

*The Margins of Sentiment:  
Nature, Letter, and Law in  
Frances Brooke's Epistolary Novels*

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THE MOST POPULAR form of literary sentimentalism in the eighteenth century was the epistolary novel.<sup>1</sup> The epistolary method aims to present human nature released from social convention, meditating on the faculty which sentimentalists saw as the spring of virtue: feeling. Through intimate letters describing characters' responses to emotions and events, these novels show sentiment even as it is being experienced, both to stir the reader's moral response and to demonstrate the sentimental thesis that moral virtue is natural instinct, not learned behaviour.<sup>2</sup> In these novels, romantic love most often provides the plot to prove this thesis. The popular sentimental novelist Frances Brooke, however, challenges the assumptions of sentimental ideology even while exploiting its conventions. Indicting social hierarchy and political oppression, Brooke defends sentiment against the tyranny of custom, law, privilege, and patriarchy, but she also warns the reader against sentiment undisciplined by sense or unlicensed by society.<sup>3</sup> By structuring her epistolary novels dialectically to oppose "natural" feeling with aesthetic and social conventions, Brooke explores the limitations of both sentimental and social values. At the same time, she locates the moral touchstone of her novels in the marginalized character of the female spectator who connects experience to culture, and undercuts the simplistic opposition of art and nature which seemed to legitimize revolutionary extremes even before the French Revolution. Brooke thus explores the proximity of social and sentimental ideals at their margins.

Known to Charles and Fanny Burney, Samuel Johnson, and David Garrick, Frances Brooke, *née* Moore (1724-1789), was a

recognized, if also marginal, figure in London literary society both before and after her sojourn in Canada.<sup>4</sup> Apart from four, possibly five, novels, she wrote drama, started a periodical journal, translated French works, and composed poetry. Her popular periodical, *The Old Maid*, reprinted at least twice in bound editions, exploits the power that marginality offers women. Published weekly from late 1755 until July 1756 under the pseudonym Mary Singleton, *The Old Maid* defines taste, comments on the social world, politics, theatre, and current events, and discusses the “female” questions of love and marriage in the manner of *The Spectator* and *The Female Spectator*.<sup>5</sup> The apologetic, teetotaling Old Maid, rather than experiencing love, recounts tales of her niece Julia, infatuated with the impoverished but well-born officer Belville, and their friends.

In her first number, like her “brother” Mr. Spectator, Mary Singleton credits her qualifications to her marginality, arguing that her distance from the bustle of politics and love guarantees her disinterest and so legitimizes her commentary. Whereas Mr. Spectator has travelled and learned, however, Mary Singleton has been merely left out. Many issues bear epigraphs ironically apologizing for the deficiencies of a virgin or spinster, and the Old Maid herself labels old women as, “except an old batchelor, the most useless and insignificant of all God’s creatures,” who must “service” the “public” to compensate for their selfishness presumably in not bearing children. Brooke challenges social prejudice, however, by political language: “every body knows an English woman has a natural right to expose herself as much as she pleases; . . . I should think it giving up the privileges of the sex to desist from my purpose” (Num. 1, 2-3). While this hyperbole parodies female expression, it also identifies female liberty with patriotic “natural rights.” By calling on English law and “privileges” to sanction Mary Singleton’s endeavour, Brooke suggests that women, precisely because their self-exposure is ridiculed, guarantee the English value of free speech.

Despite this threat, the Old Maid models disinterested observation. Her decorous diction, topical breadth, and rational tone proclaim her ability to organize social experience into moral commentary. The headpiece of the periodical illustrates the

power and precariousness of her position: a Roman matron sits at a writing table listening to a warrior and a bard recite their tales, with the city's turrets looming in the background. A version of the common illustration of travelogues in which the Muse transcribes tales of adventure, this picture shows the writer as both translator of culture and recorder of others' heroic deeds.<sup>6</sup> By portraying the audience's own culture as remote, the periodical centralizes the marginality of its "author," the Old Maid: a Roman, that is, selfless patriot, she values hearing about, rather than experiencing, sensation, and like the reader understands experience by means of language. Paradoxically, it is by their marginality that the Old Maid, and the reader, serve as centres of sentimental value.<sup>7</sup>

Brooke, however, uses this marginal stance as listener, reader, or spectator to advocate a social role for women which turns their exclusion into social power: the role of connoisseur of the arts. Even while she laughingly advises old maids to write to her periodical instead of criticizing giddy girls, Mary Singleton implies that social exclusion frustrates women. She suggests a solution to this problem by observing that traditionally women have encouraged artistic merit, and hinting that, since art demonstrates the female value of love over the male value of war, women might improve society and their own positions by controlling artistic standards, and rewarding true artists, instead of flighty singers whose tantrums men applaud. Brooke adds that this role of artistic judge is fashionable, since a "French woman of distinction would be more ashamed of wanting a taste for the Belles Lettres, than of being ill dressed; and it is owing to the neglect of adorning their minds, that our travelling English ladies are at Paris the objects of unspeakable contempt, and are honored with the appellation of handsome savages" (Num. 3, Sat., Nov. 29, 1755). Brooke maintains that cultivated minds will improve behaviour: when a reader signing himself "Spectator" complains that by laughing a lady in the audience disconcerted an actress, Brooke apologizes for her sex and bids women act more cautiously in public (Num. 15, Sat. Feb 21, 1756). She thus implies that by self-observation women may turn from spectacles into spectators, a role which empowers them to purify culture.

Although it typically defines female heroism as romantic emotion rather than judgement, sentimental fiction allows spectators the power to judge society. Brooke honed this sentimental feature in her translations of Madame Riccoboni's epistolary novels of sensibility.<sup>8</sup> In the popular *Letters from Juliet Lady Catesby, To Her Friend Lady Henrietta Campley* (1760), for example, Brooke renders Riccoboni's idealized sensibility as a blend of reflection and observation, as Juliet learns her own nature from gazing on physical nature:

I write to you, from the most agreeable Place, perhaps, in Nature: From my Window I have a View of Woods, Waters, Meadows, the most beautiful Landscape imaginable: Every thing expresses Calmness and Tranquillity: This smiling Abode is an Image of the soft Peace, which reigns in the Soul of the Sage who inhabits it. This amiable Dwelling carries one insensibly to reflect; to retire into one's self; but one cannot at all Times relish this Kind of Retreat; one may find in the Recesses of the Heart, more importunate Pursuers than those from whom Solitude delivers us. (Letter 3)

Written from the estate of a benevolent patriarch whose wisdom the ordered landscape reflects, this letter records Juliet's desire to make her inside mirror the outside and render her self as tranquil as the scenery. Unlike the sublime which coopts reflection with emotion, as Brooke depicts in *Canada*, this "soft" beauty "carries" Juliet out of time and sensation "insensibly to reflect," and so discloses the parallel between internal and external nature. Just as the world contains hunters, so her heart holds "Pursuers," desires which have not been tailored to fit social forms. The story of her heroism is the story of regulating these desires by natural and social law, of conquest of her own nature. This epistolary heroine thus models the correspondence between the conquest of the wild and of the self.

In her first novel, however, Brooke depicts the tragic consequences of failing this conquest, a tragedy John Mullan locates in the very concept of sociability by sympathy (134). *The History of Lady Julia Mandeville* (1763) imitates *Romeo and Juliet* by portraying innocent lovers doomed by the tyranny of traditional prejudice and paternal power. Brooke, however, emphasizes the hero's flaw over society's. Whereas Shakespeare's lovers are caught in a feud which forbids their marriage, Lady Julia and her

cousin Harry belong to the same family: it is Harry's own fear, rather than his father's prohibition, which pricks him to despair.<sup>9</sup> Ignoring his Rousseauian education in the true values of love, literature, and art, on which his father has spent his fortune, Harry does not ask openly for Julia's hand, as both fathers hope he will, but instead adopts the very prejudice he despises: convinced that his poverty disqualifies him from marriage, he plunges into a duel in which he dies, and kills Julia with grief. Thus, it is not so much paternal society as the hero himself who causes the tragedy.<sup>10</sup>

This novel edits sentiment with art not only in plot but also in form. By substituting letters for dramatic actions, Brooke centres the novel on the activities of observing, recording, and reflecting, exemplified not by the heroes but by the marginal character Lady Anne Wilmot. Lady Anne may well have been named after Queen Anne, whom Brooke praises in *The Old Maid* for her patronage of the arts. Her letters are juxtaposed with the sentimental epistles of the hero, Harry Mandeville. Preserving the pleasure of drama which David Hume had identified as a combination of sympathy and distance, Lady Anne describes strong emotions, but controls the reader's imaginative sympathy by contextualizing these feelings within the traditions of literature and society, evoked through irony, allusion, and quotation.

This language contrasts with Harry's sentimental diction. While interweaving aesthetic and sentimental language, Brooke creates a tension between the sentimental value for transparency and for spectatorial appreciation.<sup>11</sup> Harry describes Julia as a painting, even bedecked with the baroque conceit of "loves":

Lady Julia then . . . is exactly what a *poet* or *painter* would wish to *copy*, who intended to *personify* the *idea* of female softness; her whole *form* is delicate and feminine to the utmost *degree*: her complexion is fair, enlivened by the bloom of youth, and often *diversified* by blushes more beautiful than those of the morning. . . . Her countenance, *the beauteous abode of the loves and the smiles*, has a *mixture* of sweetness and spirit which gives *life and expression* to her charms.

(1.15; emphasis added)

These pictorial metaphors present love as courtly convention and spectacle, but Harry purifies these clichés by tracing Julia's beauty to her unspoiled nature: "As her mind has been adorned,

not warped, by education, it is just what her appearance promises; artless, gentle, timid, soft, sincere, compassionate; awake to all the finer impressions of tenderness, and melting with pity for every human woe" (1.6). Harry detects these social virtues, this ideal female complacency, through the physical evidence of Julia's loveliness; his sentimental rhetoric equates appearance and behaviour, and so prohibits irony or social consciousness, both of which result from the disparity between appearance and behaviour. Julia is transparent; she is what she looks to be, and this is the condition for sentimental heroism.

Brooke challenges this ideal, however, because it invalidates the complexity of women's internal experience in a world where men rule. True perspective, the perspective which moralizes experience, derives from distance and the power of contrast which Lady Anne models. Lady Anne has suffered such abuse from her violent, brutish husband that she hesitates to marry her exemplary lover Bellville; moreover, she reiterates an ideal of mutual respect and friendship as the basis for marriage which the youthful Harry and Julia do not experience. With characteristic irony, moreover, she questions the practical morality of sentimental feeling. After Julia's death, she recounts to Bellville: "I am now convinced Emily Howard deserves that preference Lady Julia gave her over me in her heart, of which I once so unjustly complained; I lament, I regret, but am enough my self to reason, to reflect; Emily Howard can only weep . . . she seems incapable of tasting any good in life without her" (2.176-77). Lady Anne finds happiness, or at least contentment, within her "self" through reason and reflection; the alternative, immersion in feeling and dependence on others, leads to misery.

Brooke reiterates this warning against immersion in feeling by a method later employed by Ann Radcliffe: the emblematic episode. After describing Emily's beautiful, even admirable, grief, Lady Anne recounts her own deviance from reason as, lost in feeling; she transgresses the boundaries of the estate, of day, of cultivated nature, and of reason.<sup>12</sup>

Awaking at once from the reveries in which I had plunged, I found myself at a distance from the house, just entering the little wood . . . a dread silence reigned around me, a terror I never felt before seized

me, my heart panted with timid apprehension; I breathed short, I started at every leaf . . . my limbs were covered with a cold dew; I fancied I saw a thousand airy forms flit around me, I seemed to hear the shrieks of the dead and dying; there is no describing my horrors.  
(2.179-81)

By abandoning control of her fancy, Lady Anne becomes as vulnerable as a sentimental heroine. This is an example of the wrong way to "feel," yet it is also an evocative passage of stylistic virtuosity which challenges the hold of "reason" on the imagination. By treading on the borders of sanity, Lady Anne reasserts the importance of margins. Harry, whose passionate letters lack logic, order, and balance, similarly experiences sentiment beyond the bounds of reason; his excess costs him his life.

Lady Anne, however, shakes off this temporary indulgence to model for the reader the right way to feel: by evoking contrast and deriving a moral from detached comparisons. After remarking the sad difference between what is and what was, she herself comments on the aesthetic pleasures of tragedy:

Whether it be that the mind abhors nothing like a state of inaction, or from whatever cause I know not, but grief itself is more agreeable to us than indifference; nay, if not too exquisite, is in the highest degree delightful; of which the pleasure we take in tragedy, or in talking of our dead friends, is a striking proof; we wish not to be cured of what we feel on these occasions; the tears we shed are charming, we even indulge in them; Belville [sic], does not the very word *indulge* shew the sensation to be pleasurable?

Lady Anne moralizes the general effects of the aesthetic representation of sorrow; with the theoretical language of Addison and Hume, indeed, she comments on the reader's own experience of the very novel in which she appears. Representing herself as a spectator of experience, like the reader, Lady Anne thus cautions against indulgence even in the pleasures of fiction.

Brooke's second novel, *The History of Emily Montague* (1769), portrays sentiment on the margin of civilization in Canada. By juxtaposing letters from sympathetic characters with different perspectives, Brooke creates a dialogue on the nature of sexual relations, marriage, and liberty. Two central correspondences contrast social and sentimental discourse. The titular heroine, Emily, describes her feelings as she rejects her fiancé and falls in

love with Colonel Ed Rivers. In contrast, her friend Arabella Fermor describes physical and social scenes with an allusive wit which fences feeling with irony. The sentimental Colonel Ed Rivers moralizes colonization and love to his crony John Temple in London. A few letters from Arabella's father Captain William Fermor contextualize the tale within "realistic" history.<sup>13</sup> It is Arabella, however, who tests the margins of sentiment by cultural observation.

Brooke structures the novel with a comic plot which banishes the central characters to the "wild" New World, where they recognize true nature and pair off before returning to cultivate their "gardens" in England (132; 408). While Emily must face social disapproval for breaking her engagement with the wealthy, handsome, but insensitive Sir George Clayton, she is rewarded for her fidelity to her feelings by marrying the laudable Colonel Ed Rivers and receiving a rich inheritance from a newly-discovered father. As in *The History of Lady Julia Mandeville*, however, social prejudice forms only part of the drama and suspense; the rest arises from internal doubts, realizations, and misunderstandings. Inset sentimental vignettes warn against this emphasis on emotion. In Canada, a "Hermit" forever distraught from the loss of his love demonstrates that feeling can make the world a wilderness, while in England the virtuous Fanny, impoverished foster mother to the love-child of her sentimental friend, recounts the fatal costs of loving not wisely but too well.

The most cogent critique of both sentimentalism and society, however, comes from the persistent comparison between the native Canadian Indians, the Canadian French, and the newly arrived English colonials. Generally, the English balance raw nature, represented by the Indians, and corruption, represented by the French, opposite extremes linked by their use of marriage as a political rather than a sentimental contract. Despite his sympathy for the notion of the noble savage, Ed illustrates that sentiment is a civilized luxury when he criticizes the behaviour of unmarried Huron women (34). Perhaps unaware that they wed on their parents' order, Ed observes that they are "liberal to profusion of their charms before marriage," albeit "chastity itself after."<sup>14</sup> In reverse fashion, French virgins wed for convenience



and play the libertine afterwards: "Marriages in France being made by the parents, and therefore generally without inclination on either side, gallantry seems to be a tacit condition, though not absolutely expressed in the contract" (84). In both cases, women dissociate sexual pleasure from marriage. Both Ed and Arabella record that the sentimental relationship between the sexes results from English manners, not from nature. These examples suggest, moreover, that the "English liberty" of a woman's right to marry whom she pleases is not merely a sentimental but a sensible principle to preserve social morality.

The issues of marriage and sexual relations allow Brooke to explore ideas of "natural" and political behaviour.<sup>15</sup> Whereas Arabella admires the Huron women's freedom, Ed condemns their manners, vowing to Temple, "You are right, Jack, as to the savages; the only way to civilize them is to *feminize* their women . . . at present their manners differ in nothing from those of the men" (118-19). By "feminizing" women, that is, by teaching them to love their children more than their tribe, Ed hopes to civilize them. Despite her different perspective on this process of domestication, when Arabella learns of their system of marriage, she recants her praise of Huron freedom:

I declare off at once; I will not be a squaw; I admire their talking of the liberty of savages; in the most essential point, they are slaves: the mothers marry their children without ever consulting their inclinations, and they are obliged to submit to this foolish tyranny. Dear England! where liberty appears, not as here among these odious savages, wild and ferocious like themselves, but lovely, smiling, led by the hand of the Graces. There is no true freedom any where else. They may talk of the privilege of chusing [sic] a chief; but what is that to the dear English privilege of chusing a husband? (56)

By mingling the jargon of marital engagement—"declare off"—with that of politics—"tyranny," "true freedom"—Arabella demonstrates the overlap between politics, manifested by law, and domestic relations or sentiment. She suggests that sentiment, "English liberty," and civilized refinement are interconnected: sentiment is not produced by such sublime nature as the Huron display; albeit nourished by female instinct, it is the fruit of culture.

Brooke further explores the limitations both of nature and of civilization by comparing Indian and English politics. The Huron political system represents a version of Rousseau's natural law with "no positive laws"—no written statutes—and, as one Indian avers, "we are subjects to no prince; a savage is free all over the world." Ed confirms that "they are not only free as a people, but every individual is perfectly so. Lord of himself, at once subject and master, a savage knows no superior . . ." (33). Living in the state of nature, practicing the epic virtues of hospitality, courtesy, and bellicosity, the Hurons escape European hierarchies of class and gender: Ed notes that the chief's power is limited and reasonable, while the "sex we have so unjustly excluded from power in Europe have a great share in the Huron government," choosing both the chief and his council. Just as he praises sexual equality in marriage, Ed condemns English politics as uncivilized tyranny: "in the true sense of the word, *we* are the savages, who so impolitely deprive [women] of the common rights of citizenship" (34-35). Thus, sentiment, sexual equality, and politeness result from culture.

Brooke contrasts sentimental and traditional politics by juxtaposing the letters of the other characters with the letters of Arabella's father, Captain William Fermor. In judging how suitable Canada is for settlement, William Fermor contextualizes the lovers' sentimental accounts of Indian freedom and personal relationships within the parameters of conventional social values. After Fermor records that, since they always long for home, the English will not settle well, Emily and Rivers discuss whether they can afford to leave the "exile" of Canada (224). Condemning the "[s]loth and superstition" of Canadians, Fermor advocates universal religion and rational labour in place of the religious plurality and native freedom his daughter admires (208-09). While deploring the softness of the English who cannot "bear the hardships" of settlement, he recommends winning the Canadians "by the gentle arts of persuasion, and the gradual progress of knowledge, to adopt so much of our manners as tends to make them happier in themselves, and more useful members of the society to which they belong," a perspective which satirizes the lovers' praise of Canadian liberty (220-21).

He also traces the "striking resemblance between the manners of the Canadians and the savages" to infection of the French by "savage" "manners," although, in condemning Indian drunkenness, Fermor protests that it is "unjust to say that we [Europeans] corrupted them" since "both French and English are in general sober." This argument rationalizes Arabella's tale of taking wine to the Indian women and watching them get drunk while she asked them questions (272). Indeed, Fermor's perspective resembles his daughter's in its faith in cultivation: "From all that I have observed, and heard of these people, it appears to me an undoubted fact, that the most civilized Indian nations are the most virtuous; a fact which makes directly against Rousseau's ideal system" (272). Ed, on the other hand, admires the independence of the Indians in resisting European influence, even while he also condemns their indolence.

While editing Ed's sentiment, Brooke also demonstrates that the conventional perspective Fermor adopts, with its firm definition of "virtue," does not penetrate nature. When he describes scenery, he uses technical rather than picturesque language, finally admitting, "I am afraid I have conveyed a very inadequate idea of the scene . . . it however struck me so strongly, that it was impossible for me not to attempt it" (236). An enlightened father, he advocates conversation between the sexes to educate women to be "the most pleasing companions," and recommends moralists "expand, not . . . contract, the heart"; yet he claims possession over Arabella's affections. Fermor reiterates the conventional tenet that although English women may refuse their parents' choice of husband they may not marry where they will, yet Arabella's letters suggest that she embraces complete freedom of choice in marriage. Brooke emphasizes this contrast by juxtaposing Arabella's teasingly hyperbolic declaration of passion and secret marriage to Fitzgerald with Fermor's account of Fitzgerald's birth and fortune, the very standards of value all other characters, including Arabella, condemn as English corruption.

If Fermor, albeit enlightened, exemplifies the patriarchal values opposed to sentimentalism, Ed also reveals the effects of "male" education. Despite his sympathy for their "natural law,"

Ed does not reflect Indian morality. To women, he attempts to act with an internal delicacy which the stoic Indians do not share, yet his function in Canada is colonization. He opens the novel by quoting Milton and declaring himself ruler of the wilderness. Although Brooke repeatedly identifies his behaviour with "female" softness—"my heart has all the sensibility of woman," confesses Ed (133); "You . . . really have something of the sensibility and generosity of women," declares Arabella (347)—she also points out the link between his attitude towards sexual opportunity and his exploitation of land. Ed judges woman as a sentimental connoisseur:

I hate a woman of whom every man coldly says, *she is handsome*; I adore beauty, but it is not meer features or complexion to which I give that name; 'tis life, 'tis spirit, 'tis imagination, 'tis—in one word, 'tis Emily Montague—without being regularly beautiful, she charms every sensible heart . . . she seems made to feel to a trembling excess the passion she cannot fail of inspiring: her elegant form has an air of softness and languor . . . her eyes, the most intelligent I ever saw, hold you enchain'd by their bewitching sensibility. (21)

Ed proves that his picture of her indeed describes her nature by remarking her "attentive politeness" in conversation and her "desire of pleasing." His cultural power of observation, moreover, makes him a "philosopher" not merely of physical scenery, but of human scenery too: "As I am a philosopher in these matters, and have made the heart my study, I want extremely to see her with her lover, and to observe the general increase of her charms in his presence" (21).

Brooke corrects Ed's idea that he can observe beauty unmoved by making him fall in love with Emily, but his very detachment does hurt another sentimental character, Madame des Roches. Madame des Roches enters the story when she asks Ed for legal help in adjudicating a property claim, a request Ed passes on to John Temple. This first encounter outlines the nature of their relationship: he is master of the rules which define territory, be this wild land or natural feeling. In a letter to Temple, Ed adopts the jargon of connoisseurship to describe sexual relations in society:

Widows were, I thought, fair prey, as being sufficiently experienced to take care of themselves. . . . A woman in the first bloom of youth

resembles a tree in blossom; when mature, in fruit; but a woman who retains the charms of her person till her understanding is in its full perfection, is like those trees in happier climes, which produce blossoms and fruit together.

You will scarce believe, Jack, that I have lived a week *tête à tête*, in the midst of a wood, with just the woman I have been describing: a widow extremely my taste, *mature*, five or six years more so than you say I require, lively, sensible, handsome, without saying one civil thing to her. (84-85)

Although Ed contrasts this cultivated appreciation of women as products of nature to his feelings for Emily, he fails to recognize that he affects Madame des Roches: believing he loves her, she loves him. When he learns this, however, his response employs the language of imperialism: "I was at first extremely embarrassed: but when I had reflected a moment, I considered that the ladies, though another may be the object, always regard with a kind of complacency a man who *loves*, as one who acknowledges the power of the sex, whereas an indifferent man is a kind of rebel to their empire" (158). His sexual language mirrors his political behaviour.<sup>16</sup> Brooke again reminds the reader that men confuse sex and power when Ed's friend Temple, now married to Ed's sister Lucy, after praising his wife in a rapturous letter, hastily concludes: "Lucy is here. Adieu! I must not let her know her power" (373). This echoes Ed's misogynistic clichés: when he begins to love Emily, he calls her a "little tyrant" who wishes to add him "to the list of her slaves" (24).

Brooke links colonial attitudes to language also by silencing Madame des Roches. Like the Indians, she possesses no first name, exhibits sublime nature in her obdurate passion, and is heard only by translation in the letters of the English. Arabella alone, as a disinterested spectator, passes on her words when Madame des Roches congratulates Emily and vows eternal fidelity to Rivers, and even Arabella paraphrases them: "I thought of sending her letter to [Emily and Ed], but there is a certain fire in her style, mixed with tenderness . . . which would have given them both regret, by making them see the excess of her affection for him; her expressions are much stronger than those in which I have given you the sense of them" (282). When a jealous Emily offends Ed and Madame des Roches, Arabella undercuts Emily's

complacent self-criticism with a parenthetical comment which adumbrates the implicit "colonization" of Ed: Emily "was peevish with me, angry with herself" and said "that *her* Rivers (and why not Madame des Roches's Rivers?) was incapable of acting otherwise than as became the best and most tender of mankind" (163-64). Arabella underscores Emily's desire to possess, or contain, Rivers, while Madame des Roches, the embodiment of wild nature, is banished to a solitary life in Canada, and even to madness pricked by poring over Ed's picture (283).

Brooke stresses her point that sentiment, like Burke's "beautiful," relies on art as well as nature by linking it with not only language but law and literature. The Indians have no "positive laws" because they "have no idea of letters, no alphabet, nor is their language reducible to rules": like Madame des Roches, "'tis by painting they preserve . . . memory" (85-86). Ed notes that they sing only on the subjects of war and male friendship, except for this single, "short and simple, tho' perhaps not inexpressive" lyric: "I love you / I love you dearly, / I love you all day long" (11). This emotional efficiency contrasts with both the ritualized language of complimentary courtship borrowed from the French, which Temple and occasionally Ed himself use, and with the stylized literature of sentiment which Arabella quotes and imitates. Indeed, Indian illiteracy demonstrates the degree to which sentiment, women's "power," relies on language, especially epistolary language. Both Indian women and men without sensibility lack the language of the heart. "Adieu! I never write long letters in London," asserts Jack Temple as he plays the roué at London assemblies (83). William Fermor apologizes for discussing his personal matters by blaming the nature of letters: "Your good-natured philosophy will tell you, much fewer people talk or write to amuse or inform their friends, than to give way to the feelings of their own hearts" (162). Similarly, Ed entrusts communication to women with a characteristically professional metaphor: "I shall quit my post of historian to . . . Miss Fermor; the ladies love writing much better than we do; and I should perhaps be only just, if I said they write better" (39). By chronicling the progress of love and self-realization through letters by women or feminine men, Brooke suggests that women regulate their reality, sensi-

bility, through letters, as men regulate theirs, property, through law. Epistolary language connects experience and reflection, thus constructing the very morality the Indians lack: private memory and public history.<sup>17</sup>

Arabella exemplifies epistolary power. She articulates the balance between French artifice and Indian instinct, between masculine judgement and feminine sympathy, between literary and spontaneous language. While "Rivers" and "des Roches" evoke nature, the respective ideals of the beautiful and of the sublime, Arabella is named after Pope's model for Belinda in *The Rape of the Lock*. Like her namesake, she loves cards, masquerades, and coquetry; like Pope, she "wrote pastorals at seven years old" (387). As Ann Messenger has noted, she is thus both her own artist and artwork: her creation is herself, where Ed aims to create a kingdom (80). She herself observes that "[Emily] loves like a foolish woman, I like a sensible man" (198). While acknowledging Emily's love for Rivers, she warns her not to "fall into the common error of sensible and delicate minds, that of refining away your happiness" (45), and, admitting to "a certain excess of romance . . . in [her] temper" (280), teases herself for vanity in the midst of a letter adjudicating the claims of physical and moral beauty (227-30). Arabella is the only character to describe the physical nature of Canada; moreover, she does so in picturesque language which contrasts the wild sublime and the pleasing beautiful:

There are two very noble falls of water near Quebec, la Chaudiere and Montmorenci: the former is a prodigious sheet of water, rushing over the wildest rocks, and forming a scene grotesque, irregular, astonishing; the latter, less wild, less irregular, but more pleasing and more majestic. (29)

Arabella, however, like Rivers, ultimately values English beauty, "the lovely, the smiling," over "the savage luxuriance of America" (300).

Arabella's admirable perspective on nature and art mirrors her style, which, brimming with literary allusions and philosophical argument, permits her to retain her "independence" of judgement. This style contrasts with Emily's descriptions of emotional vacillation. In one letter enclosing a missive from Emily

confessing dislike of her fiancé, Arabella concludes not only that Emily should be released, but that "long engagements . . . [are] extremely unfavorable to happiness" and that she will refuse one (131). Her ability to "read" others' feelings allows her to decide her own course; she judges from observation and education, not just sentiment. She also extrapolates from her own feeling and from literary authority to determine the nature of social concepts. Quoting a passage from Nicholas Rowe's *Tamerlane* and arguing that all people worship that same God despite their differences, Arabella paradoxically raises a distinction of gender:

Women are religious as they are virtuous, less from principles founded on reasoning and argument, than from elegance of mind, delicacy of moral taste, and a certain quick perception of the beautiful and becoming in every thing.

This instinct, however, for such it is, is worth all the tedious reasonings of the men . . . (107)

In correlating the "natural taste" for virtue and religion with gender, Arabella articulates a tenet of literary sentimentalism; at the same time, her argument that women act from instinct cultivated by good breeding locates religion in civilized sensibility rather than in wild nature. Her own reflections thus modify the literary authority she cites. Indeed, throughout the novel, Arabella exemplifies Locke's ideal of judgement as the result of reflection on the data of empirical observation and of sensation.

By the dialectic exploration of sentimental ideals in her epistolary novels, Frances Brooke delineates the uses and dangers of sentiment. Her epistolary structure juxtaposes the contemplative letters of marginal spectators with lovers' passionate epistles to demonstrate that it is on the edges of sentiment that moral perspective lies, not in the heart of feeling. In *The History of Lady Julia Mandeville*, Brooke locates sentiment in moral spectatorship rather than heroic action; in *The History of Emily Montague*, she shows that female softness is the luxury of a "civilized" society, and therefore must also be its responsibility. Brooke thus suggests that sentiment is neither a natural nor an entirely good quality, for, although it supplies an internal moral system paralleling the regulations of society, it weakens women in a world ruled by the laws of men. While she approves the ideals of



independence, sexual equality, and sympathy, Brooke believes that both civilization and right sentiment ultimately balance out feeling and reflection, and that it is the spectator who can exercise this internal command. Hence, watching women, both liberated from conventional society and exiled from conventional feelings or roles as heroines, may and must internalize the social value of conquest to rule their own natures. By letters contextualizing sentiment through allusion and pictorial diction, these characters serve to criticize the failures of literary and social conventions which identify virtue with spontaneous emotion. Brooke shows that by tracing the margins of language, letters, and law, women may translate the values of sentimentalism into the values of society.

## NOTES

- 1 See Tompkins, who distinguishes between Fanny Burney's and Brooke's "reasonable" plots and the crowd of unreasonable novels in *The Popular Novel in England, 1700-1800* (60); for an introduction to the forms and idea of sentimental fiction, see Todd. For good analyses of literary sentimentalism, see Brissenden and Sheriff: both emphasize the expressive and individualistic element of sentimentalism at the expense of recognizing the pleas for social responsibility and restraint in sentimental fiction.
- 2 The first English epistolary novels of sensibility, Samuel Richardson's *Pamela or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1747), depict heroines "writing to the minute," transcribing their reactions as they happen.
- 3 Both Mullan and Dwyer identify restraint as a pervasive discourse within sentimental fiction.
- 4 For a thorough account of Brooke and her works which notes the figure of the female spectator, see McMullen. Pointing to the reviews of her novels in the contemporary *Monthly Review* and *Critical Review*, as well as to Bonnell Thornton and George Colman's acid remarks in *The Connoisseur*, McMullen demonstrates Brooke's popularity and her experience in the literary world of the mid-century. McMullen argues that Brooke probably wrote *All's Right at Last; or, The History of Miss West*, published in 1774 and set in Canada (141). Edwards concisely documents Brooke's social life in her "Introduction" to the Carleton edition of *Emily Montague* (xvii-liv).
- 5 Shelovel explains that Brooke imitated Eliza Haywood's *The Female Spectator* but moved away from "the centrality of the essay-periodical" in its diversity of offerings (151, 175). McMullen argues that Brooke's periodical, lighter than both Haywood's *The Female Spectator* and Samuel Johnson's *Rambler*, imitated the "wit, irony, and didacticism" of *The Spectator* (15-16).
- 6 Clifford describes a similar frontispiece to Father Lafitau's *Moeurs de sauvages americains* showing "a young woman sitting at a writing table amid artifacts from the New World," Greece, and Egypt, with her pen identified as the source of truth, and Time and religious allegorical vistas behind her (21). Such frontispieces represent the control of foreign culture by the writer's translation; see Benedict, "The 'Curious Attitude'" (61-77, 96n. 28).

- 7 Mullan locates the failure of sentimental fiction in its fantasy of locating social value in private experience (119-20).
- 8 In 1770, Brooke translated *Memoirs of the Marquis de St. Forlaix* by Nicholas Etienne Framery (1745-1810); in 1771, she translated the Abbé C. F. X. Millot's *Elements of the History of England, from the invasion of the Romans to the reign of George the Second*, but she was undoubtedly most famous for her translations of Mme. Riccoboni's *Letters of Juliet Milady Catesby*.
- 9 Brooke's first love was the theatre; in her final novel, *The Excursion* (1777), she chronicles the attempts of a young heroine, Maria, to get her plays published by a hostile Garrick. For an examination of Brooke's theatrical career, see Berland.
- 10 Markley argues that sentimental fiction naturalizes class inequality by portraying bourgeois benevolists as instinctively charitable, that is, aristocratic, and thus finessing the problem of class versus wealth. Brooke avoids the issue by confining her fiction to gentle or noble characters and retaining the nostalgic "paternal" system, which Brissenden identifies as the dream of sentimentalism, and which Mullan opposes to the new exchange economy (132).
- 11 Brooke opposes the categories of the "authentic" and the conventional on the level of language, but most sentimental fictions also play with this opposition on the level of structure. Braudy notes the pretence of sentimental fiction to authenticity by means of its transparent method, the recovered manuscript or the reprinted correspondence.
- 12 MacCarthy perceives the "Gothic terrors" in this passage (71). Foucault discusses the eighteenth-century association of forgetfulness with madness; for an analysis of Radcliffe's similar use of pictorial descriptions of young women losing their sense of moral boundaries by wandering or wondering in nature, see Benedict, "Pictures of Conformity" (370).
- 13 In her "Introduction" to *Emily Montague*, Edwards suggests that Brooke may have used some of her personal correspondence in the book (xxxviii-xxxix).
- 14 While noting that women choose their chiefs and applauding the practice since "women are, beyond all doubt, the best judges of the merit of men," Ed nevertheless notes that since this chief is, in fact, the closest relative to the old chief by the female line, this power undermines women's chastity in marriage (34).
- 15 Klinck avers that Brooke approves imperialism and entertains "conventional intolerance," but in fact her careful parallels and oppositions between different cultures suggest that she is using the conventions of imperialism and cultural intolerance to argue for women's freedom and protection, not for imperialism per se (x).
- 16 Barash explores the overlaps between sexual and colonial exploitation in slave narratives which use the sentimental devices of dreaming and the possessive language of dominance.
- 17 Clifford observes that dominant cultures view colonized or "primitive" cultures as without history (32); Frye, on the other hand, identifies *The History of Emily Montague* as a chronicle of the "primitivism" of the New World which is almost historical in empirical detail (170).

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