

Critical Essay – *Julia de Gramont*

Lady Hawke's two-volume novel *Julia de Gramont* exemplifies the genre of sentimental fiction, which had become popular during the eighteenth century. Hawke's work employs emotive language to impart a didactic message to the audience, and depicts scenes in which persevering virtue is rewarded, whilst vice is ultimately punished. In addition, the plot bears a close similarity to Henry Mackenzie's earlier novel *Julia de Roubigné*, a point which I will examine in more detail later.

Julia de Gramont tells the story of a young woman, whose 'haughty and inflexible' father orders her to marry an older man already 'past the meridian of his age'.¹ The Duke de Gramont had originally planned for his daughter to live her entire life in a convent, and he threatens Julia that this will be her fate should she refuse the marriage. Julia is already in love with a man named Augustus Soissons, yet it is agreed that she should obey her father's wishes and marry the man he proposes. However, this decision is made more painful when it is revealed that the person Julia must marry is Augustus' own father, the Marquis Soissons. The Marquis explains to Julia that he had been in love with her mother, but knowing she was engaged to be married, he had kept his love a secret. Struck by the close likeness between Julia and her mother, the Marquis felt compelled to make an application of marriage. Later, Julia's nurse, Madame Tourville reveals that Julia's mother had also secretly loved the Marquis, but had complied with her marriage to the Duke out of filial duty. Julia is affected and inspired by her mother's tale, and vows to follow her virtuous example.

¹ Lady Cassandra Hawke, *Julia de Gramont* (London: B. White & Son, 1788) vol. 1, pp. 1 & 25. All future page quotations for this text will be given in round brackets.

She also persuades Augustus to marry the daughter of a neighbouring Viscount, asserting that it is his only chance of finding happiness.

The Marquis dies suddenly in the opening pages of the novel's second volume. However, before his death he reveals that Augustus had been adopted. He explains that Augustus was an orphan whom he had found in a basket placed by the side of a road. Madame Tourville soon recognises a piece of coral that had been found in the basket, and realises that she is Augustus' mother. Madame Tourville then recounts her own story. She explains that as a young woman, she had defied her parents' wishes by eloping with the son of the Viscount St. Aubin. However, St. Aubin soon lost interest in his wife and abandoned her. She then gave birth to a son, but when she had recovered from an ensuing fever she was told that he had died. It is later revealed that St. Aubin's sister, Amelia had been the orchestrator of this situation. A servant informs Madame Tourville that Amelia persuaded her brother to elope, knowing he would be disinherited, as she sought to gain her father's fortune. She also ordered that Madame Tourville's child be killed, so that he would not inherit the title or the wealth of the St. Aubins. Rather than carry out this command however, the servant placed the baby by the side of the road where it could be found by a passer-by. She also put the coral in the basket, hoping that it would one day help the baby to be recognised. Augustus is thus reunited with his mother. However, soon afterwards Augustus' wife dies unexpectedly. After mourning her loss for several months, Augustus finally marries Julia. In the novel's final paragraph we are told that the marriage 'exhibit[ed] to the world an example of happiness unequalled by the most celebrated patterns of conjugal union' (II, p.324).

Julia and her mother can be recognised as archetypal characters of the sentimental genre. Both represent what Janet Todd terms 'the chaste suffering woman', with Julia embodying the character who is 'happily rewarded in marriage', whilst her mother represents the woman 'elevated into redemptive death'.² Julia recognises that her mother displayed exemplary conduct by fulfilling her filial duty and submitting to the will of her adulterous husband. This idea is also supported by the text, where Julia's mother is described in elevated terms as 'a celestial wife [who] bore every wrong with patient resignation' (I, p.102). The association with the heavens indicates that the actions displayed by Julia's mother are considered to have been divinely good and that her behaviour reflected the will of God. Julia is inspired by her mother's example and consequently places 'her greatest confidence in the assisting influence of that power Supreme' to 'guide [her] through the intricate paths of life (I, pp.80-1). The conduct displayed by Julia's mother also serves as an example to the reader. Indeed, the reverential language employed to depict her is intended to encourage others to admire and imitate her virtuous actions. As J.M.S Tompkins affirms, this represents a common eighteenth-century belief that 'the novel was explicitly educational and that its main business was to inculcate morality by example'.³

Moreover, the link between virtue and Christianity had been reinforced by several essays of the eighteenth century. For example, in his work *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, David Fordyce asserts that virtue emanates 'directly from the Father of Lights, a fair genuine Stamp of his Hand, who impressed every vital and original

² Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London: Methuen & Co, 1986) p.4

³ J.M.S Tompkins, *The Popular Novel in England 1770-1800* (London: Methuen & Co, 1969) [first published 1932] p.70

Energy on the Mind'.⁴ Fordyce states that virtue is bestowed by God, and argues that to act virtuously is to carry out God's Will. He affirms, 'That *Virtue*, or such a conduct of the Passions as hath been above described, is agreeable to the *Will of God*, is evident beyond Dispute'.⁵ These ideas would have been extremely familiar to an eighteenth-century audience. Therefore, by endowing her characters with these Christian sentiments Hawke can be seen to align herself with the period's conventional theories regarding virtue.

However, the novel's representation of vice can be seen as less conventional. Samuel Johnson had argued that 'Vice [...] should always disgust; nor should the graces of gaiety, or the dignity of courage, be so united with it, as to reconcile it to the mind'.⁶ The novel's characterisation of the Duke de Gramont obeys Johnson's principles. The Duke is driven by greed, and allows the Marquis to marry Julia in order to gain a large fortune. However, the depiction of a character that possesses unremitting vice also presented a problem for Lady Hawke. As Gerard A. Barker explains, an 'outright villain [...] can usually be maintained only if we are denied access to his consciousness'.⁷ Barker's statement asserts that a character that is entirely villainous must be kept at a distance by the author. This is necessary for two reasons; firstly, the villain's character is so two-dimensional that it would not bear close examination. Secondly, this distance prohibits the reader from understanding the psychology which motivates the villain, and therefore prevents them from sympathising with his actions. Thus, to sustain the Duke's evil character it is necessary to remove him from the plot.

⁴ David Fordyce, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* (London: Thoemmes Antiquarian Books, 1990) [first published 1754] p.80

⁵ Ibid, p.56 [Fordyce's emphasis]

⁶ Samuel Johnson, 'The New Realistic Novel' in Donald Green ed, *Samuel Johnson: A Critical Edition of the Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984) [first published in *The Rambler*, No. 4, 1750] p.178

⁷ Gerard A. Barker, *Henry Mackenzie* (Boston: Twayne, 1975) p.73

In fact, he is absent for the entirety of the novel after Julia's marriage. Moreover, despite sternly insisting that Julia marry the Marquis, we are told in the final pages that the Duke 'expressed no interest' in witnessing Julia's marriage to Augustus (II, p.322). His refusal to attend the marriage enables Hawke to keep the Duke detached from the main action of the novel, allowing his evil character to be maintained.

Madame Tourville also displayed vice by eloping with the man she loved, yet her character is shown to be very different from that of the Duke. She is a penitent sinner, made wise by suffering and her tale offers a stark warning of the danger of abandoning filial duty. Indeed, if her mother's story inspires Julia to act virtuously, Madame Tourville's serves to remind of the unhappiness that accompanies vice. However, this representation of vice does not conform to the precepts laid out by Johnson. Whilst Johnson's essay advocates that vice be portrayed as abhorrent so that readers will be repulsed by its presence, Hawke addresses the misery that is produced by vice. Moreover, the suffering of characters such as Madame Tourville and Amelia demonstrates Hawke's Christian beliefs once again, with divine retribution enacted upon those individuals who succumb to vice. As Madame Tourville attests, 'the ungrateful fugitive, who had plunged a dagger in the bosom of those who gave her being, was decreed to feel maternal anguish; and where she inflicted the wound herself to bleed' (II, p.170).

Yet the revelation that Madame Tourville is Augustus' mother and the subsequent recounting of her melancholy story also fall within the conventions of the sentimental novel. As Todd explains 'most works function through a plot of sudden reversal [...]' When they occur, the story or argument is arrested so that the author can

conventionally intensify the emotion'.⁸ This intensification of emotion is achieved through a shift in the narrative from third-person to first-person narration. In doing so, Hawke invites her readers to engage their sensibility by granting them direct access to the suffering of Madame Tourville. Indeed the depiction of Madame Tourville as 'the outcast daughter - the childless mother - and the widowed wife' demonstrates that she is a character to be pitied rather than abhorred (II, p.170). In fact, the actions of young Madame Tourville's are shown to have been impetuous and foolish, rather than evil.

Like Julia's mother, Madame Tourville remains loyal to her adulterous husband. Her stern rejection of the call to exhibit her 'boasted beauty to the world' in order to 'attract surrounding lovers' displays morality despite her earlier vice (II, p.120). Indeed, the text had previously stated that Madame Tourville 'possessed a heart fraught with every virtue' (I, p.8). Consequently, Madame Tourville is figured as a victim of her own sensibility, too susceptible to the feeling of others, and easily prevailed upon by her lover through 'sighs and tears, assisted by the ardent rhetoric of love' (ii, p.98). The fear of too heightened sensibility was also a familiar concept in sentimental novels. Indeed, in Henry Mackenzie's novel *Julia de Roubigné* the heroine's strong sensibility compels her to marry a man that she does not love, a situation which ultimately leads to her murder. Here, Julia initially rejects the proposal of marriage made by her neighbour Savillon, but she eventually consents after the intercessions of her parents and her friend Maria. As Gerard A. Barker explains, 'Maria's entreaties joined to Savillon's are too much for Julia to resist; they play upon her love and compassion until she yields'.⁹

⁸ Todd, *Sensibility*, pp.4-5

⁹ Barker, *Henry Mackenzie*, p.79

However, *Julia de Roubigné* also reflects Mackenzie's increasing ambivalence towards the 'war of duties' which manifested itself in sentimental fiction.¹⁰ As he explains, this 'war' characterised the way in which 'the duty to parents is contrasted with the ties of friendship and of love'.¹¹ For Mackenzie, this type of scenario led only to tragedy, as in the case of *Julia de Roubigné*, where the heroine is poisoned by her jealous husband. Thus, whilst the novels of Mackenzie and Hawke hold similarities of title and plot, only *Julia de Gramont* offers the kind of happy ending more traditionally associated with sentimental fiction. To again quote Todd, 'the endings of many sentimental novels are sheer fantasy and wish fulfilment in which marriage to "men of their hearts" inevitably follow danger and misery'.¹² Like many sentimental novelists, Hawke was keen to emphasise the rewards of persevering virtue.

However, Hawke's novel indicates that the possession of virtue does not necessarily ensure correct social behaviour. Instead, young people are often guided in their actions by older characters, and are continually removed from situations that may test their conduct. Thus, when Augustus realises that his father is about to marry Julia, a friend immediately attempts to remove him from the room. As the text avows, 'the separation of Augustus, from the fatal object of his love, was a step which prudence rendered absolutely necessary' (I, p.68). The word 'fatal' indicates the dangerous potential of love. As Madame Tourville's tale demonstrates, its passion can even drive people of virtuous character to commit acts of vice. Both Augustus and Julia are therefore removed from social situations which could tarnish their virtue.

¹⁰ Henry Mackenzie, *The Lounger*, No.20, June 18th 1785, in *Works of Henry Mackenzie* (London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1996) p.181

¹¹ Ibid, p.182

¹² Todd, *Sensibility*, p.126

Lady Hawke's view can be seen to mirror that of Mr Villars in Frances Burney's novel *Evelina*. Villars is also wary of society's potential influence upon a young woman. As he writes, 'My young Evelina would have grieved, had she known the anxiety of my mind, during her residence in the great world'.¹³ Yet Villars recognises that society also performs an important role in a young woman's education. As he concedes, 'the time draws on for experience and observation to take place of instruction'.¹⁴ Despite his reservations, Villars displays a realisation that experience forms an integral part of a woman's social education. His words reflect Burney's belief that characters require both guidance and experience in order to learn how to conduct themselves virtuously. As Michael E. Adelstein observes, Evelina's time in London is an attempt by Burney to show how her heroine 'gained the necessary politesse and experience to develop into an intelligent, sophisticated young lady'.¹⁵

Evelina also employs a greater number of literary devices than *Julia de Gramont*. To again quote Adelstein, Burney's novel 'constantly alternates the serious with the satirical, the country with the city, the upper class with the middle class, the sentimental with the farcical'.¹⁶ In doing so, *Evelina* offers a more complete representation of eighteenth-century society. Whilst the upper-class setting in *Julia de Gramont* reflects Lady Hawke's own social position, it displays only one part of society. Moreover, the novel relies almost entirely upon sentiment to convey its didactic message. As Burney would herself complain, 'it [*Julia de Gramont*] is all of a

¹³ Frances Burney, *Evelina, Or, A Young Lady's Entrance Into the World* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968) [first published 1778] p.115

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.18

¹⁵ Michael E. Adelstein, *Fanny Burney* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1968) p.38

¹⁶ Adelstein, *Fanny Burney*, p.30

piece – all love, love, love, unmixed and unadulterated with any more worldly materials'.¹⁷

Hawke attempts to increase the reader's sympathy for Augustus and Julia by intimating that the couple are perfectly suited to each other. Whilst Julia embodies the ideal female with 'her beauty, her youth, her modesty, [and] her sweetness', Augustus can be viewed as her male equivalent (I, p.15). His love for her never wavers, and upon Julia's request, he patiently waits for her period of mourning to be over before he proposes marriage. These actions demonstrate the eighteenth-century masculine ideal. As Barker-Benfield explains 'the masculine ideal was shown taking women's feelings into account and deferring to their importance'¹⁸. Furthermore, we are told in the novel's opening pages that 'a similarity of dispositions and kindred virtues soon imperceptibly united [the couple's] affections' (I, p.15). Indeed, words such as 'tender', 'loyal' and 'virtuous' are often repeated in relation to the couple. Moreover, both are so well attuned to the feelings of the other that they are able to communicate without words. As the text affirms, 'they were both incapable of speech, but their eyes were eloquent: yet, fortunately they were not observed' (I, p.59).

Yet, as the extract quoted in *The Monthly Review* demonstrates, this idea serves to make the couple's separation all the more affecting.¹⁹ This scene functions through a series of juxtapositions, and it is perhaps this technique which most pleased the critics. Within the grove, the life and vibrancy of nature evidenced by 'the blooming

¹⁷ Fanny Burney, 'Part XXXII' in Charlotte Barrett ed, *The Diary and Letters of Madame D'Arblay (Aug 1786 – Jun 1788) Vol. III* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd, 1904), pp.500-1

¹⁸ G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture Of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) p.249

¹⁹ See Appendix 1 for this extract. The section quoted in *The Monthly Review* begins on p.199 with the line 'All was calm...', and concludes on p.201 with the words '...conducted to the mausoleum'.

rose' and 'the gay carnation' provide a notable contrast to Julia's 'slow and pensive air' (I, pp.199&200). Moreover, the melancholy of the scene is heightened by the mythological allusion to the 'plaintive Philomela' (I, p.200). Whilst the beauty of nature is typically a place of solace in eighteenth-century novels, this grove reminds Julia of the frequent visits that she made there with Augustus. As such 'each seat, each shrub, recall[s] a dear idea to her mind' (I, p.200). Nature's attempts to comfort Julia are therefore hampered by the memory of Augustus. The contrasting emotions that this scene produces within Julia are made evident by oxymora such as 'painful pleasure' and 'sad but soothing contemplation' (I, pp.200&201).

Julia de Gramont was Lady Hawke's only published novel. As a result, there is no body of work by which to judge the reception of this book. Nevertheless, contemporary critics praised *Julia de Gramont* when it was published in 1788. *The Monthly Review* remarked that the 'novel reflects particular honour on its author', whilst *The Critical Review* stated that the author 'deserves no little commendations'.²⁰ The reviews also suggest that *Julia de Gramont* compared favourably to other sentimental novels of the period, with *The Critical Review* stating that 'in its own class [the work] must attain a considerable rank'.²¹ In particular, critics praised the novels 'pleasing diversity of incident', as well as its 'moral' and 'pathetic' subject matter.²² However, one notable exception to this reception can be observed in the article written by Mary Wollstonecraft for the *Analytical Review*. She attacked the

²⁰ *The Monthly Review; Or Literary Journal*, 80 (June 1789) p.498, and *The Critical Review; Or Annals of Literature*, 66 (August 1788) p.145

²¹ *The Critical Review*, p.145

²² *The Monthly Review*, p.498

novel's sentimental subject matter, stating 'The style adopted by an able pen was never so miserably caricatured'.²³

Moreover, Wollstonecraft asserts that, 'We cannot attempt to soar to the exalted altitude of inborn sensibility, or the imaginary heights of artificial virtue'.²⁴ Samuel Johnson had stated that novels should depict 'virtue not angelical, nor above probability, for what we cannot credit we shall never imitate, but the highest and purest that humanity can reach'.²⁵ Yet Wollstonecraft states that the characters in Lady Hawke's novel possess a level of virtue far in excess of what readers of the book could hope to attain. Wollstonecraft's use of the term 'artificial' is particularly interesting here. To understand its meaning in this context it is necessary to refer to Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, published four years after this review. In it, Wollstonecraft employs the term 'artificial grace' stating, 'I say artificial, for true grace arises from some kind of independence of mind'.²⁶ To apply this concept to the term 'artificial virtue', Wollstonecraft argues that the conduct displayed in *Julia de Gramont* is socially inscribed. This highlights one of Wollstonecraft's central tenets, that in the absence of education, women act out of a desire to please others rather than from a 'respect [for] themselves as rational creatures'.²⁷ As she later states, 'a woman, in behaving well, performs but half her function; as what is thought of her, is as important to her as what she really is'.²⁸

²³ Mary Wollstonecraft, 'Analytical Review Article XIV' in Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler ed, *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Vol. VII* (London: William Pickering, 1989) p.27

²⁴ Wollstonecraft, 'Analytical Review', p.27

²⁵ Johnson, 'Realistic Novel', p.178

²⁶ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (London: Everyman, 1995) [first published 1792] p.105

²⁷ Ibid, p.106

²⁸ Ibid, p.151

Wollstonecraft's arguments are supported by the text to some extent. Indeed, at the novel's conclusion Julia is able to reflect that 'she had at once the sweet consciousness of having supported a blameless conduct as a wife and daughter' (II, p.311). The word 'blameless' suggests that Julia is aware of an external social force by which her actions will be judged. This would imply that she submits to filial duty in order to fulfil a social obligation. Yet, this point is complicated since Fordyce allowed that

In complying with [...] Obligation, we feel joy and Self-approbation, - are conscious of an inviolable Harmony between our Nature and Duty, - *and think ourselves entitled to the applause of every impartial Spectator of our Conduct.*²⁹

Nevertheless, Hawke and Wollstonecraft's diverging opinions regarding virtue can be seen to reflect two very different attitudes of the period. Whilst Hawke's perception of virtue is influenced by earlier eighteenth-century writers such as Fordyce, Wollstonecraft's writing reflects radical Enlightenment thinking, which came to prominence in the latter part of the eighteenth century.

Despite being largely unknown by a modern audience, the contemporary reviews of *Julia de Gramont* suggest that the work was fairly well received upon publication. However, it is likely that more lasting success for Hawke's novel was denied by the spread of Enlightenment thinking, whose pursuit of 'reason' was diametrically opposed to that of 'feeling' displayed by sentimental novels. To a modern audience however, *Julia de Gramont* remains a well executed, if rather conventional example of sentimental fiction.

²⁹ Fordyce, *Moral Philosophy*, p.42 [my emphasis]

which had lately been placed in this apartment; while the Marchionefs looked fearfully round the room to see if she could discover any traces of Augustus. She rejoiced at discerning none; and, advancing towards a glass door, which was thrown open to admit the fragrance of the various flowers which luxuriantly surrounded it, she was tempted to stray upon the verdant lawn. — All was calm; the air breathed odoriferous gales; her feet, with involuntary motion, led her to a walk she had often trod with her loved Soiffons; the meeting beech had formed a natural canopy above; the blooming rose and twining woodbine, in wild profusion, bent

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their branches to scatter at her feet their mingled sweets.

As she entered the grove she cast her eyes towards the apartment which had once contained the Chevalier. The windows were open, and the lustring curtains gently waved; she heaved a sigh, and proceeded.

The plaintive Philomela had began her evening melody—with slow and pensive air the beauteous Julia moved—each seat, each shrub, recalled a dear idea to her mind! She viewed, with painful pleasure, every memento of her former love. Here glowed the amaranthus, there blushed the gay carnation, whose opening sweets and budding in-
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fancy she had watched and tended in their early spring.

Wrapt in this sad but soothing contemplation, she advanced, till a prostrate bench, which some boisterous summer storm had overfet, obstructed her passage. An opening path appearing through the trees, she followed it insensibly: its winding turns led imperceptibly up an easy ascent; and she was roused from her reverie, by finding herself conducted to the mausoleum. This edifice, though she had often passed, she never yet had entered: it was accustomed to be kept constantly shut—the door now stood a-jar; and, though the gloom of the surrounding evergreens cast
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