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Corresponding Author	Family Name	<b>Begiato</b>
	Particle	
	Given Name	<b>Joanne</b>
	Prefix	
	Suffix	
	Division	
	Organization	Oxford Brookes University
	Address	Oxford, UK
	Email	JBegiato@brookes.ac.uk

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Abstract	<p>This chapter draws upon a wealth of accounts of marital experiences in eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century correspondence, diaries, and autobiography to explore conflictual marital relationships. This expands our understanding of marital conflict by shifting the focus away from the litigation records that resulted from the couple's interaction with the law following marriage breakdown and recourse to formal separation. The chapter confirms that economic issues and lack of marital respect undermined marital relationships, as previous scholarship demonstrates, but it also reveals the significance of religious differences, temperamental clashes, and the crucial role of other family members in marriage disputes. Strikingly these informal records also show that conflict impacted upon the inter-generational family as well as spouses, and could endure across generations for as long as people's capacities to bear grudges.</p>
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# Bearing Grudges: Marital Conflict and the Intergenerational Family

*Joanne Begiato*

Conflict after marriage was a common problem in the long eighteenth century.<sup>1</sup> Since divorce was impossible for all but a tiny minority, society thus offered formal and informal solutions to couples suffering marital breakdown due to infidelity or cruelty. Conduct writers advised couples how to avoid strife, they were titillated and warned of conflict's outcomes by shocking accounts of cruelty and adultery, and mocking tales of battling spouses offered stress-relieving humour.<sup>2</sup> Scholars have found the records generated by these problem marriages to be rich sources of social history, revealing attitudes towards adultery and marital violence, patriarchal authority and gender relationships, and the several ways in which spouses tackled their problems, from family mediation to matrimonial litigation in the Church Courts.<sup>3</sup> This scholarship is very valuable, but much of it addresses marriages at crisis or breaking point, since the unions that entered the public sphere in print or law were at the extreme end of the spectrum of conflict, which usually involved adultery

AQ1

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The author of this chapter previously published under the name Joanne Bailey.

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A1 J. Begiato (✉)  
A2 Oxford Brookes University, Oxford, UK  
A3 e-mail: JBegiato@brookes.ac.uk

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20 or cruelty and the intervention of the law and local authorities. We still  
21 know less about the other end of the spectrum where marriage difficul-  
22 ties did not end in scandal, violence, separation or divorce.<sup>4</sup>

23 An especially obscure element of marital conflict is how it fits into  
24 wider family relationships. Recent work such as Naomi Tadmor's over-  
25 view of kinship, stresses that the marital unit was not isolated from other  
26 family members.<sup>5</sup> So far, historians of marriage have dealt patchily with  
27 this. There is excellent work on the role of family across several social  
28 ranks in the making of marriage, from organising unions and marriage  
29 settlements, to approving prospective spouses, to acting as third par-  
30 ties and facilitators.<sup>6</sup> For instance the Duke and Duchess of Chandos,  
31 a wealthy, powerful, childless couple, with a mansion and estate in  
32 Middlesex, took great pains to manage the portions of their young  
33 female relations, prepare the women for marriage, and locate the right  
34 husband.<sup>7</sup> Histories of the family and illness also show that various fam-  
35 ily members, including grandparents, parents, uncles, aunts, and siblings  
36 played vital roles in managing life-course events within marriage such  
37 as the birth of children, childcare, nursing ill or indisposed spouses, or  
38 assisting them in financial, physical, and emotional crises.<sup>8</sup> As Rosemary  
39 O'Day observes in her study of the Chandos' marriage, 'It is imperative  
40 that we set the marital economy, already acknowledged by historians to  
41 be important to individuals and the co-resident nuclear family, within the  
42 context of the wider family economy'.<sup>9</sup> The same can be said for other  
43 routine aspects of marital and family life and this chapter places more  
44 'mundane' marital disputes within the context of the wider intergenera-  
45 tional family.

46 This chapter focuses on three case studies assembled from first-per-  
47 son accounts including memoirs and letters written in the period 1750–  
48 1830, which contain detail of conflict. Although such sources often  
49 provide evidence, it is usually simply to note the parting of spouses or to  
50 hint at dispute.<sup>10</sup> For example, the letter that J.H. Hayward wrote from  
51 Portsmouth to Fawley Parish Vestry in May 1834 to request poor relief  
52 for his children, comments about their mother 'we are rather at variance  
53 I dont [sic] wish to see her'.<sup>11</sup> The survival of both sides of spouses' cor-  
54 respondence is the most rich, but rare, evidence. Katie Barclay's study  
55 of the marital disputes of Anna Potts and her husband Sir Archibald  
56 Grant, of Monymusk, Aberdeenshire, 1731–1744, for instance, reveals  
57 in superb detail the causes of their quarrels and their negotiation of patri-  
58 archal conventions of marital roles.<sup>12</sup> Journals can also give considerable



59 insights into unhappy marriages such as Lady Sarah Cowper's diary  
60 begun in 1700 and Elizabeth Shackleton's begun in 1762.<sup>13</sup>


61 The cases used in this chapter are not so fulsome, but do give rea-  
62 sonably in-depth accounts of the marriage problems of couples from  
63 the middle rank of society, all of whom were pious, though of differ-  
64 ent Protestant denominations. In order to raise funds, Simon Mason  
65 [1701–?] published *A Narrative of the Life and Distresses of Simon* **AQ2**  
66 *Mason, Apothecary* in 1754 describing his troubled life to date; an  
67 account which included his marital difficulties which he believed contrib-  
68 uted to his woeful business failures.<sup>14</sup> In his sixties in the 1790s Thomas  
69 Wright (1736–1797), a West Yorkshire man who tried his hand at farm-  
70 ing and eventually became an inspector of mills, wrote a memoir for his  
71 family. His unhappy marriage to his first wife and his terrible relation-  
72 ship with her parents formed the narrative thrust of his life story.<sup>15</sup> The  
73 final troubled union is that of George Courtauld (1761–1823), occa-  
74 sionally discussed in his correspondence with his children and the letters  
75 exchanged between the children in the second decade of the nineteenth  
76 century.<sup>16</sup> George, a silk-throwster who was reasonably well off, though  
77 not particularly successful in his various endeavours, met his wife Ruth  
78 Minton on his first attempt to migrate to America. This chapter surveys  
79 these accounts of marital conflict to consider their similarities and differ-  
80 ences in comparison with more heavily scrutinised incidents in matrimo-  
81 nial litigation.

82 The descriptions of marital difficulties in memoirs and correspond-  
83 ence should not be treated as straightforward factual accounts. They  
84 were generally written from one participant's perspective in response to  
85 specific events and circumstances and both forms of writing had their  
86 own genre conventions. Accounts of marriages in autobiographies were  
87 written after the events and could be filtered through several decades'  
88 resentments, honing accusations, and sharpening memories of culpability  
89 and bad behaviour. In fact, autobiographies present an 'illusion of fixity  
90 which occludes the selective processes through which these narratives are  
91 formed' as Jessica Malay shows by comparing Lady Anne Clifford's mar-  
92 riage arrangements at the time with her description of them forty years  
93 later.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, correspondence is not an authentic account of 'reality'.  
94 As Barclay shows, the Potts-Grant spouses constructed identities in their  
95 letters and used them as a way to influence each other and the balance of  
96 power between them.<sup>18</sup>



97 Nonetheless, both types of source are valuable in two key ways. They  
 98 indicate the themes that were considered to lead to quarrels and they  
 99 name who was involved in them. As such they offer insights into conflict  
 100 which was not mediated through legal structures and shaped by the law's  
 101 demands of evidence. Their discussions of marital conflict confirm that  
 102 economic issues and lack of marital respect undermined relationships,  
 103 as the scholarship demonstrates, but they also reveal the significance of  
 104 religious differences, temperamental clashes, and the role of other family  
 105 members in marriage disputes. Strikingly these informal records of dis-  
 106 pute also show that it impacted upon the intergenerational family as well  
 107 as spouses, and could endure across generations for as long as people's  
 108 capacities to bear grudges.

### 109 CAUSES OF MARITAL CONFLICT

110 Autobiographies and correspondence  bare several features of mari-  
 111 tal conflict not in themselves sufficient to launch a suit, but problematic  
 112 enough to provide evidence of a thoroughly failing union: personality  
 113 clashes, disputes over finances and property, marital disrespect, and reli-  
 114 gious disagreement.<sup>19</sup> Conflicting understandings of love and its expres-  
 115 sions emerge as a site of tension in the Potts-Grant union, for instance.<sup>20</sup>  
 116 A further reason for conflict that is rarely discussed in matrimonial litiga-  
 117 tion is temperament and personality clashes. Simon Mason, for example,  
 118 confessed that he did not have much to complain about regarding his  
 119 wife, except:

120 she is not blest with the best of Tempers; she is a very genteel, well  
 121 behav'd Woman to every one but her Husband; she is certainly a notable,  
 122 clean, industrious Woman; and was her Temper agreeable to her Person,  
 123 she would make a Husband compleatly happy; and if after thirty-one Years,  
 124 she should alter and behave in a mild affectionate Manner, nothing could  
 125 be more pleasing, but I have hop'd for this so long, that I have but little  
 126 Hope left.<sup>21</sup>

127 George and Ruth Courtauld did not seem to have found each other easy  
 128 to live with either. They married in 1789 in America, and returned to  
 129 England in 1794 following the birth of their two eldest children. They  
 130 settled in Braintree, Essex, and had another six children; the last born



131 in 1807. By 1809, and eighteen years into their union, Ruth was taking  
 132 a lengthy sojourn at her family home in Ireland. It is unclear when the  
 133 marriage ran into difficulties, although their marital conflict was being  
 134 discussed in correspondence after this date and offers some insights into  
 135 the causes of the dispute. In his letter to his son in 1813, George offered  
 136 his view of his failing marriage which suggests a fairly early development  
 137 of problems. Perhaps countering an accusation, he declared that he had  
 138 married for affection:

139 I married from no other motive but a desire, by contributing to her happi-  
 140 ness, to increase my own. My only hope was to have a friend and compan-  
 141 ion; 'tis true that that feeling soon began to give way, and that it has long  
 142 been so crossed by very different sensations that it is by no means at this  
 143 day a very lively principle.<sup>22</sup>

AQ3

#### 144 ECONOMIC DISPUTES

145 Disagreement over financial investment or outlay was a major trigger of  
 146 conflict and distrust, regardless of level of wealth. The elite Anna Potts  
 147 and Archibald Grant quarrelled over household finances; typically her  
 148 ability to run the household economy on his provision. In 1740 Anna  
 149 wrote defensively to Archibald: 'it is no ill management in me I cant [sic]  
 150 work miracles and must tell you plainly I am vain enough to think my  
 151 self as capable of governing a house as any of those that finds fault wit  
 152 [sic] me'.<sup>23</sup> Securing economic security could be divisive. Thus, although  
 153 the family correspondence relating to George and Ruth Courtauld's  
 154 unhappy marriage does not dwell on the causes of their discontent,  
 155 Ruth's letters responding to George's desire to emigrate to America for a  
 156 second time in the 1820s imply that one of her dissatisfactions with him  
 157 was his uncontrolled expenditure and unreliable provision. In 1822 she  
 158 wrote to her daughter Sophia, who had accompanied her father to Ohio,  
 159 insisting,

160 I cannot go to America under the dread of being set adrift when your  
 161 father spends all his money, which experience teaches us would be soon. I  
 162 would rather trust to his parish in England for a support, but if he will give  
 163 me the last £500 my father left me which I only lent him, I will then go  
 164 next spring if I can be of any use or comfort to him or you.<sup>24</sup>



165 It would seem that the couple had a long history of disagreements over  
166 financial outgoings with Ruth taking the view that George was a spend-  
167 thrift. They also had different understandings about Ruth's inheritance.  
168 She saw it as a loan, while George saw it as a family contribution. Unless  
169 Ruth's father had set aside the money solely for Ruth's use, George may  
170 well have been in the right. What is quite clear is that Ruth did not feel  
171 financially secure under George's economic direction.

172 Hardship drove even sharper wedges between couples. Usually this  
173 kind of extremity is mainly visible in the form of desertion recorded by  
174 the poor law or quarter sessions authorities.<sup>25</sup> It is rare to see a detailed  
175 account of financial need eroding a relationship as it did for that of  
176 Simon Mason and his wife. Simon was an apothecary who enjoyed little  
177 success in following his trade. After several separations as Simon  
178 attempted to get established, he again left his family in Cambridge to  
179 seek work, belatedly discovering that his 'poor unhappy temper'd Wife'  
180 immediately sent two of his children, aged seven and five, to Simon's  
181 sister, their aunt, who kept them over winter despite her own financial  
182 difficulties. Simon only realised this when his sister wrote to him request-  
183 ing money for their upkeep or that their parents take them back. Indeed,  
184 said Simon, 'My good Lady's journey to London was as much a secret  
185 to me as her sending my Children to my Sister's'.<sup>26</sup> Simon's ineptitude  
186 and their poverty destroyed the Masons' ability to live with each other.  
187 As Samuel astutely reflected: couples ought to seek mutual happiness in  
188 order to alleviate their distressed circumstances, 'and not as some do,  
189 vilify, and reproach, insult, and tyrannise, ever uneasy, ever dissatisfied,  
190 perpetually destroying each other's Distress'.<sup>27</sup>

191 The Masons also experienced another financial challenge to their  
192 relationship, which is only hinted at in separation court records, namely  
193 quarrels over the portion that a wife brought to her marriage from her  
194 natal family. Simon envied those men who received 'great Favours and  
195 helps from their Wife's Relations, who do not only relieve them when  
196 distress'd, but will forward and promote their Interest'. Instead he  
197 claimed to have got neither 'fortune' with his Wife nor 'affectionate  
198 Friendship' from her relations.<sup>28</sup> He had married her, the daughter of  
199 a Southwark dyer, after finishing his apprenticeship in 1722. Following  
200 the wedding Simon learnt that his wife was due £40 from her mother.  
201 He promptly informed his parents-in-law that he expected to be paid this  
202 sum and they handed it over on the understanding that he would invest



203 it in business. The couple set up business in Stony Stratford with his  
204 father-in-law's assistance and some stock from his old master. Simon then  
205 went to London to receive the remainder of the fortune to buy drugs to  
206 sell, only to learn from his father-in-law that there was just £5 left thanks  
207 to the couple's expenses in the country, the £5 he'd borrowed at mar-  
208 riage, plus the stock. This set the scene for Simon's ongoing resentment  
209 towards his in-laws which often transferred to his wife.<sup>29</sup>

210 Thomas Wright was not well liked by his in-laws either, which had  
211 financial repercussions. He married Lydia Birkhead in November 1766,  
212 after eloping with her to Gretna Green due to her parents' disapproval  
213 of their courtship which began when Lydia was 15 years old and Thomas  
214 around 26. Consequently they refused to give him their daughter's 'for-  
215 tune,' which led to arguments with his wife.<sup>30</sup> In one argument a few  
216 years into marriage, he nobly told her that he did not blame her for her  
217 want of fortune and she retorted that she did not care if he were ruined  
218 the next day. This slur on his social and masculine identity removed, he  
219 said, any remaining esteem or love for her.<sup>31</sup>

220 Although both Simon and Thomas declared that their parents-in-law  
221 reneged on supporting them, they nonetheless recorded several contri-  
222 butions. Simon received a portion of £40 with his wife after marriage,  
223 his father-in-law helped him purchase stock for an apothecary shop, and  
224 advanced him £10 when he was in debt, and his parents-in-law sup-  
225 ported his wife and children when he could not.<sup>32</sup> Nonetheless in 1738,  
226 after yet more failures which entailed sending his wife and various chil-  
227 dren to her parents four times for support, he was again in debt. When  
228 two bailiffs came to arrest him and take his effects to pay for a bond, he  
229 turned to his wife's relations 'but could obtain no redress from them'.  
230 Forced to declare himself bankrupt, he declared: 'I could neither get  
231 credit for a Loaf, or any thing to keep us alive with; my Wife's Relations  
232 (who knew I was by this Commission clear'd) yet would not advance one  
233 Farthing to enable me to prosecute my Business'. By 1740 after losing  
234 several children to smallpox and disease he recalled that he was 'sighted  
235 by my Wife's Relations and others, who ought to have strove to allevi-  
236 ate the cares and difficulties I was struggling with; these things were too  
237 hard to bare [sic]!' <sup>33</sup>

238 It would seem that Simon's parents-in-law were not ungenerous, but  
239 increasingly wary of losing further money by investing in him and sim-  
240 ply refused when it became clear that their son-in-law failed to advance.





241 Thomas Wright faced a similar situation. Having foregone his wife's  
 242 portion by running away with her, he nonetheless asked her to 'solicit for  
 243 her fortune' to put out at interest to increase their annual income, when  
 244 facing financial difficulties a few years into marriage due to his inadequa-  
 245 cies at farming.<sup>34</sup> His parents-in-law refused and he railed against their  
 246 tight purses; yet he also recorded their assistance at various points in his  
 247 memoir: gifts of furniture; an interest-free loan of £50 in the late 1760s;  
 248 an interest-free loan of £50 in 1773; a home and board for at least three  
 249 of his children; a £20 premium for the eldest boy's apprenticeship, and  
 250 a loan to Thomas Junior of around £140 to buy a shop and its stock.  
 251 Again, one wonders if it was his failures to earn a decent living that made  
 252 his parents-in-law cautious. Perhaps tellingly, he reported his resentment  
 253 that his parents-in-law publicly explained the cause of Lydia's excessive  
 254 consumption of alcohol as due to Thomas's failure to follow a trade.<sup>35</sup>

## 255 MARITAL DISRESPECT

256 The descriptive sections of Libels (the plaintiff's statement of the defend-  
 257 ant's marital faults) in marriage separation cases list the primary com-  
 258 plaints, but also often refer to the defendant's poor spousal behaviour;  
 259 defendants issued similar counter-accusations against the plaintiff. In  
 260 addition to listing verbal abuse and gendered inadequacies, these second-  
 261 ary allegations often centred on spouses' lack of respect for each other.<sup>36</sup>  
 262 The accounts can be fairly formulaic and precede the main accusations  
 263 of cruelty or adultery, and thus historians can assume them to be more  
 264 indicative of social and legal prescription than individualised problems.  
 265 Interestingly nonetheless, spouses make somewhat similar complaints in  
 266 the informal records of memoirs and letters examined here, especially  
 267 noting anger and lack of respect. Archibald Grant complained to his  
 268 mother-in-law in 1739 about Anna using 'unbecomeing [sic] language  
 269 and conduct towards me both in private and publick'.<sup>37</sup> Simon Mason  
 270 complained that his wife behaved insolently, noisily and tyrannically  
 271 towards him. On one occasion he grumbled:

272 and what a shocking Folly and Madness is it, when a Wife, to gratify a vile  
 273 Spirit, will stick at nothing, be it ever so base and false, to vilify and [sic]  
 274 destroy the reputation of her Husband, tho's she knows his, her own and  
 275 Childrens Bread depend upon it?<sup>38</sup>



276 Thomas Wright accused his wife of bad temper too; he records her  
277 falling into a ‘furious passion’ and their exchange of ‘warm words’.<sup>39</sup>  
278 Like Simon, he felt that a wife’s disrespectful words were dangerous:

279 Hence I advise all my children of both sexes that may happen to enter into  
280 the matrimonial connection, to be doubly careful how they make use of  
281 such imprudent and disrespectful expressions to their partners, for though  
282 they may be uttered in passion, and perhaps afterwards retracted, yet are  
283 they apt to make such unfavourable impressions, and create such aversions  
284 in delicate minds, as perhaps they may never afterwards be able to sur-  
285 mount as long as they live.<sup>40</sup>

286 In 1815 George Courtauld also identified his wife as marred by ‘capri-  
287 cious anger’ in a letter to his children.<sup>41</sup> Thus, both formal and informal  
288 records relating to marriage display the power given to spouses’ words  
289 and their ensuing impact on the quality of the relationship.

290 Disputed authority often appears in separation cases. This too is  
291 reflected in personal accounts which described men as seeking to affirm  
292 their patriarchal authority over their wives when challenged. Lady Sarah  
293 Cowper recorded a nasty argument with her husband in which they dis-  
294 puted the time the servants should rise in the morning. She noted ‘He  
295 Swore – Damn mee for a Bitch did I Hector him, he wou’d fell me to  
296 the ground. This I must own was more than I Cou’d decently bear, so  
297 I set up to out dare, it being the only way to deal with it’.<sup>42</sup> Of course,  
298 Sarah hardly conformed to ideal marital conduct either since her deter-  
299 mination to ‘out dare,’ or challenge, her husband was not the subordi-  
300 nate comportment recommended. Preferably, wives should not criticise  
301 their husbands’ behaviour. It could have very real consequences. Thomas  
302 Wright commented that when his wife, Lydia, disparaged his economic  
303 status in spring 1774, he felt less affection for her, but also sought to  
304 reassert his power. Previously he had emphasised his patience and tolera-  
305 tion of her insistence in visiting her parents. On this occasion, however,  
306 he warned her that,

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



311 afterwards, though not very respectfully, yet in a less offensive manner  
312 towards me to the day of her death.<sup>43</sup>

313 At another point in his memoir, Thomas stated that he beat two of his  
314 older children to bring them back into line and respect for him, so it is  
315 not unreasonable to speculate that the severe method he threatened was  
316 physical correction. Not unlike some legal and popular culture accounts  
317 of marital conflict then, husbands' blows and wives' words were given  
318 rough equivalence in their ability to 'hurt' the recipient. Even when  
319 Lydia was dying of an unidentified complaint of the lungs at the age of  
320 30, in 1777, spousal respect was still something Thomas demanded. Her  
321 physician suggested she stay at her parents' home since it had a southerly  
322 aspect. Thomas accepted this situation for some time until again insisting  
323 upon his wife's return home, at which point Lydia, probably too ill to  
324 respond with her former anger, adopted what he felt was more appropriate  
325 demeanour: 'tears and a good deal of respectful submission'. This  
326 changed his mind and he let her stay; she died at her parental home  
327 shortly afterwards.<sup>44</sup>

## 328 RELIGIOUS DISAGREEMENT

329 Studies of eighteenth-century marriage have until recently rarely  
330 focused on religion. Steve King has proposed that it needs integrat-  
331 ing into the scholarship on courtship since it was a factor influencing  
332 spousal choice.<sup>45</sup> Religion was certainly a factor of acute interest during  
333 John Shaw's courtship of Elizabeth Wilkinson, as their correspondence  
334 reveals. In his letters to her in 1810–1811, John explained that he was  
335 not a Calvinist as her Methodist family suspected, but in fact was more  
336 a Presbyterian. Thus he insisted that they were compatible in terms of  
337 religion and that this would determine their future happiness. This was,  
338 he said, one reason for selecting her as a partner. On New Year's Eve  
339 1810 he wrote explaining that her religious education and religion made  
340 him look forward to their future intimacy. Indeed, their shared religious  
341 values were 'the one thing needfull' and would provide hope and expect-  
342 ations of happiness in the difficulties and trials of life; it was the passport  
343 to future happiness and never-ending joy.<sup>46</sup> His not attending Methodist  
344 meetings remained a hurdle, but John sought compromise and pro-  
345 posed she attend once a day with him and he would attend the other  
346 part of the day with her. The phrasing and serious intensity of these



347 letters suggests the couple saw a mutually shared faith as important to a  
348 successful union and not merely a convention to satisfy Elizabeth's par-  
349 ents. This worked and by 1813 they were married and had a long, seem-  
350 ingly happy union.<sup>47</sup>

351 The role of religion after the wedding is less investigated. It does  
352 not appear as a cause of dispute in separation records during the long  
353 eighteenth century except in unusual cases such as the cruelty separa-  
354 tion brought by Anne More against Zachary, her Roman Catholic hus-  
355 band, in 1719. Her unsuccessful suit for separation alleged that Zachary  
356 attempted to poison her when entertaining a 'Romish Bishop' to dinner  
357 at his Manor House, Loftus, North Yorkshire. She claimed that Zachary  
358 gave her poisoned wine, which made her ill for several weeks to prevent  
359 her returning to her 'Mother Church'. Anna explained that she had been  
360 educated in the Church of England till she was thirteen years old when  
361 she was 'seduced' by a relative to the Church of Rome. While she was  
362 a practising Roman Catholic, she married the Catholic Zachary More.  
363 After their union, however, she sought to return to the Protestant faith.  
364 Article ten of her Libel stated that her husband was a 'Bigotted Papist'  
365 and refused to allow her to do so. Anne lost the suit because the depo-  
366 nents, including the local Church of England Minister, deposed that  
367 she was subject to fancies or in harsher words, crazed. Here we see an  
368 extreme example of the potential for marital dispute due to differences  
369 in faith. It is unlikely that her actions indicate any exploitation of reli-  
370 gious differences for her own ends of ending a union. Such strategic  
371 thinking was probably difficult for her. Although it is impossible to tell  
372 whether Anne was delusional, deponents certainly stated that her men-  
373 tal or emotional health was precarious. In a society of entrenched piety,  
374 she articulated the collapse of their marriage and the cause of her hus-  
375 band's violence in terms of their religious differences. Still, while there  
376 was a pervasive local fear of Catholics in the area so soon after the 1715  
377 Jacobite rebellion, it is unlikely that she deployed this as a strategy for  
378 seeking separation. In truth, delineating her husband's violence and find-  
379 ing witnesses to it would have been sufficient for the court.<sup>48</sup>

380 Moreover, rather humdrum religious divisions could also be pow-  
381 erful. Thomas Wright expressed a number of religious misgivings in  
382 his account of his disputes with his wife and her family from the gen-  
383 eral to the theological. His most frequent complaint was simple: his  
384 in-laws had failed as Christians because they declared they would never  
385 forgive him for eloping with Lydia. More specifically, he repeatedly



386 contrasted his Methodism with his wife and family's Calvinism; on one  
387 occasion he explained that he 'espoused the doctrine of Free-agency and  
388 Universal Redemption' in contrast with their strict Calvinism.<sup>49</sup> The  
389 Arminian-Calvinist split in Methodism was still rumbling at the end of  
390 the eighteenth century, so Thomas probably viewed these distinctions as  
391 significant. Thomas also believed the denominational differences led to  
392 his wife's inferior upbringing, their incompatibility, and his parents-in-  
393 law's many wrongs. These tensions were variously expressed, but usually  
394 linked the religious division with the personal problem. For example,  
395 he blamed his wife's excessive drinking of rum on her bearing a sickly  
396 infant and having to stay in bed for three months after the birth. He  
397 reported that during that time 'Mr. James Scott, the minister of the  
398 Calvinistic Chapel at Heckmondwike, of which her parents were mem-  
399 bers, paid her a visit, to pray with her and administer "ghostly comfort  
400 and consolation"'. The term 'ghostly' refers to a clergyman reading the  
401 bible and offering comfort through counselling from biblical sources.  
402 Lydia responded to the clergyman by citing scripture 'in the cant strain  
403 of the party', according to Thomas. In other words, Mr. Scott was fooled  
404 by Lydia's [familial] ability to use the gospels to persuade him that she  
405 was well and distract him from warning her against drunkenness. In  
406 Thomas's view, the 'minister was imposed upon, and departed without  
407 ever discovering (that ever I could perceive) anything at all of her real  
408 situation'.<sup>50</sup> For Thomas, Lydia's Calvinism was a stain on her character  
409 and behaviour which undermined their relationship.

410

### RESOLVING MARITAL CONFLICT:

411

### INTERGENERATIONAL MEDIATION

412 Historians have established from formal records of marital breakdown  
413 that matrimonial dispute was accompanied by mediation, whether the  
414 spouses voluntarily sought it or not.<sup>51</sup> It lay within the remit of legal per-  
415 sonnel in Church Courts and Quarter Sessions to facilitate agreements  
416 between spouses, typically aimed at them living together peaceably, to  
417 protect a wife from further abuse, or to ensure that husbands' obligation  
418 to provide was honoured. The stages of conflict and attempts at reso-  
419 lution revealed in separation cases also show that family members arbi-  
420 trated between husband and wife.<sup>52</sup> Parents offered refuge to offspring  
421 experiencing marital breakdown, especially wives suffering abuse. Wives'



422 brothers and fathers warned husbands against violence, though they also  
423 persuaded wives to return to husbands. Generally they had the women's  
424 interests at heart as the marital unit was the only one that could finan-  
425 cially support women with children. In wealthy, titled families there were  
426 considerable vested interests in getting couples to agree. As O'Day com-  
427 ments, establishing patronage links was a contributing factor for indi-  
428 viduals promoting and organising relatives' unions; thus the prospect of  
429 those marriages ending in separation or divorce inferred the termination  
430 of the patronage network too.<sup>53</sup>

431 Familial intervention is also apparent in first-hand accounts discussed  
432 here, though it is somewhat different from its more formalised represen-  
433 tation in legal records. It might be as simple as providing a sympathetic  
434 ear, as Archibald Grant's letter to his mother-in-law cited above suggests.  
435 Here he complained of his wife's conduct towards him and worried that  
436 Anna misguidedly thought he did not love her. It is clear that he trusted  
437 Anna's mother to listen and offer guidance and help.<sup>54</sup> The case studies  
438 also show its less welcome aspects. Neither Simon Mason nor Thomas  
439 Wright framed their in-laws' actions as mediating between them and  
440 their spouses. Both men blamed their in-laws for instigating and main-  
441 taining conflict between them and their daughters. As well as complain-  
442 ing that their wives' parents disliked them and refused to support them  
443 financially as they saw fit, both men claimed that their in-laws were  
444 spiteful and malicious. Thomas Wright even labelled his parents-in-law  
445 as 'malevolent'.<sup>55</sup> Strikingly, both often rhetorically linked their wives'  
446 faults to their wives' families' faults.

447 Neither the Masons nor Wrights kept their tensions and arguments to  
448 themselves. Both couples were firmly embedded within their intergenera-  
449 tional families. Initially Simon Mason's mother helped him until she died,  
450 and thereafter his in-laws were prominent. He and his wife separated  
451 whenever he could no longer support her and his children. She would  
452 return to her family until he could establish himself again. When he  
453 sought her out in 1746 after yet another separation, however, he noted  
454 that: 'I was oblig'd to take a Lodging for myself, not being permitted to  
455 be with her, for fear of disobliging her pious Relations'.<sup>56</sup> The situation  
456 worsened. His brother-in-law, Mr. Cheshire, tried to help him get work,

457 but the ill nature and malice of my good Father-in-law, and his Consort  
458 &c, knowing I was pretty often at his Son Cheshire's, and finding I  
459 pick'd up a small, tho' an uncomfortable living, insisted that his Son



460 Cheshire should forbid me coming to his House, which Mr Cheshire  
461 was forc'd unwillingly to comply with: Such was the malice of this good  
462 Father-in-law, that I was forc'd to shift my Quarters, to the Stone-Kitchen  
463 in the Tower, where I was most kindly treated: But still this was an  
464 unhappy settl'd Life; I, in one Lodging, my good Wife, in another, and  
465 my Children, at the Parish; altogether almost depriv'd me of my Senses,  
466 for my little narrow Way of Business was scarcely sufficient to keep me in  
467 a State of Existence, much less to pay for my Children's Board; and my  
468 wife's Relations, not being willing to contribute one Farthing to save them  
469 from the Parish.<sup>57</sup>

470 Indeed, his regular criticism of his parents-in-law suggests that Simon  
471 found it easier to blame them for his separation from his wife and chil-  
472 dren. After all, to be solely culpable for the failure to support one's  
473 dependents undermined a man's status and manhood in most peo-  
474 ple's eyes. Eventually both Mason and Wright came to see their wives  
475 as tainted by their natal families; apparently unable to separate the two.  
476 Thomas Wright regretted allowing his wife to visit her parents regularly  
477 without him for this 'soon operated for the worse on my wife's mind and  
478 behaviour'.<sup>58</sup> During the visits 'they continued to blackguard, vilify, and  
479 abuse me in her presence with all the virulence and malignity that the  
480 blackest and most diabolical pride and malice could inspire'. He insisted  
481 this 'entirely ruined the peace and happiness of our family', because  
482 Lydia returned home 'in a bad humour, and would have abused me in  
483 the most provoking language for hours together, when I have hardly  
484 uttered a word in reply'. Nearer the end of the memoir he returned yet  
485 again to this, proposing that they 'completely inspired her with their own  
486 spirit and prejudices, which soon discovered itself in a want of proper  
487 esteem and regard for me'.<sup>59</sup> Indeed Thomas represented Lydia's visits  
488 to her parental home as going over to his 'enemies'.<sup>60</sup> He also accused  
489 them of joining in the couple's arguments. In 1774 Lydia went to live  
490 at her parents' following a falling-out. His attempts to make her return  
491 ended in more quarrels and his mother-in-law, in a 'spirit of the most  
492 perverse malignity, [said] that she had rather she had married a chimney-  
493 sweeper; nay, that she had rather follow her to her grave, than see her  
494 return peaceably home with her husband!'.<sup>61</sup>

495 The offspring of separating spouses did not play a prominent role in  
496 matrimonial litigation. Seldom even named, their numbers were stated,  
497 expenditure upon them occasionally recorded, and they were mentioned



498 as bystanders and victims of marital violence. Even more rarely they  
499 appeared as deponents. In contrast, correspondence and recollections in  
500 memoirs indicate that older and adult offspring could play an important  
501 part in their parents' marital problems, acting as confidantes, support-  
502 ers, and accusers. George and Ruth Courtauld's oldest children, Samuel  
503 and Louisa, were drawn into their disputes and it is possible to infer that  
504 this caused strains. George began a letter to Sam in June 1813 express-  
505 ing surprise at his silence even though Samuel had received a packet that  
506 contained 'among other things a copy of a paper which your mother sent  
507 to me by Louisa—the greater part of which was, as you will believe, a tis-  
508 sue of gross misrepresentations'. Already it is possible to see that Louisa  
509 was acting as go-between for her parents.<sup>62</sup> George proceeded to defend  
510 himself vigorously to Sam, citing the offending parts of Ruth's accusa-  
511 tions, clearly intending Sam to be his father's champion. He doubted  
512 that Sam would be 'inclined to believe your father to have conducted  
513 himself towards your mother (from the time when she threw herself  
514 "completely into his power, far from friends, from country, or protec-  
515 tors")', without either "Affection, Honour, Generosity or Gratitude".  
516 The quotation he cited presumably referred to Ruth's account of their  
517 marriage in America in 1789. George used these categories of affection,  
518 honour and generosity in the remainder of the letter to detail the unfair-  
519 ness of his wife's accusation. In doing so, it is possible to see that a split  
520 in child-parent support might emerge. In justifying his financial deci-  
521 sion, George defended his plan to provide more money for Sam than for  
522 the other six children as a sensible investment in a future business. Ruth  
523 clearly saw it as an unjustifiable inequity.<sup>63</sup>

524 As George's letter reveals, people turned to their adult children to  
525 discuss their marital tensions. George updated Sam further on 31 July  
526 1815, for example, explaining:

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

533 A few weeks later he added a sad postscript to another letter: 'Your  
534 mother is also very well, and appears tolerably comfortable—I wish





535 I could make her happy'.<sup>65</sup> Though these reflections might seem the  
536 conversations of friends rather than father/child, in this period par-  
537 ents were encouraged to be their children's confidantes and friends.<sup>66</sup>  
538 George's attempt to discuss his marital tensions with his adult son,  
539 however, illuminates a facet of such relationships not revealed by the  
540 advice literature, which ended its guidance for parents before the child  
541 reached adulthood. George was a man who prided himself on being a  
542 good father, caring, companionate, and devoted, as ideals recommended.  
543 Perhaps the letters he exchanged with his adult son Samuel show the  
544 reciprocal aspect of such ideals, when parents themselves turned to their  
545 children as confidantes at times of crisis.

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

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

554 Louisa explained that she could not lie or 'guard my expressions' when  
555 discussing her mother with her father. She may have been defending  
556 herself to Sam too, for she commented: 'You do not know what it was  
557 that influenced me "to take" as Papa says "My mother's part"'. This sug-  
558 gests that Sam was not fully informed of the issues, perhaps because he  
559 only had his father's side of the situation. While she admitted to Sam  
560 that her mother was 'often much to blame', she distinguished between  
561 her parents through their discussion of each other in front of their chil-  
562 dren. She approved of her mother because she praised her husband's  
563 abilities as a father, regardless of what she felt that he was like as a hus-  
564 band, but disapproved of her father because he attacked her mother's  
565 maternal abilities.<sup>67</sup> In a further letter Louisa updated Sam about 'the  
566 mutual domestic comfort of our parents'. She reported that 'an increase  
567 of apparent kind attention on the one side is accepted by an increased  
568 willingness to be pleased'. She attributed the alteration to having invol-  
569 untarily declared her plan to assist her mother: 'while Cath, Eliza and I  
570 were in the room' her father 'began a conversation or rather a mono-  
571 logue on the desirableness of a separation; he then read a letter on the



572 subject which he had written to you'. Louisa reported that her failure to  
 573 reply to this 'displeased him, which displeasure he shewed by comparing  
 574 my conduct in this instance to my mother's "infamous abominable" &c  
 575 &c behaviour; this forced me to a perhaps sharp defence of Mo[ther]'.  
 576 This included informing him that she was determined to take a small  
 577 school where she would live with her mother.<sup>68</sup>

AQ5



578 Children's involvement in parental marital breakdown shows its dia-  
 579 chronic form far more powerfully in letters and memoirs than in court  
 580 records, where at best a static picture is glimpsed. The offspring of cou-  
 581 ples who experienced sustained marital conflict often encountered it in  
 582 childhood and it could influence their actions in adulthood. Ruth and  
 583 George's inability to live happily together had impinged upon their chil-  
 584 dren's lives throughout childhood. Ruth had spent several years in her  
 585 natal home in Ireland with some of her younger daughters, leaving her  
 586 younger sons and two eldest children in Essex with George. Louisa used  
 587 these memories to support a second more permanent separation of her  
 588 parents in 1813. She informed Sam: 'As to a separation, I am convinced  
 589 my *mother's* happiness would be increased, I should therefore second  
 590 such an arrangement; but *I could not* remain at home: I never *can*  
 591 forget the many wretched dreadful hours I passed during my mother's  
 592 absence'.<sup>69</sup> There is also evidence that marriage conflict could alter the  
 593 nature of the relationship between parent and children. In 1815 follow-  
 594 ing an undisclosed dispute with several of his adult offspring, George  
 595 wrote an open letter to them observing that they were his sole comfort  
 596 in life:

597 The only troubles worthy of the name which have hitherto been allotted  
 598 to me (and of these indeed I have, I believe and hope, had a larger por-  
 599 tion than falls to the lot of most men) have arisen from the relations of  
 600 Husband and Father. When, (and long after) I had given up all expecta-  
 601 tion of being happy with my Wife – (tho' upon the hope of conjugal bliss  
 602 no man I assuredly believe ever more fondly indulged himself and assidu-  
 603 ously cherished for years, with but slight expectation of realising it) – when  
 604 this fond hope proved but an illusion and all that I could look forward to  
 605 in this connection was a bearable uncomfortableness – and even this has  
 606 scarcely been attained. When this view of earthly comfort was gone, I con-  
 607 soled myself for many years that by making friends of my children I should  
 608 secure a parent's best enjoyments.<sup>70</sup>



609 Apparently, he was not averse to a little emotional blackmail either. It is  
610 tempting to speculate that the couple's troubles shaped their offspring's  
611 lives for yet more years. George returned to America at the end of the  
612 decade with plans to found Englishtown in Ohio, taking with him all  
613 his children except the eldest two. Louisa Courtauld had already moved  
614 with Ruth to Edinburgh in order to facilitate her mother's separation  
615 from her husband. Ruth seems to have been unable or unwilling to work  
616 for a living and Louisa opened and taught in a school there, which sup-  
617 ported them both. Later Louisa also backed out of the move to America  
618 at the last minute, a decision which may have been influenced by her  
619 mother's refusal to accompany the other members of her family on this  
620 venture. Mother and daughter remained together until Ruth returned  
621 to Essex to housekeep for her son Samuel, who also refused to join his  
622 father. The family was only physically reunited in Britain after George's  
623 death in America in 1823.

#### 624 CONCLUSION: THE ONGOING FAMILIAL COST 625 OF MARITAL CONFLICT

626 Due to the nature of matrimonial litigation there is a tendency for schol-  
627 arship on troubled marriages in the long eighteenth century to focus on  
628  worst examples or  crises points: often the immediate lead up to,  
629 or breakdown of, a union. Adding evidence of marital conflict that did  
630 not reach complete breakdown or did not involve infidelity, cruelty, or  
631 desertion, adds colour to this stark, monotone picture. It shows that the  
632 concerns of unhappy husbands and wives centred on financial problems  
633 and their spouse's appropriate behaviour, whether conflict was minor or  
634 extreme. Yet it also reveals other areas of tension, particularly differing  
635 religious views and practices. These are often neglected in the history of  
636 marriage, although historians of courtship are beginning to recognise  
637 the power of religious practice, and this chapter indicates that those who  
638 address marital difficulties will also find it worthwhile to consider, espe-  
639 cially as it is peculiarly amenable to historicisation.<sup>71</sup>

640 Autobiographies and correspondence demonstrate that it is impor-  
641 tant not to view marital conflict in isolation. Such conflicts were inter-  
642 generational, often involving the union's offspring as well as parents  
643 and kin on either side of the married couple. While we know that some  
644 family members attempted to assist unhappy spouses, it is clear that in



645 other marriages they were also blamed for exacerbating or even causing  
 646 arguments. Furthermore, the sources investigated in this chapter dem-  
 647 onstrate that marital conflict could have (admittedly in the eyes of  
 648 those remembering many years later) a very long genesis, occurring in  
 649 some instances even before the wedding itself. Indeed what is strikingly  
 650 evoked by correspondence and autobiographies is the extensive nature  
 651 of familial involvement in spouses' marital problems. Even though this  
 652 may be a feature of hindsight and memory in autobiographies, some of  
 653 the husbands in the sample cited their parents-in-law as protagonists in  
 654 the marriage going wrong from the start. It also could outline the trou-  
 655 bled marriage. Although Thomas Wright married a second time (at 45  
 656 to a 15 year old) four years after his first wife's death, his memoir still  
 657 returned repeatedly to his first wife's parents to recount their continued  
 658 personal animosity to him after Lydia's death, and their role in giving  
 659 a home and work to several of his children into their own adulthood  
 660 and marriage. His mother-in-law died in 1796 and his father-in-law in  
 661 1797 and by then two of Thomas's daughters had married two brothers  
 662 who were themselves feuding over their Birkhead inheritances. Indeed,  
 663 Thomas saw the taint of this continuing through the generations. He  
 664 warned his intended readers—his and his parents-in-law's descendants—  
 665 that his mother-in-law's conduct had 'done the greatest injury to some  
 666 of her own offspring, and given occasion for the most implacable ani-  
 667 mosity to arise between the parties, who were near relations, immedi-  
 668 ately sprung from her own family, and which malice and animosity will prob-  
 669 ably be transmitted to future generations'.<sup>72</sup> Perhaps the view that marital  
 670 conflict could taint the lives of more people than the couple concerned  
 671 was an additional factor impelling society to encourage spouses to resolve  
 672 disputes.

673

## NOTES

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 803 65. George Courtauld to his son Samuel Courtauld, 7 Sept 1813, Courtauld,  
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 807 *Huguenot Family of Courtauld*, vol. 2, 50.
- 808 68. Ibid., 53–54.
- 809 69. Ibid., 52, emphasis in original.
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 815 sense of popular cultural discourses about marriage in fascinating ways’  
 816 (Batchelor )
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## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

819 **Joanne Begiato** is Professor in History and Head of History, Philosophy &  
 820 Religion at Oxford Brookes University. She specialises in the history of mascu-  
 821 line , family, and marriage. Her publications under the name Bailey include  
 822 *Unquiet Lives: Marriage and Marriage Breakdown in England 1660–1800* (CUP,  
 823 2003) and *Parenting in England 1760–1830: Emotions, Identity and Generation*  
 824 (OUP, 2012). She has just completed a book on *Sex and the Church in the Long*  
 825 *Eighteenth Century* with her co-author Professor William Gibson (IB Tauris,  
 826 2017), and is working on a monograph called *Materialising Manliness in Britain*  
 827 *c. 1780–1880: Men’s Bodies, Emotions, and Material Culture*.



# Author Query Form

Book ID: **434493\_1\_En**  
Chapter No: **3**








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Please ensure you fill out your response to the queries raised below and return this form along with your corrections.

Dear Author,

During the process of typesetting your chapter, the following queries have arisen. Please check your typeset proof carefully against the queries listed below and mark the necessary changes either directly on the proof/online grid or in the ‘Author’s response’ area provided

Query Refs.	Details Required	Author’s Response
AQ1	Please check the inserted city and country is correct and amend if necessary.	
AQ2	Please note that the year is incomplete in the sentence ‘In order to raise ...’.	
AQ3	The opening quote does not have a corresponding closing quote in the blockquote ‘I married from no ...’. Please insert the quote in the appropriate position.	
AQ4	Please check the spelling of the word ‘unbecomeing’ and ‘publick’ in the sentence ‘Archibald Anna using ...’.	
AQ5	Please check the term ‘&c &c’ is given in the sentence ‘Louisa reported ...’.	

# MARKED PROOF

## Please correct and return this set

Please use the proof correction marks shown below for all alterations and corrections. If you wish to return your proof by fax you should ensure that all amendments are written clearly in dark ink and are made well within the page margins.

<i>Instruction to printer</i>	<i>Textual mark</i>	<i>Marginal mark</i>
Leave unchanged	... under matter to remain	Ⓟ
Insert in text the matter indicated in the margin	∧	New matter followed by ∧ or ∧ <sup>Ⓢ</sup>
Delete	/ through single character, rule or underline or ┌───┐ through all characters to be deleted	Ⓞ or Ⓞ <sup>Ⓢ</sup>
Substitute character or substitute part of one or more word(s)	/ through letter or ┌───┐ through characters	new character / or new characters /
Change to italics	— under matter to be changed	↵
Change to capitals	≡ under matter to be changed	≡
Change to small capitals	≡ under matter to be changed	≡
Change to bold type	~ under matter to be changed	~
Change to bold italic	≈ under matter to be changed	≈
Change to lower case	Encircle matter to be changed	≡
Change italic to upright type	(As above)	⊕
Change bold to non-bold type	(As above)	⊖
Insert 'superior' character	/ through character or ∧ where required	Υ or Υ under character e.g. Υ or Υ
Insert 'inferior' character	(As above)	∧ over character e.g. ∧
Insert full stop	(As above)	⊙
Insert comma	(As above)	,
Insert single quotation marks	(As above)	Ƴ or ƴ and/or Ƶ or ƶ
Insert double quotation marks	(As above)	ƴ or ƶ and/or Ƶ or ƶ
Insert hyphen	(As above)	⊥
Start new paragraph	┌	┌
No new paragraph	┐	┐
Transpose	└┐	└┐
Close up	linking ○ characters	Ⓞ
Insert or substitute space between characters or words	/ through character or ∧ where required	Υ
Reduce space between characters or words		↑