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Love and courtship in eighteenth-century Scotland

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Chapter 2

Love and Courtship in Eighteenth-Century Scotland

Katie Barclay

he had Contracted the highest love and regard for her ... yea such a love, that he could not imagined [sic] was possible he should have conceived to any Woman, And that it was only in the power of the sd Mrs Sarah Murray to make him happy¹

The history of love, especially within courtship, is a topic of considerable discussion. For early historians of the European family, like Lawrence Stone and Edward Shorter, the ability to select a partner for love, rather than for economic, political or dynastic reasons, marked a major sea-change in human relationships in the eighteenth century. It was evidence of the move to modernity, where traditional institutions such as the patriarchal family were swept away in favour of individuality and choice.² Subsequently, historians have revised this picture of dramatic change in favour of emphasizing the continuities, where love has always competed alongside economic factors and parental controls in choosing a partner, and has been central to marriage, even in hierarchical family structures.³ Moreover, the idea that this was a ‘competition’ has been revised, with greater emphasis being placed on individuals

¹ National Records of Scotland [NRS], CC8/6/15/37 Mrs Sarah Murray a. Mr William Baird of Brankston, 1744.

² Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800* (London, 1977); Edward Shorter, *The Making of the Modern Family* (London, 1976); Rudolph Trumbach, *The Rise of the Egalitarian Family* (Oxford, 1978); William Goode, ‘Marriage among the English Nobility in the 16th and 17th Centuries: Comment’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 3 (1961): pp. 207–14; William Goode, ‘The Theoretical Importance of Love’, *American Sociological Review*, 24 (1959): pp. 38–47.

³ Diana O’Hara, *Courtship and Constraint: Rethinking the Making of Marriage in Tudor England* (Manchester, 2000); Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words and Sex in Early Modern London* (Oxford, 1996), p. 167; David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, 1997), p. 235; Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman’s Daughter: Women’s Lives in Georgian England* (London, 1998), p. 40.

recognizing that their own self-interest lay in making economically or politically astute choices (or not), and, conversely, on the ways that tight social networks promoted endogamous marriage, even if individuals believed they were marrying ‘for love’.⁴ Nor has this been a discussion confined to a particular social group. There is considerable debate about whether the lower-orders, less reliant on inherited income, had more freedom to ignore parental wishes than their elite counterparts, or whether economic insecurity, as well as the importance of familial networks to create employment opportunities, ensured similar constraints. At the same time, it has been recognized that meanings of ‘love’ were undergoing considerable debate during the eighteenth century. Love, romance, sex before marriage, and the appropriate emotions within courtship and marriage were discussed at length in popular culture, particularly in the flourishing genre of novels, affecting how people felt about each other and expressed such feelings.⁵

This chapter expands on this research through an exploration of love across social groups in Scotland, asking how expectations of love within courtship differed and changed over time and across class. Through doing so, it provides a sense of whether changes in ‘emotional regimes’ moved up or down social ladders, or whether different social groups acted as different ‘emotional communities’, with distinct emotional and cultural frameworks

⁴ Hans Medick and David Warren Sabean, ‘Interest and Emotion in Family and Kinship Studies: a Critique of Social History and Anthropology’, in Hans Medick and David Warren Sabean (eds), *Interest and Emotion: Essays on the Study of Family and Kinship* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 9–28; Steven King, ‘Chance Encounters? Paths to Household Formation in Early Modern England’, *International Review of Social History*, 44 (1999): pp. 23–46; John Gillis, “‘A Triumph of Hope Over Experience’: Chance and Choice in the History of Marriage’, *International Review of Social History*, 44 (1999): pp. 47–54.

⁵ Nicole Eustace, “‘The Cornerstone of a Copious Work’: Love and Power in Eighteenth-Century Courtship’, *Journal of Social History*, 34 (2001): pp. 518–45; Katherine Green, *The Courtship Novel, 1740–1820: a Feminized Genre* (Lexington, 1991); Martha Blauvelt, *The Work of the Heart: Young Women and Emotion, 1780–1830* (London, 2007), pp. 86–7; Clare A. Lyons, *Sex Among the Rabble: an Intimate History of Gender & Power in the Age of Revolution, Philadelphia, 1730–1830* (Chapel Hill, 2006).

for feeling.⁶ It is an amalgamation of completed and ongoing research. The evidence for the lives of the Scottish elites is drawn from a project based on their correspondence during courtship and throughout marriage, and placed within the context of Scottish popular culture.⁷ Material for the lower orders is drawn from ongoing research that uses Leah Leneman's database for marital litigation as its core, and expands it with criminal court records, accounts of Scottish life from literature and from other social observers, and the evidence provided by a rich oral culture of storytelling and song.⁸

Developing a full picture of how love was understood and practised across multiple social groups in eighteenth-century Scotland is beyond the scope of a single article and, indeed, knowing what people 'felt', as opposed to how they discussed and performed emotion, is an even more difficult task. This chapter wishes to begin a conversation on this subject through looking at the contexts in which Scottish people used the word 'love', or similar terms such as affection, in relation to courtship. Through doing so, it provides a history of what different social groups meant by love across the eighteenth century. At the same time, it is recognized that this is far from offering a complete picture of what it means to love, with love also being something shown through behaviour, through ritual and built into social relationships. In this sense, this chapter provides only some opening remarks on the emotional history of the Scottish family.

⁶ For a discussion of the concept of 'emotional regimes' see: William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: a Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge, 2001) and for 'emotional communities' see Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca, 2006).

⁷ For a fuller discussion of both the sources and the conclusions, see Katie Barclay, *Love, Intimacy and Power: Marriage and Patriarchy in Scotland, 1650–1850* (Manchester, 2011).

⁸ Leah Leneman listed and summarized all surviving declarator of freedom and marriage cases tried at the Commissary Court, Edinburgh between 1684 and 1830, as well as 24 legitimacy cases from the period. UK Data Archive Study Number 3970 Marriage Litigation in Scotland, 1694–1830. Her findings were compiled in *Promises, Promises: Marriage Litigation in Scotland 1698–1830* (Edinburgh, 2003).

Scottish culture offered several contexts for discussing love within courtship, contexts that expanded over the course of the eighteenth century. At the start of the century, formal discussions of courtship in the conduct literature in the libraries of Scottish elites gave little space to love beyond warnings about placing passion before parental wishes.⁹ Instead, authors emphasized that marital love would flourish within the correct material conditions. Men and women were advised to look to the external qualities and circumstances of a partner and select a spouse of similar social background and values, with a secure financial standing.¹⁰ Yet, beyond these formal prescripts, accounts of love flourished in popular culture. Love in different forms regularly featured in balladry, a medium which at the start of the century was popular across social groups and did not yet hold the class-specific content or connotations that it would at the end of the century.¹¹

Change in popular culture both reflected and shaped people's emotional worlds. As is explored at length elsewhere, both the expression and meaning of love amongst the social elites altered across the eighteenth century.¹² While courting couples in seventeenth-century Scotland felt that there should be affection that would develop into love after marriage, over the eighteenth century, the idea of marrying for love became increasingly important, although it never removed the need for parental consent or reduced the significance of marriage as an

⁹ For a detailed account of the methodology behind selecting this literature, see: Katie Barclay, 'I Rest Your Loving Obedient Wife: Marital Relationships in Scotland, 1650–1850', (PhD Thesis, University of Glasgow, 2007), Ch. 2 and 3; Katie Barclay, 'Scottish Marriage Texts, 1650–1750', (MPhil Dissertation, University of Glasgow, 2004).

¹⁰ For descriptions of the qualities desired within marriage see, William Ramesay, *The Gentleman's Companion* (London, 1672), p. 94 and Archibald Campbell, Marquis of Argyll, *Instructions to a Son* (London, 1689), pp. 41–3.

¹¹ For example, of the 1800 broadsides that comprise the National Library of Scotland's online collection, 472 contain the word 'love', 71 contain 'loving', 123 contain the word 'affection' and 700 contain the word 'heart'. For a discussion of the broad cultural influence of balladry in Scottish culture and how it changes over the eighteenth century, see Barclay, 'I Rest', chapters 2 and 4.

¹² Barclay, *Love, Intimacy and Power*.

economic institution. This was demonstrated in their use of the word ‘love’, rather than ‘affection’ as in the previous century, the use of a more extensive and flowery rhetoric of emotional expression in courtship letters, and the development of new courting rituals to reflect the new opportunities of urban, enlightenment Scotland. Although the link between love and action was never entirely severed, love became an increasingly abstract concept. It became highly personalised and directed towards a particular individual, and while unity had always been central to marriage, greater emphasis was placed on the spiritual connection between lovers. Similarly, while love was always viewed as a central part of the marital relationship, the culture of sensibility shaped the ways that married couples expressed love, moving the emphasis away from appropriate gendered behaviours, such as obedience from wives and protection from men, to elaborate expressions of romantic intention, and an emphasis on unity and shared interest. Such changes were not just superficial, but had real implications for power relationships within marriage, since the loss of self that romantic love required was taken to mean a loss of the female self at the expense of the male – an emotional coverture.

Similar changes can be seen lower down the social ladder. Many of the best accounts of courtship amongst those below the upper classes are found in the marriage litigation emerging from the Commissary Court, which performed many of the functions of the Anglican Ecclesiastical Court in relation to adjudicating marriage.¹³ In particular, Declarator of Marriage or Freedom and Seduction suits, which centred on proving disputed marriages, are particularly useful. Details of the nature of the courtship and marriage were often central factors, allowing judges to determine the legitimacy of the marital relationship or whether seduction occurred. As such they offer insight into the importance placed by couples on love

¹³ For the English equivalents of these suits see: Rebecca Probert, *Marriage Law and Practice in the Long Eighteenth Century: a Reassessment* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 26–9.

within courtship and evidence for the contexts in which couples used the word 'love'. At the same time, the nature of such court cases means that the courtships discussed were heading towards or ended in marriage which leaves us with little evidence for courtships or sexual relationships that were not intended to end in marriage or more transient relationships (explored more in Chapter 3). This is a disappointing gap given that, with some fluctuation across the century, around 20 per cent of women in Scotland conceived their first child out of wedlock, and moreover the majority of these infants were also born outside of wedlock.¹⁴

Perhaps one of the most interesting observations of this marital litigation is how infrequently love is discussed. Proving the legitimacy of a marriage or seduction rested primarily on either evidencing a promise of marriage or wedding ceremony, or on demonstrating that the courtship was known in the community and endorsed by family and friends. Social class was absolutely central to such discussions in a society suspicious of cross-class relationships and many cases centred on whether a couple were of similar background, which offered legitimacy to the relationship.¹⁵ Despite being a constant matter for debate by lawyers, these cases operated on the presumption that people of different classes who courted or had sexual relationships could not have expected that relationship to end in marriage. This was used particularly effectively to ward off claims of marriage from servants who were frequently seduced, raped or otherwise sexually exploited by employers and their sons. Demonstrating an emotional relationship between the couple was not a priority until the nineteenth century, a phenomenon perhaps encouraged by expanding literacy which meant more love letters were entered into evidence.¹⁶ While references to visiting and talking were mentioned, there are few accounts of what the 'sweet nothings' whispered between lovers comprised, although other forms of love-making, such as gift-

¹⁴ Leah Leneman and Rosalind Mitchison, *Sexuality and Social Control: Scotland 1660–1780* (Oxford, 1989), p. 176.

¹⁵ Leneman, *Promises, Promises*, pp. 9–12.

¹⁶ For example NRS, CC8/6/109/389 Jean McFarlane a. Robert Ancell, 1815.

giving, were described in evidence. At the same time, the way the word love was used in such cases provides useful evidence of how love, which appeared so regularly in popular culture, was understood by these social groups in everyday life.

Sexual Attraction, Desire and Love

What is love? Like today, the idea that love was born of sexual attraction or desire was a central theme within Scottish balladry. Love could be stirred by physical attraction, so one ‘young man’ sang: ‘When first I saw her comely face,/ I much admir'd her beauty, / And in my heart I did intend/ to proffer her all duty’, while Wullie’s sweetheart described how ‘I Wash'd and painted, to make me look provoking/ Snares that told me would catch the Man’.¹⁷ Descriptions of beautiful men inspiring love were rarer, but Jocky Blyth and Gay, ‘... was a Bony Lad/ As ever I did see,/ He made my Heart so glad,/ When first he Courted me’.¹⁸ It was also recognized that attraction might be inexplicable, with one ballad acknowledging that ‘love’s sight be dim’.¹⁹ These accounts suggest that love was outwith an individual’s control, a non-rational response to an attractive person, even if such responses may have been shaped by cultural norms around beauty and desire.

[Insert Illustration 2.1 here – portrait, ideally big enough to read text if possible]

Illustration 2.1 **‘An Excellent New Play-House Song’, c. 1701. This fascinating ballad is purportedly the words of a woman who questions whether there is any harm in premarital sex, offering a rare female perspective on sexual desire and love.**

As such, love was understood as an embodied experience, provoking a range of physical responses. Most commonly, it acted to distract the thoughts of the lover or caused them to think and talk of nothing else: ‘I thought on bonny Helen,/ as I was walking there./

¹⁷ *Sweet is the Lass that Loves Me. A Young Mans Resolution to Prove Constant to his Sweet Heart* (1701); *Fy on the Wars that Hurri'd Willie from Me* (1710).

¹⁸ *The New Way of Jocky Blyth and Gay* (1701).

¹⁹ *Cockabendie Loves Not Me* (1701).

As I was walking there, / she came into my Mind,/ I thought my bonny Helen / fairest of Woman kind'. Similarly, Bonny Dundee lamented: 'Did not my Blushes a Passion discover,/ When thou was absent, yet talking of thee', while Blyth Jockie, 'Is all my hearts delight./ He's all my talk by Day,/ And in my Dreams by night'.²⁰ Similarly, unrequited love or broken relationships caused physical pain. Blyth Jockie caused his lover's 'heart to break', which led her to move between grief and anger: 'I sigh, I sob, I Mourn, I dayly Rage and Burn'.²¹ Nancy's love lamented that 'Sad sighs and sorrow and grief is a token,/ True Love is such a Tormenting pain'.²²

A belief in fate may have reinforced this sense of lack of control over their physical experience of love. However, there do not appear to be any claims within early-eighteenth-century balladry that particular courtships or marriages were fated to be. The idea of fate was usually restricted to discussions of things beyond human control and particularly death, with the occasional pair of star-crossed lovers meeting their fate in death, and one unrequited lover noting that 'for to Love in vain's my fate'.²³ Similarly, fate appeared in discussions of married life, used to imply that once the bonds of marriage were tied, couples, and particularly women, had little control over their destiny. Valiant Jockie's lady, who followed her husband to war dressed as man, noted that she would achieve her victory as: 'Loves raging Fate doth all agree, To do some glorious act for me'.²⁴ Yet, the absence of fate in discussions of courtship suggests that within Scottish culture, at least at this stage in the relationship, couples had a choice – a choice that could overcome desire alone.

²⁰ *Bonny Helen* (1701); *Bonny Dundee* (1701); *Jocky Blyth and Gay*.

²¹ *Jocky Blyth and Gay*.

²² *A Pretty New Song. Of Nancies Unkindness to her Lover* (1701).

²³ *The Bloody Gardener's Cruelty; or, the Shepherd's Daughter Betray'd* (1700–10); Mr Ramondon, *In Heriot's Walks &c, A New Song* (Edinburgh, 1715).

²⁴ *An Excellent New Song, Intituled, Valiant Jockie, His Ladies Resolution* (1700); see also: *The Mother of Jealousie; or, The Husband's Lament* (1701).

This may be partly informed by understandings of sexual desire. Like in many cultures, sexual desire and love were closely related in Scotland, but sexual intercourse was not necessarily associated with marriage. As Leneman and Mitchison demonstrate, from at least the 1660s and across the eighteenth century, many of the lower orders appeared to be happy to engage in sexual intercourse with no expectation that marriage would follow (a trend that increased at a national level from the 1770s). They suggest that this was not simply a case of delayed marriage, as the number of marriages with ante-nuptial pregnancies remained low; rather this reflected a subculture where sex before marriage was the norm.²⁵ This can be seen in the numerous accounts of sex that do not lead to marriage within balladry. Moreover, the relationship between sex and love was complex. Love could be used as metaphor for sexual desire, so 'Jackie rouz'd with love' has explicitly bawdy implications, while one resourceful man found that '... when we had Drunken/ two Bottles of wine,/ I found my Dear Mistriss/ both Loving and Kind', where 'loving and kind' meant sexually available.²⁶

Yet sexual intercourse was also meant to arouse the feeling of love. A number of ballads give accounts of how forced sex, behaviour that a modern reader would understand as rape, could stir love within women's hearts. One suitor who attacked his sweetheart as they walked in a park, noted that he 'gain'd my Point, through Love's Assistance', while the woman responded 'I did not think you'd prove so Cruel,/ As all my quiet to destroy,/ Read in my eyes my grief, my Jewel,/ But in my Heart my coming Joy'.²⁷ Another ballad advised that to win the heart of the Coalier Lassie, one must take her virginity: 'Although at first she may deny,/ yet you must pursue her:/ Her Modesty will make her cry/ your Rudeness will undo

²⁵ Leneman and Mitchison, *Sexuality and Social Control*, p. 176. See also Lyons, *Sex Among the Rabble*.

²⁶ *An Excellent New Play-House Song; called, the Bonny Gray-ey'd Morn; or, Jockie Rouz'd with Love* (1701); *A New Song of Mallinger or, The Female-Dear-Joy Tricked of her Maiden-Head* (1700).

²⁷ Ramondon, *In Heriot's-Walks*.

her'. Moreover, this song conflated 'rape' with winning her love, noting: 'Although she struggle for a while/ yet you'll won about her,/ If once her Heart you can beguile/ you'll never go without her'.²⁸ The first of these ballads was written by a man and the second is anonymous but directed at a 'male' listener, which raises the questions of how Scottish women would have responded to the idea that their love could have been roused through violence.

Yet, women from a variety of social backgrounds, seeking to have their irregular marriages declared valid in the courts, described forced sexual encounters and used them as evidence of their 'marriage'. In 1744, Sarah Murray, an orphaned gentlewoman working as a lady's maid, described how she was locked in a bedroom by her employer's son and he 'Violently seized the sd Sarah Murray and told her, it was in vain for her to struggle, for he could not get over his passion that way, his love to her was so strong'. She then managed to exert a promise of marriage from him before she 'Compl[ied] to Yeild her body to him'.²⁹ As the century progressed and female passivity in sexual intercourse became increasingly prized, one woman even claimed 'it has ever been looked on as the most beautiful circumstance attending married Love that a seeming reluctance should still be found on the part of the Female'.³⁰ While there is not the space here to consider the complex construction of rape in Scottish culture, such accounts suggest that many women accepted that marriage was a possible outcome of forced sex and moreover expected that such marriages should be loving. This was likely also informed by a wider social reality where women were regularly expected

²⁸ *The Coalier Lassie* (1701).

²⁹ NRS, CC8/6/15/37.

³⁰ NRS, CC8/5/140 Mary Crawford a. Henry Campbell, 1781. For discussion see: Katie Barclay, 'Sex, Identity and Enlightenment in the Long Eighteenth Century', in Jodi Campbell, Elizabeth Ewan and Heather Parker (eds), *Shaping Scottish Identity: Family, Nation and the World Beyond* (Guelph, 2011), pp. 29–42.

to marry men with whom they had spent little time and yet form loving marriages, and a legal context where marital rape was not a crime. These accounts highlight the way that sexual intercourse was central to creating love within in marriage, as well as an act performed by couples 'in love'. Following this logic, children were often understood as the evidence of a 'loving' marriage.³¹ Love and sex therefore became intricately combined in the public imagination.

Making Love

While love could be provoked by physical attraction and created through sexual intercourse, the physical responses manifested by love more often emerged after lengthier courtships and were created by less personal factors than attractiveness. As the popular term 'wooing' suggests, love was often envisioned as something to be created over time, a feeling produced through appropriate behaviour towards a beloved. Many ballads introduced the main event after referring to wooing or courting, so 'Many one came to woo' the lass at Peatie's Mill, while 'Ann Maggy she was in her prime,/ When Willy made Courtship till her'.³² Courtship rituals often involved communal activities such as attendance at a fair, or where 'the Piper plays aloud [... and] the Lasses sport and play'.³³ Drinking was also very common, especially in songs where the suitor was attempting to seduce his beloved into bed: 'Dear Peggie said I/ to the Tavern let us go;/ A Bottle of Wine/ I will on thee bestow'. Peggie's lover, who met her at the fair, also bought her gifts of 'fine rigging and toping to wear,/ And a pair of new gloves'.³⁴ Jocky Blyth and Gay took a more romantic approach, meeting his

³¹ For discussion see: Joanne Bailey, *Parenting in England c.1760–1830: Emotions, Self-identities and Generations* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 22–6.

³² *The New Ballad of The Lass of Peaties Mill* (1701); *Dialogue Between Ald John M'clatchy, and Young Willie Ha, about the Marriage of his Daughter Maggy M'clatchy* (Edinburgh, 1700–20).

³³ *Come Sweet Lass or Loves Invitation* (1701)

³⁴ *New Song of Mallinger*.

beloved in a shady grove and ‘sweetly talkt of Love’. He also sent her a letter each month.³⁵

Wooing was usually understood in gendered terms, where men courted women, attempting to stir love in their breasts. While they often found men attractive, female narrators of ballads usually positioned themselves relatively passively. They dressed to provoke attention or made themselves available to be courted, but they did not understand themselves as wooing men.³⁶ This is not to say that women did not have a sense of their own role within courting dynamics, as the *Bonny Bruicked Lassie* lamented: ‘For my Love he is gone,/ and all my Labour lost’.³⁷

This sense of love being created over time was also apparent in the evidence from court cases. In 1752, Mary Malcolm’s lawyer argued that William Lees, a servant, ‘frequently made love to the complainer and profess’d the greatest friendship and regard to her’.³⁸ In the same year, the merchant James Grierson denied courting Christian Smith, noting that he did ‘not make love to the pursuer, or commune with her upon marriage, or say that he had any particular regard for her more than for any other woman’.³⁹ A daughter of a tenant, Jean Low, argued that Francis McFarlane had ‘frequently made love to the Complainer and upon the faith and belief that the defender was sincere in his Courtship for Marriage and upon his actually promiseing and Engageing to Marry the Complainer, she was induced and prevailed upon to admitt of his Embraces’.⁴⁰ Like the term ‘wooing’ in balladry, ‘making love’ implied that love was something developed over time, literally ‘made’ through appropriate courting rituals. It was not usually meant to refer to sex itself, although the fact

³⁵ *Jocky Blyth and Gay*.

³⁶ For discussion see: Barclay, ‘Sex, Identity and Enlightenment’.

³⁷ *The Bonny Bruicked Lassie She's Blew Beneath the Eye* (1701).

³⁸ NRS, CC8/6/15/60 Mary Malcolm a. William Lees, 1752.

³⁹ NRS, CC8/6/15/62 Christian Smith a. James Grierson, 1752.

⁴⁰ NRS, CC8/6/15/77 Jean Low a. Francis McFarlane, 1757.

that love was so closely related to sex in the popular imagination meant that it could be used as a playful double entendre.

It was also an expression that fell out of fashion towards the end of the century when love became something to be declared, although it never entirely disappeared. In 1784, James Primrose, clerk, argued that he rarely visited and ‘never declared love or an intention to marry’ Jean Lawrie.⁴¹ Three years later, George Archer, a medical student, denied that he ‘made any professions of Love or regard to the pursuer’. More complexly, and suggesting that some people felt that love-making did not inevitably lead to marriage, in 1796, William Fleming, a servant, argued that he had ‘formed an Attachment or liking to the pursuer, and expressed a regard and Love for her – [but] never promised to Marry the pursuer ... But frequently ... expressed love to her’.⁴² In 1806, Margaret Tenant offered to ‘prove that I was visited in my Brothers House by the Defender who made strong professions of Love and attachment to me’.⁴³

[Insert Illustration 2.2 here- portrait]

Illustration 2.2 **Plate 7 of Scottish poet Alan Ramsay’s pastoral play *The Gentle Shepherd* (1784). In the play Roger courts Jenny: ‘Baith by my service, signs and langing een: And I maun out wi’t, tho’ I risk your scorn, Ye’re never frae my thoughts baith even and morn. Ah! Could I loo ye less, I’d happy be, But happier far! cou’d ye but fancy me’.**

The shift from making love to professing love reflected a broader trend seen within the marriages of the Scottish elites and across Europe and its colonies, where an emphasis on loving behaviour was replaced by a more Romantic concern with inner-feeling and its

⁴¹ NRS, CC8/6/44/181 Jean Lawrie a. James Primrose, 1783.

⁴²NRS, CC8/6/46/199 Helen McLeay a. George Archer, 1786; NRS, CC8/6/61/253 Ann Wilson a. William Fleming, 1782.

⁴³ NRS, CC8/6/79/329 and 330 Margaret Tenant a. Aneas Morrison, 1804.

rhetorical expression. Love became less an action than a feeling to be expressed.⁴⁴ At the same time, while both models for loving placed an emphasis on men as the active instigators of love, ‘making love’ had a mutuality that ‘professing love’ did not. ‘Making love’ implied that love was something created between the couple, allowing women a part in that process; professions of love rendered women significantly more passive, offering them the opportunity to accept or reject male love but not to participate in its creation.

This is not to say that women were not understood to love. In 1778, Margaret Ferguson, who eloped with her writing teacher when she was seventeen, was described as having ‘acted in the whole of the Matter from Choice Love and affection for the Pursuer upon whose part it was perfectly reciprocal’. Her alleged husband then argued that when she showed doubt about the marriage, he offered to leave, saying: ‘he did not chuse to linger any longer in a Vain Courtship’, when a ‘Tear rushed into the defenders Eye and she seemed very unwilling to give him up as a lover and said at same time to the pursuer that her love was as strong to him as ever And that she loved him better than any oyr Man in the World’.⁴⁵ Yet, even here, Margaret was never portrayed as being the protagonist in the courtship. Unusually, Alexander Colston, a bricklayer, went a stage further when he claimed that Margaret Meldrum courted him and ‘after a considerable deal of persuasion holding herself out as a proper match for him and pledges of great love and attachment to the Complainer Protesting that she could not live without having him for her husband, he at last consented that they should be married to each other’.⁴⁶ His evidence for this was so poor that he eventually withdrew his claim of marriage, but, while a rare example, this may suggest that certain communities within the lower orders felt that women could be the protagonists in love. It also reflected the increasing contestation over this idea in the feminist literature of the period. For

⁴⁴ For example, see: Rebecca Earle, ‘Letters and Love in Colonial Spanish America’, *Americas*, 62/1 (2005), pp. 17–46.

⁴⁵ NRS, CC8/6/38/159 David McKie a. Margaret Ferguson, 1778.

⁴⁶ NRS, CC8/6/72/307 Alexander Colston a. Margaret Meldrum, 1801.

example, Wollstonecraft dismissed the prescriptive literature of the period since through it ‘women perceive that it is only through their address to excite emotions in men, that pleasure and power are to be obtained’.⁴⁷

Love in the Everyday

As well as something created between individuals, almost all discussions of love in the eighteenth century located couples in the wider social, familial and economic networks that have dominated historical discussions around courtship in early modern Europe and beyond. Most authors of conduct literature argued that love was correctly placed when it corresponded with the qualities that were conducive to a successful marriage. They expected people to choose their mates wisely, selecting them for their virtues and marrying with parental approval.⁴⁸ Similarly, the place of love within courtship was a central theme within the flourishing genre of novels. Yet, even in this literature famed for its ‘romantic’ leanings, couples rarely just fell in love and married. Instead, as Rendall highlights in Chapter 4, novels were spaces where the relationship between many different forms of love, sexual desire, social class, individual merit, dynastic concerns, and economic practicalities were explored and contested. Like in conduct literature, most novelists increasingly saw love as a requirement for a successful marriage, but the numerous accounts of marriages born from ambition, greed, or forced by parents highlighted that what constituted love and its importance within courtship were matters of ongoing debate.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ See chapter V of Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects* (Boston, 1792). The quote is from chapter VI. For discussion, see Barbara Taylor, ‘Feminists versus Gallants: Manners and Morals in Enlightenment Britain’, in Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor (eds), *Women, Gender and Enlightenment* (Houndmills, 2005), pp. 30–52.

⁴⁸ For an example of the combination of love and prudence, see Hester Chapone, *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* (London, 1827), p. 112.

⁴⁹ There is a broad literature on the complex plots and layered meanings of novels and particularly courtship novels. Some useful discussions include: Green, *The Courtship Novel*; Ruth B. Yeazell, *Fictions of Modesty: Women and Courtship in the*

Ballads too reflected the way that personal relationships were embedded within their wider contexts. While *Bonny Dundee* is primarily a lament over a disagreement between lovers and the pain it has caused, it also suggests that the difficulties arise from the difference in social status of the lovers.⁵⁰ Similarly, the shepherd's daughter found 'love did prove her utter overthrow' when she was murdered by her lover's wealthy parents.⁵¹ With a more positive spin on the motivations for parental interference in courtship, the lover of the lass at Peatie's Mill bemoaned: 'For if I lov'd her well,/ Her father lov'd her better:/ Her friends and mother lov'd her so./ That I could never get her'.⁵² *The Bonny Lass of Branksome* perhaps most fully details the process of courting, where a man is attracted to a 'pretty Lass,/ that was both neat and handsome', who he woos through buying drinks ('Twill credit me and all my Kin,/ If I your Love and Favour win'), but the song quickly turns into a discussion of their comparative social status, what she will receive as a dowry, and whether their parents will consent given that their families are rivals.⁵³

Even in ballads that focus on sex, rather than courtship, families were often in the background. *The Birks of Abergeldy* focused on a suitor trying to convince his sweetheart to have premarital sex. He promised to marry her if she fell pregnant, but she refused as 'Abergeldy is too near my Friends, [...] Their Eyes on me are stedly'.⁵⁴ Similarly, while the man who raped the Coalier Lassie did so to win her heart, he also noted that she would thank him since it would also allow her to have sex with the Laird, her father's employer. In doing

English Novel (Chicago, 1984); Ruth Perry, *Novel Relations: the Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture, 1748–1828* (Cambridge, 2004).

⁵⁰ *Bonny Dundee*.

⁵¹ *The Bloody Gardener's Cruelty; True Love Murdered or a New Dialogue Between a Young Gentleman and a Maid Of Lower Degree* (1701) has an identical storyplot.

⁵² *Lass Of Peaties Mill*.

⁵³ *The Bonny Lass of Branksome* (1701).

⁵⁴ *The Birks of Abergeldy* (1701).

so, the ballad not only highlighted the social relationships within the couple's community, but also implied that she could use sex to bring favour to her family.⁵⁵ These songs are situated amongst numerous others that do not discuss love explicitly, but give detailed and fascinating accounts of dowry negotiations, schemes to win parental consent and descriptions of weddings, or festivities where the community come together.⁵⁶

Ballads that explore love only in relation to feeling or to the individual merits of the beloved are almost exclusively songs about absence or unrequited love, suggesting that love that did not take into account the social and economic realities was not heading towards marriage. At the same time, this is not to suggest that there was a clear distinction between irrational love based on physical desire and individual choice, and rational love that took account of social circumstances. The ballad *James Harris (The Daemon Lover)*, which went through several editions between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, demonstrated the complexity of understandings of love.⁵⁷ The ballad told the story of a happily married woman, Jane Reynolds, who was seduced by a former, thought to be deceased, lover, only to discover he was a daemon.⁵⁸ The ballad distinguished between the irrational, romantic love

⁵⁵ *The Coalier Lassie*.

⁵⁶ For example: *An Excellent New Ballad (Concerning a Bridegroom and his Bride, who were Lately Married at Borrowstouness, giving a Full and True Account of their Behaviour, and of the Bridegroom's Running Away from the Bride the Same Night, without Bedding with Her)* (c.1720); *Dialogue Between Ald John M'clatchy, and Young Willie Ha*; Allan Ramsay, *The Young Laird and Edinburgh Katy, with Katy's Answer* (Edinburgh, 1720); Allan Ramsay, 'Give Me a Lass with a Lump of Land', in Allan Ramsay, *Poems* (Edinburgh, 1728). For a discussion see: Katie Barclay, "'And Four Years Space they Loveingly Agreed': Balladry and Early Modern Understandings of Marriage", in Elizabeth Ewan and Janay Nugent (eds), *Finding the Family in Medieval and Early Modern Scotland* (Ashgate, 2008), pp. 23–34.

⁵⁷ This song can be found in Motherwell's collection, see: Glasgow University Library, GB 0247 MS Murray 501 William Motherwell, *Scottish Ballads*. A discussion of its origins and development over time can be found in Francis James Child (ed.), *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (Boston, 1882–98), pp. 360–9, Child ballad 243.

⁵⁸ A daemon is a supernatural creature, such as the ghost of dead hero and is not necessarily evil. It is distinguishable from a demon, which is a malignant spirit.

shared by Jane and her lover, James Harris, and the wholesome love of her husband, a ship-carpenter. The love between Jane and James caused James to reject a rich princess for his married sweetheart, while Jane left her stable, happy marriage and children. The consequences were disastrous with Jane drowned by her lover. In contrast, Jane's love for her husband brought them happiness, contentment and devoted children.

Yet, such irrational and destructive love did not necessarily preclude pragmatism: even Jane had to be convinced of her lover's ability to provide before she left her husband, asking 'What means hast thou to bring me to/ If I should go with thee?'⁵⁹ The irrational form of love was understood as a 'temptation', with Jane crying: "'O tempt me not, sweet James", quoth she./ "With thee away to go"; an idea reinforced by the various riches he offered to put under her command. In contrast, Jane's husband 'To her wooing came' and 'gained her love'. There was no mention of his material circumstances or the place of family in their courtship, although an eighteenth-century audience may have understood 'wooing' to have this dimension. In this instance, a concern with material treasures reinforced the problematic nature of this couple's love, demonstrating the extent to which the concern with economic resources and parental consent was about ensuring social order, a tension that similarly emerged in ballads about cross-class courtships.

Similarly most couples could not separate their feelings from their social relationships, with the evidence from court cases demonstrating how couples combined a sense of the emotional power of love with the practicalities of the everyday. In 1765, Helen Swan's lawyer demonstrated the irrational, passionate nature of love, when he argued that if her employer had wanted to marry her then he 'is his own master and if in love to that height of desperation as to be impelled to marry a Servant maid, cou'd no doubt lawfully gratify that

⁵⁹ 'A Warning for Married Women', Pepys Ballad, IV, 101 (1685), see Child, *Popular Ballads*, pp. 360-9

passion ... His mother's aversion to the match could never have hinder'd it.'⁶⁰ Similarly, the writing teacher, David McKie told Margaret Ferguson that he 'loved her to distraction', before offering to 'give her fine Clothes, a house of her own' and allow her to 'live like a lady'.⁶¹ In 1754, Robert Mitchell's apology to Jean White after she became pregnant, noted that:

for Jean you know my love was very great for you [and] you know that my behaviour never designed wrong to you ... here I think is the last offer [of future marriage and financial support for the child] that ever you may get from me and I was Informed by my brother to take this method if I thought I could love the Woman which Jean you know what has been my affection.⁶²

John Megget, shoemaker, told Isobel Steel in 1757 that 'I am insensible about your money and know not what you have, and that it was her herself that he loved', while Francis McFarlane 'always Express the affection and regaird he had for the Complainer as often as he came to visite her and said that nothing in time greived him so much as her being in so mean a house and promised soon to provide her handsomely'.⁶³

Such descriptions emphasized the depth of love that men expressed for the women that they wished to marry, but are also striking for how embedded they are in daily life. Declarations of love were not expressed in the abstract, but instead accompanied by promises of future care and provision (or denial that such mercenary concerns were the motivation of love). There is also an absence of the flowery rhetoric that is found in the letters of the elite. Some of this absence may well be due to the nature of differing source materials, but it may also suggest that for those for whom provision and financial security could not be taken for

⁶⁰ NRS, CC8/6/24/95 Helen Swan a. Robert Hunter, 1765.

⁶¹ NRS, CC8/6/38/159.

⁶² NRS, CC8/6/15/74 Jean White a. Robert Mitchell, 1754.

⁶³ NRS, CC8/6/15/76 John Megget a. Isobell Steel, 1757; NRS, CC8/6/15/77.

granted such promises were a more meaningful demonstration of love than abstract language alone. At the same time, this was not because love was expected to be secondary to more practical concerns. As many of the examples above suggest, love or the potential for love was understood to be requisite for a successful marriage.

Early-eighteenth-century balladry, like other forms of literature in Scotland, continued to circulate across the century, allowing for continuity in ideas about courtship and marriage. There were, however, some changes in how love was portrayed over time. During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, romantic love became increasingly central to discussions of courtship, and many ballads moved straight from accounts of ‘love at first sight’ to marriage, without accounting for the role of family or the need to ensure economic security. By the early nineteenth century, portrayals of couples who met, fell in love and immediately married were common, a theme that had been rare earlier. *The Banks of Inverary* described a man who found a beautiful woman at a riverbank. He realized that he had found the love of his life and convinced her to marry him. The ballad ends with the couple riding ‘unto some parson without any more delay’.⁶⁴ Such ballads took much of their style and content from earlier songs that focused on unrequited love or laments for lost lovers, but concluded with a happy ending. This was also evident in the growing numbers of love letters that appeared in court after the turn of the century, reflecting a growth in literacy, but also the increasing engagement across the social ladder in the culture of sensibility. Yet, despite the greater priority given to love as an impetus for action, in the everyday most couples found it difficult to extract their feelings from the competing demands of the wider social context in which they lived.

Conclusion

⁶⁴ *Banks of Inverary* (1810–30). Examples of versions of the same tale are *Banks of Inverary* (1830–50) and *The Banks of Leven Water* (1830–50).

Perhaps remarkably, how the word love was used throughout the eighteenth century continues to have cultural resonance in the twenty-first century. What is being spoken of remains elusive, and yet it is a feeling that can be evoked by sex, desire, attraction, time spent together and accompanied by a wide social apparatus, encompassing courtship rituals, family and community, as well underpinned by economic necessities. It is an emotion that causes a physical reaction in the body and causes the mind to be distracted. Love, therefore, was the word used to describe people's emotional investment in their sexual and marital relationships. The elision between the two is interesting, perhaps reflecting the ambiguity between distinguishing informal relationships from irregular, and even regular, marriage, in a society where as many as thirty per cent of people married irregularly.⁶⁵ It was also an emotion identified in individualized terms, as a feeling created between individuals, and yet a feeling that drew in the complex social networks that individuals were located within and could lead to a marriage that continued to be viewed as the basis of community and social order. In this way, it acted as a mechanism to emotionally tie individuals into their communities, creating an emotional investment in social order.

Love was also an emotion that held similar meanings across Scottish society. At the start of the eighteenth century, this perhaps reflected the nature of social relationships. With a population of only one million in 1700, while social hierarchy was acknowledged and respected, people of different social groups were of necessity brought into close contact, reinforced by the clan system in the Highlands and Borders that tied people together in a form of familial relationship.⁶⁶ Like in other parts of Europe, this meant that a common cultural framework was shared across different levels of society, in this instance reflected in the

⁶⁵ Leneman and Mitchison, *Sexuality and Social Control*, p. 108.

⁶⁶ Alan MacInnes, *Clanship, Commerce and the House of Stuart, 1603–1788* (Dundee, 1996), p. 221.

popularity of a shared oral culture across social groups.⁶⁷ By 1801, the population had expanded to 1.6 million and was to explode to almost 2.4 million by 1830.⁶⁸ Coupled with urbanisation and changes to the economy, Scotland was beginning to develop distinctive classes with their own cultures. But, as its continuing resonance today suggests, the meanings of love explored by early balladists continued to have significant cultural relevance. At the same time, the importance of romantic love across society appeared to be growing with romantic courtships and outpourings being more likely to lead to marriage in ballads in the later part of the century, while other literatures gave more space to exploring its significance to courtship and marriage.

Many of the ideas found in novels and even conduct literature drew heavily on the oral culture of previous generations, but given the cultural ubiquity of the ballad genre this cannot be claimed as a movement of ideas ‘upwards’. At the same time, there do appear to be differences across social rank, even as a shared cultural framework informed understandings of love, which makes it difficult to argue that this group remained a single emotional community, if they ever were one. Social elites seemed to endorse the ‘romantic voice’ to a greater extent, allowing flowery expression and abstract ideas to flourish in their correspondence, even as parental consent and financial contracts remained essential to a successful match. The lower orders also used the word love and had a similar sense of its power to affect mind and body, but they appeared to be more restrained in their expression of love. At the same time, as balladry became more associated with the lower orders, they began to offer the most positive accounts of love leading to marriage – a disregard for social realities that were out of step with their concern for economic security in practice. Perhaps, like the social elites, this tension reflected that love continued to be a contested emotion

⁶⁷ Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Farnham, 2009), pp. 49–102.

⁶⁸ Neil Davidson, *The Origins of Scottish Nationhood* (London, 2000), p. 174.

within courtship. In this way, different social groups continued to ask similar questions of love within courtship, if in slightly different ways.