

# “THE TIES THAT BIND US TO EACH OTHER”: MASCULINITY IN SARAH HARRIET BURNEY’S *OEUVRE* <sup>1</sup>

Carmen María Fernández Rodríguez<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:** Sarah Harriet Burney (1771-1844) was a very popular woman writer at the turn of the nineteenth century rivalling her half-sister, the celebrated Frances Burney. This article analyses the male protagonists in Sarah Harriet’s *oeuvre* within the framework of eighteenth-century gender studies. The authoress gives a new turn to the tradition of the feminized hero who is often associated with the brotherly figure. Strongly resembling the heroine, Sarah Harriet’s male protagonists compete with the brother for feminine affection and become an instrument for echoing discomfort and articulating a radical criticism of patriarchy.

**Key words:** Sarah Harriet Burney, British literature, gender studies, eighteenth century.

**Título en español:** “The ties that bind us to each other”: masculinidad en la obra de Sarah Harriet Burney

**Resumen:** Sarah Harriet Burney (1771-1844) fue una escritora muy popular a finales del siglo diecinueve rivalizando con su hermana, la admirada Frances Burney. Este artículo se centra en los protagonistas masculinos en la obra de Sarah Harriet dentro del marco de los estudios de género del siglo dieciocho. La autora reformula la tradición del héroe feminizado que generalmente se asocia a la figura fraternal. Los protagonistas masculinos de Sarah Harriet se parecen mucho a la heroína, compiten con el hermano por el afecto femenino y se convierte en un instrumento para expresar el descontento y articular una crítica radical del patriarcado.

**Palabras clave:** Sarah Harriet Burney, literatura británica, estudios de género, siglo dieciocho.

## 1. Introduction

Sarah Harriet was the youngest daughter of the musicologist Dr. Charles Burney and his second wife, Elizabeth Allen. In 1781, after her mother’s death, she was sent to Switzerland, where she soon became fluent in French and improved her music skills. A lover of Italy and one-time resident of Rome and Florence, Sarah Harriet admired Maria

---

<sup>1</sup>Date of reception: 26/08/2013

Date of acceptance: 12/11/2013

<sup>2</sup>Researcher, Research group G000274: “Literatura y cultura inglesa moderna y contemporánea”, Universidade da Coruña, Spain; ✉ cfernandez@udc.es.

Edgeworth and Jane Austen –she punctually received copies of Austen’s productions from the publisher Henry Colburn (Clark 1995: 22; Clark 1997: lxi)<sup>3</sup>– and always wrote with an economic aim in mind and perhaps to escape from everyday life. Frances’s half-sister also worked as a governess and companion of a young invalid (Clark 2003: 42-3); and, apart from nursing his father in his last years, she helped him to transcribe his manuscripts. The people who knew Sarah Harriet always remarked on her special personality. For instance, she was befriended by the literary critic Henry Crabb Robinson: “[...] her rather prickly personality seemed rather odd in a woman but was appreciated by men of learning who could savour her sense of humour and provide the intellectual stimulation that she craved” (Clark 2003: 42-3).

In the literary realm, “little Sal” –as she was familiarly called– composed five works:<sup>4</sup> *Clarentine* (1796), which was followed by the epistolary novel *Geraldine Fauconberg* (1808); *Traits of Nature* (1812); *Tales of Fancy* (1816-20) –including *The Shipwreck* and *Country Neighbours; or The Secret*– and *The Romance of Private Life* (1839) –consisting of *The Renunciation* and *The Hermitage*. Despite losing the audience’s appeal afterwards, Sarah Harriet enjoyed as much popularity as Frances did during the nineteenth century, and her merits cannot be underrated. Several novels by Sarah Harriet ran to second editions, they were translated into French and German and pirated abroad (Clark 2000: 122). Nowadays, while the Burney Studies has not stopped growing<sup>5</sup>, it is time to turn attention to Sarah Harriet, whose productions have been brought to light thanks to modern scholars such as Lorna J. Clark, the editor of Sarah Harriet’s correspondence and last volume. Yet, there is much work to do regarding this authoress’s discovery as a chronicler of woman’s life in pre-Victorian Britain, and one researcher has gone further stating that in Sarah Harriet’s *oeuvre*, “there is a strong

<sup>3</sup> Sheila Graham-Smith hints at the connection between Edgar in *Clarentine* and Mr. Knightley in *Emma*. Austen found *Clarentine* “full of unnatural conduct and forced difficulties” (2009: 16), but she read the novel three times. As for Sarah Harriet, she enjoyed *Pride and Prejudice* more than *Emma*. She admired the originality, the plot, dialogues and characters of the former (Clark 1997: lxi; Graham-Smith 2006: 18).

<sup>4</sup> There was possibly a sixth production, *Julia* (Graham-Smith 2008: 6-7).

<sup>5</sup> They are represented by an international association (The Burney Society) with regular conferences in Europe and America and three yearly publications (*The Burney Journal*, *The Burney Letter* and *The Burney Bulletin*). For a panorama on the subject, see Fernández, 2010: 173-4. Besides, it is worth remarking the recent publication of *The Journals and Letters of Susan Burney: Music and Society in Late Eighteenth-Century England*. Ed. Philip Olleson. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012.

advocacy of a woman’s right to love whom she will, regardless of society or the convention which demands a woman must love only on command, which allies Sarah Harriet Burney with Wollstonecraft and Hays” (Trabelski 2006).

Gender studies tend to focus on female protagonists while men are usually seen as secondary in narratives by women writers. However, when authoresses represent their world and anxieties, they are also establishing a dialogue with the opposite sex, which is interpreted by Frantz and Rennhak as an attempt to construct their own realities, imagining desirable alternatives from a woman’s perspective and as significant as their female characters (2010: 2-3). Sarah Harriet draws on two literary conventions: like other eighteenth-century authoresses (Eliza Haywood [*Miss Betsy Thoughtless* 1751] or Elizabeth Inchbald [*A Simple Story* 1791]), she introduces the lover as father figure, but she also recreates brotherly friendship or the close bond between brothers and sisters with erotic overtones throughout the story, as it happens in Aphra Behn’s *Love Letters between a Nobleman and his Sister* (1683). My reading of Sarah Harriet’s courtship novels shows that men cannot be reduced to two contrasting literary masculinities. Sarah Harriet’s heroes turn into another literary device to voice her uncomfortable positioning about patriarchy which debilitates men and women. Like other novelists, Sarah Harriet manipulates narrative conventions to express conscious disappointment and questions the systems of male dominance founded upon a belief in inherent gender opposition.

## 2. Dupes of Insincerity: *Clarentine* and *Geraldine Fauconberg*

Both Frances’s *Camilla* and Sarah Harriet’s *Clarentine* appeared in 1796 though they were not promoted in the same way (Clark 1997: lxii). In the former, the male protagonist risks his happiness because he relies on Dr. Marchmont<sup>6</sup> whereas in *Clarentine* it is female actions that provoke the heroine’s unhappiness. The plot has some affinities with *Evelina* (1778) since the novel deals with the daughter of an

---

<sup>6</sup>Marchmont was Edgar Mandlebert’s tutor in Frances’s *Camilla*. He provokes doubts on the boy and almost makes him break up his relationship with Camilla.

aristocrat who was disinherited by his father after marrying a French woman of good family in one of his travels. Young Delmington left his wife and daughter in the care of his eldest brother, and when Clarentine's mother dies, her cousin, Young Somerset, compromises himself to look after her, which becomes “a sacred and irrevocable engagement, which he meant religiously to fulfil” (Burney 1796: I, 19). Although the girl is brought up by her relatives the Delmingtons; she feels a bit detached from the family until she unexpectedly meets her aunt, the emigrée Madame D'Arzele, and her husband. As the narrative advances, two men are sexually interested in the heroine: Mr. Etham, a young rich man in the line of Frances's coxcombs, and Edgar Delmington, who confesses his love to Clarentine (Burney 1796, II: 262). The protagonists are not united until the nature of Mrs. Hertford's relationship with Somerset is discovered and Somerset finally declares his feelings in a letter explaining that her “inexplicable coldness” prevented him from being sincere (Burney 1796, III: 185).

As feminist critics have pointed out, a broad repertoire of sentimental texts, sermons and conduct books by James Fordyce (*Sermons to Young Women* [1766] or Thomas Gisborne (*An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* [1797]), among others, were available to the authoresses of this period. All of them reflected a patriarchal world in which, as Eve K. Sedgwick has explained, feelings were sacrificed for wealth and hierarchical relationships between men established some interdependence and solidarity allowing them to dominate women (1985: 3). “Brother” had a distinctive meaning in literature by women in line with the change taking place in the family structure towards what Michael Foucault calls “an obligatory locus of affects, feelings, love” (1978: 108). As a matter of fact, eighteenth-century fiction registered a movement from an axis of kinship based on consanguineal ties or blood lineage to an axis based on conjugal and affinal ties of the married couple, so the biological family to which one is born gradually became secondary to the chosen family constructed by marriage (Perry 2004: 2).

William Somerset is a passive, irresolute hero as Clarentine is convinced of his goodness, but also aware that he loves another woman. At the end of the novel, the reader discovers that Somerset still wants to be more than a guardian, lover and friend

(Burney 1796, III: 186). The protagonist faces the *femme fatale* Mrs. Hertford, an improper acquaintance for a good young lady (Burney 1796, II: 12-4), who knowingly cultivates Clarentine’s friendship. The girl thinks Mrs. Hertford loves Somerset, and, thanks to her manoeuvring, the lovers avoid confessing their feelings. Furthermore, Mrs. Hertford visits Clarentine and asks her about her feelings since she has already insinuated to Somerset that Clarentine is in love with him (Burney 1796: II: 281). From that moment on, the lack of communication causes a great deal of suffering to the heroine who cannot distinguish if she feels pity or brotherly fondness for Somerset: “Why does his conduct so strangely militate against his language? and why, when his looks are all tenderness, are his actions all duplicity? Is there either rectitude or principle in seeking to conciliate my affection after his own is gone?” (Burney 1796, III: 13).

For Clark, fraternal regard is more important than passion in *Clarentine* (1997: lviii), and Somerset’s image as Clarentine’s brother recurs throughout the narrative because he aspires to be considered someone “who will act in [her] behalf with the zeal of a brother” (Burney 1796, I: 50). Should she ever see herself as an outcast, she would not be alone. Somerset gives Clarentine some advice and supports her with “affectionate brother’s kindness” (Burney 1796, II: 192) to the point that, when Eltham bothers her, he acts in his capacity of guardian. Clark comments on Somerset and Clarentine’s relationship:

[...] the fraternal relationship is split: a beautiful orphan inspires an unreciprocated passion in one cousin while herself cherishing a preference for another [. . .] lest this fictional romance be cited as actual proof of incest (as it has been done), it is worth remarking that the sense of warm fraternal regard is more convincingly portrayed than the supposed passion. (1997: lviii, also Clark 2008: xii-xiii)

The hero’s generosity towards the dispossessed French immigrants D’Arzeles, who represent the D’Arblays living in rural seclusion, moves the heroine, and before his avowal, Somerset sets out for the West Indies. He is not definitely an idealized character and exemplifies the eighteenth-century rhetor hero who will later evolve to a quieter man in Austen’s style, that is, a protagonist with unspoken powers who neither says nor

writes much. As Glen McGlish explains, “Austen very often employs the narrative strategy of ellipsis to pass over the moments when abiding attachment is professed and marriage plans are developed” (1965: 154). Sarah Harriet follows a similar pattern.

On the other hand, it is thanks to Mrs. Hertford that Clarentine discovers that she is jealous and loves Somerset:

Long had she most clearly discerned what were the designs of Ms. Hertford herself; and long had she beheld with astonishment her artful and persevering endeavours [sic] to captivate and attach him. Floating between hope and fear; conscious that her own heart was gone, and doubtful what would be the result of her rival's schemes, it had, however, been but of late that she had seriously apprehended that would be successful; every hour now confirmed her in this opinion. (Burney 1796, II: 198-9)

Perfectly aware of the limits of feminine behavior, and once Somerset is in absolute possession of his father's fortune, Mrs. Hertford formulates a plan which is frustrated: “as to his [Somerset's] fortune only, his rank in life, and independance [sic] she aspired, the feelings to which she might be indebted for his hand, were to her indifferent” (Burney 1796, II: 263).

The *dénouement* of the story takes place when the moral narrative voice, Mrs. Denbigh, is given some letters addressed to Somerset containing an account of Mrs. Hertford's life and considerably altering his image of the lady: “To have been made the dupe myself of her insincerity, I am vain enough to think, argues nothing to my disparagement: sorry should I be ever to find myself a match for such consummate duplicity” (Burney 1796, III: 146). Some sheets of the letters remained unopened, so the truth is never revealed to readers and Somerset insists on knowing about a private interview between Sophia Delmington and Clarentine who articulates a forceful feminist assertion: “Are you aware, [. . .] that by thus reminding me of your privileges you put me upon my guard, and teach me the necessity of being cautious?” (Burney 1796, III: 262).

*Geraldine Fauconberg* bears a strong resemblance to Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813). In spite of its success, the book was not well received by all the Burneys: James, for instance, called it “London Milk & Water” (Letter to Charlotte

(Francis) Barrett, 1 August 1811, cited in Clark 1997: 130). There is a dedication addressed to Lady Crewe, the daughter of Fulke Greville, one of Charles Burney's patrons, and there is also an important technical difference regarding this second production because it is an epistolary novel with many correspondents. Fairytale-like, it features two families, the Lesmores and the Archers, who plan their children's marriage when they are born. The protagonists face two problems. On the one hand, Ferdinand Lesmore, is, like Somerset, too cold to communicate his feelings to Geraldine, as it is exposed in the letter opening the book. His sister Julia describes this type of men with a quote in French: “En parlant à une personne qu'il aime, il a l'air vif et gai; très-froid avec les étrangers; il traite durement ceux qu'il méprise; n'a rien à dire à ceux qui lui sont indifférents, et devient tout-à-fait imbécile quand on l'ennuie” (Burney 1808, I: 14) and even thinks there is no love between them: “these sentiments [...] they are terribly rational and dispassionate. Not a shadow of love peeps forth from amidst their sententious gravity. Perhaps he was too proud to confess all the regret he experiences; or, perhaps, he looks forward, in Mrs. Neville, to a compensation for the insensibility of Miss Fauconberg” (Burney 1808, I: 142).

Some time later, when Julia describes Ferdinand as the cold phlegmatic philosopher, Clarentine's face is tinged with indignation (Burney 1808, II: 202). Nevertheless, female decorum forbids her to be expressive, and Ferdinand is persuaded that Clarentine is in love with Lichtmere, Ferdinand's rival in the novel. On the other hand, Reverend Archibald Newenden works as a Marchmont-like influence over Ferdinand. No matter how much Ferdinand appreciates Clarentine's purity, benevolence and charming conversation; he is afraid of forming a serious attachment and needs the Reverend's advice at the same time that Geraldine is jealous and afraid of behaving like an irresponsible person. In fact, jealousy is one of the traits in Sarah Harriet's protagonists. The Reverend explains: “You do Miss Fauconberg no injury, my dear Lesmore, if, after a candid and impartial investigation of her character, you resign all pretension to her hand. She knows not that you have been encouraged to aspire to it; and, should you finally renounce it, need never receive the mortifying information” (Burney 1808, I: 23).

Misunderstandings are the key of the novel. Both the hero and the heroine are placed in similar difficulties, which is interpreted by Clark as an attempt to envision a more general goal: “Greater than the need for romance is her [Sarah Harriet’s] need to discover a family, to surround herself with kin, to confirm a sense of belonging and construct a social persona” (Clark 2007: 49). While Ferdinand is persuaded that Geraldine – “a mere romping, pretty girl; one whose manners and dispositions were unformed; whose tastes were childish, and whose turn of mind, as yet dormant or unfixed, might, when free scope was given to its display, prove itself capricious, arrogant, or unfeeling” (Burney 1808, I: 24) – cannot be his wife, she becomes afraid of him: “I am always acting a part in his presence, and, conscious of appearing to disadvantage, I disgrace myself by a sort of school-girl awkwardness, an imbecile shamefacedness, that would only be pardonable in a damsel suddenly transplanted from the dairy to the drawing room” (Burney 1808, I: 46). In any case, Ferdinand is obsessed with a pivotal figure in the narrative. The widow Mrs. Neville corresponds with him and leaves the door open for a sexual liaison. However, he soon feels an object of total indifference and realizes that it is Geraldine whom he loves. Believing that Colonel Courtville is courting Geraldine, Ferdinand later confesses his state of mind to his confident Julia who tells him to “Persevere in little quiet assiduities; let not her indifference tempt you to show any impatience or ill-humour” (Burney 1808, I: 285).

Mrs. Neville is aware of Ferdinand’s faults: “He looks with too much contempt upon weak, frivolous and ordinary characters. This intolerance of disposition *he* will conquer; his understanding is too good, and his nature too generous, to allow its permanent root” (Burney 1808, II: 178) and requires him to be sincere and to deal with her as a brother (Burney 1808, II: 279). The happy ending is facilitated by her producing a letter explaining the nature of their relationship. After discovering that Ferdinand does not love her, Mrs. Neville claims that he must be respectful to Geraldine: “I feel assured you will be actuated by genuine principles of integrity, wholly distinct from every other consideration” (Burney 1808, II: 284). Some time later, she cannot understand why the couple is not yet married despite Ferdinand’s “brotherly interest” (Burney 1808, III: 147) towards Geraldine. The girl changes her attitude



towards the middle of the story, when she meets a gentleman called Basil who has some mental health disorder and passionately loved Geraldine’s mother. He prays the heroine not to do to Ferdinand what her mother did to him: drive him to desperation. Basil’s words resemble Geraldine’s consciousness:

has your treatment of him been, upon every occasion, perfectly consistent? Have you never raised him to the summit of all earthly felicity by your smiles, then sunk him into an abyss of despondency by your reserve? Do you not [. . .] owe to him your life? Has he not endured for you equal mental and bodily torture? Is he not bowed down to the earth by your unpitying rigour? – Oh, Geraldine! can you call yourself wholly blameless when such are the facts to be alleged against you? (Burney 1808, III: 269)

Geraldine confesses to Mr. Glenoswald how she fell in love with Ferdinand, and after many vicissitudes, Ferdinand finally opens his heart and declares “the fervent admiration, the deep-rooted, and unalterable attachment, with which [his] whole soul is penetrated, – on which depends the fate of every future hour of [his] existence” (Burney 1808, III: 322). As Sarah Harriet wrote novels, the female world comes to the fore and the father acquires more relevance in the narrative (Fernández 2013). However, from *Traits of Nature* onwards, she will introduce a new element which will greatly destabilise the relationship between the protagonists.

### **3. An Enemy at Home: *Traits of Nature***

Sarah Harriet’s fiction invariably hinges on an unprovided woman who seeks paternal recognition and, after some drawbacks, marries the man she loves. *Traits of Nature* is the only story featuring a married hero and a myriad of relatives, a consanguinal brother included. For Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, the brother and sister tie had a strong basis in the late nineteenth century: they shared economic resources as well as family origins. The relationship was stronger from the nostalgia surrounding common childhood experience. The late age at marriage meant that they continued their shared life as young adults. They had lived through family crises and

were often implicated in each others' courtship and career adventures (2002: 348). For George E. Haggerty, in an age of sensibility, male relations are eroticized or fraternalized and a sibling relation is the only conceivable male-female relationship that is neither abusive nor victimizing (1998: 26). However, this is not the affective bond existing between Adele and her brother Julius, but between Adele and her lover Algernon, and it is important to remind that Sarah Harriet's life was marked by the scandal of having maintained a possibly incestuous relationship with her brother, Captain James Burney, who provided the model for the hero in some works (Burney 2008: xiii) and was described by Henry Crabb Robinson as “a fine, noble creature, gentle with a rough exterior as became the associate of Captain Cook on his voyage around the world, and then literary historian of all these acts of navigation” (Newman 2011: 6). Charles Burney always objected to James and Sarah Harriet's “improper Attachment” and the couple even lived together for some years after James's separation from his wife (Clark 2008: xii-xiii, xxxvii).

*Traits of Nature* deals with Adele Cleveland, who is neglected by Mr. Cleveland believing that the girl is like her mother, the sentimental Lady Rosalvan. Adele's father prohibits her wife to have any contact with Adele who has been brought up by her grandmother and then goes to live with the Hampdems. In that household, she meets Algernon Mordington, an orphan who unexpectedly becomes an heir and has an unhappy marriage. At the end of the novel, Mr. Cleveland unrealistically accepts his daughter after the mediation of a cousin who explains to the old patriarch that Algernon's passion is sincere.

Childhood friendship between Adele and Algernon is reinforced by the fact that both children were neglected by their parents. Problems begin with the appearance of Julius, Adele's brother and one of Algernon's opponents in the novel. In eighteenth-century fiction, only a brother could compete for the love of a woman with her husband and arouse as powerful feelings as the hero: “a family obligation from an earlier era increasingly honoured more in the breach than in the observance, brotherly love came to be a conventional ideal in fiction and it was eroded in life by competing demands of conjugal families and the cash requirements of the new economy” (Perry 2004: 144).

Algernon describes Julius as “the most presuming, consequential and incorrigible little varlet” (Burney 1812, I: 160) at Eton, and he will compete with the hero for Adele’s esteem. First, Julius accuses Adele of playing the coquette (Burney 1812, II: 195) and he later says that he has heard Algernon condemn the offspring of divorced parents (Burney 1812, III: 80-1). When they meet again, Adele functions as a surrogate mother for Algernon’s children, but cannot help being cold towards Algernon, who insists on his passion with a metaphor:

Adele’s mind is, to me, like a book once learnt by heart, but afterwards lost sight of, and nearly forgotten, – every page, as I reperuse [sic] it, recurs familiarly to my memory, and brings back the liveliest recollection not only of its own contents, but of the time and place where they were first studied, and of the circumstances under which they were so warmly admired. (Burney 1812, III: 239-40)

He declares his feelings (Burney 1812, IV: 132) and then wants to have an epistolary correspondence with her and not to be engaged until a year has passed. Letters are important elements in Sarah Harriet’s fiction and one of Adele’s letters is intercepted by Mr. Cleveland, who forbids all contact between the lovers because there has been a duel between Julius and Algernon: “it was scarcely to be expected, the hand which has been dyed in the blood of the brother, could ever, with my approbation, be united with that of the sister” (Burney 1812, IV: 221). As a consequence, Julius decides to collaborate with his cousin Talbot to soften Mr. Cleveland’s disposition towards Algernon: “We thoughtlessly, or rather unconsciously, ‘weave the warp, and weave the woof’ of our own destiny; but, in discovering the fatal misapplication of our industry, the stings of self-reproach constitute, perhaps, the severest portion of our wretchedness” (Burney 1812, V: 127). Julius finally reforms and becomes Algernon’s brother-in-law, confirming the endogamy of the novel. In the following volume, Sarah Harriet shows she believes in relationships on equal grounds and places characters in very similar situations.

#### 4. Partnership and the power of prejudice in *Tales of Fancy*

*The Shipwreck* shares many traits with Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). Sarah Harriet Burney feminises the genre by introducing a romantic plot and directing all her attention to social prejudice and female virtue. Two English ladies, Lady Earlingford and her daughter Viola, find themselves on an island in the Indian Ocean as the only survivors of a shipwreck and try to make a new life for themselves according to European standards. One of their companions on the island is Fitz Aymer, regarded as an unprincipled man. Following her mother's advice, Viola passes for her cousin Edmund and soon falls in love with Fitz Aymer who gradually reveals his worth. When Lady Earlingford dies the victim of an infectious fever, Viola and Fitz Aymer have to rely on each other for support and eventually manage to leave the island. Back in England, Sir William, Viola's father, gives his sanction so that Viola may marry Fitz Aymer.

Viola's father has always hated Fitz Aymer, and the latter says that “antipathies *are* to be overcome, if the individual by whom they are entertained is but willing to combat against them” (Burney 1820, I: 109). An additional barrier between the lovers is the costume the heroine wears, which functions as a symbol of her mother's prejudices. Viola grows more and more intimate with Fitz Aymer. Like James, he tells of his military campaigns (Burney 1820, I: 165-6) and his background, justifying his behaviour by saying that he was a spoilt boy but not an immoral person (Burney 1820, I: 162). Later he explains exactly why Sir William had a bad opinion about him: people thought he had had a love affair with a married woman and that he had given her some money (Burney 1820, I: 285-301).

Clark has repeatedly presented Sarah Harriet's works as family novels, which is applied to the brother and sister relationship in the *The Shipwreck*, where “shared adversity serves as a formative experience, leading Fitz Aymer to vow his love as ‘a faithful and devoted brother’” (2001: 77). This partnership manifests itself after Lady Earlington's death, when Fitz Aymer impresses on Viola that they must stay together to “participate in every sorrow, and reciprocate every alleviation” (Burney 1820, I: 206).

After defending Viola against pirates, the hero is afraid of losing a “brother’s place” in her affection (Burney 1820, I: 268), and he declares his love:

our misfortunes will have united us by a thousand links; a thousand affecting remembrances will dwell on our minds such as can never connect us with any other individual: we shall have been partners in calamity: we shall, by innumerable good offices, have drawn closer the ties that bind us to each other: we shall have participated in the same hopes, the same fears, the same privations and he same sufferings. Oh, then, beloved of my heart! at whatever period our deliverance may be effected, let us still be participators of the same destiny! (Burney 1820, I: 269)

He is jealous of Viola’s fiancé, Mr. Melbourne, but Beauchamps reassures him since this will test Viola’s love: “If she is capable of ceasing exclusively to love you now, there can be no question that she would have been capable of the same inconstancy had your hands been already joined” (Burney 1820, I: 339).

Elaine Showalter argues that women wish they were men and their heroes are not so much their ideal lovers as their projected egos: “When women write, they identify with the power and privilege of the male world, and their heroes enable them to think out their own unrealized ambitions” (1977: 137). A limited experience of dependency, frustration and powerlessness –in short, of womanhood– was a healthy and instructive one for a hero (Showalter 1977: 150-2). In Sarah Harriet’s productions, heroes and heroines have a common feature: both suffer a lot in the narratives and both are deprived of parental ties –*Tales of Fancy* is an exception: Tremayne has a mother and Lady Earlingford is also alive. Sedgwick points out that marriage is one of the structures for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power (1985: 25) and, for Claude Lévi-Strauss, the relationship of reciprocity which is the basis of marriage is established between men by means of women (1969: 116), just as it happens in the other narrative in *Tales of Fancy*.

*Country Neighbours* focuses on Blanch Stavordale, the supposed daughter of George Stavordale and Aurelia Castelli, an Italian opera singer of low extraction. Blanch falls in love with an aristocrat, Mr. Horace Tremayne, and heir of Sir Reginald Touberville. She instantly faces the opposition of Lady Earlsford, Horace’s mother, who

would prefer a wealthy heiress for her son, such as his cousin Jane Touberville. The young couple can marry once it is discovered that Blanch is really Jocelyn Stavordale's legitimate daughter. Tremayne has an accident and is rescued by Blanch. Like in *Traits*, the hero temporarily disappears from the narrative and has to explain his actions to win the heroine's hand.<sup>7</sup>

When Blanch's mother's story is revealed, Tremayne still wants to conquer her heart: “No man who heard you repeat the precepts you have just uttered, would have the presumption to urge you to depart from your conviction of their justice: he would only [...] redouble all his efforts to annul every obstacle which forbade him to aspire to you” (Burney 1820, II: 354). Their love is stronger than injustice and prejudice: “[people] cannot affect our individual happiness; they cannot disunite our hearts, nor cancel our mutual vows” (Burney 1820, III: 195).

As Lawrence Stone explains, at the end of the eighteenth century, guardians began to promote marriages founded on free choice because anything was preferable to coercion. Men were supposed to make the first move in relationships, although brothers, sisters and friends could act as go-betweens, and usually alerted a young man of the woman's inclination (1977: 217-9). Companionate marriages gained ground over *marriages de conveniance*, and Tremayne explains to the narrator, the spinster Anne Stavordale, that Lady Earsford not only wants him to marry Jane but she also controls him: “as a son [...], I find myself unfitted to act in direct defiance of her known wishes” (Burney 1820, III: 343). In another conversation, he says he loves Blanch, but finding her surrounded by admirers makes him feel depressed until at a ball she surprisingly says “Consider me as engaged to you” (Burney 1820, III: 40). Tremayne envisions his future life with Blanch as a representation of the perfect domestic life and the pre-Victorian ideology of the family:

---

<sup>7</sup> There are many similarities between this story and Maria Edgeworth's *The Absentee* (*Tales of Fashionable Life*, Second Series, 1812). See Fernández 2011.

to gather round her, and to enjoy in partnership with her, the society of the friends we mutually love; to introduce her to the acquaintance of the persons eminent for genius and talents; to indulge with her in the delight of travelling –of making known to her the beauties of her paternal country, and of visiting, with her, every celebrated spot in the land that gave birth to her mother. (Burney 1820, III: 349)

*Country Neighbours* exemplifies how the feminocentric romance could be fused with sensationalist elements and satire (Clark 2003: 165) and it contains some feminist vindications. On the one hand, the heroine herself dislikes Tremayne’s attitude and paternalism: she finds him too cold and correct (“the very pink of courtsey” [Burney 1820, III: 23]). She objects to his behaving as “an offended but conscientious Guardian, who, though he disdains to converse with his disgraced ward, thinks it his duty to keep his eye upon her, and to preserve her from breaking her neck!” (Burney 1820, III: 23). On the other hand, Anne asks Tremayne not to play with Blanch’s heart:

Beware then that you call not its affections vainly forth! – Proceed upon certain grounds; and hazard not, without well considering what you are about, the dangerous experiment of awakening, perhaps only to disappoint, the sensibility of an ardent, animated girl, whose friends confide her tranquillity of your honour; and whose misery, should you be compelled to resign her after securing her regard, you would be the first to detest yourself for having caused! (Burney 1820, II: 343)

Also, Anne points out to Blanch that she has been a coquette with Lord John and is afraid that now she will reject Tremayne: “the dread of being considered as the impediment to her lover’s prosperity, might influence her to become the destroyer of his and her own happiness” (Burney 1820, III: 239-40). Like in *Traits of Nature*, in Sarah Harriet’s last production the brother is also a handicap, but this time the plot is complicated by a frustrated quest of origins and the mysterious murder of the brother. The authoress advances towards a more direct way to represent the characters’ thoughts, the free indirect style, which allows us almost unlimited access to their psyche.

## 5. Erasing the Brother: *The Romance of Private Life*

Sarah Harriet’s *tour de force* saw the light eighteen years after James’s death and it is composed of two very different tales. *The Renunciation* hinges on the experiences of Agnes Danvers, aged eleven, who is kidnapped to lead the life on the dead aristocrat Lucy de Vere until a painful discovery forces her to leave home and support herself as an artist in Italy. The mystery surrounding her existence is unravelled at the end of the story: in order to keep his first wife’s patrimony, Mr. Wharton kidnapped a girl who could pass for the aristocrat Lucy de Vere, Mr. Wharton’s dead stepdaughter. The protagonists cannot get married until the mystery surrounding Georgiana, the hero’s half-sister, is solved and they have an uncle’s sanction since Mr. Wharton finally obtains Agnes’s forgiveness and flees to America where he marries a wealthy widow.

After spending four years in London, Mr. Wharton carries Agnes to Paris and rejoices at contemplating the growing intimacy between his son, Harry Cowley, “the boldest of the bold” (Burney 2008: 41), and Agnes. Despite sharing pastimes, Harry does not please Agnes: “Disdainful of others, consequential and sarcastic, the expression of his countenance, handsome as it was, had often offended her, –and the mistrust she had imbibed of the goodness of his temper, confirmed the prepossession she entertained against him” (Burney 2008: 43). Harry turns out to be Agnes’s half-brother, and she bravely justifies her refusal when he confesses his regard and faces a negative. The scene is followed by a detailed analysis of Harry’s reaction by means of free indirect speech:

“Has any part of my preceding conduct, Harry, given you cause to think I was in love with you? [...] You cannot, in justice, accuse me of having played the coquette; neither you can, with justice, object to my exercising *the right I possess of maintaining my own independence*”. (Burney 2008: 43-4, my italics)

Never had the young man received such a lesson, and never till this moment had he been so sensible of the high value he attached to Agnes’s favour! Had she unhesitatingly accepted him, as he concluded would be the case, he might not have known how absolutely she reigned in his heart; – advantages too easily obtained are apt to lose their importance: – but now, in danger of utterly losing her, every attraction she possessed, every emotion of tenderness she had ever inspired, assumed a stronger colouring; in short, the man, who had proposed himself with



the easy security of a coxcomb, quitted her, when repulse, with the impassioned feelings of a lover. (Burney 2008: 44)

The brother's rival in *The Renunciation* is Mr. Walsingham, who is first introduced stating that he would *never* marry Lucy de Vere simply because she is an heiress (Burney 2008: 69). Agnes is very attracted to him and a family friend, Bertha, makes her realize that she has gone too far by corresponding with Harry just because she needed to sincerely communicate with somebody. Bertha explains the consequences of compromising her reputation and who is behind this plan:

Mr. Wharton most particularly, has ill fulfilled, in this affair, the duties of a guardian. He, who knowing your inexperience, ought to have been the first to preserve you from committing any imprudence, he it is, rather than either Harry or yourself, to whom the fault of this correspondence must be attributed. Break it off, dearest, whilst it is yet time; unless, indeed, you think it possible that the tired fidelity of your lover, aided by your own compassion for him, may eventually, soften your feelings in his favour. (Burney 2008: 76)

Mr. Wharton begins to spread the news that the couple is engaged, and, after coming across Lucy de Vere's letter, Agnes decides to travel to Rome with the wish to meet a brother, the sculptor William Danvers. Following a revealing conversation with him, she discovers that this is impossible and that the Blakes brought her up as if she were their daughter.

Walsingham falls in love with Agnes in the Palazzo Pitti as he listens to the explanations of St. Hubert and “a really enlightened connoisseur” on painting:

Her countenance was so intelligent, her occasional remarks were so apt and spirited, her deference to her instructor was so affectionately respectful, and she herself, when the old man described the essential characteristics of beauty, both as relates to expression and form, presented so perfect an illustration of his text, that Walsinghamfelt he had but to look at Agnes, to understand the whole dissertation. (Burney 2008: 170)

He later praises her and compares her to a guardian angel: “it seems as if no evil passion could harbor in that pure bosom; as if truth and meekness, and holy innocence

had fixed their abode in the mind that animates those symmetrical and lovely features” (Burney 2008: 183). In the spring, Walsingham’s mysterious companion dies and the hero discloses that her mother remarried a wealthy merchant and they had a daughter, Georgiana, “whose entrance into life, was hailed with rejoicings as extraordinary, as if she had been born to a throne” (Burney 2008: 210). He hates heiresses because Georgiana monopolized everybody’s attention and he felt displaced. Later on the lady marries a gentleman and is happy until Walsingham’s father and his brother in law are left bankrupt. Shocked by the news, Georgiana falls ill and wants to reach Florence to die there, which explains why they were travelling together (Burney 2008: 149).

The second tale in *The Romance of Private Life* opens with a lively conversation in the tradition of the best novel of manners and gradually becomes a mixture of a Gothic narrative and a detective story. The conflict is linked to an inheritance and passion: Ella Ormond must marry her beloved Ernest de Gray if she wants Sir Everard’s wealth (Burney 2008: 304). However, all evidence indicates that Ernest killed Frederick, Ella’s brother, and the girl grows hysteric and nearly mad. Ernest’s opponent in *The Hermitage* is Mr. Sedley, a family friend who does not declare his feelings because he notices the girl a bit cold while Ernest is aware of the situation: “Ella had been dear to him as his own existence from her very childhood; her image had accompanied him abroad –had dwelt underfaced in his heart during the whole of his absence, – and still, at his return, lived there as freshly impressed as on the day of his departure” (Burney 2008: 248).

The fraternal relationship between Frederick and Ernest is much affected when the former receives a letter from Mrs. Ormond and Ella observes that “the blood rushed impetuously to his face, and crimsoned his very forehead. His brown became contracted, and his lips firmly compressed together, evinced the strongest internal agitation” (Burney 2008: 277-8). Ella thinks that her mother has been misled by calumnious reports and she learns from neighboring villagers that both Ernest and Frederick were the lovers of Ruth Nelson, a girl from the parish (Burney 2008: 284). Finally, the truth is discovered and Philip Nelson confesses the crime (Burney 2008: 355-9). Ernest is a conventional lover whose feelings are rarely revealed to readers. For

Clark, Ernest and Ella undergo a period of suffering and self-alienation and could be seen as “scapegoat figures, taking sins upon themselves, enacting guilt on their own bodies” (Clark 2008: xxv).

## 6. Conclusion

Sarah Harriet portrays heroes as mirror-images of heroines. Both suffer isolation and oppression and marriage does not guarantee them a happy ending. There is some evolution in Sarah Harriet’s imperfect heroes who have both virtues and flaws and are a vehicle with which the author expresses her disapproval of the idealized image of the perfect romantic hero that dominated the novels of her predecessors and contemporaries.

Though the hero and the heroine share many similarities, this does not imply that feminist vindications and critique are left apart. On the contrary, other “doublings” and parallel situations also recur reinforcing the need to reform patriarchy. In this way, novels usually contain another amorous subplot (the young couple Mary and William in *Geraldine Fauconberg*, Annabel and William Hampden in *Traits of Nature* or the love story of Jane and Mr. Lloyd in *Country Neighbours*). In this analysis it is clear that social forces interfere with the achievement of long-term happiness. Sarah Harriet demonstrates that models of masculinity –including family expectations, status, education and the disposition of property– were damaging to individual men, to women and to society as a whole.

## 7. References

- Burney, Sarah Harriet. 1796. *Clarentine: A Novel*. 3 vols. London: G. G. and J. Robinson.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1808. *Geraldine Fauconberg*. 3 vols. London: G. Wilkie and J. Robinson.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1812. *Traits of Nature*. 5 vols. London: Henry Colburn.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1816-20. *Tales of Fancy*. 3 vols. London: Henry Colburn.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2008 [1839]. *The Romance of Private Life*. Ed. Lorna J. Clark. Chawton House Library Series. London: Pickering and Chatto.
- Clark, Lorna J. 1995. "Jane Austen and Sarah Harriet Burney". *Persuasions*, 17: 16-25.
- \_\_\_\_\_. ed. 1997. *The Letters of Sarah Harriet Burney*. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2000. "Sarah Harriet Burney: *Traits of Nature* and Families". *Lumen*, 19: 121-34.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2001. "The Family in the Novels of Sarah Harriet Burney". *Lumen*, 20: 71-81.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2003. "From the Margins to the Centre: The Spinster as Author, Narrator and Actor". *The Burney Journal* 6: 36-54.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2007. "Frances and Sarah Harriet Burney: The Novels in the Family and the Family in the Novels". *A Celebration of Frances Burney*. Ed. Lorna J. Clark. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press. 38-56.
- Davidoff, Leonore and Catherine Hall. 2002. *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850*. London: Routledge.
- Fernández Rodríguez, Carmen María. 2010. Review of *The Romance of Private Life*. *Atlantis* 32. 1: 173-7.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2011. "Women sans reproche in Sarah Harriet's *Tales of Fancy* (1820)". *The Burney Letter* 17. 1: 8-9.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2013. "The Quest for Acceptance in Sarah Harriet Burney's Works." *Op. Cit* 2. 2: 1-15. <https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&pid=sites&srcid=ZGVmYXVsdGRvbWFpbXhcGVhYWwpcmVjYW98Z3g6Mzg4MjVlZDZlM2ZlM2Y1NQ> [20 November 2013].

- Foucault, Michael. 1978. *The History of Sexuality*. Vol 1. New York: Random House.
- Frantz, Sarah S. G. and Katharine Rennhak. 2010. "Female Novelists and their Male Characters 1750-2000; An Introduction". *Female Novelists and their Male Characters 1750-2000*. Plymouth: Lexington Books. 1-10.
- Graham-Smith, Sheila. 2006. "Sarah Harriet Burney's *Pride and Prejudice*". *The Burney Letter*, 12, 1: 18.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2008. "Manoeuvring In a Minefield: A New Sarah Harriet Burney Attribution". *The Burney Letter*, 14, 2: 6-7.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2009. "An Eccentric Taste in Heroes". *The Burney Letter*, 15, 1: 1, 2 and 16.
- Haggerty, George E. 1994. *Unnatural Affections: Women and Fiction in the Later Eighteenth Century*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1969. *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*. Oxford: Alden Press.
- McGlish, Glen. 1965. "Richardson, Burney, Austen, and the Decline of the Rhetor-Hero in the British Novel". *Rhetoric, Cultural Studies, and Literacy: Selected Papers from the 1994 Conference of the Rhetoric Society of America*. Ed. John Frederick Reynolds. Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. 151-9.
- Newman, Hilary. 2011. "Admiral James Burney and Sarah Harriet Burney". *The Burney Letter*, 17, 1: 6.
- Perry, Ruth. 2004. *Novel Relations: The Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture 1748-1818*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sedgwick, Eve K. 1985. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosexual Desire*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Showalter, Elaine. 1977. *A Literature of Their Own: from Charlotte Brontë to Doris Lessing*. London: Virago.
- Stone, Lawrence. 1977. *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- Trabelsi, Maryam. 2006. "Sarah Harriet and Frances Burney". *The Corvey Project at Sheffield Hallam University*.  
<http://extra.shu.ac.uk/corvey/corinne/essay%20trabelsi.html> [28 January 2013].