Between 1776 and 1800 -- at the end of Garrick’s reign at Drury and the rise of Edmund Kean -- the shape of Europe, the role of women in the public sphere, and even the size of London’s patent theatres underwent renovation and reconstitution. The results often wore familiar faces, even as meaning was changed by new contexts and editorial flourish. In this spirit of adaptation, this paper will consider the most popular comedy of the late eighteenth-century, Sheridan’s *The School for Scandal* (1777), and the plays and prose pieces throughout the eighteenth-century that bore the same title convention.

It is important to identify both the innovation and the conformity of any given text, and it takes little away from Sheridan’s masterpiece to note its connection to a popular extant naming tradition. When one considers texts that adopted the “school for” title formula in this period, *The School for Scandal* was as much riding a trend as it is furthering one. True, the massive success of Sheridan’s play\(^1\) led to a sharp increase in material following the “school for” naming convention. But when it debuted on May 8 1777, Sheridan's play appeared in the midst of large number of translations and original plays entitled along the “School for” formula, many of which would see multiple editions in the decades that followed. The plays promised all manner of education: schools for rakes and greybeards, wives and lovers, fathers and guardians, honor and arrogance. A play written and performed in America and transatlantically published also called

\(^1\) *The School for Scandal* was the most-performed play of the late eighteenth-century (261 times by 1800)
The School for Scandal flew under the cover of the popular comedy to satirize the American Revolutionary War.2

Indeed, it was not only a theatrical trend: the “school for” formula expanded to encompass actual educational texts in “schools” for children, Christians, and happiness; translated texts were dubbed schools for good manners and marriage. Novels created multivolume “schools” for husbands, wives, tutors, widows, and fashion. It is tempting, given the dominance of Sheridan’s play, to think of these other “schools” as part of a phenomenon cashing in on a popular play – a vogue which would show to be a mere flash in the pan. But both of these assumptions – first, that The School for Scandal was the source of many imitation “school for” plays, and second, that these plays centered around the decade after The School for Scandal debuted, I will show, are false.

What I wish to do here is to describe the many ways in which The School for Scandal can be understood within the context of the world of stage and print, through an examination of the other texts that traded on the “school for” naming convention. In the wake of Sheridan’s success with The School for Scandal, the convention took on new life, used for political and for publicity purposes, to breathe new life into old plays as well as launch new ones. In addition to this theatrical tradition, I wish to highlight the sharp increase in prose fiction that also carried this title convention into the end of the eighteenth century, and indeed well into the nineteenth, an increase that might be understood as even more significant as a post-Sheridan explosion than the theatrical response.3 The School for Scandal’s influence, when charted not by plot but by titles,

2 Leacock
3 While this essay ends with 1800, editions of Sheridan’s The School for Scandal continued to see print and performance, and plays and other works containing the title convention continued to be published: a ballad “The Weaver’s Garland, or, a New School for Christians” (1800), The School for Friends (1806), The School for Authors (1808), Chesterfield Travestie, or, School for
reveals the larger cultural shifts around what it means to advertise a “school,” moving from satirical send-ups of husbands and fathers to more insistent, with Sheridan’s play serving as a turning point, containing both the earlier satirical comedic tradition and the sentimental education that will grow in strength thereafter.

**Schools Before Scandal**

Sheridan’s play was not the beginning, but somewhere in the middle of the “school for” trend. Indeed, if one counts Moliere’s *L’École des maris* (1661) and *L’École des femmes* (1662) (which a few “school for” plays note as either an inspiration or otherwise indicate their awareness of) then the phenomenon’s antecedents extend into the previous century. Many translations of Moliere’s plays can be seen throughout the century, and adaptations for English sensibilities followed, such as the 1735 farcical afterpiece based on Moliere’s *L’ecole des Femmes* that debuted under the name *The School for Women*. Moreover, Moliere’s plays certainly inspired some of Sheridan and his cohorts’ later plot choices, with their focus on older men whose desire for totally innocent/ignorant wives are thwarted by the natural cunning of the women they marry.

The earliest such non-Moliere play featuring a “school for” title in London appears to be the change of name of *The Professor Folly* to *School for Folly* a week into its run at Lincoln’s Inn Fields. In 1732, alongside the Moliere adaptations and translations, *Female Innocence: or, A School for a Wife* was performed “at Mrs. Lee’s great booth, on the bowling-green, Southwark,

*Modern Manners* (1808, 1812), *Love’s Victory or The School for Pride, a Comedy* (1825), *The School for Politics, a Dramatic Novel* (1854), *The School for Critics, a Comedy* (1868) and *School for Saints: part of the history of the Right Honourable Robert Orange* (1897)
by comedians from the theatres”. 7 Despite these titles in the early part of the century, it isn’t until the latter half of the eighteenth-century that the title convention multiplied substantially.

The bulk of “school for” productions were plays that existed prior to The School for Scandal, and were dominated by two plays: Isaac Bickerstaff’s Lionel & Clarissa (by 1770 it appeared as Lionel & Clarissa, or The School for Fathers) (1768), and Hugh Kelly’s The School for Wives (1773) both of which were performed at either Covent Garden, Drury Lane, or Haymarket nearly every year between their respective debuts and the end of the century. 8 In addition, Whitehead’s The School for Lovers (1762) saw runs before and after Scandal’s debut, and Elizabeth Griffith’s The School for Rakes (1769) was her most successful play, though it did not last into the post-Scandal performance seasons.

Even only counting works on the English stage, one can find as early as 1762 other “school for” play such as Poet Laureate William Whitehead’s mildly successful The School for Lovers (1762), which made intriguingly complex claims to novelty. The play is derived from a French original, “formed on the plan” of Fontenelle’s The Will (1751) which was “never intended for the stage, and printed in the eighth volume of his works” 9 Despite its status as an adaptation, the prefatory material of the 1793 edition nevertheless claims “this play may be considered as the model of the sentimental branch of the modern comedy” though it does admit of deficiencies of “wit and humor,” which might “perhaps confine it forever to the closet.” 10

6 Burling 68
7 Female innocence
8 See London Stage. School for Fathers was performed fifteen times at Covent Garden, nine times at Drury Lane, and ten times at Haymarket between 1776 and 1800. School for Wives was performed fifteen nights at Covent Garden, two at Drury Lane, and two at Haymarket in the same period.
10 ibid.
The 1793 preface is largely disingenuous, as the play saw a healthy number of performances and was counted among Whitehead’s successes.

The play is one that fits Jerry Palmer’s notion that comedy (as opposed to farce) is often a genre that places a primacy on something beyond (or at least besides) the laugh and joke. As the preface braces us for, it is indeed populated by characters who right down to the lowliest schemer “are all distinguished by elegance of sentiment, purity of expression, and propriety of manners.” 11 Three acts of the five consist largely of the hero and heroine, who have been betrothed for years, nobly renouncing one another for one reason or another. Interspersed is the subplot of Modely and Araminta, who play dim echoes of a bickering, jealous couple. Modely faithlessly flirts with the heroine Cælia for no reason other than boredom (and plot mechanics), and we are led to believe that he is reformed or about to reform at play’s end, and that his future union with Araminta is now purified.

It is all intensely contrived, and its appeal lies in its structural merry-go-round, but its epilogue, as with its title, implies a didactic turn:

Where the fair dames who like to live by rule,

May learn two lessons from the LOVERS School:

While Cælia’s choice instructs them how to choose,

And my refusal warns them to refuse. 12

Cælia’s “choice” being no real choice at all, and Araminta’s refusal being a mere postponement, an educational gloss on the play is improbable at best.

11 ibid
12 Whitehead, Epilogue, p. 87
Isaac Bickerstaff’s 1768 comic opera 13 *Lionel and Clarissa*, which would be represented as *Lionel and Clarissa: or a school for fathers* or simply *The School for Fathers* after 1770, is not much more didactic, continuing the tradition of presenting. While Bickerstaff deemed it his best piece, *Love in a Village*, his reworking of Samuel Richardson’s novel *Pamela*, was performed “ten times for once this piece is acted,” as the prefatory material to the Bell’s British Theatre edition (1791) notes. The author of the preface goes on to speculate as to why this would be so, and concludes that the answer must lie in the music, “for such Character and Writing as [the two plays] exhibit, seem tolerably uniform; -- a severe critic might say uniformly terrible.” 14

The plot parallels two well-meaning fathers: the brash Colonel Oldboy and the more sensible Sir John Flowerdale. In the main plot, the titular Lionel is in love with Clarissa, the daughter of Sir John. Lionel has been educated for the church, and true to innumerable other sentimental heroes, is willing to nobly refrain from speaking his love because of his presumed social and financial unworthiness to aspire to Clarissa. Meanwhile, Colonel Oldboy, who eloped with his wife when they were young, is tricked into assisting the clever Harman into eloping with Diana Oldboy, the Colonel’s spirited daughter. At the denouement, Sir John reveals he has tested Lionel and Clarissa’s love and obedience by pretending to favor another suitor for Clarissa, and convinces Colonel Oldboy to follow Sir John’s example and celebrate the marriages of Lionel and Clarissa and Diana and Harman. Though the title promises a “school for fathers,” only one father, Colonel Oldboy, is really “schooled,” and even that is more of comeupance for the audience’s amusement than their edification.

13 With music by Charles Dibdin, who collaborated with Bickerstaffe on the opera.
14 Bickerstaff ii.
As with Whitehead, Bickerstaff’s pride in his work lies in a sense of its originality: “I had not borrowed an expression, a sentiment, or a character from any dramatic writer extant.” Such a claim is as inflated as it is odd, as the play in terms of plot it is as pure formula as its later title: to recount its love triangle, sentimental hero and heroine, obligatory supporting soubrette role, and other details would amount to not much more or less than many other plays. Indeed, the most striking deviation is the character of Mr. Jessamy, a hypereducated coxcomb so effeminized that he cannot pair off at the resolution of the play. Frequently discussed as impotent, the play implicitly looks forward to his death to enrich his relatives, as he is an unfit heir to the estates he has accumulated.

Nevertheless, the play was successful: as Lionel and Clarissa, the play saw ten productions in the last quarter of the eighteenth-century, equally divided between Covent Garden and the Haymarket. Under the name The School for Fathers, the play saw an additional seven productions at Drury Lane in that same period.

Perhaps stemming from Whitehead’s success, Elizabeth Griffith transformed Beaumarchais’s Eugénie (1767) in her most popular play The School for Rakes (1769), which was so successful that Griffith was able to enter her son Richard into the East India Company on its proceeds, an act that would end up ensuring her family’s prosperity and her own comfortable old age. This seems no surprise, for in the period the formula Griffith followed seems nearly foolproof: French source material altered for English tastes, coupled with the “school for” title that, as seen from Moliere, Whitehead, Bickerstaff, et al, signifies more the focus of the audience’s amusement rather than the group that will be preached to or instructed. Nevertheless,
the play would not survive long on the London stages: while the play would see new editions in print into the 1790s, the play saw its last eighteenth-century performance on April 26, 1776 at Drury Lane, little more than a year before *The School for Scandal* would appear on the same stage.

The last of the pre-*Scandal* “school for” plays, Hugh Kelly’s *The School for Wives* (1774) also played on the Drury Lane stage three years before *The School for Scandal* would debut on the same boards, and after *The School for Scandal*’s debut *The School for Wives* would move to Covent Garden, where it was performed eighteen nights across nine different seasons, three times appearing within weeks of a run of *The School for Scandal*.

Kelly’s work is another good example of the strange game of influence and originality occurring amongst the “school for” plays. The preface to the 1774 text notes that “though he [Kelly] has chosen a title us’d by Moliere, he has neither borrowed a single circumstance [from Moliere] … nor to the best of his recollection from any other writer”.18 The preface goes on at some length about the originality of the piece, emphasizing its (in the author’s opinion) striking balance between “sentimental gloom” and “excess of uninteresting levity” as well as its rehabilitation of the legal profession.

Frances Abington, who would go on to play Lady Teazle in *The School for Scandal*, here plays Miss Walsingham, who like, Lady Teazle, must defend herself in the play’s epilogue. There the similarities end, as Miss Walsingham’s story is not so much a battle of wits between a couple as it is a well-worn plot of misunderstandings and proper and improper suitors. The sentimental plot is between a married couple, the Belvilles. At the beginning of the play, Belville has just seduced a young girl, Miss Leeson, in the guise of an Irish stage manager who

18 Kelly i
will make her a star, and he has not even consummated the affair before he sets his eyes on Miss Walsingham. His unsuccessful seduction is part of the humor of Miss Walsingham’s larger plot, but his behaviour becomes dangerous for him when his wife discovers his infidelity, and moreover he is challenged to a duel by Miss Leeson’s brother.

Miss Leeson, a would-be actress whose “fort is tragedy entirely,” but whose role in the play we witness is almost entirely comic, encapsulates in a line the dichotomy between the sly digs at the theatre and the sentimental plot which we are supposed to be invested in. As she says to Lady Rachel Mildew, the playwright of “crying comedies” and “boarding school romps,” Miss Leeson does like some comedies, namely the sort of sentimental comedy which the audience is witnessing: “some of the sentimental ones are very pretty, there’s such little difference between them and tragedies.”

Safely married off, Abington’s character speaks the epilogue, which constructs the theatre as a place of learning – “an ancient college to instruct the town!” and indeed, the only place of learning available to women aside from “Cornelly’s, and Almack’s, our Universities!” In a world where women must learn from places of leisure or not at all, the implication goes, it is a minor miracle that women like all-forgiving Mrs. Belville and the clever-but-chaste Miss Walsingham survive.

As with prior plays, here the “school” lies in these two plots is difficult to tell. Certainly, the minor character Lady Rachel is learning constantly, as she takes notes from the character’s reactions for use in her “crying comedies”. But the intention of blending didactic agenda with a

19 Kelly 33  
20 Whitehead III.i. 33  
21 Bell’s British Theatre, Vol 7. 111
dose of self-reflexive humor, while not very successful in Kelly’s play, does provide an interesting combination for later plays – significantly *The School for Scandal* – to master.

**After Scandal, Part One: Sheridian commentary and plot adoption**

Between the debut of *The School for Scandal* and the end of the century, six plays appeared under the “school for” title convention, seven at Drury Lane, and four at the Haymarket. Most plays on Sheridian titles did not aim to imitate Sheridan’s plots, but built on an extant knowledge of Sheridan and his plays — a theme not limited to plays with parodic titles. Primarily such plays in the late 1770s reference *The Critic*, such as *The Critic Anticipated; or, The Humors of the Green Room* (1779), attributed to “R.B.S. Esq” but functioning as a scathing satire on Sheridan as despotic manager, a critique that would also appear in *The Critick; or A Tragedy Rehearsed, A Literary Catchpenny* (1780) and Leonard MacNally’s *Critic upon Critic* (1788). 27 *The School for Scandal Scandaliz’d* (1779 York, 1780 Covent Garden), which Dane Farnsworth Smith attributes to John Philip Kemble, engages in the same debate over Sheridan, but takes the side of defense rather than critique.

The most direct use of *The School for Scandal*’s name are two political texts that take their names directly from Sheridan’s play: John Leacock’s American *The School for Scandal* (1779) and an anonymous Pittite *The School for Scandal* (1784). As David Francis Taylor has recently shown, the titles of Sheridan’s popular comedies (*The Duenna, The Critic, and The School for Scandal*) were assumed by political authors, creating dramatized political pamphlets that flew under the title and formatting conventions of the stage. In the case of Israel Pottinger’s *Duenna* (1776) and *Critic* (1779) and the 1784 *Scandal*, the texts themselves have absolutely no

27 Smith and Lawhon, 100-107
ties to the Sheridan originals other than that of title, and the contents of all such “parodies” were essentially politically unperformable: indeed, barely publishable.  

Leacock’s Scandal, like the transformations of The Critic, does retain the character names of the original play, though each are transformed by cast lists that place political movers and shakers in each role: “Mr. King” (George III) as the venal but goodnatured Charles Surface, Lord “Thane” (Bute) as his scheming brother Joseph, Lord “Sh—le—ne” (Shelburne) as the rescuing nabob Sir Oliver, Lord “Boreas” (i.e., North) as the moneylender Moses, and “Signor Frazerino” (William Fraser, editor of the London Gazette) as Snake. It was apparently successful enough to lead the London Magazine to warn readers of unthinkingly purchasing the Leacock Scandal as “Many persons have imagined that it was the celebrated comedy under that title written by Sheridan.”

This was a very real danger in the 1770s and 80s, as Sheridan did not produce an authorized version of The School for Scandal until 1799 — over twenty years after its first performance, during which time unauthorized editions had been produced nearly every year in both Ireland and England.

Taylor and Farnsworth Smith both note that the direct title lifting from Sheridan dies down markedly after the first few years of The School for Scandal’s debut — coinciding with Sheridan’s increasing presence in Parliament beginning in the 1780s. However, echoes of The School for Scandal’s title would continue in more subtle — and more far-reaching — variants through to the end of the century.

30 Sheridan would of course continue to act as manager of Drury Lane until shortly after it burned down in 1809.
After Scandal, Part Two: Renaming and Timely Naming

In the wake of the success of The School for Scandal, plays not only assumed the title of Sheridan’s play directly (as previously seen), but older plays also adopted a similar naming convention to rebrand themselves as part of The School for Scandal phenomenon. As seen earlier, Isaac Bickerstaffe’s Lionel and Clarissa had long held the subtitle The School for Fathers. While the play would continue to see success as Lionel and Clarissa at Covent Garden and the Haymarket, on the Drury Lane stage it would be known exclusively by The School for Fathers title for the rest of the century, and all the subsequent editions of the play in print would carry The School for Fathers (either singly or with the “Lionel and Clarissa” title) on the cover.

Bickerstaffe’s play was not the only one to see a shift in title to capitalize on the vogue for “school for” titles. Hannah Cowley’s loose adaptation of Aphra Behn’s The Lucky Chance (1687) was originally titled The Mourning Bride, but was resurrected and renamed The School for Greybeards (1786). In Cowley’s case, the savvy renaming for the market is part of a career-long set of moves that echo, either in content or title, earlier theatrical hits: Cowley’s The Belle’s Strategem (1780), echoes George Farquhar’s The Beaux Stratagem (1707), while her A Bold Stroke for a Husband (1783), recalls Susannah Centlivre’s A Bold Stroke for a Wife (1717). What is striking about the appropriation of Sheridan’s title is its relative youth — by turning from Farquhar and Centlivre’s generation to Sheridan’s, Cowley would seem to be highlighting the ways in which The School for Scandal has made its way into the repertory: to riff on its title is to believe it is as much a household name as the great Restoration comedies. The play had a run of nine performances — a very modest success compared to the blockbuster plays mentioned in this essay, but a success nonetheless.
Such title changes were not necessarily raging successes, it should be noted. Richard Cumberland — like Cowley, no fan of Sheridan — also saw his play *The Country Attorney* (Haymarket 1786) renamed *The School for Widows* when it made its 1789 debut at Covent Garden. The play had a longer run at the Haymarket (6) than it would at Covent Garden (3).

The timely popularity of Sheridan’s title was also exploited by political dramatists. Holcroft’s *The School for Arrogance* debuted at Covent Garden February 4, 1791 and saw 9 performances that year, then five in the 1793-4 season, another 2 the following year, and single performances in 1796, 1797, and 1799. The following year, Thomas Dibdin’s *The School for Prejudice, or Liberal Opinions* (1800) was also performed at Covent Garden.

Still other plays would also capitalize on the naming convention and continue to do so well into the end of the century. Nor was this limited to the London stage: Edmund Eyre’s *Consequences, or The School for Prejudices* (1794), announces on its title page that it has been performed in “Worchester, Wolverhampton, and Shrewbury” — thus, even a play that can advertise only its success in a forty-mile radius in the west of England over a hundred miles from the capital still takes advantage of the “school for” convention.

Moreover, in the last decade of the eighteenth-century, many plays saw print, many for the first time ever, or in many years. While Sheridan refused to produce an authorized print edition of his play until quite late in the century, numerous unauthorized editions were available almost immediately. Close behind *School for Scandal* was, perhaps unsurprisingly, *The School for Fathers*. Holcroft’s *The School for Arrogance* (1791) was published simultaneously with its theatrical debut, *The School for Wives* saw two new editions (1792, 1793), as did *The

31 *London Stage* xlii
32 Eyre
34 The English Short Title Catalogue lists 44 editions before 1800, the vast majority with Dublin
School for Lovers (1793) and The School for Rakes (1795). The School for Honor (1799). The 1783 play The Reparation was repackaged and published (though not performed) as The School for Libertines (1800).

As part of that trend, the unperformed The School for Ingratitude (1798) seems to have been given that title exclusively for publicity, as its full title suggests:

'thou shalt not steal.'

The School for ingratitude:

a comedy,

in five acts.

Presented - to a manager of Drury-Lane, in March 1797:

* Curtailed-by his Direction, and returned to him in May:

Finally-And after the Comedy, or Farce in Five Acts, called "cheap Living" (so like it, in many Points!-in one, so unlike it!) had been produced at Drury-Lane,

Returned;-With a Note from A Prompter; which the Author has not perused-

* Further curtailments being avowedly reserved for the day which-ought to have come.

It’s hard to imagine anyone would have purchased the text otherwise, as the first forty pages of the text constitutes an obsessive point-by-point comparison of the author’s play and its resemblances to Frederick Reynolds’ comedy Cheap Living (1797).
Beyond “Scandal”: Prose “Schools”

If the theatrical market for “school for” titles was buoyed but not begun by Sheridan’s play, the effect on prose fiction seems in some ways even more substantial. It should first be noted that pre-Scandal prose fiction did not include “school for” titling practices as much as might be expected, given the didactic potential implied by the phrase. One might expect that “school for” titles would appear as didactic nonfiction works, and indeed a few titles appear to do so, such as “Michael Angelo”’s *The Drawing School for Little Masters and Misses* (1774, 1777) and *The School for Marriage* by “Caesar Mussolini, professor of the Italian language” (1795). However, the handful that appear in the records suggest that the convention was not very firmly established among didactic works.

Three epistolary English “school for” fiction titles predate *The School For Scandal*: an anonymously-authored epistolary *School for Wives* (1763), and the anonymous *The school for daughters: or, the history of Miss Charlotte Sidney* (1771), and Treyssac de Vergy’s *Nature: or, The school for demi-rapes* (1771). Like the immediate predecessors of Scandal on stage, these three novels date to the years of the 1760s and early 1770s, and all three novels connect themselves to the didactic and sentimental epistolary project followed by the novels Samuel Richardson, and appear at the height of the sentimental mode, including the publication of Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey* (1768) and Mackenzie’s *The Man of Feeling* (1771).

*The School for Wives* opens with a letter from the mother of a new bride worriedly seeking news of her daughter from the husband’s sister. Unlike Moliere’s May-December marriages, the marriage is a love match only clouded by the husband Charles Goodwill’s new
friendship with Lord Rovewell and his “vile associates.” His bride Clarinda is unable to speak for herself, but her sister-in-law Lucy Goodwill is more than willing to upbraid her brother and report on his conduct to his mother-in-law. While the title seems to allude directly to Moliere’s play of the same name, the substance of the short novel seems to owe a greater debt to Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela in Her Exalted Condition* (1742), the sequel that examines Pamela’s capacity for enduring the potential infidelity of Mr. B—after she has given birth to their first child, and *Clarissa* (1748)’s scheming Lovelace as a model for the “bad influence” Lord Rovewell. Indeed, the novel even name-checks Richardson directly, as one of the characters is discovered reading *Sir Charles Grandison*, leading to a discussion of a key subplot. In *Grandison*, the titular hero has a young ward, Emily, who falls in love with him. When it becomes clear that Sir Charles will marry the virtuous Harriet Byron, Emily leaves his house in order to more effectively conquer her inappropriate passion. Clarinda Goodwill artlessly asks Miss Charlotte Spendlove, who is suspected of being in love with Clarinda’s husband, about Emily’s case, and Charlotte tellingly reveals her sentiments by taking Emily’s side, and Clarinda is able to candidly ask “You are in love, my Charlotte, and you love—my husband” leading to an exchange that ends with the erring Charlotte collapsed in the arms of Clarinda.38

While the novel’s title would seem to suggest that Clarinda must learn to be a better wife to her roving husband, the title seems to better function literally, as the text itself forms a “school” for the wives who read it and take the exemplary Clarinda as a model, and Charles Goodwill learns to better appreciate his paragon of a spouse. This is in keeping with the sentimental turn to the post-Richardsonian epistolary novel, which takes its didactic project literally.

36 183 pages in the 1763 edition.
It should be noted that this is not uniform or even necessarily the dominant strain of Richardson-imitation. The *Monthly Review* patronizingly reviews *The School for Daughters* as formulaic of a particular sort of young, amateur, female novelist “regularly instructed and practiced in the school of love,”39 and the *Critical Review* pithly notes, “We shall take particular care to keep our daughters from this School; or rather, this School from our daughters.”40

Even more so, de Vergy’s *Nature: or, The school for demi-rapes* (1771) is advertised as “a professed imitator of our Richardson” who has authored a novel “so agreeable, sentimental, and sensible… that were it not for the libertinism… we would not scruple to recommend it to such of our readers as have a taste for this species of literary entertainment.”41 As might be divined from its title, the novel includes erotic scenes that reframe Richardsonian scenes such as Pamela accidentally in bed with her would-be rapist Mr. B, and trace much more explicit female desire, as the heroine writes of “the consent her heart gave” as “Desire deadened” the voice of virtue.42 While the novel ends with double marriage and reformation, the material within is far more vexed.

**After Scandal: Fiction**

After *The School for Scandal*, the number of works that followed the “school for’ naming convention while hewing much closer to the Richardsonian model than the Sheridian. Epistolary novels included multiple editions of *The School for Husbands* (1776), as well as *The School for Tutors* (1788), *The School for Fathers* (1788), and Clara Reeve’s *The School for Widows* (1791);
and “oriental tale” outlier *The School for Majesty* (1780). It is important to note the primarily epistolary mode in which these novels were composed: the period of the 1770s and 1780s is also of course the height of the epistolary genre’s popularity, and so novels designed to capitalize on the most lucrative part of the market would do well to adopt the form (in some cases, not wholly). Moreover, the epistolary novel’s emphasis on voice and audience would seem to make it a particularly useful crossover point — we can see attempts at this sort of crossover in earlier works such as Jane Collier and Sarah Fielding’s *The Cry: A Dramatic Fable* (1754), which blends conventions of the theatre and the novel into a hybrid form. Like the “school for” plays that were extant pre-*Scandal*, many of the “school for” novels share similar moves and concerns, both as a group and as a subset of the overall market – in the majority of cases, the dominant sentimental mode popular from mid-century on.

Even the aforementioned outlier, *The School for Majesty*, which at first seems to have little to do with the epistolary sentimental project, seems to capitalize on an existing market, while branding with the more generic “school for” convention. A third person novella dyed purple with exotic diction and faraway lands, it seems very much akin to Johnson’s *Rasselas* (1759) in form. The novella, tells the story of Zomelli, the spoilt crown prince, whose life of listless ease is disrupted by an evil Genii who afflicts him with smallpox, allowing Zomelli’s identical half-brother to ascend the throne as Zomelli is smuggled out and forced to find his own way through the world. In his struggle he learns that “the duty of princes” is to protect “the lower class against the over-bearing rich” (98). He is ultimately able, through timely intervention of another king, to reclaim his throne and transform his kingdom into one designed for the benefit

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43 Franco Moretti graphs the rise and fall in new publication in each of three “hegemonic” subgenres (epistolary, gothic, and historical) in his *Maps, Graphs, and Trees* (Verso, New York: 2012).
of its subjects. He is Rasselas returned to the Happy Valley, transformed definitely and empowered to rule justly.

Also brief, and perhaps the most overtly didactic fiction using this convention, is Charlotte Brooke’s *The school for Christians* (1791) published as a children’s book by subscription. The text is the closest any of the prose “school for” pieces comes to an actual school, written in dialogue between a father and son, to teach religious and ethical principles. It is one of the few places in post-Scandal “school” fiction that seems an empowered and generous paternal figure: in much of what will follow in my discussion, fathers and paternal figures are either absent, cruel, or hands-off.

*The School for Husbands* (1776) is an epistolary novel featuring two sisters: Lucy, the quiet sweet one, marries Dashwood, who only agreed to marry her to support his now-crazy-jealous mistress, Die (and their 5 year old son Ned). Die goes increasingly nuts (though pretty justifiably) as Dashwood dotes upon the sweet Lucy. Die ultimately tries to shoot Lucy, revealing all, but Lucy has known all along and still loves Dashwood, and Die is sent away to die (so to speak) in Bristol while Ned is raised by the Dashwoods. Bab, the “madcap” (more rational, more committed to be reserved) loves Lord Charbury, who in turn believes himself preengaged to his ward Constantia, and marries her instead. Of course C dies (of a fall), and not too long after (though still with misunderstandings) the two reveal their long-standing love.

*The School for Tutors* (1788) continues the epistolary trend of *The School for Wives* and *School for Husbands* earlier. In it, a young man Everard Villers returns from abroad, in love with an half-Irish woman who lives in Marseilles. While abroad, he had a correspondence that he believed was with his sister, but her letters were ghostwritten by her "plain" companion Henrietta 2007, p. 15-16). While his graphs do not factor in reprints and later editions, the graphs are still
"Harriet" Ottley. Like Harriet Byron before her, her letters to a female friend reveal her love for Everard. Everard discovers his French-Irish beloved is duplicitous (through a missent letter), and is later "tricked" into revealing his love for Harriet by his father "proposing" to marry her himself. The short novel ends with letters from the tutor Francis Woodley with marital advice for the pair, concentrating on Harriet’s ability to be the perfect wife for the spoilt Everard because she is devoted to his happiness. The novel’s paternal tutor hovers over the novel like the benevolent patriarchal figures seen in various theatrical “schools” to contrast with tyrannical fathers.

Parental tyranny is still extant in these novels, however. The school for fathers; or, the victim of a curse (1788) appears in the same year as The School for Tutors and seems to be the nightmare alternate world far removed from the similarly-titled theatrical “schools” where bad fathers are appropriately punished, and virtue is rewarded.

A young man Harley on his Grand Tour falls in with the family barely clinging to gentility. When Harley accidentally kills the brother of the family, he takes the surviving widow and her daughter Emily into his protection, and ultimately marries Emily. But Alfred himself is at the mercy of his father, who hears damning reports of Harley’s conduct through his tutor. When Alfred travels with his new wife to beg for his father’s mercy, he first sees his Aunt, who informs him of his father’s death by apoplexy and his disinheritance. Alfred in turn dies, leaving Emily alone and pregnant, and she seeks protection in a distant relative, Mr. Nelson. That man educates Alfred and promises him a living, but dies before the living can be transferred. Thus, Alfred is doubly disinherited by both biological grandfather and adopted father figure.

striking: for example, in 1776 71% of all new novels were epistolary.
The narrator then turns to Alfred’s beloved Elwina and her own venal father, anticipating the conflicts with male authority (including brothers) that intrude upon the love story set up by the letters that follow. The narrative voice frequently makes the reader aware of future events (usually unhappy) in vague, ominous terms, and so when after the first hundred pages the novel becomes epistolary, the reader is already primed for an unhappy end. Alfred and Elwina growing increasingly close through their correspondence, which only ends with the untimely death of Alfred. The novel then returns to first-person, and we discover that the narrator is a woman, Maria, who then reports the death of Elwina, surrounded by her contrite and grieving parents. Maria, Elwina’s sole heir, uses the final pages of the novel to justify her writing and reemphasize the novel’s connection to truth.

While not as directly excoriating in its narrative voice as The School for Fathers, Clara Reeve’s The School for Widows (1791) is perhaps the most revolutionary nonetheless. Reeves’ novel, like many of the others, is epistolary and focused on marriage, but from the other end, opening as an exchange between two widows. The School for Widows both contains and exists as an educational space for women of all ages and marital statuses, warning unmarried women of the dangers of the married state, while exemplifying ways that wives and widows can maneuver in the world. The educational aspects are more striking here, as widows educate other widows (and their daughters) in running a school, starting a shop, and other entrepreneurial feats. The novel ends with a Millennium Hall (1762)-like construction of a haven out of the former estate.

In this context, the last of the eighteenth-century “School for” novels, Ann Ford Thicknesse’s roman a clef The School for Fashion (1800) seems to be the closest to Scandal’s target, while daringly naming names and creating portraits of far more of the bon ton’s vices than even those of Sheridan’s Scandal School. Published by subscription and dedicated to
“FASHION HERSELF” (vi) with a scathing critique of “her” power and corrupting influence, and promising in its introduction a novel compounded of “FACTS” (1) and “PLAIN TRUTH” (2), the thinly-veiled memoir includes gossipy accounts of “Euterpe”’s encounters with all manner of nobility and other upper class movers and shakers, including the Prince of Wales. Euterpe’s options as a mistress as well as a marriagable woman are equally weighed, though with a veneer of middle class virtue (which is repeatedly referred to as irrelevant at the highest social rungs). The sentimental is wholly absent from this novel, and Euterpe’s ambitious father is easily managed and hardly figures at all in the machinations of various noble women and their potentially dangerous influence on the savvy Euterpe. That Thicknesse chooses to title her thinly-disguised memoir as a “school” is both tongue in cheek and a homage to Sheridan, the son of her elocution teacher, Thomas Sheridan.46

Conclusion

The School for Scandal’s blend of sentimental and satire pointed directly at its audience are by and large a singular outgrowth from the thicket of formulaic responses that continued to take advantage of the marketability of the name for decades thereafter. Nevertheless, both The School for Scandal and other “school for” texts continue to coexist on the page and the stage throughout the end of the eighteenth century, a microcosm for a period that embraced the sentimental and the grand, the clever and the silly, and mixed tragedy and comedy on stages that were strikingly new and comfortably formulaic.

So what does this mean for understanding The School for Scandal and its influence? From the cases of these plays and novels, we see that although The School for Scandal was not

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the first “school for” play, it would dominate the discourse and overwhelm other prior plays due to its sheer popularity, becoming a site of critique and commercial knock-off “brands”. That said, it is important to recognize plays like *The School for Fathers* that flourished before and alongside *Scandal*, to note the ways in which *Scandal* incorporates elements from these earlier traditions. *Scandal’s* further inclusion of the sentimental then transforms the “school for” brand into one that becomes adopted in prose forms more strongly, primarily in epistolary novels that followed Richardsonian or other sentimental playbooks, while transforming the notion of “school” into texts that become spaces of discipline, rigor, and hopes of social transformation, as well as reports of scandal that might cause even Lady Sneerwell to blush.
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