



University of Pennsylvania
ScholarlyCommons

Undergraduate Humanities Forum 2010-2011:
Virtuality

Penn Humanities Forum Undergraduate
Research Fellows

4-2011

The Ties That Bind: Family Dynamics in Romantic Period Literature

Shana Rusonis
University of Pennsylvania

Follow this and additional works at: https://repository.upenn.edu/uhf_2011

Rusonis, Shana, "The Ties That Bind: Family Dynamics in Romantic Period Literature" (2011).
Undergraduate Humanities Forum 2010-2011: Virtuality. 11.
https://repository.upenn.edu/uhf_2011/11

Suggested Citation:

Rusonis, S. (2011). "The Ties That Bind: Family Dynamics in Romantic Period Literature." *2010-2011 Penn Humanities Forum on Virtuality*.

This paper is posted at ScholarlyCommons. https://repository.upenn.edu/uhf_2011/11
For more information, please contact repository@pobox.upenn.edu.

The Ties That Bind: Family Dynamics in Romantic Period Literature

Comments

Suggested Citation:

Rusonis, S. (2011). "The Ties That Bind: Family Dynamics in Romantic Period Literature." *2010-2011 Penn Humanities Forum on Virtuality*.

The Ties That Bind
Family Dynamics in Romantic Period Literature

Shana Rusonis

2010–2011 Penn Humanities Forum
Undergraduate Mellon Research Fellowship

The Ties That Bind: Family Dynamics in Romantic Period Literature
Shana Rusonis, Penn Humanities Forum Fellow 2010-2011

Introduction: A Note on 'Virtuality'

Literary study is a problematic discipline by nature. In wrestling with narratives, syntax, and diction, we (as an academic community) must keep in mind rules of the game we play. If what lies between the covers of a physical book is nothing more than paper and print, how can we possibly elevate the meaning of that object to be something more than it is?¹ If we create a virtual world in a literary setting, would it follow that that world may only be fully understood by "equally virtual people"?² Representation of a factual, historical, observable word through the work of fiction is a paradox. If language is the gateway through which we access knowledge, how do we trust that our understanding of that language not betray us? Or, to frame the issue conversely, how do we guarantee that we are capable of discerning between fictional and real? That discernment, between the representation and the actual, is where the energy and excitement of literary studies lies. To examine the phenomenon of literature as it directly represents reality, and the ways in which it deliberately strays from a perfect imitation, allow us to garner new insights into our own histories, psyches, cultures and passions. In the words of Avrom Fleishman:

[I]f discrimination between the factual and the invented is not only desirable but possible, it suggests that literature has more than one way of intersecting with the external world ... that some of the things literature talks about are evoked as *things* more than are others, and literature can be said to communicate *with* as well as *about* them.³

If we can trust that the world we live in is capable of being represented through literature, we are free to consider the implications of virtual representation in this medium. A self-conscious study of a given text, taking into account the limits of language, the flexibility of narrative, and the authorial intention in representing a world within their genre. With these conditions in mind, I intend to address the intersection of factual and fictional in Romantic literature, emerging during revolutionary historical times in eighteenth-century Europe. The construction of literary families in these texts spark questions of representation and meaning when paired with national families of the time. When do these narratives coincide, and when do they diverge? What insight may be gleaned from a virtual family which closely resembles the actual, and what may be said in times when it does not?

¹ In the introduction to the Penn Humanities Forum topic for 2010-2011, topic director James English proposes that, "For many, *virtuality* represents the loss of what is most precious and authentic in human experience," a sentiment that applies to computer-facilitated human interaction and virtualized experience, but also aptly to the concept of virtual representation in literature. The issue of creating 'actual' from 'virtual' is not new, but a reinvented and revisited concept which deserves re-examining as our understanding of the concept develops.

² Susanne Langer. *Feeling and Form*, (New York: Scribner Press 1953), 295.

³ "Introduction: Fiction as Supplement," in *Fiction and the Ways of Knowing* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978), 4.

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries bridge Restoration and Victorian literature with a unique age of revolutionary change, namely, Romanticism. Enlightenment ideals heavily influenced Romantic poetry and literature, wherein philosophers, authors, and audiences were empowered to seize control of their lives and determine their own fates. Enlightened thought proposed ideas directly at odds with many social and political customs ingrained in European culture. The subsequent friction of old and new ideologies created a turbulent climate at the national level for states such as England and France, both of which suffered great national crises during the Romantic period. The French Revolution and the Regency Crisis of 1788 and 1789 exemplify a regional trend of monarchical decline in accordance with the downfall of monarchs exemplify the dissonance between the traditional, privileged rule of the few and the burgeoning idea of autonomy in the hands of those who claim it. The politics which accompanied these rapid and radical changes are tumultuous at best. Widespread revolution and refiguring of the concept of the nation introduces the idea of chaos and degradation on a number of societal and cultural fronts. Among these is the popular literature of the time. The Enlightened age also ushered in a boom in print culture and rise of the novel as a national pastime⁴. The subject matter of these novels can be read as representative of historic trends and popular sentiment of the age. There exists a significant base of historical theory on the family as a model for national politics and revolution, but not many instances in which the historical and the literary model of the family intersect. This is where I would like to draw my focus, since I see the family as a successful platform for voicing public opinion during

⁴ Jürgen Habermas and his theory of the ‘public sphere’, a forum for social action and political discussion. He includes the advent of mass printing and widespread literacy during the mid-eighteenth century as part of a political public sphere model, which helped to strengthen public opinion. However, for the purpose of this analysis, his definition of the private sphere is equally, if not more important, since it describes the family as a space of autonomy. *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, Craig Calhoun, ed. (Boston, MIT University Press, 1992).

a volatile period. There are many narratives of dysfunctional or dismantled families occupy the focus of popular work, like that of authors Frances Burney and Robert Bage.

The eighteenth century has been associated with the rise of a “public sphere”, a concordant emergence of capitalist exchange, print culture, and the authority of the state. The model of the public is countered by the ‘private’, which concerns autonomy on a domestic level. While the public sphere acts as a vehicle for popular opinion, the private sphere is a realm of personal authority, uninterrupted by institutional supervision. However, this idea of the family as a space for personal escape and autonomy does not stand if the family is elevated to a political or public platform, which occurs repeatedly as political tensions of the eighteenth century escalate. A general consensus among sociologists is that for eighteenth-century society, is that kinship took on meanings in addition to the exchange of capital through personal relationships: “family connections – both consanguineal and affinal, by blood and marriage – were stressed across the social hierarchy.”⁵ When the elevated form of the family can act as a functional framework of literary narrative, these new understandings of families as dynamic political and social systems become relevant. According to Howard, representations of the family in imaginative fictions of the period seem to emphasize two readings of the contemporary family:

[O]n the one hand, the reader/audience is propelled into a sympathetic relationship with the child victims of dysfunctional families; on the other, the reader/audience is urged to celebrate what Fielding often in his work refers to as the ‘family of love’ in its victory over the harshness of society.⁶

The victimized reading of children reared in defunct families is predominant in the texts for consideration here, *Evelina*, *Romance of the Forest*, and *Hermesprong*. But what, exactly, are these families victim to? Is there a root cause of their misfortune and unhappiness, and what will become of their next generations? These literary,

⁵ Susan Kubica Howard, Introduction to *Evelina* (Orchard Park: Broadview Literary Texts, 2000), p. 30.

⁶ Howard, Introduction p. 26.

interpersonal interactions are confined to one of the most impossibly small and intimate arenas of interaction, the family. Within this structure, Howard makes note of a number of archetypal patterns of behavior exhibited by the characters bound within these structures. In his words, “novelists of the period are more likely to negotiate the ... demands of family in an attempt to find a sustaining, viable family structure.”⁷ An easier option, from a practical standpoint, would be an “evasion narrative”, wherein a child or member of the family leaves the nuclear family structure for pursuit of success elsewhere. A fresh start is, in many senses, a more reasonable option than resolution of incumbent problems within an existing tangle of relationships and history. However, the family tends to hold together, in some form or another. After all, there is still flexibility within this structure, and opportunities for growth or change. The possibilities include fathers who attempt to exert their authority and control the offspring. They may do so by threatening loss of inheritance in an attempt to steer the behavior of their children in the interest of the child’s fiscal future. Mothers are frequently seen as inept, bowing to the power of their spouse. It is often important to the matriarch to maintain a sense of external calm in the family’s public image, and to merely moderate the turmoil within to ensure that it does not spiral out of control. Siblings face perpetual issues, constantly competing for their parents’ attention, if not their love, and for the ultimate prize: the family inheritance. “These relationships capture one side of the conduct books’ emphasis on parental authority and children’s obedience, but ignore the admonition that the authority be rational and moderate, and that affection be its guide.”⁸

⁷ Howard, Introduction p. 26.

⁸ Howard, p. 27-27

This irrationality within the family can be informative of what we typically find to be a dysfunctional dynamic – that rationality is not the prevailing indicator of families’ behavior. The “family romance” is originally a Freudian term⁹, one which proposes the idea of a collective political unconscious when applied in a historical context¹⁰ but in order to understand this proposed connection, the notion of the family model must be further explored. It should be noted that the family systems to be examined are in no way functional; they are dismantled and defunct, and in interesting ways.

Another critically theory to posit in developing this study is Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*, which coins the term “nationalism” and pinpoints the phenomenon of a ‘national identity’ at the start of the Enlightenment. His analysis looks at the secularized approach to individual and communal purpose and destiny, but still acknowledges a type of “religious community”. The counter to this theological community is the “dynastic realm”, which aligns with the political climate of the eighteenth century with which he is studying (and, conveniently, with the novels that we will consider).

Evelina (or the History of a Young Lady’s Entrance into the World) was published anonymously in 1778, the first novel of twenty-six year old Fanny (Frances) Burney¹¹. Thomas Lowndes published the novel under the impression that Burney’s brother had penned the text, as he was the one to physically bring the manuscript to the printer. Nonetheless, the novel was printed without a name. Burney actually feared that the novel would be poorly received and that she would dishonor her family with her professional and public misdemeanor. Instead, the work

⁹ Volume 9 of *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey (London, 1959), pp. 238-239.

¹⁰ Referencing here Frederic Jameson’s coining of the term *political unconscious* in his work *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981).

¹¹ Burney was also a playwright and diarist, writing most often in an epistolary form. Epistolary novels reached great popularity during the mid eighteenth century with the works of Samuel Richardson, Montesquieu and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Although the genre experienced a decline shortly thereafter, the work of epistolary novelists such as Burney influenced the next generation of romantic authors including Jane Austen and Mary Shelley.

gained significant acclaim in fashionable society, with “Rumours about the age and youthful graces of the novelist [which] began to spread and lend piquancy to the novel”¹². Ironically, Burney composed the novel anonymously and out of sight of her father for fear that her writing would bring shame to her family: at that time, it was uncommon and uncouth for a woman to try to elevate her reputation in a literary sphere. As both an anonymous and publicly authored text, the novel gained great popular and critical acclaim as, ““written by somebody that knows *the top & the bottom* – the *highest and lowest* of Mankind.””¹³ Within the following years, Burney’s identity was revealed to the public. Regardless, her identity did not affect the success of the novel, which was well-received as a moralizing text which provided an insightful template for the behavior of young women coming of age in Romantic England. The novel was popular in both the volume of texts printed and in the quality of critical attention it received; it was described as humorous, entertaining, and instructive, and was read by the likes of Hester Thrale and Edmund Burke. The novel itself became a “universal topic”, where taglines from the novel as well as character names became commonplace in social conversation.

The full title detailed that *Evelina* was a tale of *the History of a Young Lady’s Entrance into the World*, and the plot is simple and easy to follow, as are many romantic epistolary novels of the same genre and style. The novel is sectioned into three volumes, each of which comes to a suspenseful end in order to draw the reader into the following chapters. This literary period and genre was accompanied by a rise in both widespread literacy and circulating libraries, and encompasses the spirit of the nation at the time. This is due to the fact that communication of moral lessons was often done through these ‘sentimental’ texts, and the implicit commentary on characters’ behaviors through contemporary critiques showcased more than just opinions on

¹² Ernest Rhys, Introduction to *Evelina*, (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd. 1909), p 1.

¹³ *The Early Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney* II 288, 35 n. 12.

appropriate behavior. These comments could be seen as critiques not just on various echelons of society, but also upon the behaviors at the very forefront of the public image, namely, the national families of the time.

The treatment of parents, children, and their multifarious interactions in these texts provides a critique of acceptable behavior at the macro, national level. In *Evelina*, we see the title character completely transformed within the context of a family. The objective is straightforward; the protagonist must successfully navigate her emergence into public life, and in doing so secure a promising financial and romantic future. The title character is introduced at the novel's exposition as an orphan raised outside of the metropolis of London, England. She is seventeen years of age, and her development until the point of the novel's origin is largely unknown, other than the fact that she was raised by a Reverend Villars in the rural country. However, the novel's action begins *in media res* when she is drawn into the bourgeoisie society of London at the behest of Evelina's grandmother, Mademoiselle Duval. An unsteady, makeshift family in place as a starting point for the action of the novel. She is uprooted from her country home and brought to London, where her ambiguous social status and attractive looks make her a centerpiece of urban society and she is pursued by multiple suitors. The narrative unfolds in epistolary form as Evelina reconnects with her grandmother, father, and adopted sister, all in the space of a few weeks. The family is not only disjointed to start, but constantly being reconfigured as the plot progresses. This peculiar moment of origin is emblematic of another, non-fictional circumstance of the time. The national family, centered on George III, was in a state of estrangement and disarray, and had been for some time.

George III was hardly emblematic of proper family relationships and etiquette, although the source of the family's issues was rooted in the King's poor mental health and perceived

ineptitudes as a monarch. The international authority of Britain as a colonizing, imperial world power faltered during the eighteenth century and George III's reign. This decline was marked by the notable loss of the American colonies when they fought for their independence in 1776. Although Britain defeated France in both the Seven Years' War and in the Napoleonic conflict which ended with the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, these victories were outstripped by what was seen as a massive undermine of British dominance. He suffered from rheumatism and poor sight, which crippled him as he aged. By the turn of the century, he had had to take several leaves of absence from his duties in order to remedy his personal health. What later came to light as 'fits of madness' sparked concern at the national political level, particularly among preeminent members of parliament and the king's son, George IV. What resulted was the establishment of a regency, or a minor power coup that attempted to unseat George III and insert his son in his place. Although the ploy was ultimately temporary, the event did not reflect favorably upon the royal family, and the populace in general suffered a loss of faith in the monarchical regime, which would follow George IV into his time as the supreme power in Britain. The result, therefore, is that in the last two decades of the eighteenth century, the English public was faced with dissatisfaction and uneasiness both about the loss of the colonies and the obvious turmoil with their national family, which in previous centuries, heralded their nation as a global superpower.

Although the turmoil of the French Revolution was not as close to home as the Regency Crisis, the events of French politics in the last half of the eighteenth century represented an extreme example of a nation unseated from international power and subsequent descent into turmoil. After losing the Seven Years' War at the hand of Great Britain and a significant financial strain added by the support that France gave to the American Revolution of 1776, the domestic state of the nation led to a widespread sense of dissatisfaction with the government.

Until that point, the nation had been ruled by an Ancien Regime, or absolute monarchy, which at that point in time included King Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette. The public opinion of the couple painted them in the most sadistic and self-absorbed of lights, and eventually led to an usurpation by the National Constituent Assembly that began in 1789. In 1793, the French monarchy dissolved into chaos. The public revolution and execution of the monarchs of the nation reads, in a familial narrative context, as a rebellion by a populace against its governance, or unhappy children against didactic parents. This comparison is extreme, but another reading of the national family as defunct would be to consider the physical, forceful removal of the family from power; which leaves no parentage or precedent for order once that lineage has been dissolved.

Although this extreme form of rebellion and dissolution does not come through in the novels of England, the strain and alarm that the events in France created in Great Britain compounded the anxieties that had already arisen as a result of the Regency. The fact that their national family, already on shaky ground from having suffered a public loss (the French with the Seven Years' War, the British with the American Revolution), could soon lose sovereignty if a radical faction gained sway was unsettling, at the very least. Fortunately, the dissatisfaction remained more of an undertone than an overt claim for the monarchy's immediate disbandment. A possible source of evidence of this sentiment would be the popular fictions and prevalent narratives of the time.

These narratives, like those of Burney, depict families in disarray and dysfunctional settings. However, they are not so simple as to paint a picture of a royal family and to administer prescriptive, moralizing advice blatantly and simply. The nuance on the part of these authors is that they embed their characters and themes within unusual settings and circumstances, with

superficial lessons as a gloss for the inattentive or unaware reader. Although literacy was increasing rapidly throughout the country, its populace could still not presume to be well-educated or particularly politically savvy. However, they could latch onto themes and characters that related to their own attitudes and opinions of ordinary, familiar life. If we take literature to be representative of both the realities and possibilities of human life, we can expect conceptions of the nation-state, social order, and individual behavior to be translatable from person to page. Family is a trans-national and essentially trans-cultural norm; or as literary studies would term it, a “universal”. Whole or partial, functional or dysfunctional, each individual develops in reaction to their parents and siblings, or lack thereof. No circumstance qualifies as familiar quite as much as the familial; thus, I portend that the instructive lessons of each author are ingrained in the interactions between various members of these defunct families, and that the conflict and resolution of their respective stories spells a solution for these readers’ unsettled feelings.

In an excerpt from the first letter of the novel, we find some of the language used in describing the strained family relations contained within. The catalyst for change at the outset of the novel, Mme. Duval, has lately attempted to form an account of her “*ill-advised* daughter”, resulting in the apprehension that she “bequeathed an infant to the orphan world” ... and that “if *you*, with whom *she understands* the child is placed, will procure authentic proofs of its relationship to her, you may send it to Paris, where she will properly provide for it.”¹⁴ This initial hesitation about the legitimacy of Evelina’s relationship to her currently separated family members is in line with her removal from the urban center that will become the setting for the majority of the plot: she is an outsider, of questionable status other than the fact that she is now of age to be brought into public society.

¹⁴ Fanny Burney, *Evelina* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd. 1946), p. 9, author’s emphasis.

Evelina is seen as an enthralling enigma in the eyes of London aristocracy. The potential for Evelina to establish a new family name is brought to light by her success in attracting men's attention; but since family reputation matters in social circles, her lack of history is a paradoxical tension that adds to her mystique. Not only does the possibility of new relations and relationships spell potential for success, but a functional family is considered a key feature of personal happiness by Evelina's own caretaker:

I still hope I shall live to see my Evelina the ornament of her neighbourhood, and the pride and delight of her family; and giving and receiving joy from such society as may best deserve her affection, and employing herself in such useful and innocent occupations as may secure and merit the tenderest love of her friends, and the worthiest satisfaction of her own heart. Such are my hopes, and such have been my expectations.¹⁵

So here we see that Evelina's caretaker defines his hope for her success as a supportive community, a proud family, an active and happy participation in society, and the affections of friends and a partner. We find throughout the novel that many of these measures of success- friendships, suitors, societal status- are linked back to family reputation. The recurrence of this issue only intensifies the tensions of a strained family dynamic for Evelina.

Evelina is drawn into urban, aristocratic society as a result of the somewhat inevitable pull of the distant, but still tenable, family relationships instead of living an isolated, rural, and uncomplicated life. This under-explained pull is in its essence a driving force behind the plot; it propels Evelina's life and behavior into a public eye both within the text and in the context of its reception. By contextualizing Evelina's coming-of-age in contemporary London, the audience of readership sees Evelina in a glamorized, public sphere: this is where she goes to see her life unfold, to make public mistakes, and to look for the escape from her humble, bland, and not fully realized lifestyle of her youth. The expectation that Evelina will come across a windfall that will

¹⁵ Burney, *Evelina*, p. 117.

lift her up out of her mediocre existence does not, fortunately, occur, as Burney's resolution to the tensions she frames at the outset of the novel.

A simple stroke of luck would not provide much insight into the national character or climate during the end of the eighteenth century. The national tensions of the royal family's fate were unresolved at the time of *Evelina*'s publication, and would only further escalate with the arrival of a full Regency. Evelina's fate is also unpredictable as the plot progresses. It seems that she will be unsuccessful in finding a suitor with whom to establish a family and clear the ambiguity of her status in society. She is prevented from doing so not only by her unclear background, but also by her unpolished presentation in bourgeoisie society, where she publicly embarrasses herself. Furthermore, her singular romantic connection and hope of a settled, married life is dashed by a letter of disinterest and heartbreak. Evelina, the reader fears, may be fated to return to mediocrity and never fulfill her potential of success in high society. Much like the anxieties of the populace in London, the fear that a great nation would never actualize its potential was a precipitous danger; descent into oblivion and falling out of recognition with an international "high society", per se, was a possibility that the English would have striven to avoid.

What is the proposed resolution? A possible resolution could have been for her family to successfully reunite, and for some sort of cohabitation or celebration of the functional family to occur. Instead of directly opposing the narratives of national families of monarchs George and Louis, the family of Evelina does not exhibit a rebellion: while the national families are bursting apart, the family of Evelina is attempting to unify, and ultimately unable to do so. In the one clear instance where Evelina's name could have been cleared, her attempts at a family formation fail yet again. It is revealed that Evelina is actually the daughter of a wealthy aristocrat. He

previously never knew of her existence because he believed another girl of Evelina's age to be his daughter—she had been suggested by Evelina's wetnurse that she was actually the daughter and heir to the Belmont inheritance, in another plot device that suggests the dysfunction of families which labor under the assumption that blind and unquestioning inheritance (be it of power, wealth, status, etc) is inadvisable. Although circumstances that bring Evelina and her father, Sir John Belmont, to meet for the first time are convoluted, it becomes transparent that their connection is genuine, and that their familial connection deserves that they be reunited at last. However, when they come together for an interaction as father and daughter for the first time, their interaction is unsustainable and untenable:

What a moment for your Evelina—an involuntary scream escaped me, and, covering my face with my hands, I sunk on the floor. He had, however, seen me first; for, in a voice scarce articulate, he exclaimed, 'My God! does Caroline Evelyn still live! Yes, yes,' cried he, looking earnestly in my face, 'I see, I see thou art her child! she lives—she breathes,—she is present to my view!—Oh, God, that she indeed lived!—Go, child, go,' added he, wildly starting, and pushing me from him: 'take her away, Madam,—I cannot bear to look at her!' And then, breaking hastily from me, he rushed out of the room.¹⁶

What we see instead is a narrative of transcendence; where Evelina only momentarily comes into contact with her old, now defunct family in order to have her developmental path redirected toward the creation of her own family. After a brief moment of reconciliation with her father, Evelina is welcomed into the arms of her suitor-turned fiancée, her questions of inheritance and family name now resolved. The transcendence theme is one that occurs across multiple texts in my work, and points towards a national sentiment of self-made success, if not the self-made family.

Robert Bage is an author of sentimental novels whose career overlaps with Burney's to an extent. He differs from her in that his rise to fame was much more traditional than his female

¹⁶ Burney, *Evelina*, p. 117.

counterpart; and, as a result, he was able to push the boundaries of his writing in ways that Burney did not. Furthermore, the text to be considered here was the last of Bage's career, where as *Evelina* was Burney's first. *Hempsprong, or, Man as he is Not*, is the final novel of Bage's career, published in 1796. A unique feature of this novel, and one of the key reasons it is considered unique and valuable in this context of national allegory, is that the setting is not England. In fact, the novel is quite the opposite of *Evelina* in that the novel takes place in the backwoods of undeveloped American colony territory. The hero of the novel is a mysterious and compelling figure (Hempsprong) raised with Native Americans in what is now Michigan. He values friendship, forthrightness, generosity, and romantic love, and feels strongly about the harmful effects of hierarchy, nobility and hereditary privilege, conventional gender roles and patriarchy, rarefied etiquette, commercialism, and the influence of the Church of England. The novel He travels throughout Europe by foot, with only one servant, and acts as a problem-solver whenever he can, often by dispensing money or consoling or befriending the unfortunate in a more or less chivalric way.

Much like in *Evelina*, the mystique of a single person, misplaced from their family and genuine role in society, happens upon a discovery that gives them a defined place in the world. Toward the end of the novel the reader learns his true identity: Hermsprong is the rightful heir to the aristocratic seat of Grondale, near Cornwall. Hermsprong aims to eject the dishonest Lord Grondale and, through legal means, recover his title. However, the otherwise legal claim to legitimacy is confounded by romance: Hermsprong falls in love with his uncle's daughter. The title character frequently ruminates on the natural equality of men and women and the mentally distorting effects of English tastes, gender and family structures.

However, in both of these narratives, we find that a single character in their prime of life can be drawn back into a hyperactive societal niche by estranged and far-flung family relationships. This serves as evidence that no matter how torn or dysfunctional, family ties and affinity will always overpower rational considerations. Then, having been drawn from obscurity into the public eye, these characters find themselves, unadulterated by the urbane life, pure of heart and well-intended, making publish mistakes which do not embarrass, but certainly to not clarify their ambiguous status. In strange turns of fate, each protagonist finds that their escape and refuge from their strange and ambiguous circumstance will be through love and romantic relationships. Rather than an evasion narrative, this one might be called one of transcendence; wherein the protagonist does not turn and run from the challenges of acceptance and inheritance (success) in the public eye, but rather a transcendence narrative. In the transcendence mode, the protagonist finds a way to avoid the traditional path to success, finding instead an alternate route that involves forming a new family and new relationships that will sustain into the future.

In the context of the political and historical climate of these decades in European history, we find that the British, although unsettled and anxious, are still very cognoscent of proper etiquette and behavior even in unstable times. They will be held together, in the end, by a familial bond of nationhood and obligation, much like the ties that pulled together the families of Evelina and Hermsprong, eventually and inevitably. However, instead of taking a rebellious evasion route like the scandalous French populace, they will exhibit a transcendent narrative, wherein they consider their options for success fully and rationally and slowly wait out the pains of turmoil that their nation is suffering through. But much like a family, the people of the British populace see the value in a cohesive, albeit at times untraditional, family.

Of course, a possible extension here is to consider families of nations in a variety of cultures and historical time periods; America, modern and past, Africa, the Carribean, other European nations and languages, and cultures of the Middle East and Asia as well. But with this in mind; that the well-being of a family can be taken as a vital sign of the nation, a dynamic structure in sync with the pulse of public opinion. I feel that in order to successfully understand the contentment or dissatisfaction of an entire nation, you need not look farther than the family which surrounds you.