

**The Indissoluble Knot ?**  
**Public and Private Representations**  
**of**  
**Men and Marriage**  
**1770-1830**

Submitted by Michael John Fielding to the University of Exeter  
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## Abstract

Men have been largely absent from the literature of eighteenth-century matrimony, their role and performance being inferred from examination of female experience. The aim of this thesis is to remedy that omission by exploring two representational forms: the public - contained in fiction, advice literature, periodical, newspaper and adultery case reports; and the private, a range of unpublished correspondence and diaries, almost all of which are being cited for the first time. Together, the two bodies of material reinforce the cultural history of developing affectivity which has been one of the principal trends of work within both history and criticism over the last 40 years. They focus attention on the domestic environment increasingly occupied by men, and the effect of this emphasis on perceptions of masculinity. In these respects they support the drive of historians such as Amanda Vickery and Karen Harvey to “write men back into a history from which they have been written out”. Critical reflections and the place of fiction and other literature as sources of social history comprise a second strand of the thesis. A third area of concentration will be the influence of public media on personal behaviour. Historical research into various aspects of contemporary culture – including domestic violence, prostitution, children’s upbringing – have explored *what* people did without exploring the rhetorical influences that might explain *why* people did things. Direct evidence of reading practices and therefore of these effects is limited but nonetheless important.

With its focus on marriage and after an Introduction that sets out some of the key issues, the thesis is divided into two parts: Before Marriage and After Marriage. Within each part there is further division into chapters devoted respectively to considerations of relations between men and women to be found in the public prints and those available through correspondence and diaries archived in a number of local Record Offices.

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