

**Critical Essay on the author Frances Brooke and her novel *The History of Lady Julia Mandeville*.**

**By Hayley Sherratt.**

Frances Brooke was one of the most successful writers of the mid-eighteenth century, and she was well known and well received both by the public and the literary and theatrical circles of her day. Yet Brooke has now become relatively obsolete, overshadowed by later writers such as Fanny Burney and Jane Austen. For such a recognised eighteenth-century female novelist, comparatively little has been written about Brooke since.

Frances Brooke edited a periodical, *The Old Maid*, from 1755-56, and published the tragedy *Virginia* in 1756, before she was to have some success with a translation of the French sentimentalist Madame Marie Jeanne Riccoboni's novel, *Lettres de milady Juliette Catesby à milady Henriette Campley, son amie*, published in 1760. However, it was through the publication of her own original novel, *The History of Lady Julia Mandeville*, that Brooke was to become fashionable. Throughout the rest of her career, Brooke was commonly identified first as the author of *Lady Julia Mandeville* and it remained her most successful piece of fiction.

Frances Brooke was married to the Reverend John Brooke, a widower who was fifteen years her senior. The couple spent much of their time apart, which appears to have suited Brooke as she found her husband interfering. Writing in the early 1770s to her friend and advisor Richard Gifford, Brooke claimed 'when Mr. B is here he spoils my projects', while she continues later in the letter 'we will do something together if my *barbaric honte* will let me; but I must not let Mr. B know, for he always ruins me with wanting to help me ... [He throws] cold water on my designs, & [says] everything to dampen my spirits'.<sup>1</sup> Like many writers of the eighteenth century, Brooke wrote for financial gain. Average copyright fees were inadequate for anyone attempting to maintain middle-class status, unless you were as successful as Fanny Burney, and therefore most writers of the eighteenth century ventured into as many forms of literature as possible. Brooke edited a journal, published essays, plays, translations and of course novels during her career. Reverend John Brooke

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<sup>1</sup> Lorraine McMullen, *An Odd Attempt in a Woman: The Literary Life of Frances Brooke* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1983), p. 139.

held several undertakings as a clergyman and so why the family were so in need is a mystery. However, it has been speculated that it could be due to the fact that Reverend Brooke was not paid for a period of his time as a chaplain to the garrison in Canada, yet would still have been required to pay for his replacements in England. It is also possible that he may have had to provide for any children from his first marriage.<sup>2</sup>

Frances Brooke was lucky, she had many influential friends who were a great help to her and enabled the start of her literary career. At some point Brooke was introduced to the publisher Robert Dodsley, most probably by Samuel Johnson. Brooke held Dodsley in high regard, writing in 1756 that ‘Dodsley is absolutely the Porter to the Temple of Fame, & there is no getting in without his assistance’.<sup>3</sup> Clearly, Brooke acknowledged Dodsley as crucial to her success. Publishers had a huge influence over the literary and financial success of an author. Their interpretation of demand was a key determinant of publication, and they were free to choose whether to promote or suppress a writer’s material.

In June of 1763 the *Gentleman’s Magazine* listed *The History of Lady Julia Mandeville* as newly published. Through her translation of Madame Riccoboni’s highly emotional narrative, Brooke learnt to construct the novel of sensibility, and *Lady Julia Mandeville* follows in this tradition. The novel is in the epistolary genre and is comprised of seventy-seven letters, the majority of which are written by the hero Harry Mandeville and Lady Anne Wilmot. While Lady Anne’s letters recount events at Lord Belmont’s country estate, to her friend and later lover Colonel Bellville, Harry’s letters to a friend are occupied with his growing love for Lady Julia, the daughter of Lord Belmont. The love affair between Harry and Julia is the principal love story of the narrative, although it is joined later by the love affairs between Lady Anne Wilmot and Colonel Bellville, and Lady Anne’s niece Bell Hastings and Lord Melvin. Believing that traditional prejudices mean his relationship with Lady Julia is doomed, Harry leaves Lord Belmont’s to make his fortune and thus enable him to marry his love; however, before his departure Harry and Lady

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

Julia neglect to inform their parents of their feelings for each other. When Harry fails to receive a letter, a misunderstanding leads him to believe that Lady Julia is instead to marry Lord Melvin, actually destined to wed Bell Hastings and, overcome with jealousy, Harry rushes back to Belmont and forces Lord Melvin into a duel. Lord Melvin mortally wounds Harry in self-defence, and it is on his deathbed that Harry learns Lady Julia had been intended for him since birth, and that the wedding he had mistakenly believed to be for Lord Melvin and Lady Julia had actually been a triple wedding, including his own to Lady Julia, where he would have inherited Belmont's title and estate. This is the emotional climax of the novel as Lady Julia, unable to go on without her beloved, dies from a grief and a broken heart.

*The History of Lady Julia Mandeville* is a good example of the novel of sensibility, with its hero and heroine, Harry and Julia Mandeville. Harry describes Julia as

exactly what a poet or painter would wish to copy, who intended to personify the idea of female softness. Her whose form is delicate and feminine to the utmost degree: her complexion is fair, enlivened by the bloom of youth, and often diversified by the blushes more beautiful than those of the morning: her features are regular; her mouth and teeth particularly lovely; her hair light brown; her eyes blue, full of softness, and strongly expressive of the exquisite sensibility of her soul. Her countenance, the beautiful abode of the loves and smiles, has a mixture of sweetness and spirit, which gives life and expression to her charms. As her mind has been adorned, nor 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.<sup>4</sup>

This description of Lady Julia proves her to be in every respect the epitome of the heroine of sensibility. She is beautiful, with a sweet and reserved nature, and most importantly has the ability to experience human emotion, especially that of pity. Barbara M. Benedict writes that Harry's 'sentimental metoric equates appearance and behaviour ... Julia is transparent; she is what she appears to be, and this is the condition for sentimental heroism'.<sup>5</sup>

Jane Spencer has argued that women in the eighteenth century were constrained by the generic expectations that built up for the feminine sentimental novel, and that from the mid-century onwards there was a turn towards moral and didactic fiction. Contemporary reviewers gendered the novel as a feminine form, and so didacticism and sentimentalism, which became standard features

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<sup>4</sup> Frances Brooke, *The History of Lady Julia Mandeville* (London: R & J Dodsley, 1763), Vol. I, pp.4-5.

<sup>5</sup> Barbara M. Benedict, 'The Margins of Sentiment: Nature, Letter and Law in Frances Brooke's Epistolary Novels', *Ariel*, 3 (July 1992), p. 12.

of the novel, were particularly associated with women.<sup>6</sup> Female writers were seen as moral and so morality became an important aspect of their work. In *The History of Lady Julia Mandeville*, Brooke presents Lady Julia as supremely moral and correct in her behaviour. Lady Julia can be seen as a representation of the courtesy-book girl and, with didacticism so prevalent in the eighteenth century, it is not surprising that many sentimental heroines were modelled on courtesy-books. Courtesy-books were widely read during the period and advised young men and young women on the qualities they should possess, their education and interests, and their conduct.<sup>7</sup> Lady Julia's moral and appropriate behaviour is observed by Lady Anne, who writes to Colonel Bellville that 'poor Harry [is] in terrible disgrace with Lady Julia for only kissing her hand ... she takes the affair quite seriously, and makes it an offence of the blackest die'.<sup>8</sup>

Similarly, Harry is the classic hero of the novel of sensibility. With sensibility came a new kind of hero, and male susceptibility began to be celebrated. This new 'man of feeling' had to be virtuous and gentlemanly, but also a private and highly sensitive person, who would not only be put through his own misfortunes but also those of any he met.<sup>9</sup> Harry's extremely emotional letters prove him to be an example of this new 'man of feeling'. Writing to a friend about a Miss Westbrook who claims to have fallen in love with him, Harry explains

I have just received a letter which makes me the most unhappy of mankind: 'tis from a lady whose fortune is greatly above my most sanguine hopes, and whose merit and tenderness deserve that heart which I feel is not in my power to give her. The general complacency of my behaviour to the lovely sex, and my having been accidentally her partner at two or three balls, has deceived her into an opinion that she is beloved by me ... How much she is to be pitied! My heart knows too well the pangs of disappointed love, not to feel most tenderly for the sufferings of another, without the additional motive to compassion of being the undesigned cause of those sufferings, the severest of which human nature is capable. I am embarrassed to the greatest degree, not what resolution to take ... but how to soften the stroke, and in what manner, without wounding her delicacy, to decline [the] offer.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Jane Spencer, 'Women Writers and the Eighteenth Century', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth Century Novel* ed. by John Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 215.

<sup>7</sup> McMullen, p. 57.

<sup>8</sup> Brooke, Vol. I, p. 51.

<sup>9</sup> John Mullen, 'Sentimental Novels', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth Century Novel* ed. by John Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 243.

<sup>10</sup> Brooke, Vol. I, pp. 76-77.

Here Harry is at his most understanding, sympathetic to the delicacies of the heart and emotions, sensitive to the misfortune of Miss Westbrook, and gentlemanly in his manner of declining the offer. He is truly the hero of sensibility.

While Brooke championed the novel of sensibility, she also subverted it through the character of Lady Anne Wilmot, who acts as a foil to the excessive emotions of Harry and Lady Julia. Upon publication of the novel, the character of Lady Anne was often singled out for specific praise and is one of Brooke's most interesting creations. Lady Anne enjoys her newfound freedom as a widow, having escaped from the abuse she suffered at the hands of her brutish husband. As a result of her past Lady Anne is hesitant of marrying her exemplary lover, Bellville, and she acts as the voice of reason and practicality within the narrative, advocating mutual respect and friendship as the basis of marriage. Lady Anne often writes with wit and irony, and this is contrasted with Harry's heavy sentimental diction. In contrast to Harry's emotional letter to his friend concerning Miss Westbrook, Lady Anne writes of the episode

You would die to see Harry's distress – so anxious for the tender creature's life, so incensed at his own wicked attractions, so perplexed how to pronounce the fatal sentence – for my part, I have had the utmost difficulty to keep my countenance – Lady Julia, who was to have been his partner, sighing with him over the letter, entreating him not to dance, pitying the unhappy love-sick maid, her fine eyes glistening with a tear of tender sympathy. The whole scene is too ridiculous to be conceived, and too foolish even to laugh at: I could stand it no longer, so retired and left them to their soft sorrows.<sup>11</sup>

Lady Anne mocks the sensibility shown by Harry and Lady Julia, portraying more reason than these two characters. Brooke's use of the epistolary method in *The History of Lady Julia Mandeville*, allows her to present the same situation from different viewpoints, and so we see this episode both from the perspective of Harry, who is directly involved, and from Lady Anne who acts as an observer. Lorraine McMullen writes that 'the disparity between the temperament and outlook of the two central viewpoints, that of the conventional, rather prosaic male and that of the perceptive, articulate female, contributes to the tension of the novel and provides variety of pace and tone'.<sup>12</sup> Lady Anne livens up the novel in her role as friend to the two lovers, and with her outspoken

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<sup>11</sup> Brooke, Vol. I, pp. 119-120.

<sup>12</sup> McMullen, p. 62.

manner and wit enjoys flouting convention. Lady Anne continues in her close relationship with Colonel Bellville even though she claims at the beginning she will never marry him, enjoying her role as a coquette. Lady Anne is a marginal figure who cautions against too much indulgence, and is a model for the reader on the correct way to feel. Barbara M. Benedict argues Brooke's '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'.<sup>13</sup> Benedict highlights a passage taken after the death of Harry and Lady Julia to argue that Brooke uses the character of Lady Anne to question the practical morality of sentimental feeling. After Lady Julia's death, Lady Anne recounts to Colonel Bellville 'I am now convinced Emily Howard deserves that preference Lady Julia gave her over me, 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'.<sup>14</sup> While Lady Anne can find contentment within her self through reason and reflection, immersion in feeling and dependence on others can only lead to misery.<sup>15</sup>

Brooke drew on several of Madame Riccoboni's themes within her novel, including noble lovers behaving with sensibility, unwanted suitors and apparent betrayals, but she also drew upon Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* with the tragic death of the hero and heroine. The disastrous ending of the novel was in fact one of the only areas to receive criticism by contemporary reviewers, who in general praised *The History of Lady Julia Mandeville* as one of the better examples of the genre. The *Monthly Review* commended the sentiments expressed in the novel, commenting that

This performance is distinguished from the common productions of the novel tribe, by ease and elegance of style, variety and truth of character, delicacy and purity of sentiment. The plan is simple and natural, the incidents are interesting and important, the catastrophe highly affecting, and exemplary. A tender love-tale is the basis of the work, which is carried on in a series of letters, less tedious, because less laboured, than those of the celebrated Richardson: of whose writings, this most agreeable history seems, however, in some respects, to be an

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<sup>13</sup> Benedict, p. 22.

<sup>14</sup> Brooke, Vol. II, pp. 176-177.

<sup>15</sup> Benedict, p. 12.

imitation. If we have any fault to find with it, it is that which some have objected to in *Clarissa*; the heart-rending, tragic *event*; scarce to be supported by a Reader of feeling.

The unhappy fate of the amiable Harry Mandeville, and his lovely Julia, with the unutterable distress of their worthy parents, is, indeed, most dreadful. We really could not support the perusal, without giving way to those tender emotions which the ingenious unknown Writer so well knows how to inspire; and from which we were gladly relieved by the reflection, that the story is fictitious. The novel, however, is excellent.<sup>16</sup>

In an age where the ability to feel and be emotionally responsive was deemed essential to the notion of being civilised, the ending of *Lady Julia Mandeville* was thought to excite the emotions too much and cause readers too much pain. The *Critical Review* continued in praising the novel, writing that

whatever opinion the reader may have of the design, he will find it an original in point of execution, especially colouring. Several episodes, tending to promote the main subject, are introduced with great judgement... We cannot, however, on the whole, help thinking, that that of Lady Anne Wilmot is by far the greatest ornament of the work, and is supported in her letters with a spirit and propriety that is not excelled, if equalled, by any other author in this species of writing... If we were disposed to find fault with this agreeable performance, it would be for the author's introducing any politics at all; though we cannot disown that it is done with great propriety, and her wheeling us too much about in an easy chair, on the carpet of description. In the main however, she is as sentimental as Rousseau, and as interesting as Richardson, without the caprice of one, or the tediousness of the other. We cannot recommend the catastrophe.<sup>17</sup>

With comparisons to such popular writers as Rousseau and Richardson, it is clear that Brooke was very well received upon publication and her novel became an immediate sensation. One unknown commentator wrote that '*Lady Julia Mandeville* was the first work which fairly ushered Mrs Brooke into the world of letters. This production was universally read, and it was as universally admired. Few novels have been published with more celebrity, and few have better deserved it'.<sup>18</sup> *The History of Lady Julia Mandeville* was translated into French in 1764 and was equally praised by French reviewers, including Voltaire. The reviewer in the *Année Littéraire*, one of the most influential French periodicals, devoted thirty pages to the translation, significant in itself, and indicative of the success of the novel. He praised the character of Lady Anne and wrote that 'this work deserves assuredly to succeed ... the end of the last volume excites the biggest emotions. One has the heart stirred, softened, torn; one is penetrated of the frightful truth that virtue in this world seems to be destined to be tested by misfortune', finishing his review with 'what truth! What purity

<sup>16</sup> *Monthly Review*, XXIX (July 1763), p. 159.

<sup>17</sup> *Critical Review*, XVI (July 1763), pp. 41-45.

<sup>18</sup> McMullen, p. 56.

of sentiments!’<sup>19</sup> In his essay on the novel in Europe, published in the *Gazette Littéraire de l’Europe*, Voltaire wrote ‘*The History of Lady Julia Mandeville* is maybe the better novel of this kind that has appeared in England since *Clarissa* and *Grandison*’.<sup>20</sup> Although only mentioned briefly by Voltaire, to be singled out for specific praise by him is, again, indicative of the popularity and success of the novel at this time, both in Britain and France.

*London Magazine* also printed a review of the novel over two months. Though mostly concerned with a summary of the novel and several long extracts, the reviewer concluded that

the interesting and engaging volumes we have thus loosely epitomised, are replete with refined and exalted sentiments, abound in just and spirited reflections and animated descriptions: the characters are well drawn, and the interwoven adventures extremely entertaining – In short, nothing but the horrid catastrophe, could abate of that high satisfaction, the perusal must convey to every generous and delicate mind.<sup>21</sup>

Robert Dodsley had bought a quarter share of the *London Magazine* in 1748 for £350<sup>22</sup>, and though he had little to say in the production of the magazine it is likely that he would have encouraged the printing of an extended review over two months as a way of advertising his most recent publication. Reviews from the period tended to include lengthy extracts that were examples of Harry’s sensibility or Lady Anne’s outspokenness and wit. The *London Magazine* however, also included an extract from the novel on Mr Herbert, a friend of Harry’s who had once been given to vice and folly and had squandered his fortune, but who had learnt the error of his ways and had redeemed himself with the help of his beloved wife. This is another example of didacticism within the novel, and was highlighted by the *London Magazine* ‘as a very striking lesson to numbers of his rank and others’.<sup>23</sup>

Modern criticism on *The History of Lady Julia Mandeville* by Barbara M. Benedict, B.G. MacCarthy and Lorraine McMullen has been inclined to focus on the character of Lady Anne, her contrast to the excessive emotions of the hero and heroine, and her introduction of a gothic element to the narrative. MacCarthy writes that ‘this is a very disappointing novel. The story is clear and

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>21</sup> *London Magazine* (August 1763), p. 436.

<sup>22</sup> James E. Tierney (ed.), *The Correspondence of Robert Dodsley 1733-1764* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 15.

<sup>23</sup> *London Magazine* (July 1763), p. 376.

closely linked, but there is no characterisation, except possibly for the witty and vivacious Anne Wilmot who is a fascinating widow with a kind heart and ironic turn of mind. Her flirtations, capricious moods and railleries are amusing, but too often overdone'.<sup>24</sup> MacCarthy argues the descriptions of country life in *Lady Julia Mandeville* are so idealised as to be pastoral, but does highlight a passage towards the end of the novel as possessing an interesting suggestion of gothic terrors.<sup>25</sup> This passage describes Lady Anne's walk in the shrubbery after the death of Harry and Lady Julia:

Awakening at once from the reverie in which I had been plunged, I found myself at a distance from the house, just entering the little wood so loved by my charming friend; the very moment increasing darkness gave an awful gloom to the trees. I stopped, I looked around, not a human form was in sight. I listened, and heard not a sound but the tremblingly of some poplars in the wood. I called, but the echo of my own voice was the only answer I received; a dreary silence reigned around; a terror I never felt before seized me; my heart panted with timid apprehension; I breathed short; I started at every leaf that moved; 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 horror.<sup>26</sup>

Both McMullen and Benedict also emphasise this passage as of interest. McMullen notes Brooke's awareness of the link with the novel of sensibility and that of the gothic, as both possess heightened emotions<sup>27</sup>, while Benedict argues that within the gothic passage Lady Anne loses her reason and becomes as vulnerable as the sentimental heroine, uncovering the dangers of excessive feeling. She writes, '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; but his excess costs him his life'.<sup>28</sup> Benedict then goes on to argue that 'Brooke thus suggests sentiment is neither a natural nor an entirely good quality, for, although it supplies a moral system paralleling the regulations of society, it weakens women in a world ruled by men'.<sup>29</sup>

The modern critical reception of Brooke's novel is interesting. In general the sedate and slow moving nature of the story make it fairly inaccessible to a current audience, and the rather listless characters of Lady Julia and Harry are often criticised. The character of Lady Anne

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<sup>24</sup> B.G. MacCarthy, *The Female Pen: Women, Writers and Novelists 1621-1818* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1994), p. 316.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 316.

<sup>26</sup> Brooke, Vol. II, p. 201.

<sup>27</sup> McMullen, p. 55.

<sup>28</sup> Benedict, p. 13.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

however, is correctly singled out for praise. She is by far the most captivating character in the novel, providing well-needed light relief to the plot. Benedict's argument that Brooke uses Lady Anne to highlight the dangers of excessive feeling is a persuasive one. The gothic passage is the only instance in the novel that Lady Anne is presented as vulnerable and susceptible to danger, due to the loss of her reason and wit. Lady Anne loses her sense of self and becomes weak, therefore Benedict's argument that Brooke has used the gothic passage to suggest that sentiment is neither a natural nor a good quality, but actually weakens women, is a strong one.

It would appear that *The History of Lady Julia Mandeville* resulted in immediate success and popularity for Brooke, and was one of the more widely read novels of the mid-eighteenth century. The extent of the success of the novel is evident in the correspondence of Robert Dodsley. In a letter from Elizabeth Cartwright to Dodsley, dated November 24<sup>th</sup> 1763, she writes 'but I have not read *Lady Julia* yet – but I protest to you Sir that it has not been my fault; the Horrid Bookman at the Hotwells promis'd that he w.<sup>d</sup> get it me, - but alas! I know too well how promises are kept sometimes'.<sup>30</sup> Written only four months after the publication of *Lady Julia Mandeville*, this would indicate that the novel was sought after and obviously recommended by Dodsley himself. Indeed in a letter from Dodsley to Elizabeth Cartwright dated April 28<sup>th</sup> 1764, Dodsley comments 'I had a letter the other day from Quebec, from Mrs Brooke who is very well. A third edition of *Lady Julia* is printed, which continues to sell and is much admir'd'.<sup>31</sup>

Brooke published *Lady Julia Mandeville* when the fashion for novels of sensibility was reaching its height. Fiction of the eighteenth century reflected contemporary life and thought, which emphasised the extremes of emotions. Civilised people were expected to be susceptible to sympathy, show a readiness to be touched and display tender feelings. MacCarthy explains that

sensibility made one 'tremblingly alive'; without it one merely existed in a 'vegetative state'. It was the great ideal of eighteenth century novelists and an essential characteristic of all heroes and heroines. Every opportunity for a display of sensibility was seized upon with avidity, and the plot was even deliberately framed so as to involve the characters in the greatest number of tribulations.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Tierney, p. 480.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 488.

<sup>32</sup> MacCarthy, p. 256.

Underlying sensibility was the belief that a capacity for deep feeling rendered individuals fit for society, as to readily feel pleasure and pain enabled one to escape self-interest and therefore be virtuous. Sensibility rescued individuals from themselves. As the eighteenth century was so concerned with moral teaching, the novel of sensibility became extremely popular with the reading public, mostly made up of middle-class women. Their bourgeois and feminine outlook reinforced one another to produce a reaction against coarseness and a preoccupation with emotionalism and morality.<sup>33</sup> Nature became an increasing source of sensibility with landscapes sentimentalised and used to echo moods, while poverty was also idealised and the poor presented as humbly submissive and accepting of their fate. Heroes and heroines, such as Harry and Lady Julia, had to be moral in their conduct, capable of deep feeling and expressive of their emotions. Samuel Richardson is generally attributed with initiating the trend towards novels of sensibility with his publication of *Pamela* in 1740, while Lawrence Sterne continued the fashion; however, it was women who were considered naturally adapted to writing in this genre. Contemporary notions of femininity included such characteristics as emotion, spontaneity and intuition, in contrast to male attributes such as rationality and objectivity, and so women were considered ideally suited to sensibility. This could lead to the undermining of their authorial autonomy though, confining the boundaries female writers could write within and concentrating attention on their sentiment rather than literary skill.<sup>34</sup>

Richardson wrote his most successful novels in the epistolary style which was extremely popular during the mid-eighteenth century and which was adopted by Brooke. The epistolary form lent itself well to the novel of sensibility as it allowed the reproduction of the momentariness of feelings, with emotions being instantly conveyed onto paper by the writer of the letter.<sup>35</sup> Many writers embarking on a literary career embraced the epistolary genre, as it was a relatively simple method to adopt and adapt. Writing was not traditionally seen as a feminine pursuit; however, as long as the female writer was sufficiently humble, and was writing to be morally didactic or out of

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 285.

<sup>34</sup> Cheryl Turner, *Living by the Pen: Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 56.

<sup>35</sup> Mullan, p. 241.

distress then it was acceptable. Literary ambition in a woman was regarded as impertinence, and therefore while women may have been ambitious, as Brooke clearly was, it was not to be shown. This is evident in the absence of a name on the title page to many female writers' novels, including *Lady Julia Mandeville*, as it was considered indelicate. Though the authorship may have been an open secret it was to remain unacknowledged publicly nevertheless.<sup>36</sup> Despite this, gradually the novel became a way that female writers could compete with their male counterparts without relinquishing their delicacy or morality.<sup>37</sup> The novel was a genre that was open to the less-educated writer, and so suited to the female author who was unlikely to have received a classical education.

The eighteenth century saw many shifts in society as the boundaries between public and private spheres altered. Clubs, coffeehouses and the expanding print culture were all privately run institutions, separate to the state. Women were subjected to the same traditional and patriarchal confinements that they had been subjected to for centuries, with emphasis being laid upon their role in the home and with the family. However, with the shifting of the boundaries between public and private spheres, new opportunities were opened to women. Jane Spencer points out that

we need to recognise the new public dimension to domestic life, fostered especially by print culture. What is new about the eighteenth century experience, it has recently been argued, is not the confinement of women to the home but the new value placed on that home. The new evaluation of privacy and domesticity encouraged by sentimental ideology contributed to the ambiguity of public and private distinctions; and the domestic sentimental novel of the late eighteenth century had an ambiguous role as the carrier of private concerns into public print.<sup>38</sup>

Print culture became one area of the public sphere that women could participate in, and could use it to bring attention to female issues and women's place within the structures of society. This would have to be done subtly of course, as first and foremost female novelists were expected to be upholders of truth and virtue. While Brooke's novel is firmly embedded in the tradition of sensibility and its domestic and familial issues, Brooke does raise some concerns. She comments on the brutality of Lady Anne Wilmot's husband, and argues against arranged marriages, using her

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<sup>36</sup> MacCarthy, p. 291.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 289.

<sup>38</sup> Spencer, p. 217.

moral authority to comment on women's role and experience and to promote marriage based on respect and friendship.

Frances Brooke was a recognised figure on the London literary scene, and was well known among her fellow female authors. Elizabeth Griffith wrote in Volume VI of *A Series of Genuine Letters between Henry and Frances* that 'I am going to dine at Mrs. Ch\_\_\_ today to meet Mrs. Brooke. I am told that I shall like her extremely. She is sensible and unaffected – an unaffected wit is *rara Avis*'<sup>39</sup>, while the poet Anna Seward wrote two weeks after Brooke's death, 'so the world has lost my two friends, Mrs. Brooke and Mrs. Miers; Beings whose talents were first-rate in their different departments, and every way did honour to the age in which they lived'.<sup>40</sup> Brooke was a successful and popular writer in her day, who possessed considerable wit and charm. In *The History of Lady Julia Mandeville*, Brooke manages to combine the traditional sentimental heroine of Lady Julia who is submissive and modest and whose story ends unhappily, with the forward thinking character of Lady Anne, who combines intelligence, reason and wit to achieve happiness. Through the character of Lady Anne, Brooke hints at women's issues and female emancipation; however, Brooke herself held conventional attitudes towards social structures such as class and religion. It is this dichotomy between the traditional novel of sensibility and the female issues raised within the narrative that make it an interesting example of mid-eighteenth century literature.

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<sup>39</sup> McMullen, p. 136.

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