

THE POLITICS OF ROMANCE IN "THE HISTORY OF EMILY MONTAGUE"

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THE MOST INTERESTING, because most problematic, claim that Mary Jane Edwards makes in her fine edition of *The History of Emily Montague* is that Frances Brooke expresses in her novel an "essentially positive view of the potential of the new British colony."¹ This claim is problematic for many contextual and textual reasons. In the first place, although on March 22, 1769 Brooke dedicated her book to Guy Carleton, the recently appointed governor of Canada, and spoke glowingly of the country's prospects under his governance, her optimism is rendered questionable by her personal experience of the new province and by the frustration of her political wish to affirm the Conquest of Quebec. While the dedication praises Carleton's "enlightened attention" for bringing about a "spirit of loyalty and attachment to our excellent Sovereign" and a "cheerful obedience" to British law (1), the text of her epistolary novel, in the course of plotting a retreat from Canada to England, necessarily embodies a much less positive attitude than announced by the dedication.

When Mr. Brooke returned to his wife and England in the autumn of 1768, he did so because his petition for a land grant had met with no more success than their joint campaign to establish the Anglican Church in Quebec.² Like many of their middle-class contemporaries, the Brookes opposed historical, social and political forces that they understood only partly and could resist hardly at all. Still, in the two years following Carleton's arrival in Quebec and before Mr. Brooke rejoined his wife, the couple must have had an inkling that the new governor would continue to implement the policies of John Murray, the former governor, who, if initially a benefactor to the Brookes, regarded them finally as opponents of his governorship and of his strategic and aristocratic sympathies for the habitants. Indeed, the novel's allusions to Carleton's political stance less celebrate his enlightenment than warn him against continuing Murray's appeasement of Quebec's French populace. Having written her book in Canada during the last months of Murray's term and revised it in England throughout the summer of 1768, Mrs.

Brooke had time to grasp why the British government was abandoning the Royal Proclamation of 1763 and was ceasing to trumpet the Conquest of Quebec.³

However, *The History of Emily Montague* upholds the Proclamation without predicting the 1774 Quebec Act: while mirroring the facts behind the reversal of British policy, it fails to grasp this policy. Instead it aggravates this political contrariness in ways that question claims for Mrs. Brooke's optimism about Canada. She more eagerly resists political and economic change at home than she promotes Canada's future. She defends the Crown and attacks the Court by favouring military, Anglican and rural over commercial, dissenting and urban values in simple-minded, conventionally middle-class ways.⁴ Her bourgeois reaction to aristocracy's growing political and economic power is salient in her emphasis on the freedom of choice for marriage partners: her stress on the right of lovers to choose mates without parental interference constitutes a rear-guard attack on Lord Hardwicke's Bill of 1753, which forbade clandestine marriages and stipulated the fulfilment of ecclesiastical, legal, and familial conditions. This Bill, originating in the House of Lords, was interpreted as a sign of the increasing power of the upper chamber over the House of Commons and as an attack on the social mobility and individual liberties of the middle class. Mrs. Brooke's insistent yet questionable attacks on arranged marriages signal the important because ultimately contradictory relation between politics and romance in *The History of Emily Montague*. Rather than looking ahead to 1774, she takes her bearings from the Royal Proclamation, hoping thereby to belittle the aristocracy's power in church, army, and society, a power epitomized to her by arranged marriages in the English upper classes.⁵

Narrative logic requires Mrs. Brooke to confront as well as to recognize the complexity of Canadian politics, but she writes of them with a vague, even self-exposing, sense of propaganda. Colonel Edward Rivers, her hero, hopes a "new golden age" will follow the "interregnum of government" after Carleton officially becomes governor (7). But hopes for the institution of British rule are beyond realization. When William Fermor, the military patriarch who is Mrs. Brooke's most serious commentator, leaves the colony, he testifies to the governor's "personal character" diffusing the "spirit of urbanity" through this "small community" (285). But he will not judge the governor's political conduct since Mrs. Brooke wishes to eulogize Carleton's personality by way of evading his adoption of French cultural values. Evasiveness leads her to both bury conquest motifs in her text and subsume politics to romance. When Indian women announce to Arabella Fermor, the patriarch's coquettish daughter, that the English conquerors of Quebec are their "brethren" (50), the theme that the aboriginal people are eager to have the British military system of land grants in full operation is somewhat implausibly reinforced. Fermor truly finds the "politics of Canada" to be "complex" and "difficult," but Mrs. Brooke derides this complexity by fancifully turning political

evasiveness into female social power. Arabella thinks her preeminence at the governor's balls and assemblies vitally important since "we new comers have nothing to do with" the "dregs of old disputes." Her amusingly egotistic diversion of politics to the "little commonwealth of woman" (98) alerts readers to some of the social and cultural contradictions underlying Mrs. Brooke's propaganda.⁶

When Arabella declares that "[o]ur little coterie is the object of great envy; we live just as we like, without thinking of other people" (101), her sentiments indicate the typically self-exposing contradictoriness of the tiny community which Mrs. Brooke celebrates. This community sees itself as exiled from England yet able to exploit English patronage. It also feels superior to the *habitants* while appropriating French diction and *bons mots* to its speech. Pretending aloofness to Quebec politics, the community imposes its culture on the conquered. Claiming to live in isolation from the larger community, Mrs. Brooke's English characters seek to dominate it, with the result that they depend on it unconsciously. Thus, when Arabella's courtship of Captain Fitzgerald is interrupted by the failure of the French women at the governor's assembly to obey English dancing codes, her protest that the "whole province" knows of her courtship is profoundly inconsistent (188). This inconsistency is more than a matter of unintegrated geographical and cultural concepts; it stems from Mrs. Brooke's political evasiveness. Arabella first compares Quebec to a "third or fourth rate country town in England (98); yet, on leaving, she prefers to live there rather than in "any town in England, except London" (281). Despite this shift of perspective, the theme of colonial progress stands up to neither contextual nor textual scrutiny. The aloofness to colonial politics analyzed in the context of the suppressed views of the *habitants* and governors shows how Mrs. Brooke encodes political ideas in ways neither historically accurate nor narratively compelling.

Historians of the years between 1763 and 1774 clarify what William Fernor admits to have been a politically complex era and help to assess Mrs. Brooke's ideological exploitation of romance. The necessarily dialectical stance of historians is instrumental to understanding the propaganda in *The History of Emily Montague*. For Kenneth McNaught, the Treaty of Paris was "an unqualified British victory" over French imperialism, but the Royal Proclamation effected the "most perilous conditions imaginable" for British control of North America by defining a "substantial minority nation" on the continent which exacerbated mercantile and military tensions in the empire.⁷ Although the Proclamation counted on an influx of colonial Protestants, the mere six hundred merchants who came to live among the sixty-five thousand Canadians served to strengthen rather than weaken the religious and cultural identity of the *habitants*. If the merchants wanted the Proclamation enacted through a legislative assembly, the establishment of English common law, and the exclusion of Catholics from public office, Quebec's demography meant that "assimilation was soon replaced by a quite exceptional toler-

ance” of the Canadians.⁸ Their compelling sense, moreover, that the Crown needed to find in Quebec a military resource against the turbulent New England colonies led governors Murray and Carleton to oppose both the merchants and the Proclamation by tolerating the seigneurial system and Catholic institutions. When the Quebec Act allowed the Canadian church to collect tithes, enabled Catholics to hold public office and endorsed French civil law, the assimilation promulgated by the Proclamation was officially suspended. However, as W. L. Morton says, the church’s power remained strong on account of the “sheer inapplicability, in reason and humanity” of the Proclamation to the “circumstances of Quebec.”⁹ Thus, shortly after 1763 Catholics served on juries and pleaded cases before the Court of Common Pleas. Five years, then, after the appearance of *The History of Emily Montague*, the British government decided Quebec’s future was to be more French than English, a reversal Mrs. Brooke might have foreseen as she composed her novel. Yet she discounted political trends in Quebec in ways that expose the flaws of British colonialism and undermine her narrative authority. While she and her husband sided with mercantile interests in support of the Proclamation, her book does not uphold these interests. Besides wanting Catholic institutions taken over by Anglicans and reserved for the seigneurs, she wishes her military, genteel class both to dismantle and appropriate the seigneurial system of landholding. While Morton argues that the displacement of the seigneurial class was the Proclamation’s most irreparable effect (154), Brooke holds that the French noblesse can be preserved and assimilated by a new aristocratic order modelled on the English hierarchical recognition of military and noble values (250).

DOUTBLESS, NATIONAL PREJUDICE dulled Mrs. Brooke’s contemporaries to the clash of political systems in the colony. But enthusiastic imperialism seems to have blinded her profoundly to this clash. Her contempt for the seigneurs (26) and for the French landholding system (140) together with her indulgent stance toward River’s political fantasies about purchasing a seignury show that the novel’s opposing wishes to demean and to appropriate French cultural forms prevent it from openly exploring the conflicts arising from the interaction of the European legal and political systems. Her hero’s dreams of being “lord of a principality” (3) and acting “*en prince*” (85) by way of building a “rustic palace” for Emily (154) so that he can regard themselves as “the first pair in paradise” and his spouse as “the mother of mankind” (260) agglomerate sexual, religious and royalist fantasies, thereby concealing his wish to treble the value of his land in a country which, without these fantasies, he feels to be a “place of exile.” Economic imperialism underlies Mrs. Brooke’s refusal to describe the *habitants’* well-known complaints about the crudity of the British legal system.¹⁰ Their sense of outrage at imprisonment for debt and for jail fees, their anger at

the expense and infrequency of court hearings, and their humiliation at trial-by-jury in the face of huge numbers of capital offences are neither presented nor allowed to generate implications. The discrepancy between constitutional theory and political fact, manifest by the abandonment of the Test Act in the selection of Catholics to jury service as soon as 1764, is also suppressed by Mrs. Brooke's imperial and colonial mentality. Unable to admit the implausibility of the 1763 Proclamation, she chose to ignore that Carleton "utilisa au maximum l'élasticité des textes officiels pour redéfinir la politique anglaise."¹¹

Mrs. Brooke's political views are yet more equivocal because her colonial and imperial ideas are interfused with notions of class and social hierarchy. Her evasion of the complex alliance between the governors and the *habitants* is inseparable from contradictory reactions to the long-time residents of Quebec and the newly arrived merchants. While her ambivalence toward the *habitants* and merchants promotes Augustan gentility, her novel contains a wider range of unacknowledged ideological conflicts which imply that her narrative heedlessly allows political, social, and cultural contradictions to coexist.

If Mrs. Brooke's commitment to the Royal Proclamation and the Conquest of Quebec appears to entail the degradation of French culture and appreciation of the merchant class, this is not the case simply. While she advanced the cause of Anglicanism in Quebec by siding with mercantile interests, her presentation of Sir George Clayton, the newly knighted baronet with close ties to the city, is negative. Moreover, although Fermor criticizes the economic and political restraints placed on the American colonies, his sense that they are "naturally inferior" (241) is one indication among many that Mrs. Brooke despised those who were supposed to swamp the *habitants* and embody the Proclamation. Since her stance toward the *habitants* is erratically authoritarian and sympathetic, it recoils on British policy as enshrined in the Proclamation. Thus, if Rivers mocks the noblesse's consciousness of rank (22) and laughs at the deference to titles in the French community (42), Fermor's propagandistic claim that the noblesse should be assimilated by a new system of titular honours binding this class to English military officers is not self-evident (250). Fermor's views of French culture often undermine British policy. If his claim that French officers have been assimilated by barbarous Indians stresses the hollowness of French culture (271) and defies its enlightenment (141), he weakens his claim by arguing that the convents in Quebec should be limited to children of the noblesse so as to preserve the old French hierarchy (274). His inconsistency is clear in light of the novel's repeated criticism of the convents as agents of celibacy and depopulation. His inconsistency is made more striking by his attacks on English economic and agricultural policies which, he fears, will so depopulate the countryside that it will become an "uncultivated desert" (221). His admiration of Rousseau and rejection of this philosopher's major idea of primitive virtue (271-72), shows that, while Fermor stresses English political

dullness, he holds that his nation's culture is more enlightened than that of France. But the novel's action unravels this pretension. Despite the running debate about the worth of French manners, the characters always proclaim their refinement in terms of French gallantry. Arabella may dramatize herself by rejecting French gallantry (49), but she employs the phrase "British belles" earnestly (147). An ultimate sign of the appropriation of French modes is the closing masquerade at which Emily appears as a "French *paisanne*" (377).

BEFORE ANALYZING MRS. BROOKE'S ambivalence towards the merchant class and mercantile wealth, we should recognize how she translates Augustan sensibility into a mode of enlightenment that appropriates and bests French culture. For Mrs. Brooke, classical allusion, Horatian ideas of retirement, and religious Latitudinarianism coalesce into a myth of Anglican gentility. Although her characters are displaced from England by economic and political change, their familiarity with Greek and Roman letters betokens true Englishness. Rivers' knowledge of Virgil's *Georgics* (24) and Sophocles (38) confirms his gentility, and, if Arabella claims that Canadian scenery renews her appreciation of Greek and Roman myths (30), her mythical references pretend to a sensibility which exquisitely invalidates ideologies other than her own. Thus, she cites Horace to establish an image of female grace applicable to the Church of England but not to Presbyterianism or Catholicism (80). Far from steadily implying that the Canadian setting upholds classical mythology, Mrs. Brooke shows that her characters transport mythology with them as an aesthetic system for disguising and validating their distinctly Augustan notion of patriotism: her strategic mythology helps to uncover the political ideology motivating her romance. If deities reside in Canada, they do so mainly because of Emily. In her presence Canada is the habitation of the Graces (139), for she is Venus who is always attended by the Graces (23): in England Rivers sees her as led by them (355). But this romantic hyperbole is not restricted to Canada or Emily; Temple in England pictures his wife Lucy as Venus attended by the Graces (373), and, since England is supposedly alone among nations in permitting marital choice to women, the country is personified as Venus tended by the Graces (56). So, if Arabella projects nereids (30), naiads (301) and other "tutelary deities" (303) onto the Canadian scene, her refined posture with mythic sense is based on a nexus of political, class, and patriotic codes. In expressing a desire to address a poem to his "household Gods" (379) and in esteeming his "native Dryads" more highly than an "imperial palace" (407), Rivers shows that this nexus of codes implicitly affects or lays claims to a universal enlightenment in the name of a beleaguered rural, Anglican gentry.

To the degree Mrs. Brooke's gentrified heroes and heroines both disparage and appropriate French culture, so they are ambivalent about merchants and mer-

cantile wealth. Vulnerability to inflation rates of twenty-five per cent in the 1760s partly explains their affected differentiation between the wealth of India and North America, between the wealth of imperial trade and colonial expansion. Although Canada holds out to Rivers and the others the prospect of new forms of landed wealth, the resolution of the plot depends far more on the riches of the Orient. Throughout, the characters contradict themselves about Indian wealth because they wish to associate it with city business interests. While Rivers spurns the wealth of nabobs (5), he wishes his sister to spend her portion of two thousand pounds on jewels when she marries Temple so that she will "be on a footing" with a "nabobess" (179). Despite the insistence that love and friendship are richer than an oriental monarch (330) and Lucy's claim that the return of Emily and Rivers from Canada is worth more than an argosy's treasure (311), Colonel Willmott, the patriarch who confirms Emily's marriage and endows her with his wealth, is a nabob (388). Although Rivers' house, Bellfield, is contrasted with an "imperial palace," Willmott's oriental wealth pays for the new wing and completes the original design (407). As final evidence of the questionable displacement of imperial wealth, consider Arabella's contention that "no nabobess" could be as happy as Emily and herself in marrying such poor men as Rivers and Fitzgerald (348): Arabella deliberately underrates their wealth which, if not ample enough for English peers, is far more considerable at the end than earlier in the novel.

Mrs. Brooke's ambivalence about mercantile wealth is clear in the way her characters belittle Clayton: they scorn him to uphold their social superiority but they are no less mercenary. Rivers looks down on Clayton as a "gentleman usher" whose unromantic sensibility fits him to marry a "rich, sober, sedate, presbyterian citizen's daughter" (51-52). Clayton's "splendid income" (74) leads Emily to reject his "parade of affluence" (58), "false glitter of life" (95) and "romantic parade of fidelity" (320). Arabella is completely dismissive about Clayton's prospect of marrying a rich citizen's daughter whose dowry is fifty thousand pounds and who brings with her the promise of an Irish peerage (121). Arabella's contempt arises from her avowed hatred of the "spirit of enterprise" that drives men to keep on acquiring money and land (347). But, if she derides the peerage by claiming that she would not give up the man she loves to the "first dutchess in Christendom" (124), her lover not only is the son of an Irish baronet but also has five hundred pounds a year plus a military salary (284-85), which he advances by exploiting the patronage system to become "*Monsieur le Majeur*" (404). The discrepancy between renunciation of wealth and mercenary calculation is sharper in Emily and Rivers since they articulate most forcefully the myth of rural independence. Emily has "the genuine spirit of an independent Englishwoman" since she resists patriarchal hierarchy (116), and Rivers believes that "we country gentlemen, whilst we have the spirit to keep ourselves independent, are the best citizens, as well as subjects, in the world" (342). The romance between Emily and

Rivers, far from simply a matter of companionate individualism, entails an ironically ideological debasement of mercantile and aristocratic interests, as can be shown by an analysis of the lovers' financial attitudes and circumstances.

Rivers declares that love is "more essential, more real" than riches (266) and, if he admits that a "narrow fortune" is inconvenient, he sees mutual love as a "treasure" cancelling fortune's power over Emily and himself (264). Yet, familiarity with the "finest company in England" always reminds him there is a gap between his "birth" and "fortune" (297). Far from endorsing the heroines' view that "our whole felicity depends on our choice in marriage" (381) and far from consistently treating money metaphorically, Rivers is very concerned with money and profit. His acquisitiveness seems to be based on his sister's trust that "the future will pay us for the past" (311). His desire for affluence is evident in his wish to treble the value of his lands in Quebec by clearing and settling them (154). His attitude to his English estate is no less mercenary, despite his claims to the contrary. His redefinition of country gentlemen as the "best citizens" stresses the reciprocity of private and national profit: when he counts on "raising oaks, which may hereafter bear the British thunder to distant lands" (342), he focusses on the systematic integration of personal and public gain that will stem from country gentlemen supplying the materials for imperial ventures. Rivers' profoundly conformist ties to the crown and the constitution are reflected by his constant references to his investment in the funds. While he pretends that he wants a larger income only to entertain friends and to be philanthropical (341), the masquerade's costly elaborateness indicates his unacknowledged wish to imitate London fashion and urban luxury. The underlying acquisitiveness of Mrs. Brooke's characters is elicited by the changing references to River's income and by Emily's dowry and other financial prospects. With his four thousand pounds in the funds, probably yielding five per cent (58), and his military half-pay, Rivers is said to have an income of four hundred pounds per annum at one time (301) and five hundred at another (312). The wish-fulfillment behind these erratic figures also motivates Mrs. Brooke's endowment of Emily with a settlement of twenty thousand pounds which, setting aside her prospects and Colonel Willmott's improvements to the estate, trebles Rivers' income (323). Doubtless, an income of fifteen hundred pounds per annum does not lift Rivers up to the "finest company in England," but it does move him from the merely land-based gentry to the class which gained from the financial revolution based on London capitalism. Certainly, his ultimate income depends far less on Canada than on imperial wealth from India.¹²

THE CONFLICTING RENUNCIATION of and dependence on monetary wealth confirms that Mrs. Brooke's characterization says less about Canada's immediate future than about the economic plight of Britain's gentry.

For the oblique reliance on finance and on mercenary calculation draws out the submerged themes of the middle-class's sense of displacement and its compensatory dreams of living in a more highly differentiated hierarchy responsive to its ideology of romance and sensibility. But, if cultural flexibility is an illusion that reveals her characters' loss of social and economic power, the same is true of their apparently progressive attitudes to gender, love, and marriage. As their myth of adaptation to Canada subsides, their fantasy of progressive romance merges into a social reaction that strengthens the forces they have been supposedly combatting throughout the novel. Their romantic strategies, far from being a compensation for relative poverty, in the end merely disguise their wealth and its imperial sources. The novel's closure so completely resolves the conflict between romance and money, individualism and patriarchy, that, in addition to undoing the motivation of the plot, it emphasizes that Canada in the 1760s was neither a fiscal nor a social haven for English gentry. Her merely formulaic reliance on parental and filial conflicts about love and marriage recoils then on Mrs. Brooke's concealment of the economic motives spurring herself and her characters to return from Quebec.

The commercial boom foretold by the Proclamation did not occur. Instead, a decade of recession followed, with many business failures and much fiscal muddle caused by the colony's three currencies.²³ Paper money was overvalued since coins were scarce, and the resulting speculation in French bills led the French émigrés to export huge sums of specie and the British traders to absorb such losses that the colony's capital growth was stunted. The Quebec economy did badly too because of falling agricultural prices as a result of overproduction and international barriers to foreign markets. While Mrs. Brooke links Quebec to other cultures and to the international scene, she prefers to see its place in the world through utopian or nationalistic eyes. The result is that Quebec's economic problems manifest themselves in transferred and covert ways: if her characters pretend that romance transcends economic power, their sexual and cultural codes prove otherwise. Their letters, far from conveying epistolary pluralism, are uniformly nationalistic and imperialistic. The illusion of plural viewpoints and of radical stances to gender mask economic and political values that are reactionary and unsympathetic to Quebec's colonial burdens.

The elements of economic and political reaction in Mrs. Brooke's concept of romantic sensibility clarify the way she uses cultural and sexual codes. Rivers perhaps best exemplifies the reactionary impulses of what could be seen as progressive and experimental attitudes. The "tender tear" he lets drop at Carisbrook Castle in memory of the "unfortunate Charles the First" (3) and his oblique lament for General Wolfe, for the "amiable hero" who "expir'd in the arms of victory" (5), show that Rivers joins Stuart nostalgia to the pathos of military heroism. His sensibility is self-dramatizing and backward-looking in a manner that renders his pretensions to gentility questionable. He wishes to be "lord of a principality" in

Canada to "put our large-acred men in England out of countenance" (3). His ambition to be the "best *gentleman* farmer in the province" (24) and his concern for "dominion" (26) indicate that his fantasies about property and power divide him from indigenous cultural codes. In fact he trusts quite blindly to the political hierarchy that guarantees his estate in England and his freedom to traverse Quebec with a *valet de chambre* to look for land to develop (71). The foreign cultures he encounters only confirm his nationalism and aggrandize his already superior sensibility. He praises the Indians' hardy lifestyle mostly to denigrate "effeminate Europeans" (111). He also celebrates the Huron's matriarchal government to attack Europe's denial to women of the rights of citizenship (34). If he says that women may disobey laws not made by them (35), his feminism is not radical. He wishes English women to have the franchise so that canvassing for a parliamentary seat will be more enjoyable for men like himself who believe that women's real power is sexual and who refuse to be a "rebel to their empire" (158). The limits of his radicalism are evident when he concludes that European women have just as much right as the American colonies to complain about political disadvantage: in the context of Mrs. Brooke's consistent refusal to appreciate the American colonies, Rivers' comparison is gratuitous. The partial, prejudiced aspects of Rivers' sensibility are highlighted by his claim that Indian women will be civilized only if they are feminized (119) and by his avowal, after decrying French manners, that Emily embodies the best cultural features of France and England (57). Like Arabella who sees the promenade at Quebec as a "little Mall" (49), he imposes English cultural signs on life in Canada confusedly. When he talks of driving out "*en caleche* to our Canadian Hyde Park" (13), his histrionic English sensibility relies on French technology and manners. As with Arabella, Rivers' cultural volatility testifies to a vital personality but it reveals, too, the contradictions arising from a shallow, unthinking complacency. His indifference to Canadian politics is, like Arabella's, a mask for political power. Despite decrying the English parliamentary system, he unhesitatingly exploits it when he asks friends at Westminster to secure Mme. Des Roches's agricultural settlement (90, 277). Rivers' sensibility is romantic only in a very qualified way. When he offers Emily his Acadians as her "new subjects," since he pictures her in Edenic terms as the "mother of mankind" (260), his patriarchalism, royalist absolutism, and pseudo-worship of Emily cumulatively suggest that his sensibility is whimsically regressive.

WILLIAM FERMOR, THE MOST explicit upholder of Mrs. Brooke's propagandistic interests, gives commentaries on Quebec marked by contradictions that testify, like Rivers', to erratic sensibility. If he tolerates Quebec's institutions, he also wants them redefined by the English constitution. Moreover, while he defends the Proclamation by insisting Anglican bishops must supervise

Catholic rites, he opposes it by spurning the assimilation of *habitants* by an influx of British subjects (220). Fear of depopulation at home weighs on him more than prescriptions for Quebec: preoccupied with the harmful effects of the Agrarian Revolution in England, he satirizes its alliance of economic and aristocratic power for displacing rural workers and shrinking the birth-rate. Despite this satire, despite his view of the superiority of the French agricultural system because of its intense use of labour (222), and despite his criticism of the British government's unjust taxation of the American colonies (242), he still idealizes church-state relations in England, asserting that God blesses its constitution before all others (233). The contradictions between his satire and his idealization of England, particularly the gap between his views that Quebec's population is a great asset to England and that it must be defined by English political values, show Fermor remote from the spirit of accommodation promoted by Murray and Carleton. Fermor's parting eulogy of Carleton's urbane character rather than of his political stance is unintentionally ironic since Fermor hardly appreciates the complex processes Carleton was ably managing: in his patriarchal condescension to Quebec, Fermor stresses the Conquest and the colony's need for British institutions with a dogmatism opposite to Carleton's flexibility. Fermor's conventional, if confused, application of gender terms to England manifests the easiness of his sensibility together with his actual political rigidity. His view of the "mother country" as the centre of trade and the colonists as bees that must return to enrich the "paternal hive" (241) vaguely conflates sexual images in the name of national sentiment. His claim that the French leaders of Quebec, by adopting a new order of English honours, would spur the *habitants* to commercial efforts for England's benefit reveals a similar sort of utopian vagueness. His view that the *habitants* will not gain from the "change of masters" (250) until reformed by Anglican priests and his rejection of Rousseau's primitivism show extreme rigidity. By claiming that the most virtuous Indians are the most civilized and that they demand English priests (285), Fermor, far from tolerating Carleton's political and cultural pluralism, equates civilization with England and its national church.

To a degree, however, Mrs. Brooke exposes the contradictory propaganda of patriarchy, in the process apparently giving critical force to the sensibility of women. She even has her heroes criticize themselves according to what they take to be feminist sensibility. Rivers, Fitzgerald, and Temple seem to begin to understand the social construction of gender, and as a result their sense of romance leads them to attempt to reform social and sexual convention. But, if Mrs. Brooke's use of romance appears to offer radical insights into society's constraints upon women, ultimately her novel reinforces what it criticizes.¹⁴

Emily cultivates a theory of emotional refinement which displaces courtly politics: for her, "tenderness" always outweighs being "empress of the world" (295). Likewise, Arabella scorns male acquisitiveness and naval imperialism: she

debases the "lord high admiral of the British fleet" (310). By claiming to accept the women's criticism of political and military aims, Mrs. Brooke's male characters, especially Rivers, imply that relations between women and men must change, as must the institutions governing their relations. Since he feels most at home in a "feminized little circle" (326), Rivers pretends to a womanly sensibility and affects radical change. Although seeing himself as a rural gentleman, and therefore as a true citizen and loyal defender of church and state (343), he urges that the Anglican liturgy be revised by the removal of the word 'obey' from the wife's response in the marriage service (205) and he accuses the government of establishing "domestic tyranny" with its marriage law (371). He speaks on behalf of women because he is, he claims, one of the "few of [his] sex" to possess the "lively sensibility" of a woman (42). This androgyny is confirmed by Lucy and Arabella who see in him "an almost feminine sensibility" balancing his masculine "firmness of mind and spirit" (133, 198, 277). If, however, Rivers and his friends have the capacity to be "melted" to "the softness of a woman" by mothers, sisters, and wives (400), their feminism is condescending. Far from endorsing a distinctive female political outlook, it heightens sexual differences. Rivers' view that "Indian ladies . . . do not excel in female softness" (13) matches his instruction to his sister that she cultivate "feminine softness and delicate sensibility" (93). If he allows "a little pride in love" to women while holding that the man's role is "to submit on these occasions" (187), he also differentiates between the sexes by telling Lucy that "your sex" is to "avoid all affectation of knowledge" (206). His linking of companionate marriage with civic obedience shows that Mrs. Brooke's males do not take women's concerns as seriously as they claim. Despite their feminist pretensions, her heroes are no more averse than society in general to imposing constrictive roles upon women.

Mrs. Brooke's unsteady feminism is manifest in the way her women themselves differentiate between the sexes, allow matriarchal concepts to give way before conventional ideas of rank and nationalism, and promote romantic dependence on men. While calling Lucy "an exquisite politician" for keeping Temple at home by working hard to renew his domestic pleasures, Arabella insists that a woman always finds male more pleasing than female friends (378). When Emily affirms that she has acquired a "new existence" from Rivers' "tenderness" (340) she subsumes female claims of romantic transcendence to social and psychological truisms about sexual difference and marital roles. Mrs. Brooke's women embody an ideology that makes them secondary to men. If she associates England with Rivers' mother when insisting that he return to the world for which he was formed, Emily hails England as the "dear land of arts and arms" (212), thereby defending nationalistic and imperialistic values. Her social solidarity with Rivers is tacitly revealed by her sharing his judgment of Sir George Clayton.

THE POLITICAL LIMITS OF Mrs. Brooke's feminism are exposed by her dubious association of England with women's supposed free choice of marriage partners. Arabella's observation of foreign marital modes is superficial: having praised aboriginal matriarchy, she spurns it on learning that Indian mothers arrange their daughters' marriages (56). Emily and Arabella defend their native right to free choice in marriage by adopting romantic slogans. But they do not so much invent definitions of transcendent love as adopt the rules of love made up by Rivers. If the women feminize married love by pretending that it transcends money and social circumstance, he introduces slogans such as "souls in unison," "harmony of mind," and "delirium of the soul" (59). He promotes the transcendent concepts that Emily and he "were formed for each other" (185) and that they were friends in "some pre-existent state" (138). Having induced the "spirit of romance" in Emily (324), Rivers has strategically to offset the way it makes her unpredictable. The interpolated story that depicts Sophia as "romantic to excess" (360) confirms that Mrs. Brooke believes that women are made vulnerable by their "romantic generosity" (358). The political illusions arising from romance diminish women's intelligence. In likening the Church of England to "an elegant well-dressed woman of quality" (80) and claiming that women, unlike men, cannot be infidels because of their natural softness (107), Arabella unthinkingly links feminist romance to an institution whose theology opposes her feminism. Her application of "petticoat politics" to the creation of a "code of laws for the government of husbands" in the context of her tenet that England alone is enlightened about marriage manifests an inconsistency which reveals that Mrs. Brooke's feminist stance is not radically critical but complacently nationalistic (230-31).

While it may seem that the author uses the language of romance to denote the transcendent feelings shared by ideal couples and to validate the male's subordination to the female systematically, such is not the case. For Mrs. Brooke, romantic vocabulary does not apply exclusively to companionate marriage: it also elevates the male over the female as well as honouring the extended family and the gentry as a class. That is to say, the androgyny attributed to Rivers, seemingly on behalf of radical sexual experimentation, ultimately shows such experimentation to be redundant. While Rivers dismisses the liturgical vow of female obedience, making equality the basis of marriage (205), Emily from the first gives over her "whole soul" to him (189). To her, Rivers is "a god" (190) and the "most angelic of mankind" (192). His tender image excludes all other ideas from her soul (226). Not only does she find his "mental beauty . . . the express image of the Deity" (247) but also she effaces herself before him, letting her every emotion be ruled by him (249). If she transforms his benevolence by the romantic claim that their souls conform, her romantic self-assertion does not displace theological ideas of self-effacement. Further, Emily's idolization of Rivers is not unique: his mother

loves Rivers "to idolatry" too (254), proving that the words of romance are not systematic in companionate terms, a point accented by Emily's wish to secure the permission of Mrs. Rivers and of her father before she marries.

Far from constituting a private, intimate code between the heroine and the hero, the language of romance tightens society's patriarchal bonds. If Rivers idolizes his sister as well as Emily (177), Emily idolizes Mme. Des Roches as well as Rivers (219). If Rivers' eyes see no one lovely but Emily (165), she being the only object in his universe (224), so the whole creation contains no other woman for Temple than Lucy (226). Perhaps the strongest illustration of the conservative function of romantic codes is Arabella's pride in rebelling against patriarchal authority even as her father, unknown to her, controls her marital choice. The insubstantiality of radical, romantic action in the novel is evident from the predictable ways in which Mrs. Brooke solves the conflicts by contingency. Conflicts such as Emily's jealousy of Mme. Des Roches and her dispute with Rivers about delaying their wedding seem generated only to train the characters to offset languid marital moments by posturing with romance as distinct from developing radical visions through its means. If Arabella, on leaving Canada, mocks this "terrestrial paradise" and "divine country" (287), debasing thereby the terms of romantic idealization, her deliberate irony is indistinguishable in effect from accidental ironies. When Emily recalls her unwillingness to parade a romantic fidelity to Sir George (74, 320), it is impossible not to see that she so parades for Rivers. The masquerade closing the novel shows that the self-objectification by which Emily mediates honour to Rivers relies far more on social convention than on romantic transcendence.

THE ILLUSION OF FREE romantic plays always reinforces patriarchal structure in *The History of Emily Montague*. If Rivers creates private domestic spaces for Emily, he is bent on engrossing and absorbing "every faculty" of her mind (331). He succeeds because she agrees to have "no will" but his, submitting to him as "arbiter" of her fate (332). The lovers' romantic gestures do not reduce their desire to be recognized by their class. Their pleasure in the "little circle" and "little empire" of rural retreat is ironic: their boasted indifference to the "parade of life" (341) heightens their wish to make their estate a social and political centre. The interpolated story of Miss Williams and the orphan allows the lovers to parade their benevolence, their contempt for aristocrats, and their influence in the "great world" (336). The tensions between their romantic self-containment and political program for marriage are never sustained by narrative dialectic however, as attested by the arbitrarily complete closure. When

Emily wins her father's permission to wed Rivers, the threat of forced marriage dissolves, as in Arabella's case. It is not enough for Mrs. Brooke to reveal Colonel Willmott to be Emily's long-lost father; she must arrange that the patriarch chooses the same husband for his daughter as she chooses for herself. The closure's reliance on coincidences that displace plot-conflicts wholly, demonstrates that romantic resistance to patriarchy is a charade. By also having the lovers blessed providentially with wealth, Mrs. Brooke heightens her dependence on the sentimental dramatic formulae of plays such as Steele's *The Conscious Lovers*. In addition to remotivating money in a way the narrative resists, the closure elides married love, imperial wealth and patriarchal authority. That the ending rewards the rural gentry with financial wealth and social prestige is the ultimate devaluation of romance.

The closure, in epitomizing Mrs. Brooke's use of romance to champion the rural gentry and Anglicanism, debases narrative and political process. In its excessive symmetry, the closure does not present the author's discontent with politics in Quebec and England. The reduction of merchants and aristocrats to marital villains and the idealization of gentry as true citizens avoid rather than address political reality. The ending confirms the gentry's francophobia and Augustan nostalgia: they are patriots with an exaggerated sense of social exclusivity and their style of romance cultivates a likemindedness dismissive of cultural diversity. In seeming to reconcile ideological conflicts, the closure aggravates them: if matriarchy is admired, patriarchy is reinforced; if the liturgy is attacked, the Church is defended; if marriage is an agent of reform, it signals exclusive social contentment. No doubt, Mrs. Brooke shapes political facts with romance, and her novel does contain progressive ideas, as in the case of the motif of androgyny. But conformity seizes her innovations: old political ideas govern the new. Romance is static, not dialectical; the psychological thrills by which it offsets marriage's languid moments give way to a complacency aptly summed up by Rivers' phrases "peaceable possession" and "voluptuous tranquillity" (314). Far from allaying ideological conflict, the closure provokes unresolvable questions. If wealth and power are decried throughout the novel but appropriated to the ending and if prudence, maligned in the duration, finally outweighs transcendence, the final universalizing of themes debases their mediation.

This being so, the novel predicts little positive about Canada's colonial future. Its characters, far from considering the gap between political theory and fact, merely widen that gap; adamant about the Conquest, they think to confirm France's defeat through their cultivation of French sensibility. But, by insisting that French romantic sensibility is best realized by refined English people, they define patriotism in French terms. Their assumption that England can and must assimilate Quebec not only fails to foresee the day when French will replace English law but also blinds them to the political action implied by their romantic illusions.

The History of Emily Montague is less about Canada than about an overextended colonial empire and the strains of a mother country which supposedly most afflict the lesser, Anglican rural gentry whose refinement of English social hierarchy through romantic propaganda is their sole means of healing their own political displacement.

NOTES

- ¹ Frances Brooke, *The History of Emily Montague*, ed. Mary Jane Edwards (Ottawa: Carleton Univ. Press, 1985): xliii. All references are to this edition.
- ² Despite Mr. Brooke's fruitless association with merchants in Quebec, he was paid as its chaplain until his death. See Lorraine McMullen, *An Odd Attempt in a Woman: The Literary Life of Frances Brooke* (Vancouver: Univ. of British Columbia Press, 1983): 79-83.
- ³ On the Brookes' Anglicanism and "genteel poverty," see Mary Jane Edwards, "Frances Brooke's *The History of Emily Montague*: A Biographical Context," *English Studies in Canada*, 7:2 (Summer 1981): 171-82.
- ⁴ While the novel tries to "deal honestly" with the "Canadian scene," it is "dominated by a bourgeois moral system" that values "prudence, caution, and respectability" highly: Desmond Pacey, "The First Canadian Novel," *Dalhousie Review*, 26 (1946-47): 147-50. The present essay develops William H. New's claim that Mrs. Brooke's novel is "indicative of the tension of the times": "Frances Brooke's Chequered Gardens," *Canadian Literature* 52 (Spring 1972): 37. Mrs. Brooke's hostility to aristocrats is best seen through the eyes of such historians as Derek Jarrett, *The Begetters of Revolution: England's Involvement with France, 1759-1789* (London: Longman, 1973), and John Cannon, *Aristocratic Century: The peerage of eighteenth-century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984), who emphasize the increasing economic and political power wielded by the aristocracy.
- ⁵ On the Marriage Act, see Dorothy Marshall, *Eighteenth Century England* (London: Longmans, 1962): 225-27. Cannon, *Aristocratic Century*, describes the growing intermarriage among aristocrats and the relative immobility of the middle class in marriage (74-92). McMullen, *An Odd Attempt in a Woman*, gives biographical reasons why the Brookes objected to the Marriage Act (9). Rivers definitely connects the Marriage Bill to the constitution (371).
- ⁶ Ann Messenger, *His and Hers: Essays in Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Literature* (Lexington; Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1986), upholds Arabella's "complexity of self-awareness" (162) against Pope's diminution of the central character of *The Rape of the Lock*. Messenger assigns an "all-pervasive" irony to Arabella and an acute awareness of "irreconcilable contradictions" (164): Arabella is a self-conscious, not frivolous, coquette (165, 170). The present essay argues that Mrs. Brooke was fully in command neither of her epistolary medium nor of the strategic requirements of narrative dialectic.
- ⁷ Kenneth McNaught, *The Pelican History of Canada* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969): 45.
- ⁸ *The Pelican History of Canada*, 47-48.
- ⁹ W. L. Morton, *The Kingdom of Canada: A General History from Earliest Times* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1963): 153.
- ¹⁰ W. J. Eccles, *France in America* (Vancouver: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1972): 223-24.

- ¹¹ André Garon, "La Britannisation" in *Histoire du Québec*, ed. Jean Hamelin (Mont-réal: France-Amérique, 1976): 260.
- ¹² Samuel L. Macey, *Money and the Novel: Mercenary Motivation in Defoe and His Immediate Successors* (Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1983): 89-93, provides an interesting account of the growth of dowries and the relation of this growth to the 'financial revolution' and to the development of the national debt in the eighteenth century. Cannon, *Aristocratic Century*, "Marriage," 71-92, gives statistics about the tightening bonds between class, wealth and marriage in the period. He shows that, despite talk about companionate love, arranged marriages increased in number and increasingly fortified social hierarchy.
- ¹³ Fernand Ouellet, *Economic and Social History of Quebec, 1760-1850* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1980): 53-102, explains how economic rivalry between aristocratic and bourgeois values eroded nationalistic concepts. He discusses also the growing power of aristocrats in government. His account clarifies why Mrs. Brooke both admires the governors' gentility and rejects their aristocratic sympathy for the displaced seigneurs and noblesse.
- ¹⁴ Readers wishing to explore the issues raised by the present article are advised to consult Joseph Allen Boone, *Tradition Counter Tradition: Love and the Form of Fiction* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1987) and Leslie W. Rabine, *Reading the Romantic Heroine: Text, History, Ideology* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1985). Boone compellingly describes the ways in which conceptions of marriage and narrative techniques, whether traditional or progressive, are corollaries of one another while Rabine, through an analysis of the recoil of radical ideology upon itself in a series of romances, elaborates convincingly why progressive concepts in romance tend to be self-defeating.

PARTITA

Robyn Sarah

Springs in your knees, ball-
bearings in your ankles, always
on the edge of dancing — you —

your goat-dance down the sides of hills,
skywalks on scaffolds, your
shimmy-on-the-spot in bank queues

Even a dance
under your eyelids
when you close them

against the sun,
or the sharp colours
of remembering

what you liked, and
the private dance
of liking it.