



Adam Smith in Love

F. E. Guerra-Pujol¹

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Is any resentment so keen as what follows the quarrels of lovers, or any love so passionate as what attends their reconciliation?

—Adam Smith (1980a/1795, 36)

Was Adam Smith speaking from personal experience when he posed those questions?² Here I report on my investigations into the matter.

An investigation into someone's love life is not the sort of endeavor that Smith would have ever undertaken. At the same time, if someone had ever produced such a report on, say, Montaigne or Grotius, we can imagine Smith glancing at it. The authors we most admire and learn from are human beings, and their character, personality, and private lives often figure into our understandings of their works. In the present report on Smith's love life, I do not turn to interpreting Smith's works, notably *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, which contains several substantive passages about romantic love and about lust and licentiousness.³ Instead, I presuppose that the reader has a natural and healthy curiosity about Smith's personal life, including his love life.

1. University of Central Florida, Orlando, FL 32816. I thank Alain Alcouffe and three anonymous reviewers for their comments, clarifications, and suggestions.

2. This quotation appears in Section 1 of Smith's essay on "The History of Astronomy." Although "The History of Astronomy" was first published in 1795 along with some other writings of Smith, it is more likely than not that Smith first wrote this particular essay during his young adult years prior to his appointment at the University of Glasgow in 1751 (see Luna 1996, 133, 150 n.3).

3. Smith's discussion of romantic love appears in Book 1, Section 2, Chapters 1 and 2 of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, while his rebuke of lust and licentiousness appears in his critique of the ideas of Bernard Mandeville in Book 7, Section 2, Chapter 4. It is also worth noting that Smith's philosophical analysis of romantic love has generated significant scholarly commentary. See, for example, Den Uyl and Griswold 1996; Dawson 2013; Harkin 2013b; Tegos 2019. No evidence exists to indicate whether any of these passages are autobiographical in nature; nevertheless, Smith's treatment of romantic love in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* seems consistent with a man who may have himself once fallen in love.

To begin with, previous scholars have adopted different stances when writing about Smith's love life. Some (Heilbroner 1999; Muller 1993; Ginzberg 1934; Mackay 1896; Haldane 1887) simply avoid the subject altogether. Others (Fay 2011, 144; Phillipson 2010, 136; Ross 2010, 227–228; Weinstein 2001, 8–10) entertain the possibility of love affairs, but do so reluctantly, either relegating their romantic speculations to a footnote (Stewart 1980/1811, 349–350) or merely alluding in passing to the possibility of Smith falling in love during his days as a travelling tutor in France (Ross 2010, 227–228; Buchan 2006, 77–78; Scott 1936, 404; Rae 1895, 212–213). By way of example, Edith Kuiper (2013, 69–70) devotes time and attention to “Smith's romantic relationships” and concludes that information about his love life is “scarce.” Gavin Kennedy (2005, 4–5) addresses the possibility of numerous “love interests” in the opening pages of his intellectual biography of Smith—but calls the possibility “speculation.” Dennis Rasmussen (2017, 131) refers to reports of Smith's dalliances as “rumors,” while Nicholas Phillipson (2010, 136) refers to these reports as “gossip.”

I do not fault Smith biographers for treating the gossip, rumors, and speculations lightly. But gossip and rumors might be true, and a careful look at all of the evidence is in order. Although his lifelong devotion to his intellectual life and to his widowed mother Margaret Douglas may have prevented him from getting married and forming his own household, the evidence shows that it is more likely than not that Smith fell in love on multiple occasions.

With a view toward systematizing the available evidence and extending the work of previous scholars, I will first put Smith's love life in historical context by describing the strict ecclesiastical regulation of sex in the Scotland of his youth. Next, I will reassemble the available evidence. Specifically, I shall present the following five pieces of primary evidence regarding Smith's loves:

- an obscure but intriguing end note that was first published in the second edition of Dugald Stewart's biography of Smith's life and writings;
- a private letter dated July 14, 1784, addressed to Stewart;
- a brief anecdote by Henry Mackenzie, a prominent Scottish lawyer and writer and a co-founder (along with Stewart) of the Royal Society of Edinburgh;
- a personal letter dated September 18, 1766, written by one of Smith's closest friends and confidants, containing details about Smith's love life; and
- a letter of introduction dated sometime in October 1766 authored in the hand of a possible love interest, Madame Marie-Jeanne Riccoboni.

In addition to the presentation of this body of evidence, I draw reasonable infer-

ences, make several conjectures, and consider a few hypotheses concerning Smith's sexuality and romantic attachments. I then conclude by speculating about Smith's desire to have his papers destroyed and about the possibility of a lost travel diary from his Grand Tour.

The ecclesiastical regulation of sex in the Scotland of Smith's youth

One of the most regulated aspects of Scottish life during Smith's lifetime was sex (Hardy 1978; Mitchison and Leneman 2001). Smith's world was one in which intellectual life and sexual activity were strictly monitored by Church elders, and nowhere was the regulation of sexual morality more oppressive than in Scotland.⁴ During Smith's lifetime, every parish in Scotland had its own ecclesiastic or church court. These parish courts or 'kirk sessions' had jurisdiction over every parishioner's private and public conduct, including over all matters of sexual morality. According to historians Rosalind Mitchison and Leah Leneman (2001), during Smith's lifetime the great majority of these church cases consisted of sexual matters.⁵ Mitchison and Leneman have also painted a detailed picture of the repressive nature of Smith's world and of the roving jurisdiction of these parish courts or kirk sessions over sex:

In the early modern period every parish in Scotland had its own church court (the kirk session) dealing with matters of conduct and morality. Drunkenness, sabbath breaking, slander, riotous behavior—all these came under the aegis of the session. However, partly through a sharper defining line between the roles of lay and of ecclesiastical jurisdictions, by the mid-eighteenth century the great majority of cases were of a sexual nature.... (Leneman and Mitchison 1988, 483)

Leneman and Mitchison (1988, 483) also emphasize "[t]he thoroughness with which these cases were pursued." By way of example:

The usual train of events was for an unmarried girl to be reported as 'with child' at a meeting of the kirk session and to be cited to appear at the next meeting. At that time she would be asked to name the man who had been

4. See generally Mitchison and Leneman 2001; Leneman and Mitchison 1987; 1988. For an overview of the legal and ecclesiastical regulation of sex in Scotland prior to the birth of Smith, see Hardy 1978.

5. Mitchison and Leneman (2001) survey over 8,000 church court records spread across 78 Scottish parishes from the mid-seventeenth to mid-eighteenth centuries.

guilty with her, and that man would in turn be cited to appear at a forthcoming meeting. Unless a case were in some way unusual, for instance if the man denied fornication with the woman, further enquiry would not normally be made into the circumstances surrounding the act. However, for some unknown reason, certain parishes in the Western Highlands and certain parishes in Fife often went on to ask where, when and how often intercourse had taken place. (Leneman and Mitchison 1988, 483)

Moreover, even marital sex in anticipation of marriage or ‘ante-nuptial fornication’ was a sin, though there was a disconnect between official Church doctrine and informal social norms on the matter of pre-marital sex.⁶

Thus, the sex lives of parishioners in the Scotland of Smith’s youth were strictly monitored by Church elders, and the penalties for fornication, adultery, and other such moral offenses consisted of shaming penalties, or “penance on the pillar” (Leneman and Mitchison 1988, 495). Although Smith’s theism and views of religion are unclear,⁷ a cautious and careful scholar of Smith’s stature would most likely not have wanted to incur such penalties as they would have derailed his prestigious academic career and lucrative private tutoring opportunities. These general observations must thus be kept in mind when exploring the question: Who were Smith’s loves?

The evidence

Rasmussen (2017, 131) reports of “occasional rumors, throughout Smith’s life, of potential romantic connections” but concludes that “none of them amounted to much.”⁸ Similarly, Ian Simpson Ross (1995; 2010), the scholar who has painted the most comprehensive picture to date of Smith’s possible amorous interludes (2010, 227–228), concludes that “the biographer can do little more with the topic of Smith’s sex life than contribute a footnote to the history of sublimation.” Information about Smith’s romantic encounters is admittedly “scarce” (Kuiper 2013, 62), but it is not non-existent. At least five separate pieces

6. For ordinary people, betrothal was a part of marriage, and as such it made sexual intercourse permissible. Church elders, however, generally did not approve of such ‘irregular’ marriage. For the Church, a marriage required the public exchange of promises in the presence of the parish minister (Gillis 1985, 52–54; see also Hardy 1978, chs. 4 and 5).

7. Or in the words of Margaret Jacob (2019, 128, 126), “Adam Smith kept his religious beliefs very private” and “[his] private religious beliefs will probably never be known.”

8. It is unclear whether the “them” in this passage refers to the rumors of Smith’s romantic connections or to Smith’s possible romances themselves. Harkin (2013a, 502) notes a “complete dearth of information” about Smith’s love life, while Weinstein (2001, 10) describes Smith’s romantic life as “virtually non-existent.”

of primary evidence mention or refer to Smith's love life.⁹

Dugald Stewart's "Note (H.)"

The earliest published reference to Smith's love life appears in 1811, 21 years after Smith's death, in the very last endnote—"Note (H.)"—of the third and fourth editions of Dugald Stewart's biographical essay "An Account of the Life and Writings of Adam Smith" (Stewart 1811a, 150; 1811b, 552).¹⁰ Stewart's enigmatic note reads in full as follows:

In the early part of Mr Smith's life *it is well known to his friends*, that he was for several years attached to a young lady of great beauty and accomplishment. How far his addresses were favourably received, or what the circumstances were which prevented their union, I have not been able to learn; but I believe it is pretty certain that, after this disappointment, he laid aside all thoughts of marriage. The lady to whom I allude died also unmarried. She survived Mr Smith for a considerable number of years, and was alive long after the publication of the first edition of this Memoir. I had the pleasure of seeing her when she was turned of eighty, and when she still retained evident traces of her former beauty. The powers of her understanding and the gaiety of her temper seemed to have suffered nothing from the hand of time. (Stewart 1980/1811, 349–350, my emphasis)

Ian Simpson Ross (2010, 227) describes this early love interest as "a Fife lady whom he [Smith] had loved very much," but neither Ross nor Stewart provides any additional evidence about the geographical location of this love affair; nor do they identify this woman by name.¹¹ Nevertheless, if this love affair occurred in the Kirkcaldy of Smith's youth, a small parish with a population around 1500 at the time (Heilbroner 1999, 46), it should not be impossible to identify the lady. I explore this matter further in the next part of this paper.¹²

9. More significantly, these five separate sources of information—these five historical witnesses, so to speak—all knew Smith personally or knew people who travelled in Smith's social circles.

10. An historical aside is in order. Dugald Stewart had originally written his biography of Smith in the early 1790s and had read his "Account of the Life and Writings of Adam Smith" to members of the Royal Society of Edinburgh on January 21 and March 18 of the year 1793. He then published his biographical essay in 1794 in Volume 3 of the *Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh*. A second edition of this essay was then published in 1795 in a book titled *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*. Neither the 1794 edition of Stewart's essay nor the 1795 one, however, contain any notes or any reference to Smith's love life. As a further aside, "Note (H.)" subsequently became "Note (K.)" when additional end notes were added to the 1858 edition of Stewart's biographical essay (see Ross 1980, 265–268, who provides a complete list of the first five editions of Stewart's biography of Smith).

11. Fay (2011/1956, 144) refers to her as the "Maid of Fife."

12. For what it is worth, Alain Alcouffe and Andrew Moore (2018, 15 n.18) identify Smith's "lady of Fife"

Regardless of the question of geographical location, Stewart is a credible witness to an attachment “well known” to Smith’s friends. Stewart knew Smith and many of Smith’s acquaintances.¹³ Also, to give the reader some idea of Stewart’s stature and sterling reputation, he co-founded—along with Henry Mackenzie, a Scottish lawyer, novelist, and writer whom we shall re-encounter soon—the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1783 and held the chair of moral philosophy at the University of Edinburgh for thirty-five years, from 1785 until 1820.¹⁴ Why would Stewart risk sully his own reputation (and that of his friend Smith) by reporting mere gossip or an unfounded rumor?

James Currie’s letter to Stewart in 1794 about a French connection

A next relevant item is a letter dated July 14, 1794, addressed to Stewart (Currie 1831, 317–320). This personal correspondence is signed by one James Currie (1756–1805), a medical doctor who was then residing in Liverpool, and is addressed to “Dugald Stewart, Esq.” This letter is important because it contains a second-hand account of a second Smith love affair.

Before proceeding any further, however, why did Currie write this letter to Stewart? Since Dugald Stewart’s biography of Smith was read to the members of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in January and March of 1793 and then appeared in published form a year later (1794), it is possible that Currie himself may have obtained a copy of this first edition of Stewart’s biography of Smith. Or, Currie may have heard about Stewart’s biography from someone who, in turn, had either heard or read Stewart’s account.¹⁵ Currie writes to Stewart with the intention of providing further proof of another affair involving Smith. Although this evidence consists of a second-hand report, Currie states that his source of information, a “Captain Lloyd,” spent considerable time with Smith and with Smith’s student Henry Scott, the Third Duke of Buccleuch,¹⁶ during their three-year Grand Tour in

as Lady Janet Anstruther, who “was renowned for her beauty and for her reputation as a flirt.” Dugald Stewart’s original “Note (H),” however, refers to a lost love “in the early part of Mr. Smith’s life,” while Alcouffe and Moore are referring to “a famous lady of Fife in the 1760’s,” when Smith would have been in his late 30s and early-to-mid 40s. Also, Lady Janet is said by one source to have died at the age of 76 in 1802 ([link](#)) so she may not have lived to see her 80th birthday.

13. Or in the words of Alain Alcouffe and Philippe Massot-Bordenave (2020, x): “Dugald Stewart... had the advantage of having been close to both Smith and witnesses to his life.”

14. For more information about Stewart’s contributions to the Scottish Enlightenment, see Haakonssen 1984; Rashid 1985; Wood 2000.

15. The first edition of Stewart’s biography of Smith was published in the third volume of *The Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh* in 1794.

16. For an in-depth biography of the Third Duke of Buccleuch, as well as a portrait and family tree, see

the mid-1760s.¹⁷ Currie writes:

Another source from which I have heard much of Dr. Smith, was the information of a Captain Lloyd, who was much in [Smith's] intimacy in France; and who passed the whole time that he spent at Abbeville with the Duke of [Buccleuch], in his society. Captain Lloyd was bred a soldier, but left the army early. He is one of the most interesting and most accomplished men I ever knew. (Currie 1831, 317–318)¹⁸

Currie says further: “I could perceive from many circumstances [that Smith and Lloyd] were on a footing of great intimacy; and many curious particulars of the Doctor's [Smith's] conduct he has related” (Currie 1831, 318). Among these “curious particulars” are the allegations that Smith “was deeply in love with an English lady” during his sojourn in Abbeville.¹⁹ Currie's report reads as follows:

Dr. Smith, it seems, while at Abbeville, was deeply in love with an English lady there. What seems more singular, a French Marquise, a woman of talents

Alcouffe and Massot-Bordenave (2020, 28–34); for a short biography of Duke Henry, see Valentine 1970, 2:773.

17. For a summary of Smith's travels in France see generally Ross 2010, ch. 13, as well as Rae 1895, chs. 12–14. (For a map and detailed timeline of Smith's extensive travels in the South of France, see also Alcouffe and Massot-Bordenave 2020, xiii–xiv, xviii–xix.) In summary, Duke Henry's stepfather, Charles Townsend, had appointed Smith to be the future Duke's private tutor and chaperone, and Smith personally supervised Duke Henry's Grand Tour from early 1764 through the fall of 1766. Duke Henry, a direct descendant of King Charles II of England and King Henry IV of France, was born into one of the wealthiest and most prestigious families in Scotland, and upon coming of age in September of 1767, Smith's pupil would become one of Scotland's largest landowners (see generally Alcouffe and Massot-Bordenave 2020, 28–34; Valentine 1970, 2:773). For a description of Duke Henry's landholdings and his lifelong friendship with Smith, see Bonnyman 2014.

18. Hirst (1904, 131) speculates that Captain Lloyd was “doubtless on a patriotic visit to the field of Crecy” when he reportedly met Smith and Duke Henry in Abbeville.

19. The precise date of Smith's stay in Abbeville and his reasons for visiting there are unclear. In an unpublished paper, I speculate that Smith may have travelled to Abbeville to witness the execution of the Chevalier de La Barre, who became the last man in Europe to be put to death for the crime of blasphemy. For detailed histories of this case, see Claverie 1992; 1994; Chassaing 1920. At the time, “l'affaire du Chevalier de La Barre” attracted attention across France—even attracting the sustained notice of the celebrated atheist and free-thinker Voltaire, who wrote not one but two accounts of the young de La Barre's prosecution and sentence (see Voltaire 2000/1766; 2000/1775. (Voltaire's first essay about this case is dated 15 July 1766, but some scholars believe this essay was actually written in 1767 or 1768.) For a summary of Voltaire's involvement in this notorious case, see Claverie 1994; see also Braden 1965, 58–65. Also, this case has become so central to the identity and history of modern France that many streets are named after the Chevalier de La Barre and many monuments were subsequently erected in his honor, including a statue standing at the gates of the famous Sacred Heart Cathedral in the Montmartre neighborhood of Paris. A picture of this particular monument to de La Barre is available online ([link](#)). Alas, this monument was taken down during the Second World War on orders of Marshal Philippe Pétain and melted down (Caulcutt 2020).

and *esprit*, was smitten, or thought herself smitten, with the Doctor, and made violent attempts to obtain his friendship. She was just come from Paris, ...[and she] was determined to obtain his friendship; but after various attempts was obliged to give the matter up. Dr. Smith had not the easy and natural manner of Mr. Hume.... He [Smith] was abstracted and inattentive. He could not endure this French woman, and was, besides, dying for another. (Currie 1831, 318–319)

Currie then concludes his July 1794 letter by offering to put Stewart in touch with Captain Lloyd. Alas, no evidence exists of further communication between Lloyd and Stewart or between Stewart and Currie.

Henry Mackenzie’s recollections of Miss Campbell

The next piece of primary evidence comes from Henry Mackenzie (1745–1831), a distinguished Scottish lawyer and popular novelist who, as I mentioned previously, co-founded, along with Stewart, the Royal Society of Edinburgh.²⁰ According to Ross (2010, 227), Mackenzie knew Smith personally and “was much in Smith’s company when he [Smith] lived in Edinburgh in the last twelve years of his life.”

Toward the end of his long and remarkable life, Mackenzie jotted down a series of personal recollections, hoping to have these memories published in a book of “anecdotes and egotisms,” as Mackenzie himself referred to them (Fieser 2003, 251). Mackenzie’s wide-ranging collection of anecdotes was eventually assembled by Harold William Thompson and published by Oxford University Press in 1927.²¹ Among other things, Mackenzie’s collection of anecdotes includes an entry with the title of “Smith and Hume in Love.” The first part of Mackenzie’s brief recollection about Smith is quoted in full below:

Adam Smith [was] seriously in love with Miss Campbell of _____ (the name is so numerous that to use it cannot be thought personal), a woman of as different dispositions and habits from him as possible. (Mackenzie 1927, 176; reprinted in Fieser 2003, 255, omission and parenthetical remark both appear in the original)²²

20. For a sketch of Mackenzie’s life as well as his contributions to Scottish letters, see Scott 1834; Drescher 2004; see also Fay 2011, 2; Valentine 1970, 2:567–568.

21. Thompson wrote his dissertation on Mackenzie. For an overview of Thompson’s life and work, see Caplan, French, and Mineka 1964.

22. About David Hume, Mackenzie goes on to write (1927, 176; reprinted in Fieser 2003, 255): “His friend, David Hume, was deeply smitten with a very amiable young lady, a great friend of mine, Miss Nancy Ord, but the disparity of age prevented his proposing to her, which he once intended. She was a great admirer of his, and he was a frequent guest at her father’s, where I met him, and made one of his whist party with

Who was “Miss Campbell of _____”? When exactly did Smith fall in love with her? And what, if anything, became of this romance? In a parenthetical remark, Mackenzie implies that “Campbell” was a common last name—a “name so numerous that to use it cannot be thought personal”—so that he is not giving anything away by identifying “Miss Campbell” as the object of Smith’s affections. That said, could Mackenzie’s Miss Campbell nevertheless be the same “young lady of great beauty and accomplishment” that Stewart refers to in Note (H.)—now Note (K.)—of his biography of Smith? Or could Mackenzie perhaps be referring to Lady Frances Scott (1750–1817), the daughter of Caroline Campbell Scott and Duke Henry’s younger sister? This conjecture is not far-fetched, especially considering Mackenzie’s observation that the woman was “of as different dispositions and habits from him as possible”—she being the daughter of a wealthy aristocratic family and he an absent-minded professor. Smith corresponded with Lady Frances on multiple occasions, and both lived at Dalkeith House during the fall of 1767.²³ Further below, however, I explain why it seems unlikely that the Miss Campbell in Mackenzie’s anecdote is the young Lady Frances.

Colbert’s letter of September 1766: a smoking arrow?

There is a fourth piece of primary evidence, a long French-language letter addressed to Smith and to his teenage pupil, Henry Scott, the Third Duke of Buccleuch.²⁴ The identity of the letter’s author is disguised under an abbreviated and jocular pseudonym: “Le Gr. Vic. Eccossois,” which stands for Grand Viccaire Eccossois (Smith 1987, 165). Nevertheless, it is most likely that this French-speaking “Great Scottish Vicar” was none other than Seignelay Colbert de Castle-Hill, also known as Abbé Colbert, a fellow Scotsman and Smith’s “chief guide and friend” during his extended 18-month sojourn in the South of France (Rae 1895, 176).²⁵ In one passage of this intimate letter, dated September 18, 1766,²⁶ the author

the young lady and some other person. I played well at the time and so did she. D. Hume was vain of his playing whist. That game has much of observation in it, and such games best suit a thinking man.”

23. At least three letters by Smith addressed to Lady Frances survive: nos. 97, 98, and 225 in Smith 1987. For details regarding Smith’s stay at Dalkeith, see Bonnyman 2014, 58–59.

24. At the time this contemporaneous letter was composed, Smith was serving as a private tutor and chaperone for Duke Henry—and for his younger brother Hew Campbell Scott as well, who had joined them in Toulouse subsequently (see Alcouffe and Massot-Bordenave 2020, chs. 1 and 2; Bonnyman 2014, ch. 2; Ross 2010, ch. 13).

25. It is also worth noting that Colbert would eventually be appointed the Bishop of Rodez (Alcouffe and Massot-Bordenave 2020, 63–64), but at the time of Smith’s travels in France, Colbert had been appointed as one of the vicars general of the diocese of Toulouse in the South of France. For an overview of Abbé Colbert’s life and career as well as an illuminating summary of his relationship to Smith, see Alcouffe and Massot-Bordenave 2020, 54–66.

26. Private correspondence dated September 18, 1766, located in the National Archives of Scotland,

refers in jest to some of Smith's romantic attachments, including one by name:

Et tu, Adam Smith, philosophe de Glasgow, heros et idole des high-broad Ladys, que fais tu, mon cher ami? Comment gouvernes tu La duchesse d'Anville et Mad. de Boufflers, ou ton coeur est il toujours epris des charms de Mad. Nicol et des apparent apparens que laches de cette autre dame de Fife, que vous aimees tant? (letter dated 18 September 1766, National Archives of Scotland, GD224/2040/62/3, quoted in Alcouffe and Moore 2018)

Translated, the passage is:

And you, Adam Smith, Glasgow philosopher, high-broad Ladies' hero and idol, what are you doing my dear friend? How do you govern the Duchess of Anville and Madame de Boufflers, where your heart is always in love with Madame Nicol and with the attractions as apparent as hidden of this lady of Fife that you loved. (as translated in Alcouffe and Massot-Bordenave 2020, 260)²⁷

This letter of 1766 is a crucial piece of evidence for two reasons. First of all, it is the first primary source to mention Smith's love interest in France by name, and secondly, it is the first source to pinpoint the geographical location in Scotland of Smith's first love. Does "this hidden lady of Fife" refer to the same woman mentioned in Note (H.) of Stewart's biography of Smith? Does "Madame Nicol" refer to the love interest in Abbeville mentioned in James Currie's hearsay report?²⁸ Either way, Colbert's testimony is a highly credible source by any measure. He became Smith's closest friend and confidant during Smith's sojourn in Toulouse (March 1764 to November 1765), and he even travelled with Smith and Duke Henry to Bordeaux and to other places in the South of France during this 18-month period (Alcouffe and Massot-Bordenave 2020, 216–217; see also Rae 1895, 179). Colbert got to know Smith the man, for the jocular and intimate tone of his letter suggests camaraderie and close connections, or in the words of Alain Alcouffe and Philippe Massot-Bordenave (2020, 217), the letter "is probably a private correspondence between friends who have established trust."

GD224/2040/62/3. The letter is reprinted in full in Alcouffe and Massot-Bordenave 2020, 260–261. The *Correspondence of Adam Smith* edited by Ernest Campbell Mossner and Ian Simpson Ross incorrectly dates the letter as "February 18, 1766" (letter 91 in Smith 1987). As a result, at least two scholarly sources (Buchan 2006, 77; Kuiper 2013, 76 n.11) incorrectly identify the date of this letter as February 18, 1766, instead of September 18, 1766. Also, Kuiper (2013, 76 n.11) incorrectly attributes the authorship of this letter to David Hume.

27. For slightly different translations of Abbé Colbert's letter of September 18, 1766, see Ross 2010, 227; Buchan 2006, 77; Smith 1987, 111).

28. Ross (2010, 227) reads the two letters in this way.

Riccoboni's letter of October 1766

The last piece of primary evidence is a letter from Madame Marie-Jeanne Riccoboni dated sometime in October of 1766.²⁹ Although Riccoboni is little remembered today, she was a highly accomplished actress in the Théâtre-Italien, located in the Hôtel de Bourgogne of Paris,³⁰ and an illustrious *femme de lettres*, one of the best-selling novelists of her day (Darnton 1998, 255). Riccoboni became acquainted with Smith during his extended residency in Paris in 1766.

Recall that Smith, along with Duke Henry and the Duke's younger brother Hew Campbell Scott, had returned to Paris in late 1765 or early 1766. At some point thereafter, most likely in the Parisian salon of the Baron d'Holbach,³¹ did Smith and Riccoboni become acquainted (Nicholls 1976, 16). Riccoboni described the impression Smith had made during their first meeting in a private letter dated May 21, 1766:

Two Englishmen have arrived here. One [David Hume] is a friend of Garrick's; the other is Scottish; my God what a Scot! He speaks with difficulty through big teeth, and he's ugly as the devil. He's Mr. Smith, author of a book I haven't read. I speak to him about Scotland, and especially about mountains. (quoted in Dawson 2018, 6)

Whatever Smith lacked in looks or vocal refinement, however, he must have made up with his intellect and personality, for Riccoboni quickly developed "a schoolgirl crush on the Scot" (Leddy 2013, 11). In a subsequent letter addressed to fellow actor David Garrick and dated sometime in October 1766, she reveals her feelings for Smith thus:

I am very pleased with myself, my dear Garrick, to offer you that which I miss very sharply: the pleasure of Mr. Smith's company. I am like a foolish young girl who listens to her lover without ever thinking of loss, which always accompanies pleasure. Scold me, beat me, kill me! But I adore Mr. Smith, I adore him greatly. I wish the devil would take all our philosophes, as long as he returns Mr. Smith to me. (quoted in Leddy 2013, 11; Dawson 2018, 10)

29. I wish to thank Alain Alcouffe for bringing this correspondence to my attention.

30. For a history of this celebrated theater, see Roy 1995.

31. Baron d'Holbach (Paul-Henri Thiry) was a philosopher, translator, and devotee of the French Enlightenment who played a prominent role in Parisian intellectual circles through his salon. The guest list of his salon included many of the most prominent intellectual and political figures in Europe (see LeBuffe 2020). For an introduction to the institution of the Parisian salon, see Goodman 1994.

Riccoboni's exuberant confession, however, may very well be an example of unrequited love or simply fondness and affection, as we have no further evidence of any affair between the two. Also, the month of October 1766—the month in which Riccoboni wrote the second letter quoted above—was a fateful moment for the Smith party in Paris, for that was the month that Duke Henry's younger brother died of fever in Paris and Smith and Duke Henry decided to cut short their Grand Tour. It thus seems possible that Riccoboni, writing immediately upon Smith's departure, might have been exaggerating her feelings.

As for Smith's words about Riccoboni, he mentions her in a 1766 letter to Hume (Smith 1987, 113), but, more significantly, Smith ranks her as a novelist among illustrious company in material he introduced in the sixth edition of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*: "The poets and romance writers, who best paint the refinements and delicacies of love and friendship, and of all other private and domestic affections, Racine and Voltaire, Richardson, Marivaux, and Riccoboni, are, in such cases, much better instructors than Zeno, Chrysippus, or Epictetus" (Smith 1976/1790, 143.14).

To sum up, the evidence presented thus far—Stewart's own testimony in his 1811 "Note (H.)"; Mackenzie's brief 1831 anecdote; and Colbert's intimate 1766 letter—all suggest that Smith had fallen in love on at least two or perhaps three occasions during his life, while additional evidence—Riccoboni's letter of October 1766 as well as Currie's secondhand report in his July 1794 letter to Stewart—indicate that Smith was not lacking in admirers during his sojourn overseas. But who were these ladies?

Inferences and conjectures

I will now draw the most reasonable inferences from the evidence presented above and propose several new concrete conjectures. Given my background in law—I graduated Yale Law School (Class of '93) and teach law and ethics at the University of Central Florida—I will borrow the common law's 'more likely than not' or 'preponderance of the evidence' standard used to try facts in civil cases. I argue that it is more likely than not that Smith did, in fact, fall in love on several occasions in his life.

Smith's first love?: The hidden lady of Fife

Stewart, the only biographer who knew Smith when he was alive, reports from his personal knowledge that it was "well-known to [Smith's] friends that he was for several years attached to a young lady of great beauty and accomplishment,"

that this attachment occurred “in the early part of Mr Smith’s life,” and that he (meaning Stewart) had once met the lady in person “when she was turned of eighty” (Stewart 1980/1811, 349, 350). Stewart’s *Account* is a professional and circumspect work, choosing its words carefully. Given these facts and their reputable source, I conjecture that this love, Smith’s first romantic attachment, would most likely have occurred or begun during the years 1746 to 1748, when the young Smith returned to his hometown, the small coastal community of Kirkcaldy, and lived with his mother for two years after having completed his formal studies at Oxford.³² Smith would have been between 23 and 25 years old at that stage in his life.

Further, given the small population in Kirkcaldy during Smith’s lifetime as well as the existence of detailed Church records for this small parish, it is my belief that historians should be able to identify the woman with some confidence.³³ For their part, Alain Alcouffe and Andrew Moore (2018, 15 n.18) have recently identified a reference to “this hidden lady of Fife” in Colbert’s September 1766 letter as Lady Janet Anstruther (1725–1802), who “was renowned for her beauty and for her reputation as a flirt.”³⁴ Is this the same lady referred to by Stewart (1980/1811, 349–350) in “Note (H.),” now “Note (K.),” in his first-hand account of Smith’s life? Alcouffe and Moore (2018, 15 n.18) speak of “a famous lady of Fife in 1760’s.” Stewart’s “Note (H.),” however, dates this love to “the early part of Mr Smith’s life.” Also, Stewart mentions in “Note (H.)” that he himself had the pleasure of meeting the lady “when she was turned of eighty,” but when exactly did this meeting occur? Stewart’s “Note (H.)” did not appear in published form until 1811, and Stewart himself states in “Note (H.)” that this lady “survived Mr Smith for a considerable number of years, and was alive long after the publication of the first edition of this Memoir,” so the meeting between Stewart and the Smith’s first love could have occurred as late as 1810. If she were 80 years old in 1810, then she

32. In the alternative, it is also possible—but in my view less likely—that Smith’s first love may have been a Glaswegian, a resident of the port city of Glasgow, where Smith lived for over 15 years—first from 1737 to 1740, when he was a student at the University of Glasgow, and then from 1751 to 1763, when he held a prestigious professorship there. (For a visual outline of Smith’s biography, see that produced by Liberty Fund ([link](#)); see also Wight 2002, App. A, 267–269.) I say, however, ‘less likely’ because Smith would have been very young during his first residency at the University of Glasgow (1737–1740). During the extended period of his second residency in Glasgow (1751–1763), Smith would have been financially independent and thus less dependent on his mother, so we cannot rule out the remote possibility of a lost love in Glasgow. Towards the end of his life, for example, Smith himself once referred to his years in Glasgow “as by far the happiest and most honourable period of my life” (see letter 274 in Smith 1987, dated November 16, 1787; see also Alcouffe and Massot-Bordenave 2020, 4, 12).

33. According to Heilbroner (1999, 46), Kirkcaldy boasted a population of only 1500 souls at the time of Smith’s birth in 1723. See also Jacob (2019, 124), who notes that Edinburgh, the largest city in Scotland during Smith’s lifetime, had only about 40,000 residents.

34. For a 1761 portrait of Lady Anstruther by Sir Joshua Reynolds, see [here](#). I thank Alain Alcouffe for bringing the existence of this beautiful portrait to my attention.

would have been born in 1730, seven years after Smith's birth in 1723.³⁵

For my part, I wonder whether Smith's mother, Margaret Douglas Smith, who was by all accounts a strong-willed and dominating mother (Kuiper 2013),³⁶ may have objected to any proposed union between her son and this first love. Of course, Smith and the woman may, themselves, one or both, have seen a union as impractical or unwelcome for any number of reasons. But I wish to explore now the specific conjecture of a maternal veto, more or less against the inclinations of the son. Such a conjecture is relevant given what we know about early modern Scottish society as well as Smith's lifelong devotion to his mother.³⁷

Margaret Douglas Smith belonged to the landed gentry, descending from a respected landowning family on her mother's side.³⁸ Adam Smith's complete financial dependence on his mother during this stage of his life must also be noted.³⁹ Smith was most likely largely financially dependent on the support of his widowed mother until his initial appointment in 1751, at the age of 27, as the Chair of Logic at the University of Glasgow.⁴⁰

Although parental consent was not a legal requirement in early modern Scotland (Leneman 1999, 673; Leneman and Mitchison 1993, 845, 847), it was generally expected that "children should have the consent of their parents, or those 'in loco parentis', to their marriage" (Hardy 1978, 531). The parental consent norm was so pervasive that it "could vary from marriages arranged by parents without consideration being given to the personal wishes of their children to marriages where the child made the selection of marriage partner and the parents were expected to accede to their choice" (ibid.). This parental consent norm makes all the more sense given the economic structure of Scottish society during Smith's lifetime, a neo-feudal and religious society in which property, especially property in

35. Given that Lady Janet Anstruther was reportedly born in 1725, Alcouffe and Moore's conjecture about her might be correct, after all. On the other hand, Dugald Stewart writes in his Note (H.) of 1811 that he "had the pleasure of seeing her [Lady Janet?] when she was turned of eighty," but as mentioned previously, Lady Janet is said to have died in 1802, aged 76.

36. For a portrait of Margaret Douglas, see [here](#).

37. Or in the words of John Rae (1895, 4): "His mother herself was from the first to last the heart of Smith's life." Smith's first biographer, Dugald Stewart (1980), also confirms the central role Margaret Douglas played in Smith's life.

38. See Özler 2012, 346–347; Kuiper 2013, 64. For his part, Smith's father—also named Adam Smith—had died a few months before his son Adam was born and had accumulated some wealth during his lifetime, having served as "Judge Advocate for Scotland and Comptroller of the Customs in Kirkcaldy" (Rae 1895, 1). By all accounts, Smith's father left a large income and considerable property to his young widow, Margaret Douglas Smith (see Özler 2012, 346; Kuiper 2013, 64).

39. By way of example, one of Smith's own cousins, Lydia Marianne Douglas, found herself in dire financial straits after she married a man against the will of her parents (see Ross 1995, 401).

40. A year or two after this initial appointment, Smith subsequently accepted the Chair of Moral Philosophy at the University of Glasgow (Heilbroner 1999, 46), a position he held until early 1764, when he departed on his Grand Tour with Duke Henry.

land, was held on a family basis.⁴¹

Smith's second love?: Madame Nicol

Next, I conjecture that Smith may have fallen in love yet again at some point during his Grand Tour (1764–1766) alongside Duke Henry (Henry Scott Campbell), the Duke of Buccleuch.⁴² In 1764 Smith was no advanced senior—he was 41 years old—and one of our primary sources—Colbert's letter of 1766—identifies a Madame Nicol as a possible love interest during Smith's travels in France.⁴³ More recently, Alain Alcouffe and Philippe Massot-Bordenave (2020, 262) have identified this potential love interest as a resident of Toulouse: “Madame Nicol, the wife of Capitoul Nicol.”⁴⁴ Was this the same woman with whom Smith is reported to have fallen in love in Abbeville in 1766? Is it possible that Smith had already fallen in love with her during his 18-month stay in the south of France?

The main outline of Smith's travels in France is well known (Ross 2010, Ch. 13; Rae 1895, chs. 12–14). After arriving in Paris on February 13, 1764, Smith and his pupil Duke Henry travelled to the south of France and established a base in the tranquil town of Toulouse, where they lived for many months.⁴⁵ They arrived in Toulouse in March of 1764, travelled across the South of France during the summer and autumn of 1764, and returned to Toulouse a second time in January of 1765.⁴⁶ At some point upon his return to Toulouse in early 1765, Smith wrote a letter to Charles Townsend, Duke Henry's stepfather and the man who was

41. Cf. Leneman (1999, 675), explaining why some Scottish couples resorted to clandestine marriages: “usually because the man was (or said he was) financially dependent on relations who would not approve of marrying at that stage in his life, or of his choice of wife.”

42. In setting off for France, the father of modern economics and the young duke were following an elite and well-established tradition, for the Grand Tour was a rite of passage of the sons of elite British families as well as the “‘crown’ of [their] education” (Cohen 2001, 129; Brodsky-Porges 1981, 178). Michèle Cohen (1992; 2001) has explored the educational and cultural ideals of the Grand Tour and has identified many deep “contradictions and ambiguities” of these tours. In addition, the sexual aspect of Grand Tours by young British aristocrats (and their tutors?) during this era should also not go unnoticed (see, e.g., Chapter 5 of Black 2011/1985, which is titled “Love, Sex, Gambling, and Drinking;” see also Black 1981, 660, 666 n.7; Black 1984, 413–414; Cohen 1992, 255–256).

43. In the alternative, could this Madame Nicol refer to the Marie-Louise-Nicole Elizabeth (1716–1794), the duchesse d’Anville? According to Mossner and Ross (in Smith 1987, 111 n.3), Marie-Louise-Nicole—with her son, the young Duc de La Rochefoucauld—met Smith in Geneva at the end of 1765.

44. Although Alcouffe and Massot-Bordenave (2020, 262) provide additional details about Madame Nicol's husband, Jacques Nicol de Montblanc, a wealthy Anglophile Frenchman who presided over the Mont Blanc Estate in the present Croix Daurade district of Toulouse, they do not provide any further details about Madame Nicol.

45. Smith and Duke Henry were subsequently joined by the Duke's younger brother, Hew Campbell Scott.

46. See the timeline in Bonnyman 2014, xiii–xiv; see also chs. 4 and 5.

financing their Grand Tour, requesting permission to relocate to Paris.⁴⁷ Was Smith hoping to leave Toulouse to avoid public scrutiny or to arrange a *rendezvous* with Madame Nicol, i.e., away from her husband, Capitoul Nicol?

Either way, Charles Townsend granted Smith's request in a letter dated April 22, 1765,⁴⁸ but two points are worth noting. First, Smith and Duke Henry did not leave the South of France for good until the fall of 1765,⁴⁹ so for some unknown reason Smith was apparently in no hurry to leave Toulouse, after all (Alcouffe and Massot-Bordenave 2020, 285). Did this change of itinerary have anything to do with the aforementioned Madame Nicol?

Secondly, Townsend warns his stepson in his April 22, 1765 letter “against any female attachment” (Ross 1974, 184). The relevant part of Townsend's April 22 letter reads as follows:

If you go much into mixed company, as I suppose you will, let me warn you against any female attachment. Your rank & fortune will put women of subtle characters upon projects which you should not be the dupe of, for such connexions make a young man both ridiculous & unhappy. Gallantry is one thing; attachment is another; a young man should manifest spirit & decorum even in this part of his character, & preserve his mind entire & free in lesser as well as greater things. (Ross 1974, 184)

Townsend's warning to his stepson Duke Henry was not an academic or abstract admonition, for a fellow contemporary with personal knowledge of Townsend's habits and dispositions, Lady Louisa Stuart (1985/1827, 38), describes Duke Henry's stepfather as “a man of pleasure, a libertine.” In any case, could Townsend's warning “against any female attachment” have been meant for Smith as well?

Sex in the City of Light: The Paris theater scene

Previously, we presented evidence regarding Madame Riccoboni. It is still

47. According to Alcouffe and Massot-Bordenave (2020, 283), it was Smith—not his pupils Henry and Hew—who wanted to relocate from Toulouse to Paris. Alcouffe and Massot-Bordenave even speculate that Smith was becoming “impatient.”

48. This letter is reprinted in full by Ross (1974, 182–184) and Alcouffe and Massot-Bordenave (2020, 284–285).

49. Smith and Duke Henry, along with the Duke's younger brother Hew Campbell Scott, eventually returned to the City of Lights sometime during the month of December of 1765, where they resided until the month of October of that same year, until Hew's tragic and untimely death. Cf. Ross (1995, 209): “it has been assumed that Smith and his pupils [Hew and Henry] travelled to Paris from Geneva in December 1765.” I thank Jonathan Wight (2020) for helping me clear up the actual date of Smith's return to Paris. See also the timeline in Alcouffe and Massot-Bordenave 2020, xiii–xiv.

worth mentioning that Riccoboni, an accomplished actress and novelist, and Smith, an admirer of the stage, were by all accounts avid theater and opera fans, especially during Smith's stay in the City of Light.⁵⁰ Indeed, "it is very likely Smith took recommendations from Riccoboni as to which theatrical performances to attend" (Dawson 2018, 8), and so it is not far-fetched to imagine to them attending a play or opera or concert together.

Many Smith scholars have failed to mention that these theatrical venues were the center of an elite Parisian sexual marketplace, the famed *dames entretenues* or "kept women" of French high society (Kushner 2013). Famous for their talent, glamour, and beauty, these *femmes galantes* were the most highly sought-after women of pleasure in all Europe, models and actresses who "earned their living by engaging in long-term sexual and often companionate relationships with men from the financial, political, and social elites, known as *le monde* (high society)" (ibid., 3). This sultry scene overlapped directly with the world of the theater.⁵¹ Although not all theater women were kept mistresses or *femmes galantes*, "[i]t was widely understood that any woman in the Opéra, and to a lesser degree the other theater companies, was a *dame entretenue*, or at least wanted to be" (ibid., 31). The world of theater was the center of this high-end sex market because "being on the stage greatly increased... 'sexual capital,' the desirability of a mistress and hence the prices she could command for her services" (ibid., 5), and the theater district of the French capital was teeming with high-end brothels and places of ill repute.⁵² But there is no evidence to indicate that Smith himself partook of any such transactions.

"Miss Campbell" is probably not Lady Frances Scott Campbell

The most tenuously conjectured love affair would be one during Smith's extended stay at Dalkeith House in late 1767. On this theory Smith may have carried out a short-lived love affair with the younger sister of his former pupil Henry Scott,⁵³ Lady Frances Douglas (1750–1817), née Campbell Scott, whose

50. By way of example, John Rae (1895, ch. 14) and Ian Simpson Ross (2010, ch. 13), scholars who have produced two of the most comprehensive biographies of Smith, both commented on Smith's fondness for the opera during his second sojourn in Paris.

51. Kushner (2013, 4–5): "About a fifth of the kept women under police surveillance at midcentury worked in the theater. Most were in the Opéra or its school, as dancers and singers."

52. In the words of Kushner (2013, 110), "Many brothels were in the center of town, on the rue St. Honoré or nearby, making them convenient for men leaving the Opéra."

53. Recall that Smith was Duke Henry's private tutor during their Grand Tour from February 1764 to October 1766. As a further aside, Edith Kuiper (2013, 70) incorrectly identifies Lady Frances as Duke Henry's elder sister. In fact, Lady Frances was four years younger than her brother (see Alcouffe and Massot-Bordenave 2020, 32–33; Bonnyman 2014, 1).

mother's maiden name was Campbell and whose other brother, Hew, was referred to as Hew Campbell Scott.⁵⁴ Lady Frances would have been 17 years old at the time (Stuart 1985/1827, 54); as a result, such an affair, if it really occurred, would be one between a man of 44 and young woman of 17. Lady Frances did not wed until 1783.⁵⁵

Also worth noting is that Smith may have first met Lady Frances nine years earlier, when Duke Henry's stepfather Charles Townsend "visited Scotland in the summer of 1759 with Lady Dalkeith [Caroline Campbell Scott] and her daughter [Lady Frances]" (Ross 1974, 179). Among other places on his Scottish itinerary, Townsend went to Glasgow "to make the necessary arrangements for the period five years ahead when the duke would...complete his studies by travelling on the Continent with his tutor" (Ross 1974, 179).

Of particular relevance to this conjecture is Mackenzie's recollection about "Smith and Hume in Love," in which he partially identifies by name a "Miss Campbell of _____" as the object of Smith's romantic affections. Could this "Miss Campbell" be a veiled or indirect reference to Lady Frances, whose mother's maiden name was also Campbell? If so, her prominence and subsequent marriage in 1783 to Lord Archibald Douglas might explain Mackenzie's reluctance to identify her by name.⁵⁶

Duke Henry, along with his sister Lady Frances and other members of the Buccleuch family, returned to the Buccleuch estates in Scotland and took up residency at Dalkeith House in September of 1767 upon Duke Henry's coming of age.⁵⁷ According to one scholarly source (Bonnyman 2014, 59–60), Smith resided

54. The mother of Lady Frances and her brothers Henry and Hew was Caroline Campbell Scott, Lady Dalkeith (Ross 1974, 178). For more details about Caroline Campbell and her family background, see Bonnyman 2014, 9, 12–19.

55. See Alcouffe and Massot-Bordenave 2020, 290. When she married in 1783, at the age of 33, Lady Frances became Lord Archibald Douglas' second wife (see Jill Rubenstein's biography of Lady Frances in Stuart 1985/1827, 11). For a short biography of Lord Douglas, see Valentine 1970, 1:258. As a further aside, Lady Frances, upon reaching the age of 21, was entitled to an income from her family of £600 per year (see Stuart 1985/1827, 59). To put this monetary amount in perspective, Smith's compensation for serving as the Duke's private tutor during their Grand Tour from 1764 to 1766 consisted of an annual salary of £500, plus travel expenses, and a pension of £300 a year thereafter (see Mackay 1896, 237; Heilbronner 1999, 48; Bonnyman 2020, 41).

56. Recall that Mackenzie did not jot down this particular passage about "Miss Campbell" until the end of his life—the late 1820s or early 1830s. Also, as an aside, in the very same passage in which Mackenzie mentions "Miss Campbell" as the object of Smith's affections, Mackenzie also writes about David Hume's love life, but instead of partially disclosing or withholding the identity of Hume's romantic attachment, as he does with Adam Smith, Mackenzie fully identifies Hume's love interest by name as "Miss Nancy Ord" (Mackenzie 1927, 176; reprinted in Fieser 2003, 255).

57. Dalkeith House (or Dalkeith Palace) was the Buccleuch family's principal residence in Scotland and is located only four miles south of Edinburgh, where Smith lived the last 12 years of his life. This neo-classical palace was commissioned and built in the early eighteenth century and then refurbished in preparation for

at Dalkeith House in the fall of 1767, a stay that coincides with Lady Frances's residency there.⁵⁸ Moreover, Smith's stay at Dalkeith House lasted at least two months, from mid-September to mid-November 1767.⁵⁹ Thus the possibility of a love affair between Smith and the young Lady Frances during this time, though unlikely, is not altogether inconceivable.⁶⁰ This conjecture, however, is doubtful. In his brief recollection, Mackenzie says that "Miss Campbell" was "a woman of as different dispositions and habits from him as possible." That he would make such a remark without also remarking on other extraordinary aspects of an affair with Lady Frances would be odd, unless he purposely wanted to disguise her identity. In that case, however, why identify her as "Miss Campbell" at all? In a parenthetical remark immediately following the words "Miss Campbell of _____" (see quoted text in Mackenzie 1927, 176, reprinted in Fieser 2003, 255), Mackenzie says that "the name is so numerous that to use it cannot be thought personal." This comment further suggests that "Campbell" tells little or nothing about the woman's identity. Also worth noting here is the reference to "*Miss* Campbell" instead of *Lady* or *Dame* or some other signifier of aristocratic distinction. Perhaps this reference to "Miss" points us away from Lady Frances.

That said, however, two additional points are worth making regarding the relationship between Lady Frances and Smith. Firstly, among the letters of Smith that were not lost or destroyed are three addressed directly to Lady Frances, dated October 15, 1766, October 19, 1766, and March 17, 1783 (Smith 1987, letters 97, 98, and 225). The two of 1766 precede Smith's visit to Dalkeith, and concern

Duke Henry's first visit to Scotland in honor of his reaching the age of majority (see Bonnyman 2014, 10, 57–58). For an engraving of this palace as it appeared in the early eighteenth century, see [here](#).

58. In her memoir of her cousin and close friend Lady Frances, Lady Louisa Stuart (1985/1827) confirms that Lady Frances had been growing up in London under the watchful eye of her stepfather Charles Townsend. Lady Stuart (1985/1827, 48–50) also describes the circumstances surrounding Lady Frances's return to Scotland.

59. For further details regarding Smith's stay at Dalkeith, see Bonnyman 2014, 58–59. According to Ross (1974, 180), Heilbroner (1999, 50), and Kuiper (2013, 76, n.14), Smith may have also visited Dalkeith House and the Buccleuch estates on several subsequent occasions. None of these sources, however, provide any actual evidence in support of this proposition, so it is unclear whether Smith, in fact, ever returned to or stayed at Dalkeith House following his initial two-month stay in late 1767.

60. For a biography of Lady Frances written by a contemporary of hers, see Stuart 1985/1827. Among other things, Lady Louisa Stuart's intimate memoir of Lady Frances's life and circle of family and friends paints a very unflattering picture of Lady Frances's mother; in addition, Stuart (1985/1827, 45–49) describes Lady Frances's stepfather Charles Townsend as extremely possessive: "unwilling ever to have her out of his sight." Stuart's intimate memoir also highlights Lady Frances's worldliness and awareness of adult double standards (see especially *ibid.*, 54, 58). Given these facts, along with her stepfather's (Charles Townsend) sudden death in August of 1767, perhaps it is not far-fetched to imagine a romance or fling between her and Smith. For a portrait of Lady Frances by Sir Joshua Reynolds when she was still a child, see [here](#). As a further aside, Lady Frances was an accomplished artist in her own right; a collection of her works is available from Tate ([link](#)).

the melancholy news of the death, in France, of Campbell Scott, brother of both Lady Frances and the Duke of Buccleuch. The third letter, of 1783, is brief and somewhat curious. It is thought to be authored by Smith, but it refers to Smith in the third person. Specifically, it thanks Lady Frances for having sent to Smith “his paper on upon Italian and English verse” and promises “to send her a more perfect copy as soon as he has completed his plan” (Smith 1987, 265). It would seem that Smith had shared his essay on Italian and English verse, which is contained in the modern edition of *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*.

Secondly, Lady Louisa Stuart (1985/1827, 90–93)—who wrote an intimate memoir of her cousin and best friend, Lady Frances—mentions toward the end of her memoir that she (Lady Frances) may have had a mysterious lost love of her own. Or in the melodramatic words of Lady Louisa herself: Lady Frances had at one time in her life fallen “prey [to] one of those fixed, deep-rooted torturing passions” (ibid., 90). Could this lost love have been Smith?

For context, at this point in her Lady Frances memoir, Lady Louisa is writing about Frances Scott’s decision to marry a widower, Lord Archibald Douglas.⁶¹ According to Lady Louisa, Lady Frances confided to her:

...at one time I could not doubt that he was extremely inclined to make me his proposals, and would have done so on a very little encouragement. But no—Oh no!—I had just—only just enough reason left to see that this must not be—that we must never marry—it would have been madness to think of it—And I withstood the temptation like a famished wretch refraining from the food he knows to be mingled with poison. (Stuart 1985/1827, 91)

Who is the “he” to whom Lady Frances is referring to here? Could it be none other than Adam Smith? Alas, not only did Lady Frances fail to reveal the identity of this lost love to Lady Louisa; she explicitly forbade Lady Louisa “to guess who it was” (Stuart 1985/1827, 93).⁶² Nevertheless, although Lady Louisa reports that Lady Frances never gave her “the least clue to discover who this person was” (ibid., 92), Lady Louisa does identify three possible clues in her memoir of Lady Frances, none of which rule Smith out.

The first clue is a temporal one. Writing from the vantage point of 1781 or 1783,⁶³ Lady Louisa (1985/1827, 90) says that this love affair originated many years

61. Lord Archibald and Lady Frances wed on May 1, 1783 (see Stuart 1985/1827, 95). Lady Frances was Lord Archibald’s second wife.

62. Lady Louisa further states: “I confess I had an eager desire to know [the identity of Lady Frances’ lost love]; but so far from gratifying my curiosity, [Lady Frances] besought me... to repress it, desist from enquiring, and forbear to even form a conjecture” (Stuart 1985/1827, 92).

63. Although this part of the memoir deals with “the momentous year 1783” (Stuart 1985/1827, 85), the year Lady Frances wed Lord Archibald Douglas, Lady Louisa also mentions an anecdote from the year

ago but “not less than twelve or fourteen” years. In other words, Lady Frances’ mysterious love affair occurred in the late 1760s or early 1770s, right after Smith’s stay at Dalkeith house in the fall of 1767.

The next clue involves the wavering religious beliefs of Lady Frances’ lost love. According to Lady Louisa (Stuart 1985/1827, 91), this lover was “an unbeliever, almost to the extent of atheism.”⁶⁴ Although Smith’s private religious beliefs are unknown, since he was careful during his life to keep his views about religion to himself, it is not inconceivable that Smith confided his private views to someone he was romantically attached to. (Indeed, perhaps it was Smith’s secularism—especially in an age of religious conformity—that prevented his love interests from going any further.)

The last clue approaches closest to Smith. According to Lady Louisa:

The only thing [Lady Frances] ever let fall which might have led to [a conjecture] was a circumstance mentioned by chance in speaking of Mr. Townshend [Lady Frances’s stepfather]. She had told him, she said, that she felt quite sure she should never be in love—the persuasion of most sensible young people before their hour is come—“Yes, you will” answered he gazing at her pensively—“Your brother [Duke Henry] will come from abroad, and amongst his young friends your eye will single out some man destined to be master of your fate”—“Good heavens!” added she with energy, putting her hand to her forehead—“One would actually suppose he had been endowed with the spirit of prophecy.” (Stuart 1985/1827, 92–93)

Although Smith could not be considered one of Duke Henry’s “young friends,” Smith did return with Duke Henry from abroad, resided at Dalkeith House with Duke Henry and Lady Frances in the fall of 1767, and was by all accounts (Bonnyman 2014; Alcouffe and Massot-Bordenave 2020) Duke Henry’s closest friend and confidante at the time.

To sum up our conjectures thus far: all the available pieces of evidence, scarce as they are, as well as the most reasonable inferences that can be drawn from these sources, point to the existence of two or perhaps three love interests. One is Stewart’s mysterious maiden of Smith’s youth, a time and place in which people’s love lives were strictly monitored by Church elders and in which parental consent for marriage was the norm. Another is Colbert’s Madame Nicol in Old Regime France, the France of Louis XV, literary salons, and the *demimonde*. A third is “Miss

1781 involving Lady Portarlington (ibid., 92).

64. For the reader’s reference, here is the complete passage in which this clue appears (Stuart 1985/1827, 91): “One particular [Lady Frances] mentioned [to Lady Louisa], that in conversation which passed between them [between Lady Frances and her lover], he had frankly avowed himself an unbeliever, almost to the extent of atheism.”

Campbell,” though that could be anyone, including possibly the Lady of Fife.

Additional conjectures

For thoroughness, we may also consider two additional conjectures about Smith’s sexuality and love life. One is that Smith was romantically involved with his unmarried cousin Janet Douglas. Miss Douglas had moved into Smith’s household as early as 1754 (Özler 2012, 348) and lived under the same roof with Smith and Smith’s mother—Douglas’s aunt, Margaret Douglas Smith—until her death in 1788 (Kennedy 2005, 5).⁶⁵ Given the decades that they lived in the same household, this thought is something that a nosy sleuth must ponder,⁶⁶ though there is no evidence in support of the speculation beyond these circumstantial facts. Indeed, the lack of evidence for what would be such a protracted and proximate intimacy constitutes strong evidence against the idea.

A final hypothesis is that Smith was not attracted to women.⁶⁷ Daniel Klein has pointed out to me in conversation how some of the surviving correspondence between Smith and Hume (see especially Smith 1987, letters 70, 88, 92, and 121), as well as the remarkable frequency in Smith’s works of subtle, playful, inside-joke-like textual connections to Hume’s works, suggests a ‘bromance’ and brotherly tenderness between them, although Klein clarifies to me that he does not mean to suggest a sexual relationship. In a letter dated February 22, 1763, Smith invites Hume to visit him in Glasgow thus: “Tho you have resisted all my Sollicitations, I hope you will not resist this” (Smith 1987, 139). And in a letter dated September 1765, Smith writes to Hume:

In short I have a very great interest in your settling at London, where, after many firm resolutions to return to Scotland, I think it is most likely I shall settle myself. Let us make short excursions together sometimes to see our friends in France and sometimes to see our friends in Scotland, but let London be the place of our ordinary residence. (Smith 1987, 161)

65. Alas, scholars have been unable to confirm Janet Douglas’s year of birth (Kuiper 2013, 62).

66. Weinstein (2001, 10) says that Miss Douglas and Smith were “quite close.” Weinstein, however, does not suggest that Janet Douglas and Smith were romantically involved—only that Smith “seemed to have good relationships with women as his time and stature would have allowed.” For what it is worth, Voltaire, who Smith admired, is alleged to have had an affair with his niece, Madame Denis, during their younger years (see, for example, Alcouffe and Massot-Bordenave 2020, 171 n.8). Nevertheless, such types of incestuous relationships were strictly forbidden by the Church of Scotland (Hardy 1978), and during most of Smith’s lifetime the sex lives of Scots were strictly monitored by the local ‘kirk sessions’ or ecclesiastical courts of each parish (Mitchison and Leneman 1998).

67. Regarding speculation that Smith may have been gay, both Edith Kuiper (2013, 70) and Gavin Kennedy (2005, 4) conclude that it is unfounded; see, also, a fascinating and thoughtful discussion on the Reddit website [r/AskHistorians](https://www.reddit.com/r/AskHistorians) ([link](#)).

Absence of evidence or evidence of absence? Smith's lost diary and the destruction of his private papers

Smith's letters

Is there any evidence of a love affair written in Smith's own hand? In an early essay Smith wrote on the "Imitative Arts" (1980b/1795, 190), Smith states: "It is a lover who complains, or hopes, or fears, or despairs." Also, some references to romantic love appear in various places in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, but on his deathbed Smith specifically instructed his literary executors, Joseph Black and James Hutton, to destroy his unpublished manuscripts, correspondence, and other private papers (Ross 2010, 404–405). In fact, Smith may have insisted on the destruction of his private papers and letters as early as 1773 (Phillipson 2010, 279), when he had made his first will and had appointed his friend David Hume his executor. Nevertheless, despite Smith's desire to have his private papers and personal letters destroyed upon his death, a small sample of Smith's correspondence still survives, including three letters addressed to Lady Frances. According to Alcouffe and Massot-Bordenave (2020, x), in all "only 193 letters written by [Smith] and 129 addressed to him remain."⁶⁸

The key question is, Why did Smith want to destroy his private letters and papers as early as 1773, only a few years removed after his extended sojourn in the South of France (1764–1765), his ten-month residency in the City of Lights (1766), and his two-month stay at Dalkeith House (1767)? Most scholars, like Ross (2010, 405), point to "Smith's prudence" and "his concern for his literary reputation" as the motivating factors.⁶⁹ Alcouffe and Massot-Bordenave (2020, 133) write: "it is important to underline also that the place ascribed to the judgement of posterity is found in the arrangements which he [Smith] to make prior to his death; to make his personal papers disappear and thus to control the image which posterity would later preserve of him."

68. Most of these remaining 322 letters (304 to be exact) are reprinted in Smith 1987. Also, according to W. R. Scott (1940, App. II 272, 273): "there is just a possibility that a large body of documents relating to Smith may still be in existence" and "there remain opportunities, even at this late date, for remedying the present meagre knowledge of Adam Smith's life." Tracking down any new Smith letters addressed to Lady Frances, however, will be a daunting task. Lady Frances, for example, eventually married Archibald Douglas in 1783, and the couple had six children (see Jill Rubenstein's biography of Lady Frances, in Stuart 1985/1827).

69. Likewise, a reviewer has suggested to me that Smith simply wanted to avoid any airing or public scrutiny of his private views about "religion, politics, his correspondence with Hume, etc."

The lost travel diary

It has been reported that Smith brought back no less than three trunks of documents from his extended travels in France (Alcouffe and Massot-Bordenave 2020, 204). Also, according to Jeremy Black (1981, 657), the custom of “keeping a travel diary of some form” among the British during their Grand Tours was “relatively widespread.” In addition, Smith scholar W. R. Scott (1940, App. II 273) has speculated that Smith or his pupil (or both?) may have kept a travel diary during their extended travels in the South of France and Paris in the mid-1760s (see also Ross 2010, 248 n.2; Rasmussen 2017, 286 n.61). In an unfinished appendix to his survey article titled “Studies Relating to Adam Smith during the Last Fifty Years,” Scott (1940) specifically refers to the existence of this lost diary,⁷⁰ which was sold in the 1920s to an unknown buyer from an Edinburgh bookshop owned by one Mr Orr:

Contrary to the report of Dugald Stewart, Mr. Orr, a bookseller of George Street, Edinburgh, maintained that Adam Smith did keep a diary when he was in France, and that he had had it in his possession and had sold it for cash to an unknown customer who was believed to be from one of the Dominions, or perhaps from the United States. (Scott 1940, App. II 273)

Scott (1940, 273) further reports in his survey article that he was personally able to interview the employee who had made the actual sale and that this employee “was clear as to the...particulars”: the fact that Mr Orr’s bookshop had at one time a copy of Smith’s travel diary and had sold it for cash to an unknown buyer.⁷¹ Scott further speculates about the identity of this unknown buyer:

It may be guessed that the purchaser cannot have been an economist, else he would surely have printed extracts from a manuscript of such interest. It may be he was a collector of autographs, in which case the tracing of the diary must be largely a matter of chance. (Scott 1940, App. II 274)

Perhaps this lost diary, if it exists at all, would contain details of Smith’s personal life during his travels in France.

Given the absence of strong evidence, Ross (2010, 228) famously concluded

70. W. R. Scott (1868–1940), the Professor of Political Economy at the University of Glasgow, was a prolific writer and an authority on the life and works of Smith (see Coase 1993, 355). Given these impeccable credentials and his record of scholarship, Scott is a credible source of information.

71. Alas, this employee’s memory as to the date of the sale was foggy. Specifically, Scott (1940, 273) reports the employee “was doubtful about the date of the transaction. In 1935 he thought it was over ten years earlier, and last year [1939] he put it back to ‘nearly twenty years ago.’”

that “the biographer can do little more with the topic of Smith’s sex life than contribute a footnote to the history of sublimation.” But is this sparse record evidence of absence? The little available evidence shows that most likely Smith fell in love at least twice, if not three times: that he had a romantic bond with the Lady of Fife and quite possibly one with Madame Nicol. That Mackenzie’s “Miss Campbell” accounts for an actual and separate affair is less likely. Beyond that, who knows! Or, as Smith himself is once reported to have asked, “Am I beau to no one but my books?”⁷²

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72. Quoted in Wight 2002, 292. For a slightly different formulation of this possibly apocryphal quotation, see Smellie 1800, 297 (quoted in Rae 1895, 329; Heilbroner 1999, 45): “I am a beau in nothing but my books.”

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About the Author



F. E. Guerra-Pujol received his J.D. from Yale Law School and teaches business law and ethics at the University of Central Florida. His areas of research include markets, property rights, and the history of legal ideas. Dr. Guerra-Pujol is the author of many scholarly papers and book chapters including “Gödel’s Loophole,” “Buy or Bite?,” and “The Poker-Litigation Game,” and he is currently writing a book on probability and the law. His email address is fegp@ucf.edu.

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