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Emotional economies of pleasure among the gentry of eighteenth-century England

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses familial cultures and exchanges of pleasure among 11 eighteenth-century gentry families. The research is based on a substantial collection of family correspondence and identifies emotion words within these letters to understand familial conversations about pleasure and the various purposes that pleasure was put to. Here pleasure is problematised and studied as an emotion. There are three main arguments. Firstly, the letters reveal a previously hidden world of family pleasure, connected to but in some ways remote from the public and sensory pleasures of the urban renaissance that most previous studies have focused on. The letters reveal an emotional economy of pleasure, where feelings materialised as currencies underlying the building and breaking of family relationships. Secondly, pleasure was not a singular or solitary feeling, but rather operated in affective clusters with other emotions such as anxiety and surprise. Finally, pleasure and displeasure were vital in keeping good order among the gentry and between the gentry and their subordinates, within inheritance systems and family dynamics where inequality and an unequal distribution of resources were part of everyday life.

KEYWORDS

Pleasure; emotions; gentry; affect; family

In 1738 Sir Roger Newdigate described Paris in a letter to his mother during his first Grand Tour, at the age of 19.¹ Immersed in sensory wonders of the new, he was seized with the beauty and modernity of the city and the architecture. The streets were ‘all finely pav’d, like Whitehall’, and he noted ‘the manner of hanging the lamps in the middle of the street by ropes from house to house’ which had ‘a very pretty effect’. Versailles Palace he described as the ‘greatest piece of magnificence since the time of Salomon’ and the Great Gallery within it ‘the finest room I ever saw’. His first taste of French wine similarly agreed with him ‘as it ran in great streams

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¹Sir Roger Newdigate, Angers, France, to his mother, Arbury Hall, Warwickshire, England, 8 September 1738 (in) A. W.A. White (ed.), *The Correspondence of Sir Roger Newdigate of Arbury, Warwickshire* (Hertford, 1995), 10.

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out of the presse'.² He saved his displeasure for the Opera, which he thought to be 'the greatest jumble of noise and jargon that I ever yet heard'. However, he decisively and affectionately claimed to his mother, in the same letter, that 'to hear from you would be my greatest pleasure'. Newdigate offered a range of responses to the pleasures of Paris while affirming the pleasures he derived from family epistles.

The aesthetic pleasures of the Grand Tour, along with the pleasure garden, the clubhouse, the coffee-house and the luxuries of the new consumerism and shopping, troubled contemporaries. The eighteenth century was 'an age wherein the passions exert their influence with the greatest vigour' and there was growing consternation at the imbalance or contradiction between the 'pleasures of the imagination', inner worth and virtue.³ These anxieties have formed a focus for historians who, for the past 30 years, have been pursuing pleasure across the eighteenth century. This work has focused overwhelmingly on sensory 'higher-order' pleasures, showing how they had become more acceptable, more virtuous.⁴ Roy Porter argued that a series of developments in enlightenment thinking, natural theology, moral philosophy and aesthetics had provided pathways for people 'to achieve gratification of the senses not just purification of the soul'.⁵ Smithsonian economics further democratised desire, lending politeness and respectability to pleasure.

Desire was also key in driving the new consumerism of the period.⁶ Maxine Berg showed that the novel goods of the eighteenth century spread refinement and politeness, but that they were also objects of pleasure for their 'beauty, ingenuity, or convenience'.⁷ In this context luxury and novelty combined to create demand beyond necessity, or 'fashion desire', and through the urban renaissance and the building of pleasure gardens and a range of other amusements, the boundaries of these pleasures were driven beyond the aristocracy and the gentry and into the middling sorts.⁸ Luxury

²*ibid.*, 25 October 1738, 12.

³Anon., *The Scourge of Pleasure* (London, 1758), 3.

⁴See, for instance, D. Spadafora, *The Idea of Progress in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London, 1990); R. Porter, 'Enlightenment and pleasure' in R. Porter and M. Mulvey Roberts, *Pleasure in the Eighteenth Century* (Basingstoke, 1996), 1–19; P. Borsay, 'The English urban renaissance: The development of provincial urban culture, c.1680–1760', *Social History*, 5 (1977), 581–603; N. McKendrick, J. Brewer and J.H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The commercialisation of eighteenth-century England* (London, 1982); J. Brewer and R. Porter, *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London, 1993); J. Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English culture in the eighteenth century* (Abingdon, 1997). Similar perspectives have been adopted among historians of the nineteenth century. For example, see J. Flanders, *Consuming Passions: Leisure and pleasure in Victorian Britain* (London, 2006).

⁵Porter, *op. cit.* For a discussion focused on a more specific topic, see A. Cook, 'The politics of pleasure talk in eighteenth-century Europe: turning points in the history of sexuality', *Sexualities*, 12, 4 (2009), 451–66.

⁶M. Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2007), 38; Porter and Brewer, *op. cit.*; M. Berg and E. Eger, *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century: Debates, desires and delectable goods* (London, 2003).

⁷Berg, *op. cit.*, 5.

⁸*ibid.*, 13. Foreign visitors impressed by the freedoms that the urban renaissance offered British people often made particular reference to pleasure gardens and the new shopping streets of London. See Brewer, *op. cit.*, 8.

was also central to taste, civility and status and, therefore, identity.⁹ In this way pleasure was a civilising force. Shopping was a key element in the new consumerism, locating desire in carefully crafted urban settings, themselves designed for pleasure.¹⁰

Enlightening as these studies have been, none of them problematised or questioned the nature of pleasure as a human experience. Rather, their authors accepted that pleasure is 'pleasure' and 'pleasurable', casting universalist notions of pleasure into the past and failing to consider the emotional–historical content of this experience. This is part of a broader lacuna in our understanding of this affective state. The history of emotions has revealed experiences and discourses of emotions in the past and the role emotions have played in shaping history, recognising that they vary across time just as they do in the present day. The history of emotions has signalled a profound change in the perspective and scope of historical research. The field offers an impressive range of themes from philosophical or medical understandings of emotions in the past to the lexicography of emotions and the history of material culture.¹¹ Historians have addressed a range of specific emotions such as love, loneliness, or fear.¹²

They have had little to say about pleasure, however, and the best studies we currently have are philosophical and psychological ones that do not historicise pleasure in a methodical way. Where it does appear, pleasure is most often an associate of a particular emotion rather than the main character in the story. Thus, Ute Frevert sought to discover 'in what form and with what intensity' emotions were 'thought pleasant or unpleasant' in discourse and debate about emotions in the past.¹³ This is a significant omission for various reasons. Firstly, pleasure has played a central part in the social, cultural and economic histories of the eighteenth century and requires the kind of problematisation offered to other affects and emotions in the past, such as pain.¹⁴ Secondly, pleasure and displeasure are universal everyday experiences, 'even as emotions like happiness and anger are not', and form the building blocks for all other emotions.¹⁵ Knowing the history of pleasure will help us understand other emotions more deeply; if we understand the

⁹*ibid.*, 38.

¹⁰*ibid.*, 36–37. Also see J. Stobart, *Spend, Spend, Spend!: A history of shopping* (London, 2008).

¹¹T. Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions: The development of a secular psychological category* (Cambridge, 2003); F. B. Alberti, *Matters of the Heart: History, medicine and emotion* (Oxford, 2010); U. Frevert et al., *Emotional Lexicons: Continuity and change in the vocabulary of feeling 1700–2000* (Oxford, 2014); S. Downes, S. Holloway and S. Randles (eds), *Feeling Things: Objects and emotions through history* (Oxford, 2018).

¹²S. Holloway, *The Game of Love in Georgian England: Courtship, emotions and material culture* (Oxford, 2019); F. B. Alberti, *A Biography of Loneliness* (Oxford, 2019); J. Bourke, *Fear: A cultural history* (Counterpoint, 2006); W. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A framework for the history of emotions* (Cambridge, 2001).

¹³U. Frevert, 'Defining emotions: concepts and debates over three centuries' in U. Frevert et al. (eds), *Emotional Lexicons: Continuity and change in the vocabulary of feeling 1700–2000* (Oxford, 2014), 1–32.

¹⁴See for instance see J. Bourke, *The Story of Pain: From prayer to painkillers* (Oxford, 2014).

¹⁵L. F. Barrett, *How Emotions Are Made: The secret life of the brain* (New York, 2018), 56. Also see N. H. Fridga, 'On the nature and function of pleasure' in M. L. Kringelbach and K. C. Berridge (eds), *Pleasures of the Brain* (Oxford, 2010), 99–112.

way in which pleasure is socially and culturally constructed we can understand more, as Frevert suggested, about why and in what ways emotions were thought to be pleasant or unpleasant.

Everyday utterances of pleasure are the focus of this article, rather than the sensory pleasures more familiar to historians of the eighteenth century. In family letters we see pleasure circulating as an emotion rather than a consumer experience, being given force and finding meaning within emotional economies that made it, for the correspondents, an 'over-learned cognitive habit'.¹⁶ Pleasure was a core emotion shaping normative notions of 'family affection' and giving force to family belonging as well, at times, as unbelonging.¹⁷ The 'habitual repetition' of pleasure words circulated within emotional economies, materialising as practice and performance in ways that were productive of human agency 'shaped to social form and put to civic use'.¹⁸ We might think of a range of economic metaphors including the 'exchange' of pleasure between people and within emotional communities; the way in which pleasure was used as 'currency' between people, including family members; and the 'emotional labour' that people did with their pleasure.¹⁹

The analysis is based on 2933 family letters of 11 landed gentry families (see Table 1) representing a range of different levels of wealth and status. 'Pleasure' has been identified by finding emotion words within the letters. The use of the terms 'pleasure', 'please', 'pleased' and 'pleasing' were noted as primary emotion words denoting this affective state. Also, a series of synonyms for pleasure were identified, including desire, joy, contentment, entertaining, happiness, amusement, enjoyment, agreeable and gratification. Thirdly and mainly in relation to the material in the third section, a collection of antonyms for pleasure were found, including dull, distress, displeasure, pain, anxiety, unease, unhappiness, restless and bitterness. This methodology reflects how pleasure is a universal experience, a valence that lies at the root of other emotions and the way that emotions cluster in the letters and interact in describing affective states. The article analyses the use of 'pleasure' and associated emotion words to elucidate familial discourses across the century. In reading the letters we are not directly encountering the feeling of pleasure. Rather, we analyse the rhetoric of pleasure and the way it was deployed as a means of valorising the values and norms of the emotional community.²⁰ The analysis is focused on landed gentry families

¹⁶W. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling*, op. cit., 21; Also see, D. Lemmings and A. Brooks, 'The emotional turn in humanities and the social sciences' in D. Lemmings and A. Brooks (eds), *Emotions and Social Change: Historical and sociological perspectives* (London, 2016), 3–19; H. Kerr, D. Lemmings and R. Phiddian, 'Emotional light on eighteenth-century print culture' in H. Kerr, D. Lemmings and R. Phiddian (eds), *Passions, Sympathy and Print Culture: Public opinion and emotional authenticity in eighteenth century Britain* (Basingstoke, 2016).

¹⁷C. H. Johnson and D. W. Sabeen, 'From siblingship to siblinghood: kinship and the shaping of European society 1300–1900' in C. H. Johnson and D. W. Sabeen (eds), *Sibling Relations and the Transformation of European Kinship* (Oxford, 2011).

¹⁸S. Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh, 2014), 13–14.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 100.

²⁰On emotions as rhetoric and 'emotionology', see P. N. Stearns and C. Z. Stearns, 'Emotionology: clarifying the history of emotions and emotional standards', *American Historical Review*, 90, 4 (1985), 813–36.

Table 1. The sampled families, their locations and wealth.

Family	Residence	County	Acres	£ Valuation p.a. (1883)	Source of data
Cotton	Madingley Hall	Cambridge	3351	3500	Wright & Lewis, <i>VCH Cambs.</i> , 9, 166–71
Dryden	Canons Ashby	Northampton	2599	2500 ^a	Dix, 'Sir H.E.L. Dryden', <i>ODNB</i> (2004)
L'Estrange	Hunstanton Hall	Norfolk	7803	12,413	Blomefield, <i>Norfolk</i> , 10, 312–28
Huddleston	Sawston Hall	Cambridge	2368	3333	Burke, <i>Commoners</i> , 1876, 2, 582
Newdigate	Arbury Hall	Warwick		15,000 ^b	Tyack, <i>Warwick Country Houses</i> , 9–15
Parker	Alkincoats/ Browsholme	Lancs.	3106	3446	Burke, <i>Commoners</i> , 1876, 3, 684
Delme- Radcliffe	Hitchin Priory	Herts.	3826	5890	Page, <i>VCH Herts.</i> , 3, 12–21
Warriner	Weston Park	Warwick			CR1635 Family Papers Catalogue
Weld	Lulworth Castle	Dorset	15,525	13,584	Burke, <i>Commoners</i> , 1876, 2, 677
Windham	Felbrigg Hall	Norfolk	10,000 approx.	12,350 ^c	Baring, <i>Diary</i> , xi
Woolcombe	Ashbury	Devon	6850	3564	Lysons, <i>Magna Britannia</i> , 6, 132–60
Mean				7558	

^aValuation in 1770.^bValuation in 1789.^cValuation given in Norf. R.O. WKC 4/29/7, William Windham lunacy case, 16 December 1861.

Information in this table is derived from: F. Blomefield, *An Essay towards a Topographical History of the County of Norfolk* (London, 1809); J. Burke, *The Commoners of Great Britain and Ireland* (London, 1834) and (London, 1876); Brian Dix, 'Sir Henry Edward Leigh', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (London, 2004); J. Hargreaves, 'Lister, John (1845–1933)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (London, 2004); A.P.M. Wright and C.P. Lewis (eds), *A History of the County of Cambridge and the Isle of Ely: Volume 9* (London, 1989); W. Page (ed.), *A History of the County of Hertford: Volume 3* (London, 1912); A.P.M. Wareham and A.F. Wright (eds), *A History of the County of Cambridge and the Isle of Ely: Volume 10* (London, 2002); D. and S. Lysons, *Magna Britannia: Volume 6 Devonshire* (London, 1822); CR1635 Family Papers Catalogue, Warwickshire County Record Office.

as a series of emotional communities, and many of the conclusions are specific to this group. However, as Barbara Rosenwein has made clear, emotional communities were open systems and intersected across social groups with other communities.²¹ Therefore, the cultures of pleasure found in these letters were indicative, in some way, of wider discussions of pleasure and family affection among elite and upper middling families.

This article aligns the history of emotions with key debates in eighteenth-century studies in novel ways. It places the family and private life at the centre of eighteenth-century pleasure rather than the emergent public realm. It joins a movement in eighteenth-century studies over the past 20 years seeking to reassert the significance of the family and the home and, more recently, to explore experiences such as comfort.²² 'Public' and

²¹B. H. Rosenwein, *Generations of Feeling: A history of emotions 600–1700* (Cambridge, 2016), 3–4.²²For examples, see K. Harvey, *The Little Republic: Masculinity and domestic authority in eighteenth-century Britain* (Oxford, 2012); B. Hellier, 'Leisure and the use of domestic space in Georgian London', *The Historical Journal*, 53, 3 (2010), 623–45; S. G. Hague and K. Lipsedge (eds), *At Home in the Eighteenth Century: Interrogating domestic space* (Abingdon, 2022); A. Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors: At home in Georgian England* (London, 2009). On comfort, see J. Stobart, *Comfort and the Eighteenth-Century Country House* (Abingdon, 2022).

‘private’ were hardly enclosed worlds, even if the notion of them as separate realms may have carried more force into the modern period.²³ The family could be defined as a co-residing group of blood relations or as a network of extended family living apart that could include ‘friends’.²⁴ By focusing on pleasures, whether they arose from the receipt and ownership of the letters themselves or from the evocation of family memories as rhetorical devices within them, the correspondence helps us see across these porous boundaries.

Indeed, inasmuch as the language of pleasure was part of the culture of sensibility in the later eighteenth century, which it surely was, this article emphasises the importance of discussing the pleasures of home and family for both elite men and women in specific ways.²⁵ Sensibility demanded heightened feelings and emotional expressions controlled through reason and morality.²⁶ The correspondence evidences the role of pleasure in the cult of sensibility, specifically in the realm of family life, as well as the importance of pleasing in the culture of politeness.²⁷ This research also has much to offer that of epistolary practices. Certainly, pleasure was part of the ‘shared conventions and norms’ exchanged through family networks referred to by Whyman.²⁸ The expression of pleasure was, perhaps, a way to mediate the inevitable anxieties aroused by communication at distance, although this depended of course on the precise way in which pleasure was being deployed.²⁹ In some instances pleasure could invoke anxiety and was intended to do so. In other ways, the appearance of pleasure in the sampled letters supports research suggesting that emotional epistles could build and break family alliances and relationships, building loyalty in some and reminding others of their place.³⁰

Based on the evidence in the letters, I make three main arguments. Firstly, the letters reveal a world of everyday familial pleasure, connected to the new seductive public world of pleasure but purposefully more parochial and intimate in nature. These more everyday pleasures played an important role in forming and maintaining family relationships and in reminding the gentry of the dangers of the pleasures to be found in the bright lights of

²³M. McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, private and the division of knowledge* (Baltimore, 2005); H. Grieg, ‘“All together and all distinct”: Public sociability and social exclusivity in London’s pleasure gardens ca. 1740–1800’, *Journal of British Studies*, 51, 1 (2012), 50–75.

²⁴N. Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England: Household, kinship and patronage* (Cambridge, 2009).

²⁵G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and society in eighteenth-century Britain* (London, 1992), 199–201. On men and domesticity, see J. Tosh, *A Man’s Place: Masculinity and the middle class home* (Yale, 1999).

²⁶Barker-Benfield, *op. cit.*

²⁷On politeness and pleasing, see M. Cohen, ‘“Manners make the man”: Politeness, chivalry and the construction of masculinity, 1750–1830’, *Journal of British Studies*, 44, 2 (2005), 312–29.

²⁸S. Whyman, *The Pen and the People: English letter writers 1660–1800* (Oxford, 2009), 10.

²⁹G. Schnieder, *The Culture of Epistolarity: Vernacular letters and letter writing in early modern England, 1500–1700* (Newark, 2005), 32.

³⁰S. Broomhall and J. Van Gent, ‘Corresponding affections: Emotional exchange among siblings in the Nassau family’, *Journal of Family History*, 34, 2 (April, 2009), 143–65.

the growing cities and in excessive consumption. Secondly, pleasure was not simply ‘pleasure’; it was not a singular feeling and it did not work alone but in concert with other emotions, some positive and some negative. Pleasure was embedded in affective clusters alongside emotions such as surprise and anxiety. Thirdly, pleasure, and displeasure, expressed within family correspondence as an emotional practice helped enforce good order among the gentry, imposing structural norms and values.³¹ This helped to create an acceptance of emotional regimes in which emotional liberty was, necessarily and for the longer-term goals of the family, unevenly distributed.³² In gentry families resources were distributed unevenly and those members who acquired smaller shares of this capital were required to accept this at both a material and an emotional level.

The second section of the article explores the relationship between pleasure and other emotions. Pleasant surprises were valued experiences, and stories of these experiences were a way of bonding and strengthening family affection when apart. Pleasure was also often juxtaposed with anxiety. The third part dwells on the way in which pleasure was used to assert status, impose order and hierarchy, and to remind people of their duty. The article begins by exploring wider cultural definitions and understandings of this complex feeling before moving on to the everyday pleasures found in family correspondence, including the pleasure of writing and receiving letters.

Everyday pleasures

As the eighteenth century progressed, the term ‘pleasure’ was used more frequently in published literature (see [Figure 1](#)), even if its incidence had become less common than that of ‘happiness’ through the seventeenth century.³³ This signalled both a rise in the discourse surrounding the rights and wrongs of pleasure as well as the influence of sensibility in the literature of the late century. The search for sensory pleasures came under fire from those concerned at the moral and physical condition of elites. In his *English Malady*, George Cheyne meditated on the damage that rich French foods, ‘the materials of luxury’, exotic goods from Britain’s empire in the form of ‘eastern pickles and sauces’ as well as ‘Assemblies, Musick Meetings, Plays, Cards and Dice’, were causing the gentry and aristocracy of England. ‘Such a course of life must necessarily beget an ineptitude for exercise’, he bemoaned.³⁴

³¹M. Scheer, ‘Are emotions a kind of practice (and is that what makes them have a history?): A Bourdieuan approach to understanding emotions’, *History and Theory* 51, 2 (2012), 193–220.

³²On ‘emotional regimes’ and ‘emotional liberty’, see Reddy, *op. cit.*

³³P. Withington, ‘The invention of happiness’ in M. J. Braddick and J. Innes (eds), *Suffering and Happiness in England 1550–1800: Narratives and representations: A collection to honour Paul Slack* (Oxford, 2017) 23–44.

³⁴G. Cheyne, *The English Malady* (2nd edition, London, 1734), 52.

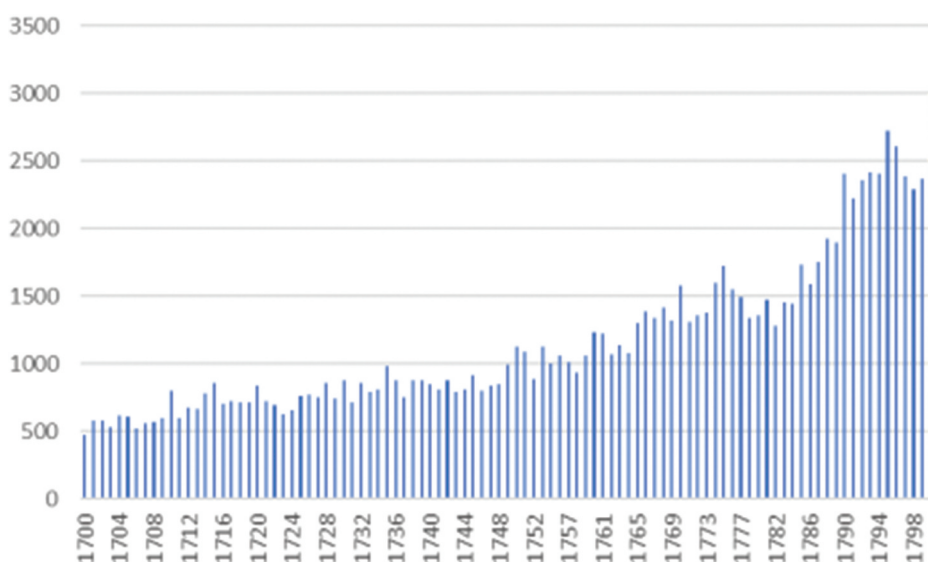


Figure 1. Number of uses of 'pleasure' in texts in eighteenth century collections online: <https://www.gale.com/intl/primary-sources/eighteenth-century-collections-online>.

This preoccupation formed only a part of more diverse understandings of 'pleasure'. Lexicographers such as Samuel Johnson distinguished between 'gratification of the mind or the sense', often valorising the former over the latter.³⁵ Nathan Bailey, in 1756, focused on the sensual nature of pleasure but noted, as many others did, how this was connected to those of the mind, as 'the effect of a sensation or perception agreeable to the mind, or the satisfaction of some appetite; content, joy, diversion, all good turns, service, kindness'.³⁶ More broadly the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* noted that '[p]leasure and pain are simple ideas, which we receive both from sensation and reflection'.³⁷ A third type of pleasure concerned 'choice: arbitrary will', and this definition referred more to pleasure as a privilege of power and authority.³⁸ This type will be explored in the third section.

Today, psychologists distinguish between sensory pleasures which are responses to external stimuli through the five senses and non-sensory pleasures in things such as achievement, gain and activities. The latter includes the 'social pleasures' of human interaction, or what Benjamin Norton Defoe described as 'to give content, to do one a pleasure'.³⁹ It is this type of pleasure we mainly find in the letters, the type that formed the

³⁵S. Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language: In which words are deduced from their originals* (1765), 361. For another example, see D. Fenning, *The Royal English Language or a Treasury of the English Language* (1761), 761.

³⁶N. Bailey, *A New Universal Etymological Dictionary* (London, 1756).

³⁷*Encyclopaedia Britannica: Or a dictionary of arts and sciences compiled upon a new plan* (1771), 181.

³⁸J. N. Scott, *A Universal Etymological English Dictionary* (London, 1764), 858.

³⁹Fridga, *op. cit.*

focus for thinkers such as Adam Smith, writing of sympathy that ‘nothing pleases us more than to observe in other men a fellow-feeling with all the emotions of our own breast’.⁴⁰ All of these uses of pleasure could also be found practised in letter writing manuals.⁴¹ These publications also frequently noted the simple pleasures of letter writing, ‘that we have not a more sensible Pleasure than corresponding by Letter’.⁴²

The term ‘pleasure’, including the variations pleased, pleased, pleasurable and pleasant, occurred in just over 45% of the letters included in this study, in a range of contexts and forms. The distribution of the term in the letters was remarkably even across the period and the families, so that 43% of the usage occurred before 1750 and 57% in the late eighteenth century. This contrasts markedly with the rise in the use of pleasure in published literature, noted at the beginning of this article, and signals the abiding presence of pleasure in familial discourse, in all its various forms, as opposed to the way in which published discussions were an outcome of specific concerns around particular developments, such as the new consumerism and the urban renaissance.

Correspondents in the sample letters drew on templated uses of pleasure found in letter writing manuals and also signalled the diverse forms that pleasure could take in meaning and language. In the letters they either described a mental recollection of the sensation of pleasure in the company of their correspondents or they expressed the experience of pleasure in the moment that they were writing, and so blended pleasures of the mind with those of sociability. The pleasures of sociability were noted by Hannah Knaplock to her niece Pheobe Wilkinson, in 1754. She remembered ‘... the time when I could’ve gone thro any fatigue with pleasure for a few hours in bright conversation, ingenious company’.⁴³ Sir Roger Newdigate found sensory joy in the landscape of Plymouth as well as Paris, and the sharing of these memories with his wife, Sophy, was part of a script expressing longing and apartness:

remember the verdue of the cliffs & quarries red, their feet black with the beating of the waves, the houses rough stone, much lim’d, whitish, their roofs of slate, blue, the ships some flags out . . . Nothing could be more beautiful, I longed for you to see it. All I can do is to describe it.⁴⁴

The family letters sometimes did reflect the wider critiques of pleasures, particularly concerning masculinity and the need for manly self-control.⁴⁵

⁴⁰A. Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (London, 1759), 9.

⁴¹For examples, see T. Osborne, *The Art of Letter Writing* (London, 1762) and S. Johnson, *The London Letter Writer* (London, 1758).

⁴²Osborne, *op. cit.* 30.

⁴³Hannah Knaplock, London, to her cousin, Phoebe Wilkinson, Bath, 20 July 1754, West Yorkshire Archive Service, SH7-LL-135.

⁴⁴Sir Roger Newdigate, Plymouth, Warwickshire, to his wife, Sophy, 17 October 1762, in White, *op. cit.*, 120.

⁴⁵H. French and M. Rothery, *Man’s Estate: Landed Gentry Masculinities 1660–1900* (Oxford, 2012).

Edward Weld's Jesuit tutor, Edward Church, advised him to spend 'but your leisure hours in books, and you will soon learn that nothing is so entertaining, or affords so lasting a pleasure as this rational exercise'.⁴⁶ The more riotous type of pleasure could be costly. Commenting on the death of a young man, 'Storkie', in 1797, Elizabeth Pitchford referenced the wider problems facing young men, noting 'what a dreadful calamity it is, to think that young men thus run headlong to their everlasting ruin ... without deriving any real pleasure from it'.⁴⁷ Certainly excessive pleasure could obstruct the everyday functions of life. As Francis Pitte noted of Edward Dryden in a letter to Edward's brother, John, in 1739, 'he owes money to all ye Publick houses here [he] was so besoted to liquor, was incapable of any business'.⁴⁸ So there were hierarchies of pleasure, just as there seem to have been for pain, and the temptations of sensual pleasure were sometimes specifically male dangers.⁴⁹

There was a far stronger sense that pleasure could be virtuous if experiences were selected wisely. In a didactic letter of advice to his son, Hamon, Nicholas L'Estrange suggested that he take a tour of England, which 'may lend both to your pleasure and improvement'.⁵⁰ Most references to pleasure were more mundane utterances, positive, everyday and more gender neutral. As Michel Foucault noted, we take great pleasure in discussing pleasure, and the correspondents dwelt on simple everyday pleasures far more readily than they did the sensory pleasures that have pre-occupied historians.⁵¹ The term 'pleasure' most frequently appeared in the opening sections of letters as part of extended greetings and as a way of thanking correspondents for their epistles. In a letter to her cousin and future husband, Robert Parker, Elizabeth Parker admitted that she 'co'd not deny myself the pleasure of asking after your Health'.⁵² In 1796 William Woolcombe asked that his brother 'forget not that I always receive great pleasure from hearing from you'.⁵³ In 1802 Sophia Warriner, replying to her younger brother Enoch's question, wrote, 'what amusement it can be to me to hear of your toils and labours your pleasure & c'.⁵⁴ Earlier, in 1728, Katherine Windham told her grandson, William, that although he was 'now able to partake all the diversions [sic] of persons of your age' it 'is pleasure eno' to me to hear

⁴⁶Edward Church to his tutee, Edward Weld, 8 April 1760, Dorset Record Office, D/WLC/C47.

⁴⁷Elizabeth Pitchford to her friend, Richard Huddleston, Sawston, Cambridgeshire, 17 May 1797, Cambridgeshire Studies and Local Archives (CALS), 488/C3/P3.

⁴⁸Francis Pitte, London, to John Dryden, Canons Ashby, Northamptonshire, 10 July 1739, Northamptonshire Records Office, D/CA0/951.

⁴⁹Bourke, *The Story of Pain*, *op. cit.*, 19.

⁵⁰Nicholas L'Estrange to his son, Hamon, 1704, Norfolk Record Office (NRO), LEST/P20/255.

⁵¹Noted in M. Mulvey-Roberts, 'Preface' in R. Porter and M. Mulvey-Roberts, *Pleasure in the Eighteenth Century*, *op. cit.*, ix.

⁵²Robert Parker to his cousin, Elizabeth Parker, 13 August 1751, Lancashire Record Office (LRO), DDB72/1/51.

⁵³William Woolcombe, London, to his younger brother, Henry, 2 September 1796, Plymouth and West Devon Record Office, 710/408.

⁵⁴Sophia Warriner to her brother, Enoch, 9 June 1802, Warwickshire Records Office, CR1635/34/10.

you are so well, & your papa'.⁵⁵ Sometimes apologies for delayed epistles returning pleasurable news were required. Mary Huddlestone told her mother that she hoped

you will be so good as to pardon me for having so long delayed answering your kind and affectionate letter which we received with the greatest pleasure on the 26th September and more particularly so as it contained the news of our having the satisfaction of seeing all our relations and my Dear Papa and Mama next summer.⁵⁶

One way of reading these emotions might be as expressions of homesickness and nostalgia, and certainly this plays a significant role in their deployment. However, sharing this sense of longing assisted in the maintenance of family relationships at distance, and emotional authenticity through the expression of pleasure, as opposed to mere flattery, was very important.⁵⁷ Priscilla Woolcombe delighted in her anticipation of seeing her youngest son, Henry, after he had taken a trip to Holland. 'I feel great pleasure', she wrote, 'at the thought that I am addressing you for the last time while you are in Holland, and that a short time will I hope reunite us all'.⁵⁸ Robert Parker's wooing of his cousin, Elizabeth, made frequent reference to his anticipated and very genuine joy at being in her company. In 1751 he gushed 'I now can fairly say without flattery or dissimulation that I have no rest but when with you & no pleasure when absent from you'.⁵⁹ Robert's cousin, Edward, subscribed to these expectations of affect in referring to Robert's happiness, noting that 'the sight of her gave you pleasure'.⁶⁰ The well-being of family was also a valuable currency of pleasure for correspondents. In a letter to her mother, Jane Huddlestone found solace in Mary's growing strength after an illness. 'It gives me great pleasure to hear that your health is improved', she wrote, 'and I am quite of Mr Chapel's opinion that strengthening things alone can be of service to you'.⁶¹

There was pleasure in the desirable qualities of people, too, the impression they made and their reputations. Pleasure played an important role in fixing gender-normative boundaries of behaviour and appearance for men and women. Sarah Cotton's friend, Mr Stevens, related his delight at meeting 'the Baron' and his 'manly openness of character'. He did 'not wonder that your cousin fell in love with him'.⁶² Sarah's mother, Lady Cotton, was informed by her friend Lady Hardwicke of the qualities of the French Tutor

⁵⁵Katherine Windham to her grandson, William Windham, 20 November 1728, NRO, WKC/7/21/32.

⁵⁶Mary Huddlestone, Paris, France, to her mother, Mary Huddlestone, Sawston, Cambridgeshire, 29 October 1780, CALS, 488/C1/MH67.

⁵⁷On emotional authenticity, see H. Kerr, D. Lemmings and R. Phiddian (eds), *Passions, op. cit.* On homesickness and nostalgia, see S. Goldsmith, 'Nostalgia, homesickness and emotional formation on the eighteenth-century grand tour', *Cultural and Social History*, 15, 3 (2018), 333–60; M. Roper, 'Nostalgia as an emotional experience in the Great War', *Historical Journal*, 54, 2 (2011), 421–51.

⁵⁸Priscilla Woolcombe, Plymouth, to her son, Henry, Alkenaan, Holland, 1793, PWDRO, 710/400.

⁵⁹Robert Parker to his cousin, Elizabeth Parker, N.D. 1751, LRO, DDB72/1/51.

⁶⁰Edward Parker to his cousin, Robert Parker, 20 April 1746, Parker Family Archive, LRO, DDB72/468/49.

⁶¹Jane Huddlestone, London, to her mother, Mary Huddlestone, Sawston, Cambridgeshire, 1 June 1805, CALS, 488/C1/MH55.

⁶²Mr Stevens, London, to Sarah Cotton, Madingley, Cambridgeshire, 3 July 1797, CALS, 588/C57.

'Mons'r D'Ervall . . . I think he brings on children astonishingly fast, and he is a very agreeable and well bred man'.⁶³ Mary Scully (née Huddlestone) provided an assessment of a possible match for her brother, Richard, in a letter to her mother, noting that 'she looks altogether Pretty and has a very good figure and pleasing manner . . . but I do not consider she has money'.⁶⁴ The sensory pleasures of beauty and manners were here tempered by the limited achievement pleasures to be gained from Miss Plunkett's financial resources.

Everyday pleasures were also marked and remembered in diaries. Elizabeth Shackleton routinely noted the receipt of letters from her sons. In 1777 she 'had the pleasure to receive a letter from my own Dear Robert Parker when I was in the New Building at Pasture House'.⁶⁵ Elizabeth anticipated meetings with her sons and grandsons in much the same way recorded in correspondence and their well-being formed part of her affective memory. In 1780 she 'had the pleasure to find my little Robert quite well & very good God Bless his life he sat down stairs & eat some pudden staid an hour he talk'd laugh'd and play'd'.⁶⁶ In this way the qualities of her children, to bring pleasure to others, was also frequently noted. In 1780 she received a letter from her daughter-in-law relating that 'my own Dear Nice Sweet Dear little Robert Parker Improves dailey he is very Entertaining & delights every one'.⁶⁷ The diary allowed the writer to remember and bookmark pleasurable moments each day but also enabled a memory of the family as a network of pleasurable encounters, tying the individual to the family through commemorative emotional bonds. The association of pleasure with other emotions could subtly alter these experiences for family members.

Indeed, the pleasures expressed in the sample letters and in the receiving of them closely relate to the sense of comfort that families could derive from these same experiences, from 'being in company or correspondence with family and friends' that might bring news and gossip and help cement family relationships.⁶⁸ Happiness was another closely related emotion. Braddick and Innes note that the term 'happiness' accumulated emotional content over time, having been associated with material circumstances rather than emotional well-being before the late seventeenth century.⁶⁹ Happiness was, though, rather less

⁶³Lady Hardwicke to Lady Cotton, Madingley Hall, Cambridgeshire, N.D. 1798, CALS, 588/C84.

⁶⁴Mary Scully, Rilateache, Ireland, to her mother, Mary Huddlestone, Sawston, Cambridgeshire, 3 May 1802, CALS, 488/C1/MH76.

⁶⁵Journal of Elizabeth Shackleton, 15 August 1777, LRO, DDB81/31.

⁶⁶Journal of Elizabeth Shackleton, 12 April 1780, LRO, DDB81/36. Robert was Elizabeth's first grandson and died in infancy.

⁶⁷Journal of Elizabeth Shackleton, 15 August 1777, LRO, DDB81/37.

⁶⁸Stobart, *Comfort and the Eighteenth-Century Country House*, *op. cit.*, 186.

⁶⁹M. Braddick and J. Innes, 'Introduction' in M. Braddick and J. Innes (eds), *Suffering and Happiness in England 1550–1850*, *op. cit.*, 6. Also see Withington, 'The invention of happiness', *op. cit.*

problematic than pleasure. Withington argued that the need to balance different types of pleasures, both sensory and spiritual, has been an ongoing preoccupation, something borne out by the published literature referred to earlier.⁷⁰ Laura Frost has also emphasised this essential problem, noting that ‘pleasure can easily become disruptive, anti-social or excessive. Pleasure can get out of hand; happiness, never’.⁷¹ The solution to this problem was to valorise certain pleasures over others, those of the intellect being more worthy than those of a sensual or sexual nature.⁷² As Sally Holloway notes, family letters were ‘a source of emotional enjoyment, eliciting feelings of cheer, happiness, and joy, and a sense of comfort and gratification’.⁷³ So, together they formed a clustering of emotions, within which pleasure was located, helping to define elite life. It is in these types of clusters that pleasure is best understood, as the following section shows.

The affective clustering of pleasure

Pleasure, like all human feelings, is complex and multi-faceted. In the way it was discussed in the letters it was not simply ‘positive’, just as anger or anxiety may not be wholly ‘negative’ but might be experienced in a hedonic way.⁷⁴ Rather, pleasure operated within clusters of emotions including surprise, anxiety and disgust, in dynamic ways to help produce narratives of family belonging, and to inculcate unbelonging through discord, displeasure and agitation. It is a measure of the unproblematic way that historians have understood pleasure that one author considered the avoidance of the history of pleasure gardens by Marxist historians to be a result of their ‘po-faced aversion to pleasure’.⁷⁵ This section and the following show how pleasure played a far more complex role in the epistolary exchanges of the sample families.

Surprise was described as a pleasurable and arousing emotion in eighteenth-century letters. The two feelings of surprise and pleasure were often associated in correspondence in relation to specific events and often in the form of narratives intended to amuse and entertain a recipient. Mary Huddleston recounted one such event to her mother, Mary, in 1797. During the Royal Procession her brother, Ned, had visited her in London,

⁷⁰Withington, *op.cit.*

⁷¹L. Frost, *The Problem with Pleasure: Modernism and its malcontents* (Colombia, 2013), 8.

⁷²J. Innes, ‘Happiness contested: happiness and politics in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries’ in M. Braddick and J. Innes (eds), *Suffering and Happiness in England 1550–1850*, *op. cit.*

⁷³Holloway, *op. cit.*, 65.

⁷⁴Reddy, *op. cit.*, 23; J. Bailey, *Parenting in England 1760–1830: Emotion, identity and generation* (Oxford, 2012), 39.

⁷⁵J. Conlin, ‘Introduction’ in J. Conlin (ed.), *The Pleasure Garden: From Vauxhall to Coney Island* (Philadelphia, 2013), 1–28.

having ‘... travelled all night on the outside [of the coach], there being no place within’.⁷⁶ His suffering and his masculine resilience in Mary’s narrative amplified the significance of their meeting, building the drama of the story. The unexpected extension of his visit was a source of additional pleasure. ‘He intended to set out again for Colchester at eight o’clock but was too late for the mail, so that he staid till six the next morning’, she wrote. She continued:

We knew nothing of his coming tho’ I had somewhat expected his arrival the day before yet I was not a little surprised and rejoiced to behold him coming across Pall Mall as I sat at the Window – I immediately (with Mrs Eystons leave) invited him in.

Mary shared this experience of surprise and pleasure with her mother to entertain her but also, in the process, to create an affectionate family narrative around sibling belonging. This juxtaposed, in her letter, with the public procession, which she deemed, with some disgust, ‘rather melancholy than otherwise’ considering that ‘certainly such Pomp and such unnecessary expenses are very ill timed’. Mary’s pleasure was of a sensory nature, in *seeing* her brother return to her and *feeling* his embrace. It was also a deeper pleasure derived from family belonging and reproduced through narrative. Experimental psychologists have found that surprise, a basic and fundamental human emotion, is also cognitive. It has complex functions and is used to make sense of the world through ‘representational integration’.⁷⁷ In this case Mary was building a reality of family life based on pleasure, affection and belonging, recording her experiences of surprise within that family story and sharing this reality with her mother. We might reasonably expect her mother to repeat this story to others and to co-opt them into the narrative.

As Joanne Begiato (Bailey) has found, pleasure was often juxtaposed with unease and anxiety, suggesting that anxiety (as opposed to pain) was the opposite affective state of pleasure.⁷⁸ This is unsurprising given the association in various intellectual disciplines of the eighteenth century between the pursuit of pleasure and moral anxieties about these human inclinations.⁷⁹ The pleasure of familial company and communication was often contrasted with more concerning and unhappy news. In 1781 a friend of Mary Huddleston’s, Elizabeth Merrimen, wrote:

⁷⁶Mary Huddleston, London, to her mother, Mary Huddleston, Sawston, Cambridgeshire, 22 November 1797, CALS, 488/C1/MH72.

⁷⁷R. Maguire, P. Maguire and M. T. Keane, ‘Making sense of surprise: An investigation of the factors influencing surprise judgements’, *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory and Cognition*, 37, 1, 176–86.

⁷⁸J. Bailey, ‘Paternal power: The pleasures and perils of “indulgent fathering” in the long eighteenth century’, *The History of the Family* 17, 3 (2012), 326–42.

⁷⁹Porter, *op. cit.*; Cook, *op. cit.*

Will you my Dear Mrs Huddleston excuse my having so long omitted to answer your obliging letter, and accept my best thanks for it, believe me your agreeable epistle afforded me sincere pleasure, I ever rejoice to hear of your Health and Felicity.⁸⁰

Here the sincerity and authenticity of pleasure was again emphasised, perhaps as a means of easing other anxieties referred to in the same letter. Elizabeth then enquired after Mary's children who were being educated at Catholic schools in northern Europe. She referred to Mary's anxiety about their safety and assured her that 'in a few years your beloved children will return and be every thing you can wish them, which will make you ample amends for the pain of separation'.

Equally, current pleasures were sometimes tinged with anxiety at separation from family. While taking a sea-cure in Southend, the same Mary Huddlestone, later in life, stated in a letter to her daughter, Jane, that 'our situation is delightful the full view of the sea from our sitting room the Bedroom the Garden and fields ... Sheerness and the Coast of Kent'. She also took pleasure in the Port Wine she drank 'for the benefit of my health'.⁸¹ The anxieties of managing Sawston Hall and concerns for the family were never far from her thoughts, though. She enquired after a servant, Frank, whom she and other servants suspected of 'derangement' and whom she considered 'ungovernable'. She also told Jane that 'if you find your Father not well or continue to be distress'd on my absence pray let me know and I could curtail the time ... I should be miserable to have him hurt so pray let me know'. Family letters were very often constructed around these tidal movements of emotions, located somewhere between pain and pleasure, rest and agitation.

The absence of pleasure and joy, in extreme cases, could be a cause for concern, particularly in children. Henry Bostock reported on the poor state of his nephew while studying abroad in a Catholic school in Bornheim. He wrote:

Ever since our nephew has been with Mr Hubertti I have corresponded with him frequently ... after being some little time from us Dicky wrote that he had been and still was dull, owing, as he supposed, to the quitting his parents & Relations & finding himself in the hands of strangers.⁸²

Henry's response was to offer achievement pleasures in place of immediate satisfaction. 'In my letter', he explained, 'I shew'd him ... all the tenderness and gave him all the encouragement I possibly could. I pointed out to him some advantages would arise from his being absent from his friends &

⁸⁰Elizabeth Merrimen, Marlborough, Wiltshire to her friend, Mary Huddlestone, Sawston, Cambridgeshire, 14 July 1776, CALS, 488/C1 MH91.

⁸¹Mary Huddlestone, Southend, to her daughter, Jane Huddlestone, Sawston Hall, Cambridgeshire, 25 July 1805, CALS, 488/C1 MH57.

⁸²Henry Bostock, Brussels, to his sister-in-law, Mary Huddlestone, Sawston, Cambridgeshire, 24 January 1786, CALS, 488/C1/MH10.

indeed all Eng.' His plan failed and he advised Mary against returning her son to school, that 'his health considered we think it would be madness to urge it'.⁸³

Family disputes and breakdowns often generated letters declaring displeasure with shades of anxiety. From 1779 to 1784 William Windham penned a series of lengthy and hostile letters to his mother, Sarah. Their relationship had been strained to the breaking point over Sarah's 'refusal indeed to accommodate me, by freeing a very small part of my Estate, from the many incumbrances you make upon it'.⁸⁴ He later wrote, 'your illness I am to understand is occasioned by your unhappiness; your unhappiness by the loss of my affection'. He then persisted in expressing a lack of desire to see his mother, expressing doubts about her emotional authenticity. 'What connection is there between the recovery of those affections and a visit such as you require?', he continued. Then he hypothesised:

What can be the motive for pressing so earnestly to see me? I really should have thought, if there was nothing in this but sheer affection, that after my two last letters, you could have exclaimed eagerly that your purpose in urging an interview was already answered; that though you should be glad to see me, my absence would no longer be a subject of unhappiness. Such I should have expected would have been the language of a person actuated by anxiety about my affections: but I suppose the same sentiments operate differently in different persons.⁸⁵

In his letters William used emotion words antonymic to pleasure in a way intended to cause pain. William finished his letter by remembering past injustices and the dishonesty of his mother. 'It is impossible for me not to remember, that upon former occasions, whenever a point was to be carried, a representation was sure to be made of declining health', he wrote.

Courtship also brought both pleasure and pain, and Robert Parker rode the waves of positive and negative emotions in a letter narrating his developing relationship with his cousin and future wife, Elizabeth, in 1751. He claimed that his neighbours had derived 'great Pleasure & satisfaction' on hearing that he had visited her at Browsholme, at the same time deferring his pleasure in her company to others and indirectly claiming that pleasure. This contrasted with his experience of being absent from Elizabeth:

It might be Imagined when a Man has very nearly accomplish'd his views & Expectations; & that his affairs are in a quite [sic] & serene condition; that Absence should give him little or no uneasiness: but [I] am myself, dear Parky, a Notorious Instance to the Contrary.⁸⁶

⁸³*Ibid.*

⁸⁴William Windham, Felbrigg Hall, Norfolk, to his mother, Sarah Windham, 9 October 1779, NRO, WKC 7/84/3.

⁸⁵William Windham, Felbrigg Hall, Norfolk, to his mother, Sarah Windham, 9 October 1779, NRO, WKC 7/84/3.

⁸⁶Robert Parker, Alkincoats, Lancashire, to his cousin, Elizabeth Parker, Browsholme, ND 1751, LRO, DDB 72/1/51.

In this way the sensual pleasures and desires of courtship were juxtaposed with the anxieties of absence.⁸⁷ This epistolary technique of walking the line between the two emotions was quite common and was perfectly suited to the dichotomies of pleasure and displeasure. The double-edged nature of pleasure was also in evidence when it was weaponised for the purposes of distributing power and calling subordinates to order.

The power of pleasure

Pleasure was a valuable commodity in the eighteenth century. It could be used as a tool to broker power, assert status and denote subservience, to keep good order and to remind people of their membership in an emotional regime that limited their emotional liberty. The role of hierarchies and the policing of pleasure has been explored in the colonial context and in histories of sex.⁸⁸ However, power and the management of emotions play a deeper role in the history of feelings. William Reddy places power at the centre of his theory of emotions. Emotions are not available to all people evenly; there are hierarchies of emotional liberty and all of us submit to norms and values of various emotional regimes. Much of the human experience of emotions, according to Reddy, is based either on attempting to 'navigate' through these regimes to find some kind of liberty or on playing a part in managing these regimes and making sure people stick to the rules.⁸⁹ Other scholars find space for the management of emotions, often in family settings but also in the public world of the service economy.⁹⁰ Pleasure played an extensive role in the distribution of power in the letters, primarily in terms of valorising shared values within emotional regimes.

Power was inherent to aristocratic life but the achievement of an honourable position in the world for men was satisfying nonetheless, a pleasure shared among family members. This economy of pleasure started at an early age. In 1780 Frances Huddleston reported on the progress of her nephew's son, Richard, during his schooling at Bornheim, Belgium. 'I've the pleasure of informing you of having seen yr son who is indeed a charming boy', she wrote. He was 'well advanced in his studies, has a fine character from his Master, his piety pleases me most of all, I congratulate you for having so

⁸⁷ Sally Holloway focuses at length on the role of anxiety in courtship in *Game of Love*, *op. cit.*

⁸⁸ N. Jabbar, 'Policing native pleasures: A colonial history', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 63, 4 (December 2012), 724–29; R. Muchembeld, *Orgasm and the West: A history of pleasure from the sixteenth century to the present* (Cambridge, 2008).

⁸⁹ Reddy, *op. cit.*, 113–22.

⁹⁰ J. Bailey, *Parenting*, *op. cit.*, 71–29; S. Broomhall, 'Renovating affections: Reconstructing the Atholl family in the mid-eighteenth century' in S. Broomhall (ed.), *Spaces for Feeling: Emotions and sociabilities in Britain 1650–1850* (Abingdon, 2015), 52–79; S. Broomhall and J. Van Gent, 'Corresponding affections', *op. cit.*; A. R. Hochschild, *Managed Heart: Commercialisation of human feeling* (Los Angeles, 1983).

promising an Heir'.⁹¹ The satisfaction of achievement continued into adult life. Later, in 1800, Ferdinand Huddlestone, in a letter to Richard, noted that 'it gave us all great pleasure to hear that nephew Fra[ncis]. Has got a Capt[ain]ns Commission in the Regulars'.⁹² Similarly, on his election as Member of Parliament (MP) for Middlesex in 1742, Sir Roger Newdigate proudly told his mother 'to see myself at once establish'd in so creditable a manner you will easily imagine gives me great pleasure'.⁹³ Pleasure was deployed here to mark an important stage on the path to masculinity, underlining the significance of these moments with affective annotation of what Fridga terms non-sensory 'achievement pleasure'.⁹⁴ There was a pleasure in male honour, just as there are often historic and contemporary connections between anger and honour.⁹⁵ The pleasure shared in this achievement helped to marshal correspondents around key values as an emotional community.

Pleasure might also be withheld from others to signal authority and reinforce social hierarchies, in a similar way as neighbourly love could have an 'edge' in the early modern period.⁹⁶ According to eighteenth-century dictionaries, 'pleasure' could refer to one's choices or 'arbitrary will'. Samuel Johnson quoted Virgil's Aeneid with 'raise Tempests at your pleasure' in order to reference this type.⁹⁷ Similarly, Joseph Nicol Scott noted that 'pleasure' could refer to '[w]hat the will dictates'.⁹⁸ This kind of pleasure was more often a male requisite. In a letter to a tenant, Mr Boys, in 1747, who had disputed his lease and was behind on rental payments, Sir Roger Newdigate noted his displeasure at Boys's letter, which required 'all my patience to refrain from answering'.⁹⁹ He threatened that 'this bargain may be canvass'd in the Courts of Westminster'. He specified the limits of Boys's rights and powers by referencing his limited emotional liberty. He insisted 'upon the lease, which it is not in your power to be quit of as soon as you please'. In one move Newdigate both neutralised Boys's freedom of pleasure and, perhaps, took Aristotelian delight himself in unleashing his anger as virtue.¹⁰⁰ Similarly loaded with references to the politics of emotions, although with more positive intent, he promised his political ally and friend George Cooke that he was 'always glad when it is in my power to

⁹¹Frances Huddlestone, Bruges, Belgium, to her nephew, Ferdinand Huddlestone, Sawston, Cambridgeshire, 4 October 1780, CALS, 488/C2/HD6.

⁹²Ferdinand Huddlestone, Sawston, Cambridgeshire, to his son, Richard Huddlestone, London, 21 February 1800, CALS, 488/C2/HD210.

⁹³Sir Roger Newdigate, Arbury Hall, Warwickshire, to his mother, 5 August 1742, in White, *op. cit.*, 17.

⁹⁴Fridga, *op. cit.*

⁹⁵L. Pollock, 'Anger and the negotiation of relationships in early modern England', *The Historical Journal*, 47, 3 (2004), 567–90; B. H. Rosenwein, *Anger: The conflicted history of an emotion* (Yale, 2020), 181–82.

⁹⁶K. Barclay, *Caritas: Neighbourly love and the early modern self* (Oxford, 2021), 10.

⁹⁷S. Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, *op. cit.*, 361.

⁹⁸Scott, *op. cit.*, 858.

⁹⁹Sir Roger Newdigate, Arbury Hall, Warwickshire, to Mr Boys, 23 February 1747, in White, *op. cit.*, 29.

¹⁰⁰Rosenwein, *Anger*, *op. cit.*, 85.

contribute to your pleasure, & happy in an opportunity of shewing how much it is my wish to continue the union & friendship'.¹⁰¹ If freedom is partly about the ability to experience pleasure and to self-fashion through the regulation of pleasure, as Foucault argued, then Newdigate managed the freedoms and identities of those lower down the social hierarchy through a discourse of pleasure.¹⁰²

There were, of course, hierarchies of power within the gentry. Inheritance and provision for younger children was a frequent source of dispute in landed families. In the Radcliffe family of the early eighteenth century the elderly Sir Ralph Radcliffe (1633–1720) held the purse strings over his son Edward and his grandsons, and determined their lot in life under the system of strict settlement and primogeniture. He set his grandsons up as merchants in the Levant trade, in Aleppo, Syria, and managed the three younger brothers' investments through their eldest brother, Ralph, also a merchant there. Although, in time, these men were greatly enriched through trade, the early stages of the process put considerable pressure on the overall investment in their careers and on Ralph, who noted with displeasure the power his grandfather wielded. In a letter of 1715 he explained to Sir Ralph that 'the ruin of my three younger brothers (as your pleasure is they should be merchants) is inevitable'.¹⁰³ Sir Ralph's desires had a direct (and negative) material impact on the lives of his descendants, according to Ralph. More significantly, Ralph needed to make it clear that he was aware of this, hinting at *schadenfreude* in Sir Ralph's motivations as well as poor decision making and the immoral treatment of his grandchildren.

Ralph's status as the eldest son helped shape his forthright language with his grandfather. Eldest sons, after their majority, had some say over the allowances given to younger children and over the management of the estates more generally. Therefore, he had more control and autonomy in expressing his displeasure than his younger brothers. Three months before Ralph sent his letter, his younger brother, George, wrote in a far more deferent tone. He informed Sir Ralph that Edward, the second son of the five, had 'sett out two days since from this place' and that he could

with pleasure inform you you will have the satisfaction of seeing him return to Patria with a very plentiful estate which to a man of his age and industry I am sensible Cannot bye idle but must be employed as I doubt not he generously will in our service.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹Sir Roger Newdigate, Arbury Hall, Warwickshire, to George Cook, 25 April 1748, in White, *op. cit.*, 32.

¹⁰²K. Starkey and A. Hatchuel, 'The long detour: Foucault's history of desire and pleasure', *Organisation*, 9, 4 (2002), 641–56. Starkey and Hatchuel here primarily refer to two of Foucault's later works, *The Use of Pleasure* (1985) and *The Care of the Self* (1986).

¹⁰³Ralph Radcliffe, Aleppo, Syria, to his grandfather, Sir Ralph Radcliffe, Hitchin Priory, Hertfordshire, 24 September 1715, Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies (HALS), D/ER/C10/2.

¹⁰⁴George Radcliffe, Aleppo, Syria, to his grandfather, Sir Ralph Radcliffe, Hitchin Priory, Hertfordshire, 15 June 1715, Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies (HALS), D/ER/C12/3.

These are two very different narratives expressed through contrasting emotional styles. Part of this can be explained by Ralph's circumstances as the elder brother and the higher status and power that came with this. The presence of his brothers acting alongside him as merchants had limited his freedom of action. As he said:

you have placed me in a sphere, that were I put in a condition I might answer those ends you at first intended being serviceable to your family and making myself considerable, either of which from my circumstances have been impossible.¹⁰⁵

However, material concerns were discussed and negotiated through the mediums of pleasure and displeasure, conduits for power and preferment. As Ralph stated again in this letter, with failing resolution, 'tis your pleasure not to remove those obstacles which obstruct your designs'. More direct accusations of Schadenfreude were reserved for the brothers' communications among the next generation of Radcliffes. In a letter to his youngest brother, Arthur, Ralph thought that he seemed 'to take delight . . . to treat my late brothers character with all that acrimony and bitterness that can fall from your pen'.¹⁰⁶

Conclusion

Pleasure was a birthright of the gentry. Their wealth and status allowed them to indulge in the sensual and the sublime. The Grand Tour, lavish country house parties, fine art and sculpture, the seductions of London life, field sports and other 'high society' activities were all emblematic of the position of landowners at the apex of society as consumers of pleasure, although this privilege was becoming more readily available to the lower orders as this period progressed.¹⁰⁷ And yet family and home repeatedly make their claim in letters of the eighteenth century as the most nourishing of gentry pleasures. Writing to his father from his army camp in Sudbury, in 1793, Richard Huddleston echoed the sentiments of Roger Newdigate earlier in the century. 'I am in much better spirits than I was owing to getting more acquainted with the officers, from all of whom we both receive every politeness', he informed his father, 'altho' home when I can live there will always be the most agreeable'.¹⁰⁸

These were performances of family affection and politeness, not necessarily outpourings of genuine feeling. Nevertheless, the agreed narrative for

¹⁰⁵Ralph Radcliffe, Aleppo, Syria, to his grandfather, Sir Ralph Radcliffe, Hitchin Priory, Hertfordshire, 24 September 1715, Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies (HALS), D/ER/C10/2.

¹⁰⁶Ralph Radcliffe to his younger brother, Arthur, 29 December 1741, Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies, D/ER/C143.

¹⁰⁷J. de Vries, *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer behaviour and the household economy, 1650–the present* (Cambridge, 2010), 13.

¹⁰⁸Richard Huddleston, Sudbury, Suffolk, to his father, Ferdinand Huddleston, Sawston, Cambridgeshire, 29 April 1793, CALS, 488/C2/HD203.

emotional economies of pleasure was central to sustaining and nourishing families as functioning emotional communities. Pleasure, allied with other emotions such as surprise, was a very common ingredient of family discourse in letters because sharing in the simple pleasures of family could reinforce belonging and create narratives of affection. In some ways this is not surprising. The regularity of pleasure in family correspondence is explained partly by the very regularity that pleasure and displeasure have in the human condition. These everyday notations of pleasure in gentry correspondence can be found among other social groups. In a letter to his wife, Elizabeth, in 1734, the non-conformist minister Phillip Doddridge began, 'My Dearest Creature can hardly imagine the Pleasure with which I receiv'd hers for which indeed I had waited with much impatience'.¹⁰⁹ The uses to which these pleasures were put, however, were to some extent specific to the different groups expressing them.

The permanence of landed elites depended heavily on the function of the family as a network of support and an institution for the transfer of status and wealth from one generation to another. A life of dissolute pleasures could (and did) threaten the permanence of the family if taken to extremes by spendthrift elder sons or estate owners. The anxieties surrounding public pleasures in the eighteenth century were more immediate for elite families since their identity rested so centrally on the transfer of wealth and capital intact across generations. Pleasure was coded within family discourse so that the virtues of family and home life were valorised above those of the public realm, and these were important ways in which the family, as an emotional regime, could remind the individual of their responsibilities to the longer-range goals of the family and consequently the limited nature of their emotional liberty. Displeasure was an equally powerful tool in bringing subordinates and dependants to heel, imposing the authority of the gentry and reasserting hierarchies within and beyond the family.

Understanding the role of pleasure also helps us understand more deeply the role that emotions and affect played in the maintenance of the family both for the emotional sustenance of family members and for the longer-range goals of the gentry. Family belonging among the gentry depended on access to wealth, status, and resources and on the subscription of the individual to diachronic identities, but it was also created through the habituation of discourses of pleasure, repeated over and again in family letters. In this sense feelings were as important as inheritance patterns, country houses, fashionable clothes and patronage networks in defining the landed elite.

¹⁰⁹ Letter from Phillip Doddridge, Hackney, London, to his wife, Elizabeth, 16 July 1734, in K. Barclay and F. Soyer (eds), *Emotions in Europe 1517–1914, Vol. III, Revolutions, 1715–1789* (Abingdon, 2021), 85.

In many ways the pleasures of family life were a refuge from the controversies of more worldly pleasures. Family pleasures were virtuous, derived from morally robust experiences in the main. This only strengthened the power and attractiveness of familial pleasures vis-à-vis the pleasures awaiting the gentry in the wider world. Family correspondence was also a means by which that wider world could be understood, conditioned and subsumed into narratives of family life. Our gaze is often far more fixed on the public life of landed elites and on the material circumstances supporting their power, their country houses often being the closest we get to their familial and domestic lives.¹¹⁰ Pleasure, and other emotions, are perspectives through which this imbalance can be remedied.

Disclosure statement

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¹¹⁰For one of the most recent and comprehensive analyses of the country house, see J. Stobart and M. Rothery, *Consumption and the Country House* (Oxford, 2016). For exceptions to this, see French and Rothery, *Man's Estate*, *op. cit.*, and J. Lewis, 'When a house is not a home: elite English women and the eighteenth century country house', *Journal of British Studies*, 48 (2009), 336–63.