

**From *Evelina* to *The Woman-Hater*:
Frances Burney and the "Joyce" of Dramatic
(Re)writing.**

Composed between 1796 and 1801,¹ *The Woman-Hater* belongs to a series of three comedies completed by Frances Burney in the period that passed between the publication of her third novel *Camilla or, A Picture of Youth* (1796) and the novelist's hasty removal to France (1801), where her French husband Alexandre d'Arblay (m. 1793) had returned in the hope of regaining whatever of his properties had not been seized by the revolutionary militia. Up until recently, this period of Burney's life had been lacking literary interest for the author's scholars. Her authorial reputation had been slowly on the wane since the general acclaim tributed to her second novel *Cecilia or, Memoirs of an Heiress* (publ. 1782) and her last literary effort *The Wanderer* (publ. 1814) was still to await almost another two decades before being set to print (proving however no amend for her novelistic fortunes). For a long time it seemed that this part of Burney's life could remain of consequence only for her biographers, free to delve into the domestic events of the new d'Arblay household, the hushed incestuous relationship between Frances's brother James and their half-sister Sarah Harriet, and the bewailed death of Susanna Burney (1800), a bereavement Burney never fully got over.

The recent publication of Burney's plays has however offered a chance of revaluing this long-neglected span of the author's career by bringing into the focus of her current scholarship her forgotten dramatic production. Although they were never produced during her lifetime, these plays bear a strong relation to her major narrative production, and so they claim attention by their own right.

Among these end-of-the-century dramatic pieces, *The Woman-Hater* appears to be the most challenging to the scholar. While the plot of the comedy bears an evident resemblance to the story of *Evelina* --the novel which marks Burney's literary debut (1778) and which still remains her most popular achievement-- it is however its less overt, yet strongly significant debt to the juvenile play *The Witlings* (1779) and the more recent *Camilla* (whose second edition was at the time still under revision)² which gives us a unique chance to follow Burney's poetic development through the years, understanding at the same time how she worked out a transposition from the narrative to the dramatic mode of writing.

An outline of the play seems necessary before any further discussion. After a period of seventeen years spent in the West Indies, Wilmot returns to England. He is

accompanied by his daughter Miss Wilmot, a girl of silent and extremely reserved disposition, and the young lady's nurse. Wilmot has returned home in the hope of gaining the financial support of his sister, Lady Smatter, in whose charge he intends to leave his daughter as he pursues his wife Eleonora, whose return to England he has accidentally heard of. Wilmot and Eleonora have not met for the past sixteen years, since the day the outraged woman, accused of having an affair with a fellow-traveller, departed just after landing in the West Indies, leaving their baby daughter behind.

At the same time of Wilmot and Eleonora's wedding, Wilmot's sister Lady Smatter jilted Eleonora's brother, Sir Roderick. Since the event, Sir Roderick's character has soured into that of an inveterate misogynyst, who has imposed unrelenting woman-hating to his heir Young Waverley, a distant kin who lives at Sir Roderick's with his sycophant father, Old Waverley. Tired of being financially dependant on Sir Roderick's will and with the help the house steward Stephens, Young Waverley intends to woo into marriage Lady Smatter, now an affected, but rich widow who continually prides herself on her imaginary erudition.

Young Waverley is torn between his desire for the financial security the old and conceited Lady Smatter can provide for him and the strong attraction he feels for Sophia, a beautiful young woman who has recently come to live with her mother in an obscure cottage in the woods. Very soon we discover that the young girl is the daughter of Eleonora, who has returned to England in order to plead for assistance from her brother Roderick and Lady Smatter. However the woman's task is made harder by the fact that years before, her marriage to Wilmot had taken place without their approval. Moreover Eleonora's alleged elopement and subsequent abandonment of her infant daughter seems to have sullied her reputation indelibly.

Predictably, Lady Smatter refuses Eleonora any assistance on the grounds of her past marital and maternal misconduct. The distressed woman manages to leave Smatter's house just in time to avoid an unexpected meeting with the returned Wilmot. We apprehend that all through the years they have been apart, Wilmot has been lamenting his wife's desertion, even more so now that he has been informed of her complete innocence. Wilmot's desire is to reunite with his wife, in whose search he intends to leave.

As soon as Miss Wilmot is left alone with her nurse and aunt, she surprisingly transforms herself into a loquacious hoyden, who enjoys jumping about and bossing people around. Nurse explains to the young woman that she substituted her for Wilmot's real daughter at the time of the flight of Eleonora, who fled secretly taking her baby daughter with her. The only way that is now left to the young girl to pull it off is

to convince Sir Roderick to will her part of his fortune before the nurse's trick is discovered.

After Smatter's unsympathetic refusal of assistance, Sophia undertakes to engage Sir Roderick's help. However she mistakes Old Waverley for her uncle, and her request for financial succour is grossly misunderstood. Identities become more and more confusing after Miss Wilmot (whom we know now to be Joyce, the nurse's daughter) and Sophia manage to approach the real Sir Roderick on separate occasions to ask for the baronet's support, both claiming close relationships to him.

In the meantime Wilmot has found Eleonora's cottage. He intends to forgive her past error, but he is struck with horror when he realises that his wife lives with a young girl who is known as her daughter, and therefore whom she must have had out of wedlock. Sophia turns up just before Wilmot, enraged at the discovery of Eleonora's new alleged guilt, is threatening to carry her away. The error is explained by the providential arrival of Joyce, who willingly accepts to give up her former condition in order to marry the dunce Bob and take up the life of a ballad singer. Also Lady Smatter makes peace with Sir Roderick and the Wilmots unite their daughter Sophia with Young Waverley, who has opportunely come to realise that his love for the girl is stronger than any desire for unearned riches.

The comedy is the result of the interplay of four organically-connected sub-plots. The main sub-plot (Wilmot and Eleonora's) is also the one from which the three remaining stories are directly dependant.

I sub-plot	Wilmot-Eleonora-Sophia
II sub-plot	Sir Roderick-Lady Smatter
III sub-plot	Old and Young Waverley
IV sub-plot	Nurse-Joyce-Bob-Bob's sister Hetty

In its turn, each sub-plot is associated with a relevant love story, characterized by its strong generic attributes.

I sub-plot	Eleonora-Wilmot	sentimental tragedy
II sub-plot	Sophia-Young Waverley	sentimental comedy
III sub-plot	Sir Roderick-Lady Smatter	comedy of humours
IV sub-plot	Joyce-Bob	farce

On the performance level, the importance and interaction of the dramatic genres was underlined in the cast list drawn by Burney, which included the most celebrated actors of her time. Sarah Siddons, the greatest tragedienne of the day, was intended to play Eleonora, while John Philip Kemble was cast as Wilmot. The name of Dorothy Jordan, famous for her comic roles, was pencilled in for Joyce.³

With its harmonic progress and happy ending, which lead us from initial disharmony to final reunions, *The Woman-Hater* superficially seems to follow the established pattern of comedy. In fact Burney appears to question many of the dramatic conventions she has recourse to, in what seems an undercover attack on the current sentimental clichés and their social and familial implications. Furthermore, her rewriting of the several literary models she openly refers to (a broad-ranging list which includes Shakespeare, the popular sentimental playwrights of the age and a long-standing tradition of romance writers) testifies to the complexity reached by her dramatic abilities and it proves that the comedy must be considered on a footing with Burney's more popular narrative efforts. Although never performed, and thus lacking the tightening given by rehearsing with a group of actors (evident for instance in the frenetic cramming of the scenes), *The Woman-Hater* appears a mature work that -- despite any parental injunction-- was clearly written, in one critic's words, "with stage production in mind."⁴

The comedy respects the unities of time and action. In adherence to the contemporary theatrical conventions, the unity of space is overlooked, effecting several scene changes which add to the spectacularity of the play. The action begins in the morning at Sir Roderick's and it ends in the late afternoon in the wood. This chronological passage from morning to evening coincides with Wilmot's (apparent) education from mad jealousy to reason.

morning	-->	evening
UNREASON	-->	REASON

Topologically, the comedy moves from the civilized spaces of the house to the wood, a highly significant area where a great part of the Act V is set. In this way the movement follows an indoors-outdoors direction, which takes us from the spaces of culture and society to the wilderness of unspoilt nature.

indoors	outdoors
AN APARTMENT AT SIR RODERICK'S (I,i-x)	THE WOOD (V, xii-xiii)
A DRESSING ROOM AT LADY SMATTER'S (I, xi-xvi)	
A ROOM AT AN INN (II, i-iv)	
A LAWN BEFORE THE HOUSE OF LADY SMATTER (II, v-viii)*	
A COTTAGE (III, i-ii)	
AN AVENUE (III, iii-v)*	
LADY SMATTER'S DRESSING ROOM (III, vi-x)	
THE COTTAGE (III, xi-xiii)	
AN APARTMENT AT SIR RODERICK'S (IV, i-ii)	
A DRESSING ROOM AT LADY SMATTER'S (IV, iii-viii)	
THE AVENUE (IV, ix-x)*	
THE COTTAGE (IV, xi-xv)	
THE AVENUE (IV, xvi-xvii)*	
AN APARTMENT AT SIR RODERICK'S (V, i-x)	
THE DRESSING ROOM AT LADY'S SMATTER (V, xi)	

In spite of their outside location, both of the settings indicated as an AVENUE and a LAWN (marked above by an asterisk *) are clearly connected with civilized life, and thus part of what we may define a *natura naturata*. On the other hand, it appears significant that the final denouement and the ensuing happy reunions take place in the wood, a location whose symbolic meaning Burney must have certainly been aware of. With a deliberate upturning of the kinds of exchanges and errors of identification that take place in the wood of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, reason and identity return in a setting which traditionally stands for un-reason, error, and folly, thus raising doubts about the real meaning of the comedy's ending.⁵

As I have previously mentioned, the movement of the plot follows an orderly sequence which takes us from inceptive ORDER through DISORDER back to ORDER again, as in the following sketch:

ORDER ---> DISORDER ---> (apparent) ORDER
 HARMONY ENTROPY
 SYMMETRY

The action begins with two pairs of lovers, linked by strong affective and familial bonds. Eleonora, sister to Sir Roderick, is promised in marriage to Wilmot, brother of Lady Smatter (then Miss Wilmot). In their turn, Miss Wilmot and Sir Roderick are betrothed.

BROTHER	loves	SISTER
(Wilmot)		(Eleonora)
┌───		┌───
SISTER	loves	BROTHER
(Miss Wilmot)		(Sir Roderick)

In the opening dialogue between Old Waverley and Young Waverley, this initial harmony and balance are immediately hinted at.

YOUNG WAVERLEY Was not the double marriage projected first by Sir Roderick?

(I, i, 36-7)

The specularity is then broken by Miss Wilmot's jilting of Sir Roderick in favour of Lord Smatter, who, well aware of the woman's literary ambition, conquered her by wooing her in verse. Miss Wilmot's bad turn proves women's fickleness and lack of morals to Sir Roderick and confirms him into a hater of the whole sex.

OLD WAVERLEY Sir Roderick is a little crabbed against the female sex, I own; but then, he has been rather unkindly treated by them, you must allow. Miss Wilmot's marrying Lord Smatter, just as his own wedding day was fixed with her, was but a bad sort of joke to a man.

(I, i, 14-7)

Shunning any possible familiar connection with his former fiancée, Sir Roderick demands his sister Eleonora never marry Wilmot. In defiance of his enraged disapproval, Wilmot and Eleonora get married anyway. As a result, in a fit of pique Sir

Roderick renounces Eleonora. Thus the original parallel pattern between the two sets of couples is definitely shattered:

SIR RODERICK	MISS WILMOT [\leftarrow --- \rightarrow LORD SMATTER]
	┌ └
ELEONORA	\leftarrow --- \rightarrow WILMOT

Lady Smatter's widowhood and the apparent elopement of Eleonora -- who appears to have left her husband in order to satisfy her unlawful appetites -- definitely overturn the original symmetry of the couples, who now come to relate in accordance with a new paradigm of opposition, altogether antithetical to the initial pattern. Instead of two double couples, we are left with four separate characters, whose familial bonding has been fractured and inverted, in opposition to every familial and sentimental tie.

◆ SIR RODERICK	LADY SMATTER ∅
◆ ELEONORA	WILMOT ∅

In the V act, the final double reconciliation is additionally emphasized by the presence of two new pairs of lovers (Sophia-Young Waverley; Joyce-Bob), so that not only does the initial pattern seem ultimately recovered but also (superficially) reinforced. The reunion of parents and children, the multiple reconciliations and the new marriages in prospect (conventional elements of narrative and dramatic romance) ratify the restoration of a socially-sanctioned natural order. This renewed allegiance is physically conveyed through a communal joining of the hands. The gesture replicates the proxemics of social order and symbolizes the reknitting of the social and familial bonds previously disrupted by the characters' ungoverned passions and unnatural behaviour.

SIR RODERICK	By the lord Harry, Lady Smatter, if you want to make a fool of me again --
LADY SMATTER	No, upon my word! see the token of Faith! (<i>playing her hand before his Eyes</i>)
SIR RODERICK	(<i>taking it</i>) O Lady Smatter! what a devilish Jilt you have been to me! [...]
WILMOT	Heed [Joyce] not, Sir Roderick, but accept our congratulations. <u>You are but making friends again with Nature as I have done with Reason!</u> [...] Now then, my Eleonora, let me hope that the tempest of our days is past [...].

WILMOT and ELEONORA *join the hands of* YOUNG WAVERLEY and SOPHIA.

(V, xxiii, 76-96)

Thus the characters' mutual relationships are finally structured as follows:

BROTHER (Wilmot)	loves	SISTER (Eleonora)	∅	DAUGHTER (Sophia)
				loves
SISTER (Lady Smatter)	loves	BROTHER (Sir Roderick)	∅	KINSMAN (Young Waverley)

At the same time, this symmetrical structure strongly displays the irregularity of the new fourth couple JOYCE-BOB, which stands out for not having any familial or sentimental links with the three other sets of lovers. In the final scene Bob is not even present on stage, thus singling out Joyce as an eccentric INDIVIDUAL.

As we have seen, Wilmot's final speech is meant to underline the definitive re-establishment of order and harmony. In effect, Sir Roderick's renunciation of his sister, Wilmot's unjustified aspersions and Eleonora's (apparent) desertion of her husband and infant daughter are all connoted as aspects of a general overthrowing of the natural order of things, a reversal which reflects the far-reaching socio-historical crisis which was shaking the age from its foundations.

Sir Roderick has chosen to will his fortune to his "distant kinsman" Young Waverley only out of spite:

OLD WAVERLEY If it had not been for all that combustion, how would you have been made heir to Sir Roderick? For he don't [sic] care a fig for you! He only chose you in spite!

(I, i, 28-30)

His woman-hating is unnatural, and so is his desire to have Young Waverley remain single for ever.

YOUNG WAVERLEY In short, Stephanus, I'll tell thee what: he has kept me at such an unnatural distance from the Women [...] he has so irritated and inflamed me, by this last monkish interdiction never to marry [...].

(I, iii, 25-5)

Even Wilmot's final outburst of rage against Eleonora is described as an iniquitous act which goes against nature and reason, whereas her vigorous maternal instincts, consistent with her characterization as victimized wife of sensibility, are portrayed as the only emotional response possible.

ELEONORA I am petrified! If even maternal tenderness be a crime --
 [...] Whither wouldst thou drive me? To what may I lay
 claim, if not to maternal tenderness? [...] Stormy as thine
 will be my passions; -- as bitter -- though not as causeless
 -- my resentment! Wilmot! -- deny me not my Child!
 (V, xiv, 68-70)

It seems fitting that Sophia's final acknowledgement coincides with Wilmot's return to reason. As hinted at by her strongly significant name, Sophia stands for her father's *wisdom*, his rationality, his sanity. From this point of view, the first possible euphoric interpretative paradigm of the *The Woman-Hater* may be that the folly of the father is redeemed by the wisdom of the daughter. However, a further discussion of the play will show that it also warrants alternative readings.

As a matter of fact, despite the play comic ending, the familial and sentimental ties, traditionally regarded as the guardians and hub of the social structure, are exposed as paltry conventions, jeopardized by selfishness, inconstancy, wantonness or suspicion. This challenge to the received notions of family structure is reiterated throughout the play by means of the continuous errors and mistakes of identity of which the characters remain victims. Natural and domestic affection leaves singularly unplucked the heartstrings of the characters, who seem to respond correctly only by induction, once the various family connections are laid bare and explained. Thus the Act V --the *locus optimus* for the administration of poetic justice, with resulting reunions, resolutions and rewards-- is able to reinstate only feebly the broken social order and to reconstruct a very shaky familial structure. Parents are reunited with long-lost children, domestic bliss is made to return and ancient misunderstandings are cleared, but in the end the family is denounced as a mere cultural practice, while sensibility is attacked as a void and hackneyed cliché. Biology and genealogy win over affection and sentiment, as in Wilmot's fatherly protestation:

WILMOT I am impatient to assure you [Joyce] of my inalterable
 interest in your welfare -- though the paternal tie by
 which I thought it bound, has changed its object (*turning
 to SOPHIA*).

(V, xxii, 4-6)

In effect, the three main matters Burney takes issue with in *The Woman-Hater* are the female position within the social and familial institutions, personal and social identity, and lastly that complex epistemic concept that goes under the name of "sensibility". These issues are recurrent in most of the author's works, from the early *Evelina* to her last published novel *The Wanderer*, through most part of her dramatic production, both comic and tragic. Burney repeatedly dwells on the ambivalence of such social signs as the paternal name, or familial legitimization and on the importance of female independence and self-sufficiency. In *Camilla*, only to mention the novel that was revised along with the late comedies, Burney had already taken up the idea of woman-hating in the character of Dr. Marchmont, a sour but respected old gentleman who alerts the young male protagonist to women's duplicity, encouraging him to an almost sadistic probing of the girl he intends to marry.⁶ Also the attack on the limitations and moral deficiencies of sensibility had become a staple argument of the literary and essayistic output of the age, so much that Janet Todd can rightly affirm that "[b]y the end of the 1790s almost all serious novelists noted the selfishness, irrationality and amorality of the cult of sensibility".⁷ Only a short time before the composition of *The Woman-Hater*, Burney herself had condemned immoderate sensibility in *Camilla*, where the sentimental and poetic-minded Mrs. Berlinton is ruinously carried out of *ennui* from the gaming table into the arms of a passionate, strongly-feeling, and particularly unscrupulous lover, who gets providentially stopped on the very verge of seduction.

However, since *The Woman-Hater* is a dramatic script, and as such a work intended for stage performance, it seems appropriate to analyze how Burney manages to carry out her critique of sensibility by granting a semiotic function to stage space and through character movement and dialogue.

The comedy of mistaken identities that occurs all through the drama seems particularly apt for a study that takes into consideration the dramatic nature of *The Woman-Hater*. My argument is that one of the great models of Burney is Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors*, a play which went back into production in the early part of the Eighteenth Century and which enjoyed numerous adaptations throughout the next decades.⁸ It would be possible to say that most characters of *The Woman-Hater* are caught in a vortex of frantic "supposes" (intending with this expression the mistaking of one thing/person for another).⁹ Lady Smatter does not recognize her sister-in-law Eleonora when she unexpectedly turns up after an absence of seventeen years.

ELEONORA	Do you know me?
LADY SMATTER	Know you? Have you ever brought me any of your works before?

ELEONORA Alas, I ought not to wonder I am forgotten! Sorrow is a yet more fatal foe to remembrance than even Time, - though Time has dragged on seventeen heavy years since last we met [...].

(II, vii, 19-24)

Old Waverley mistakes Sophia for a corrupt wench and her mother for her procuress. At the same time, the young girl takes Old Waverley for her uncle Roderick and her failure is not redressed even by the simultaneous presence of both characters on stage. In a parody of the improbable romantic disclosures which is reminiscent of Jane Austen's contemporary *Love and Freindship* (1790), long-lost alleged relations crop up frantically, without being recognized in any way.

SOPHIA I am confounded! in what a series of mistakes and errors have I been involved! -- Alas, Sir! -- pardon an offence that has been so unintentional! It is Sir Roderick I have always meant, -- it is Sir Roderick whose kindness and protection I come to implore -- it is Sir Roderick who is my Uncle!

SIR RODERICK Very clever, truly! And pray how many more of you may be there, who intend to pop in upon me in this manner? As I am alive, if I don't put an end to this, I shall have a niece of every Girl in the Parish!

(V, ix, 19-26)

Both Eleonora's petition to Lady Smatter and Sophia's application to her uncle are selfishly disregarded. The sensibility displayed by most of Burney's characters is everything but noble and "tremblingly alive" -- as in the stereotypical sentimental phrase -- and it has given way to a more opportunistic behaviour. Old Waverley believes Sophia is pleading for money instead of soccour, Roderick denounces her as a "Mrs. Mynx", a scheming little rogue come to rob him of his fortune, whilst Lady Smatter callously cuts short her unhappy sister-in-law's protestations of innocence in order to be courted at leisure by Young Waverley.

LADY SMATTER (*aside*) I think I hear Young Waverley return; I must get rid of her.

(II, viii, 119-120)

The dramatic conventions of the literature of sensibility are completely deflated in the final meeting between Sophia and her father, a scene strongly evocative of the climatic interview between Belmont and Evelina in Burney's first novel. It is evident that in *The Woman-Hater* Burney has decided to pick up a marginal episode of *Evelina* -- the protagonist's substitution for the daughter of her nurse --, bring it to the fore and

turn it into a new story, in a revision of herself as a writer and of her fiction whose texture is incredibly modern. In the narrative, after long-drawn uncertainties, the "child of bounty"¹⁰ Evelina meets her father Belmont at the end of an absence of sixteen years -- a telling gap of time that *Evelina* has in common with *The Woman-Hater* and *The Winter's Tale*, the Shakespearian romance that appears to be a model for both works by Burney.¹¹ Evelina's only material proof of her legitimacy is a letter written by her mother years before, but the girl's several adjutants are confident that the definitive evidence lies in the young girl's incredible likeness to her late mother. Evelina is repeatedly called "the lovely resemblance of her lovely mother"¹², and her guardian Villars supports her search for legitimacy reminding her that she only needs to show up "without any other certificate of your birth, that which you carry in your countenance, as it could not be effected by artifice, so it cannot admit of doubt."¹³

Once Belmont agrees to meet Evelina and gazes on her face, the truth immediately becomes apparent and to her tortured parent nothing is left but to throw himself at the girl's feet, in a long-postponed, guilty acknowledgement: "Oh my child, my child! [...] Oh dear resemblance of thy murdered mother! [...] behold thy father at thy feet! [...] bending thus lowly to implore you would not hate him."¹⁴ The call of nature and affection is immediately heard and correctly responded to: seeing Evelina means recognizing her, owning her, and ultimately, returning the girl her long-withheld identity, her own story.

In *The Woman-Hater*, a period of twenty years replete with substantial shifts in taste, new familiar responsibilities, a newly-acquired authorial awareness -- as well as possibly the potentialities of the dramatic mode -- are enough for Burney to deflate totally the highly-charged meeting between the distraught Belmont and the wronged, yet tender Evelina -- the episode in the entire novel which may have wrung most tears and sympathetic identification in the emotional bosoms of Eighteenth-Century readers. The similarities of Evelina's and Sophia's situations are repeatedly underlined by Burney. Like her predecessor's, Sophia's likeness to her mother admits of no doubts. However, in *The Woman-Hater* the task of stressing this patent resemblance is left to the dunce Bob Sapling, in a recodification of the pathetic into the farcical mode.

WILMOT	[...] I should meet her [Eleonora], you think, by herself?
BOB	Yes, as sure as can be; except just for Miss.
WILMOT	For Miss? Who do you mean?
BOB	Why the young one.
WILMOT	What young one?
BOB	Why her Daughter.
WILMOT	Her Daughter? [...] Some companion, probably -- some one who travels with her? [...]
BOB	No, no; it's her own born child. [...] Lauk! it's as true as ever you heard in your life! Besides, if you were only to

set Eyes on 'em! Why they are as like one to t'other as
you ever see a Chicken to a Hen.

(IV, x, 16-34)

In its turn, Evelina's filial pity, ready to throb at the simple mention of her father's revered name, is devastatingly reduced to bathos. Sophia fails to recognize her father when she eventually meets him. However, once the correct response is primly pointed out to her by the virtuous Eleonora, the girl is ready to acknowledge her daughterhood by means of the sanctioned sentimental jargon and proxemics. At the same time, Wilmot appears totally unmoved by the reunion, and unheeding of any reawakening fatherly affection.

ELEONORA	My child! -- O pitying powers! my Child! my Child! [...]
SOPHIA	Ah! -- <u>who is that?</u> --
ELEONORA	My poor Child! -- I cannot speak! -- Thou will not forsake me? [...] Turn, then, my Child -- look there! -- <u>Thou knowst thy duty!</u>
SOPHIA	Ah Heaven! -- Is it -- O! is it -- my Father?
WILMOT	<i>(trembling)</i> My feet will scarce sustain me! [...] Ah! such might have been <i>(looking at SOPHIA)</i> my own poor Child! -- No! thou nameless Girl! I am not thy Father! [...]
SOPHIA	Ah, sir! and how have I offended you? And why are you so unkind as to disown me? -- Let me go, my dear Mother, -- support yourself a moment -- he looks softer, - - <u>let me kneel to him</u> -- and perhaps he may bless me!
WILMOT	Am I fascinated? Does my understanding fail me? Is this a Scene for a Man injured as I am? -- Advance not, young woman! -- Kneel not to me! -- alas! alas! I have no claim to thy reverence, or affection!

SOPHIA *quits her mother's arms and drops on one knee* [...].

(V, xv, 2-30)

Wilmot displays some stock fatherly emotions only once Joyce, unable to "abide to see his own true flesh and blood upon her knees there for nothing" (V, xvi, 2-3), has explained the dramatic misunderstandings and cleared away whatever doubts are still lingering.

WILMOT	<i>(springing into [Eleonora's] arms)</i> . Wife of my Heart! my esteem! my gratitude! my contrition! [...]
ELEONORA	[...] But let us fly from sorrows which, explained, are past! A happier theme -- <i>(turning to SOPHIA)</i> our daughter --
SOPHIA	Ah, my Father! will you now own me? <i>(kneeling to him)</i> Will you bless me, my dear Father?

WILMOT

And have I such a daughter? And canst thou wish my blessing? Rise, rise, my lovely Girl (*raising and embracing her*) with joy, with pride I own thee! -- May every hour of my future life offer some kind compensation for the cruelty of the past.

(V, xxi, 25-37)

Thus, despite its forced consistency with dramatic stereotypes, the comedy's final reunion turns out as superimposed, whilst the conventional happy ending does not manage to resolve the numerous ideological difficulties aroused in the course of the play. The resolution of the Wilmots' plights is left in the hands of Joyce, the low-born, eccentric character who seems to represent best Burney's critique of sensibility and the coercions women are exposed to by the familial institution.

Unlike the Shakespearian Antipholus of Syracuse who, puzzled by the gifts he is showered with in stead of his twin, wonders amazed why "[s]ome tender money to me, some invite me / Some other give me thanks for kindness",¹⁵ Joyce learns that being mistaken for a well-bred young lady, who is being instructed into becoming a daughterly model of subordinate perfection, is a demanding task, that leaves her with very few rewards.

Joyce appears on stage for the first time as Wilmot is trying to induce her to read Hester Chapone's educational treaty *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind Addressed to a Young Lady* (1773), a book "easier of comprehension, and of more immediate utility" (II, i, 23) where she is supposed to find her behavioural model. In the presence of Wilmot, the girl keeps obstinately silent, expressing herself only with timid nods and bashful modesty, and when she is introduced to Lady Smatter, she is described as an exceedingly reserved girl.

WILMOT

[...] You will find her simple and unpolished, fearful as the Hare, who in every shadow sees a pursuer, invincibly shy, pensive and nearly mute.

(III, viii, 20-22)

Despite the naïveté she is reported to be characterized by, Joyce is well aware of the rules of role-playing, though. With meta-theatrical far-seeing, she has learnt to play the proper young lady appropriately and to respect that specific, daughterly behaviour she is expected to abide by. So, whilst posing as mute and deferential daughter, in reality Joyce is resisting the education imposed on her, in a rejection of the constructions of femininity popularized by the Eighteenth-Century homiletic manuals. As soon as she is left alone with Nurse and the inn-keeper's children Hetty and Bob Sapling, Joyce transforms herself into a strongly assertive, markedly physical and

extremely lively young hoyden. This metamorphosis takes place abruptly and it is effectively displayed by unhinged gestuality, singing and playful romping across the stage space.

MISS HENNY *(going)* Poor young lady! She don't [sic] seem to dare say her Soul's her own.
 BOB *(going)* She's but mumpy, indeed.
 NURSE Why a young lady, Miss Henny, can't be supposed to be as free and easy as you are. Good by, Miss Henny, good by, Mr. Bob.
 MISS WILMOT *peeping over the shoulders of the NURSE.* Is Papa gone?
 NURSE Yes, Miss.
 MISS WILMOT Are you sure?
 NURSE Yes Miss, up stairs to his own room.
 MISS WILMOT *(jumping up and singing)*
 Then hoity, toity, whiskey, friskey,
 These are the joys of our dancing days.
 Come, now let's get rid of all this stupifying learning! so march off, Mr. Thompson! decamp, Mrs. Chapone! away, Watt's improvement of the mind, and off! off! off! with a hop, skip, and a jump, ye Ramblers, Spectators, and Adventurers!

(Throwing about the Books, and dancing around them).
 (II, iv, 23-37)¹⁶

As signified by her name, Joyce stands for true joy, spontaneity and her nature is displayed by means of her boisterous movements and assertiveness. Joyce enjoys life, eating, expressing herself freely and her speech is markedly emotive and self-centred (I like/I hate).

LADY SMATTER [...] What, then, may be the study you prefer? painting? Music? Botany? languages? -- Geography? --
 MISS WILMOT O, I hate all those! Whenever I am forced to set about any thing of that sort, do you know, Aunt, it always makes me sleepy? [...] I hate study.
 LADY SMATTER You seem well practiced in hating. Perhaps you hate everything?
 MISS WILMOT O no, I don't. I like a great many things; but my first best favourite of all is dancing. It makes one so light, and so blyth, and so gaysome, and so skipping! Do you ever dance, Aunt? [...] Well, and the second best thing that I like is singing. Can you sing, Aunt? [...] Well, and the third best thing that I like --
 NURSE Miss, Miss, how you run on!
 MISS WILMOT Why, Nurse, you scold if I speak, and you scold if I hold my tongue! so I'll tell you what I intend. [...] Why to talk or be dumb, as much as I will for my own amusement, and to let you scold, or look bluff, as much as you will for your's. [...]

(III, x, 55-83)

The nurse's dramatic revelation of her substitution for Wilmot's infant daughter leaves Joyce singularly unconcerned for her position and future financial situation. Rather, the discovery is immediately converted into an escape to freedom and she willingly proclaims her newly-gained identity.

Enter JOYCE, from the wood, struggling with the NURSE.

JOYCE I won't be held, Nurse, I won't! Why, I a'n't afraid to speak to him now he i'n't Papa! [...] (*springing forward to him*) Papa, papa! do you know you a'n't Papa?

WILMOT What do I hear? [...]

JOYCE Why, Papa, I don't tell it very well; but Nurse says that you a'n't Papa; and that my Mama, there, that should be, i'n't my Mama; and that that young lady there is your right earnest Daughter; and as for poor I -- now who's [sic] daughter do you think I am? Why nobody's but old Nurse's, and a shoe-maker's. -- And what do you think is my real Christian name? Why Joyce!

(V, xvi, 1-18)

Being left with only her own Christian name, Joyce severs any remaining links with Wilmot, and nullifies the protection and impositions which go along with the social signs. Through her, domestic ideology is exposed as a repressive institution. Now able to dispose of herself and her future, Joyce decides to abandon the domestic haven to become a ballad singer and she spontaneously decides to marry Bob, cutting short the never-ending sentimental dilemmas that afflict generations of Burney heroines.

MISS WILMOT How droll it would look, Nurse, to see me a real ballad singer! I saw two or three, at the great Inn we stopt at, in our way through London. Such comical, dumpty, mupty figures! and such squalling and bawling voices!

(IV, viii, 87-90)

Her refusal of normative expectations, her spontaneity, her anti-capitalist attitudes, and sudden outbursts of benevolence and affection towards the Nurse who has brought her up -- long before it is revealed that the woman is her birth mother -- mark Joyce out as an unconventional answer to the feeble, self-regulated, confined heroine of sensibility. Her juxtaposition to Sophia -- attained at a distance by verbal and bodily comparison -- represents two versions of daughterhood which are ultimately the result of two opposing ideological visions of femininity.

	JOYCE	SOPHIA
	NATURE	NURTURE
Temperament	instincts	familiar duties
Behaviour	spontaneous spirit	self-regulation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •desire for choice and freedom •assertiveness •chooses to marry Bob 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •her heart acknowledges her •father's rights
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •seeks to control her destiny •directs her future •self-determining •female agency •desire 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •chosen in marriage by Young Waverley •passive virtue •directions of male figures •submissive •familial expectations •emotional submission •financially distressed
Dramatic representation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •financially unconcerned •boisterous nature extremely physical •energetic nature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •obedient submissive •governed by a strict code of manners •conceal/resist emotions •silence sacrifice
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •instincts 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •open, unrestrained expression 	

However, the conventions of dramatic closure leave the experiment of *The Woman-Hater* regrettably incomplete. The pattern of comedy is respected, blissful domesticity is reinstated, identity returns and the play ends happily, or mostly so. However social stability seems restored rather than reorganized. Wilmot's aggressive behaviour, his hardheartedness, and finally his socially-sanctioned version of woman-hating -- a subtle cultural practice less overt than Sir Roderick's, but certainly more threatening and deep-rooted -- are not reformed, but simply put aside. From this point of view, a second disphoric interpretative paradigm presents a different, ideological interpretation of *The Woman-Hater*. Although the sin of the father has been displaced, society has not been reformed and its potential for abuse has not been extinguished.

Conflicts remain unresolved and the curtain falls on two new couples, whose future remains unpredictable. Whilst raising the problem of identity and asking her audience by what right one possesses or is guaranteed a name, Burney questions the familial and social institutions, the practice of sensibility, and its repressive potentialities for abuse. Thus the happy ending of the comedy is dramatically unable to reintegrate her characters' shattered selves. At the same time Joyce, Burney's alternative version of post-Revolutionary, turn-of-the-century femininity, joyfully leaves the constraints of sensibility behind her and so, in her own non-conformist way, she decidedly looks ahead towards the anti-sentimental heroines of Jane Austen.

Francesca SAGGINI

¹ For a detailed chronology of the composition of the comedy, see Peter Sabor's "Introduction" to the play, in Frances Burney, *The Woman-Hater*, in *The Complete Plays*, ed. P. Sabor, vol. I (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1995), pp. 192-93. All subsequent references to the text will be taken from this edition, which is the only one currently available.

² Lillian D. Bloom discusses the 1802 edition of *Camilla* in "Fanny Burney's *Camilla*: The Author as Editor", *Bullettin of Research in the Humanities*, 83 (1979), pp. 367-93.

³ See Peter Sabor's Introduction to the play, in Burney, *Complete Plays*, pp. 192-3.

⁴ Margaret Anne Doody, *Frances Burney. The Life in the Works*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press), 1988, p. 286. Doody's study remains Burney's standard critical biography and it is full of perceptive insights into the dramatic production of the author. More recently, Barbara Darby (*Frances Burney, Dramatist: Gender, Performance, and the Late Eighteenth-Century Stage*, [Lexington: University Press of Kentucky], 1997) has presented an interesting analysis of Burney's comedies and tragedies from a feminist performance theory standpoint.

⁵ Burney mentions having assisted to a performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1792. See Frances Burney, *The Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney [Madame D'Arblay], 1791-1840*, ed. Joyce Hemlow *et al*, 12 voll. (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1972-84), Vol. 1, 1791-92 (letters 1-39), ed. Joyce Hemlow, David Cecil e Althea Douglas, p. 205. For an outline of the influence of Shakespeare's plays on Burney's early narratives, see my doctoral dissertation "La messinscena dell'identità. Teatro e teatralità nell'opera di Frances Burney" (Università di Chieti 1998), which contains in appendix a list of the Shakespearian dramas Burney mentions in her narrative, journalistic and diaristic production.

⁶ See a revealing conversation between Dr. Marchmont and the protagonist, Edgar Mandlebert: "Dr. Marchmont! how wrechedly ill you think of women!" "I think of them as they are! I think of them as I have found them. They are artful, though feeble; they are shallow, yet subtle." "You have been unfortunate in your connexions?" (Frances Burney, *Camilla or, A Picture of Youth*, edited and with an Introduction by Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom [Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 1983], Bk. viii, ch. vi, p. 642).

⁷ Janet Todd, *Sensibility. An Introduction* (London-New York: Methuen, 1986), p.144.

⁸ Burney mentions to have read *The Comedy of Errors* in 1785, see Frances Burney, *Diary and Letters of Madame D'Arblay*, 6 vols., edited by Charlotte Barrett and annotated by Austin Dobson (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1904-5), vol. II, p. 312. For a sketchy introduction to the fortune of the play in the Eighteenth Century, see R. A. Foakes's preface to the Methuen edition of the comedy (1968, revised 1984). It would also be conceivable to see Shakespeare's influence in other Eighteenth-Century stage blockbusters favoured by Burney such as Goldsmith's *She Stoops To Conquer* and Sheridan's *The Rivals*, which turn the farce of identities from a stock comic component into a major dramatic force.

⁹ *The Supposes* is the English title of Ludovico Ariosto's 1509 comedy, translated in English by George Gascoigne.

¹⁰ Frances Burney, *Evelina; or The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994), p. 408.

¹¹ The similarities between the plots of both *Evelina* and *The Woman-Hater* and Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* is disregarded by most critics. Only Margaret Anne Doody makes a passing mention to it, see *Frances Burney*, p. 304.

¹² Burney, *Evelina*, p. 147.

¹³ Burney, *Evelina*, p. 374.

¹⁴ Burney, *Evelina*, p. 428.

¹⁵ William Shakespeare, *The Comedy of Errors*, IV, iii, 4-5.

¹⁶ Lydia Languish finds herself in a similar situation in *The Rivals* (1775) I, ii. It is interesting to see how Burney carries out her revision of the text written by Richard B. Sheridan, one of her theatrical advisors and certainly one of the contemporary dramatists she knew best. As soon as Lydia hears someone's voice, she quickly hides the sentimental novels and romances she has been eagerly perusing -- well aware that Mrs. Chapone and John Fordyce are the only authors a mannerly young lady is supposed to read. On the contrary, in a vindication of her intellectual independence, Joyce flings all her conduct manuals away. As she says, "[i]f Papa had as many words of his own as I have, he would not be always wanting to be poring over other people's so. I can find enough to say of myself. And I 'm sure that's cleverer" (II, iv, 89-92).