

THESIS ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses primarily on *The History of Emily Montague*, a novel written in 1769 by Frances Brooke. The novel is remarkable for covering a vast spectrum of eighteenth-century debates. In formal terms, it is an epistolary as well as a sentimental novel, both of which were widely popular during the eighteenth century. As it is written in letters by several persons, an example of the polyvocal epistolary novel, it provides a broad range of perspectives whereby it achieves exceptional insight into the social, cultural and even political concerns of the era.

The thesis will focus on issues of form and on thematic issues: which range from the sentimental construction of ideal femininity and marriage, aesthetic conceptions of the visual appreciation of landscape and depictions of cultural otherness as parts of socio-cultural and literary debates of the eighteenth century. The thesis is consequently divided into three parts. The first part introduces the background of the author and of the novel concentrating on the specificities of its epistolary form. A short introduction into the history and development of this particular literary device will be provided, but the main thrust will be on its functions in the novel, advantages and disadvantages. The second part will observe *The History of Emily Montague* as a prime example of the sentimental novel. Typical themes such as courtship and marriage or specific types of characters usually presented in these novels will be exposed. The nature of sentimental heroines will be revealed using the instances of Emily Montague, an ideal sentimental heroine, and Arabella Fermor, who serves as a lively foil for Emily. Differences and contrasts between these heroines will be scrutinized as well as the formation of the sentimental hero (Edward Rivers) and his specific traits distinguishing him from ordinary male characters (Sir George).

Finally, the novel is set in Canada and, although the novel was written by an English woman writer who published it in England, it is frequently mentioned as an important text in Canadian literary history, perhaps even the first Canadian novel. The characters come to Canada as new settlers and they contemplate the location, frequently applying contemporary notions of the picturesque, the beautiful and the sublime in their descriptions. Their arrival takes place closely after the Seven Years' War when the English gained Canada as their colonial possession from the French. This means that three cultures meet in one place: the English, the French and the Canadian aboriginal population. Thus, the characters face cultural and social differences, which provide an extraordinary portrayal of the social interaction from the English perspective. Although the novel is not a well-known canonical literary work, its intriguing style and wide scope of themes contributes significantly to the pressing debates of the eighteenth century. The aim of this thesis is to discuss the novel within the contemporary discourse ranging from such issues as femininity, masculinity and marriage to Canadian landscape, cultural otherness and the political reach of the British Empire.