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Gender-Bending Heroism in Sarah Harriet Burney's *Tales of Fancy*

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Abstract: This article offers a new reading of Sarah Harriet Burney's *Tales of Fancy*, a paired collection comprising *The Shipwreck* (1816) and *Country Neighbours* (1820), arguing that Burney reimagines heroism as fluid and educable rather than fixed in relation to sex. Building on recent scholarship that has identified the proto-feminist dimensions of Burney's fiction, it focuses on moments of physical exertion, particularly acts of rescue, in which her heroines assume roles conventionally coded as masculine. *The Shipwreck* is read as an experimental space in which displacement and cross-dressing allow Viola to suspend normative gender expectations and enact a form of female heroism grounded in action. *Country Neighbours* relocates these questions to domestic English society, where Blanch's physical courage tests the viability of such heroism within more restrictive social structures. Although both narratives ultimately reassert conventional gender roles, these moments of crisis open a space in which heroism is detached from masculine exclusivity. In doing so, Burney's fiction helps to articulate a model of gender as mutable and performative, positioning her as a significant and innovative voice in debates about gender and female agency.

During the lifetime of Sarah Harriet Burney (1772-1844), the reception of her fiction was largely shaped by the success of her half-sister Frances (1752-1840), whose more famous novels helped to define the late eighteenth-century sentimental tradition. Early reviewers detected a "family

likeness” in their heroines: silent, sensitive young women negotiating entrance into the world through trials, isolation, moral testing, and reconciliation (*Monthly Review* 452-56). Yet, as scholars led by Lorna Clark and Carmen Fernández Rodríguez have recognized in recent years, Sarah Harriet Burney had a unique, innovative, and experimental style in her own right. Building on such scholarship, especially where it addresses “explicit proto-feminist statement[s] in Burney’s work” (Clark, “Literary Legacy” 124), this article provides a new reading of *The Shipwreck* (1816) and *Country Neighbours* (1820), Burney’s two paired fictions that together make up her *Tales of Fancy*. It argues that, in her depictions of the characters Viola and Blanch, Burney offers the reader depictions of female heroism which challenge societal expectations around gendered virtues. I am particularly interested in moments at which Burney’s female characters undertake forms of physical exertion—especially acts of rescue in moments of crisis—which, at the time, were almost exclusively coded as male. I argue that, through these moments, Burney begins to imagine heroism as fluid, constructed, experimental, and educable, rather than fixed in relation to one’s sex. Such a stance anticipates late twentieth-century theories of gender as performative, exemplified in the critical theory of Judith Butler. My reading therefore develops and moves to new territory Clark’s discussion of Burney’s nascent “proto-feminist” vision, positioning heroism as a terrain on which gender boundaries can be productively unsettled.

Tales of Fancy stages this redefinition of heroism across two contrasting yet complementary narratives which, while deploying very different landscapes, both raise the prospect of “the primacy of the female domain” (Clark, “Literary Legacy” 124). *The Shipwreck* is set on a previously uninhabited island

in the Indian Ocean following a storm and the wreckage of an English ship; the main drama plays out between the survivors Lady Earlingford, her daughter Viola, and the gentleman Fitz Aymer, to whom Viola disguises herself as a young man. Rebecca Weaver-Hightower has commented that, in castaway fiction, the island often functions as a site where identities are “simultaneously threatened and remade” (4), and in this context, as Fernández Rodríguez notes, Burney “romanticises the Robinsonade to question conventional femininity” (“Robinsonade” 23). *Country Neighbours*, by contrast, relocates questions about power and gender to genteel, domestic English society. The heroine Blanch’s arrival in a village society dominated by the neighbouring Touberville and Stavordale families proves the catalyst for a realignment of relations between the families in which women prove ultimately dominant. It depicts, in Clark’s words, the “feminiz[ation of the] paternal sphere” and the “absor[ption]” of the patriarch into the female domain” (“Literary Legacy” 126).

Much work, then, has already been done on the proto-feminist implications of these two *Tales*, with Clark going so far as to suggest that *The Shipwreck* “should be mentioned in the same breath as” Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (“Literary Legacy” 124). Building on these foundations, I interrogate moments of physical exertion, especially rescue, by Viola and Blanch within these texts, using them to think about how such moments enable Burney to imagine the virtue of heroism as fluid, constructed, experimental, and educable. Such a topic, especially when prompted by the act of cross-dressing in *The Shipwreck*, invites comparisons to twentieth-century critical theory styling gender itself as performance. While acknowledging that Burney wrote within a specific historical

moment that had no conception of such theory or terminology, in my conclusion I nonetheless draw lightly on later concepts of performativity and gender fluidity as heuristic tools that can help us to understand Sarah Harriet Burney's contributions—as we have long understood Wollstonecraft's—to evolving modes of thought about gender and performance as well as feminism.

The argument unfolds in three parts. Section I outlines eighteenth-century lexicographical and literary understandings of both heroism and heroinism, locating Burney's experiment within its contemporary late-eighteenth-century contexts. Section II reads *The Shipwreck* as an island laboratory for gender-bending heroism, where displacement and disguise allow Burney to suspend conventional gendered ideals of virtue and have her heroine rescue the hero from a violent attack by French pirates. Section III investigates *Country Neighbours* as a domestic counterpoint to *The Shipwreck* that revisits similar themes by planting within genteel, rural English society a resourceful and physically active heroine, who saves the male hero from drowning. I conclude by suggesting that Burney's literary experimentation participates in a long literary negotiation of gender fluidity: further evidence, if it is needed, of her fiction's cultural and political vitality.

I: Defining Heroism

In the 1773 edition of his *Dictionary*, Samuel Johnson defines heroism as “the qualities and character of a hero,” which is in turn defined as “a man eminent for bravery” or “a man of the highest class in any respect: as, a hero in learning” (“Hero, n.s.”).

Despite the fact that the cognate noun “heroine” had been in use for almost two centuries (“Heroine, N.”), and

also appeared in his Dictionary as “a female hero” (“Heroine, n.s.”), Johnson here aligns heroism exclusively with masculinity. Perhaps surprisingly, Mary Wollstonecraft replicates this alignment when she issues her call for women to “every day grow more and more masculine” in her 1792 *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (75). As Janet Todd notes, such a gendered division also manifested in much eighteenth-century sentimental fiction, which permits male characters to undertake physical action, rescue and combat – all evidence of Johnson’s “eminent... bravery” - within the public sphere, while defining the key virtues of women as moral composure and patient endurance (81). At its extremity such a dichotomy can result, in Julia Epstein’s words when considering Frances Burney’s fiction, in heroines who “prefer to remain silent” and who even find themselves physically “paralyzed” (123-24). As Sophie Cassagnes-Brouquet and Mathilde Dubesset observe, masculine heroism is externalized in deed, while its feminine counterpart is internalized in restraint (10-11).

However, the turn of the nineteenth century seems to be a moment when the gendered basis of heroism comes under scrutiny. *The Oxford English Dictionary*’s first documented usage of the word “heroism,” applied to a female referent unironically and without any hint of anachronism, dates to 1799, in Charles Brockden Brown’s *Ormond, or the Secret Witness* (“Heroism, n.”)¹ Meanwhile, in the literary realm, Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* (published in 1817, but written during the 1790s), also satirizes the binary model: Catherine Morland’s “training for a heroine” (13) exposes the potential absurdities and risks of female passivity and deference to gendered authority (as exemplified in the comic-disastrous consequences of Catherine’s deferral to John Thorpe and abduction in the carriage, incurring

the displeasure of the Tilneys) as well as those of quixotism and an overactive imagination.

Burney, who greatly admired Austen's fiction (Clark, "Austen and Burney" 22), further complicates this binary paradigm within her *Tales*. However, her methods differ from Austen's. She uses moments of temporary crisis, often occasioned by natural phenomena (a shipwreck at sea, a fast-moving current of water) to justify transgressions of gender norms (especially within acts of rescue) and show female characters to be just as capable of Johnson's "eminent bravery" as male ones.

II: The Shipwreck

To appreciate the novelty of the female heroism depicted in *The Shipwreck*, we must briefly establish the circumstances under which it takes place. Significantly, Burney labels the work not a novel but a "tale of fancy," a generic distinction that quietly signals a looser relation to strict verisimilitude and permits a more speculative mode than her earlier fiction. This latitude is immediately apparent in the tale's improbable premise. Lady Earlingford and her daughter Viola are *en route* to India to join Viola's father when a storm wrecks their ship, killing most of the passengers. Miraculously, the women are stranded on a deserted island. Supported by the island's food resources, a discovered cave, and, conveniently, a trunk of clothing and books belonging to Viola's cousin Edmund, Lady Earlingford skillfully makes life bearable for her disheartened daughter. Eventually, they encounter two other survivors, both Europeans: a noble young man, Fitz Aymer, and a little boy, Felix. Incredibly, Lady Earlingford and Fitz Aymer are already acquainted: she has heard shocking tales of his "dissipated

habits, and thoroughly relaxed opinions” (*Shipwreck* 104), and tells Viola he is “the man least fitted to become the friend and protector of a young woman in your position” (84). In an ambivalent “experiment” (78) designed to protect Viola’s virtue, Lady Earlingford instructs her to assume Edmund’s male identity by dressing in his clothes.

At the tale’s onset, Lady Earlingford appears to be the protagonist. “[A] woman of incomparable fortitude, and very rare mental endowments,” she orchestrates (with quite a bit of help from servants) the escape of herself and her “almost senseless daughter” (4) from the shipwreck. Viola, conversely, is rather a dead weight during this crisis; and once the two women are safely washed up on the island is introduced with language entirely conventional for a passive sentimental heroine—“drooping,” “exhausted,” “inanimate,” “pale,” “melancholy”—but “young,” “innocent,” and, of course, “beautiful” (8). In an early dialogue with her mother about the “terror” she feels at their stranded situation, she shows that she has absorbed the dichotomized gender norms outlined in section I, equating fearlessness and authority with masculinity while viewing fortitude and endurance as feminine virtues: “Had I been a man, dear mother, my firmer nerves would have enabled me to bear it better. The higher degree of energy and fortitude attached to the male character would surely have divested this wilderness of much of its dread solemnity” (38).

A pivotal moment occurs when Viola’s mother cuts off her daughter’s “luxuriant tresses” to complete her transformation into Edmund, robbing her of what confidence she has in “converting a graceful, soft, and interesting female, into a shy, down-cast, awkward looking boy” (88-89). Burney’s use of the phrase “luxuriant tresses” may allude to the biblical

description of Samson's hair, where it is noted that "Delilah saw that he had now told her the truth, and, while yet he was asleep on her knees, a man whom she had sent for shaved off the luxuriant tresses of his hair, and his strength departed from him" (*King James Version*, Judg. 16.19). Consonant with the thrust of such a metaphor, Viola finds herself divested of her power to please since she initially makes only an uncertain and unimpressive boy; her own mother describes her "look of sheepish inquietude" as "the most ridiculous I ever witnessed" (89), and when Fitz Aymer first lays eyes upon her he "glanced his eye slightly over her" before showing "acute disappointment" at the absence of any more interesting companion (91). Viola, who largely stays silent in Fitz Aymer's presence, experiences inner turmoil as she compares herself to him: "She compared her own borrowed and insignificant semblance with the natural loftiness of his, and shrunk into nothing at the contrast" (92). In this moment, the cutting of Viola's hair becomes a symbolic transformation that strips her of the signs by which she had previously been recognized and valued and precipitates a crisis of identity, in which she appears to internalize her own diminishment.

However, the situational crisis in which she finds herself, and budding admiration of Fitz Aymer, eventually helps Viola to grow into her role. Perceiving "Edmund" as somewhat inept for his age, Fitz Aymer attempts to take "him" under his wing and frequently appeals to the disguised Viola to join him in hunting and fishing expeditions, "with the hope of stimulating her to participate in his own love of action" (125). While he does not initially succeed, Viola is goaded into her first form of useful and effective action by Fitz Aymer's sustaining an injury; she helps her mother nurse him back to health and takes care

of the motherless Felix overnight. Following this, she begins to accompany Fitz Aymer on his “rambles” (164), hardening up so rapidly that it is not long before she declares: “I can climb, now, nearly as actively as yourself” (167).

The island idyll is interrupted when two menacing French pirates land on the island and, simultaneously, Lady Earlingford contracts a tropical fever. On her deathbed, she renounces her prejudices against Fitz Aymer and commits Viola—whom she finally admits is her daughter, not her nephew—to his care. Shortly afterwards, the Frenchmen attack Fitz Aymer, and Viola undergoes an extraordinary transformation:

A scene fraught with such imminent peril to her only friend, produced upon Viola an effect almost supernatural. In a moment it braced her nerves, dispelled all personal timidity, and endowed her with the energy of desperation. Quick as thought, she darted back into the cave, – seized one of the pistols which had been found in the chest... – flew, swifter than lightning, down the steep rock, and just as the old man had drawn near enough to strike his mediated victim – just as Fitz Aymer, panting, and nearly exhausted, seemed sinking under the efforts of his Herculean adversary, – stood, like a guardian angel, at his side; and, placing the pistol within his grasp, dauntlessly cried: “Defend your life, Fitz Aymer! – A fiend lurks behind you! – Save – defend your life!” (216)

The “brac[ing]” of Viola’s “nerves” in this moment of crisis recalls, and gives the lie to, her earlier disparagement of her sex: “Had I been a man, dear mother, my firmer nerves would have enabled me to bear it better” (38). Still dressed as Edmund, but now exposed as Viola, she is not prevented by

any inherent weakness of her sex from performing heroism in a moment where Fitz Aymer is the one “panting” and “sinking.” All his tuition in masculine physical sports has paid off, to produce a heroine who can “dart,” “seize,” and “fl[y] down the steep rock,” quick as “thought” and “lightning.” The pointed imagery of Viola as guardian angel seems to draw attention to this transformation, since from a theological point of view angels are generally understood to be androgynous—as Milton writes in *Paradise Lost*, angels “when they please/ Can either Sex assume, or both” (1. 422–24).

Following his rescue, Fitz Aymer praises Viola’s ability to “surmount” her “terror” and “timidity” (217). The reader finds further evidence of her newfound abilities in the tale’s climactic scene, in which, in the midst of an enormous storm, Viola roams the island in search of Fitz Aymer, to alert him to the arrival of a European vessel that might rescue them: “She sprung over chasms... braved the danger of the lightning, and the impetuosity of the blast, with an intrepidity that almost amounted to unconsciousness that they had not yet subsided” (241). It is only coming face to face with her mother’s rapidly decaying corpse, and facing the prospect of having to bury it, that finally causes her to faint away – after which, in his turn, Fitz Aymer rescues her (249).

Just before they leave the island on a small homemade boat (swiftly to be picked up by an English ship happily containing Felix’s father and other important characters), Viola resumes her female attire to pray at her mother’s grave, prompting Fitz Aymer’s rapture at her “metamorphosis” (313). He now berates “the hateful disguise which has deformed [her, and] robbed [him] of the delight of adoring in [her], an angel in person as well as mind” (314). Such a response restores Viola

to conventional femininity and reprises the angelic metaphor (though such an appellation now feels like the courtly cant of a Sir Clement). Viola's disguise has operated as a chrysalis of sorts, enabling transformation, yet it seems that the return from island to homeland reinstates the hierarchies that isolation has suspended.

Having performed masculinity to heroic effect, Viola graduates to a role—wifhood—that secures social acceptance but curtails freedom. Her deferential words, “before I knew you, Fitz Aymer, I felt some gratification in occasionally indulging a will of my own: my highest gratification, now, is to comply with yours,” complete this retreat into the submission expected of an ideal wife (346). Following this, Viola's voice is barely heard in the final sections of the narrative, minus a little blushing and apologizing (335-56), though there is plenty of triumphal celebration and exposition among the male characters. As Catherine Craft-Fairchild observes, eighteenth-century cross-dressing in the masquerade performs a similar double gesture: it often destabilizes gender only to reassert it, mirroring Burney's uneasy resolution (43-45).

Critical views diverge on the meaning of *The Shipwreck's* conclusion: Lorna Clark reads the seeking out of his lost daughter by the penitent Sir Willliam as a reversal of patriarchy, in which, as on the island, women “command the male sphere” (“Literary Legacy” 124). While such a reading compellingly centers Burney's progressivism, I read the *Tale's* closure as more uncertain and ambivalent. The hardy mountaineer whom we previously saw leaping over chasms and brandishing pistols finishes the novel as “the fair Viola” who is to be “secure[ly]...install[ed]” in “the residence of [Fitz Aymer's] forefathers” as if she were a piece of art (389). It seems that

Viola's metamorphosis cannot withstand reabsorption into polite English society; the experimental heroism nurtured in the island's fanciful space is suppressed and domesticated on return. Burney's fiction, though daring, remains bounded by its historical moment. *The Shipwreck* thus comes full circle—from voyage outward to return—with a heroine whose unfurled potential strains against the limits of her age.

III: *Country Neighbours*

Country Neighbours: or, The Secret (1820), the second volume of *Tales of Fancy*, was published four years after *The Shipwreck*. In this *Tale*, although the world in which the fiction unfolds is far more typical of the late novel of manners, Burney presents an equally nuanced portrayal of female heroism. Indeed, during the first section of the narrative it is not entirely clear who the heroine is; the tale is narrated by Anne Stavordale, a forty-year-old spinster, but the narrative is stimulated by the arrival in Hazleford of her sixteen-year-old niece, Blanch. Anne is resuming the diary she began at sixteen years old herself, when she expected to become the sole heroine of her own absorbing adventures. However, as years passed without sufficiently romantic experiences, she abandoned her writing until Blanch's arrival reignites her narrative ambitions. Clark reads *Country Neighbours* as a satire structured around matriarchal rivalry, highlighting Anne's ironic duality as participant and observer in a female-dominated world the civility of which conceals aggression and frustration (Clark, "From the Margins" 45-47). Fernández Rodríguez instead links its spinster narrator to Anne Elliot in Austen's *Persuasion* (1817) and to Burney's concern with female marginality ("Afterlife" 260-71). I treat the story as experiment: Burney

tests whether the fluid female fortitude first imagined in exotic exile can endure within rural civilization. I show that it achieves a temporary flourishing in Burney's depictions of Blanch's unusual tomboyishness and physical strength, especially the act of rescuing Horace Trenmayne. Ultimately, however, Blanch is contained and domesticized in much the same manner as Viola: by a proposal of marriage, a bashful acceptance, and a return to conventionally feminine blushes and silence.

Upon first meeting her, Anne notes the conventional feminine characteristics of "exquisite" beauty and a "graceful" form, likening Blanch to that emblem of passivity, "an antique bust" (21; vol. 1). Yet Blanch turns out to show surprising resilience in the face of a violent thunderstorm which traps the Stavordale family inside a church, eagerly volunteering to run through the rain to commission a carriage to pick up her relatives: "She was quite sure the rain would not hurt her; – she had been wet a hundred times, and had never suffered by it" (106; vol. 1). Blanch shows similar disregard for feminine refinement in her passion for gardening, appearing before guests with "clothes stained by the dripping of the watering pot, shoes soiled by the mould, and hair escaping, in every direction, from the comb intended to confine it!" (119; vol. 1). Anne oscillates between amused observer and anxious protector, proud of Blanch's independence yet wary of the boldness that so often places her in situations requiring unusual nerve.

These early signs of physical fortitude culminate in Blanch's most important moment of heroism, when, sitting sketching by the banks of a "capricious" stream (177; vol. 1), she sees Horace Tremayne crossing a "decayed" (181; vol. 1) wooden bridge with his horse:

[S]he sprang like lightning from her seat; flew to the rope

(for we were now on land) by which the boat was secured; applied to it the knife with which she had been cutting her drawing-chalk, and divided it in less time than I can take in relating the action. This done, she with equal celerity leaped into the loosened bark; and, with a strength which perhaps at no other time she could have commanded, pushed it from the shore, and rowed (an art which my father has taught her) precipitately towards the bridge.” (180-81; vol. 1)

Predictably, Tremayne and his horse fall into the water, at which “Blanch – the heroic Blanch – (prepared for what would happen, and preserving amidst all her affright, a presence of mind scarcely less than miraculous) rowed with incredible energy towards the struggling, sinking Tremayne” (183; vol. 1). Anne’s emphatic description— “incredible,” “supernatural”— echoes *The Shipwreck’s* rhetoric of wonder, while the male hero is once again described as “sinking” in the face of adversity. Here we see Viola’s far-flung heroism repeated by Blanch on a domestic stage.

Following Tremayne’s rescue, Blanch’s conduct is praised rather than condemned by elders including Lady Stavordale and Sir Reginald Touberville, who “lavished upon Blanch every encomiastic epithet which our language can supply” – Sir Reginald praises the girl’s “astonishing firmness” (191; vol. 1) and “mental, as well as physical, rigour” (192; vol. 1), while her grandmother describes her as being “as firm as a rock!” (196; vol. 1). The silly Lady Earlingford, Tremayne’s own mother, is an exception, preferring to praise her favourite Jane Touberville for the more conventionally feminine heroism of saving “a kitten from being hunted up a tree” (216; vol. 1). And the spiteful Philippa Stavordale mocks the bandage

Blanch sports after spraining her wrist in the crisis as “the black badge of female chivalry” and her “expertness in rowing” as “masculine” (274; vol. 1). Though this is meant disparagingly by Philippa, Blanch herself invokes a longing for masculine prerogative, when, once Tremayne is recovered, she exclaims “Oh, that I were a man!... that I might spring upon the back of an agile courser, and gallop away with as much fearlessness and velocity as Mr Tremayne” (363; vol. 1).² The episode thus both expands the scope of feminine action and exposes the gendered framework that continues to circumscribe it.

In the final chapters of *Country Neighbours*, however, as in *The Shipwreck*, conventional decorum triumphs. Blanch accepts Tremayne’s proposal of marriage with a quotation taken from Metastasio: “Chi s’arrossisce, e tace, dice assai,” meaning “He who blushes and is silent says enough” (7, 435; vol. 2). This line reflects her awareness of the expectations surrounding feminine silence, aligning with Epstein’s analysis of a conventional heroine’s voice as more reserved than outspoken. When Blanch marries Tremayne, Anne tells the reader, she acquires “a new character of beauty... the heavenly air of serene, because entire, reliance on the worth of him she had chosen” (468; vol. 2). Thus, her heroic self-reliance comes to an end, giving way to an ideal of culturally sanctioned dependence. The last the reader sees of Blanch, her “self-possession” has “deserted her” and she “clung round us, and wept with great emotion” (469; vol. 2).

Conclusions

In *Tales of Fancy*, Sarah Harriet Burney’s protagonists are more physically active than either the heroines of her earlier stories or those of most of her contemporaries. Prompted

by moments of crisis, they are temporarily permitted to assume the role of hardy physical rescuer, which, at that time, was conventionally coded male. Lorna Clark and Stephanie Russo have positioned Burney's fiction as bridging the transition between the Romantic and the Victorian novel (Clark, "Introduction" xxi; Russo 75)³, but there is an equally compelling case to be made that in this respect it foreshadows and anticipates key feminist concerns of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. I read Viola and Blanch's transgressions as tentative, germinative instances of "gender-bending"—early steps towards the "crossing[s]" or "blending[s]", agentic efforts to move "beyond [a] naturalized binary," that Judith Butler would later theorize in her influential writings on gender performance (*Undoing Gender* 46). We might even suggest that Burney's fiction in this respect aligns with Kate Singer's and Susan Stryker's idea of "trans metaphoric," a "movement across a socially imposed boundary away from an unchosen starting place" that enables "self-transformation" (Singer 195; Stryker 1).⁴ Granted, *The Shipwreck* lends itself more convincingly to such a reading than does *Country Neighbours*: Viola's initial discomfort in the performed masculine role draws attention to something like Butler's claim that gender consists of a "stylized repetition of acts" rather than a "seamless identity" (*Gender Trouble* 179), her faltering performance revealing the labor of iteration which, Butler would later claim, sustains gender itself. Yet, such labor can be learned, and the extraordinary physical prowess that Viola acquires during the *Tale* encourages the reader to reflect on the educability of qualities and actions that were generally coded, lexicographically and literarily, as the exclusive province of men. Such currents of late twentieth-century gender theory

are no key to understanding Burney's intentions, but they can perform some valuable functions as speculative aids that help us to understand the prescience and power of her literary innovations.

In conclusion, through the creation of the characters of Viola and Blanch, Sarah Harriet Burney questions the traditional gendered stereotypes imposed upon heroines, presenting a more inclusive and multifaceted understanding of heroism than was largely available in Romantic fiction. Read together, *The Shipwreck* and *Country Neighbours* form a paired experiment: island and drawing room environments testing what heroism might look like when detached from fixed gender scripts. Such a reworking of heroism serves as a telling example of Burney's broader importance, positioning her as a pivotal figure in the transition to modern feminist theory and practice.

NOTES

¹ Some earlier usages apply the term to a woman ironically, or while drawing attention to the anachronous nature of a female hero.

² Clark points out that Burney is fond of this quotation from Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing* (“Literary Legacy” 124). See also Ritchie and Sabor 331-32.

³ Clark describes Burney as “a pivotal figure who builds on the conventions of the eighteenth-century novel and carries them forward,” suggesting that her work leads to Hardy, Dickens and Eliot (“Introduction” xxi). She also sees Burney’s last tale, “The Hermitage” (in *The Romance of Private Life*) as an early example of detective story, anticipating both Wilkie Collins and Edgar Allan Poe (xxii). Meanwhile, Stephanie Russo sees ‘The Renunciation’ (the other tale in *Romance*) as “an underappreciated forerunner of the novels of Dickens and the Brontës (75).”

⁴ Here “trans” is employed in its expansive, metaphorical sense as movement across socially imposed boundaries rather than as a claim of historical transgender identity.

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