still fulfilling her maternal duties and communicating her love. Mary Anne, on the other hand, used the discourses of pain and sympathy to try and alleviate her underlying anxieties concerning her relationship with her son and build a loving relationship between them. She used emotional language to craft her positive maternal identity in order to express her emotions and defend her decisions, which she framed as in the best interests of George. However, her letters reveal her constant uneasiness over her son's feelings towards her, suggesting that an epistolary relationship can be unstable and difficult to maintain without some form of physical contact. Maternal anxiety therefore was key to the construction of maternal selves

in eighteenth-century letters. The next chapter will continue to consider these relationships, focusing on the child's perspective, to consider childhood anxieties.

Chapter Four – Growing Up: Childhood and Adolescent Anxieties

On 17th September 1787, eleven-year-old Elizabeth 'Bess' Canning signed off her letter to her mother, Hitty, with her five-year-old younger brother's tearful message that 'he is a very good boy' and that he was 'really sorry Hetty & Willy & Hal is gone' before adding a postscript '[p]ray Don't forget to bye [*sic*] the combs for me.& don't forget to write to me very soon for we long to hear from you. Charles's love to you & his brothers'.[1] Bess's letter hints at her younger brother's concern about his mother's absence and desire for her love and affection and of her own fears that her mother might forget their pre-agreed arrangement. On the one hand, this is a typical everyday exchange, variations of which litter Bess's letters to her mother. On the other hand, it evidences how adolescents used emotions to craft their distant communications, providing a glimpse of the worries of children and adolescents in eighteenth-century England.

According to remaining accounts, all the Canning children were letter-writers from a young age, reflecting that it was an important part of the education of middle-and upper-class boys and girls.[2] Sadly, not all the Canning children's letters have survived in the various Canning archives. Out of Hitty's five children, only Bess's letters survive. This appears to not just be circumstantial: Hal was noted as very 'idle' with his correspondence and Bess appears to have been the main correspondent for the family home, thus her younger

[1] BRO, fl2111-2308, Elizabeth Canning to Mehitabel Canning, September 17th 1787.

[2] Rachel Bynoth, 'A Mother Educating her Daughter Remotely though Familial Correspondence: The Letter as a Form of Female Distance Education in the Eighteenth Century', *History*, 106.373 (December 2021), pp. 727-750, pp. 728-740.

brothers often communicated through Bess's letters, too young to regularly pen their own sentiments.[3] Similarly, both Bess's aunt and grandmother passed messages through her letters to her mother, sending their love and kind thoughts.[4] Children's and adolescent's letters then can hold many voices, perspectives, writers, and readers. As noted in the previous chapter, there is an extensive surviving correspondence for the years of Bess's adolescence, from 1789 to 1793. However, whilst Bess's brothers' letters have not survived, forty-one letters between Bess's cousin, George Canning, and his mother, Mary Anne, have. This reflects their epistolary relationship, as George was adopted by Bess's parents at the age of six and wrote regularly to his mother to maintain their relationship at a distance. These letters cover this period until 1788, when George turned eighteen, went to Oxford University and began the transition into and adult life. There are also several letters between George and Bess, detailing their relationship as he entered university and maintained his relationship with his twelve-year-old cousin. Brought together, these letters provide a window into the anxieties of growing up. Importantly for this thesis, they signal these communications through letters written by and to adolescents, to various relatives, unearthing power, communication, and familial negotiations which took place at a distance. Like Elaine Chalus's remark regarding the diaries of Betsy Wynne, these letters also provide insight into 'adolescence identity formation', in this case, displaying the anxieties towards the transition into the responsibilities of adulthood, for both genders.[5]

[3] Across the entire letter collection, Hitty, Bess and George note Hal's poor record of corresponding.
[4] All of Bess's letters from 1789 show that her aunt and grandmother send their love and good wishes. BRO, fl2111-2308, Elizabeth Canning to Mehitabel Canning, 1789 letters.
[5] Elaine Chalus, 'Becoming an Englishwoman: Gender, Politeness, and Identity in the Age of Revolutions', in *Revisiting the Polite and Commercial People: Essays in Georgian Politics, Society, and Culture in Honour of Professor Paul Langford*, eds by Elaine Chalus and Perri Gauci, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 222-238, p. 223.

Up until now, this thesis has focused on adult emotions and life stages. This chapter turns to consider childhood and adolescence. The seventeenth century had been considered, most notably by Phillipe Ariès, as the century where childhood was invented but it was during the eighteenth century that the concept developed.[6] This was seen as tied with the rise of affectionate, loving relationships between parents and their children, as touted by Ariès and Lawrence Stone.[7] Edward Shorter held similar views that there were marked differences in how 'traditional' and 'modern' 'ordinary people' felt and acted towards their children.[8] Stone's work in this area became particularly influential, due to its attempt to construct a metanarrative of change within the family across three centuries. Stone set out that the early modern family developed within three overlapping forms, which, as Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster note, superseded each other.[9] The first, the 'open lineage family' (c. 1450-1630) which Stone suggested was typified by cold, distant relationships, the wider family involvement in courtship and subsequent marriage, and indifferent, 'brutal parent-child relationships'.[10] The 'restricted patriarchal nuclear family' (c.1550-1700) was characterised as an overlap between the patriarchal power of the previous and the increasing emphasis on the nuclear family and central affectionate ties which bloomed further in the era of the 'closed, domesticated nuclear family' (c.1640-1800).[11] This final period saw increasing moves towards a loving, affectionate parent-child relationship, 'good mothering' according

[6] Phillipe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, Translated from the French by Robert Baldick (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), pp. 118-122, 132-133.
[7] Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*, pp. 130-132, 365, 403-405; Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (London: Penguin, 1977), Chapter 9; Edward Shorter, *The Making of the Modern Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), Chapters 5 and 6.
[8] Shorter, *The Making of the Modern Family*, pp. 168-169, 170
[9] Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster, eds, *The Family in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 1-3.
[10] Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage*, Chapters 1 and 2; Berry and Foyster, *The Family in Early Modern England*, pp. 1-2.
[11] Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage*, pp. 98-115.

to Shorter, more emphasis of love and affection within marriage and less interference from kin in marriage prospects.[12] This final era outlined by Stone saw marked changes in the style of child-rearing espoused by didactic literature, material representations of the family as affectionate and loving, and the broader development of toys and books designed for children, all of which led to Ariès conclusions that this period developed the concept of childhood.[13]

However, this theoretical outlook has been strongly challenged by scholars who have stressed that parent/child relationships in the early modern period were more affectionate than Ariès, Stone and Shorter suggested.[14] Moreover, there are continuities into the eighteenth century, with continued importance of dynasty and lineage for family prospects, as outlined by Ingrid Tague, and demonstrated in Chapter One by Counsellor Canning, George Canning's grandfather, in the 1760s.[15] Whilst there were changes in childrearing practices, as Anthony Fletcher rightly argues, no two families reared children the same as they would have been influenced by their own social, cultural, and behavioural practices and circumstances.[16] This complicates the idea that 'childhood' was an eighteenth-century invention. It is less that childhood as a life stage was invented in the eighteenth century than it was better documented due to rising literacy levels, rise of print culture and changing

[12] *Ibid*, pp. 254-285.
[13] Berry and Foyster, *The Family in Early Modern England*, pp. 14-16.
[14] Linda Pollock, *Forgotten Children: Parent-Child Relations from 1500 to 1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) and Joanne Bailey, *Parenting in England, 1760-1830: Emotion, Identity and Generation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) are just two prominent examples of studies that refute this perspective.
[15] See Ingrid Tague, 'Aristocratic Women and Ideas of Family in the Early Eighteenth Century' in *The Family in Early Modern England* eds by Helen Berry and Elizabeth Foyster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 184-208.
[16] Anthony Fletcher, *Growing Up in England: The Experience of Childhood 1600-1914* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), pp. 2-4.

social hierarchies.[17] The eighteenth century was also a period where children's relationships with parents, especially mothers, was celebrated and was promoted as important to the fulfilling of parental identities and parental success in raising the next generation, in line with Lockean and Rousseauian ideals.[18] This provides an important societal context for the discussion of childhood anxieties.

Due to a lack of distinction in a definition of the period of 'childhood', it is fruitful to think beyond chronological age. Bess and George Canning's letters show that the concept of what constitutes 'childhood' in the eighteenth century is complex, as they depict unclear, blurred boundaries between childhood, adolescence, and adulthood in terms of chronological age. Whilst I mostly use 'adolescence' throughout this chapter, I occasionally use 'children', as this reflects that the history of childhood tends to encompass both terms and that boys and girls are defined as children and adolescents and even adults at different times and in different circumstances.[19] This is also deliberate, as my chapter shows that the timings and definition of 'childhood' are more socially and culturally defined rather than biologically.[20] Other studies, such as those highlighted by Laura Tisdall in her overview of the field of the history of childhood studies, points to how historians studying non-European cultural and social contexts emphasise that generation was more important than age in determining age-

[17] Will Coster, *Family and Kinship in England, 1450-1800*, 2nd Ed. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), pp. 13-15; Anthony Fletcher argues that nothing fundamentally changed between 1600-1914 in the relationship between parents and children. See Fletcher, *Growing Up in England,* pp. 5-7.

[18] Bailey, *Parenting in England*, pp. 22-31, 33-37, 48, 54-56, 62-63, 71-74, 101-111, 125, 129, 144-147, 154-159; Fletcher, *Growing Up in England* pp. 10-11. See also Chapter Three of this thesis.

[19] Upon marriage, which was legal from fourteen for girls, a girl could be denoted an adult. Some see girls as adolescents until marriage or spinster age, others see young men as adolescents until they left university, others when they left school. See Coster, *Family and Kinship in England*, pp. 56-59 and Claudia Jarzebowski and Thomas Max Safley, eds., *Childhood and Emotion: Across Cultures 1450-1800* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 1.

[20] See Jarzebowski and Safley, *Childhood and Emotion*, p. 1.

relations.[21] I expand this thinking to consider how both familiarity and gender sometimes subverted these chronological and familial power relations, and could give adolescents some power.

More broadly, class and finances are important influences, with a rich, elite child having a different experience than a child of the lower orders. However, an in-depth discussion of these aspects is beyond the scope of this chapter. Therefore, whilst the Canning children are not representative of all anxieties, concerns and feelings concerning eighteenth-century adolescents, they give important indicators of gender and familial differences, based on age and financial position. Whilst Bess and George's circumstances are idiosyncratic, their positions as daughter and eldest son are not, and their anxieties are reflective of their positions as adolescents, as a girl/boy and as a younger child/eldest son respectively. These letters are important, rare glimpses into how adolescents learnt to cope with anxiety at a distance, in a variety of circumstances which could arise.

This chapter is an advocate for the use of children's and adolescents' letters alongside those written by adults. Whilst the previous chapter examined parental anxieties and displayed how children could affect adult histories of anxiety in letters, this chapter examines their children, flipping the previous chapter on its head to put adolescents front and centre of the research. Whilst it utilises some of the same letters, it emphasises feelings and uses of anxiety from the transition from childhood to adolescence and then the transitions through into early adulthood.

[21] Laura Tisdall, 'State of the Field: The Modern History of Childhood' *History*, 107.378 (December 2022), pp. 949-964, p. 954.

A rounded study of family emotions should include the emotions of children and adolescents, to understand the differences and similarities in their experiences within the family's letter network. Yet, despite their centrality, and that the history of emotions continues to be used as a lens for the analysis of eighteenth-century letters, their emotions in correspondences have received relatively little attention from the field. Whilst it is partly due to their lack of survival in many familial correspondences, I agree with Whyman that it is also partly due to the perception that they 'usually only contained only compliments, [that] may seem formulaic and uninteresting'.[22] Yet children's and adolescent's letters are crucial sources for historical information. They were key sites of emotions, just as they were for adults.

Where there has been some attention given to childhood emotions in the eighteenth century, these have often been viewed through the lens of adult letters, or adults looking back at their childhood, with studies by Joanne Begiato and Fletcher particularly influential in beginning to uncover emotions related to childhood through memory and adult perspectives.[23] However, there is a different mixture of emotions and performance at play in memoir and memory, as well as within adult letters regarding childhood and there is merit in looking at children's letters to understand the child's direct perspective more clearly. More attention has been paid to children's emotions in early modern scholarship, with Susan Broomhall and Jacqueline van Gent considering elite familial letters in the

[22] Susan Whyman, *The Pen and the People: English Letter Writers 1660-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 30.
[23] See Bailey, *Parenting in England*; Joanne Bailey, 'Selfhood and "Nostalgia": Sensory and Material Memories of the Childhood Home in Late Georgian Britain', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 42.2 (2019), pp. 229-246; Fletcher, *Growing Up in England*.

sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[24] Whilst they study a European dynasty, considering the use of multiple languages and multiple siblings across different countries, this chapter builds on this methodology to look at adolescent letters from a middle class/gentry family in the eighteenth century, providing a different social and historical context to analyse emotions in adolescent letters.[25]

Where childhood letters have been utilised, they have provided fruitful exploration into the childhood experiences. Looking towards the end of 'childhood', Henry French and Mark Rothery use both adult and adolescent letters to uncover the complex emotional relationships between elite families and younger sons transitioning into adult life. Their study emphasises that emotion work, what they term 'emotional economy', forms the basis for familial control at a distance, whilst families encouraged young men to become independent.[26] Emily C. Bruce's rare use of very young German children's letters demonstrates the important eighteenth-century relationship between learning to write and expressing love and affection towards parents within letters. Here, I state how the language of anxiety is central to this loving distance relationship between not just parent and child (though this is more evident and often conveyed in stronger terms) but a child and their correspondent.

Indeed, my own work to date has considered the epistolary distant rhetoric, as I term it, between Hitty and her daughter, Bess, providing an important insight into the emotional

[24] Susan Broomhall and Jacqueline van Gent, 'Corresponding Affections: Emotional Exchange Among Siblings in the Nassau Family', *Journal of Family History*, 34.2 (April 2009), pp. 143-165, especially p. 143.
[25] Broomhall and van Gent, 'Corresponding Affections', pp. 143-165.
[26] Henry French and Mark Rothery, 'Male Anxiety and the Younger Sons of the Landed Gentry, 1700-1900', *The Historical Journal,* 62.3 (2019), pp. 967-996, pp. 980, 982-986.

relationship between a mother and her daughter, through looking at distance learning through letters.[27] This chapter builds on that work to consider the broader relationship between Hitty and Bess, as well as complexify the discussion to consider other relationships, such as George and his mother, Mary Anne, and George and Bess themselves, to uncover some of the broader anxieties of eighteenth-century adolescents.

As seen in the previous chapter, adolescents tended to display one overriding anxiety in their letters: that of separation from their parents and the need for affection and love. As they transitioned into adults, adolescents' anxieties increased as they began to think of the future and adult responsibilities. Notwithstanding personal circumstances, boys tended to begin showing anxieties regarding adult responsibilities at a similar time to girls, though with different societal pressures, but that girls tended to think about the anxieties of marriage at a far younger age than boys. Likely influenced by societal expectations around primogeniture and patriarchy, George Canning's letters show that a lack of male head of the family meant that the eldest son felt his responsibilities from a young age, even without the means to necessarily fulfil them.

This chapter explores this idea, arguing that future work should integrate more fully the perspectives of children and adolescents, as they give important insights into how social, cultural, and educational ideas were expressed by adolescents and shaped their expressions. Overall, it argues that they could use their status as children and adolescents to gain agency and leverage in distance relationships. At the same time, it also argues that adolescents could adopt 'adult' or more mature roles, to gain similar agency and leverage.

[27] Bynoth, 'A Mother Educating her Daughter Remotely', especially pp. 747-749.

Epistolary Anxieties

Adolescents displayed their concerns most acutely through their epistolary anxieties, whilst they learned to navigate distance and absence. These anxieties were not confined to their letters as they are a regular feature of both adult and adolescent eighteenth-century letters alike. Gary Schneider terms an 'epistolary anxiety' as a concern arising from using the epistolary form.[28] However, the frequent discussions of the post, the receiving and sending of letters and expressions of love and affection were part of epistolary conventions and language which managed and tempered these anxieties. It allowed participants to express their concerns through semi-scripted emotional management practices, what I term distance epistolary rhetoric.[29] It is this that children and adolescents learnt and reinforced through writing letters to their parents, their relatives, and their peers.

Families taught children various societal ideals particularly the desired loving bond between parents and children. These ideas were reinforced through letters, and through learning to write and developing their epistolary conventions through familial correspondences, children learnt to express their love and affection towards their parents and other close relatives. In the earlier eighteenth century, children were taught to show deference in their letters to their parents, chastising themselves for familiarity. In a 1725 American memoir, a preacher acknowledged his daughter's reflections on her familiar address, stating that he believed she had done well to correct herself as this 'Error' of 'Reverence and Esteem to

[28] Gary Schneider, *The Culture of Epistolarity: Vernacular Letters and Letter Writing in Early Modern England, 1500-1700* (Delaware: Delaware University Press, 2005), p. 15.
[29] Bynoth, 'A Mother Educating her Daughter Remotely', pp.733, 747-749.

your Father, or to your Spouse' could easily 'be lavish and run into foolish flatteries'.[30] A published memoir from 1741 commended the daughter Jane's 'Fear and Reverence of her Father notwithstanding all his Condescentions [sic] to her, and vast Freedoms with her'.[31] Whilst letters had become more familiar by the time Bess and George Canning were writing in the 1780s, this desire to show deference and affection towards parents continued in letters. However, through the turn towards sensibility and the change in letter writing practices, showing this affection was encouraged as it, alongside obedience, was considered the reward of good, diligent parenting.[32] As Sarah Pearsall acknowledges, 'this fault – being too fond – became instead a virtue'.[33] Children thus strove to please their parents and demonstrate their affection through their letters.

From their earliest surviving letters, both Bess and George used anxiety as a language to express their affection towards their parents but in different ways. Whilst George had many anxieties, his mother, Mary Anne, was the first and longest lasting, and thus his principal concern. Chapter Three introduced George and Mary Anne's complicated relationship and how George was adopted, at age six, and largely led an epistolary relationship with his mother for the rest of his life, with no visits between the ages of six and sixteen. His letters to his mother tend to show more anxiety than Bess's letters to her mother as there was less certainty as to the intimacy and stability of the relationship, especially as Mary Anne represented an absent mother whom George did not know physically very well.

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[30] Ebenezer Turell, ed., *Memoirs of the Life and Death of the Pious and Ingenious Mrs. Jane Turell* (London, 1741), p. 16, Benjamin Colman to Jane Coleman [Turrell], Boston, August 10th 1725.
[31] Turell, *Memoirs of the Life and Death*, p. 75.
[32] See Emily C. Bruce '"Each Word Shows How Much You Love Me": The Social Literary Practice of Children's Letter Writing (1780-1860)', *Paedagogica Historica*, 50.3 (2014), pp. 247-264, pp. 250, 257 See also Bailey, *Parenting in England*, p. 30, 91 and Bynoth, 'A Mother Educating her Daughter Remotely', pp. 734-740, 749.
[33] Sarah M. S. Pearsall, *Atlantic Families: Lives and Letters in the Later Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 61.

Bess on the other hand, had a very loving, stable relationship with her mother, who communicated with her through letters often, giving advice, instructions, and tutoring. The closeness of their relationship is evident through their shared jokes. A notable example of this was a joke, communicated in French so it could not be deciphered, to prank Bess's Grandmother. These levels of intimacy are missing from George's letters with his mother, where there are loving words but few signs of familiarity. These two cases have similar anxieties, but they were expressed in different ways, showing how understanding the relationships children had with their correspondents were essential in understanding how they expressed their anxieties around epistolary communications.

A common situation for both adolescents and adults, was the miscarrying of letters. Children and adolescents were taught distance epistolary rhetoric to learn the rhythms of the postal system and become used to the delays, distance, and frustrations it could cause.[34] Sixteen-year-old Bess, writing to her mother, wrote of one such delay:

> I can not tell you how vexed and disappointed I am, at not having a letter, from you to day as I expected. Yesterday I <u>hoped</u> to have received one, but this morning, I had not a doubt of haring [*sic*] from you. Indeed, it is very <u>bad</u> of you keeping us so long in suspense, you promised to write at least twice a week. I give <u>you</u> two, to one, and <u>you</u> cannot be as anxious to hear from us, as we are from you … How I do wish to hear from you. If I do not tomorrow, I shall be very much <u>enraged</u>. I shall take it <u>really</u> to heart. – In propriety, and justness I ought to close my letter here but as my heart still <u>yearns</u> a <u>little</u> towards my mother, and that I think and trust she would not neglect me without some cause, or with intention, I will write a few lines more, first begging of you to remember, that I shall expect with anxiety, to have a letter from you on Saturday, and that I shall <u>hope</u> not to be disappointed.[35]

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[34] See Bynoth 'A Mother Educating her Daughter Remotely', pp. 746-749.

[35] BRO, fl2111-2308, Elizabeth Canning to Mehitabel Canning, May 30th 1792.

Here, Bess adopted the epistolary convention of scolding for a late letter from an idle correspondent. Chapter Three discussed thirteen-year-old Bess's playful scolding and growing banter with her mother for her lack of letter. Here, rather than unrealistic expectations as to the regularity of the correspondence, the letter had miscarried. The archives themselves show that there was a delay as Hitty's last surviving letter is from May 23rd 1792, and this letter from Bess does not seem to be a reply to match it, with Hitty's next letter dated 31st May 1792. This suggests that there was either a week in between replies from Hitty or that the post was delayed. Like the passage in Chapter Three, Bess used emotional language and tone, to convey anger and concern to illicit a response but here there is a sense of more emotional control, of a more mature linguistic response than her thirteen-year-old attempt. [36] Bess's opening term 'I can not tell you how vexed and disappointed I am' suggests that her feelings are so strong, no words would do them justice. Nevertheless, the rest of the passage attempts to explain Bess's feelings, to try and cause a guilty response to the lack of attention. For Bess wanted to hear from her mother and by suggesting that her mother could not be anxious to hear from them, challenged her mother to write back to the contrary.

It is the feeling words of '<u>hope</u>', '<u>yearns</u>' and '<u>enraged</u>' that are underlined, suggesting that Bess began to recognise ways to communicate the strength of her feelings through writing. Bess's underlining of '<u>you</u>' connects the underlined feeling words with her mother and her actions. Importantly, Bess accused her mother of not being 'as anxious to hear from us, as

[36] For more information on the emotives theory and methodology see William Reddy, 'Against Constructionism: The Historical Ethnography of Emotions', *Current Anthropology*, 38 (1997), pp. 327-51 and William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

we are from you', language designed to receive a response from Hitty to either confirm, or as hoped, contradict this to soothe Bess's feelings. This follows Bess's reference to her 'heart', already seen in the eighteenth century as connected to emotions such as love and represents an embodiment of the pain and anxiety that Bess stated she felt.[37]

The letter section ends with Bess's use of the phrase, 'I shall expect with anxiety', to demonstrate that she would remain in an anxious state until her mother's reply, another tool used to invoke a response, as this entire passage appears designed to do. Bess shows her mastery of emotion, particularly anxiety, as a method to make demands. That Hitty was herself torn between her family and her sick friend whom she was caring for appears to have partially escaped Bess's thoughts here, despite previous extensive epistolary conversations between the two of them on the subject. It is single minded in its focus. Bess's emotional response also communicated the strength of her feelings for her mother and acted as a method of sending love as well as a desire to receive it in return. Yet, despite its focus, it also acts as a reflective passage, with tones of understanding as she noted her mother would have 'cause' to not write. This letter is multi-layered, using anxiety alongside other emotions to both challenge a missing letter and to affirm love but in a more sophisticated manner than her thirteen-year-old self. It details not just Bess's firmer grasp with anxiety as a linguistic and emotional tool but the development in her bantering relationship with her mother.

[37] Fay Bound Alberti, *Matters of the Heart: History, Medicine, and Emotion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 16, 29-30, 32-33, 37-38, 120.

George Canning on the other hand, had a shakier relationship with his mother, prompting different epistolary anxieties to Bess. As highlighted in Chapter Three, due to their almost entirely epistolary relationship, Mary Anne was very uncertain about George's feelings towards her. Consequently, many of George's anxieties in his letters were focused around trying to reassure his mother of his love and affection for her. Here, I discuss George's side of the relationship. In many of these letters, George's primary, if not sole, focus was to unburden his mother from her own anxieties, in order for him to manage his own. By continually writing 'to assure you of my unchangeable affection for you + my brothers + sister', twelve-year-old George emphasised that his letters are proof of his affection and desire to connect with his mother.[38] Through his letters then, George aligned himself with expected behaviours for sons, dutifully writing to his mother regarding his affection, asking after their welfare and maintaining his commitment to write to them.[39] However, it could have been this display of epistolary and societal convention which meant that his mother found it difficult to differentiate between George's duty and his true feelings towards her, continuing her anxieties.

Likely due to his mother's anxieties, there is a lot of repetition present in George's childhood letters, especially of his feelings towards her, suggesting that he perhaps thought his mother did not believe him. However, this was also through a concern that the letters were not being received. For George also had to negotiate long silences, caused by his mother's idleness in her correspondence commitment and her frequent travelling around the provincial theatres to earn a living. One such example was from 1782, when George was

[38] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/5, George Canning to Mary Anne Reddish, July 16th 1782.
[39] *Ibid*, July 16th 1782.

twelve. He wrote that 'both' have 'been silent for some time', suggesting that he believed it was not just himself that was at fault. Nevertheless, he owned that 'I am afraid I have been the cause of some uneasiness to you' and proceeded to reassure his mother of 'the unalterable Love and Duty of Yr Affectionate Son', taking responsibility for the silence to recommence the relationship.[40] George shows an acute awareness at a young age of the anxiousness that could accompany epistolary relationships, particularly if the recipients had not communicated for some time. For a twelve-year-old, his letters communicate a sense of the commitment he needed to maintain the relationship, from his mother, including sending him timely directions for sending letters. He challenged that one silence was not just his fault for 'I must now direct this letter at random', suggesting that he was unsure as to Mary Anne's whereabouts. In several letters from 1782, George repeatedly requested for his mother to 'tell me how to direct to my Grandmother and Aunt', a request which he had asked for twice previously.[41] Mary Anne's idleness, combined with her continual anxiousness of George's feelings towards her, made their relationship highly unstable and inconsistent during George's childhood and his letters depict a relationship of uncertainty and frustration. Sadly, there are no surviving letters from this period from Mary Anne, but George's replies do not suggest that she offered any explanation for her silences. It shows that entirely epistolary relationships could cause difficulties in maintaining relationships, especially when they were not kept up regularly, as it led to a great deal of uncertainty.

Anxieties about the future: Bess

[40] *Ibid*, February 12th 1782.
[41] *Ibid,* February 12th 1782.

The adolescent letters of the Cannings show that their future prospects could be a source of ongoing anxiety. Compared to the childhood letters, where the anxieties focused much more on relationships and expressions of love, adolescent letters display anxieties about the future. The pressures to meet and fulfil gendered expectations, such as getting married and having children, taking care of parents as they aged and becoming independent and successful in public life become ever more evident as they reach the period of transition into adulthood. It becomes apparent that these fears and anxieties were reinforced by their parents, as this section will attest.

Education for girls centred around their future roles as wives and mothers. As a young girl, Bess's family expected her to grow up, obtain a husband and start a family, a fact her mother reminded her about in a letter to Bess from 1789, when Bess was twelve years old:

> I am much pleased with your daily occupations + am glad you are improving your knowledge of housekeeping – It is a very necessary Qualification, for all young Women, but especially such as have small Fortunes…we must act with great Circumspection, for many Eyes are upon us, + all our actions will be well scrutinised.[42]

As I have written about elsewhere, Bess's 1789 letters were being shared with Hitty's elite Whig friends in London.[43] These 'many Eyes' watched Bess's progress to judge both mother and daughter's accomplishments. However, this passage also reinforces that Bess's distance education was in aid of her future: to find a suitable husband and that Bess was not only aware of this but it was used as a tool to maintain her diligent learning. Hitty used it as both

[42] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], Mehitabel Canning to Elizabeth Canning, February 17th 1789.
[43] Bynoth, 'A Mother Educating her Daughter Remotely' p. 740.

a motivation but also a warning to Bess: her ability to succeed in her education would directly affect her future.

Her cousin, George Canning, as an eighteen-year-old entering Oxford, also took on an older brother role in the absence of Bess's father, writing often to Bess, and their letters demonstrate a playful, intimate friendship. George also made it clear that he was interested in Bess's development and her future:

> how glad I am that you have long ago taken the only method by wch you c^{d} really + effectually [make her mother happy] – I mean – by applying yourself wth so assiduity + good humours to the learning of every thing wch she sets before you…now every body now looks for twice as much from you as they did before. + I, for my own part, have drawn to myself the picture of a very agreeable, well accomplished tho' not remarkably pretty indeed, but infinitely good-tempered, graceful…I shall ask of you some years hence, + then, I doubt not, you will shew that the rest of your time has been as diligently + improvingly employed, as the few first years have been … you see too how gravely a little girl of ten years old [Bess was actually twelve] may be written to when she has shewn herself to have good sense + a good heart to deserve it.[44]

George and Bess's wider correspondence present a developed relationship, one built on the emotion work that had already taken place when George lived with his aunt and uncle, Bess's parents. Their closeness is indicated in one letter where George notes that Bess gave him a lock of hair which she had plaited 'with infinite care' and he was deciding where to keep it.[45] It is moments such as this which led historian Harold Temperley, a biographer of George Canning's from the early twentieth century, to believe that George and Bess were in love.[46] Whilst this would provide motivation for George's interest in Bess's education, it is more likely they were like siblings; George used the closeness of their relationship to

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[44] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], George Canning to Elizabeth Canning, November 30th 1788.
[45] *Ibid*, March 1789.
[46] Giles Hunt, *Mehitabel Canning: A Redoubtable Woman* (Royston: Rooster, 2001), p. 87.

establish himself as an elder brother figure, imparting instructions and advice. As Broomhall and van Gent show in their study of the Orange-Nassau dynasty in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, sibling-like relationships were important spaces for the negotiation of both present and future relationships, especially for favours and emotion work. It is likely that George, as the eldest Canning, saw it as his duty to monitor Bess's education, in the absence of her father.

The above quoted speech was typical of Canning's writing style to his cousin but conveys an important image of Bess in her elder cousin's eyes. George presents Bess as an obedient, diligent student to her mother's teachings, whose behaviour he approved of and wished to continue. George's use of the word 'only' reinforces the singularity of Bess's expected behaviour: only attention to her studies would make her mother, Hitty, and by extension him, 'glad'. From George's surviving letters, and those from Bess to other relatives, it is clear that Bess admired and looked up to her elder cousin and it is therefore likely she would have wanted to please him and receive his compliments and praise. His last sentence implies that his letter here was written in a more 'grown up' manner, a reward for Bess's continued educational development. This speech therefore could be emotional economy rhetoric designed not just to compliment Bess but use their intimate relationship to encourage Bess to remain committed to her studies. By doing so, George reinforced Hitty's message that Bess should focus on her future.

With various relatives emphasising the importance of her present actions for her future, it is little wonder that Bess displayed anxieties about her adult prospects, even from a very young age. Bess's constant updates to her mother, Hitty, during Hitty's stay in London in

1789, attest to Bess's anxieties to please her mother with her educational pursuits and progress.[47] Each letter notes her '2 hours on the Harpsichord', often followed by French, and household affairs, as well as occasionally riding, walking, reading, and tutoring her brothers.[48] Her regularity in documenting her learning suggests more than simply reporting to her mother her activities, which Bess herself acknowledged as she commented that 'I wish not to intrude on my reader yet a while with much flowery passages but continue the more important subject of these little volumes', that is reporting her daily activities.[49] Whilst I argue elsewhere that this was part of Hitty's use of letters as a form of distance education, it is also a desire on the part of Bess to show her obedience to her mother, her commitment to her studies and to communicate her knowledge that constant practice was required for improvement. This was a further method, according to Bruce, used by children to display love and affection through the epistolary form.[50]

Her anxieties regarding her future intensified upon her first trip to Bath in 1792/3, aged sixteen. Her first letter, dated November 28th 1792, registers her excitement at describing her petticoat, jacket and sash for her first outing in society. Her letter quickly turned to anxious language as she 'wondered what her fate would be' at the Ball. There is a sense of trepidation at being introduced to society, with Bess's use of the word 'fate' suggesting that her first impressions could be important to her future beyond that night.[51] Her anxious musings are similar to those of Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey*, excited but anxious

[47] I talk about this more at length in my article. See Bynoth, 'A Mother Educating her Daughter Remotely'.
[48] BRO, fl2111-2308, Elizabeth Canning to Mehitabel Canning. The 1789 letters all mention most of these aspects as they were a daily occurrence.
[49] *Ibid*, March 31st 1789.
[50] Bruce, '"Each word shows how you love me"', pp. 258-259.
[51] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], Elizabeth Canning to Mehitabel Canning, November 28th 1792.

for the night ahead in the city of Bath and the following accounts show some similarities to the Austen heroine.[52] Bess wrote to Hitty that her cousin Letitia 'danced a minuet but did not perform quite as well as expected' and so she chose not 'to exhibit before so many people who were watching the steps of every miss with criticising eyes'.[53] These 'eyes', like the ones Hitty warned Bess about in the 1789 letters, would be judging all young ladies for their dancing, accomplishments, and social skills. For, as Hillary Burlock notes, 'the pressure to perform with grace and accomplishment was immense, as any missteps were eagerly commented on in the press and in correspondence'.[54] In an earlier letter from 1792, Bess advised her mother that her minuet was 'pas grave pretty bobbish', so she was going to attend 'Mrs Curtis's on Friday evening' to show off her dancing skills.[55] That she used the term 'pas grave' which meant okay but also was a step in the minuet, demonstrates her knowledge of both the dance and Bess's French to her mother.

This is what Bess had been preparing for her whole life. Her letter suggests she understood the magnitude of society's judgement for her future and despite Bess feeling confident enough to perform at Mrs Curtis's, perhaps she was not yet ready at sixteen for the anxiety and scrutiny that came with dancing the minuet at Bath. There is a recurring theme within Bess's letters that her anxieties connect to the scrutiny of young girls and their future prospects. In *Northanger Abbey* Jane Austen also alludes to the significance of a girl entering society, for she specifically mentions that Catherine's 'hair was cut and dressed by the best

[52] This is from Austen's novel *Northanger Abbey*. Jane Austen, *The Complete Novels of Jane Austen*, (London: Penguin, 2007), pp. 965-967.
[53] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], Elizabeth Canning to Mehitabel Canning, November 28th 1792.
[54] Hillary Burlock, '"Tumbling into the lap of Majesty": Minuets at the Court of George III', *Journal of Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 44.2 (2021), pp. 205-224, p. 205.
[55] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], Elizabeth Canning to Mehitabel Canning, May 16th 1792.

hand, her clothes put on with care', suggesting such details built up the anticipation of the first important ball, not just for the reader but to play out Catherine's own excitement.[56] For Bess, letters became a place for these anxieties to play out, both as a space to navigate them but also to continually display awareness to others that young women should be focused on the future.

Bess continued to register anxieties that her every move was being watched: 'to my great annoyance [her aunts] saw everything I did. However, I had the satisfaction to hear from them that I performed very well. When I began the first dance I was in a terrible fright but afterwards I felt quite at my ease, the last dance was very pleasant'.[57] These anxieties stem from Bess's introduction into society, the moment that all her learning, education and accomplishments led up to and her letters suggest that she felt the pressure to perform well on her first outing. Catherine Morland's reaction to their lack of acquaintance in Bath and her embarrassment in the tearoom suggests the same pressure to succeed.[58] Balls were such important spaces to show off your skills and accomplishments that children's balls were relatively common, to provide a space for them to practice their dancing and become used to the formalities of the ballroom before entering the adult arena.[59] An earlier letter from Bess tells of her decision to get dancing lessons just prior to her attendance at Bath, to practice before her debut.[60] On another occasion, Bess once again registered her initial fright at dancing again for 'I should dance if I could get a partner, I felt at first as if I should

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[56] This is from Austen's novel, *Northanger Abbey*. Austen, *The Complete Works of Jane Austen*, p. 965.
[57] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], Elizabeth Canning to Mehitabel Canning, 1792.
[58] This is from Austen's novel, *Northanger Abbey.* Austen, *The Complete Works of Jane Austen*, pp. 965-966.
[59] Susannah Fullerton, *A Dance with Jane Austen: How a Novelist and her Characters went to the Ball* (London: Francis Lincoln, 2012), pp. 16-17.
[60] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], Elizabeth Canning to Mehitabel Canning May 1st 1792, May 16th 1792, May 30th 1792, June 18th 1792.

be afraid, but the sound of the musicians did so insinuate itself, in to my ears, that all idea of fear, took itself off'.[61] Bess describes her initial nerves before taking to the floor, suggesting that her fear of failure continued as an undercurrent to her experiences of dancing in Bath. Bess presents dancing as an anxiety-ridden activity, one which held a lot of importance for the future of young ladies wishing to seek a future husband. At sixteen, Bess was already worried she would not have done enough to secure success.

It is important to consider that Bess was reporting from hindsight, after the ball took place. Her anxieties here are shaped by her apparent success rather than her failure and thus her concerns over her future could have been stronger, had the evening been less successful. At her second ball, in December 1792, Bess noted that she had only wanted to dance if she 'could get a mighty smart partner' and her earlier observation that a Mr Badcock was 'obliged to stand up with seven, or eight ladies successively' during the opening minuets, suggests a scarcity of gentlemen. Indeed, after a few efforts to secure Bess a partner 'your poor little peachy was obliged to content herself without evening cappers'. This could be presented as a defence mechanism for her failure to secure a partner, as though she notes that she 'did not lament' this turn of events due to the heat, she declared herself wiser of 'the maneouvres of it' and that she would 'get them to look out for a partner earlier in the evening' at her next event.[62] Equally, Catherine Morland in her first ball learned some of the rules and manoeuvres of securing a partner, succeeding in securing the handsome Mr Tilney at her next ball.[63] Whilst her fears surrounding the evening did come true, Bess presented it

[61] *Ibid*, December 18th 1792.
[62] *Ibid,* December 18th 1792.
[63] This is from Austen's novel, *Northanger Abbey.* Austen, *The Complete Works of Jane Austen*, pp. 967-968.

as a learning experience and displayed less anxiety than when she was successful, realising that she had much to learn to achieve success, especially with fewer men available.

The lack of men is unsurprising. With the year being early 1793, men would have been called up to serve in the Revolutionary Wars, making it likely that there were less men present to begin with, before social manoeuvring took place. Thus, there were more reasons to be anxious about finding a partner for the balls and Bess's letters relate to these wider concerns. However, this is very much a female adolescent reading of the situation. Children provided other readings of the coming of war. In 1789, five year old Charles, according to his sister Bess's letter, showed little fear at the thought of becoming a soldier as even when 'the simple and good-natured Betty expressed her fears that master would run through so many dangers & perhaps be killed at last, Charles said he should like to be one & how he should like to be in the Bloody Wars was his cry all Day'.[64] Charles's is a childlike reading of the situation. His behaviour displayed knowledge of soldiers and war, suggesting that he was already being socialised into masculine ideas around loyalty, bravery and commitment on the battlefield. His use of the term 'Bloody Wars' suggests he was aware that there was bloodshed, or perhaps that he had heard such a term being used to describe battles. His innocence also shines through, as he did not contemplate the thought of being wounded or killed, like servant Betty did, but focused on the excitement and glory of war. Bess contrasts Charles's fervour with Betty's older perspective of concern and delicate sensibility, displaying his masculine traits against her feminine ones. Here, little

[64] BRO, fl2111-2308, Elizabeth Canning to Mehitabel Canning, February 8th 1789.

Charles was already thinking about his future, which seemed a place of possibility and excitement whereas Bess's adolescent letters suggest a bleaker prospect.

This early disappointment compares favourably to a later unsuccessful ball from early 1793, where Bess once again expressed her apprehension by her whole family that she would not get a partner and sadly, a letter from early 1793 showed that despite her cousin, George Canning, trying, the lack of men meant that Bess 'began to be in a bad way'.[65] Her hope in the previous letter adds to the disappointment expressed here, after yet another failed attempt to secure a partner. Whilst Bess states it was because she was 'inclined to dance', her letters also suggest that she was anxious for her future prospects and felt pressure to present herself successfully to Bath society, and that she saw this as through securing dance partners.[66] However, a Mr Tippin was rustled up, changing Bess's spirits and relieving her anxieties that she would once again be sitting on the sidelines. Nevertheless, the pressures just to find a dance partner tell of the importance placed on balls as sites where female futures could be shaped, which both Bess's letters and Austen's *Northanger Abbey* attest.

There are other points where children took advantage of parental anxiety regarding their futures. Whilst Bess's letters do show anxieties around entering society, these are infrequent, scattered amongst the vast accounts of excitement and joy at the entertainments, which Bess described in detail. Bess's comprehensive accounts appear to be at the request of her mother, Hitty, to stem her anxieties about her daughter's success. Hitty was not with Bess in Bath, instead, she was travelling with her aunt and cousins. These

[65] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], Elizabeth Canning to Mehitabel Canning, January 4th 1793.
[66] *Ibid*, January 4th 1793.

entrances into society, in the later teenage years, appeared to be as anxiety-inducing, if not more, for parents and guardians than the daughters themselves. This is particularly the case when the parent was distance parenting. In her letter from 22nd January, Bess responded to her mother's anxieties with a stern sense of independence over her own behaviour. Her letter 'performs her promise' to tell her mother of her behaviours but Bess stated that:

> it is not for me to tell, whether I be a silent, or talkative miss when I am dancing, or on what topicks, I touch, on those occasions; look in the newspapers for such information; the first time you read of a certain, young lady now at Bath, the admiration of the ballrooms &cc&cc, you may see, I make no doubt, will fully satisfy your curiosity, and will convince you that my beauty, elegance, grace, and uncommon wit is not to be surpassed.[67]

Bess's letter suggests an annoyance at always having to report all details of her movements, behaviours and outfits to her mother, what in the modern sense we might term, being micromanaged. Hitty's letters and the relationship between the two show that this was due to Hitty's ongoing anxieties regarding Bess's behaviour and how it was being received in Bath, made more acute by her absence. Mothers often chaperoned their daughters in society, particularly for their first outing.[68] Once again, Bess used underlining to highlight key elements to stress her point. Underlining was used throughout eighteenth-century familial letters to stress certain words or points, a feature also used in the letters of others such as Jane Austen and Elizabeth Montagu.[69] Here, Bess's underlining presents an annoyed tone, through highlighting the traits which Hitty would have wanted her daughter to excel

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[67] *Ibid*, January 22nd 1793.

[68] See Vera Lee, *The Reign of Women in Eighteenth-Century France* (Rochester: Schenkman Publishing, 1975), p. 92; Numerous examples of mothers as chaperones can be seen in Jane Austen's works including Mrs Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*, Mrs Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility* and Mrs Thorpe in *Northanger Abbey*. See Austen, *The Complete Works of Jane Austen*.

[69] See Jane Austen, *Jane Austen's Letters*, ed. by Deirdre le Faye, 4th edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) and Elizabeth Montagu Correspondence Online, (2023) https://emco.swansea.ac.uk/home/ [Accessed 11/04/2023].

in. Bess's letter is forceful in its expression, trying to end an ongoing frustration. She asserts her position, re-negotiating the power balances in the relationship with her mother and challenging her desire to know every detail. She reminded her mother that it was public opinion that would ultimately tell of her success or failure, demonstrating her growing awareness that her future would now be played out in front of other eyes, whilst she searched for a husband. Bess had learnt a great deal from her time in Bath.

Anxieties about the Future: George

George's letters on the other hand, were no less anxious about the future, if not more so. In George's case, with a lack of a father figure, George took on a paternal role as young as 14, displaying concerns about supporting his mother, his half siblings and his cousins. This links back to his letters with Bess, where he adopted a paternal role and their relationship became a space for practicing paternal behaviours. Here too, the letters to his mother also provided a space to play out and develop his future masculine roles. For whilst George's desire to take care of his family would have been the concern of many young men from their early adulthood, as their parents grew older, this was a mantel George took on from a young age. His letters, beginning from around the age of fourteen, depict his anxieties about growing up and the embodiment of masculine or manly values. Whilst French and Rothery note that 'opinions differed' among the correspondents in their work on what exactly manliness was, they note that 'self-control and self-management, industry and hard work, independence and autonomy, and truth and honesty' were common attributes.[70] George's early letters reveal his desire to embody many of these qualities and this is often expressed

[70] Henry French and Mark Rothery, eds, *Making Men: The Formation of Elite Male Identities in England, c.1660-1900, A Sourcebook* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 4,7.

through anxiety. This section intends to explore how George's adolescent letters to his mother reveal his anxiety to embody these masculine qualities.

As he grew older, George's letters became more focused on Mary Anne's career and material wellbeing: during 1786 especially he expressed his desire to be acquainted with Mary Anne's whereabouts and future plans.[71] Whilst it is not entirely clear what Mary Anne's responses were, due to the lack of surviving letters, George's responses show his desire to understand the extent of Mary Anne's theatre work and financial situation. He was 'happy' that Mary Anne's 'prospects seem to improve' though showed concern at her uncertain response from Coleman's theatre.[72] George took care to try and save his mother money, even telling her to spare the expense of coming to Eton to see him as he might be able to come and visit her.[73] There is a sense that George was trying to show both his interest and care in his mother's situation. He was 'extremely anxious to be acquainted with all that concerns your plans & prospects – the more so, being so advanced the Winter'.[74] His knowledge of the theatre seasons becomes evident here as he noted that Mary Anne's position with Owens (presumably another theatre owner) was just a summer plan.[75] Here, George shows uneasiness at Mary Anne's nomadic lifestyle and uncertain income, with his need to know her plans seemingly to grant reassurance of her finances and wellbeing. He was continuing to take a caring role.

[71] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/5, George Canning to Mary Anne Hunn, January 5th 1786.
[72] *Ibid*, January 5th 1786.
[73] *Ibid*, February 9th 1786.
[74] *Ibid*, January 5th 1786.
[75] *Ibid*, February 27th 1786.

George's concerns suggest an adoption of a more adult masculinity for, as Tul Israngura Na Ayudhya states, 'grown limbs and torso alone did not necessarily signify the full state of manhood'.[76] For it was a 'social and cultural process' not just a sexual and physical transformation, and as such, masculine values can be adopted and practiced before sexual maturity.[77] This manifested most in George's adoption of the role of the male breadwinner, in earning to provide for his family, in this case his mother and half siblings.[78] In some respects, this fits in with the chivalric code of masculinity which Michele Cohen argues developed from the mid-eighteenth century, based on 'generosity, justice and courage' and was a mode of masculinity where 'love was central'.[79] George's used chivalric notions of masculinity to convey his love for his mother, through his desire to protect her and free her from an impoverished life in the theatre. In other letters, it fits with ideas of male politeness, its central concept to 'please' seen through George's previous reassurances of his love and duty towards his mother. That he displayed elements of two codes of masculinity supports Cohen's argument that there was a blurred gradual cultural shift from polite to chivalric masculinities.[80]

In his teenage years, George's letters strongly express feelings that he had a duty of care towards his mother, especially in taking care of her and saving her from a life in the theatre. Whilst for most adolescents, this duty fell to them later in life, once they were settled in

[76] Tul Israngura Na Ayudhya, 'Men in the Family: Constructions and Performance of Masculinity in England, c.1700-1820', PhD Thesis, Queen Mary University London, 2014, p. 136.
[77] *Ibid*, p. 136.
[78] Matthew McCormack, *The Independent Man: Citizenship and Gender Politics in Georgian England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 5, 16-21; Karen Harvey, *The Little Republic: Masculinity and Domestic Authority in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 6-12.
[79] Michele Cohen, '"Manners" Make the Man: Politeness, Chivalry, and the Construction of Masculinity, 1750-1830', *Journal of British Studies*, 44.2 (2005), pp. 312-329, pp. 315, 320.
[80] See Cohen, '"Manners" Make the Man', especially pp. 312-315, 320, 325-328.

households of their own, George's letters strongly suggest that he feels this burden of duty during his adolescent years. One quote from a letter from 1786, when George was sixteen, demonstrates the strength of his emotional expression. He evoked distress that 'a Mother should labour under such disadvantages, such mortifications, and I not have the power to alleviate them. Heaven grant, that the time may come, when it will be in my power in some little measure to lighten the inconveniences of a Situation so mortifying!'[81] It is notable that whilst George's letters always communicated that he wished to alleviate his mother's situation of working in the theatre, these feelings intensified when he turned sixteen, and met his mother for the first time in over nine years. George's letters suggest a need to convey a desire to achieve a masculine ideal, that which Matthew McCormack terms 'the independent man', through supporting his family. This links to the aforementioned masculine traits of being careful with money, hardworking and, in this historical period, a dutiful and loving son.[82] It is likely that this was encouraged and developed by his mother, Mary Anne, who would hope to benefit from giving George up for him to receive an excellent education, through financial and emotional support into her middle age and elder years, an aspect discussed in Chapters Three and Five. Sadly, the letters from Mary Anne have not survived from this period but her lengthy letter-journal from 1803 does support this notion.[83]

George became a mediator between his uncle and his mother, passing messages between the two in 1784 as their own relationship disintegrated due to Mary Anne's illicit sexual relationship with Samuel Reddish. For Mary Anne, George's letters were her lifeline in

[81] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/5, George Canning to Mary Anne Hunn, October 20th 1786.
[82] McCormack, *The Independent Man*, pp. 16-21.
[83] See BL, Add MS89143/3/1/54, Mary Anne Hunn, to George Canning, January 27th 1803.

keeping her in touch with the family. After delivering Mary Anne's letter to his uncle Stratford, George communicated in his own letter that 'I am sorry to write to you news which are so unwelcome to us both. We cannot meet next summer [1785]'.[84] Stratford's reply noted George's natural filial feelings towards his mother and how he did not wish to disengage them but that a visit could be a danger to George's sentiments towards his mother. In other words, he was worried about Mary Anne's influence. Stratford believed that Mary Anne was selfish and indulged in her own pleasures, putting herself before her son. Until George could 'prevent all possibility…of your Mind receiving any Bias from your Visit to her, which might be Prejudicial to you for the rest of your Life', Stratford did not want to expose George to his mother.[85] George adopted a reassured tone, telling his mother that he was upset by the news, though he does add that it was delivered in a kind and affectionate letter to himself. This suggests Stratford's tone may have been very different had he written directly to Mary Anne.[86] Interestingly, George himself does not show an exertion of power or position in his letters but both adults recognised his capacity for persuasion of the opposite party, using him to communicate with each other, showing how adolescents could negotiate with other family members. This reflects Karen Harvey's comment that 'domestic patriarchy was a system of order in the household in which different individuals may each have access to different kinds and levels of power' and that other family members were aware of this and used it to their own advantage.[87] Sadly, neither of the adult letters survive but George's letter shows how children could become

[84] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/5, George Canning to Mary Anne Hunn, May 23rd 1785.
[85] *Ibid*, May 23rd 1785.
[86] *Ibid*, May 23rd 1785.
[87] Harvey, *The Little Republic*, p. 4.

important intermediaries in adult conversations and internal familial disagreements and tensions.

Once George met his mother, in 1786, their relationship changed. It appears that she was not the woman that George thought she would be physically, the theatrical life and many childbirths having taken their toll. Historian Julian Crowe wrote that George likely had an image of her in his mind from when he last saw her, aged six, and George wrote later in his adult years that his 'heart now sickens at the recollection of the sudden revulsion' that he had towards his mother.[88] This was a phenomenon seen in imperial familial correspondences, also borne of lengthy distance as bodies and personalities had altered over time, despite epistolary closeness.[89] Whilst it should be noted that this recollection is tempered with his developed attitude towards his mother and her profession and reputation, the letters before and after 1786 show a marked difference in his ardent affection towards her and the tensions between his duty as a son and his feelings towards her as a person. Consequently, his letters became more strongly emotive towards removing his mother from her life of poverty and theatre, which George perceived as the cause of her change in gentility and looks. At sixteen, he displayed masculine ideals of taking care of his mother whilst at the same time thinking about his own reputation and his future. At the first opportunity, George wrote that Stratford, his uncle, 'has consented my dear Mother, in the kindest & readiest manner to my giving as a small alleviation to the irksomeness of your circumstances £20 a year – Small tho' it be, I hope in God it may contribute to render a little

[88] BL, Add MS89143/3/3, George Canning to Lady Dundas, 1799.
[89] See Viccy Coltman, 'Sojourning Scots and the Portrait Miniature in Colonial India, 1770s-1780s', *Journal of Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 40.3 (2017), pp. 421-441.

more Comfortable & easy'.[90] George was careful with his small income from his estate to provide a sum for his mother to reduce her burden, already performing his position of providing for his dependants, albeit on a smaller scale. Yet, this was a position which men were expected to achieve as a marker of adulthood: to provide for dependants took income for an estate, career or inheritance. George had not yet left Eton. The correspondence between the two allowed George to perform his duty towards his mother and practice his responsibilities towards her, with her encouragement. This determination plagued him his entire political career and he was eventually successful enough to provide her with a pension in her later years.

Anxieties about family

George confirmed that he has seen his mother in a letter to her in 1786, when he was sixteen (for the first time in ten years that has been recorded).[91] The view of his mother, from this point, shaped the later years of George's adolescence and his entry into adulthood. It was also around this time that he began to see his mother as an embarrassment and the theatre as a hotbed of vice and depravity. Importantly for Canning, he grew up at a time where personal and public lives began to be conflated.[92] From around sixteen, he became aware of his mother's actress status and fallen reputation and how it could affect his own standing in society. This viewpoint only appears to have grown once he entered Oxford University. He was anxious not to be seen in his mother's company. This continued uneasiness is exemplified in a letter written to his Aunt, Mrs Leigh, when he was

[90] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/5, George Canning to Mary Anne Hunn, February 3rd 1787.
[91] *Ibid*, February 27th 1786.
[92] McCormack, *The Independent Man*, pp. 1, 19.

eighteen, on refusing an invitation to Crewe Hall, in Cheshire, due to his mother performing in the area at the same time. He wrote that he could not see his mother, as much as he would 'be glad of an opportunity to see her' because he could not bear to see her performing on the stage, 'in such a situation'. George saw it as 'a useless and painful gratification' as he could not free her from it.[93] Instead, he asked Mrs Crewe to solicit her patronage to get his mother's name on the front of the Bill in order to try and further her career. This action typified George's desire to ameliorate his mother's life and rescue her from the theatre:

> the time will come when it will be in my power to effect something more permanent for her ease and comfort, and to snatch her, at least in her decline in life, from a profession…the prejudice and perhaps illiberality of mankind has stamped as disreputable.[94]

George emphasised to his Aunt Leigh that it was 'mankind' that had labelled the theatre as 'disreputable' rather than himself, suggesting that the opinion of society had significant bearing on his desire and anxiety to 'snatch' his mother from the theatrical life and provide her with 'ease and comfort'. Here, George's ongoing anxiety about his mother's position played into chivalric manly ideas around rescue narratives, and the man as protector.[95] He also displays traits relating to the protection of honour, in this case of his mother but also of himself and the wider family.[96] The tarnish of a profession which 'mankind has stamped as disreputable' would fade as George rescued her from a life in the theatre and returned her to a respectable position within society.

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[93] BL, Add MS89143/3/2, George Canning to Mrs Elizabeth Leigh, September 26th 1788.
[94] *Ibid*, September 26th 1788.
[95] Cohen, '"Manners" Make the Man', p. 329.
[96] Cohen, '"Manners" Make the Man', pp. 319, 321, 329.

Though in this extract George wrote to his Aunt Leigh about his anxious desire to free his mother from theatrical life, it was to his Aunt, Hitty Canning, that he wrote of his anxieties concerning his mother. Whilst regular letters to their household were written to Hitty's daughter, Bess, regarded as his favourite family member by many biographers, his worries were contained in letters directed to Hitty. This signals that it was to her alone that he directed his questions, information, and anxieties regarding his mother, not the general household. George had mixed emotions regarding his mother. He loved her, as a son, and sought to always do his duty by her. Yet she was a constant source of shame, ridicule and anxiety and no one understood this better than his aunt, Hitty Canning.

As Hitty had adopted George at the age of six, she and her husband were George's guardians throughout the turbulence of the letters between George and his mother during his childhood and adolescence. She herself had a complex relationship with Mary Anne and knew that her status as both George's mother and a mediocre actress with a questionable reputation would cause conflict. As Mary Anne's sister-in-law, and not a blood relation, she was able to distance herself and did so at the earliest opportunity after her reputation was ruined. Yet George could not escape his mother: they were bound by blood.

This would also haunt him into his early adulthood, when he was trying to establish a career. George wrote to Hitty, a few years before entering parliament, in 1791, that he would not be joining her in Bristol:

> My mother having returned thither, I am sure I need not explain to you how this is an obstacle as you cannot for a moment hesitate to ascribe my feelings on the subject not to a want of affection for her, or of desire to be in her company – but a

> perfect conviction that it is for the true interest of us both, that we should not be, more than is necessary, together.[97]

Though he does not 'ascribe his feelings' to Hitty, George's letter suggests that he expected Hitty to be fully aware and understanding of his emotional state surrounding this revelation and how his actions are justified and necessary, alluding to the intimate nature of the exchange. Whilst the Leighs did know of Canning's mother and her history, he is less open about his anxieties concerning her than he is with his aunt Hitty. This is likely because Hitty was present for the early years of his life, when Mary Anne decided to become an actress and, as his guardian, knew about the history of their relationship better than almost anyone else alive. George would have learnt emotional management under Hitty's tutelage, like she showed in her letters to her daughter, Bess and he likely felt safe in confiding in her. Hitty was also against Mary Anne taking to the stage, a decision which George grew to dislike as his knowledge of the theatre's (and his mother's) chequered reputation became apparent. The extent of the knowledge required to understand George's decision highlights just how important familial history and correspondence collections and networks are for contextualising relationships, actions, and intimacies.

By taking these steps to avoid his mother in public, George subtly communicated his anxieties to Hitty about the effect of her reputation on his own and his future public career (at this point in law). George alluded to a fear and anxiety that his mother would see him in front of colleagues, friends and the well-born 'and you know, under all circumstances [that] would be rather inconvenient and distressing'.[98] The entire letter highlights the intimacy and

[97] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], George Canning to Mehitabel Canning, May 22nd 1791.
[98] Peter Jupp ed., *The Letter Journal of George Canning 1793-1795* (Frome and London: Butler and Tanner Ltd, 1991), pp. 230-231.

secrecy of this information, with little given away to those with no information on the situation. It is a specific intimacy surrounding this anxiety rather than George's anxieties more generally, as there is little indication that he shared any of his other worries with her.

Unlike George's relationship with his mother, Bess's sixteen-year-old letters reveal a more intimate relationship between child and parent. However, as this chapter has shown, this was no less ridden with a sense of burden and expectation. Though Bess's letters show how her intimate correspondence with her mother had developed her use of anxiety as a linguistic and emotional tool. Bess demonstrated how she was beginning to use anxiety as a language of affection, copying her mother's use in her letters. Bess noted that her mother's letter 'makes us truly uncomfortable' as 'I fear this is much too cold, for you to set out' on the short journey to Bristol that was planned for Eliza's health.[99] Her mother's health concerns were interwoven with concern for the dying Eliza Sheridan, whose doctor was 'detaining poor Mrs Sheriden trying new medicines' and there were fears that 'delaying…will do her no good'.[100] Bess ended with expressing that she 'shall be very anxious till I hear that your situation, which at present is really melancholy, is somewhat mended, by poor Mrs S being anything better'.[101] This passage details how Bess's letters were filled with more control over herself, rather than displaying the emotional outbursts that often characterised her thirteen-year-old letters. She learnt to use anxiety as an emotional tool, to demand a reply to alleviate her worries over how her mother was doing. She recognised the emotional toil it was likely to take on Hitty, nursing her very sick friend, especially if the doctor appeared to be preventing treatments that could potentially save her life.

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[99] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], Elizabeth Canning to Mehitabel Canning, May 1st 1792.
[100] *Ibid,* May 1st 1792.
[101] *Ibid,* May 1st 1792.

There is, in one sense, less anxiety. Bess was less concerned with acquiring her mother's affection, the main anxiety of her younger letters, and now focused her anxieties on her mother and Eliza Sheridan. In other words, she worried less for herself and more for other family members, which I argue was a sign in letters of growing up as displaying concern and sympathy for others was an important element of the language of sensibility, as displayed in adult letters.[102] Whilst self-centred anxieties are still present in Bess's letters from the end of her childhood, they are framed more around her mother rather than herself. These youthful letters indicate the differences in childhood and adult letters tend to be a sense of control and mastery of convention, which can demonstrate how children learnt to communicate within familial circles. Here, anxiety plays an important part as both an emotion and as an emotional linguistic tool to shape emotional responses and create a sense of intimacy between, in this case, a child and their mother. This is a good example of epistolary distance rhetoric, with epistolary anxieties expressed as a form of expression of love and affection and wishes for both news and a subtle hint that they want to have a reply. By sixteen, Bess was more adept at using her writing to convey more sophisticated epistolary exchanges, whilst still communicating similar emotions of love, affection, and a desire to have these expressed in return.

The two cousins themselves had a close epistolary relationship, though it is notable that George appears more carefree and playful in his letters to a young teenage Bess. It suggests that he felt it was a space in which he gained a sense of relief from the pressures of life at

[102] See discussion of sympathy in Introduction to this thesis; See also G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), Introduction.

Oxford University, and later in Parliament. There is less sense of anxiety within this relationship, for Bess appears to be the outlet for his jokes, teasing and joy. It is likely that George saw their correspondence as relief from the many homosocial spaces he now inhabited, and the anxieties of his career and attaining full adult masculine status would have now prevailed.[103]

On one occasion, he wrote to Bess 'in preference to any other branch of the House, because I know the best people are always readiest to forgive those who are bad…those who are the most delight little Being in the world, will be most ready to forgive one who has been very idle'.[104] George's teasing tone suggests that this type of idleness has taken place previously and that he believes that his cousin will forgive him. There is little sense of anxiety here but a sense of pleasure in writing to 'the most delight little Being in the world', to whom this opening 'apology' communicates a warm sense of affection. Thus, epistolary relationships with children and adolescents were also crucial sites for relief from anxieties, spaces where politics, foreign affairs and matters of state were absent in favour of advice, teasing and entertaining stories.

Childhood letters are valuable sites of emotion and provide a glimpse into the adult that the child will become. Children do not share many of the adult anxieties that have already been discussed in previous chapters. Whilst this does not suggest they did not have anxieties, it shows that their anxieties are not necessarily always communicated in letters, at a young age. Instead, children tended to have one central anxiety: that of separation from their

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[103] See French and Rothery, 'Male Anxieties Among Younger Sons' for a discussion of the transition into adult life and adult masculinities.
[104] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], George Canning to Elizabeth Canning, November 30th 1788.

parents and the need for affection and love. Their letters suggest a craving for reassurance and closeness, not easily obtained at a distance and children learnt to cope with these feelings and to use and receive the letter as a vehicle for emotional expression. Parents taught children to deal with these separation and epistolary anxieties through teaching them epistolary distance rhetoric, a social language used in letters to express affection and love, of which anxious language and tone was a central part.

Moving into adolescence, the focus shifts on the child's future, an aspect which was communicated daily through their education and familial position. Naturally, this shift in focus led to children expressing anxieties related to their future adult selves, alongside their continual negotiation of familial relationships at a distance. Pressures such as gendered responsibilities and expectations begin to be expressed through the language and tone of anxiety. Thus, children developed anxieties connected to their hoped-for adult selves. These developed into many of the anxieties which the adults expressed in their letters, as the adolescents grew up, learned to become part of society, and further understood their familial roles and duties. There are also moments where adolescents spoke of their concerns to more than just their parents: aunts and cousins were important outlets for concerns or a relief from a heavy burden of worries. These were shared usually due to intimacy or familiarity to the source of the anxious thoughts.

Children's and adolescent's letters are an important site for power dynamics to unfold. George Canning's letters evidence how children could be important mediators within adult relationships, especially at times of tension and how adults could take advantage of a child's agency within various familial relationships. Bess's letters signal how adolescents could use

adult anxieties to gain agency within the relationship. Bess renegotiated her position with her mother, through asserting her independence and asking for her mother to restrain her demands for information. It is these everyday power dynamics, in which anxiety plays a crucial role, that make children's and adolescent's letters such valuable sources for studying the eighteenth-century family.

Chapter Five – Later Life, Growing Old

'We Dowagers played our Whist all the Evening' wrote Hitty Canning to her daughter, Bess.[1] Written on the 16th December 1805, the day after Bess's wedding, Hitty's use of the term 'Dowager' proudly states her status as a respectable, elderly, widowed woman, now with a married daughter.[2] This letter insinuates Hitty's awareness of distinct generational circles and that just as her daughter now entered a new phase of life, she too was transitioning into a different life stage: old age.[3] Here, Hitty situated herself here as part of a group of 'Dowagers' who avoided the dancing, which was for the 'young' but played cards instead, suggesting that she considered herself too old for dancing.[4] These hints that frequented Hitty's letters to her daughter across the first third of the nineteenth-century show that she wanted Bess to be aware of her ageing status and potentially her need for emotional and even physical or financial support in the future. According to eighteenth-century literature and societal expectations, it would soon be time to begin to repay her mother for her years of anxiety-driven care and dedication, though full care was not expected until the final stage of 'decrepitude'.[5]

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[1] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], Mehitabel Canning to Elizabeth Canning, December 16th 1805.
[2] Oxford University Press, 'dowager, n.' *OED Online*, (2023) [Accessed 12/04/2023], https://www-oed-com.bathspa.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/57174?rskey=vaP9az&result=1&isAdvanced=false; Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, Vol I (London: W. Strahan, J. and F. Rivington; J. Hinton, 1770), p. 315.
[3] Susannah R. Ottoway notes that generations related to each other far more than with other generations. See Susannah R. Ottaway, ed., *The History of Old Age in England, 1600-1800: Intergenerational Relations in the Eighteenth-Century*, Vol. IV (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), p. vii.
[4] Oxford University Press, 'dowager, n.'; Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, Vol I, p. 315.
[5] See Ottaway, *The History of Old Age in England*, esp .pp. vii-viii, 1-6.

According to Devoney Looser, in the long eighteenth century, one reached old age if they 'lived beyond age 55 or 60'.[6] Similarly, Susannah R. Ottoway suggests that 'the age of sixty' was considered old age, though health and appearance also factored into whether someone was considered old. At 56 and 58 respectively by 1805, both Hitty and Mary Anne had reached the lower end of this bracket. Moreover, Mary Anne, having lived a hardened life, was already considered aged by contemporaries such as Eliza Sheridan, due to her 'vices', in letters as early as the late 1780s. Mary Anne would have only been in her late thirties, so ageing was also based on appearance as well as age.[7]

This chapter will centre around the anxieties of old age and ageing, and how and to whom they were expressed. This generational shift, from youth to adulthood and adulthood to old age, saw anxieties both change and remain constant. In particular, the Canning letters demonstrate how letters were an important lifeline for those ageing to remain a central and useful part of their family networks, and their fears when health, relationships and other circumstances threatened the ability to correspond. Anxieties for the ageing in the Canning letters centred around care, loneliness, and usefulness. Firstly, I examine care and provision in old age, and the generational expectations surround this as well as around the ageing and independence. Secondly, the chapter considers usefulness as a point of anxiety, and how ageing mothers could be important and useful members of the family. Finally, I explore the overarching anxiety of loneliness, to discuss how anxiety was utilised in this life stage as a language of loneliness as well as continuing as a language of care and love. This section also looks at how health threatened letter writing and that important communication medium

[6] Devoney Looser, *Women Writers and Old Age in Great Britain, 1750-1850* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2008), p. 4.
[7] BRO, fl1536-1572, Elizabeth Sheridan to Mehitabel Canning, 1789.

between the ageing and their families. The chapter determines that the letter was an important vehicle for those reaching old age, to remain active members of the family, to stave off loneliness and reassure family of their own health. It reveals new and continuing worries, nuancing our understandings of intergenerational relationships. It also builds on the previous chapters in this thesis to consider how familial relationships developed, or indeed, stayed the same, as the individuals aged.

Surprisingly for a stage in the life cycle, relatively little research has been conducted on ageing and old age in eighteenth-century Britain. Ottoway's body of work remains the most prominent study of old age. She argues for the value of considering old age as it reveals the workings of intergenerational relationships and nuances understandings of family, community and gender.[8] This thesis builds on her observations that long eighteenth-century society placed emphasis on those ageing being useful to their families and society and that they should retain their independence for as long as possible, by focusing on the anxieties of these aspects of ageing in the period.[9]

Other work on ageing, such as Barbara Crosbie's research on intergenerational relationships, also influence my approach to discuss intergenerational familial relationships. Whilst Crosbie uses various generations to understand the differences and relationships which build and change over the mid-eighteenth century, this work considers these relationships through a microstudy considering anxieties of ageing and changing relationships. Growing old was an anxious time, not just for the individual but also their

[8] Susannah R. Ottoway, *The Decline of Life: Old Age in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), Conclusion.
[9] See Ottoway, *The Decline of Life*, Introduction.

family and wider society, specifically around the notion of care. This is evident in doctrines stating that the aged should remain independent for as long as possible and the instilling in children of their duty to aid their ageing parents, when they were no longer able to support themselves.[10] This context is important for understanding the potential motivations of Hitty and Mary Anne within the correspondences.

The chapter also considers the anxiety of loneliness. Fay Bound Alberti argues that loneliness did not take on its contemporary meaning until the early nineteenth-century.[11] The Canning letters evidence notions of loneliness in exactly this period: the period where Hitty and Mary Anne began to experience old age, a period associated with loneliness in the modern era. Both widowed, neither had the comfort of marriage and a companion into old age. They were alone. Importantly, their letters do not simply echo notions of being alone but notions of loneliness, a need to connect and reach out to escape potential melancholy, despair, or unwanted solitude. There was an anxiety to avoid loneliness and this chapter focuses in on this in connection with old age.

In the Canning correspondence, there are fewer regular letters surviving from the nineteenth century, compared to those from the eighteenth, a likely result of Bess's marriage and lack of time to converse with her mother through paper and ink. There is an increase in the survival of letters that Hitty wrote to her sons, most notably a collection from 1809 to 1815 to her son, Stratford, who was posted in Constantinople and later Switzerland. These provide an insight into how a network of letters conveyed information to different family members. Conversely, most of Mary Anne's surviving letters, totalling

[10] *Ibid*, pp. 2,9,29.
[11] Fay Bound Alberti, *A Biography of Loneliness: The History of an Emotion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 16, 21, 70, 194.

seven, are from this period, suggesting their importance or significance for George as they, out of the hundreds Mary Anne sent to him, have been retained. However, as Ottaway argues, though experiences and expectations of ageing would be highly influenced by societal attitudes towards it, individuals experienced growing old differently and so no two experiences can account for a "typical" experience.[12] Indeed, as this chapter will show, individual circumstances, behaviours and relationships characterised the experiences of growing old. Whilst smaller, the archive is still a rich source for discussions of later life for these Georgian women and their families.

The Anxiety of Care and Provision

Upon entering old age, the parent/child relationship, nurtured from birth, began to shift from the parent taking care of the child to the child taking care of the parent. *The Female Aegis; Or the Duties of Women*, 1798, paints an idealised portrait of the development of the mother/child relationship when the mother reached old age. It notes that 'when years have put a period to authority and submission; parental solicitude, filial reverence and mutual affection survive'. The mother then may 'justly hope' that her children will 'delight to smooth the path of her latter days'.[13] In other words the anonymous author suggests that if parents exercise authority but in a loving, friendly manner then her children will give her the respect, love and support in her old age. However, as Ottoway rightly argues, it would be simplistic to state that 'adult children nurtured their ageing parents'.[14] Indeed, some parents, such as Mary Anne, had fraught relationships with their children. Mary Anne's

[12] Ottaway, *The Decline of Life*, p. 4.
[13] Anon, *The Female Aegis, or The Duties of Women from Childhood to Old Age and In Most Situations of Life, Exemplified* (London: Sampson Low, 1798), p. 161. See also Ottaway, *The History of Old Age in England,* p. 62.
[14] Ottoway, *The Decline of Life*, p. 1.

letters depict more anxiety over her need for care and provision than Hitty's do, as Hitty's relationship with her children was more stable. As both this section and the rest of the chapter develops, a more nuanced picture will emerge, showing how both parents and children looked after and worried about each other, in different ways, and that it could mark a fundamental shift in parent/child relationships.

This ideal of children beginning to take care of parents becomes especially important in later life when certain anxieties become more acute. One such anxiety was money, connected to the societal ideal that the aged remained financially and physically independent.[15] It was a marker of their duty to contribute to society whilst not becoming a burden.[16] In her older age, Hitty had less money to live off than she did when her husband was alive, or in the early days of her widowhood, having spent it on her children's education and prospects. For the longer one lived, the more money one required to keep up living standards. The letters detail how Hitty took cheaper, less permanent, lodgings by 1805, and in doing so, reduced the number of household staff and tried to live a more economic life.

Early indications of desire to save money come from 1805. Aside her note that she only had one servant with her, another instance concerned 'saving Postage' as evidenced in a letter from July 1805.[17] Hitty was 'out of Town, and G[eorge] C[anning]-'s motions so uncertain' and so Hitty asked her daughter to 'make some arrangement about it, if you can'.[18] By 1805, George Canning was an MP and able to obtain a frank, or free postage, which was a privilege of his position but according to this letter, a free frank from George looked

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[15] *Ibid*, pp.1-2, 119-120.
[16] Ottaway, *The History of Old Age in England,* p. vii.
[17] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], Mehitabel Canning to Elizabeth Canning, 1805.
[18] *Ibid*, July 13th 1805.

unlikely. Whilst this exchange may seem anxiety free, it details underlying concerns about money, to the point that Hitty openly asks for assistance. Though asking for franks from relatives and friends was not uncommon, Hitty appeared to be actively searching for a frank to save money.[19] For unlike her letters to her daughter in the 1780s and 1790s, she went beyond just trying to secure a frank from George for convenience, to asking her daughter to help her secure one. This is further compounded by the 1805 letters marking the beginning of Hitty's use of cross writing.[20] In this passage, Hitty does not appear to express shame in asking for help, likely because she is not asking for direct financial assistance in the form of money, but these 1805 letters do indicate her financial savings in terms of letter writing, as well as household affairs.

Later letters more openly request financial assistance. Hitty's letter to her son, Stratford, in 1815, whilst he was posted overseas as a diplomat, states that she was 'well satisfied with my present lot, and have no anxiety about the future' however, she had ' no objection however, to an increase of the advantages I now enjoy, or to their being rendered more secure, if practicable'.[21] Whilst Hitty's words say she had no anxiety, that she felt the need to write that she would have 'no objection' to more secure circumstances suggests this is not quite true. Hitty distinguishes a difference between satisfaction and comfort, suggesting that she had not anxieties due to a satisfactory position but that it did not necessarily mean she was comfortable or entirely content. Hitty's letters in the collection do not suggest that she was a greedy woman but do show her to be a proud one and it could be that her

[19] See Alvin F. Harlow, *Old Post Bags* (London: D. Appleton and Company, 1928), especially Chapter XIX: The Era of Cheaper Postage.
[20] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], Mehitabel Canning to Elizabeth Canning, July 13th 1805. Hitty used cross writing frequently in her letters from 1805-1820.
[21] BRO, fl2111-2308, Mehitabel Canning to Stratford Canning, March 1815.

reduced circumstances were a source of discomfort. That she writes this to her youngest son is telling as he is the most financially successful of her male children in 1815 and in the best position to potentially aid his mother.

In her final years, particularly in 1827, Hitty's letters infrequently mention her need for financial assistance to cover her bills. She presented it as a 'Secret' to her daughter, Bess, that she had not '2 in my Coffers – and that without help by next Saturday, I shall not have wherewithal to pay my bills on Monday - £10 - would bring me to 3rd or 4th Sep^{t} [so would last just under a month] can you supply my wants, without exposing my poverty to G:H.B. [Bess's husband]'.[22] Here, Hitty suggests that she wanted Bess to provide her with money without revealing to her husband Hitty's financial woes, suggesting both pride but also a sense of shame. It is clear by this point in her life that Hitty was becoming more financially dependent on her children and relying on their dutiful, loving bonds to remain independent. For here, it is less anxiety regarding her finances and anxiety regarding her situation being revealed which dominate the financial aspects of Hitty's final letters.

Hitty also turned her frugality into saving money for her children, as well as herself. One letter from 1805 discusses Bess's travel options, sharing that 'A Chaise from London, including expences on the Road is £7 – a place in Stage one guinea – therefore to convey the two Gentlemen in a Chaise with you, doubles their expences – you must make two days of it'.[23] Hitty expressed her discomfort with the financial costs as she wrote that she wished 'some plan could be thought of less expensive, and that would not expose you to injury or inconvenience'.[24] Whilst it was Bess's travel plans, Hitty makes it clear that she would 'pay a

[22] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], Mehitabel Canning to Elizabeth Barnett, August 8th 1827.
[23] *Ibid*, July 13th 1805.
[24] *Ibid*, July 13th 1805.

Poster', likely referring to a post-chaise, if her brother Henry could come with Bess, as 'that will certainly be the most saving plan'.[25] Here, the letter is shown to be an important place of financial negotiation, where savings with other family members could be arranged and also showed how parents still had a role to play in their children's financial concerns. Whilst letters allowed ageing mothers to subtly remind their children of their own financial worries, they also acted as spaces for those same mothers to pass on their knowledge of savings and frugality. The letter both reinforces societal expectations of children taking care of parents in their elder years whilst also asserting the helpfulness and wisdom of parents in the everyday financial concerns of their children.

George Canning too made efforts to provide for his mother, and indeed his extended family. As seen in Chapter Four, from the age of sixteen, George felt shame towards his actress mother, keeping her hidden from anyone outside of his family. He saw her as a liability to his new foundling career and his mother noted his change in perception as 'a sort of regret appeared at my precise situation in the world' in his letters to her.[26] Despite this, he remained anxious about his mother's financial situation and continued to fulfil his duty to rescue her 'from a line of life, in which you have endured so much'.[27] This conflicted position dictated many of George's decisions regarding his mother, such as his outburst in the very same letter at Mary Anne's deliberation on whether to put his half-sister, Mary, onto the stage:

> For God's sake, for her sake and your own, do not permit a thought of theatrical attachments to take root in her breast'.[28]

[25] *Ibid*, July 23rd 1805.
[26] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/54, Mary Anne Hunn to George Canning, January 27th 1803, p. 126.
[27] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/5, George Canning to Mary Anne Canning, June 28th 1788.
[28] *Ibid*, June 28th 1788.

The conflict of care and duty are scattered across this letter, with George's concern for his sibling's future prospects outweighing any financial benefits her taking to the stage could provide. Indeed, he did not mention this in his letter, writing only what reads as a demand to his mother. Indeed, no thought of the delights of the stage, or the excitement or interest which Mary Anne and Mary might have had, appear in the surviving letters, suggesting this was not considered.

This mixture of shame and frustration and a sense of duty and responsibility are seen most acutely in George's provision for Mary Anne in 1797, a few years after he entered parliament. Whilst Chapter Four discussed George's desires to provide for his mother, once he was able to provide assistance, George expected a level of control. In an earlier letter from 1791, George noted that 'I have no right to advise [on the theatre], where I cannot assist' though the letter was accompanied by 100 guineas, a suggestion that George saw his financial assistance towards his mother as his means of bending her to his will.[29] Indeed, when Mary Anne still went to Plymouth after accepting the 100 guineas but ignoring George's advice, he wrote a more strongly worded letter stating his views on the theatre, Mary Anne's daughter's future prospects with a mother on the stage, and the harm it could cause his own prospects. In 1791 Mary Anne, turned to another source of income, selling eye ointment, upon which George congratulated her. Thus, there is a correlation between George financing his mother and his expectations of compliance and obedience to his wishes.

[29] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/6, George Canning to Mary Anne Canning June 8th 1791.

This is also seen in his Totteridge plan, where he located a house for his mother, upon earning the role of receiver-general of the Alienation Office, with an income of around £500 a year.[30] Mary Anne reflected that she did everything that George told her to do 'I took a lodging…waited your own appointment…'.[31] She also recounted several times that she told Mr Borrowes of 'my fears' that 'the scale was too large – however, I would try ever proper means to make it do what we all wish'd'.[32] Indeed, despite George paying for the rent and general housekeeping, Mary Anne was unable to sustain the appearances required for a genteel woman in such a society.[33] However, it was not just George's money that elicited compliance, for George argued that he would be able to visit his mother, just like he visited his Aunt Hitty at Wanstead. Thus, George also emotionally manipulated his mother into obedience, appearing to grant her what she desired. However, Mary Anne noted that this 'sentiment', the only one which would have made the situation bearable, was 'destroyed' as George was 'not at liberty to spend even a few hours' with his mother.[34] Mary Anne noted her 'anxiety' after this plan that George would 'send me away again', suggesting that she saw the Totteridge plan as George's way of keeping his mother at a distance.[35] The 'experiment' failed and George ended up organising a legal separation for his mother and Mr Hunn, and expressed his desire for her to leave London. This episode demonstrates that George's care shone through his letters but so did his opinions and values and with financial and emotional care could come demands, control and conditions, which in George's case were based on his anxieties regarding his reputation and his future. George and Mary

[30] Julian Crowe, *George Canning is my Son* (London: Unbound, 2021), p. 253.
[31] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/54, Mary Anne Hunn to George Canning, January 27th 1803, p. 139.
[32] *Ibid*, pp. 140-143.
[33] Crowe, *George Canning is my Son*, pp. 253-254; BL, Add MS89143/3/1/54, Mary Anne Hunn to George Canning, January 27th 1803, p. 139-43.
[34] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/54, Mary Anne Hunn to George Canning, January 27th 1803, pp. 142-143.
[35] *Ibid*, p. 143.

Anne's letters reveal a power struggle based on reputation, finances, and compliance, as each battled to negotiate their relationship to alleviate their own, opposite, concerns.

Both the sets of Canning letters show a picture which is more complicated and nuanced than children simply taking care of their parents. Letters were key mediators of financial difficulties, used to arrange plans and share financial information with specific parties. They were also a means of control, to assist in the exchange of money for obedience, and children could manipulate their parent's need for assistance for their own gain. At the centre of these exchanges were wider anxieties about reputation, comfort, and the future, determining the importance of context for the nuances of care and provision for ageing parents.

Usefulness in Old Age: Never-ending Parental Anxiety

Whilst the older generation had their own concerns about growing old, it did not mean that they did not worry themselves over others, particularly their children. Despite them now being adults, the Canning letters echo other family archival sources in demonstrating continued concern over the futures of their offspring.[36] These feelings stemmed from a desire to see children independent to alleviate the anxieties of potential parental death, secure provision for parents in their old age and indulge in parental pride.[37] This section demonstrates that although Hitty was on the verge of becoming a grandmother, her anxiety for her children never wavered throughout her life. Similarly, Mary Anne showed parental concern and pride in George, trying to remain a useful part of his life. It shows how

[36] See Elizabeth Foyster, 'Parenting was for Life, not Just for Childhood: The Role of Parents in the Married Lives of their Children in Early Modern England', *History*, 86.283 (July 2001), pp. 313-327.
[37] Dr John Gregory, *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (Ludlow: H. Procter, 1801), pp .iii-v.

parenting did not stop when children grew up and moved away from home. Anxiety was a lifelong commitment for the eighteenth-century parent, as it is today and provided ageing parents with an important familial role, guiding their children in early adulthood.

The relationship between parents and children changed as the children grew up, moved away from the family home and became parents themselves. Thomas Percival, author of *A Father's Instructions* in 1790, wrote another volume 'adapted, I trust, to the maturity of years and knowledge which most of you have attained. It comprehends not the lessons of authority, but the communications of friendship'.[38] This again communicates the desire for parents to be friends with their children, important for their relationship in parental old age. However, Percival continues, stating that this newer volume is 'a further memorial of my love, and of my unabating solicitude to promote your intellectual, moral, and religious improvement', demonstrating that the duties, and anxieties, of a parent did not dissipate but changed as children grew older.[39] With the family away more permanently from the familial home, epistolary communication was vital in alleviating anxieties.

Primary concerns for parents at this later stage of parenting centred around the careers and marriage prospects of their children. Except for her two youngest sons, none of Hitty's children were in stable careers until well into their adult lives. None married young, with Bess marrying first in 1805, at the mature age of twenty-nine. Both Hitty's eldest two sons turned their hand to several occupations until they settled down in the 1820s, when Hitty was in her mid-seventies. As a mother, with a diminishing income, it is unsurprising that this

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[38] Thomas Percival, *A Father's Instructions, Adapted to Different Points of Life, from Youth to Maturity* (Bath: Richard Cruttwell, 1790), p. 249.
[39] Percival, *A Father's Instructions*, p. 249.

led to anxieties being shared across correspondences and displays how parental anxiety was a lifelong life stage.

Both Hal and William's situations appear to be important topics of Hitty's letters to her youngest son, Stratford, as she updated him with the latest news from home. That she chose to discuss her concerns over her other sons' futures with him suggests that she relied on Stratford's success as a chance to secure positions, favours, money, and advice for her other offspring. Her anxious language is subtly persuasive, desirous for her youngest son to aid his brothers in the game of life.

Hitty's eldest son, Henry, known as Harry or Hal, she described as particularly morose in her letters. As eldest son, there were likely expectations for him to take on the mantle of head of the family, to look after his mother and sister. Whilst he was settled having taken over his father's role in the Bank Borrowes, Canning and French, its failure in 1812 caused him to lose everything and he returned to living with his mother. Men were seen to have the predominant role in patriarchal societies, yet this came with significant pressures and burdens. By the early nineteenth-century, there was continued expectation for middle-class, and upper-class men with an occupation, to be the main breadwinners and heads of their own households, often married with families, to achieve full masculine identities.[40] This coincided with what Joanne Bailey has argued as the increased importance of the role of the tender father, to notions of manhood and masculine ideals.[41] Similarly, Phillip Carter argues

[40] Henry French and Mark Rothery, *Man's Estate: Landed Gentry Masculinities, 1660-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 191-192; See also Henry French and Mark Rothery, 'Male Anxiety and the Younger Sons of the Landed Gentry, 1700-1900', *The Historical Journal,* 62.3 (2019), pp. 967-996.
[41] Joanne Bailey, '"A Very Sensible Man": Imagining Fatherhood in England, c.1750-1830', *History*, 95.3 (July 2010), pp. 267-292, pp.270-271, 274-280, 283-284.

that notions of virtuous manhood were bound with ideas of fatherhood and the home.[42] The tender father was a man who possessed emotional availability, gentleness, and sensitivity, deriving from the discourse of sensibility emerging after 1750.[43] Importantly, Leonore Davidoff argues that a man's 'sense of self' derived from his 'exercise of authority over women and children', which came from his position as husband and father.[44] This position demonstrated stability, independence, authority and strength, all important masculine traits of the long eighteenth century.[45] Having neither his own home or family, Hal was unable to attain this full masculine status. In this sense, he had lost his sense of self.

Such failures happened and were recorded across letters in the period but what is interesting is that it is Hitty's voice that tells Hal's story. Hitty's letters evidence how ageing parents still played a significant and crucial role in family dynamics, reflecting the societal rhetoric that the aged should make themselves useful.[46] Writing these letters to Stratford, who was working as a diplomat on the Continent, could be to solicit advice or contacts for Hal, especially due to the language and expressions Hitty used to describe his situation. Whilst letters between Hal and Stratford could have existed, Hal's was recorded in family letters as a notoriously poor correspondent and likely relied on his mother and sister to share news by letter.[47] That this is the case typified Hitty's sense of parental authority over her son, even when he was forty years old. It also further emphasises Hal's lack of authority

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[42] Phillip Carter, *Men and the Emergency of Polite Society, Britain 1660-1800* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2000), p. 99.
[43] Bailey, 'A Very Sensible Man', p. 271; Joanne Bailey, *Parenting in England, 1760-1830: Emotion, Identity and Generation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 275.
[44] Leonore Davidoff, *The Family Story: Blood, Contract, and Intimacy, 1830-1960* (London: Longman, 1999), pp. 156-157.
[45] French and Rothery, *A Man's Place,* Introduction, pp. 197-198; Matthew McCormack, *The Independent Man: Citizenship and Gender Politics in Georgian England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), esp. Introduction.
[46] Ottoway, *The Decline of Life*, esp. Introduction.
[47] Across the entire letter collection, Hitty, Bess and George note Hal's poor record of corresponding.

within familial circles. She wrote that Hal 'does not feel that perfect content, that I do' as he is unsure how to 'get on'.[48] It is likely that Hal's discontentment stemmed from his failure of fulfilling masculine ideals likely embedded into his elite education, such as independence and self-government, and through his family. Like his cousin George felt in his youth, there was pressure as the oldest son to succeed, to assert financial independence and, according to Hitty, Hal was anxious and uncertain as to how to regain his standing. This section of the correspondence reveals some of the nuances of intergenerational and gendered ideals and expectations. Hitty, as an ageing widow of sixty-six, is content with less money and a more simplistic lifestyle. This is juxtaposed with Harry, who, at forty, would have been expected to have an established career and be considering marriage to fulfil expectations of adulthood in the early nineteenth century.[49]

Yet Hitty framed her account of Hal to portray him in a positive light, in relation to masculine ideals of the early nineteenth century. She suggested that he has motivation to succeed, to improve and take opportunities if they arose, expressing that Hal was not idle or lazy but simply not 'basking in the sun-shine of fortune'. Indeed, Hitty believed that Hal 'fe[lt] his situation more' because 'so many of his contemporaries' in their neighbourhood were successful.[50] Hitty continued her letter stating that 'he often asks, how he is to get on? In what quarter is he to meet with preferment? Whose interest he can solicit?' [51] These questions communicate uncertainty about Hal's prospects, prospects which Hitty admits she

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[48] BRO, fl2111-2308, Mehitabel Canning to Stratford Canning, May 23rd 1815.
[49] See Bailey, 'A Very Sensible Man', p. 268; McCormack, *The Independent Man*, pp. 12-13, 16-19, 22-23, 26-28, 166-168; John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 4, 6-7, 13, 113.
[50] BRO fl2111-2308, Mehitabel Canning to Stratford Canning, March 1815.
[51] *Ibid*, March 1815.

cannot advise on except to ‘preach patience’.[52] Perhaps she wanted Stratford to consider answers to these questions, to offer solutions that Hal could follow up. For Hitty was proving her usefulness in negotiating between and for her children through her correspondence.

This anxious language is used persuasively to solicit help and advice. Hitty herself expressed her own concerns for Hal to Stratford, layering the persuasive passage with a desire for Stratford to help alleviate her own anxieties. She wrote: ‘You may be sure, I do all I can, to keep up his spirits, but I never saw a man who requires so much encouragement, or who thinks so humbly of himself, and yet, who is so much liked by every body’.[53] There is a sense of resignation, that Hitty was unable to even ‘keep up his spirits’ due to his ‘unnatural’ situation through a lack of employment. As Hitty herself admitted she can do nothing to aid Hal, she utilised her correspondence to seek advice, favours and contacts from her successful son, a son who had contacts with many in the government offices. In this example, the language of anxiety expresses Hitty’s love for her son but also appeals to Stratford’s love and duty towards his mother and brother. Despite ageing relations, this sense of familial love and duty and the role of anxious parent transcends life stages. It also shows the importance of elder relatives in the dynamics of the family.

Another son, William, also had a rocky career path but Hitty’s letters share how career successes could alleviate underlying concerns. Hitty wrote to his younger brother, Stratford of her relief at a situation as a tutor for William, in 1809:

[52] *Ibid*, March 1815.
[53] *Ibid*, March 1815.

> a very unexpected and most welcome piece of intelligence, which itself alone, was sufficient to have set my Heart a dancing and my eyes a watering; namely of something having at last turned up, in favour of dear William, which through but temporary, is both agreeable and profitable, and may be productive of future and permanent advantage…[54]

Hitty used bodily terms to communicate the strength of her feelings. That her 'Heart' was 'a dancing' suggests her pleasure stems from love and affection. There is an implication that a weight has been lifted or strength regained as Hitty, at the age of sixty, uses the vigorous term 'dancing'. That her 'eyes' were 'a watering' also communicates relief, that sense of release. This had been a long road for William and his career and Hitty's reaction expresses the anxiety that had built up which had now been lifted. So much so, that she wrote that 'however, well pleased I was to hear of the success of your mission, my dear Stratford, I am not sure that this little domestic event did not afford me one greater degree of satisfaction'.[55]

The importance of this position for William's prospects is emphasised in Hitty's next letter to Stratford, almost a month later. Whilst she shared the good news that William's employer, Lord Cremorne, 'took every opportunity of sounding his praises', Hitty added a cautionary note that 'it is of great consequence that he should like him'.[56] Whilst she did not elaborate, there is a lot unspoken of the journey William had gone through to get this position in such a statement,. There is also a sense of the magnitude of this opportunity and Hitty's statement implies an anxiety as to whether this opportunity will finally set William on a career path.

[54] BRO, fl2111-2308, Mehitabel Canning to Stratford Canning, March 17th 1809.
[55] *Ibid*, March 17th 1809.
[56] *Ibid*, April 10th 1809.

Hitty's letters to her sons suggest a sense of purpose. In the eighteenth century, the aged were expected to remain useful members of society, as espoused in didactic literature. Hitty's letters function as one means of her complying with that ideal by aiding her family. In this way, she remained an important, active family member in sorting out the anxieties and misfortunes of her family, as well as being a central point of contact for news. This does not only evidence the endurance of parental anxiety but also how expressions of anxiety as desire and love continue to be utilised to maintain familial ties at this later stage of life.

Usefulness: The Anxieties of Grandparents

Parents were rewarded for their anxieties with parental pride. *The Parental Monitor* suggests there is no 'higher gratification than what arose from performing the anxious, but at the same time, the delightful duties' of parenthood.[57] When children married and became parents, familial roles shifted. Daughters became mothers, sons became fathers, mothers became grandmothers and fathers became grandfathers. Whilst there is no anxiety exhibited in the letters about becoming a grandmother, in contrast to hopes and fears of become a parent, there is evidence of anxiety in cementing new familial roles.

Grandparents were seen to dote on their grandchildren. Indeed, Hitty Canning wrote delightedly to her son Stratford in 1809 about Bess's daughter:

> [the] little girl is delightful, and grows every day more entertaining. She has excellent dispositions, and uncommon sharpness and observation. She is the picture of health and good humour... Her dear mother is looking uncommonly well, and seems as truly happy and contented as her warmest friend could wish her'.[58]

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[57] Mrs Bonhote, *The Parental Monitor*, 3rd Ed. (London: William Lane, 1796), pp. vi-vii.
[58] BRO, fl2111-2308, Mehitabel Canning to Stratford Canning, January 29th 1809.

The little girl, Harriet, developed an epistolary relationship with Hitty in the early nineteenth century, when Hitty was firmly in her twilight years. Through their correspondence, Hitty demonstrates her usefulness in advising the next generation and performing the ideals of the aged in eighteenth-century society.

The role of grandparents was littered through didactic literature, mostly through texts for the elderly on how to instruct the young, clearly defining and cementing a social and familial role for the grandparent within familial circles.[59] It outlined how this newly prominent familial identity was 'active' and 'useful', a central part of the family through their experience, wisdom, and advice.[60] Hitty's letters to her granddaughter functioned as a space for her to display her usefulness to her family and try to fulfil the ideals of her new identity as a grandmother. They also evidence compliance with the values that didactic literature espoused, literature which hints at the anxieties of providing for an elderly population who were not contributing to society.

A two-way discourse is at play in these letters. Through the provision of experience and resources, those of old age could expect 'respect and emotional comfort'.[61] Whilst Hitty's letter to Harriet from 1817, when she was eleven, appears similar to Hitty's advice filled letters to her daughter in the 1790s, there is a notable absence of that parental anxiety which denoted the care and devotion of a mother to her child. However, they are no less filled with advice. After opening with a hope that 'dearest mamma' would not be

[59] Ottoway, *The History of Old Age*, p. viii.
[60] *Ibid*, p.1.
[61] *Ibid*, p. vii.

'displeased' that the weekly letter was written to her daughter, Hitty first discussed 'the comfort and happiness of religious belief, and a firm reliance on providence' to help her granddaughter face 'all the Trials of this Life'.[62] There is a softer tone to Hitty's advice, less authoritative and more wizened, alongside pride and 'great pleasure' in Harriet's attention to her duty at Church, suggesting that either she has received favourable reports or Hitty has been observing Harriet's development.

Hitty also provides a different perspective on the mother and child teaching dynamic. Whilst Hitty showed the same pleasure in Harriet and her 'dear sister's eagerness to learn', she emphasised it is the mother's attentiveness and devotion to her children's studies that deserves diligence and willingness from her pupils. For these were the rewards for a mother's 'sacrifice not only of [her] time, but [her] own pursuits, and amusements to the Toil of instructing the infant mind'.[63] Hitty used her letters to install behaviours such as diligence, attentiveness, and respect for her mother in her granddaughter, speaking less from a place of authority but from experience and love. This is seen through her use of the softer 'my dear Children', the more informal 'mamma' and exhaulting their achievements. To Harriet particularly, she used the letter to give Harriet the responsibility to educate her younger siblings in these lessons and to aid her 'mamma' 'by talking gently to your sisters, and shewing them how best to please mamma, and on all occasions setting them a good example…'[64] Through this, Hitty was also continuing to attend to Bess's needs, as well as advising Harriet, playing an important role in family dynamics.

[62] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], Mehitabel Canning to Harriet Barnett, November 4th 1817.
[63] *Ibid*, November 4th 1817.
[64] *Ibid*, November 4th 1817.

Hitty's letters notably are entirely dedicated to advice and maintaining loving relations between herself and Harriet, with far less news, gossip and more moralistic education, likely influenced by the rise of Evangelicalism. There is far more focus on Harriet's moral behaviour than in Hitty's letters to her daughter thirty years prior, suggesting both a change of focus in education and perhaps Hitty's role as grandmother in passing on behaviours and wise advice rather than teach French, household affairs and history as her letters to her own daughter display. Grandparents then, played an important part in socialising and educating their grandchildren but from a place of love and advice rather than authority and anxiety. This may be framed in a manner to not usurp the authority of the parent, 'so as to contradict their own parents in the management of them'.[65] Hitty's letters to her grandchild, and indeed her children as discussed earlier in the chapter, demonstrate her desire for emotional connection but also this 'emotional comfort' which likely links to the avoidance of loneliness in the period and an expectation that 'kin and community' would look after the emotional as well as physical aspects linked to old age.

Mary Anne's relationship with her grandchildren, born in the 1800s at a similar time to Hitty's, was non-existent, providing an important insight into the importance of the role of grandmother to both Mary Anne herself, and to women in general as they reached old age. As seen in Hitty's relationship with her granddaughter, there appears to be a mutually beneficial emotional relationship between grandparents and grandchildren, one providing emotional comfort and the other as a source of advice and wisdom. In being denied access

[65] Ottoway, *The History of Old Age*, p. 55.

to her grandchildren, in both a physical and emotional space, Mary Anne's letter-memoir suggests that she lost an important sense of self-identity in her elder years.

According to Fox, the paternal grandmother's role was less certain than that of the maternal grandmother, as the emotional connection between sons and mothers was thought to be less intimate. [66] This meant that they were less likely to be present at the birth and share their emotions at the arrival of the infant within the birthing chamber community.[67] However, paternal grandparents were still involved in their grandchildren's upbringing, often providing gifts, sending congratulatory letters, and undertaking the role of advisor and loving grandparent which Hitty's letters to her grandchild, Harriet, encapsulate. It is thus not unreasonable that Mary Anne wished to have an emotional relationship with her grandchildren.

Mary Anne's letter-memoir in 1803 was prompted by George's denial to let her see her grandchildren. In doing so, Mary Anne argued that her role as grandmother was one of blood and that it was 'unnatural' for George to keep his children away from her. Mary Anne attemptted to gain power through her emotional display, linguistic prowess and argument for her 'natural' role as George's mother. However, it is George that held the power and the affirmation of Mary Anne's status as his mother in a social context. She did gain agency through her actions, using the letter form, one familiar to her and her relationship with George, to tell her story. Considering this letter is not to be sent, but rather given, it is curious that she decided to write it as a letter, rather than prose or simply telling him. This

[66] Sarah Fox, *Giving Birth in Eighteenth-Century England*, (London: University of London Press, 2022), pp. 138-140, 147-152.
[67] *Ibid*, pp. 138-140, 147-152.

suggests a sense of articulation in letter writing, a process of construction of persuasion and a need to craft a performance. Indeed, Mary Anne's authorship of the novel *The Offspring of Fancy* (1778) suggests she found the letter form a comfortable genre to write in.[68] Here, her motivation was the potential loss of her natural place in George's life as his mother and the grandmother to his children.

Mary Anne's argument then returns to her discourse of natural filial feelings between mother and child. She used this as her main defence against George's 'unnatural' behaviour towards her, intertwining this with her 'ideal mother' qualities to prove that her actions were based on her precarious situation rather than a lack of feeling or neglect, and were done in George's interests rather than her own. This is particularly seen in her emphasis on the 'natural' pains at giving George up for adoption as she had 'to sacrifice my own inclinations for your good' and 'resign my right of Guardianship to your uncles, Paul & Stratford'.[69] The 'soothing' from 'the bitterness of the resignation' only came from 'having performed a duty…for you present and future good'.[70] Mary Anne emphasised that the sacrifice of not raising George was based on strong natural maternal feelings and a duty to provide the best life possible for her son rather than for pursuing her own interests.

Mary Anne also used the 'natural' feelings discourse to shame George and his behaviour towards her. She recollected how she recoiled at George's 'first bitter words I ever had from <u>your</u> pen' which 'excited the first tears that ever blotted <u>your</u> paper!' George had written

[68] See A Lady [Mary Anne Canning], *The Offspring of Fancy, A Novel* (London: J.BEW, 1778).
[69] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/54, Mary Anne Hunn to George Canning, January 27th 1803, pp. 103-104.
[70] *Ibid*, p.107.

that he and his wife were ‘precluded by circumstances from all personal intercourse’ with Mary Anne to which she replied:

> – Oh God humours how far the horrid & unnatural suggestion was from my understanding of any thing it contained! – and how I should have thought that such a translation would have blasphamised your virtue, your purity, your Humanity – your duty – how I should have hated the being who should have tortured it into every such bare and unworthy meaning! Unworthy of the Son I Loved![71]

Mary Anne attacked George’s characteristics here and emphasised how it is he, not she that is not virtuous, not pure, not humane, and not dutiful, by shunning her. She accused George of acting ‘unnaturally’ in his feelings and manner towards her. Her use of the word ‘unnatural’ here does not just state that this behaviour was unnatural for George’s character but that it was also unnatural between a parent and child and that George was going against the natural order.

Mary Anne then brought up the unnaturalness of George’s silence on his marriage. Whilst Hitty was heavily involved with Bess’s marriage prospects, albeit at a distance, Mary Anne was entirely absent from the romantic attachments of her eldest son.[72] Accounting for gendered differences, in that mothers were more likely to be proactive in assisting daughters with marriage prospects, George’s lack of information towards his mother on a pivotal life event is notable, especially when compared to other families letters of a similar station.[73]

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[71] *Ibid*, pp. 136-137
[72] As evinced from the letters between 1798-1800. See BL, Add MS89143/3/1/10; Bl, Add MS89143/3/1/11.
[73] See French and Rothery, *A Man’s Estate*, pp. 191-193; Sally Holloway, *The Game of Love in Georgian England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 13-14.

George allowed Mary Anne no power to aid his search for a wife. Indeed, he presented her as an obstacle to be overcome. Mary Anne was George's biggest anxiety, an ongoing threat to his entry into the public world of politics. According to Crowe, George needed to marry a woman with money. Only then would he be able to afford to climb the ladder in parliament and he saw his mother as a potential threat to this ambition.[74] Having secured Mary Anne a pension, he believed that he had done his duty to provide for her. Upon meeting his future wife, George wrote to Lord Granville's sister, Lady Susan Ryder, that he was impressed by her frank way of discussing things.[75] George's letter to Lady Jane Dundas, suggests that he believed he could be considered a fortune hunter, as Joan was an heiress.[76] George had to convince Joan's family that he loved her sincerely.

In the extensive letter to Lady Jane Dundas, George made it clear that his wife would never mix with his mother. That he placed so much emphasis on this point reveals that his central concern was that Mary Anne, or more specifically her fallen reputation, could be the reason for the rejection of his suit. He assured that 'at no point have I omitted to impress upon her mind' that Mary Anne was not to have a relationship with anyone but him, words carefully chosen to demonstrate both distance from his mother and her behaviour but also his determination to do his filial duties towards her regardless. The letter acts as a reassurance that a connection with him would not damage Joan's reputation. He may have apparently made every effort to 'impress' this upon Mary Anne but George was aware that she was stubborn, resilient, and unpredictable. He words his letter to take the onus away from himself, lest Mary Anne not accept the terms of their relationship, as she had not on several

[74] Crowe, *George Canning is my Son*, p. 271.
[75] BL, Add MS89143/3/3, George Canning to Lady Susan Ryder, August 15th, 24th, 1799.
[76] *Ibid*; Crowe, *George Canning*, pp. 278-280.

occasions previously, most recent being when George told her to leave London in 1798. He also takes care to emphasise that although they were mother and son, 'her lot in life had no connection to mine'.[77] It was choices that separated them and George takes pains to reassure Joan's guardians that 'whatever my feelings of affection and duty towards my Mother may be, I have them at least under such regulation and control, that they can never be productive of inconvenience, or even awkwardness, to any Connexion that I may form'.[78] George insinuated, more boldly than current accounts would suggest, that his mother would present no problem in the issue of his marriage as she was, in some sense, under control. George was conscious that his mother could hinder his proposal so he employed definitive language, as opposed to anxious language to assert the strength of his convictions. Mary Anne would not be a problem.

Mary Anne's feelings on the situation are expressed in her letter-memoir, where she once again turned to maternal language to emphasis her identity as George's mother. She focused on her belief that as his mother she had a right to further information about his marriage whereas, her letter-memoir notes, that she found out about the engagement in early 1800, through newspaper reports. It might have been through the *Whitehall Evening Post* which reported that the engagement took place in February 1800 and was careful to note 'Miss Scott's' familial relationship with 'the Marchioness of Titchfield', her sister.[79] Yet it was not until the 8th May that George finally wrote to his mother with the long-awaited news, first introducing Joan Scott as a 'person who has engrossed my attention' but

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[77] BL, Add MS89143/3/3, George Canning to Lady Jane Dundas, 1799.
[78] *Ibid*, 1799.
[79] 'News', *Whitehall Evening Post*, 8203, February 20th-February 22nd 1800, link-gale-com.bathspa.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/Z2001644533/GDCS?u=bsuc&sid=bookmark-GDCS&xid=e92c275f [Accessed 16 Aug. 2021].

provides very little further information. Indeed, Mary Anne's reference to Joan in her reply, as 'the dear object whom my heart admits to its maternal kindness' shows that George did not even share his fiancée's name.[80] The scant information offered lays out that there would be no relationship between Joan and his mother, and Mary Anne's careful negotiation demonstrates her awareness of this delicate relationship. According to her packet from 1803, Mary Anne was all exultation and joy but quickly addressed the fact that George had been sparing with his information on the union. Three years after the event, her reaction communicated her hurt through sarcasm and passive aggressive statements. There is an acknowledgement that their correspondence had become a cat and mouse affair, as Mary Anne wrote that she was thankful for the 'portion of confidence' in telling her about the impending union, implying that she felt she was entitled to far more than she received. This is compounded by adding that she would wait patiently until his 'unabated love (for I love that word better than duty)' would persuade him to give further particulars.[81] Mary Anne's response shows that care needed to be taken for her anxieties to be alleviated and for their emotional distance to not increase further. Her juxtaposition of love and duty here echoes the tensions within their relationship between love and duty to one another. Mary Anne used this to imply that George did not love her if he did not provide further information on his upcoming union, using the language of filial love as a weapon against him. She wanted to make her part of his life.

These letters between George and Mary Anne wrestle with the concept of familial love between mother and son and prove that close blood relations were not automatically

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[80] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/54, Mary Anne Hunn to George Canning, January 27th 1803, p. 144.
[81] *Ibid*, p. 144.

entitled to intimate details but had to earn them through trust. They further complicate the notion that children should look after their elderly parents, not just financially but through allowing them to remain socially useful to their families. Whilst George remained dutiful towards his mother, making sure she did not suffer without physical comforts, he found it much more difficult to resolve the tensions of him providing her emotional comfort to which she believed herself entitled. These letters sent a clear signal to Mary Anne that she was no longer part of George's public or personal life, only a private one between them both. Mary Anne's main argument was that it was against nature itself to prevent her from being part of George's family. We know that George upheld some aspect of the 'filial duty' and 'natural feelings' towards his mother, through his actions of visiting her in private and giving her an annuity until her death. Therefore, Mary Anne used this to argue she:

> has still the claim, the unabrogated claim of nature – she makes that claim; and offers herself as Godmother…the claim lay dormant then, but was not cancelled – it never can, but by death -another child is born - & christened; that wretched, excluded mother still exists and hears of it - by the way – these two – Oh God my brain will split if I pursue the subject – these two Grandsons, spend months within a mile or two of this Grandmother, without an apology being thought necessary, and carried away to their enobled relatives without being permitted to see or be to seen by her!...tell me whether it is conduct worthy of yourself then![82]

Mary Anne's argument here reads as a need for the social and emotional identity of grandmother, not just a biological one and an anxiety that she would be denied this. She argued that nature and familial relationships cannot be altered: no matter George's feelings towards his mother, she will always be the grandmother of his children and has a natural right to fulfil that familial role. Mary Anne even embodied her pain, noting that her 'brain

[82] *Ibid*, pp. 155-156.

will split', to demonstrate the strength of her feelings and her desire to be a useful and loving grandparent and mother.

The use of the 'natural feelings' discourse highlights the complexities and anxieties over personal reputation and maternal identity. Mary Anne chose the identity of mother over her own reputation and her letter is both a defence of this decision and her attempt to re-establish it fully with George, to place her back into his family as his mother and grandmother to his children, which she argues is her 'natural' right. By doing this, Mary Anne revealed her anxiety over losing her identity as 'George's mother' through George being fed lies and not understanding the complexities of the challenges she has faced as his mother. It is this turmoil and anxiety over reputation and identity that has led George to be 'George Canning, statesman and family man' and 'George Canning, son of Mary Anne Hunn' at different times. This way, he could see Mary Anne and perform his filial duties towards her with minimal risk to his reputation. Therefore, Mary Anne's letter was also fighting against George's anxious desire to protect his public and private reputation. This shows that, despite the importance placed on 'natural feelings' between mother and child by domestic discourse, the importance placed on reputation and personal and public identity are enough to disrupt it.

Using this letter, and indeed many of her previous letters to George, Mary Anne disrupted her place in the 'family' through trying to gain emotional power. In this passage more specifically, by emotionally appealing to George that he was neglecting his filial, natural duty to her, she placed his reputation as a dutiful son at risk, an identity which George was keen to emphasis in his letters and his letter to various other family members and associates such

as Lady Dundas. This is particularly highlighted by Mary Anne doing her duty and offering to be a Godmother to at least one of the children, a practice which in the Canning family went to grandparents first before siblings, other family members and friends. She shows that she will no longer stay silent and this posed a threat to George's balance of public and private. French and Rothery argue that 'masculine power produced anxieties in men' as they 'struggled' to assert authority over other men and women.[83] George saw Mary Anne as a potential challenge to the organised life which he had been carefully constructing through his correspondence, able to undermine his masculine authority and embarrass him in the public eye. George's situation shows that he had a public life, a personal life and a hidden private life, and how he used letters to balance these identities.

Mary Anne was eventually allowed to have a controlled visit with her grandchildren, but only once, in 1804. George's letters from this period detail a very thorough operation, with four letters written in the week of the visit to clarify the length of time and the travel arrangements.[84] Mary Anne wrote of giving them gifts, objects she likely hoped would become emotionally associated with their 'grandmother'.[85] George and Joan sent their servants with their eldest son, Georgey to South Hill whilst they waited for Mary Anne's return visit to see her youngest grandchildren.[86] No-one saw Mary Anne who did not need to. This was the only time Mary Anne saw her grandchildren so was unable to properly claim her position as useful grandparent, supporting her son and sharing her advice and life experience.

[83] French and Rothery 'Male Anxieties Among Younger Sons' p. 9.
[84] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/16, George Canning to Mary Anne Hunn, September 1804.
[85] *Ibid*, September 1804.
[86] *Ibid*, September 17th, 27th 1804.

Anxieties of Ageing and Letter Writing

Once children had grown up, they left home and set up their own households and families, marking a new stage in the relationship between parents and children. Parents left behind often relied on letters for communication with their far-flung family members, for in a period of war, Empire and increasing social mobility, as was the case by the early nineteenth-century, families were becoming more distanced than ever before. The letter then, became an important vehicle for connection, maintaining relationships, and providing ageing relatives with a means to continue being useful to their families at a distance. As authors aged, anxieties about maintaining these epistolary relationships increased. This section examines the increasing difficulties, discomforts and anxieties which accompanied the labour of letter writing as recipients aged.

The health of those ageing, as bodies became frailer and more prone to disease, was a particular concern which appeared in many eighteenth-century letters.[87] Health was more prominently connected with children in the early Canning letters, or with enquiring about the general health of recipients. Even in older age, the Canning letters do not openly discuss many health concerns associated with old age in this period, which is a departure from other letters where complaints are often discussed at length.[88] Whilst it is not certain why, it is likely that this stems from the recipients. Many letters discussing ailments are sent between friends rather than relatives. It is likely that the elder Canning women did not wish

[87] University of Birmingham, *Social Bodies* (2023) https://socialbodies.bham.ac.uk/ [Accessed 12/04/2023].
[88] For examples of letters where health complaints are discussed more readily see University of Birmingham, *Social Bodies* (2023) https://socialbodies.bham.ac.uk/ [Accessed 12/04/2023]. Examples of correspondents include Barbara Johnson, Miss Dyer, Mr Edgecombe, Mrs Dodge and Mrs Osbourne.

to be a burden on their younger relatives, in line with Ottoway's observations above and kept quiet with any lingering complaints. One exception were the ailments concerning letter writing.

If the recipient did not explicitly mention the state of their health, a letter's style and content could provide important indicators of health and wellbeing. Whilst this is not necessarily specifically connected to old age, as these factors would also apply to those who were ill, they are important indicators for younger family members of the health and wellbeing of elder family members. Whilst writing to her mother in 1825, Bess appeared delighted that her mother had written 'one of the gayest ++ delightfullest Epistles I ever read' and that this 'chearful style so clearly denoted perfect health + tip top spirits'.[89] This supports Emily Vine's observation that the materiality of letters belied the health of the author, through 'the quality of the handwriting, the forming and shaping of characters, and the organising of coherent sentences', which all indicated health concerns such as tiredness, poor eyesight and pain in the hands or fingers.[90] Here, Bess focused on Hitty's coherence of thought and ability to entertain her daughter with her storytelling, rather than her writing style, though noted that Hitty's 'chearful style' meant that she was in 'tip top spirits'.[91] That Bess took time in her letter to point out Hitty's well composed and cheerful letter is telling: it suggests an underlying concern that her mother was feeling low and possibly unwell. This is evidenced by Hitty's previous letters from 1825, where she both alluded to and explicitly

[89] BRO, fl2111-2308, Elizabeth Barnett to Mehitabel Canning October 27th 1825.
[90] Emily Vine, 'The Letter as an Embodiment of Health', *Social Bodies* https://socialbodies.bham.ac.uk/blog/ [Accessed 26/02/2023].
[91] BRO, fl2111-2308, Elizabeth Barnett to Mehitabel Canning October 27th 1825.

stated that she was feeling fatigued. This letter appeared to be welcome news of Hitty's changing health and mood.

Handwriting could also provide an important indicator of the author's health. Letters from other correspondents note that eyes tired a lot during the writing process. In her mid-sixties, Barbara Johnson frequently mentioned that her 'eyes ache with writing so much'.[92] Similarly, this was often an excuse used by Hitty to denote her poor composition.[93] Hitty's 'poor eyes' were also accompanied by indisposed fingers and 'fatigue' which often led to 'a sad, blundering mood' and nerves that were easily 'affected by every trifling occurrence'.[94] In one letter to her granddaughter, Hitty noted that the younger 'hands and eyes' of Bess and her grandchildren could have 'proved such excellent aids and substitutes for my own', suggesting that potentially younger family members could take on the burden of letter writing for elder relatives.[95] These accounts show how physical letter writing could be for the ageing in the long eighteenth century. By detailing this, ageing individuals communicated the discomfort they were willing to tolerate to communicate with their loved ones, signalling their love and affection, as well as their duties towards their families.

This was not always an indication of illness or poor health but simply old age. In a letter to her daughter-in-law, Eliza, Hitty made sure to point out that 'Ill written as this may appear unto you my dear Child, I assure you, I feel very proud of the performance, and only wish, I

[92] Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS.Don.c.193 39, Johnson Family, Barbara Johnson to George William Johnson, July 20th 1803.
[93] This excuse is in almost every letter from 1827-1831. See WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], Mehitabel Canning to both Harriet Barnett and Elizabeth Barnett, 1827-1831 letters.
[94] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], Mehitabel Canning to Harriet Barnett August 21st 1828; December 19th 1827; Mehitabel Canning to Elizabeth Barnett February 11th 1831.
[95] *Ibid*, Mehitabel Canning to Harriett's Barnett December 19th 1827.

was sure of not writing worse, before I finished my letter'.[96] Despite this, Hitty ended her letter with a plea: 'pray do not allow any person see this scrawl'.[97] This letter was written a few months before Hitty's death, aged 82, and indicates that her ability to compose a letter, regardless of her 'scrawl' was an accomplishment and was not always an indication of poor health but sometimes success in continuing a correspondence into one's latter years. Indeed, Hitty noted that she was 'thankful not to have greater ills to contend with'.[98]

Despite these rare successes, Hitty's letters detailing her constant ailments reveal an anxiety of being unable to correspond, which could lead to loneliness. Her letters from the 1820s and early 1830s show real concern for her falling behind with her correspondence, especially to Bess and Harriet. Her eyes, fatigue and poor fingers were causing Hitty to be slow in composing her letters and her correspondence becomes littered with anxieties about missing the post or trying to write quickly. Her writing is very wobbly, very untidy, and changes in ink can be seen very clearly compared to her letters from even a few years prior. The state of her eyes had become so bad that by 1831, Hitty was having her paper lined so she could write straight across the page.[99] As a collection, the letters show the value that her correspondences had, and her continued weekly epistolary relationship with Bess particularly so. Thus, health ailments which affected letter writing could prevent ageing individuals from completing their writing duties, falling behind or stopping altogether. With the letter such an important vehicle for connecting families, Hitty could have been concerned about keeping in touch with her own family.

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[96] *Ibid*, Mehitabel Canning to Elizabeth Barnett February 11th 1831.
[97] *Ibid*, February 11th 1831.
[98] *Ibid*, Mehitabel Canning to Harriett's Barnett December 19th 1827.
[99] *Ibid*, June 1st 1831.

Loneliness and Exclusion

With their children moving out of the family home, and with George growing up and entering Parliament, both Hitty and Mary Anne began to convey a sense of loneliness in their letters. This section discusses various anxieties connected to loneliness, both from Hitty and Mary Anne, and their children. It argues that loneliness was a common feeling expressed in the Canning letters at this late stage of life, suggesting that it was connected to ideas of old age and widowhood.

Loneliness, in its modern form, only appeared in literature and letters from 1800, suggesting that the notion of 'feeling lonely' only fully developed in the late eighteenth century.[100] Bound Alberti defines loneliness as 'a conscious, cognitive feeling of estrangement or social separation from meaningful others; an emotional lack that concerns a person's place in the world'.[101] Incidentally, this rise in the communication of loneliness developed at the same time as ideas that the aged should remain embedded within their familial communities, active and useful in providing advice and support for the younger generations, came to prominence.[102] Thus, there is a link between societal expectations of the ageing to be socially active within their families and communities and this sense of loneliness which stems from a failure to achieve this on a continuous basis. Unsurprisingly, an anxiety about being alone is visible in the letters of the elder Canning women. Their children also express

[100] Bound Alberti, *A Biography of Loneliness,* p .5.
[101] *Ibid*, p.5.
[102] Ottoway, *The Decline of Life*, esp. Introduction.

concern about their loneliness, again suggesting that loneliness was synonymous with being alone in old age.

Letters did not just afford reassurance. They also provided an outlet for ageing parents to admit their concerns about their own wellbeing to their children, now that they were grown adults. Hitty wrote to her son, Stratford, posted on a diplomatic mission in Constantinople, Turkey in 1809:

> It affects me sadly, when I see a cloud over his [Hal's] countenance; but I take care not to let him see that. We are very good friends, and I fancy he likes to converse with me; as on many subjects, he is very unreserved. All things considered, I am, I assure you, in general very happy and free from anxious thoughts, as my health and good looks evince. As a constant evening companion, I miss dear William's company extremely. My greatest grievance at present, being my distance from Bess, and some other friends, where I should like to pop in for an hour of an evening, when tired of silence and my own thoughts. But we cannot have everything exactly to our mind in this world, therefore I may keep my murmurings within my own Breast.[103]

Hitty's letter became an outlet for her loneliness, despite having a child remaining at home. It communicates emotional distance rather than physical distance, as Hal's career troubles have caused 'a cloud over his countenance' which emotionally affects his mother. Her monthly letter to Stratford therefore became a space in which to free her emotions, to air her uneasiness at her current situation and the toll it was taking on her wellbeing. This is suggested by her keeping her 'murmurings within my own Breast'.[104]

That Stratford was so far away potentially may be freeing to Hitty: Stratford expected longer letters and perhaps could understand Hal's feelings more than his sister, Bess, who would

[103] BRO, fl2111-2308, Mehitabel Canning to Stratford Canning, July 24th 1809.
[104] *Ibid*, July 24th 1809.

usually be Hitty's main correspondent on family matters. However, Stratford's distance also caused caution. Hitty was very keen to reassure Stratford of her overall wellbeing, and that this is an isolated account rather than a reflection of her general state of health. Being posted far away, Stratford would receive news every few months and by the time he received an update from his mother, six months could have passed. This passage of time altered the expressions used when communicating feelings or news that could cause Stratford prolonged anxiety. Hitty linked her 'health' with her 'good looks', suggesting that there was a known correlation between physical health and the appearance of ageing in the eighteenth century.[105] Letters were central to intimate connections and were tools used to maintain familial connections and lessen the effects of being alone, that feeling of loneliness.

This became especially important once Bess got married in 1805. Fox discusses the emotional bond that was created between elite mothers and their children, particularly their daughters, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. These 'emotional relationships were reciprocal' as daughters became companions and friends to their mothers as both grew older.[106] Due to this close bond, the event of that daughter's marriage signalled a change in familial relationships, a change which appears to have concerned the children more than the mothers they were leaving. For the Canning letters show that children were worried their marriage could trigger feelings of loneliness in their parents. This was particularly acute in the case of the widowed Hitty.

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[105] Ottoway's work too implies that physical health linked to looks and ageing. Ottoway, *The Decline of Life*, pp. 17, 26-28.
[106] Fox, *Giving Birth*, p. 140.

The marriage of a child, especially a daughter, was the culmination of years of loving parenting. It was the aim of parents to see their daughters wed. And yet, this time was also one tinged with sadness. With parents, especially mothers, encouraged to form loving bonds with their children from birth, the loss of a child through marriage marked the end of their childhood and their transition into adult life, leaving the household that they grew up with. Hitty wrote a letter to her daughter and her new husband, George Barnett, the day after their wedding and it opens with what reads as a very emotional passage:

> 'It is not good for either of us at present, to indulge in tender expressions, concerning the past. We may I believe give each other credit for feeling so much as ever Mother and Daughter did feel upon such a Separation, unaccompanied by any one unpleasing or painful circumstance. For I may say, that every thing was propitious and auspicious on that happy Day, and gave ample promise of future comfort and Happiness to all concerned in the Events of it'.[107]

Such a letter denotes unspoken but shared feelings, a real sense of intimacy and knowledge of one another at a time of both happiness and sorrow. Hitty communicated the significance of the wedding as a change from the 'past', a past which neither would benefit from dwelling upon now. This is likely because this was a time of joy, of Bess transitioning into the role of wife and not time to be upset at Bess leaving the family home and potentially the loss of the constant closeness of mother and daughter.

Whilst this passage does not specifically focus on anxiety, there is an element of uneasiness about the future of their relationship as it enters a new life stage. Hitty's letter communicates the strength of her feeling by stating that it would not be good to 'indulge in tender expressions', likely due to the difficulties it could cause in the necessary transition.

[107] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], Mehitabel Canning to Elizabeth Barnett, December 1805.

Importantly, Hitty noted that this marriage gives promise for the 'future comfort and Happiness to all concerned', suggesting that the match should also serve Hitty well into her future old age.

When Bess departed from the familial household, Hitty was living alone in lodgings in Hastings and her need for social attention became more prominent. Her letters focused either on her many visitors or her loneliness when she was not entertaining. This infers that the loss of her daughter, and main companion to marriage, since the death of her intimate friend Eliza Sheridan in 1792, led to these expressions of loneliness. One such letter, written to Bess in 1806, starts:

> Should [William's] absence be prolonged, it will make a great difference to me, during the dreary Winter, as I cannot depend on having Harry's company so const[section missing from tear] as his; but if it be for his good, I must reconcile my [section missing from tear] the privation as well I can. At present however, it is a mere matter of surmise — we have received some very laughable letters from him, and he promises us a fine collection of Scotch and Irish Stories, to entertain us, over a Christmas Fire. —[108]

Whether Hitty was feeling lonely or not, her letters utilised this language as emotives to trigger a sense of anxiety about her welfare in her children. She painted a picture of her life during the 'dreary winter' all alone, signalling the loneliness Hitty envisions if William's 'absence be prolonged'. It is unlikely that Hitty would be so emotive in a letter to her son, Stratford but Bess, living in London would be able to reply within days to her mother's wistful ponderings and even arrange a visit, which is likely the intended outcome. Indeed, Bess's next letter arranged a visit to see her mother.

[108] BRO, fl2111-2308, Mehitabel Canning to Stratford Canning, September 24th 1809.

Hitty's reference to 'surmise' or guesswork both offers hope but also uncertainty as to when visitors would come and stay. Old age has provided less stability, routine and certainty, points which she reflected upon in her letters during this period. Hitty regarded being alone as a 'forlorn situation' in one of her letters and her visits are often recorded with an expression of melancholy after receiving a visit.[109] Hitty confessed that she 'felt rather down after the departure of my good and amiable Companion Mrs Dilkes' who had stayed for a month in Hitty's new lodgings in London.[110] That she felt 'more chearful and happy' than she 'had previously imagined could be the case' communicates that Hitty felt happiest when in the company of others and appeared to dislike being alone. Whilst she expressed anxiety at the difficulties that her sons were having in their careers, she almost always expressed pleasure in their company when they stayed with her. Hitty's letters note that she needed to find employment in various 'Occupations' to make her 'forget my unusually forlorn situation'.[111]

Whilst letters could bridge distance, they could also be used to maintain it. Hitty used the language of potential loneliness as 'emotional economy' to persuade her children to provide her with more attention but Mary Anne's letters, and indeed George's letters to his mother, imply a deeper, more embedded emotional loneliness which Mary Anne was desperately trying to rectify. Mary Anne's recognition of the emotional distance between herself and George is echoed in her letter to him in July 1800, just after his marriage. She wrote that 'I think I never was less equal to the business of an Epithalamium…I think I feel as I shou'd do

[109] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], Mehitabel Canning to Elizabeth Barnett, February 20th 1806.
[110] *Ibid*, February 20th 1806.
[111] *Ibid*, February 20th 1806.

if you were gone upon a long Embassy- and I was – an Old woman'.[112] Despite already being in her mid-fifties, Mary Anne suggested that she is not an 'Old woman' and used the term to denote physical and emotional distance. She connected the distance and loneliness she associated with old age, to her present situation with her son, George. Her use of old also insinuates that if George was far away on a 'long Embassy' that she would be unable to travel to see him, due to her age. The connotations of old age became one way for Mary Anne to express the loneliness she is experiencing.

Loneliness for Mary Anne was connected to her emotional estrangement from her son. Whilst she had friends and socialised, Mary Anne and George's correspondence suggest that her happiness lay entirely in George's power and that every opportunity she had to be connected to him was one she wanted to take. This sense of feeling lonely, despite not being alone, is seen as far back as 1793, when George wrote to his mother:

> I cannot pass it wholly without observation. I mean that part of your conversation with Mr. N. in which he makes mention of the time <u>when</u> you are "to be <u>properly introduced</u> as Mr C's mother" – Will you, my dearest mother, forgive me if I call to your mind, by repeating them here, the language, which I have ever used, & the wishes which I have ever indulged with respect to your future situation. It is this the first & warmest wish of my heart, it is & ever has been the prudent & most sanguine object of my ambition, & will be the end & aim of all my exertions, to contrive some day, at such a situation in life, as able me to afford to your latter days, that peace & comfort, of which you have too long been cruelly deprived; to pour upon you, if it shall please God to put it within my ability to do so: such abundance, as might not only make your own situation easy & happy, but might extend that ease & happiness to your children…Forgive me, if I have occasioned you the smallest pain – forgive me, if I have myself misinterpreted, as it is possible I may, the words, which have drawn from me this explanation. Above all things let us not renew the subject; & attribute this one, first, & final mention of it to no feeling, inconsistent with the esteem, the duty, & the fond affection with which I have ever been, & shall be your most dutiful & affectionate son'.[113]

[112] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/54, Mary Anne Hunn to George Canning, July 19th 1800.
[113] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/6, George Canning to Mary Anne Hunn, August 18th 1793.

This example is one of many passages in their correspondence where George used a language of concern and care to try and placate his mother. His crafting of language asserted the strength of his affection and attention to her plight and of his wish to give comfort 'to your latter days', artfully communicating that he did not wish to acknowledge her as his mother to others. This is but one situation where Mary Anne was sidelined, and George's words merely flattery to elicit compliance. There is no sense of dialogue here, rather a one-sided resolution and it is this lack of conversations which led to emotional distance building between Mary Anne and her son.

The Canning letters infer that anxiety was not specifically attached to growing older but related to consequences of moving between life stages. Hitty and Mary Anne's correspondences both exhibit continued parental anxieties in negotiations of changing familial roles, or a lack of role, and concerns over being alone. Letters enabled ageing relatives to retain their roles as family lynchpins in epistolary networks. They maintained familial relations, passed on news, and gained a sense of usefulness and purpose in their role as advisors and supporters of their children and grandchildren. Letters also signalled an ageing individual's independence as the existence of letters suggest a separate dwelling from other family members. Thus, societal ideals surrounding old age were played out in correspondences. However, letters could also communicate a sense of loneliness, using this as a tool to persuade other relatives of a need for society and emotional comfort. Letters were central to the renegotiation and maintenance of familial roles as these roles evolved with the shifting of life stages.

Chapter Six: Death, Grief, and Anxiety

Writing in June 1787 to his mother, seventeen-year-old George Canning imparted the news of his Uncle and guardian, Stratford Canning's, death. However, George's letter builded into the news:

> My long silence may, I fear, have been to you the cause of much uneasiness, but till now I have scarcely had it at all in my power and what I must now impart to you, was a subject so unpleasant, as not to hold out any great temptation to me for so doing.[1]

This passage reveals how writing about death could be portrayed as a difficult experience in the long eighteenth century. George regarded Stratford as a father figure, having never known his own father, who died when he was one-year-old and upon Stratford's death, he lost him at an important point in his transition into adulthood. Indeed, the effects of the death are suggested in his acknowledgement of his lack of 'power' to communicate the news of the death which had taken place ten days prior.

Even this short snippet, and the rest of the short letter that follows, reveals the entanglement of anxiety within death and grief. For there is a sense that George's letter builds into the news, to partly prepare Mary Anne for the blow of reading of Stratford's death, suggesting an anxious desire to impart the news as gently as possible to his distant mother. There is also an acknowledgement that his own grief practices had prevented him from writing, potentially causing Mary Anne some anxiety about his silence. There is also an underlying sense of anxiety to show his mother that he was first and foremost concerned

[1] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/5, George Canning to Mary Anne Hunn, June 2nd 1787.

for his aunt Hitty, to whom he would 'write to…today'.[2] As Stratford's widow, Hitty's bond and subsequent grief would be seen as the hardest to bear. George's own future was uncertain, now that his guardian was dead, as he noted to his mother at the end of this short note that in a few months he would 'take my leave of Eton - & in October shall go to Oxford'.[3] Who would become his new guardian?

Grief was, and still is, a complicated emotion, one which encompasses other emotional states such as anger, guilt, and anxiety. Yet historians of death, when looking at grief, tend to focus entirely on emotions around intense sadness: sorrow, depression, and despair. Whilst I acknowledge that there are many emotions intertwined within grief, this chapter argues for anxiety as a key emotion at points of death and grief, as individuals, families and friends transition into new relationships and familial roles.

Grief and death in the eighteenth century have often featured as part of studies on death and grieving practices in the early modern or modern period, often being lost between the seventeenth century and Victorian attitudes to death. Examples include those by Ralph Houlbrooke and Phillipe Ariès.[4] Specific focuses on death in the eighteenth century tend to centre on material culture, rituals and the practice of death and mourning. Desirée Henderson notes that 'the public and performative character of mourning indicates the political nature of loss – never simply an experience of personal bereavement but always

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[2] *Ibid*, June 2nd 1787.
[3] *Ibid*, June 2nd 1787.
[4] See Ralph Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and Family in England, 1480-1750* (London: Clarendon Press, 2000) and Phillipe Ariès, *Western Attitudes Towards Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present* (London and New York: Marion Boyars, 1976).

one linked to social structures, rituals and identities'.[5] Societal expectations and practices determined how, when and where an individual could express their grief and mourn for their loss.

Letters have often been used by historians in the study of emotions but few have looked at condolence letters to examine grief.[6] This is despite work such as Retford's study on posthumous portraiture which asserts that sharing grief within family epistolary networks was common upon the death of a relation or family friend.[7] Zahra Newby and Ruth Toulson acknowledge that there has been significant academic interest in death; however, 'such scholarship is frequently marked by a neglect of grief'.[8] There are some notable exceptions, with case studies such as Lucia McMahon's study of one mother's grief in eighteenth-century America.[9]

Yet, historians should be cautious in interpreting condolence letter rituals as purely reflecting grief. Whilst grief is the overwhelming emotion connected to death, anxiety is also present, an undercurrent which is most prominent before and after the immediate aftermath. Death can occur at any part of the lifecycle and so, whilst subsequent chapters

[5] Desirée Henderson, *Grief and Genre in American Literature, 1790*-1870 (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 8.
[6] Exceptions include Thomas M. Carr Jr., 'Sharing Grief/Initiating Consolation: Voltaire's Letters of Condolence', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 25.1 (1996), pp. 131-146; Zarha Newby and Ruth Toulson, eds, *The Materiality of Mourning: Cross-disciplinary Perspectives* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019); Lucia McMahon, '"So Truly Afflicting and Distressing to Me His Sorrowing Mother": Expressions of Maternal Grief in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia', *Journal of the Early Republic*, 32.1 (Spring 2012), pp. 27-60 and Joanne Bailey, *Parenting in England, 1760-1830: Emotion, Identity and Generation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 39-42.
[7] Kate Retford, 'A Death in the Family: Posthumous Portraiture in Eighteenth-Century England', *Art History*, 33.1 (February 2010), pp. 74-97, p. 78.
[8] Newby and Toulson, *The Materiality of Mourning*, p. 2.
[9] Notable exceptions include McMahon, '"So Truly Afflicting and Distressing to Me His Sorrowing Mother"' and Bailey, *Parenting in England*, pp. 34, 38-42, 45, 47, 50.

concentrated on the chronological lifecycle of the Canning family, this chapter spans the entire period of their correspondence, from 1760 to 1830, to investigate if there were any changes in expression across this period, as well as analyse various types of familial relationships.

This chapter will look at the Canning family letters to examine how societal practices shaped their expressions of grief and mourning. This will demonstrate that the societal ritual of sending condolence letters and the performance of cultural emotional expression was utilised for alternative motives, not just to sympathise with the bereaved. This chapter attests that anxiety was a prominent emotion throughout periods of death and grief and should be present in studies on the emotions of grief and death. Whilst grief was the overwhelming emotion in the immediate aftermath of the death, anxiety was a constant presence, and manifested in the letters in very idiosyncratic ways, reflecting the peculiarities of individual relationships. Letters were used by several members of the Canning family circle, including Richard Brinsley Sheridan and Hitty Canning, before Eliza Sheridan's death in 1792, to renegotiate relationships before death and to provide comfort and an emotional space away from those of the dying or their family's eyes. Whilst news of home and general worries about the infirm's health littered their letters, there is an undercurrent of anxieties about unhealed familial rifts, coping without an intimate friend and about self-identity. Their letters provide a space for emotional management of these uneasy thoughts and a way to control some of their anxieties for the future.

Before Death

When death was probable, anxiety became a prominent expression in letters. This section deals with two main sets of anxieties in the lead up to death: those of the dying and those of their family and friends, particularly those looking after them in their final illnesses. It explores how letters allowed individuals to prepare for death.

For example, George Canning Sr. died on 11th April 1771. Before his death, various letters and sources show his awareness of his impending end and the various anxieties that this appeared to cause him, particularly alluding to his need to provide for his family.[10] He wrote a short note to his infant son, George, stating that 'you are born, my dear George, with all my Rights & all my Wrongs upon your head: assert my Rights, avenge not my Wrongs'.[11] Whilst there is a lack of evidence of George's anxieties penned by himself directly, this surviving short note to his son alludes to his failure to provide for his family, his 'Wrongs'. This likely refers to his disinheritance and then his inability to keep a job and his anxiety that his son now carried this burden of financial uncertainty. That he asks George not to 'avenge' his Wrongs suggests that he is, at least in part, to blame for them but implies that he should 'assert' his rights to the inheritance his father was denied. This brief note is all the advice that survives between George and his son. A letter from Mary Anne to family friend John Beresford suggests that George left a 'scroll' detailing these rights and wrongs, but this appears to have been lost to history.[12] Whilst we cannot be certain this scroll existed, if it did, it would likely evidence a man concerned for his posterity and the unresolved financial situation that he left behind him.

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[10] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/3 showcases numerous letters to Stratford Canning regarding his concerns, many of which are discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis.
[11] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/2, George Canning Sr. to George Canning Jr. 1771, written on the back of a potential book project.
[12] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/4, Mary Anne Canning to John Beresford, 1771.

Yet, despite George sharing his financial worries with his brother, Stratford, as evidenced in Chapter Three, there is no surviving communication between them detailing these fears in the weeks and months before George's death. Mary Anne appeared to have little knowledge of these anxieties either, as she wrote in her letter-memoir that their financial situation became a lot clearer upon George's death.[13] This suggests that either these letters have been lost or George concealed his anxieties in his final months. Indeed, other accounts such as one from Robert Crowe noted George begging to be paid in advance for a book of the love letters between him and Mary Anne and that he 'broke into tears' upon an old family friend providing five guineas upfront.[14] Whilst this is a recollection from some forty-five years later, and so the details could be questionable, it does evidence that George Canning was anxious about his financial situation whilst he was gravely ill and tried to rectify his failure to provide for his family before he passed. Whether this was through shame, anxiety or despair is unclear, but it proves that death was a motivator for reflection and a trigger for anxiety.

Similarly, Hitty's intimate friend Eliza Sheridan became aware of her impending death in 1792 and, whilst George used his letter to leave a hope for the future, Eliza utilised letters to set her affairs in order, so that she could die without anxiety of what she was leaving behind. This is particularly the case with her infant daughter, Mary, who was born in 1791. Mary was the result of an affair between Eliza Sheridan and Lord Edward Fitzgerald, an Anglo-Irish peer and Irish nationalist. Eliza wished for her daughter to be known as the

[13] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/54, Mary Anne Hunn to George Canning, January 27th 1803.
[14] BL, Add MS89143/1/2/6, Robert Crowe to George Canning, June 22nd 1816.

daughter of her husband, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, and raised as their legitimate daughter. She wrote a makeshift will to that effect for both Hitty and Lord Fitzgerald to sign. The language is one of promise and warning:

> I have-& do most solemnly promise my Dear Friend Mrs S- to protect & guard her poor Child thr Life, & to do my utmost to breed her up like my own – that is saying enough
>
> I here solemnly promise my Dear Betsty never to interfere on any any [*sic*] account with M^rs^ C in the Education or in any other way of my poor Child – I cannot write all I wish but he knows my Heart – swear or I shall not die in peace-[15]

Eliza's note to Lord Fitzgerald is particularly striking as she noted that she would not 'die in peace' without certainty on this point regarding their daughter. There is also clear language here that Eliza was struggling to compose this piece through her comments that this was 'saying enough' and 'I cannot write all I wish'. That Eliza was described as 'so weary' and 'fatigued' after composing the short will suggests the determination Eliza felt to secure her daughter's future after her death.[16] This document was allegedly sent to Lord Fitzgerald along with a note of explanation which has not survived. Neither party has actually signed the document but Hitty did look after Mary alongside Richard Brinsley Sheridan until she died at the age of three from convulsions.

The main writers of letters in the period before a death were family and friends, usually updating correspondents on the condition of the dying in their care, often finding solace from their anxieties through letters. This process mirrors condolence letters to an extent, in that news of impending death or severe illness was followed by sympathy, tenderness and

[15] BRO, fl1536-1572, Elizabeth Sheridan's Will, mid-May 1792.
[16] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], Mehitabel Canning to Elizabeth Canning, May 15th 1792.

reassurance, but it was ongoing, for as long as the illness or situation continued. This was also a period where relationships could often be reassessed, in preparation for a world without the deceased.

Hitty wrote to her daughter, Bess, whilst she cared for dying Eliza Sheridan. With her daughter now sixteen, Hitty's increasingly friendly, rather than parental, tone in the 1792 letters suggests that Bess would soon take over Eliza's role as intimate confidante and friend. She expressed her worries and concerns about Eliza's appearance, behaviours, manner, and symptoms to Bess, the primary correspondent over her Aunt and Grandmother who were looking after the household in Hitty's absence.[17] This choice appears deliberate: as discussed in Chapter Three, an ideal mother/daughter relationship was that of close friendship. Hitty did not just maintain this but developed their relationship in the wake of her current intimate friend's serious illness.

This process of acceptance and preparation for the death could trigger anxious reflections. Whilst Richard Brinsley Sheridan wrote to his former lover, Lady Bessborough, of his worries and concerns regarding Eliza, he actually referred to his own fears. He noted that he 'loved her so that had she died as I once thought she would…I should assuredly have plunged with her body to the Grave' but now 'times' and 'changes' have 'passed'.[18] These 'changes' are likely a reference to Sheridan's many affairs, of which Lady Bessborough was the most notable. Whilst Sheridan contemplated the 'interval of [his] Life' which will leave 'but misery

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[17] *Ibid*, 1792 letters.
[18] Electronic Enlightenment, (2021) https://www.e-enlightenment.com/item/sherriOU0010237a1c/?letters=decade&s=1790&r=1162 [Accessed 12/05/2021], Richard Brinsley Sheridan to Lady Bessborough, March 1792.

from Memory and a horror of Ref[l]exion?', he writes to one of the women who changed his relationship with his wife. In this sense, Sheridan is reassessing his relationship with Lady Bessborough, to whom he has not written in months, but it is likely that he wished for female company as his wife was 'now so near me fading in sickness from all her natural attachments'.[19] Thus, letters could provide a source of comfort for anxieties from correspondents which one may keep a secret, even, and perhaps especially, at times of death. Expressions of anxiety were an emotional tool utilised to reassess the importance of morality, love, and friendship just before death and prepare for the transition into a new phase of life. They often expressed personal anxieties of the self rather than about others as letters began the process of grieving and adjusting to a world without their loved one.

The Epistolary Pact of Three Letters

Many letter-writers of the long eighteenth century had to come to terms with communicating death with other loved ones. In July 1817, Cassandra Austen wrote to her niece, Fanny Knight, stating that:

> it is as if I have lost a part of myself…I am perfectly conscious of the extent of my irreparable loss…I hope I do not break your heart my dearest Fanny by these particulars, I mean to afford you gratification whilst I am relieving my feelings. I could not write so to any body [*sic*] else, indeed you are the only person I have written to at all excepting your Grandmama.[20]

This letter excerpt tells of the death of author Jane Austen, and Cassandra's attempts come to terms with her loss and her 'feelings'. Fanny Knight's subsequent condolence letter, and

[19] *Ibid*, March 1792.
[20] Jane Austen, *Jane Austen's Letters ed.by Deirdre le Faye*, 4th edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), Cassandra Austen to Fanny Knight, July 1817, pp. 360-362.

Cassandra's further acknowledgement in reply, completes what Thomas M. Carr Jr. refers to as an 'epistolary pact of three steps': '[a]n initial letter comes from someone near the deceased announcing the death; the expectation is that a letter of condolence will follow, for which a letter of acknowledgement must be sent'.[21] Through this condolence letter trio, Carr Jr. demonstrates how grief was ritualised through letters. This 'epistolary pact' is also seen throughout the Canning correspondence, suggesting that they too followed these conventions in the wake of a death. This section considers the performativity of these condolence letters, and how anxiety was both an emotional tool for personal motivations but also a language to reshape and renegotiate relationships following the death of a loved one.

The deathbed scene could be included in the first letters of the condolence pact, those communicating the death to others. According to Ariès, until the eighteenth century, the deathbed ritual centred on the dying person, as they prepared for judgement by God, with family and friends passively present. During the eighteenth century, though, the notion that one would be judged upon their deathbed was cast off; however, 'they continued to acknowledge that there was moral importance in the way the dying man behaved'.[22] Instead, the deathbed scene now actively included the grieving, reflecting the growing cultural move towards the culture of sensibility by detailing that ''[e]motion shook them, they cried, prayed, gesticulated' as Ariès suggests was more common of the nineteenth century.[23] Ariès's notion is depicted in Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748) which provides a full and

[21] Thomas Carr Jr., 'Sharing Grief/Initiating Consolation: Voltaire's Letters of Condolence', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 25.1 (1996), pp. 131-146, p. 133.
[22] Ariès, *Western Attitudes Towards Death,* p. 39.
[23] *Ibid*, p. 59.

crafted depiction of the eighteenth-century deathbed scene through letters. Whilst fictitious, it provides a useful comparison to the Canning letters. Clarissa's death is communicated in a letter from Mr Belford, who notes her redeeming qualities such as her benevolence, humility, and Christian virtue in accepting death.[24] It also describes the sensible emotions at the scene. The 'good widow', Mrs Lovick's 'face was overwhelmed with tears' and Mrs Smith turned to the 'Only Power' with 'clasped fingers', 'uplifted eyes' and 'kneeling down'.[25] The women are described to be embodying their refined sensibility, 'with a fresh stream [of tears] bursting from them' as Mr Belford approached Clarissa's deathbed.[26]

The scene shows the women to be the more affected such as in a later scene where Clarissa's posthumous letters are being read out: the women 'were still more touched' than the sensibilities of Mr Belford and Colonel Morton. Later on, Mrs Norton was told of Clarissa's death and 'she sunk down to her feet in fits', with the women 'too much affected themselves' to describe Mrs Norton's 'affecting' behaviour when she saw Clarissa's corpse.[27] As already discussed above, it is Mr Belford that narrated the letter depicting Clarissa's death. He gave an extremely detailed account to Lovelace and though shows grief and sensibility, it is restrained through his crafted narrative celebrating Clarissa's 'happy' death and victory over her virtue. The women themselves are repeatedly portrayed as too overcome to narrate.[28]

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[24] Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa. Or, the History of a Young Lady*, *Comprehending the Most Important Concerns of Private Life ; And Particularly Showing the Distress that may Attend the Misconduct Both of Parents and Children, In Relation to Marriage*, Vol.7 (London: S. Richardson, 1748), pp. 216-220.
[25] *Ibid*, pp. 216-220.
[26] *Ibid*, p. 216.
[27] *Ibid*, p. 228.
[28] *Ibid*, pp. 216-230.

This demonstration of difficulty in narrating a death scene, particularly for women, is shown in Hitty's condolence letter to her daughter Bess. In a letter from the 28th June 1792, Hitty conveyed the news of Eliza Sheridan's death. Eliza was Hitty's intimate friend and Bess's godmother and considered kin.[29] Her letter opens with her usual superscription 'My dearest Bess' but then goes straight into a lengthy, strongly emotional passage:

> Your beloved Godmother is no more! She expired this morning about five Oclock, in the midst of her Family, of whom she took a most affectionate Leave - She departed like an Angel, and I trust is now a blessed Spirit, in the Presence of Our God! – What I have gone through during the last twenty-four hours excludes all description; I never sustained such acute Sufferings! But now thank God; all is peace & silence. but never never shall I forget what I have seen! and felt!
>
> My only consolation is, that I am a comfort to the poor sufferers around me, and that I [soothed?] her Passage from Life to Eternity. – I have seen her my dear Bess, & kissed her cold, pale cheek, beautiful even in death! Excuse me, my dear Child, my sorrow is very great. But I will endeavour to compose myself – and you may be sure I will take care not to injure myself.[30]

As Houlbrooke states, '[t]he moment of death and the sight of the newly dead body were often deeply shocking'.[31] One can examine this as signifying Hitty's grief: this passage is emotionally raw, written just hours after Eliza's death and Hitty struggles to convey her emotions in words. This reflects philosopher David Hume's theory that feeling was ineffable, that is almost impossible to fully explain. It was sympathy, or as he understood it, the ability to recognise feeling and emotion in others, through facial expressions, descriptions, and social understandings, which enabled emotions to be communicated.[32] Instead of emotional

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[29] See WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], letters from Hitty to Bess from 1792 in which she notes multiple times that Eliza is Bess's godmother. The letters from Eliza Sheridan to Hitty depict a very close friendship.
[30] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], Mehitabel Canning to Elizabeth Canning, June 28th 1792.
[31] Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and Family in England,* p. 228
[32] David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature: Being an Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects,* Vol.2 (London: John Noon, 1740), p. 5, 83.

words with fixed meanings such as 'grief', 'bereaved' or 'afflicted', Hitty provides Bess with a physical description of her emotional condition, the effects of her feelings. By using physicality, Hitty suggested that her grief is all-encompassing, and that her suffering is both physical as well as mental. Rob Boddice, in his work, refers to the 'heavy weight' of emotional suffering and here too Hitty suggests the weight of grief when she referred to 'sustaining acute sufferings'.[33] Here, the letter functioned as a space to grieve as well as a method of communicating the death itself.

Hitty's approach to writing about her grief influences the ambiguity and magnitude of her emotions. By refusing to define her emotions within linguistic parameters, Hitty left Bess to imagine endless scenarios. Boddice argues that 'language does not merely label experience; it influences it'.[34] Moreover, 'an emotional process is "registered" by a lexical reference - an emotion word – but also involves evaluation and response'.[35] Here, Hitty used utterances that evoke emotional responses and transform the feelings of the reader to illicit a stronger emotional reaction. That this use of strong language is intentionally trying to cause a sympathetic reaction is unlikely, as Bess and Hitty's close relationship and constant letters throughout Eliza's illness infers that Bess's condolence letter would have given her mother the sympathy and condolence that she would have expected. Hitty's passage does convey her strength of feeling at the passing of her beloved friend and the anguish yet spiritual solace of the scene.

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[33] Rob Boddice, *A History of Feelings* (London: Reaktion Books, 2019), pp. 124-130; WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], Mehitabel Canning to Elizabeth Canning, June 28th 1792.
[34] Boddice, *The History of Feelings*, p. 16.
[35] *Ibid*, p. 50.

One can see Hitty's attention to cultural conventions in her religious references. Those writing about grief and condolence both prior and during the eighteenth century almost always referred to religious solaces, albeit with fluctuating conviction.[36] Boddice states that 'it is a common enough rhetorical device for the period, and one might pursue the extent to which the uttering of acquiescence to God's will actually worked as a salve for painful emotions'.[37] Hitty's grief does provide an insight into this process. The belief that the deceased individual reached heaven, in as comfortable manner as possible, was important for assuaging grief. So too, was the behaviour of the deceased before their demise; those that showed a 'courageous acceptance of death' were praised and helped their family and friends come to terms with the fact that 'God has taken the dead from this unhappy world to a better' and that they would be reunited in death.[38]

This is typified in *Clarissa* as Mr Belford describes Clarissa's death:

> When I recovered myself, it was almost to repine as what I *then* called an unequal dispensation; forgetting her happy preparation, and still happier departure' and that 'the women declared, they never saw death so lovely before; and that she looked as if in an easy slumber.[39]

It was proper to not show excessive grief for when death strikes, 'it is the Will of God' and 'it was impious to resent his decisions'.[40] Hitty's grief expressed in her letter to Bess reflects these beliefs. Hitty's description of Eliza's last moments and her state in death celebrated

[36] Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and Family,* pp. 240-241.
[37] Boddice, *The History of Feelings*, p. 127.
[38] Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and Family,* pp. 240-241.
[39] Richardson, *Clarissa*, pp. 216-220, 225-226.
[40] Jill Werman Harris, *Remembrances and Celebrations: A Book of Eulogies, Elegies, Letters and Epitaphs* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2007), p. xix; Nicole Eustace, *Passion is the Gale: Emotion Power, and the Coming of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), p. 286; Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and Family,* pp. 240-241. See also A Gentleman of Fortune, *The New Art of Letter Writing* 2nd Ed. (London, 1762), pp. 47-48; Anon, *The Complete Letter Writer* (Edinburgh: David Paterson, 1776), pp. 210-211; Anon, *Newbery's Familiar Letter Writer* (London: G. Wright, 1758), p. 39.

Eliza's 'courageous acceptance of death' when she states that she 'took affectionate Leave' of her family and that '[s]he departed like an Angel, and I trust is now a blessed Spirit, in the Presence of Our God!'[41] By describing Eliza as an angel, Hitty represented Eliza's purity, beauty and innocence in life and her new status as a 'blessed Spirit' in death.[42] 'Angel' has been a term used as far back as Shakespeare to denote ethereal beauty and purity and they have been denoted as messengers from heaven for centuries.[43] However, it is unclear when they first became associated with death. It is likely to be the link between purity and heaven and that Hitty's description ties in with the notion of the good Christian death, would attest to its association with death. This image of death prevailed throughout the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century through works such as *Clarissa*, whose deathbed scene was described above, and the move towards Evangelicalism.[44]

However, whilst Hitty did show her faith in Providence, passages such as this one, written as they are in the height of emotion, could cause anxiety to recipients at a distance, as this lack of control in the composition of the letter signalled instability of emotion. Hitty's raw outburst, seen through the terms 'what I have gone through during the last twenty-four hours exceeds all description', 'never, never shall I forget what I have seen! And felt!', appeared to have caused Bess unintentional anxiety, as displayed in her letter from June 28th 1792. Though condolence letters were a ritual to aid those in grief, to show concern and share tender feelings with mourners, I believe Bess's letter is more tailored in its

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[41] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], Mehitabel Canning to Elizabeth Canning, June 28th 1792.
[42] *Ibid,* June 28th 1792.
[43] Oxford University Press, 'angel, n.' *OED Online*. (2019) https://www-oed-com.bathspa.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/7458?rskey=507lKh&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid [Accessed 6 May 2019]; Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, Vol I (London: W. Strahan, J. and F. Rivington; J. Hinton, 1770), p. 68.
[44] Richardson, *Clarissa*, pp. 216-220, 225-226; Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and Family*, p. 180.

concerns. For Bess communicated that 'I am afraid I shall find you badly unhinged' and that 'I entreat of you to take care of yourself, for our sake'.[45] The entire letter moves from the condolences of Eliza's death to Bess communicating her worries about Hitty, which tended to only feature as a part of the condolence letter. Indeed, Carr Jr.'s study of Voltaire's letters suggests that tailoring letters and stronger concerns tended to be expressed when both the recipients knew the deceased and each other intimately.[46] Whilst Hitty's letter expressed strong feelings of grief, Bess's response suggests that those sending condolences to close family or friends displayed anxiety about their grieving loved ones, beyond mere convention.

Condolences were most often sent through the medium of the letter, which the Canning letters evidence.[47] In practice, writers adapted convention to tailor their letters to the 'characters and needs of the bereaved'.[48] Letter-writing manuals show a clear approach to writing and formatting letters of condolence. In order to aid the bereaved with their grief, it emphasised the need to put the death in perspective. One such manual, *The New Art of Letter Writing*, states that

> When the person we write to is overwhelmed with an excess of Grief, instead of Stopping the Flow of his first Tears, we may tell him we mingle ours with them. We may speak of the merit of the Friend or Relation that is lost, yet shewing there is nothing extraordinary in that Death, as may be seen by more surprising Examples the afflicted Party is not acquainted with.[49]

Another manual gave an example letter in which the friend wrote:

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[45] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], Mehitabel Canning to Elizabeth Canning, June 28th 1792; Elizabeth Canning to Mehitabel Canning, June 30th 1792.
[46] Carr Jr., 'Sharing Grief/Initiating Consolation', pp. 135-138.
[47] Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and Family*, p. 245.
[48] *Ibid,* p.246.
[49] A Gentleman of Fortune, *The New Art of Letter Writing*, p. 47.

> a suitable grief on so trying an occasion ought to be indulged; but yet not so as if you were bereft of all comfort, and insensible to other great mercies, which God has bestowed upon you.[50]

This was common advice in the eighteenth century to help the bereaved with their grief. There was an emphasis on sympathy, reflecting the influence of sensibility in the composition of condolence letters but also the ordinary and everyday nature of death, to begin the process of bringing the grieving back into their daily routines.

Like Hitty's letter above, Bess's reply is performative. Begun on the 28th June, it takes elements seen in these manuals but tailors her condolence to reflect her close relationship with her mother. She opened with:

> This moment I have received my Dearest Mother's sad letter, the one I got yesterday partly prepared us for it, but I cannot tell you what I feel, and how much I lament the dear creature, that is gone. I did not know her, as you did, but what I did know, I could not but love and admire. I shall never forget her kindness to me, and shall always remember her with affection and think of her, as one too good and too charming, for this world.[51]

Letters tended to have a balance of condolence and consolation.[52] In keeping with conduct literature, Bess led her condolences with her inability to express her feelings and celebrating the deceased, albeit it in a muted manner for Bess admitted 'I did not know her, as you did'.[53] Bess echoed her mother's inability to express her emotions over Eliza's death but her tone and language suggests sympathy rather than the excessive grief that Hitty displayed in her letter. This line reinforces that Bess's condolence letter intended to console her mother's grief rather than express her own. This contrasts with Hitty's letter which

[50] Anon, *Newbery's Familiar Letter Writer*, p. 110.
[51] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], Elizabeth Canning to Mehitabel Canning, June 30th 1792.
[52] Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and Family*, p. 247.
[53] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], Elizabeth Canning to Mehitabel Canning, June 30th 1792.

exclusively shows Hitty's grief over Eliza's death, backing up Carr Jr.'s observation that the relationship of the writer to the deceased and the bereaved affected the position taken by the letter writer in their condolence.[54]

Unlike Hitty's letter, Bess's condolence letter was sent at least a day after receiving the news, on the 30th June, giving Bess a chance to temper her immediate emotions and produce a more considered response. Bess also noted that her own grief over Eliza's death was potentially premature, as Hitty's earlier letter from 27th June already began to convey the sense of Eliza's imminent death. Hitty wrote on the 27th June that she believed that 'my attendance here will not be much longer required'.[55] Thus, Bess was already prepared for the news before receiving it. Instead of overwhelming grief, her immediate concern is for her mother's emotional turmoil:

> I pity you most sincerely, as likewise the poor people, you are with. – It must be a heart breaking stroke to poor Mr and Mrs Linley, indeed to them all. I trust in God, my dearest Mother, you will not suffer by your exertions. I entreat of you to take care of yourself, for our sake. I am in hopes Mr Leigh was not absent (As we have heard nothing of him) and that you sent for him, but if he is from home, is there no other kind person that you could have with you? It is cruel for you to have all fall upon you, without having any one to comfort, and assist you… it is a pleasure to think that she went off so resigned an composed, and a great comfort to you, that you contributed so much towards it, and making her last moments less bitter – the almighty will, I make no doubt, reward you for your kindness to her. –We think you are right to stay to the last, it would be cruel to leave the poor family, when you are their only consolation, but we hope a week, or ten days more will bring you safe back to us. I am afraid that I shall find you badly unhinged, but I will do all I can to comfort you…Pray let me have a few lines from you again, as soon as you can, to let us know how you all do, and when you think it likely that we shall see you.[56]

[54] Carr, 'Sharing Grief/Initiating Consolation' p. 133.
[55] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], Mehitabel Canning to Elizabeth Canning, June 27th 1792.
[56] *Ibid*, June 30th 1792.

Here, Bess focused on the bereaved, especially Hitty, rather than her own grief over Eliza's passing. Bess's letter shows concern for her mother and that Bess too has recognised her mother's inability to console herself over Eliza's passing. Her approach is typical of condolence literature: sympathise with the bereaved, administer notes of self-care and remind the bereaved of religious solace in the face of death.[57] However, Bess went beyond this to personalise her condolence. In the passage above, Bess wrote to Hitty that it must be 'a great comfort to you, that you contributed so much towards it, and making her last moments less bitter'.[58]

Hitty and Eliza were not on speaking terms at the time when Eliza fell ill. This was because Hitty had found out, in 1791, about Eliza's affair with Lord Fitzgerald and that she was pregnant with his child. This child, the aforementioned baby Mary, was born at the end of March 1792. Prior to Eliza's deterioration in May, her husband, Richard Brinsley Sheridan wrote to Hitty, pleading for her to return to her friend's bedside. Therefore, Hitty had set aside her moral feelings to nurse her friend through what proved to be her final illness. Bess's reminder to Hitty of this event served as a tailored method of alleviating Hitty's grief.

However, Bess's condolence letter had underlying motives. In the above passage, the opening to Bess's letter, as seen in the first extract, was sympathetic to her mother and celebrates Eliza's passage to a better place. As this passage shows, Bess shifted to remind Hitty of her duty to her family. Bess told her mother: 'I entreat of you to take care of yourself, for our sake'.[59] This reminder of Hitty's maternal duty reflects the social

[57] Carr Jr., 'Sharing Grief/Initiating Consolation', pp. 139-142.
[58] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], Elizabeth Canning to Mehitabel Canning, June 30th 1792.
[59] *Ibid,* June 30th 1792.

convention of avoiding excessive grief and forgetting what God had given you.[60] Bess took this further when she asks Hitty about Eliza's baby, Mary, who was mentioned above.[61] The most important role for married women in eighteenth-century society was maternal duty. Therefore, Bess gently reminded Hitty of her societal role, her identity as mother and her new responsibilities which Eliza has left her, to relieve Hitty of excessive grief. Hitty's original letter from the 28th June and her reply on the 1st July shows that Bess's approach in discussing practical affairs and Hitty's duties to her family was well judged. Hitty wrote on the 28th June, with the news of Eliza's death that 'my only consolation is, that I am a comfort to the poor sufferers around me' and again on the 1st July that 'I am extremely comforted by finding myself of such essential use to poor Mr S –'.[62] However, as Eustance states, '[f]ar from being simple and straightforward expressions of personal sadness, statements of grief conveyed critical social commentary in the eighteenth century' and could be used to convey other thoughts and feelings.[63] Bess was not only reminding Hitty of her maternal duty, her condolence served to communicate to Hitty her desire for her to return home.[64]

The earliest condolence letter in the Canning collection was written to Mary Anne by her brother-in-law, Stratford Canning, in 1769, upon the death of her daughter, Leitita. Stratford's condolence letter follows most closely the form and elevated sensibility found in condolence letter examples in model copy books.[65] The model letters from *The Art of Letter*

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[60] A Gentleman of Fortune, *The New Art of Letter Writing,* pp. 47-48; Anon, *The Complete Letter Writer*, pp. 210-211.
[61] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], Elizabeth Canning to Mehitabel Canning, June 30th 1792.
[62] *Ibid*, June 28th 1792.
[63] Eustace, *Passion is the Gale,* p. 286.
[64] Bess's previous letter communicated that she was hiding her desire for her mother to return home to lessen Hitty's guilt at staying with her dying friend. See WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], Elizabeth Canning to Mehitabel Canning, June 24th 1792.
[65] See Samuel Johnson, *The New London Letter Writer* (London: T. Sabine, 1790), p. 86; *Models of Letters, in French and English, To Which are Annexed Accurate Directions with Regards to the Proper Form of Address to*

Writing – 'Letter to a Man of Quality, on the Death of his Son' and 'Letter to a Lady of Quality, on the Death of her Daughter' both echo the sentiments and tone of Stratford's letter to Mary Anne. Both these examples and Stratford's letter open with shared grief which 'afflicted me sensibly'. Then they demonstrate the belief that it is God's will which should not be questioned, that the deceased are lucky to be in heaven with eternal happiness and that we should be thankful for what God has given us, all whilst acknowledging the grief and affliction of the bereaved.[66] This emphasis on God's providence and thankfulness for what God has given is emphasised in condolence letters as a mechanism to prevent prolonged grief and encouraged people back into their societal roles. Stratford's letter emphasised Mary Anne's duties and, like the model letters, asked rhetorical questions regarding the source of sin and selfishness being our self-indulgence in grief.[67]

Stratford's letter chiefly concerns Mary Anne's proneness to sensibilities and his advice, instruction and warnings over excessive grief and emotional attachment to young children. Interestingly, Stratford suggested that Mary Anne was too anxious about her child's health, allowing herself to become emotionally attached before the child's life chances were more certain. Stratford's letter also demonstrates an awareness of the growing culture of sensibility and the 'best known of the new ideology of sensibility is that its proponents posed "the social affections" – sympathy, compassion, benevolence, humanity, and pity –

Superiors (London: Mr Pomy, G.G.J and J. Robinson, and F. Wingrave, 1791), p. 39; Rev. George Brown, *The New and Complete English Letter-Writer* (London: Alex Hogg, 1770), p. 176; A Gentleman of Fortune, *The Art of Letter Writing*, pp. 49-52.

[66] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/4, Stratford Canning to Mary Anne Canning, November 22nd 1769; Brown, *The New and Complete English Letter-Writer*, p. 176.

[67] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/4, Stratford Canning to Mary Anne Canning, November 22nd 1769; Brown, *The New and Complete English Letter-Writer*, p. 176.

against selfishness'.[68] Stratford's condolence letter demonstrates all these qualities and is a written performance of this elevated sensibility.

Stratford used this social ritual of sending condolences to establish an epistolary relationship with his sister-in-law, Mary Anne. Indeed, he acknowledged his intentions in his opening paragraph:

> When I proposed to myself the pleasure of corresponding with you, I little thought of being reduced to the distressing Necessity of mixing with my Professions of fraternal affection, the melancholy Terms of Condolence.[69]

Stratford had been away on the continent, on the Grand Tour, and had just returned to Ireland. This opportunity to establish a correspondence, and thus a relationship, with Mary Anne was timely, albeit in sad circumstances. Yet Stratford was not the only one to renegotiate relationships after a death.

Whilst Stratford's entry took advantage of the death to set up a new relationship, others were anxious about their place within the family. John Keats' fiancée, Frances Brawne, wrote to his sister upon Keats' death in 1821. Her letter begins with condolences over their shared bereavement but then quickly addresses Frances's main concern: her relationship with Keats' family. She stressed that she 'felt so happy' when Keats 'desired me to write to you' and her letter suggests that she was anxious for this relationship to continue beyond his death.[70] Frances referred to Fanny Keats in this letter as 'my dearest Sister' suggesting

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[68] G.J Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 215.
[69] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/4, Stratford Canning to Mary Anne Canning, November 22nd 1769.
[70] Frances Brawne, *Letters from Frances Brawne to Frances Keats, 1820-1824*, edited by Fred Edgcumbe (New York: Oxford University Press, 1936), Frances Brawne to Fanny Keats, 1821.

that for her, their familial attachment was the same as if Keats were still alive. She also asked Fanny to stay with her 'if it be not disagreeable to Mr Abby' for 'I must hope you will favor me with your company'.[71] As his fiancée, Frances would have not had a formal place within Keats's family and this letter tells of her anxiousness to renegotiate her position and stay familiar with his family after his passing. Frances noted all sorts of solutions to potential issues with the plan, suggesting its importance to her, whilst still remaining sympathetic to Fanny's situation, the likelihood being that she cannot visit so soon after her brother's death. This letter shows how those that have undefined or unestablished roles within a family can find themselves uncertain of their position and identity within the family at times of death. Whilst Stratford utilised letters to his advantage, to create a new relationship, Frances's letter reveals the difficulties in losing one's familial place and the anxiety of renegotiating your position. It also shows how ties can be severed upon death and the anxiety of losing connections and intimacies that were enjoyed before the death occurred.

Distance and the Communication of Death

As many of the condolence letters discussed thus far also show, it was not just the relationship but also the distance between correspondents which was an important consideration in the communication of death. This shaped the language, tone, and timing of condolences. Whilst the recipients discussed thus far lived relatively close, in that their communications would have taken days to reach their recipients, Hitty's letters to her son, Stratford, stationed on a diplomatic mission in Constantinople, meant that their letters took months to exchange. When Stratford's brother, Charles, died at the Battle of Waterloo in

[71] *Ibid*, 1821.

June 1815, Hitty took longer than perhaps expected to compose a letter to him. Her letter, dated simply July 1815, acknowledged that it is overdue:

> You will naturally expect to hear from your poor mother, in this hour of sorrow and perhaps will think she has delayed too long, to impart her feelings to you, on your common and heavy loss.
>
> She has been deeply afflicted, though possibly not so keenly as your dear self – who never knew grief before. I felt particularly for you my dear Stratford, on this lamentable occasion, at a distance from your family, deprived of the sad consolation of mixing your tears with theirs, and of knowing many circumstances, which, though mournful, give relief to the oppressed heart; above all, for your never having seen your beloved brother since your first separation, which I have no doubt, has greatly increased [*sic*] your sorrow and Regret.[72]

Unlike her other condolence letters to Bess from 1792 and 1827, initially she wrote in the third person to Stratford. Writing letters in the third person was not unusual in the eighteenth century.[73] It was typically used to distance the writer from the reader, often for jest. That Hitty adopted this style now insinuates a desire to distance herself from talking about her affliction, as if she was passing on someone else's news. Considering her first-person account of Eliza's death in 1792 and her lack of composure in her letter writing, the use of the third person could have perhaps aided her control of her composition. This is seen later in the letter: once she began talking in the first person, her style began to become free flowing, with a larger use of exclamation marks and dashes such as in this comment 'and parted in peace and love – little thinking, that parting was to be forever; in this world!', though she still retained more emotional control than in her letter to Bess.[74]

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[72] BRO, fl2111-2308, Mehitabel Canning to Stratford Canning, July 1815.
[73] Examples include Jane Austen, her friend Anne Lefroy. See Helen Lefroy and Gavin Turner ed*., The Letters of Mrs Anne Lefroy: Jane Austen's Beloved Friend,* (Winchester: The Jane Austen Society c/o Sarsen Press, 2007); Jane Austen, *Jane Austen's Letters ed.by Deirdre le Faye*, 4th edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Examples include Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, January 14-16th 1801, pp. 75-77; Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, January 25th 1801, pp. 80-83; Anne Lefroy to Edward Lefroy, May 25th 1804, p. 114.
[74] BRO, fl2111-2308, Mehitabel Canning to Stratford Canning, July 1815.

This suggests that the frequency of the postal system affected the way that grief and condolence was communicated in letters to loved ones abroad. Hitty was unable to write as often to Stratford as she would to Bess; his replies would often come back a few months after she sent them.[75] This linguistic decision could be to prevent her epistolary form from slipping and worrying Stratford about her emotional state, when he was away abroad and could do little to help her. This would explain why she dis not use this performative technique in her letters to Bess. Indeed, all her letters to Stratford tend to be more emotionally controlled, except in regard to her affection for Stratford himself.[76]

It also shows Hitty presuming Stratford's emotions when she states that Stratford's grief would be more 'deeply afflicted' than hers due to 'having not known grief before' and that 'your never having seen your beloved brother since your first separation, which I have no doubt, has greatly increased [*sic*] your sorrow and Regret'.[77] This is another practice that is seen in conduct literature, albeit less often.[78] Stratford's letter to Mary Anne in 1769 also presumed her emotional reaction 'to wounds which cannot yet be thoroughly healed' as he writes 'it was the certainty that your Affliction would be most poignant' and that 'we are afflicted at the diminution of our own Satisfaction'. It appears that this is used as a tool for shared affliction and understanding. In Hitty's case, it could also be the normalising of the feelings of grief: Stratford, she stated, has never known grief before. Therefore, by listing what she knows to be grief, Hitty shows a desire to help Stratford come to terms with these

[75] See the series of letters BRO, fl2111-2308, Mehitabel Canning to Stratford Canning, 1809-1815.
[76] *Ibid,* 1809-1815.
[77] BRO, fl2111-2308, Mehitabel Canning to Stratford Canning, July 1815.
[78] For an example see Charles Johnson, *The Complete Art of Writing Letters* (London: T. Lowndes and T. Evans, 1779), pp. 85-86.

new feelings. As Hitty was far away, she would be unable to know Stratford's feelings for months and to alleviate any sense of anxiety about Stratford's emotional state, and potentially any hopelessness to aid him over the next few months, her letter tries to offer support to supposed feelings at a distance.

Hitty also used shared language, which is a typical feature of condolence letters in conduct literature and in the practice of the Canning family's letters. We see this in her use of terms such as 'mixed your tears with theirs' and 'on your common and heavy loss' and her admission that they are both afflicted with shared sorrow and grief over Charles's death. We also see this in Hitty's letter to Bess upon the death of Eliza when she used the familial terminology of 'godmother'.[79] These 'performative utterances' aimed to give a sense of calmness, solidarity and comfort in a shared closeness with other family members.[80] Replies to condolence letters confirmed the sense of comfort that this ritual of familial closeness brought to them such as in Hitty's reply to Bess's condolence letters of 1792 and 1827 where she writes 'I have just read your dear letter, and thank you a thousand times for your tender sympathy' as well as 'many thanks…for your constant and affectionate attention at this afflicting period'.[81] Though Stratford's reply has been lost, Hitty's next letter acknowledged that he replied on 31st July with a 'most affectionate and charming letter' suggesting that whatever he wrote, it was to Hitty's satisfaction.[82]

Reputation and Afterlife

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[79] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], Mehitabel Canning to Elizabeth Canning, June 28th 1792.
[80] An example is Johnson, *The Complete Art of Writing Letters*, pp. 47-50.
[81] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], Mehitabel Canning to Elizabeth Canning, July 2nd 1792; Mehitabel Canning to Elizabeth Barnett, August 10th 1827.
[82] BRO, fl2111-2308, Mehitabel Canning to Stratford Canning, October 16th 1815.

George Canning's death in 1827 reveals anxieties of a person's reputation and afterlife, especially in connection with the family legacy. In 1827, the Cannings had to cope with the tensions of grieving for a family member who was also a public figure, a process which took place even before he died. This section examines the anxiety of shaping an individual's afterlife in the wake of death.

On 7th August 1827, just prior to George's death, Hitty received the news of the 'alarming state of dear G:C's health' and immediately wrote to her daughter, Bess, to share in their distress and grief[83]:

> This sad news, you may believe, quite overcame me!... I feel inclined to rest till tomorrow; when I trust, it may please Heaven to relieve my present anxiety, by a much better report, from your Pen, of our dear Invalid; whose Life, I earnestly pray, may be spared to his admiring Country, as well as to his attached Family. Who I believe, have all the same feelings towards him; and should they have the misfortune to lose him, would assuredly lament him for his own sake, and not on account of any advantage they might derive from his elevated station, and great power.[84]

Once again, Hitty's faith became an important tool of fortitude, in the wake of her 'present anxiety', putting her faith in Providence and the will of God. Despite these words, there is a sense that she was still struggling with the news which, she reported, 'overcame' her, to the point where she felt 'inclined to rest til tomorrow' when the alleviation of her anxieties could be conveyed. As an elderly woman, in her late seventies, such news could have tired her out. Modern studies show that such shocks can cause fatigue and other physical pains

[83] Hitty uses these words in the past tense in the letter so it reads 'no less distressed and grieved'.
[84] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], Mehitabel Canning to Elizabeth Barnett, August 7th 1827.

within elderly people in such circumstances.[85] This choice of anxious language to convey overwhelming feelings again unites feelings of anxiety with love. Here, Hitty's implied inability to cope with her anxieties suggests the impact that George's impending death could have on her. It echoes those first stages of grief where all one could think about was the deceased and the overwhelming feeling of sadness and this too rendered one unable to undertake many employments and continue with normal life.[86]

Yet, Hitty's letter does not end on her anxieties but continues to reflect on what could happen if George died. Despite her anxious state, she was still able to consider its magnitude beyond just their 'attached Family' and it is this which presents her prayer to save George as not selfish but for the good of the nation. Whilst it is not overt, there is also a sense of anxiety that George's death would be utilised as an opportunity for some to get ahead in their careers, though she does not state how. Hitty's statement reveals how the death of a public figure could be difficult for a grieving family, sharing their beloved family member with the rest of the country and the added anxieties that this could cause.

Hitty shows anxiety at the prospect of having no company upon hearing the news of George's death. As already noted above, her letters of condolence emphasised familial connections, shared grief, and closeness. In the eighteenth century, it was a usual practice to share tears with others, to reinforce familial bonds with those left behind and to jointly lament the deceased. Hitty's expressed vexation that there was 'not one friend to hand!'

[85] P.Sable, 'Attachment, Loss of Spouse, and Grief in Elderly Adults', *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying*, 23.2 (1991), pp. 129–142; Julia Treml *et al.*, 'Loss and Grief in Elderly People: Results from the LIFE-Adult-Study', *Death Studies*, 46.7 (2022), pp. 1621-1630.
[86] Carr Jr., 'Sharing Grief/Initiating Consolation', pp. 139, 141-142.

shows her panic at being alone to digest this news.[87] That she then called upon a Doctor to deliver this comfort shows her need to not go through this experience alone. This is the first major death in her life where she did not have someone close to her present: she was with Richard Brisnley Sheridan, the Linleys and her brother-in-law, Reverend Leigh, when Eliza Sheridan died; she was with all her young children when her husband died; she was with her grown son William when the news came of her son Charles's death in 1815. It also appears that this need for friendship was to distract her from her own thoughts and feelings: she later states that whilst the Doctor was not a comfort, he did give hope that George would recover, and Hitty appears to have clung onto this thought for the rest of her letter.[88] She also acknowledged that being able to write to Bess was a comfort, showing how letters could represent substitute methods of connection beyond physical presence, even in times of grief.[89] Whilst this could be idiosyncratic to Hitty herself, it does show that anxiety could manifest itself in a variety of ways during times of grief, especially if, like Hitty, usual coping mechanisms or rituals have been removed. With no one to perform these rituals with in-person, Hitty showed apprehension as to how to proceed, turning to letters, the substitute vessels for physical human interaction, to seek condolence and a partner to perform her grief with.

When George Canning died on 8th August 1827, whilst still in office as Prime Minister, newspaper articles detailing his life began to appear such as this one from the *Morning Post*, began to appear immediately:

> Stratford Canning Esq. of Garvagh, the grandfather of the subject of our memoir, had two sons, George and Paul. George, the eldest son displeased his parents, by

[87] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], Mehitabel Canning to Elizabeth Barnett, August 7th 1827.
[88] *Ibid,* August 7th 1827.
[89] *Ibid,* August 7th 1827.

> marrying a dowerless beauty, and in consequence, was turned upon the world, to push his fortune as he could…He died poor, on the 11th of April 1771, a few days after the birth of his son George…His infant son, the subject of this memoir, was placed with a maternal uncle, a respectable wine merchant in the City, who, discovering strong marks of genius, at a very early age, sent him to Eton…[90]

This biographical sketch is full of incorrect information, which Hitty, upon finding this, immediately wrote to Bess with her frustrations and anxieties that her husband would not get his proper recognition as George's guardian:

> Mr Coleridge has been here to inform me, that to day's paper states that our lamented G:C – 'was educated by his maternal Uncle, a wine merchant in the City'. Now you know that his Mother never had a Brother. And that your Father, the youngest Brother of his Father, had the entire care of his Education from the age of 6 years to 17 years when he died on 22nd May 1787 – respected as a general merchant…[91]

As George Canning was a public figure, this information appearing in the paper could have been read by thousands, and later used to inform biographies and tributes.[92] Thus, there was a real danger that Stratford Canning's role in George's upbringing could be misconstrued, or even left out. For Stratford was not even acknowledged as George Sr.'s brother in the extract. This account, from the *Morning Post*, is unlikely to be the article that Mr Coleridge read, as Hitty stated he mentioned it was 'to day's paper' on the 10th August and this paper was dated the 9th August. Therefore, it is likely that this incorrect information was published in more than one newspaper, spreading the false information about George Canning's early life. Hitty's letter suggests there was a danger of the family's role in George's life not just being misrepresented but underrepresented.

[90] 'Biographical Sketch of Mr Canning', *Morning Post*, 9th August 1827, p. 2.
[91] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], Mehitabel Canning to Elizabeth Barnett, August 10th 1827.
[92] The *Morning Post* had a typical daily readership of around 4000 people at this time. See Wilfrid Hindle, *The Morning Post, 1772-1937: A Portrait of a Newspaper* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1937; repr.2023), pp. 9-10.

Saving George's reputation became a family affair, conducted through letters. Hitty noted that she 'knew more on this interesting subject than any other person now alive. I require advice how to act on this critical occasion'.[93] This is followed by a short alternative to replace the false information and for Bess's husband, George Barnett to have the biographical information corrected, likely signalling Hitty's awareness of the potential limits of women's involvement in matters concerning print.[94] Nevertheless, that Hitty acted immediately, mere days after finding out about George's death shows not just the importance but the awareness around shaping family legacy in the immediate aftermath of death.

Hitty's actions across all her surviving letters show an awareness of legacy, reputation, and afterlife; from her warnings to Bess about her future and the 'eyes' that watched them, to her own editing of the 'letters from Mr Canning to his son SC [Stratford Canning, Hitty's decease husband], noting that they were 'worth perusing by his grandchildren'.[95] Here, Hitty was not just swift in her response but also aware of the need to act correctly and to craft George's image. Upon hearing the news of George's death, Hitty's immediate words suggest that George Canning, the Prime Minister and public figure was just as important to her expressions of grief as George Canning, lamented nephew.

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[93] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], Mehitabel Canning to Elizabeth Barnett, August 10th 1827.

[94] That Hitty immediately turns to Bess's husband suggests that she does not think she will be able to do this herself. Hitty's letters from 1789 suggest that there are limits to a woman's ability to negotiate in certain arenas as she gets her brother, Paul Patrick to help her with the legal aspects of getting hold of a house after her husband's death. See BRO, fl2111-2308 Mehitabel Canning to Elizabeth Canning 1789 letters. This reflects situations such as Jane Austen's hunt for a publisher – her father and later her brother undertakes this task for her. See Austen, *Jane Austen's Letters*, pp. 190, 205, 210, 213, 226-227, 230, 260, 266-7, 269, 273-274, 293, 299, 303-13, 317-21, 327, 350.

[95] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2323], Mehitabel Canning, date unknown – written on the collection of letters between Stratford Canning Sr and his son, Stratford Canning, December 27th 1766- June 19th 1770.

Hitty was more composed in her expressions of grief in her letters to Bess concerning George's death, compared to her raw letters regarding Eliza Sheridan's death in 1792. This could be due to be Hitty's awareness of a future public reading these letters and that she took more time to wait to compose them than at Eliza's death. She almost addressed the future reader when she wrote 'What an Affliction for us all! If the Publick lament him so deeply, what must not his family and private Friends suffer, on this most melancholy, and deplorable occasion!'[96] Hitty again shows an awareness that George Canning would be grieved for by the public but that it was different, and more acute, for those that knew him personally. That she wrote this to Bess, suggests an awareness that the letters might be seen or used in the future: in a private correspondence, Bess would not have needed to know about the impact of familial grief as she would have been experiencing it for herself.

This could also explain Hitty's comments on George Canning himself:

> Oh!- how I dread great Prosperity, and inordinate ambition! Something is sure to check the Career of those, who possess such advantages; lest they should forget themselves, and assume too much superiority over the rest of the World. I truly believe the ambition of him, whom we now lament, was of the purest and most virtuous kind. And that his first wish was to promote the prosperity & happiness of his Country. And the next, to improve the moral & religious character of the People.[97]

There is a sense of performativity here: Hitty was fully aware that now George had died, he would receive eulogies, obituaries, biographies, and it would be public news. She was already painting a picture of George Canning as she would want him to be remembered in the future. That she worked so hard to preserve this image of him could be partly the reason for her consternation at his biography in his obituary being incorrect in the papers

[96] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], Mehitabel Canning to Elizabeth Barnett [and Harriet Barnett], August 8th 1827.
[97] *Ibid,* August 8th 1827.

and an anxiety for him to be remembered as the family wished. Hitty was right to worry; various subsequent biographies of Canning, such as the almost immediate *Memoir of the Right Honourable George Canning* (1827) and Robert Bell's *Life of Canning* (1848), had errors relating to his Uncle Stratford's role in his upbringing.[98]

She also represented George by societal standards: sensibility was 'the social affections – sympathy, compassion, benevolence, humanity, and pity – against selfishness'.[99] Hitty demonstrates these qualities in George's behaviour in her letter to Bess, likely also performing for an unknown future reader. This could also be the reason for her emphasising that she was the person who knew most about him as a person in her letter to Bess: Hitty was claiming authority over the information being accurate.[100] Hitty's last comment could refer to George Canning's support of Catholic emancipation, a cause that is believed to have partly stemmed from the Canning family's general views on Ireland and gives a personal touch to her commendation.[101] That these letters were kept and have survived, seeing as few others have from Hitty between 1809-1827, suggest that these were kept precisely for their importance in documenting the conversations between the family at George's death and their view of him as a statesman and family member. Whilst this is a low-lying anxiety, masked by grief, it is one that kept Hitty distracted, suggesting that anxiety was not always a negative emotion, especially in times of death. It also offers an insight into the multitude of

[98] Bell asserts that Stratford had no idea of George's situation until he was seven: this is untrue as Stratford was supporting Mary Anne to prevent them from starving and took George in at six years old. See Robert Bell, *The Life of the Rt. Hon. George Canning* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1855), p. 40.
[99] Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility,* p. 215.
[100] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], Mehitabel Canning to Elizabeth Barnett, August 7th -10th 1827.
[101] Giles Hunt, *Mehitabel Canning: A Redoubtable Woman* (Royston: Rooster, 2001), p. 57.

emotions which families of public figures had during these first few weeks and months where they shared their grief with the country.[102]

Ultimately, nowhere is it clearer than in condolence letters, that anxiety was an emotion and a feeling bound up with love, as it caused a reassessment of feeling and emotional ties and was a useful language tool to achieve this through correspondence. Letters offer expressions of anxieties from men and women who knew that they were going to die as they worried for those that they were leaving behind, those that would have to live with any mistakes they had made, in George Canning Sr.'s case. The repercussions of death could cause considerable anxieties: letters show how it was often a catalyst for anxieties for many years to come.

Anxiety was present at points of grief and the expressions of anxiety were often used to renegotiate relationships upon the death of a loved one. Condolence letters were a way for people to renegotiate these relationships. Grief letters did not just offer a space for the grieving to reflect, they also offered a space for people to reaffirm bonds, create new bonds and to re-establish their familial positions. Anxiety was also expressed in idiosyncratic ways after the death had taken place. People worried about being alone, about public and private reputations and also framed their expressions of grief in order to not cause anxiety in those that were far away.

[102] Another example of an afterlife being crafted by relatives is Jane Austen. See Devoney Looser, *The Making of Jane Austen* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2017) for a detailed exploration of this.

Expressions of anxiety were also utilised in the wake of death as a persuasion tool. Whilst it was not always successful, it does demonstrate how the language and tone of anxiety was representative of love, friendship and affection, and how these emotional reactions were used to try and persuade people for money, support, help and guidance. This was especially used by the bereaved, wanting money, support, or friendship in the wake of a death, particularly if it was significant such as the death of a spouse, and the financial hardships that this could cause.

Conclusion

Mary Anne Hunn died in January 1827, around the age of eighty years old. She never lived to see her beloved son become Prime Minister a few months later nor did she see her grandchildren again after that meeting in 1804. Her wish to be laid on a pillow of George's letters was also denied, and the letters eventually passed into the hands of the British Library. George Canning died a few months later, in August 1827, during the period of his political zenith, one hundred and nineteen days into his premiership. Until Liz Truss's forty-five-day record surpassed his in November 2022, George Canning was the shortest serving prime minister in the UK and remains the shortest serving to die in office. Canning's granddaughter married the 4th Earl of Harewood and many of George Canning's papers resided there until many, including his familial letters, were deposited at the West Yorkshire Archives Service in Leeds.

Hitty Canning followed her husband to the grave in 1831, aged eighty-two, after being a widow for forty-five years. Her final surviving letter, from June 1st 1831, with its uneven handwriting and inconsistent ink pressure, spoke of her idleness and delight at the King doffing his hat to her as she was now living in Windsor. Her ailments are a constant topic, but her delight in being able to 'wield the pen' to address her granddaughter is evident.[1]

Bess Barnett, Hitty's daughter, remained sickly throughout her life and died in 1838, around the age of sixty-two. Hitty's youngest son, Stratford, only six months old when his father

[1] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], Mehitabel Canning to Elizabeth Barnett February 11th 1831. Hitty also wrote to her granddaughter in this letter though it was addressed to her mother.

died in 1787, had a successful career as a diplomat, earning a Viscountcy and died at the ripe old age of ninety-three, in 1880. It is through Bess that many of the letters from this side of the family have survived, passed down through the generations until they ended up in the Bath Record Office.

Hitty and Mary Anne lived long lives, the backbone of which have shaped this thesis and the extraordinary family correspondence has allowed for this family's everyday epistolary relationships to come to the fore. The Canning letters, across the four generations, have provided a wealth of material on different familial roles, different stages of life and some of the changes from the mid-eighteenth century to the early nineteenth, especially in terms of emotional expression and familial relationships and how they were impacted by societal and familial expectations.

This thesis is the first long-length study of anxiety within familial letters of the eighteenth century and is one of few projects to utilise the method of focusing on one family's collection of correspondence.[2] It is also one of the only studies which examines anxiety and fear as a focus, especially at several points of transition between life stages, building on key work by Henry French and Mark Rothery on the anxieties of younger sons of gentry families transitioning into adulthood, and Joanne Begiato, who examines fear in the letters of pregnant women.[3] It therefore breaks new ground as it provides an important intersection

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[2] Notable others include Susan Whyman, *Sociability and Power in Late-Stuart England: The Cultural Worlds of the Verneys, 1660-1720* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) and Susan Broomhall and Jacqueline van Gent, *Gender, Power and Identity in the Early Modern House of Orange-Nassau* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016).
[3] Their studies put anxiety at the centre of the argument. See Henry French and and Mark Rothery, 'Male Anxiety and the Younger Sons of the Landed Gentry, 1700-1900', *The Historical Journal,* 62.3 (2019), pp. 967-996 and Joanne Begiato, '"Breeding" a "Little Stranger": Managing Uncertainty in Pregnancy in Later Georgian

between anxiety, letter writing, and distant, familial relationships in the long eighteenth century. Other studies could adopt this methodology to build up a more comprehensive picture of familial anxieties and expressions but also research other emotions such as anger, love, disgust, happiness, sadness, guilt, and shame and importantly how these emotions intertwine within relationships.

The Canning epistolary relationships analysed in this thesis have thoroughly demonstrated that anxiety was an important everyday emotion within remote relationships in the long eighteenth century. It was built into the very process of sending and receiving letters, with misunderstandings, delays, and miscommunications common. Writing a letter acknowledged these anxieties, as most of the Canning letters open with their pleasure at receiving a letter or playful rebukes at still waiting for a response. Some letter forms accentuated these anxieties, such as the love letter seen in Chapter One, with anxious waits communicating love and commitment to courtship. Thus, this thesis has endeavoured to showcase correspondences as a constant tension between relief and anxiety.

It has also undoubtably shown that anxiety was not just common across the letters as a felt emotion but was also an important social and emotional tool to build, maintain, further, and sometimes salvage relationships. Different forms of letters had their own conventions, in which anxiety was an important part. Love letters, as seen in Chapter One, used anxious expressions to denote care and affection towards the recipient. Condolence letters, as seen in Chapter Six, saw anxiety as the motivator of the structure and content of condolences, to

England', in *Perceptions of Pregnancy from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century*, eds by Jennifer Evans and Ciara Meehan (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 13-29.

encourage those grieving to return to their earthly responsibilities. The language of anxiety was sometimes employed in this endeavour, as condolence letter writers wrote of their anxieties about the strength of the mourner's grief. The everyday letter, which covers the other life stages and includes love and condolence letters, saw anxiety as an important emotional tool for persuasion, negotiation and performance of identities, identities, and arguments.

The letter was also an important site for performance. Whilst there is a recognition that some performances were more habitual, that is learned practices which are utilised for emotional expression and can often be 'executed without much cognitive attention paid', the Canning letters do evidence how anxiety was utilised as an emotional tool, crafted to invoke emotional reactions in the intended reader(s) of the letter.[4] Expressions of anxiety were used to invoke feelings of love and commitment, to illicit replies to alleviate anxieties and to teach children emotional management and behaviours, to name but some examples. Language was also utilised to invoke anxiety, such as Hitty's warnings to Bess that the 'Eyes' were upon them and that she would fall behind her peers with her learning if she did not write a letter in French to Betty Ticknell.[5] Anxiety was an important emotional tool across the lifecycle, but especially for parents managing and shaping children's behaviour. However, children themselves learnt to utilise anxiety, as seen in Chapter Four, and began asserting authority and challenging their parents. It is an important emotion for

[4] Monique Scheer, 'Are Emotions A Kind of Practice (and is That What Makes Them Have a History)? A Bourdieuian Approach to Understanding Emotion', *History and Theory*, 51.2 (May 2012), pp. 193-220, pp. 199-201.
[5] WYL888/LC02169 [Accession 2169], Elizabeth Canning to Mehitabel Canning, November 28th 1792.

understanding the role of families in shaping behaviours and emotional expectations, alongside the consideration of societal standards.

The multitude of relationships explored also allowed for the discussion of performances for different family members. For example, George Canning's personal correspondence has revealed a very anxious figure, but one anxious beyond just his political stresses. His familial history uncovers a very important relationship with his mother which led to his known difficulties in trusting people, his suspicious nature and his constant efforts to share different worries with different individuals, with none being shared with his mother. Intimacy is more important than blood in determining which anxieties are shared and why and there is a clear correlation between positive intimate relationships on a certain anxiety or topic and it being shared within that relationship through letters. More work could be done to tease out the extent of George's compartmentalising as a way of managing his familial relationships, beyond just a focus on anxiety.

This thesis has highlighted the importance of context in understanding the nuances of remote relationships. Through the analysis of the Canning family and their biographical elements, the anxieties within the letters take on new or deeper meanings. This is especially true of Mary Anne's performance within her few surviving letters of her mothering, including her defence in her letter-memoir from 1803. Fragments from other correspondences such as Bess's letters to her mother regarding Hitty's indecision to remain with her dying friend, Eliza Sheridan, or to return home to her motherly duties is better understood when the argument between Eliza and Hitty is examined over Eliza's affair and subsequent pregnancy. The letters reveal unexpected anxieties connected to wider societal

events such as the lack of suitors for young Bess in the late 1790s, during the Revolutionary Wars, turning an already anxiety-inducing event – finding a husband – into one filled with more concerns.

An important intervention made by this thesis has been the demonstration of anxiety and anxious language as an expression of love across the lifecycle and various familial relationships. Chapter One's love letters demonstrated the intertwined nature of anxiety as an important indicator of sincerity of feeling, commitment to the relationship and heightened emotion, aspects which Holloway brought out in her broader discussion of love letters.[6] Whilst Holloway does discuss the trial of writing love letters, this thesis takes this further to discuss how linguistic inconsistencies and difficulties in conveying the strength of feelings were argued as evidence of anxious and strong loving feelings. This might remind readers of Jane Austen's *Emma* of Mr Knightley's famous declaration that 'if I loved you less, I might be able to talk about it more'.[7]

This thesis has also shown how anxiety connects with grief, and how it is a key indicator of love, both from the preparations, or inadequate preparations in the case of George Canning Sr., of the deceased, to allow for the provision and security of remaining family members, especially widows and dependants. Then anxiety was also a key emotion of condolence letters, both in expressions of anxiety about the feelings of those grieving but the concern that this grief could deepen into what is termed in the twenty-first century 'complicated

[6] Sally Holloway, *The Game of Love*, 'Love Letters'.
[7] This comes from Austen's novel *Emma*. See Jane Austen, *The Complete Novels of Jane Austen* (London: Penguin, 2007), p. 926.

grief'.[8] Whilst to discuss the duties and responsibilities of the grieving to others might seem like an intrusion onto the period of mourning from a modern perspective, this was a recognised tool to aid the grieving process in the long eighteenth century.

The letter itself was an important indicator of love and not receiving a letter on time could cause distress, or a concerned response. That these letters have been kept suggests something of their value, as emotional objects or those which are deemed to have some historical value. Mary Anne's avid preservation of her son, George's, letters was noted in her letters as her dedication to their relationship, as she wanted to be buried with them, with them forming a pillow for her head.[9] Bess's childhood letters also note the letter as a signal of affection, expressing her great joy at hearing from her mother and her playful displeasure when her mother's letters were delayed. Anxiety and love were intertwined, with anxiety an important display of care, love, and commitment.

Significantly, the thesis as a whole has highlighted how anxiety was particularly acute in the transitions between these life stages. From attaining adulthood, to concerns over marriage and becoming a parent and later grandparent, familial roles were constantly shifting and with these came uncertainties and worries. Sometimes these anxieties were played out in letters, other times they were glimpsed in surviving sources. It details how transitioning through life's stages was an anxious time for all the Cannings.

[8] *Mind:* Bereavement, (2023), https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/bereavement/experiences-of-grief/ [Accessed 14/04/2023].

[9] BL, Add MS89143/3/1/54, Mary Anne Hunn to George Canning, January 27th 1803, p. 146.

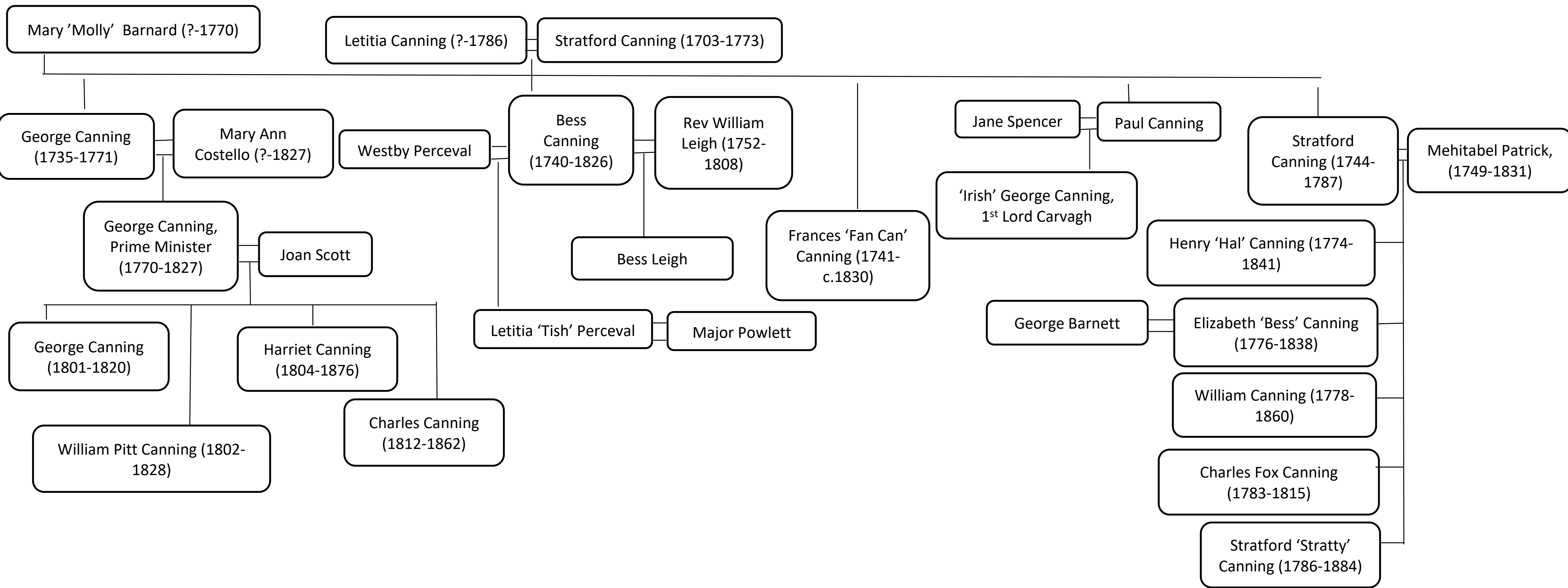
It is important to note that we will never know the conversations that were held between the individuals unless they were recorded in the letters themselves. As Sally Holloway rightly points out 'relationships in history were enormously complex' and this thesis has begun to reveal some of the complexities of the various relationships, such as the mixed feelings George had toward his largely physically absent mother and the tensions between Hitty's beliefs and her strong relationship with Eliza Sheridan when she had her affair with Lord Fitzgerald.[10] Even the relationship between Hitty and Mary Anne themselves, which effectively ended after she joined the theatre and took up with Mr Reddish outside of wedlock, continued to hold strong feelings for both parties: Hitty's determination to disassociate with Mary Anne's actions and her personal dislike of Mary Anne's choices and Mary Anne's aversion to Hitty as the woman who poisoned her son against her.[11]

Equally we cannot fully ascertain how they engaged materially with the letters. There is no evidence of physical remains from tears or kisses and it is ink stains, handwriting and crossing out which guide analysis of the materiality of the letters. However, material features have occasionally featured in the analysis to determine the speed and neatness of handwriting, the neatness of the letter copy and the ink pressures, especially in Chapter Five on later life, as handwriting became an important indicator of health, leading to potential anxiety when handwriting changed or became wobbly or inconsistent. How anxiety is expressed though the letter's materiality could be nuanced through further research.

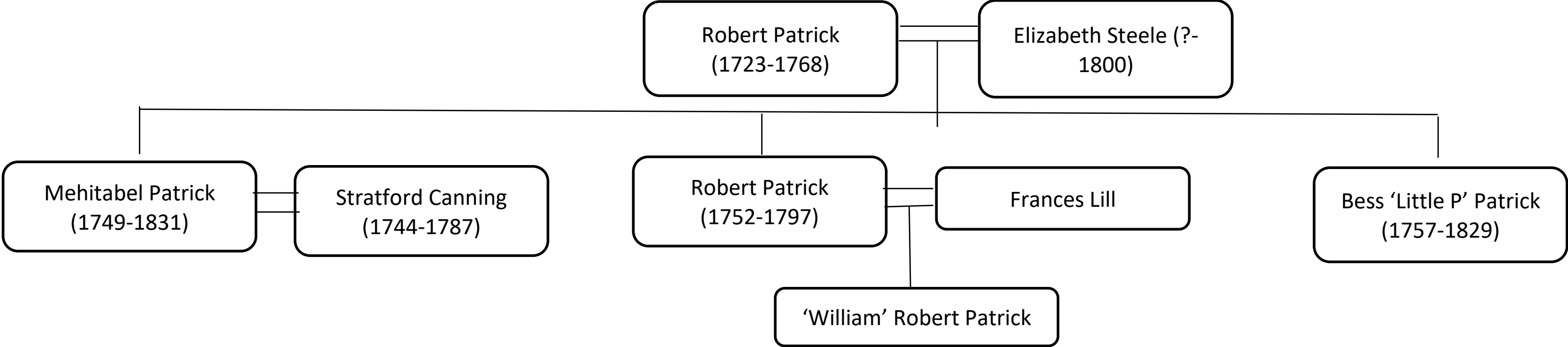
[10] Sally Anne Holloway, 'Romantic Love in Words and Objects during Courtship and Adultery c.1730-1830', PhD Thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2013, p. 267.
[11] See BL, Add MS89143/3/1/54, Mary Anne Hunn to George Canning, January 27th 1803.

Overall, this thesis argues for the continued study of anxiety as an everyday emotion, one which is present daily within our lives, across history and societies. As discussed in the Introduction, in modern society, the term anxiety is often connected to the mental health condition and whilst this is one facet of anxiety, there is a danger that it becomes solely associated with the pathological and its status as a normal emotion and feeling is understudied or sidelined, especially within an age of digital communications. It is also intertwined with feelings and expressions of love and the language of anxiety was and, in many ways, still remains a language of care and love. There is a lot to be gained, particularly through understanding communications, from examining anxiety and how it functions within relationships, across different historical times and spaces and this is an area which is ripe for further research.

Appendix One: The Canning Family Tree



Appendix Two: The Patrick Family Tree



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