

**The Eighteenth-Century Women Novelists and the
Literary Canon of Forgetting
Dr. Siham Hattab Hamdan
Department of English
College of Arts,
Al-Mustansiriyah University**

Abstract

The paper sheds light on some of the Eighteenth century women novelists who are unfortunately overlooked by the Iraqi scholars as well as by the Iraqi academic curriculum utilized in the departments of English language either in Colleges of Arts, Colleges of Education, or Colleges of Languages. For decades, the study of the Eighteenth-century novel has focused on male novelists, namely Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding apparently because it is assumed that the masters of the Eighteenth-century novel are only men. Recent studies by feminist critics and literary historians have proved that there were many female novelists who were well-known in their lifetime and who were highly acknowledged as established woman novelists by the masters of the eighteenth-century novel themselves.

The aim of this paper is to give a fresh start to a new field of study concerning the eighteenth-century novel written by women through studying their literary achievements which promote woman issues and show their literary impact on the female novelists who followed their example.

المستخلص

هذا البحث يسلط الضوء على بعض روائيات القرن التاسع عشر اللاتي قد تجاهلهم الباحثين العراقيين وكذلك المناهج الأكاديمية المستخدمة في أقسام اللغة الانكليزية ماذا كان ذلك في كليات الآداب وكليات التربية وكليات اللغات. ومنذ عقود فإن دراسات التي تتعلق برواية القرن التاسع عشر قد ركزت على الروائيين سيما دانيال ديفو وساموئيل ريجاردسون وهنري فيلدنك وذلك بسبب الاعتقاد بأن رواد رواية القرن التاسع عشر هم من الذكور فقط. ولقد أثبتت الدراسات التي أجريت من قبل النقاد ومؤرخي الأدب بأن هنالك العديد من الروائيات المشهورات في عهدهن واللاتي تم الاعتراف بهن كروائيات مرموقات من قبل رواد رواية القرن التاسع عشر انفسهم.

يهدف هذا البحث الى اضافة بداية جديدة لدراسة رواية القرن التاسع عشر المكتوبة من قبل النساء من خلال دراسة الانجازات التي ارتقت بقضية المرأة والتي اظهرت تأثيرهن الادبي على الروائيات اللاتي اتبعن منهجهن في هذا المجال.

Key Words: Eighteenth-century women novelists, Literary canon, Feminism, Literary history, Charlotte Lennox, Frances Burney.

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The Victorian critics tended to disregard most eighteenth-century novels altogether. They had little time for what went before them: before the perfections of Sir Walter Scott and George Eliot....Critics, it seems, have not always been diplomatic and objective in their judgment of literature...They are often personal and deliciously *vicious*.

(Wilputte, pp. 19-89)

1. Introduction

Starting by emphasizing the casual subjectivity of literary critics as the abovementioned quote demonstrates, this paper aims to show the criteria against which the importance of literary works is measured and the causes leading to the rising of a literary work and the eclipsing of another. The literary canon may frequently befallen by injustice due to the taste of some critics. Well-known in the eighteenth century as professional and respectable writers who competed with male novelists to attract the attention of the reading public, eighteenth century women novelists suffered from being overlooked by critics. Literary criticism has oddly missed a large part of the nineteenth-century women novelists who have been thoroughly explored in since the 1970's.

With the advent of feminism as a strong political, social and literary movement, feminist critics and literary historians began to search in the old archives, personal memoirs, diaries and book reviews to find out bits of information to enable them to establish the long lost and forgotten connection about those women writers such as Frances Burney, Charlotte Lennox, Eliza Haywood, Sarah Fielding (Henry Fielding's sister), Frances Brooke, Elizabeth Inchbald, Clara Reeve, Ann Radcliffe, Frances Sheridan, Mary Robinson, Sarah Scott, Charlotte Smith, Mary Wollstonecraft and many others.

In her examination of the process of publishing and republishing explicated in her essay entitled "*Momentary Fame: Female Novelists in Eighteenth-Century Book Reviews*," the literary critic and historian Laura Range comments that:

[a]mong the sixty-four novels by identified novelists that go through five or more editions between 1770 and 1829, thirty (or nearly half) are written by female authors. This includes the first three of Burney's novels, Inchbald's two novels, five novels of Radcliffe's, Reeve's *Champion of Virtue* (1777), or *The Old English Baron*, Robinson's *Vancenza* (1792), two novels by Smith, and Wollstonecraft's *Original Stories* (1788).

(Laura Range, 2005: p. 279)

Range also believes that "[C]ritics from Ian Watt to Nancy Armstrong consider the last quarter of the eighteenth century a veritable wasteland of novels, and most historians of the novel contentedly pass over the field with barely a nod at Frances Burney" (229). Ian Watt's

most prominent book *The Rise of the Novel* (1957) which discusses the appearance and growth of the novel in the eighteenth century focuses basically on male novelists such as Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding, making a shift at the end of the book to discuss "Realism and the later Tradition" in a note. In this "Note," (italics mine) Watt discusses some early nineteenth century novelists, focusing on Jane Austen. Commenting on her contribution, Watt states "Jane Austen was *the heir of Fanny Burney*" (296). Unfortunately, Watt does not discuss the contribution of the eighteenth century novelist Frances (Fanny) Burney in order to fully establish her status as the forerunner and the literary "mother" of Jane Austen. Watt's overshadowing of a host of woman novelists while discussing eighteenth century novel made him in allegiance with the Victorian critics already mentioned hereinabove by Wilputte. He ignores and sometimes undervalues the contribution of the eighteenth century women novelists insofar as he states that "the majority of eighteenth-century novels were actually written by women, but this had long remained a purely quantitative assertion of dominance" (339). With the passage of time as studies in this field have increased, Watt's statement proves itself to be invalid.

Through the efforts of feminist critics and literary historians, many women novelists of the eighteenth century have recently floated to the surface due to the recognition of their literary merits and contributions to the flourishing of the novel as a literary form. The feminist interest to revive eighteenth century woman writers has represented "a great recent shift in literary assumptions... [with what] only a few years [before], would have seemed inconceivable to write, or to read, a literary history of the Restoration and eighteenth century focused entirely on women" (Patricia Meyer in Schellenberg, 2005: p. 1). In a very early published book about the novel and perhaps one of the earliest books which discussed the contribution of woman novelists, *British Novelists, with an Essay and Prefaces, Biographical and Critical* (1810), the critic, poet, educator, essayist children's writer Anna Laetitia Barbauld (1743–1825) wrote:

And indeed ... it may safely be affirmed that we have more good writers in this walk living at the present time, than at any period since the days of Richardson and Fielding. A very great proportion of these are ladies: and surely it will not be said that either taste or morals have been losers by their taking the pen in hand. The names of D'Arblay (Frances Burney), Edgeworth, Inchbald, Radcliffe, and a number more, will vindicate the assertion.

(Anna Laetitia Barbauld in More, 1986: p. 383)

Barbauld points out that among the twenty-one authors included in *British Novelists* are eight women, and among the twenty-eight novels are twelve ones written by women. In this early book, Mrs. Balbaud tried to find out the differences in style between men and women novelists. Women, she observes, give a more "melancholy tinge" and less humor to their novels than men (Barbauld in More, 1986: p. 397). She thinks that the chief reason is circumstance: "Men, mixing at large in society, have a brisker flow of ideas" (Ibid). In addition, she suggests that only "the stronger powers of man" have the ability to produce humor, the "scarcer product of the mind." The product of a woman's mind, in contrast, is "sentiment," resulting from the imposed societal necessity to "nurse those feelings in secrecy and silence" which men usually experience only "transiently" and "with fewer modifications of delicacy" (Ibid). Women, therefore, unlike men, "diversify the expression of [feelings] with endless shades of sentiment." Thus, she perceptively notes that "it is isolation that gives a distinctive color to the creations of the feminine imagination" (Ibid). Although Mrs. Barbauld mentions and discusses many woman novelists in her book, the literary canon of erasing and forgetting them continues to overlook even the contribution of this pioneer female critic and her informative book.

The great forgetting of eighteenth-century woman novelists began in the nineteenth-century with a tremendous change in view towards woman novelists. Gender became the standard of the evaluation of woman novelists and not the status of their literary creativity as writers. William Hazlitt's "Review of Burney's *The Wanderer*" (1815) pinpointed the beginning of this view. He dismissed the well-established novelist in the eighteenth-century Frances Burney for being "a very woman" in her writing and denied all her literary merits but her powerful observation. So nothing more constituted the beginning of the long-established canon of erasing of woman novelists as shown in Hazlitt's essay. He stated:

Women, in general, have a quicker perception of any oddity or singularity of character than men, and are more alive to every absurdity which arises from a violation of the rules of society, or a deviation from established custom. This partly arises from the restraints on their own behaviour, which turns their attention constantly on the subject, and partly from other causes. The surface of their minds, like that of their bodies, seems of a finer texture than ours; more soft, and susceptible of immediate impression. They have less muscular power, – less power of continued voluntary attention, – of reason – passion and imagination: But they are more easily impressed with whatever appeals to their senses or habitual prejudices.

(quoted in Range, 295)

Hazlitt was, perhaps, the first outstanding critic who adopted a policy of "gender criteria" as Range observes:

Instead of ranking Burney among the best novelists – he identifies Cervantes, Fielding, Smollett, Richardson, and Sterne – Hazlitt groups Burney with unnamed and clearly unregarded women writers. In the process he articulates a gendered theory of the novel that associates literary criteria with the biological and social attributes of sex. Women's soft minds, like their soft bodies, are incapable of the sustained attention and inborn genius required to create the best novels, pace Cervantes et al. He attributes the minor successes of women, for he can hardly discount Burney entirely, to rote learning and obsessive scrutiny of their limited surroundings. *Hazlitt's dismissal of Burney's novels underscores the very different critical climate.*

(Italics mine, 295)

Historically, the beginnings of women's writing are not linked to the eighteenth century. Josephine Donovan finds out that the first wave of woman writers' literary career did not begin in the eighteenth century, and it actually began especially in the realm of fiction almost in the second part of the seventeenth and lasted till the beginning of the eighteenth century with the novels of Delarivier Manley, Catherine Trotter, Aphra Behn, Mary Davys, and reached its climax in the novels of Jane Barker (79). These women novelists used women's realism which came to be called as anti-romance tradition in English literature. This kind of realism has shaped the nature of the English novel. In their novels, the reasonable woman character, the woman of sense (as opposed to sensibility) controlled the scene and articulated the point of view of feminist critical irony, firmly established by the woman novelists of the framed-novelle tradition (Ibid). Sensibility in the eighteenth century, "meant extraordinary sensitivity to emotional stimuli, expressed often through such physical manifestations as weeping, blushing, and fainting" (Spacks, 74). Women novelists in this phase tried to warn against such a conviction because it weakened woman's will. This kind of tradition continued to permeate the works of eighteenth century women novelists in various degrees, till it reached to Jane Austen when she presented Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* and Elinor Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility* as her heroines of sense rather than sensibility.

With the development of the middle class in the eighteenth century, women were subjected to the private and domestic sphere, inflexible systems of avoidance of sexual sins and politeness and silence. Women novelists were allowed to go through the public sphere of letters so as to be writers, for instance, only to strengthen the character of "the domestic woman, constructed in a relation of difference to men, a difference of kind rather than degree" (Shevelov in Schellenberg, 2005: p. 2).

Many social, economic and legal obstacles confronted women novelists of the eighteenth century. In order to overcome these obstacles, they had to follow one of two methods: to be presented to the public through a well-known and respectable male, whether that of a powerful male literary figure like Dr. Samuel Johnson or even Samuel Richardson through writing prologues or prefaces to these women's works; or writing sympathetic reviews as is the case with Richardson to whom Francis Sheridan dedicated her novel *The Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* (1761), and "The Author of *Clarissa* and *Sir Charles Grandison*," as an acknowledgment of gratitude to "exemplary Goodness and distinguished Genius...found united in One Person" (Shelenberg, p. 24), as is the case with Charlotte Lennox's relation with Dr. Samuel Johnson. One of Johnson's activities to help women writers whom he admired was to present them to publishers and to use his impact on booksellers to make them publish the literary works of women. He, for instance, introduced Lennox Charlotte to Richardson, who read *The Female Quixote* and demonstrated that the novel was worthy to be published, and then persuaded Andrew Millar to be published (Staves, p. 265).

The second method considered by eighteenth century woman novelists was that of the writer herself writing remorseful preface mentioning her "domestic distress, financial necessity, and the urge to instruct other women" (Copeland, 14). While literary figures like Dr. Johnson, Fielding, or Richardson patronized some women novelists. However, eighteenth century women writers suffered from some older upper-class attitudes that saw professional writing as improper for a woman.

On the other hand, most male writers were pleased to be paid for their work, and once they became recognizable in the new literary marketplace, as reviewers, essayists, and so forth, with only few exceptions, they would set to discourage any rivalry from women writers (Ibid, p. 13). At the same time, women were criticized for having the impudence to write without having the crucial education and experience. Only when they were in distressed economic need, like supporting elderly parents, an ailing husband, or poor children, could, as it is generally accepted by literary men, justify a woman's use of writing to obtain her living. Accordingly, the prefaces of women often ask for forgiveness for writing by referring to problems of this sort, causing reviewers frequently to write kindly of their literary works (Ibid).

It may also be suggested that a woman writer might also face lawful problems to authorize her work if she were married. A married woman novelist had no legal identity. She could not have possession of property or sign contracts of her novels. For example, the contract of

Charlotte Smith's novel *Desmond* (1792) was not signed by her or by her husband who was imprisoned at that time for debt. Though, she began to publish in order to support herself and her children, she needed the help of Benjamin Smith, who was at the time living in Scotland under a pseudonym who signed the contract instead of her (Coperland, 13). The publishing reports for Ann Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forest* (1791) recorded William Radcliffe, her husband, as the author of the novel. He actually received 40 £ for the second edition (1792) (Ibid). This kind of unjust legal procedure denying the woman writer to use her official name to sign the contracts of her books continued for a long time. It was not until the year 1965 that married women were officially allowed to publish a work or employed in any career without the permission of their husbands (Ibid).

Modern literary historians divide the contribution of woman novelists into three phases. Restoration and early eighteenth century woman writers such as Aphra Behn and Delarivier Manley who had occupied a short "flowering of feminism," being distinguished by what was called as the "sophisticated insights and techniques," used in actions which were "erotic and worldly" (Schellenberg, p. 2). These novelists wrote directly to criticize in political circles the political atmosphere showing the hypocrisy, intrigue and corruption. Ros Ballaster makes a contrast between the public position claimed for the woman writer in this phase with the later eighteenth century vision of the woman's novel as an "essentially private" structure, in which the moral domestic woman takes an indirect political role specifically because she is used to represent the bourgeois ideology that looks at family life as a dominion separated from the political atmosphere (128, 206-7).

The second phase which was represented by woman novelists such as Charlotte Lennox, Frances Brooke, along with Sarah Fielding and Frances Sheridan, on the other hand, signified a retreat of feminism due to what was called as the "modest muse," controlled and made suitable for social conventions by patriarchal figures such as Samuel Richardson and restrained by "a moralistic...colluding with the growing ideology of femininity, preaching and greatly rewarding self sacrifice and restraint" (Schellenberg, p. 3). In the third phase, novels "seem[ed] to gain a new strength from an assumption of the moralist's authority" (Ibid, p. 2). Novelists such as Frances Burney, Ann Radcliffe and Mary Wollstonecraft wrote novels of manners showing woman characters that push their way in the society trying to be recognized and accepted.

As a matter of fact, marriage was the only good alternative for women in the eighteenth century. Therefore, the kind of novel which makes its main interest women's marriageability

comes to be called "courtship novel." The courtship novel focuses on the financial obstacles that hinder a young woman's coming forth from her father's protection to the enforced attachment of her identity into that of her husband's. After their marriage, heroines usually hide within their domestic life (Epstien, p. 199). In this phase dealing with the emergence of women's novel, novelists did not criticize the marriage-market as a system though it subjected women as was the case with their predecessors.

In her book *The Rise of Women Novelists: From Ephra Benn to Jane Austen* (1986), Jane Spencer argues that eighteenth-century women novelists have more and more succeeded in the social sphere through the skillful intensifying of the beliefs which situate women's lives in the domestic realm. In other words, they come to learn and use some tactics which enable them to achieve "the Terms of Acceptance" required for their novels in order to gain recognition of their literary talents (Schellenberg, p. 3).

The era between the death of Samuel Richardson to the emergence of Jane Austen has been considered a "dead period" in the English literary history. In fact it was a period in which Virginia Woolf later on noted that "the paradigm for women's fiction of the nineteenth century was being prepared." She added by stating that it is "to this enterprise...Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, and George Eliot are deeply indebted" (Donovan, 1999: p. 121).

In consequence, the eighteenth-century women novelists have established that paradigm of a woman of reason who is financially dispossessed and who works hard to achieve her economic security. She is usually presented in comparison with a more conventional female foil and a frustrated young woman who helps emphasize the traits of the major character and who usually acts as an opponent. The female foil is often a sister or at least a close friend, who is much more of a playful and beautiful and who is usually a silly romantic young woman. This character represents "sensibility" as opposed to sense (Donovan, p. 121).

Jane Austen's title *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) highlights a contrast between two sisters, Elinor and Marianne Dashwood, representing sense and sensibility respectively. However, the sensible or reasonable characters such as Elinor and Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* (p. 181) make intelligent and ironic comments about various aspects of courtship traditions. Hence, the marriage-market system itself remains stable and the same within which these women operate. "Sense" thus has become the talent of knowing how to work and progress in the marriage market, avoid adventures and deviate from becoming a target to bad men who would destroy a woman's value in that market. Highly romantic or sensitive characters such as Marianne Dashwood and Lydia Bennet are criticized because their excessive emotions make

them exposed to morally bad men and make them unaware of the economic reality in their life, a knowledge that is fundamental for their continued existence.

It may be concluded that the Austenian novel of manners is similar to the sentimental novel as reflected in the tradition of Richardson and "the modest muse" in that both are concerned with the female heroine's financial survival, and at the same time it differs in that it has manipulated the active and satirical woman of sense created by the realistic novels of the early eighteenth century such as those of Benn, Manley and Daves. It also differs in other important ways such as being worldlier in outlook while the novel of sentiment presents uncritically the Christian moral principles. It also differs in using a comparatively simple style whereas the sentimentalists have used a highly expressive, hyperbolic language (Donovan, p. 122).

2. Two Eighteenth-Century English Women Novelists: Charlotte Lennox and Frances Burney

2.1. Charlotte Lennox (1730- 1804)

Charlotte Lennox was ready to become a kind of surrogate to both Richardson and Johnson (Staves, p. 264). She was a novelist, essayist, translator, editor and poet. She spent her childhood in New York where her father was a British army captain. Charlotte Ramsey moved to England after her father's death. She married the Scottish Alexander Lennox who appeared unable and unwilling to support his family, which drove Lennox to support her family through writing (Drabble, 586). So, Lennox represented a very early example of the professional writer who made writing as her living. At the age of eighteen, she published her first collection of poems, *Poems on Several Occasions* (1747) which she dedicated to two prominent women of the age, the Countess of Rockingham and Lady Isabella Finch (Ibid). Besides *The Female Quixote* (1752), Lennox's major novels are *The Life of Harriot Stuart* (1750), her first novel, and *Henrietta* (1758), a novel that tackled the eighteenth-century problem of female reliance on others and their forbearance of the resultant consequences accordingly. Though she was a prolific writer, Lennox's main concern as a novelist was the cause of women, especially the romantic and sensible women who have to learn the hard lesson of becoming realists: they are those who can combine sensibility with sense in order to be influential and acceptable by society.

Lennox's work was supported and promoted by Samuel Richardson insofar as he is her patron and she is his girlfriend: "the sex's friend/And constant patron" as Lennox said (Jones, 2007: p. 114). In reviewing Lennox's *The Female Quixote*, Henry Fielding stated:

our Author hath taken such Care throughout her Work, to expose all those Vices and Follies in her Sex which are chiefly predominant in Our Days, that it will afford very useful lessons to all those Young Ladies who will peruse it with proper Attention.

(Henry Fielding in Staves, 267).

In recent times, Jane Spencer believes that Charlotte Lennox's *Female Quixote* (1752) is promising as an essential novel in comprehending the relation between romance, female desire and the novel (p. 212). She is also of the opinion that this novel brilliantly demonstrates its heroine's passion for the French romances of *La Calprenetde* and *de Scudkry* which show a female aspiration for "significant selfhood and public existence" (Ibid, p. 214).

The Female Quixote or The Adventures of Arabella (1752), as the title itself shows, is a parody of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1605-15). It is written in the anti-romance tradition which was used by seventeenth and eighteenth century women novelists as a tool to satirize the public view of women being romantic and fanciful, and at the same time to show the hypocrisy of men. The novel is written in the omniscient third person narrator. Lennox's heroine Arabella is mixing between illusion and reality. She does not have a motherly supervision because her mother died early and she is left to read seventeenth-century French romances in social isolation in the countryside. Arabella makes these stories her guide in understanding life and people. As a result, she makes false interpretations of the realistic events and the characters surrounding her as is the case with viewing the handsome young gardener of her father's estate, Edward, as a lover in disguise. Or she thinks that the prostitute she has met is only a gentle woman in distress. Since the characters' behaviour in her world does not match her expectations, she always misinterprets them. Susan Staves thinks that Arabella's eagerness for romance is related to "romance's representation of women as heroines, and as consequential persons capable of exalted virtue" (p. 269). Eventually, Arabella's process of learning and facing reality makes her the heroine of her own life, not that old delusional romantic figure, but a more sensible and reasonable one.

Lennox was one of the early women novelists who had tried their hand at writing as their only source of living. Her mere attempt was very courageous in an eighteenth-century society among which men were controlling all the areas of writing, publishing and even criticism. Though her novels were a kind of didactic and cautionary, she used them to empower women by promoting their self-awareness.

2.2. Frances Burney (1752-1840)

Frances Burney or Mme d'Arblay (1752-1840) was the daughter of Dr. Burney who was famous as a classical scholar. She spent her youth in a cultured society of London which included Dr. Johnson, Burke, Reynolds, Garrick, the Blue Stocking Circle, and many members of aristocracy (Staves, p. 413). She was part of the kind of society that exposed her to the inherent dangers, especially when she was a young woman without experiences which she was able to depict them in her novels. Her four novels are novels of courtship: *Evelina or The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (1778), *Cecilia, Memoirs of an Heiress* (1782), *Camilla, or a Picture of Youth* (1794), and *The Wanderer, Female Difficulties* (1814).

Different as they seem to be in style (*Evelina* is written as an epistolary novel), Burney's novels share the same concern. Though they are concerned with marriage, they are basically about women. They investigate a woman's posture in society, her power to defy or adapt to such a patriarchal society, and the costs she has to pay in order to stand still.

Most of Burney's novels move around an orphan young girl who is thrown into society without a real protection. Without a family to protect her, *Evelina* has to walk the hard way only armed by her kindness. *Cecilia* Beverley is entrapped by an inheritance which seems impossible to acquire when her father sets a condition that whoever proposes to her must take her name. *Camilla* concentrates on the love affair of Camilla Tyrold herself and her appropriate but cold and critical suitor Edgar Mandlebert. The novel reveals the virtues and failings of Camilla who attempts to adapt to and reinvent herself to be acceptable in her society. In addition, the wanderer, exiled of Burney's fourth novel, is the stranger Juliet who escaped from revolutionary France, seeking new opportunities, just to find out those things for a woman are not better in England.

In fact, Burney sets out the dilemma of eighteenth-century woman through the words of Reverend Villars, *Evelina's* ward: "This artless young creature with too much beauty to escape notice has too much sensibility to be indifferent to it; but she has too little wealth to be sought with propriety" (*Evelina*, 14). All Burney's heroines are women who struggle to survive in such a hierarchical society which makes the family lineage and wealth the true pointers for respectability. At the same time, they have to confront hypocrisy and double standards of the eighteenth-century society concerning women. Though she did not engage in politics despite the fact that she spent some time in the court, Burney has been described as having deep political imagination.

Throughout her novels, the above questions are asked by Burney's heroines because as women they feel estranged in a society which looks at them not as real human beings but only as objects for entertainment: beings that have no business but to be married. In the words of Jane Spencer, one can realize that "an [eighteenth-century] woman's maturity is marked by entering a marital relationship in which she is considered *a perpetual minor*" (29, *italics mine*). At the same time, Epstien highlights Burney's economic consciousness: "Burney was a perfect viewer of the economic pressures in social classes as the new business classes began to work to replace the landed gentry. Her heroines, with the possible exception of Camilla, go across classes as they constantly face the need "to invent and reinvent themselves" for public consumption" (p. 198).

In her four novels, Burney was an acute observer of the socio-economic pressures set in the way of her heroines. The novels show possible, but not definite, procedures that these women have to take in order to survive. Economic realities are so obvious in the lives of women, especially those concerning marriage issues. The critic Terry Castle comments on Burney's critical exploitation of the traditions of the courtship novel or the novel of marriage, saying: "Certainly no eighteenth-century woman novelist before Burney had uncovered so starkly the ideological contradiction in fictional marriage—that it might be represented as a punishment as much as a reward, an algebra of loss as well as gain" (285).

Evelina or *The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (1779) was Burney's first novel. She published it anonymously without the consent of her father when she was only twenty-six. The novel was an enormous accomplishment in its time. *Evelina* provides a critical view of high class in late eighteenth-century Britain through the point of view of a young, childlike and orphan country girl who is not acknowledged by her true father. At the same time, it is a novel of education. Evelina learns the proper behavior of her society through making awkward social errors. Through writing letters, she documents her experiences once she is entered into high society during the days before her wedding party. Though everyone around her is searching for wealth, control and a proper marriage, Evelina's quest is for integrity, self-respect, cleverness and care for others.

Evelina is an example of the eighteenth century young woman without a family protection in that her father refuses to acknowledge her. This leaves her constantly exposed to sexual harassment. Evelina's doubtful social place, without a family name to identify her makes her an object of sexual abuse as shown in Sir Clement Willoughby's failing seduction plan and in

Mr. Brown's proposition that he might just convince himself to marry her. The only one who offers love and marriage to Evelina is Lord Orville, even before knowing her true identity. Nonetheless, Evelina herself seeks to make her identity acknowledged before she can happily accept his proposal.

The meeting with her father, when he acknowledges his daughter by seeing her as the image of her mother, forms the emotional climax of the novel. Burney builds up an image of the woman of the eighteenth century who cannot stand alone if she wants to live a proper and respectable life. Beauty and self-accomplishment are not enough to make the woman acceptable in this society, for family heritage and wealth are very important for a woman to thrive.

Through her novels, Burney tried to present examples of eighteenth century middle-class women who struggle against a patriarchal society that did not accept them to stand by themselves. But, at the same time, these women learned how to use their potentials to survive. They were not rebellious against such a society by violently rejecting its conventions, but they make use of the best options available for them to go on, just like their author.

By acknowledging and understanding the contribution of eighteenth-century women novelists, scholars and readers are going to have a comprehensive understanding of the literary scene, a scene which has been controlled for a long time by men being writers and women being only readers. At the same time, the rise of women novelists such as Jane Austen, George Eliot, Emily and Charlotte Bronte would be more comprehensible when we know that they constitute a lineage or a continuation of the eighteenth-century women writers who had captured the mind and heart of the reading public at their time. The field of eighteenth-century women writing in general and fiction in particular, is a promising field, especially for the worldwide countries where women novelists are still behind in investigating this area of study.

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