COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE RITUALS IN SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

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COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE RITUALS IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my husband Jarrod who has always supported me in furthering my education and reaching my goals. I would also like to dedicate this to my mother Patricia, who always knows the right time to pick me up and throw me back in.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Courtship and marriage rituals of the past have often caught the attention of both historians and the mainstream population. Movies, books and plays often center their plots on a romance, or the tribulations of a young couple. Often works that take place in or around seventeenth century England, portray marriage as an arranged business deal, or if chosen by the course of romantic love, an act of utter disobedience. Are these pop-culture portrayals in any way accurate? Or are they simply images concocted to engage the modern audiences in a period piece that takes them out of their everyday lives, and into a time of Royal Court, tradition and gentlemen suitors?

There are various ways to examine the courtship and marriage rituals in seventeenth century England. One approach is to look at the available public records and write from a mainly demographic perspective. This approach may be found to be very useful, and may allow the historian to gain conclusions about the statistical aspects of marriages, such as: the average age at the time of marriage, the length of courtships, and the length of the marriages themselves. These demographic perspectives are very interesting; however they are not the approach that will be pursued in this thesis. Instead, this thesis will examine the more personal side of courtship and marriage, through the use of seventeenth century diaries and letters. By reading these diaries and letters, we may
hope to gain a better understanding of people’s personal views on their own courtships and marriages, as well as the courtships and marriages of others.
CHAPTER II
HISTORIOGRAPHY OF COURTSHIP AND THE FAMILY,
PARTICULARLY IN ENGLAND

This thesis is by no means the first investigation into the courtship and marriage rituals of seventeenth century England. Over the years there has been much written about family life during this time period, a topic which inevitably lends itself to courtship and marriage. Perhaps the most widely cited book dealing with courtship and marriage is Lawrence Stone’s *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England: 1500-1800*. It was Stone’s goal to investigate, in detail, the many aspects of family life in early modern England. While it must be recognized that this was a massive undertaking for any historian, he left out many details regarding the lower classes. Like this paper, Stone cites many diaries as his resources, but rather than using them for any personal insight they may provide, he uses them mostly for their dates and statistical figures. Stone regards marriage as chiefly an exchange of property; therefore he focuses his attention mainly on arranged marriages. Although he mentions that choice could play a role in a marriage, he often describes it as something more common among the lower classes, thus spending little time discussing it as a factor.\(^1\) Stone’s massive investigation of relationships in England spans a time frame of three hundred years and inundates the reader with endless facts and demographic

comparisons, yet it fails to investigate the courtship and marriage rituals for those members of society who were not part of the upper classes.

Following Stone’s 1977 publication, there were many books published which questioned his ideas, and criticized him for focusing far too much on the arranged marriages between members of the upper classes. One such book was English Society: 1580-1680, by Keith Wrightson, published in 1982. Like most books that discuss courtship and marriage, Wrightson’s book was not solely dedicated to these topics. Instead it is divided into two parts, the first of which discussed the enduring structures found in English society; and the second, which discuses the course of social change. Given the fact that many have regarded marriage as one of the major structures of English society, it seems logical that he would attempt to discuss the topic in some detail in the first part of his book.

One of the major aspects of courtship and marriage that Wrightson discusses briefly, are the guidelines associated with who could or could not enter into a marriage, based on the rules of consanguinity. ² Wrightson also discusses what constituted a valid marriage contract, and how two people could be entered into such a contract. ³ Unlike Stone, instead of focusing on the arranged marriages of the elite, Wrightson attempts to investigate what courtship and marriage rituals middle and lower class people participated in. Although Wrightson makes the attempt to discuss courtship and marriage rituals among the different classes, his investigation is somewhat limited because he is only using it as one aspect of a broader investigation of English society as a whole.

³ Wrightson, 67
Wrightson’s work in the area seems to be only an introduction into the study of courtship and marriage, as well as a riposte to Lawrence Stone.

Like previous works, Ralph A. Houlbrooke also examines courtship and marriage as just one aspect of English society. However, Houlbrooke brings a new topic to the readers’ attention in The English Family 1450-1700, published in 1984. In his book, he examines the European marriage pattern found in early twentieth century England. Houlbrooke makes it a point to trace this modern marriage pattern back to its roots, and show how it may have come about as a result of courtship and marriage practices from hundreds of years ago, including during the seventeenth century. Per his description, this European marriage pattern may be identified by men and women marrying later in life, or perhaps choosing not to marry at all.4 Houlbrooke cites one of the major reasons for marrying later in life as the availability (or unavailability) of a suitable marriage partner.5 While Stone and Wrightson also recognized a higher average age of marriage in England in their own works, they saw it as the result of the need to ensure economic independence and stability. 6

One observation that should be noted is that Houlbrooke does not cite Lawrence Stone’s The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800 in any of his chapters. This may come as a surprise since the vast majority of works on the subject are in some way influenced by Stone’s 1977 publication. However, Houlbrooke explains in detail his feelings about Stone’s work in his introduction. Houlbrooke states that while Stone’s

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5 Houlbrooke, 67
work was the first to attempt a ‘total’ history of family life in England during the early modern period, and his work is in fact a very readable text, it has some major flaws. These flaws include: that the degree of change that took place in thinking about conjugal and parental responsibilities and familial affection was exaggerated; that the link between official doctrine and actual life was overestimated; that practices and experiences in the book were too confidently asserted; that Stone’s economic approach deemphasized the varying economic roles of different family members; that Stone’s assertions of the importance of wider kindred in late medieval England are based on myths; and that Stone interpreted the demographic statistics in a very pessimistic way, showing exaggerations without providing enough evidence. Houlbrooke asserts that because of these flaws and others, it will be a long time before another work on the English family of the same scale as Stone’s is even attempted. Although this is just one historian’s point of view on the subject and a critique of Stone, it does give insight as to what historians after 1977 were thinking when writing on the topic, and what a vast effect Stone’s work had on the subject area, whether it is viewed positively or negatively.

In this work, Houlbrooke makes mention of many aspects of marriage in England. However, due to the need to fit information on courtship and marriage into the broader topic of the book, he makes some generalizations and leaves out certain time tables that would help compare his work to that of other historians who have written on the topic. While Houlbrooke cites Wrightson and some of the same diaries he used, it is clear that he is attempting to take a much more demographic approach.

7 Houlbrooke, 14
8 Houlbrooke, 14 – 15
9 Houlbrooke, 15
Whereas Houlbrooke focuses his research on the broader topic of the English family, the following work limits its focus to marriage, albeit with a longer time span to investigate. In his 1985 book, *For Better, For Worse: British Marriages, 1600 to Present*, John Gillis searches for the origins of the conjugal, on a social level below that which had been studied by most historians. Through his search for such origins, Gillis found that marriage was not like the conventional unilinear view expressed by previous historians in the field, instead it had been constructed over time through various paths.\(^{10}\) To view the idea of the conjugal as simply a means to the end which is seen today is extremely flawed. Such a process narrows its views and is limited to by class and gender through its sources.

Like Stone, Gillis states that for the most part marriage has never been just about love. Due to this, Gillis argues that the community has played a very important role in the marriage and courtship process throughout history. The importance of the community is an integral theme to be examined in his work. Gillis gives attention not just to the actual marriage ceremony, but also the festivities leading up to it. According to Gillis “ritual makes (and unmakes) marriage just as surely and effectively as any legal proceeding”.\(^{11}\) By examining the rituals and ceremonies that were part of the marriage process, this work is not just a study of conjugal bonds but the various relationships that are part of the marriage itself. To Gillis the marriage process is simultaneously private and public; as well as personal and political.\(^{12}\)

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\(^{10}\) John Gillis, *For Better or Worse: British Marriages, 1600 to Present*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 4

\(^{11}\) Gillis, 7

\(^{12}\) Gillis, 8
While the scope of Gillis’ work is rather large, spanning nearly four hundred years, it is his 16\textsuperscript{th} and 17\textsuperscript{th} century work that is most valuable to this thesis. In his examination of the 16\textsuperscript{th} and 17\textsuperscript{th} century, Gillis focuses not just on courtship and betrothal, but also the politics of a big wedding, as well as clandestine marriage and sexual nonconformity. His examination of such topics is very useful, and his inclusion of various sources to show the experiences of men and women of the time gives the study a more personal approach.

Much like Gillis’ work, Alan MacFarlane’s 1986 publication: *Marriage and Love in England: 1300-1840*, does not deal with the broad topic of life in English society, but instead narrows its focus exclusively to courtship and marriage. As with the other works, MacFarlane studies a large time span, which may explain why in certain parts of the book it becomes slightly confusing as to exactly which time period he is discussing. Nonetheless, it is a different approach than those taken before him. MacFarlane examines marriage through a cost-benefit analysis, focusing on natural selection and population control. He also spends time at the beginning of the book explaining some of the ideas of Thomas Malthus. According to MacFarlane, Malthus’ analysis states that marriage was something that carried social and economic costs; both of which had to be considered before the decision to wed was made.\textsuperscript{13} Outside of the cost-benefit analysis, MacFarlane also uses popular literature and poetry to explain how romantic love could be tied into courtship and marriage. He also reiterates what other historians have written concerning the important role of parents, status and economics in the final choice of a marriage partner.

Of all of the books mentioned thus far, this book spends the most space examining courtship rituals, highlighting two major aspects of English courtship. The first aspect was that courtship and marriage were usually initiated by the parties directly involved or their families, not by an institution as can be found in other cultures. The second was that the length of the courtship was generally between six months to a year. MacFarlane also discusses the more relaxed interaction between men and women, and even a certain amount of private time spent between courting couples, although it is clear that there was direct instruction forbidding any pre-marital sexual acts. This description of courtship may be seen in some of the diaries that will be examined later. Finally, MacFarlane analyzes how three popular theories of courtship go against the previous ideas and evidence found in English marriages during this time. The first is the Frustration Theory, that courtship was a way to exercise sexual frustration between the time of maturity and the late marrying age. The second is the Shotgun Theory, that courtship was a way for a woman to get pregnant which would force the man to marry her. The third is the Fertility Testing Theory, states that courtship provided a time when it could be tested whether a given couple could conceive a child a produce a family successfully. MacFarlane makes it clear that although these courtship theories may be true for other cultures, he does not find that they are applicable to courtship in England.

In addition to the work done in the 1970s and 1980s, there has also been work done on the subject more recently. One such work is David Cressy’s 1997 book, Birth, Marriage and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England.

14 MacFarlane, Marriage and love in England, Modes of Reproduction 1300-1840, 294
15 MacFarlane, Marriage and love in England, Modes of Reproduction 1300-1840, 295
16 MacFarlane, Marriage and love in England, Modes of Reproduction 1300-1840, 298
17 MacFarlane, Marriage and love in England, Modes of Reproduction 1300-1840, 306
In this work David Cressy examines the ritual activity associated with each stage of life in early modern England. Cressy argues that ritual performance revealed frictions and fractures that everyday local discourse attempted to hide. Such rituals also provided the opportunity for contact between family and community. While courtship was not governed by the church as other stages of life were, there were none the less unwritten rules of conduct that were expected to be followed. Cressy also argues that marriage identified new social roles for both men and women, making it a very important part of a person’s life.

Cressy uses a wide variety of sources in his research, including but not limited to: legal documents, sermons, letters and autobiographies. Such a wide range of sources allows Cressy to investigate the ideas of individuals who were not members of the gentry and clergy, although Cressy makes it very clear that this study is not “history from below”. According to Cressy, the purpose of his work is not to reconstruct the lives of ordinary people, as this is often extremely difficult to do; nor is his purpose to challenge other historians. Instead, Cressy seeks to comment on the historical material available to him.

While his goal may not have been to challenge other historians, Cressy is in fact at odds with several of the more commonly held academic views. First, Cressy argues that the early modern period did not see a growth of individualism as other historians have written. In addition to that concept, Cressy did not find significant changes in the family structure as Stone had been trying to convey. Instead, Cressy focuses on the idea

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19 Cressy, 4
that patriarchy was always dominant. Finally, Cressy argues that Puritans were for the most part moderates, not zealots as they have been portrayed; therefore, they had few objections and little influence on the ceremonies, such as marriage, that were ordained by the Church of England. According to Cressy, it was the English Revolution that led to the challenging of ceremonies of the Church of England.

While Cressy’s work focuses on a shorter time period than some of the other works in the field, he does not limit his focus to courtship and marriage exclusively, focusing also on the rituals around birth and death. In his examination of courtship and marriage he focuses on the idea of holy matrimony, the prohibitions and impediments that could be involved, clandestine and irregular marriages, nuptial vows and wedding celebrations. Such a wide focus allows for many useful details, which help the reader understand early modern marriage on a broader scale.

Another, more recent work is Diane O’Hara’s 2000 publication Courtship and Constraint. O’Hara believes that the field of history has been skewed by Stone’s work and his overemphasis on the structural change of the family. However, she does not take the work of Alan MacFarlane to be entirely accurate either; stating that he has placed too much emphasis on individual choice. The historians whom O’Hara sees as taking the middle road are Keith Wrightson, Ralph Houlbrooke and Martin Ingram. O’Hara sees the variability of circumstances as a very important factor to consider when discussing marriage and courtship rituals.

21 O’Hara, 5
While O’Hara admits that much work has already been done on the topic, she argues that certain areas of research have been neglected.\(^\text{22}\) In order to remedy some of this neglect O’Hara focuses her book on the social, economic and cultural aspects of English courtship in the 16\(^{\text{th}}\) century. Her work focuses on the “strategies, circumstances and influences which potentially formed the making of marriage”.\(^\text{23}\)

Now that we have examined what has already been written on the subject of courtship and marriage in early modern England, it is time to turn our attention to the main purpose of this paper. Unlike Houlbrooke’s work, this investigation is not intended to look at the demographics associated with courtship and marriage, although the data he presented in his book has been very helpful in placing the content of the diaries into a historical context. While Wrightson and MacFarlane have been similarly very helpful, this paper does not attempt to discuss such broad topics or times spans as their works have. While O’Hara’s book may be most similar to the aim of this work, there are some notable differences. The first differences can be found in the sources analyzed. In her work, O’Hara includes evidence from church and court records, while this work focuses almost entirely on the use of diaries and letters. Secondly, O’Hara’s work focuses on the 16\(^{\text{th}}\) century, while this work focuses on the 17\(^{\text{th}}\) century. Although such difference might seem subtle, they allow for a much different study. While many historians have influenced this field, this is not an attempt to re-write what has already been done. Instead, it will focus on courtship and marriage in seventeenth century England, including the experiences of people of varying gender and social status. It will also question what effect, if any, the type of courtship had on the resulting marriage. The limitation of the

\(^{22}\) O’Hara, 7
\(^{23}\) O’Hara, 7
scope of this investigation allows us to make more effective comparisons between the personal writings of people who were in some way involved in courtship and marriage rituals. It should be noted here, that while the choice of diaries used was meant to represent a variety of social classes, diaries of women who were not part of the upper echelons of society are nearly impossible to find. Due to this lack of resources we will be forced to establish any views about their courtship rituals through the lens of men either in their families or in their communities. With these limitations being considered, one section of this thesis will also explore courtship and marriage rituals from the perspective of women’s history.
Perhaps the most traditional view of courtship in early modern England is that its purpose was merely a means for two families to achieve some sort of economic bargain. In fact, as mentioned previously, this economically based theory is one of the main focuses of Lawrence Stone’s work. In such a traditional model, the parents would determine whom their children would marry and when these marriages would take place. Certainly there is truth to be found in this traditional model, but exactly how much? Arranged marriages did occur often in seventeenth century England, especially among the upper classes. To what degree were these marriages forced, as an economic bargaining chip for parents and what were some of the results for the children who were to be married? In order to examine the idea of arranged marriage in seventeenth century England, we may look at the diaries of two women, Ann Lady Fanshawe and Lady Grace Mildmay. Although these women came from similar family backgrounds and social status, they had two very different experiences as they entered into, and lived out their lives in arranged marriages.

The first woman we will discuss is Ann Lady Fanshawe. As John Loftis explains, in his introduction to the 1979 republication of her diary: Ann Lady Fanshawe came from

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a very wealthy family with strong Royalist ties and entered into a marriage, proposed by her parents, at the age of nineteen. Her husband, Sir Richard Fanshawe, also came from a wealthy family with Royalist ties, and was thirty-five years old when the couple wed. In her diary, which was written retrospectively after the death of her husband, she leaves out many of the details of her courtship with Richard Fanshawe. What is included in her writing is that she married him on May 18, 1644 and brought to the marriage a promised portion of £10,000, a substantial amount of money for the time. In reality, events having to do with the Civil War may have compromised the actual amount of her portion; nonetheless the fact that it is mentioned shows the status of her family and the substantial economic consequences of her marriage. There is no mention of what Ann thought of the match at the time, but there is also no mention of any attempts made by her or her husband to prevent the union. It seems that although the match was arranged, the couple married willingly.

Ann’s lack of descriptiveness about the actual courtship itself is somewhat compensated for by her glowing commendations of her husband throughout the rest of her writing. Although it seems that the purpose of her diary was to relay a detailed family history to later generations, any discussion of her late husband shows the great admiration she felt for him throughout their marriage. It seems in this case, that an arranged marriage turned out to be a very happy one.

26 Fanshawe and Halkett, 96  
27 Fanshawe and Halkett, 112
In contrast to Ann Lady Fanshawe’s diary, the writings of Lady Grace Mildmay paint a very different portrait of an arranged marriage. Like Ann Lady Fanshawe, Lady Grace Mildmay came from a very wealthy family, one of four children born to Sir Henry and Lady Anne Sharrington, and entered into an arranged marriage at a very young age (she was only fifteen when she married Anthony Mildmay). However, unlike Fanshawe’s portion of £10,000, there is no mention of any type of marriage settlement; either financial or property related. The only item Lady Grace mentions her father giving her, was her wedding ring on which was engraved ‘Maneat Inviolat Fide’ or “Let Thy Faith Remain Inviolate”. The absence of such a settlement is particularly strange since Lady Grace Mildmay was a member of the privileged landed elite, which made up only two percent of the total population of England at the time. Although it is possible that a marriage settlement was involved, there is no evidence to show its existence either in Lady Grace’s description of her courtship or the years after her wedding. The fact that there is no known marriage settlement may cause us to question Stone’s ideas about arranged marriages as economic pacts and important bargaining chips among the upper classes. However, it is very possible that there was gain to be had by arranging this union, albeit in a political sense instead of an economic one.

Unlike Ann Lady Fanshaw’s marriage, which seems to have been entered into willingly by both parties or at least out of obedience to their parents; initially Lady Grace Mildmay’s suitor wanted absolutely nothing to do with her or the marriage. She wrote

28 Linda Pollock *With faith and physic: the life of a Tudor gentlewoman, Lady Grace Mildmay 1552-1620*, (London: Collins and Brown, 1993), 33
29 Pollock, 1
30 Pollock, 8
that upon his father’s proposal of the union, Anthony Mildmay “being then more willing
to travel to get experience of the world than to marry so soon, was unwilling to give his
ear thereunto”.31 It was Sir Walter Mildmay (Anthony’s father), who finally coerced his
son into the arrangement. In her diary, Lady Grace Mildmay describes how Sir Walter
told his son that if he did not marry Lady Grace, he could never bring home another
woman, and if he did marry her he would be left everything in his will.32 With little to no
courtship, the two were married, and shortly thereafter Anthony left her to travel. For
much of her marriage she lived with her husband’s parents on their estate, although her
husband was completely absent from her life for the majority of the time.

Although their marriage may not seem happy, especially compared to Ann Lady
Fanshawe’s glowing descriptions of her own husband, Lady Grace Mildmay seems to
have heeded the advice of her mother-in-law and remained a faithful wife. She even goes
on to discuss how her marriage made her a more religious person and how she avoided
appearances at court for fear that men would approach her.33 Although Lady Grace
Mildmay’s diary is far more descriptive concerning the details of courtship and marriage
than Ann Lady Fanshaw’s, the comparison of the two shows the diversity of how
arranged marriages may have occurred and what it meant to the people involved.

31 Pollock, 33
32 Pollock, 32
33 Pollock, 34
CHAPTER IV
MARRIAGES OF CHOICE

Contrary to certain common misconceptions about courtship and marriage practices in Early Modern England, not every marriage was arranged. Although many parents still maintained a substantial say in who their children married, it seems that it was often the children themselves who first initiated the courtship. Five excellent examples of how freedom of choice and romantic inclinations entered into courtship rituals can be found in the diaries of Roger Lowe, Anne Lady Halkett, Elizabeth Freke, Isaac Archer and Mary Rich, Countess of Warwick. Although these individuals were of different social status and obviously of different genders, their detailed accounts of the trials and tribulations of romantic love give us an insight into the more emotional side of courtship.

The first diary detailing a marriage of choice to be examined is that of Roger Lowe, a middle-class shopkeeper whose writing dates from 1663-1674. Unlike the diaries we have already discussed, this one was not written from the point of view of someone who was a member of the upper class with ties to royalty and nobility. In fact, Lowe’s diary focuses mainly on the events within his community, not national events.34 With

such a limited discussion of major national events, it is little surprise that his “love-life” (and sometimes the love-life of others) often takes center stage in his writing.

At the beginning of his diary, in January 1663, Roger is keeping the company of Ann Barrow. Only two weeks later he wrote that he visited her at her house to break things off.\textsuperscript{35} Although brief, this is the first mention of any type of courtship with a woman in his diary, and is very important because it shows that when courting was done by the choice of the individual, it did not necessarily end up in a marriage. The second courtship occurs some months later, in May 1663. Writing about the previous evening, Roger first makes mention of spending time with Mary Naylor, with whom he says he stayed up all night talking. Roger described this night as the first night he had ever stayed up “wooing”.\textsuperscript{36} It is shortly after this that Roger and Mary solemnly swore to be faithful to one another. Over the next four months of their courtship, Roger described numerous disagreements between the two of them, which often resulted in Mary’s refusal to speak to Roger at all. In September of 1663, Roger expressed that he was very perplexed by Mary’s affections for him.\textsuperscript{37} All of the entries pertaining to their disagreements were written with emotion, and show Roger’s personal distress over the state of their courtship. Their relationship continues its rocky course, but it does not seem that Roger was as committed to the courtship as he previously had been. In October, Roger told a female friend that he should be next in line if her current suitor did not work out; she refused him.\textsuperscript{38} In November, Roger drank with another woman and wrote in his diary that he “wanted to please his carnell selfe, and could have” but he respected his vow to Mary.

\textsuperscript{35} Lowe, 13
\textsuperscript{36} Lowe, 20
\textsuperscript{37} Lowe, 34
\textsuperscript{38} Lowe, 42
Naylor and abstained. Although Roger had previously alluded to some kind of physical affection with women, thus far this is the most descriptive entry to make mention of the possibility of a premarital sexual relationship. Based on his entries, it seemed that Roger and Mary’s courtship continued until May of 1664, about one year after they pledged their faithfulness. From the tone of his entries, and the unfavorable things he said about her, which included calling her a “false, hatred person”, their courtship did not end amicably. After his relationship with Mary Naylor ended, Roger returned to single life; which included many nights at the ale-house. After a particularly rough night of drinking in June of 1664, he was taken care of by Emm Potter. Following the incident, he wrote his feelings about her repeatedly in his diary. However, at the time Emm was involved with someone else, a fact that greatly upset him. Although his entries did not make mention of why Emm’s previous relationship ended, he was finally able to begin courting her in August 1664, and on August 15, he wrote that the couple “professed each other’s loves to each other”. Roger’s description of his courtship with Emm Potter is much less detailed than his previous courtship with Mary Naylor. However, he did discuss some disagreements he and Emm had, and how much he was upset by them. In the end, after a three and a half year long courtship, Roger Lowe married Emm Potter, on March 23, 1668.

The details of Roger Lowe’s several courtships show us that not only was there freedom to choose whom one wanted to court, but also that it was not uncommon for a
middle-class man or woman to have several failed courtship attempts before finally entering into marriage. Furthermore, the degree of informality in the couples’ interactions paints a very different picture from the arranged marriages previously discussed. There is very little discussion of parents, and no discussion of money or property transactions. Instead, it appears Roger chose his companion based on personal traits and romantic inclinations. Roger’s freedom to choose could have landed him married to Mary Naylor, with whom he had difficulty getting along, but instead he chose to marry Emm Potter after a relatively calmer courtship.

The second diary we will examine to help illustrate what role choice played in courtship, is that of Anne Lady Halkett. Like Roger Lowe, Anne Lady Halkett engaged in more than one courtship before finally marrying Sir James Halkett when she was thirty-three years old. However, Anne Lady Halkett’s and Roger Lowe’s backgrounds and social positions were very different. Whereas Lowe was a working middle-class shopkeeper, Anne Lady Halkett was raised in an aristocratic home with ties to the Royal family. Although Anne Lady Halkett’s family struggled financially, the world in which she lived her day to day life, and the people she encountered were undoubtedly among the wealthiest in English society. Another difference from Roger Lowe’s diary is that while his was written at the actual time of the events as a running commentary, hers was written retrospectively about twenty years after her marriage. These differences aside, a comparison of these two diaries is still very valuable. One reason these two diaries are comparable is because of the tone of writing and topics discussed in both. Unlike other diaries describing seventeenth century courtship, both Halkett and Lowe write specifically about their emotions and personal relationships. Furthermore, both diaries
include accounts of more than one courtship that was not arranged, but entered into by the parties’ own free will.

To understand fully the comparisons already mentioned, we must first take a look at the diary of Anne Lady Halkett as we did with Roger Lowe. As previously mentioned, Anne Lady Halkett came from an aristocratic family that had fallen on hard times financially. It was as a result of these financial difficulties that Anne’s first attempt at courtship ended without her marriage. Due to their meager monetary resources and her suspicion that the suitor wanted to marry into a wealthy family to improve his own financial standing, Anne Lady Halkett’s mother refused to grant her daughter permission to marry her first suitor, a man Anne refers to as “Mr. H”. 44 Although Mr. H. made many pledges of love and faithfulness to Anne, she was forbidden from having any sort of contact with him. Despite her own personal wishes, Anne refused to marry Mr. H. without her mother’s consent, because she saw it as the worst form of disobedience. 45 Ultimately, Mr. H. was forced by his father to move to France, although he promised in a secret meeting before he left, that he would not marry at all, unless it was to Anne. Shortly thereafter, Anne received word that Mr. H. had in fact married the daughter of an earl, presumably for money, although it did not seem to be a happy union. Anne wrote very candidly about the pain this news caused her and even about her satisfaction over the fact that he was unhappy with his new wife. In the end, Anne resolved not to let this news of betrayal affect her. 46

45 Halkett, 13
46 Halkett, 18
Anne Lady Halkett’s second courtship occurred when she was slightly older and after the death of her mother. Her second suitor, Colonel Bamfield (or more commonly referred to in her diary as C.B.), was a Royalist involved with the King and the Civil War. Anne and C.B. became better acquainted when they worked together to help plan the escape of the Duke of York, the future James II. While planning the escape, the two spent a great deal of time alone together, as C.B. relayed information to Anne so that she could prepare a dress for the Duke to wear as a disguise. The planned escape was carried out successfully, although there was suspicion of their involvement.47 After the episode, Anne continued to discuss C.B. frequently and wrote that he explicitly told her that his wife had recently died.48 The two admitted their romantic inclinations to each other and after some courtship, Anne accepted C.B.’s marriage proposal, although they delayed the actual marriage due to his involvement with the affairs of the King and the Civil War.49 Throughout their lengthy courtship Anne wrote that she kept her innocence and virtue, although she was reprimanded for causing people to think otherwise.50 Her comments regarding her innocence show that her second courtship allowed for much more time spent alone with her suitor than was the case with her first courtship with Mr. H., presumably due to the lack of parental involvement. While engaged to C.B., Anne began to hear rumors that his wife was not dead, that he was in fact still married and that he had been lying to her all along.51 Although Anne had trouble believing the rumors, she was told repeatedly by members of her family that the rumors were true. Anne was devastated.

47 Halkett, 21-23
48 Halkett, 25
49 Halkett, 28
50 Halkett, 28
51 Halkett, 33
when she finally learned the truth, that C.B. was indeed married. Although it seemed that their engagement had ended, or never truly existed, she still wrote about her feelings for C.B. even as she began her third and final courtship.

As with Roger Lowe’s diary, the details concerning Anne Lady Halkett’s final courtship are less detailed than was the case with her previous ones. Nonetheless, Anne wrote very highly of Sir James Halkett, the man who would later become her husband. Anne mentioned what great respect Sir James, a widower, treated her with despite the embarrassing turn of events associated with C.B. Although she continually denied his marriage proposals, Anne allowed Sir James’ daughters to stay with her. The combination of allowing his daughters to stay with her, and the amount of time Sir James and Anne spent together; led many people to believe that they were actually married. After more consideration, Anne finally accepted Sir James’ proposal; however, she first had to clear her past and confirm that because C.B. was married, their engagement was not valid. Also before marrying Sir James, Anne had to pay her debts and ensure that she was financially sound. In order to accomplish both of these tasks Anne traveled alone to London. In the end, she was cleared of any previous engagement and her debts were paid. With all matters resolved, she went through with her marriage to Sir James Halkett, despite some last ditch efforts of C.B. in London to win her back. Although her diary entries end with her marriage, giving us little information about her life after, because her diary was written retrospectively and her tone regards Sir James Halkett with such respect, it may be assumed that their union was a happy one.

52 Halkett, 32
53 Halkett, 8
54 Halkett, 90-92
55 Halkett, 99
Judging from what was written, it seems that both Roger Lowe and Anne Lady Halkett entered into positive marriages resulting from their own personal decisions; however that does not mean that every romantically inspired match had a happy ending. The perfect example of this is the courtship and marriage of Elizabeth Freke, as recounted in her diary published in 2001.

Elizabeth Freke was born in 1642, to a wealthy, gentry family near London, England.\textsuperscript{56} Like many of the diaries included in this study, Elizabeth wrote retrospectively, not beginning her work until she was about sixty years old.\textsuperscript{57} Perhaps it is due to the retrospective nature of her writing that Elizabeth spares few harsh words when discussing her late husband, Percy Freke.

Compared to some of the other diaries, there are fewer details pertaining to the courtship of Elizabeth and Percy Freke. We know that Elizabeth entered into the courtship by choice, and that the couple was engaged for six or seven years before they wed.\textsuperscript{58} The reasons for such a long engagement could have been financial issues or familial resentment, but any conclusions about these reasons would be purely speculation because Elizabeth did not discuss why the engagement was so lengthy in her writing. Nonetheless, it is clear that Elizabeth was less than thrilled with the prolonged engagement. Furthermore, Elizabeth wrote that when their wedding did eventually take place, it was done privately without the knowledge or consent of her father.\textsuperscript{59} Although she left out many details of the day, she did describe it as “a most grievous rainy, wett

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{56} Elizabeth Freke, \textit{In Remembrance of Elizabeth Freke, 1671-1714}. Edited by R.A. Anselment. (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2001), 4
\item \textsuperscript{57} Freke, 2
\item \textsuperscript{58} Freke, 37
\item \textsuperscript{59} Freke, 37
\end{itemize}
Nearly eight months later, Elizabeth was again married to Percy, although this time it was in a church with her father present. Again she described the day as stormy and rainy, citing the weather of both days she was married as “fatall emblems” of how her marriage would go.  

It is clear that it was Elizabeth’s choice to enter into the marriage, so much so that she waited six years to be married and showed great disobedience by marrying without her family’s consent. However, unlike Roger Lowe and Anne Lady Halkett, Elizabeth Freke did not describe her spouse in a positive way. In fact, the majority of her diary was spent describing incidents of him taking money from her and her leaving him, choosing to live on her own. No doubt, this diary breaks down any conclusions that marriages entered into by choice were guaranteed to be successful!

While Elizabeth Freke may not have discussed in detail her family’s reaction to her disobedience in marrying Percy Freke, Issac Archer’s diary gives numerous details of his father’s reaction to his choice in a spouse and the repercussions of his decision. Isaac Archer was born in England in 1641 and began writing his diary retrospectively in 1659. Archer came from a relatively wealthy background, and although he struggled in his studies he was very well educated. His diary details many aspects of his life, including his complicated relationship with his father, his troubles at school, and his arrangements for marriage. Like many other diarists of the time, it appears that Archer wrote at least in part for religious reasons. This concern for religion and spirituality can be seen in various aspects of his writing, including his description of his struggles with a speech impediment throughout his life as the work of God.

60 Freke, 37
61 Freke, 38
The first mention of marriage comes in 1664 when Isaac was twenty-three years old.\textsuperscript{62} Isaac discussed his choice in marriage with his father, who did not approve of the match, at least in part because Isaac wanted to marry the daughter of a non-conformist minister. Isaac’s father disapproved of such a match based on financial concerns, and since her father was still alive she did not have much property or wealth. Instead, Isaac’s father proposed another woman with more money. This proposal shows that although Isaac had the opportunity to choose a possible spouse, his father’s involvement in the decision was ultimately extremely important. In response to his father’s proposal, Isaac decided to live a life of celibacy rather than marry his father’s choice for him. His decision to disobey his father’s wishes led to a further strain in his relationship with his father. However it was this possible marriage to the woman of his father’s choice that prevented him from leaving the Church of England as he had been considering.\textsuperscript{63}

In 1667, Archer’s father finally consented to the union of Archer and his first love, supposedly without any negative consequences. Archer had told his father that he would make a living as a minister, and his father agreed that if he could set up his own household he could marry.\textsuperscript{64} Isaac Archer was married on a Wednesday, November 13, 1667; He was twenty-six and his bride was twenty-four. The wedding took place shortly after his father gave his consent because it was believed that the marriage would cure the melancholy from which Isaac’s bride was suffering. Although his father had given his

\textsuperscript{63} Storey, 99
\textsuperscript{64} Storey, 115
consent to the marriage, he was angry that his son had married so quickly without giving notice.65

Archer’s early marriage was not as he had planned. When his work as a minister dwindled the couple was forced to live with his wife’s family because he could not provide for them.66 Unfortunately, Archer had difficulty in such a living situation because he did not agree with how the household was run. Even with his discontent Archer spoke highly of his wife and mentioned with great affection the births of their children.

The repercussions of disobeying of his father would continue to haunt Archer, even after years of marriage. When one of his children died at a young age he commented that he believed it to be punishment for marrying his wife so quickly due to her melancholy. Although his father had agreed not to punish Isaac for his choice in marriage, the resentment he harbored over his son’s disobedience was reflected in his behavior towards Isaac’s children. His father, still angry over his son’s choice of a woman with a small portion, refused to provide money for Isaac’s children’s education.67 However, part of this problem was solved when his wife’s older sister died suddenly, therefore forwarding part of her portion to Isaac’s wife, which in turn provided for the education expenses of their children. 68

While many of the instances detailed in the diary show Isaac Archer’s father’s concern and involvement in his son’s marriage even years after the event took place, later writings indicate that his father’s action of disinheriting him may not have been a result

65 Storey, 115
66 Storey, 116
67 Storey, 123
68 Storey, 140
of his wedding. Isaac writes that in 1676 that he found out that his father had plans to disinherit him totally three years before he had even met his wife.\textsuperscript{69} This revelation is significant not only because it shows the complex relationship between father and son, but also because it in some ways takes away from the importance Archer’s father may have placed on the significance of his son’s choice in a spouse. If all along his father had been planning to disinherit him, his choice of a bride may just have been used as an opportunity to do so.

Although his strained relationship with his father no doubt had an impact on his life, from his writing it appears that he had a happy marriage. Archer wrote about his wife and children very affectionately throughout his diary and discussed frequently his concern when his wife became ill. After his wife lost her sight completely in 1691, he wrote frequently about how he took care of her.\textsuperscript{70}

Unlike the others mentioned so far, Archer’s diary shows the possible negative long-term consequences that accompanied entering into a marriage by choice rather than following a parent’s intentions. Perhaps Isaac and his father’s relationship was already strained and disinheritance would have been inevitable. However, apparently Archer’s decision to marry by his own free will was a socially acceptable reason for his father to go through with the disinheritance. The fact that Archer assumed for some time that his father’s actions were a direct result of his disobedience shows the connection a father could have to the personal choices his child made. If parental involvement was not such a common occurrence perhaps Isaac would have considered another reason for his father’s actions.

\textsuperscript{69} Storey, 153
\textsuperscript{70} Storey, 182
Another example of outright disobedience by a child in their choice of spouse can be found in the diary of Mary Rich, Countess of Warwick.\textsuperscript{71} Mary was on November 8, 1625 to Richard Boyle Earl of Cork and Katheren Fentone, a wealthy household despite the fact that her father was a third son and had to wait until later on in adulthood to come into his wealth.\textsuperscript{72} Mary’s mother died when she was three years old, after which her father sent her to live with a woman named Lady Clayton who looked after her and took care of her education until she was eleven years old.

The first mention of a possible match for Mary came when she was thirteen or fourteen years old. Her potential suitor was Mr. Hambletone, son of Lord Clandeboyes. Mary’s father and Mr. Hambletone’s father had made arrangements some years earlier that if when their children met they liked each other, they should marry. It is very apparent from Mary’s account of the situation that she was very much expected to marry Mr. Hambletone. Indeed, Mr. Hambletone came from a wealthy family and could have provided for Mary very well; however she would not consent to the match. Mary discussed her father’s distress at the situation when she wrote “though my father pressed me extremely to it; my aversion for him was extraordinary, though I could give my father no satisfactory account of why it was so”.\textsuperscript{73} While her father pursued the match for quite some time after her first moves against it, in the end she could not be coerced into marrying Mr. Hambletone and the match was called off. Despite her father’s great displeasure, he could not force Mary to go through with it. Within a year of the broken

\textsuperscript{71} The selection of diary to be discussed was kept by Mary Rich, Countess of Warwick from 1666-1673 and printed for the Percy Society, London in 1848.
\textsuperscript{72} Charlotte F. Otten, \textit{English Women's Voices, 1540 – 1700}. (Miami : University of Florida Press, 1992), 158
\textsuperscript{73} Otten, 159
arrangements, Mr. Hambletone had lost all of his wealth in the rebellion in Ireland and Mary was grateful she had not married him for his estate, for she would have lost everything as well.

Following this failed match, there were many other suitors who asked for Mary’s hand. However, despite her father’s encouragement Mary still had a strong aversion to marriage and refused all offers. During this time Mary’s brother was married, but because he was so young he was sent to France to study and his wife came to live with Mary and her family. The two young women soon became friends, a relationship that would eventually lead Mary to her future husband.74

Mr. Rich first came to Mary’s home as a friend of her brother’s wife, and in fact he was there to express interest in another woman who also had the interest of Mary’s other brother. Mary’s brother was successful in winning the woman’s hand in marriage, however the wedding was called off just before it was scheduled to take place. Mary’s father had never liked the match for his son, however because his son was so dedicated it he could not refuse. Meanwhile, Mr. Rich continued to visit as a friend. Mr. Rich was well bred and well liked, but would not have been an approved match for Mary because of his status as a second son. When Mary’s sister-in-law told her of Mr. Rich’s affections for her, she was doubtful of the match because she was certain her father would disapprove.

Mr. Rich continued to visit, all the while hiding his feelings for Mary from the rest of the family. Mary wrote that it was during this time that she fell for him and that

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74 Otten, 160
this secret part of their courtship lasted some months.\textsuperscript{75} Throughout this time marriage offers continued to be brought to her, however she would not consent to any of them. Although she could not imagine herself happy with any other man, she could also not see herself happy with Mr. Rich’s standard of living, which was well below her own. It is due to his standard of living that Mary decided to give Mr. Rich a “flat and final denial”.\textsuperscript{76} With all the intentions of ending things, Mary approached Mr. Rich but in the end could not go through with her denial.

Shortly after this episode Mary was stricken with measles and became extremely ill. Mr. Rich came to her bedside and visited her frequently. His frequent visits led the woman she was staying with to become suspicious of Mr. Rich’s true feelings for Mary, which led her to threaten to tell Mary’s father. After such a threat, Mr. Rich came to Mary’s bedside and confessed his feelings and asked for her hand in marriage, a proposal she accepted. With intentions between them out in the open, all that was left to do was for Mr. Rich to gain Mary’s father’s permission. Given Mr. Rich’s standing as the second son, Mary’s father was very upset by the news that the two wanted his permission to marry. Mary’s father even went as far as to send her brothers to talk her out of marrying Mr. Rich. In response, Mary told her brothers that she would not marry Mr. Rich without her father’s permission, however if she could not marry him she would not marry anyone else either.

Although her father was extremely upset and refused to speak to Mary, after approximately ten weeks he agreed to give his consent to the marriage. Shortly thereafter, Mary further upset her father by marrying Mr. Rich in a private ceremony as

\textsuperscript{75} Otten, 162  
\textsuperscript{76} Otten, 162
opposed to the public wedding her father had planned. At the age of fifteen, after several failed match-making attempts by her father, Mary was married to the man of her choice. It is important to note here that at a time in which the predominant pattern was to marry later in life, Mary was married at the age of fifteen, even after several other courtships had not worked out. While it is true that members of wealthier families did often marry younger than those of the lower classes, this situation is nonetheless somewhat of an anomaly. Retrospectively Mary wrote about how disobeying her father went against God’s wishes and how she was blessed to join a religious family and that God had forgiven her for her disobedience. 77

Whereas Isaac Archer’s relationship with his father was extremely strained and arguably destroyed by his decision to marry by his own choice, it appears the Mary Rich’s father was in the end more understanding about his daughter’s wishes. One characteristic that is similar between both the diaries of Isaac Archer and Mary Rich are their threats to never marry at all if they are not given permission to marry who they have chosen. While such a dramatic bargaining tool may seem fit for a Hollywood movie, it does show to a certain extent the amount of control a son or daughter had over their marriage.

77 Otten, 166
The seven diaries we have already compared have discussed a variety of courtship situations, however all were written from the point of view of one of the “spouses-to-be”. There have been some references within these diaries concerning outside opinions or influences on their courtships, but these references have been limited. In order to gain a more well-rounded view of courtship and marriage rituals, it is important to look at other sources that were written by people who were not one of the parties intended to be married. Two excellent examples of such resources are the diaries of Adam Martindale and Ralph Josselin.

While the diary of Adam Martindale is much less extensive than that of Ralph Josselin, it nonetheless makes mention of numerous courtship situations. Although Martindale viewed these courtships not as a suitor himself, but as an outsider looking in, he expressed his opinions on them in his writing. Adam Martindale was an educated man who wrote retrospectively about his life, and described the experiences of living in England during the Civil War. Due to his family’s financial troubles Martindale struggled to stay in school throughout his youth and was therefore forced to acquire much of his education through his own motivation. After he obtained his education, both formal and informal, Martindale taught in a variety of schools before he entered into the ministry.
Martindale wrote about both major and minor events throughout his childhood and his adulthood as a teacher and minister. Although he wrote about the events after they occurred, he clearly included his thoughts and feelings about them at the time.

Although Martindale makes brief references to numerous marriages throughout his diary, we will be focusing on one in which he gives many details about the actual courtship. The entry we will focus on describes the marriage of his eldest brother in 1632, when Martindale was only about ten years old. Martindale wrote that his brother was engaged to what he described as a “suitable woman”, with a portion of seven-score pounds. Just before the couple was to wed, Adam’s brother met and became interested in a young woman, who was only about fifteen or sixteen years old, and who Martindale described as “wild”. Furthermore, this new young woman would only bring a portion of forty pounds to a marriage, a great deal less than his originally intended spouse. Martindale wrote that despite his young age, he could tell the difference between the two women. Although many family members and friends attempted to persuade him otherwise, his brother would not change his mind. Eventually, his father unwillingly gave his consent, allowing the two to marry. Much to the surprise of many of the family members involved, the marriage ended up being a happy one. Martindale wrote that even though his brother’s choice ended up being an excellent wife, the family still maintained hard feelings towards her, as a result of her small portion of forty pounds. Although the choice of his spouse was in the end his brother’s decision, the description of family

78 Adam Martindale, The life of Adam Martindale, written by himself, and now first printed from the original manuscript in the British museum. Edited by R. Parkinson. (New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968), 16
79 Martindale, 16
80 Martindale, 16
involvement and financial concerns illustrates the fact that choosing one’s own spouse could have far reaching consequences for many people involved.

Although this selection from Martindale’s diary gives us details about family involvement in courtship, it is a different perspective than that of Ralph Josselin because as a younger sibling Martindale was not as involved in the events as a parent would be. Whereas Martindale is a bystander in all of the controversy surrounding the courtship, it is clear from his diary that Ralph Josselin at least attempted to play a major part in the matchmaking and courtship of his children, especially his daughters. Josselin himself was an educated man and a minister, who wrote diligently about many details of his life, including weather, village events, illnesses and of course his family. Whereas Martindale included his thoughts and feelings in his writing, Josselin’s diary entries were often short and lacked much elaboration. Even without the emotional details, Josselin often made his thoughts on his children very clear.

The most detailed account of the courtship and marriage of one of Josselin’s children is that of his eldest surviving daughter, Jane. As the first child to be married, her courtship gains substantially more attention in his writing, and we are able to follow the path it took through his entries. On January 21, 1670, Josselin wrote that John Woodthorp asked permission to begin courting Jane.\textsuperscript{81} This action by Woodthorp is very significant because it showed to what degree parents acted as gate-keepers in courtships, even when they were not directly involved in the matchmaking process. Josselin described

\textsuperscript{81} Ralph Josselin, The diary of Ralph Josselin 1616-1683. Edited by A. MacFarlane. (London : Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 1976), 55
Woodthorp as a man from their town who was sober and hopeful, with an estate of about £500, and he subsequently gave him permission to court his daughter.82

On March 18, 1670, Josselin wrote that Jane and John Woodthorp publicly testified their agreement to be married. Judging from the tone of the entry and the language usage, Josselin saw this as a positive thing and asked God to bless them.83 On April 29, 1670, Josselin discussed getting money together for Jane’s portion, and on August 30, 1670 the couple was married, concluding a seven-month courtship.84 As well as paying for the wedding, Josselin provided Jane with a portion consisting of £200, clothing, a plate valued at £40 and £20 in cash.85 Josselin also included various entries which detailed the installments of Jane’s portion, until its complete payment in November of 1671. Upon its full payment, Josselin wrote that “its mony I thought well bestowed”, showing his confidence in the choice of his daughter’s spouse.86

Although Josselin lived to see the marriage of all four of his surviving daughters, he included substantially less information about the three married after Jane. For the marriage of his next daughter, Elizabeth, he mentions that although there were difficulties on both sides he was involved in the matchmaking of the couple.87 Furthermore, although Josselin had included specific details regarding Jane’s portion, there is no discussion of what, if anything, Elizabeth brought to her marriage. Josselin goes on to say that it was not a match based on estate, which may mean that there was no portion involved at all.88

82 Josselin, 551
83 Josselin, 552
84 Josselin, 553, 555
85 Josselin, 561
86 Josselin, 561
87 Josselin, 600
88 Josselin, 600
Of his daughters, the only major difficulty encountered in their courtships came when his daughter Mary, at the age of twenty-three, refused to marry a proposed suitor. On June 2, 1681 Josselin wrote that Mary had “Quitted Mr. Rhea”, giving her family various reasons for the courtship’s termination. Her primary reason was that since he was fourteen years her senior, she feared she might be left a widow with children. She also said that she had not liked his estate and that he was not loving towards her. Josselin wrote that the end of the courtship “was no small grief” to him, but if it would make his daughter unhappy, he would not want them to marry. This episode with Mary’s suitor shows that although Josselin maintained influence in his daughters’ courtships, in the end it was their own personal choice.

The descriptions of the marriages of the two remaining daughters, Mary and Rebekah, were very limited due to Josselin’s declining health. However, Josselin did describe the larger portions these daughters received compared to his daughters who married earlier. One possible reason these daughters received more at the time of their marriage, was because Josselin may have been giving them their inheritance early, since he died shortly after their marriages.

Any description of the courtships of his two sons who survived into adulthood, Thomas and John, is virtually non-existent. There was mention of a possible matchmaking for Thomas in Josselin’s entry on June 2, 1667, but no mention of marriage

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89 Josselin, 632
90 Josselin, 632
92 MacFarlane, *The family life of Ralph Josselin*, 97
before Thomas’ death at the age of twenty-nine in 1673.\textsuperscript{93} Although there were many entries detailing Josselin’s concern and distress over his son John’s poor behavior, the only reference to Josselin’s thoughts regarding his marriage was his entry on September 24, 1681 in which he writes that: “John’s wife [is] likely to bee trouble to us”.\textsuperscript{94} Obviously, Josselin’s opinions regarding his son’s choice for a wife were much less complementary than for the choices of his daughters.

Two features that both Martindale and Josselin included in their descriptions of courtships were the role of money and family. While both diaries portray money and family influence as important factors in courtship and marriage, in neither diary were they portrayed as the deciding factors. In fact both Martindale and Josselin included examples of when the decision to marry was made against the suggestions of family members. Examining these outside views helps to shed new light on what role individual choice played in courtship and marriage.

\textsuperscript{93} Josselin, 536
\textsuperscript{94} Josselin, 640
CHAPTER VI

THE VERNEY FAMILY

The final source to be analyzed by this thesis are the Memoirs of the Verney Family. While this thesis has up until this point drawn its information exclusively from diaries, Memoirs of the Verney Family is a collection of letters written throughout the 17th century. The nearly 30,000 letters that were written from the 1620’s to 1696 were compiled, and background information added by Mrs. Frances Parthenope Verney in 1858. While it must be taken into consideration that the materials have been edited by a family member, many excerpts from the letters are included and it is still possible to gather information with limited bias. Furthermore, the recent book by Adrian Tinniswood, The Verneys, which cites the actual letters extensively, is an excellent resource for cross checking quotations and details. The Verney family members who wrote the letters came from a background of wealth and privilege and in some cases participated in political affairs. Although the family does not offer an accurate representation of the “common folk” of the 17th century, Frances Parthenope Verney writes in the introduction to the memoirs published in 1858, “Verney records are only those of an ordinary gentleman’s family of the higher class”.  

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Frances Parthenope Verney may have considered the family of which she was writing “an ordinary gentleman’s family”, this does not mean that everything its members experienced over various decades was typical or even similar to other members of the family.

Throughout the four volumes there are numerous references to courtships and marriages. In the interest of completeness this thesis will focus only on the instances with substantial details given. This section of the thesis will show situations similar to what we have already examined, such as: arranged marriages, marriages by choice, and outside views on marriages. What is significant about this section is that all of the examples come from within the same family. While the previous approach in this thesis has been to examine situations by category, in the interest of coherence it may be better suited for the analysis of this source to follow a chronological path.

As Tinniswood describes in the introduction to his book, Ralph Verney was the family member most responsible for amassing the massive collection of correspondence that was found at the family home of Claydon House in the 19th century.96 As the patriarch of the family for nearly fifty years, it seems appropriate that the first substantial example of courtship and marriage found in the Memoirs of the Verney Family is that of Ralph Verney himself. The future Mrs. Ralph Verney was born Mary Blacknall in 1616. When her parents died, leaving her an orphan at the age of nine, four of her relations came forward and were granted guardianship over her by the Court of Wards. The terms of the Court’s decision stated that whomever watched over her would have lease of her

lands and the right to bestow her in marriage when she was fourteen. Against the Court’s terms, one of her guardians made the first arrangement for her marriage (conveniently with his own son) to be finalized when she was eleven years old. As a result of an appeal by her other guardian, the Court ruled against the match and Mary was sent to live with a woman, Lady Denham of Borstall, who was also raising her own daughters. While living with Lady Denham, three of Mary’s guardians approached Sir Edmund Verney to make arrangements for a match between Mary and Sir Edmund’s oldest son Ralph. Sir Edmund Verney agreed to the arrangements with the stipulation that she be “well-bred, not forced into marriage, but allowed to make her own decision when she was older”. The marriage of Mary Blacknall and Ralph Verney took place in 1629, when Mary was 13 and Ralph was 16. Due to the bride and groom’s young age, Mary stayed with relatives while Ralph was at school. During this time Mary’s relatives tried to convince her to repudiate her marriage, but to no avail. Mary came to live with her husband at the family home, Claydon, in 1631 while he attended Oxford. Their marriage lasted until Mary’s death in May of 1650, by all accounts found in the memoirs their union seemed to be a happy one.

The second example of courtship and marriage found in the Memoirs is one of the very few examples to be found throughout the correspondence of a marriage based almost entirely on personal choice, with relatively little weight given to matters of money or family opinion. Margaret Lady Pulteney was Ralph’s aunt who was widowed at age

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100 Verney, *The Memoirs of the Verney Family, Volume I*, 122
twenty-five, but left a substantial fortune by her husband John Pulteney. Predictably, after her husband’s death, numerous suitors began to pursue her.\textsuperscript{101} While Margaret consulted Ralph on what to do about her various suitors, it is clear that she was not interested in the men based on what they could offer her monetarily, and indeed she and Ralph discussed this aspect of the prospective spouses quite frankly. It appears that Margaret was far more concerned with finding a good husband than what he owned, and she is quoted as saying “but for my part I thinke that all the riches in the world without content is nothing – for this liberty I will take to myself, that is, to make choice of one as I affect, as for him I find I canot”\textsuperscript{102}

In time, Margaret rejected several suitors but then finally agreed to marry Mr. William Eure. Eure, a Roman Catholic, was not seen as a suitable match by either Margaret’s mother or Ralph Verney, for various reasons. First, it appears that Eure was not at all wealthy and therefore it may not have been an economically sound decision on Margaret’s part. Secondly, she had gone against the advice given by both her mother and Ralph and married William Eure privately. Finally, and most upsetting for those involved, the fact that Eure was a Roman Catholic was seen as “religious infidelity” and utterly appalling to the strictly Protestant family members.\textsuperscript{103} Eventually, the family accepted the union and Margaret converted to the Catholic faith, but not without a great degree of scandal being associated with her choice.

The third example of courtship and marriage is that of Cary Verney, daughter of Sir Edmund Verney and Ralph’s sister. The courtships and marriages of Cary show how

\textsuperscript{101} Verney, \textit{The Memoirs of the Verney Family, Volume I}, 277
\textsuperscript{102} Verney, \textit{The Memoirs of the Verney Family, Volume I}, 278
\textsuperscript{103} Verney, \textit{The Memoirs of the Verney Family, Volume I}, 281
both an arranged marriage and a marriage by choice might play out in one woman’s lifetime. Cary’s first marriage was arranged by her father in 1641 when she was fourteen years old. Her father had been in agreement with Sir Thomas Gardiner, Recorder of London, that Cary and his eldest son should be married. The prospective couple had become acquainted in 1641 and married a year later. Before the marriage actually took place, Sir Thomas Gardiner came under disgrace in parliament. Even with the distractions and complications, Sir Edmund agreed to go on with the match and wrote with much sentiment about the details of his daughter’s pending marriage. Although the match was arranged, it does appear that it was a happy, albeit brief, marriage. Shortly after their wedding Cary’s husband was killed during his service to the King’s army, leaving Cary a widow and a mother at the age of eighteen.\footnote{Frances Parthenope Verney, \textit{The Memoirs of the Verney Family, Volume II: during the civil war.} (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1970), 76} During her husband’s absence, Cary had been living with her in-laws who had always treated her very kindly. However, after her husband’s death, and the birth of a daughter instead of a son, their attitude toward her changed and she was forced to return home.\footnote{Verney, \textit{The Memoirs of the Verney Family, Volume II, 77}}

Cary remained a single widow and mother for two years, until she met Mr. Stewkeley, “a man of property in Hampshire”.\footnote{Verney, \textit{The Memoirs of the Verney Family, Volume II, 78}} Unlike her first marriage, this match seems to have been made entirely on her own accord. Perhaps because it is a second marriage, there are considerably fewer details regarding the courtship of Cary and Mr. Stewkeley, including who played a role in the arrangements and what type of marriage
settlement was reached. However, by all accounts Mr. Stewkely “seems to have been a kindly amiable husband”.107

After Sir Edmund Verney’s death in 1642, all responsibility for the matching of his five unwed daughters fell to their brother Ralph Verney. Since Cary was the only sister provided for in marriage by her father, Ralph was faced with task of making arrangements for the girls whose ages varied from nine to twenty-one years old.108 To complicate matters, this responsibility had to be carried out as Ralph, a Royalist, moved his family to Rouen, France to ensure their safety.109 The first marriage negotiations to be arranged for Ralph’s sisters was that of Peg.

In May of 1646, Peg Verney was married to a Mr. Elmes of Norhamtonshire, a match found by their brother Henry (no doubt due to Ralph’s exile). Mr. Elmes was apparently very wealthy and negotiations for his marriage to Peg took place relatively quickly.110 While the courtship arrangements may have gone smoothly, Peg’s marriage certainly did not. According to her sister Susan’s letter, “poore peg has married a very humerume cros boy has ever I see in my life, & she is very much altered for the worse since she was married; I doe not much blame her for beine so altered because sumetims he makes her cry night & day”.111 Peg’s brother Henry, the originator of the match later writes of Mr. Elmes, “A proves in fitts very bad & divelish jelous, now and then for an houer strangely fond. I must doe her write, she deserves it not; want of worth &

109 Tinniswood, 204
breedinge makes him do it. I am forst to speake bigg words when a acts the part of a Madman, & that stills him for a time”.112

Accounts of Peg’s abusive marriage to Mr. Elmes continue in the following volumes of the memoirs. Peg writes in her letters that her husband repeatedly kicked her about the house and that she would drink water to ensure there would be more ale for him.113 Finally, in 1657 the family began to discuss possible terms of separation between Peg and Mr. Elmes. After some discussion, arrangements were made for Peg to live with her sister Cary, and although she recognized the dishonor of being separated from her husband, she wrote to her brother that she could no longer handle her situation and would wish to “live in obscurity” after leaving him.114 Peg’s separation from her marriage occurred in 1659 when she was finally able to come to live with her sister Cary. Cary writes in letters to her brother that Peg was very “disordered” when a door would shut in the house, and for quite some time she was unable to endure music playing or company; no doubt indications of the traumatic lifestyle she had endured while living with Mr. Elmes.115

While the monetary details of the separation are not discussed at length, Peg does write that she was struggling because her estranged husband was not providing her with enough money for her survival. It seems that although they separated there were some arrangements for Mr. Elmes to be responsible for Peg monetarily. Regardless of her struggles, Peg refused to return to him, saying that the life she would lead “is worse than

114 Verney, The Memoirs of the Verney Family, Volume III, 432
keeping of hogs”. Despite the harsh rhetoric and stubbornness of her stance regarding her separation, Peg did indeed reconcile with Mr. Elmes in October of 1661. After their reconciliation there was little information given to the quality of their marriage, only that their second honeymoon was “riddled with disaster”, although no details were given.

The next of Ralph Verney’s sisters to be married, Susan, wed in August 1646, three months after Peg’s marriage. Ralph had previously discussed a possible settlement for his sister with a potential spouse, Mr. Alport, and worked out various details of the arrangement, however he then gave Susan three months to decide whether or not she approved of the match. While Susan spoke highly of her future husband and agreed to go through with the marriage, the negotiations over her portion took a considerably longer amount of time than expected. After approximately one year of discussion over portion amount and form of payment Susan married Mr. Alport in a private church ceremony and was given away by her uncle. It appears that Ralph may not have been extremely supportive of the match because Mr. Alport was extremely poor, so much so that the newlyweds lived the first years of the marriage in the Fleet as a penalty for debt. There were also worries that because the wedding had been delayed for so long, the couple had decided to start living the lifestyle of husband and wife before arrangements were finished. The fear that Susan might be pregnant out of wedlock helped to spur the negotiations along. Even with all of the contention over the “business” part of the arrangement, it does appear from Susan’s writing that she was intent on marrying Mr.

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119 Tinniswood, 216
120 Tinniswood, 216
Alport and he was very much her only choice as an acceptable husband. Shortly after the wedding Susan wrote in a letter “I was never so happy since my father died has I am now, I thank god”, thus confirming Ralph’s second foray into matchmaking was more of a success, at least on a personal level, for the couple involved.

After the disastrous match for Peg, and the less than ideal match for Susan, Ralph and Henry worked to find a match for their other sister Pen. The details of Pen’s match to a cousin, John Denton, are relatively sparse however certain things are clear. First, despite his role as being responsible for his sisters, Ralph was not consulted on the match, again presumably due to his status of being in exiled in France at the time. Instead of Ralph handling the arrangements, Pen’s other brother Henry was again the one to take action. In a letter Henry wrote to Ralph after Pen was married, Henry explained that his decision to act was not out of disrespect, but out of fear that if he did not act the match would be lost completely. Furthermore, it is clear that there were serious concerns for finding a match for Pen, because as Henry described the situation, “she had a small portion, she was getting older and not to all men’s liking”. While such a statement may seem harsh, it explains why Henry found it important to note that John Denton was “not a great match but he was not asking for a large portion”. Ralph’s only comment on the match was that he had some worries that John Denton’s father would not consent to it, however when Henry brought the proposal to the Dentons they accepted it willingly.

It appears that the marriage of Pen Verney to John Denton took place without any major problems. While Pen does write to Ralph after the two are married to apologize for not having waited for his official consent, it appears that all sides of the arrangement were happy.\textsuperscript{124} Having arranged marriages for three of his five sisters who had remained unmarried after their father’s death, Ralph was faced with making matches for his two youngest sisters, Betty (age thirteen) and Mary (age eighteen). Although Ralph expressed interest and concern over finding spouses for Betty and Mary; his concerns would go unheeded, as both of the young women’s courtships would take turns that at the time were considered very scandalous.

In May of 1654, Mary Verney (aka: Mall) began to complain of feeling ill, and although she took a large dose of medicine to cure her sickness her condition did not improve.\textsuperscript{125} As rumors and suspicion spread throughout the family, it was decided that someone would have to approach Mall and see if she was in fact pregnant, and if she were secretly married. When confronted, Mall confirmed that she was indeed expecting, and although she was not married she named the father as Robin Lloyd.\textsuperscript{126} Arrangements were made for Mall to give birth to the baby discreetly and then hand it over to the care of Robin Lloyd’s brother and sister-in-law. Eventually, in November of 1655, Robin and Mary were married by a minister in Paddington who was known for conducting irregular marriages.\textsuperscript{127}

\textsuperscript{124} Verney, \textit{The Memoirs of the Verney Family, Volume II}, 367
\textsuperscript{125} Tinniswood, 308
\textsuperscript{126} Tinniswood, 308
\textsuperscript{127} Tinniswood, 312
relationship as brother and sister was strained and after 1657 they never saw each other again.\textsuperscript{128}

With nearly all of his sisters married (only Betty remained unwed), and he and his family safely resettled in England, Ralph began to turn his attention to the marriages of his own children. In 1656, the Verney family came upon some financial difficulty. Ralph saw the only solution to this difficulty was to have his son Edmund (Mun) marry a wealthy woman.\textsuperscript{129} Of Ralph’s seven children, only three were living, Edmund, Tom and John (Jack), and because Edmund was not the eldest son it was very important that he be matched well.\textsuperscript{130} Ralph tried to make marriage arrangements for Mun, however Mun his was very apathetic to the situation. Finally, in December of 1657, Ralph had to call off other possible marriage negotiations because Edmund wrote to tell him that he had fallen in love with a childhood friend, Mary Eure.\textsuperscript{131} Although he had finally developed an interest in marriage, it seems that his love for Mary Eure was unrequited. Edmund wrote letters to Mary, asked for personal interviews and proposed marriage several times, however Mary’s answer was always no. Finally, in January of 1659 Mary denied Edmund for the final time, which ended his attempts for courtship.\textsuperscript{132} Other matches were proposed for Edmund throughout 1659, and his interest was renewed in Mary in February of 1660, but with little success.

\textsuperscript{128} Tinniswood, 313
\textsuperscript{129} Verney, \textit{The Memoirs of the Verney Family, Volume III}, 296
\textsuperscript{130} Verney, \textit{The Memoirs of the Verney Family, Volume III}, 296
\textsuperscript{131} Verney, \textit{The Memoirs of the Verney Family, Volume III}, 320
\textsuperscript{132} Verney, \textit{The Memoirs of the Verney Family, Volume III}, 346
After Mary Eure’s final rejection, Edmund returned to his previous indifference.\textsuperscript{133} For a brief time, Edmund attempted to pursue a wealthy widow, though she ultimately rejected him, choosing a lord instead.\textsuperscript{134} In 1661, Edmund began to woo another wealthy widow, Mrs. Mary Abell, who had for some time been very sad and had turned away all suitors.\textsuperscript{135} By all indication the courtship seemed to be going smoothly, and when Mary told Edmund that her decision to marry him would be based on her uncle-in-law’s influence. In response to her comment, Mun enlisted the help of a family friend to help turn the situation in his favor. Their courtship stumbled over agreements and settlements, however the couple continued to show great affection for one another.\textsuperscript{136} Despite some disapproval by family members, the couple was married in July of 1662.\textsuperscript{137}

Unlike Mun’s rather traditional courtship and marriage, his Aunt Betty, (Ralph’s only unmarried sister) did not maintain a similar courtship and marriage in 1662. While Betty Verney’s marriage may not have been as scandalous as her older sister Mall’s, it none the less went against the traditional practices of the day. Unfortunately, little information was given about Betty’s courtship and marriage. A spinster until the age of twenty-nine, Betty married Charles Adams, a poor clergyman who was five years younger than she.\textsuperscript{138} While the wedding took place secretly with no formal arrangements mentioned, the fact that Betty wrote a letter to Ralph seeking his forgiveness after word got out shows that her actions certainly went against accepted protocol.\textsuperscript{139}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{133} Verney, \textit{The Memoirs of the Verney Family, Volume IV}, 12
\bibitem{134} Verney, \textit{The Memoirs of the Verney Family, Volume IV}, 14
\bibitem{135} Verney, \textit{The Memoirs of the Verney Family, Volume IV}, 16
\bibitem{136} Verney, \textit{The Memoirs of the Verney Family, Volume IV}, 18-19
\bibitem{137} Verney, \textit{The Memoirs of the Verney Family, Volume IV}, 27
\bibitem{138} Tinniswood, 335
\bibitem{139} Tinniswood, 335
\end{thebibliography}
Presumably much to the relief of Ralph, the last of the courtships and marriages of his children described in the *Memoirs of the Verney Family* followed the relatively typical pattern of the time. For example, the account of the first courtship of Ralph’s son John Verney, follows a relatively typical model, although as a Merchant’s Apprentice in the Levant and later a successful businessman in London, John’s life may not be considered typical. Shortly after John’s return to England after his stay in Turkey, he wrote to his father of his plans to find a wife. He also mentioned to his father that if he was going to make such arrangements then he must do it quickly upon his arrival in England because that was when he would be most likely to find the best match.140 Shortly after his arrival, John was approached by Mr. Edwards who proposed a match for John in his nineteen-year-old daughter. Initially John refused to answer any of Mr. Edwards’ questions until he had the opportunity to see his daughter. Although the two barely spoke, John found her agreeable and after he visited her again he decided that she was indeed passable if her father had enough money to give.141 John made a verbal commitment to Mr. Edwards and discussed the details of the settlement privately. Although the exact numbers of the settlement were not given, John remarked that although Mr. Edwards’ daughter did not have a large portion, he was more or less breaking even since he did not have to spend very much money wooing her.142 While all arrangements seem to have been set, the marriage never happened. No details are given as to why the first wedding did not occur and John was later married to a woman of his

choice, Elizabeth Palmer.¹⁴³ Complications with this match also occurred, however the two were still married in a private ceremony at Westinster Abbey in May of 1680.¹⁴⁴

The final courtship to be discussed is that of Ralph’s granddaughter Molly. While the letters reveal fewer details about Molly’s courtship than that of than John Verney, it is nonetheless different from the majority of courtships discussed in the memoirs. According to the correspondence, Molly had for some time had affections for a man, who her grandfather believed was not good enough for her. Instead of Molly’s choice, Ralph pursued a match with Mr. Dormer. Little information is given about either man, except that Mr. Dormer came from a family that the Verneys had never gotten along with. Molly went along with the arranged courtship for some time, but then she began to complain about her lack of affection for Mr. Dormer and his for her. In June of 1693, Mary disappeared and left the following note: “Sir, I have in for some time married to Mr. Kelynge & upon his desires am now gone to live him att his Mother’s, I hope you will excuse my not giving you notice of this before as well as my abrupt leaving of our house, I was in fear of putting you in a passion the sight of which my temper cannot very well bare”.¹⁴⁵ Molly also wrote her grandfather asking him to forgive her for having “married the only parson in the world I though of making me happy”.¹⁴⁶ After some time Ralph forgave his granddaughter for her “stolen matching” and wrote that “he is her equal in every respect but ‘in point of fortue’, and she is confident ‘his personal merits will atone for that defect”.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ Verney, The Memoirs of the Verney Family, Volume IV, 164
¹⁴⁴ Verney, The Memoirs of the Verney Family, Volume IV, 249
¹⁴⁵ Verney, The Memoirs of the Verney Family, Volume IV, 463
¹⁴⁶ Verney, The Memoirs of the Verney Family, Volume IV,463
¹⁴⁷ Verney, The Memoirs of the Verney Family, Volume IV, 463
What conclusions may we draw from the stories told by the Verneys in their letters throughout the 17th century? As mentioned previously, the Verneys certainly did not embody the typical English family of the time, however they are a family of their time nonetheless. While arranged marriages were definitely the normal protocol for the Verneys, we have seen that personal choice did play a role in nearly all of the courtships, although some more than others. Furthermore, it is clear that when we examine the marriages in which arrangements were most formal, money and status were the defining factors in all decisions made. As can be seen in the marriages of Ralph, Aunt Margaret, Betty, Mall, and Molly, this formal protocol was not always followed, and at times it was rejected. What is interesting to note is that even though going against tradition could be divisive, or even scandalous to the family at the time of the marriage, often times the situation blew over and was generally accepted with time. Of course this was not always the case, especially when looking at the situation Mall encountered. However, especially using the example of Aunt Margaret’s marriage to a man outside of her family’s religious persuasion, no matter how upset the family was at first, eventually they accepted her choice. This does not mean that all courtships and marriages that followed the advice and negotiations of family members were good or acceptable to all of those involved. No better example of this can be found than Peg’s marriage to Mr. Elmes. Certainly the degree of abuse she endured from her husband, who had been chosen by her brother Henry, was not acceptable to members of her family or likely members of society at large. This negative reaction to the treatment of Peg can be seen in the fact that arrangements were made with the help of her family to separate her from her husband, at least for a time. Examining the many situations found in the Verneys’ letters gives us a
valuable look into the variety of circumstances associated within seventeenth-century courtship and marriage and how such circumstances could be handled
CHAPTER VII
WOMEN’S HISTORY APPROACH

Thus far this thesis has focused solely on the analysis of specific documents to identify key characteristics or patterns if seventeenth century courtships and marriage. Another avenue that has more recently been explored when studying courtship and marriage rituals, and may also be a useful approach for this work, is women’s history. While this approach may be challenging at times, due to the lack of resources, it is nonetheless a worthwhile area to examine. One of the most recent works on the topic is Women in Early Modern England, 1550-1720. The goal of this work, as the authors put it is to “understand early modern English history from a women’s viewpoint initially then expand to everyone’s viewpoint”\textsuperscript{148}. While Mendelson and Crawford set out to examine what they describe as the long 17\textsuperscript{th} century, from 1550 to 1720, most of their discussion on courtship and marriage uses sources from 1600 to 1700.

The difficulty with sources is something to be examined further. As mentioned at the start of this thesis, diaries of women of the lower classes are nearly impossible to find, therefore we must draw our conclusions about these women from materials written by men or women of higher statuses. Furthermore, although diaries exist written by upper-class women, it must be considered that such sources were often collected and edited by

male family members after the woman’s death. As Mendelson and Crawford so eloquently state: “women are everywhere and nowhere in the archives”.

Another author, Anne Laurence, has also attempted to pull together a greater understanding of courtship and marriage through the lens of women’s history. In her 1994 book, *Women in England, 1500-1760*, Laurence examines a wide variety of topics that affected women’s lives, including: marriage, political rights, wage-earning positions, family, etc. Much like Mendelson and Crawford, Laurence sees women as a group “hidden from history”. However, while Mendelson and Crawford disagree with Stone’s work in many ways, Laurence seems to embrace many of his ideas and techniques. Thus Laurence’s work draws from a larger array of demographic sources and exhibits excellent analysis of the patterns found in such sources. By including some personal anecdotes from diaries, songs, and other elements of popular culture, she is able to round out her facts to create a picture of a woman’s life as best as can be expected with limited resources.

So where does this leave us in our quest for women’s perspectives on courtship and marriage? Perhaps the sources are imperfect, but they may still lead us to some understanding of how women may have viewed the world around them and their place in it. While regretfully this study does not include sources from women of the lower classes, it is still useful to examine the situations of the women whose diaries and letters have been discussed previously in this thesis. With such emphasis placed on traditional means of courtship and marriage, if anything can be shown by looking at the previous situations examined, it is that while the traditions may have been seriously considered

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149 Mendelson and Crawford, 10
150 Mendelson and Crawford, 9
and often times a prominent factor in the courtships of these women, they were by no means always followed exactly and certainly ended with very different results for some women.

What does the status quo of arranged marriages mean for the measure of personal choice allowed by women in such formal arrangements in the 17th century? It is clear that in the arranged marriages examined, money and status were key elements in all negotiations and were at the forefront of the conversations between those involved. However, it is also clear that a positive or at the very least sustainable relationship was also very important. Throughout the diaries of the women who entered in arranged marriages, we find concern for how future husbands and in-laws would treat them.

In certain situations it appears that the women played little role in the arrangements for their marriages, as can be seen in the cases of Lady Grace Mildmay, Elizabeth Freke, Cary Verney and Pen Verney. While part of this conclusion may be attributed to the fact that fewer details about their roles are given in the sources, this might be considered telling of what was the socially expected norm. If there was little dispute over the settlements and little involvement by the women it may not have been noteworthy enough to write in diaries or letters.

In other situations, women did indeed play a role in their arrangements. In the cases of Mary Verney (nee Blacknall) and Susan Verney, it appears that their personal decisions were important factors in their marriages. As previously mentioned, arrangements for Mary’s marriage to Ralph Verney were made when she was very young. However, one stipulation of the negotiations was that Mary would have the right to make the final decision when she was of marriageable age. The fact that such a
statement was included so directly in the negotiations themselves indicates the value of a woman’s personal choice in the final decision of a spouse. While this is indeed an important aspect to the role of personal choice in the negotiations, the actual amount of say that Mary had may be contested. A very young girl at the time of the marriage, it is quite possible that Mary could have been persuaded by others to agree to the marriage, not to mention the amount of pressure she must have felt with the monetary significance of the negotiations resting on her decision. Although her choice may have been influenced, it is none the less important that it was formally recognized.

In the example of Susan Verney, it appears that her personal choice for a husband was the impetus behind the final match with Mr. Alport. While arrangements had been entered into before Mr. Alport’s father had gotten into trouble with Parliament, it would not have been unheard of to cancel all negotiations as a result. Susan’s insistence on marrying Mr. Alport, and the advanced stage of the negotiations may have prevented the deal from being called off. Susan’s happiness after the marriage, further indicates that she was content with the choice made for her husband.

What then of the women who did not merely influence their own matchmaking, but actually made the decision to marry by entirely their own choice? The examples already shown in this study give insight into the situations and consequences of going against the grain and marrying without family intervention. While the consequences of marrying against the advice or desires of family may vary from case to case, one thing is consistent: marrying without following the traditional protocol was always a noteworthy event. In most of the cases discussed the women were eventually forgiven for their
disobedience and their husbands are accepted into the family, however in some cases it was enough to separate the woman from her family completely.

Perhaps what all of these various examples and approaches indicate is that the path a woman’s courtship and marriage took in seventeenth century England relied less on socially accepted norms, and more on the personality of the woman involved. While marrying a person of one’s choice, without parent involvement, may be the norm for many Western women today, it was no doubt extremely disobedient in the seventeenth century. Perhaps the women who took the initiative to ignore traditional protocol were at least in this way, simply exhibiting a notion of rebelliousness in their own personalities. Perhaps this rebelliousness could be linked to family background or outside influences, as many attempt to do in contemporary cases, however that is something that cannot be stated irrefutably because of the limit and scope of what was written about the situations. The view of courtship and marriage from a woman’s perspective can therefore not be generalized no matter what patterns may be found. Each marriage that was entered into was as different as the woman who became the bride, and therefore regardless of decisions made before and during the courtship each marriage had undeniably different results.
CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

Throughout the course of this thesis we have examined different types of courtships and marriages. Through the use of selected diaries and letters, we have been able to compare various courtships and see examples of how different family background and gender may have affected how courtships played out. Although other books have used some of the same diaries and letters we have compared as resources in the past, this thesis pulls them together as a collection to show similarities and difference in courtship and marriage rituals across gender, and to as much a degree as possible, across social class.

When making comparisons across social classes it seems clear that some of the previous works’ focus on arranged marriages among the upper classes was not completely off track. Both examples of arranged marriages found in the diaries that were used in this investigation, as well as the Verney family’s arranged marriages involved young women from very wealthy families. Nonetheless, the situations of Anne Lady Halkett, Elizabeth Freke, Mall Verney, Molly Verney, Betty Verney and Margaret Pulteney show us that not all women from upper-class families entered into arranged marriages. Among the middle class it does seem that courtship was often the choice of the couple involved, at least from the male perspective like that of Roger Lowe. It can
also be seen through the diaries of Adam Martindale, Ralph Josselin and Isaac Archer that while personal choice may have been the most important factor in middle-class courtships, families and parents still played a major role in the process.

Perhaps the most valuable thing to be gained from this study is that sweeping generalizations about the personal lives of individuals in the past often neglect to consider the uniqueness that every circumstance possesses. As with any discussion of social history, there are statistical patterns to be observed, yet if we mistake these patterns for absolute facts we create a set of rules that we are bound to find exceptions to. This investigation has not rewritten history when it comes to courtship and marriage. In some ways, the information gained from these diaries simply reinforces what has already been written. For example, we have seen that arranged marriages did in fact occur, and that parental involvement was common in many courtships. However, it may be argued that parents did not possess as decisive a role as previous historians would have us believe. Even in cases where parents played a major role as matchmaker, as was the case with Ralph Josselin, in the end it was their child’s decision.

What did this at least partial freedom of choice mean for the couples who were courting in seventeenth century England? Was there any difference in the success of marriages based on the type of courtship they resulted from? Contrary to what the exceedingly high divorce rates may indicate, modern Western logic would say that if allowed to choose a spouse, rather than enter into an arranged marriage, a couple is more likely to have a happy and healthy relationship. As we have seen through the diverse set of circumstances found in the diaries and letters, this was not always the case. No better example of an unhappy marriage based on choice can be found than that of Elizabeth
Freke. Conversely, one of the most glowing descriptions of any spouse is found in the diary of Ann Lady Fanshawe, who entered into the marriage because it was arranged by the couple’s parents. Case by case we can see that then, just as now, there was no magic formula to follow in order to create a happy union.

What can be gained from a study such as this one? By looking at these diaries and letters we are able to gain a better understanding of the variety of circumstances that played a role in the courtship and marriage of individuals in seventeenth century England. Although literature, pop-culture and even certain historians would have us believe that marriage at the time was either arranged or purely the result of romantic inclinations, this interpretation is too over simplistic. There are many gray areas when it comes to the actual events as recorded by people in their personal diaries and letters. The varied sources allow us a window to look into how different courtship and marriage rituals were across English society. Perhaps a comparison of these select sources is just the tip of the iceberg for what could be found through far more extensive research and the addition of more diaries and letters. It is a valuable thing to add human stories to the demographic facts and figures, and is something that is helpful in reminding us that not everything that is written about history is set in stone.
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