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with love

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1. Introduction

In late eighteenth and early nineteenth century British literature a discrete presence of French characters can be found, which mainly play a minor role, but which often prove to be important for the development of the plot and for the definition of the main characters' identity, which is usually British. The way in which the foreign characters are depicted, the role they play, how they are treated by the other characters and by the narrator, and the characteristics which are attributed to them, is the focus of my analysis. The purpose of my research is to investigate, first, whether the representations of the French in British literature are stereotypical and to understand their meaning and use in a cultural and historical perspective, second, what stereotypical qualities are attributed to the characters and in which way, if there are differences in terms of gender and social status, and lastly, if the stereotypes changed throughout the time covered by the texts analysed and for which reason.

In order to reach this purpose, imagology, which deals precisely with national stereotypes in literature, proves to be the most suitable theoretical approach. The first chapter explains the theory in detail and the method used for the analysis, which is strictly connected to the historical background of the texts chosen, and of which an overview is given. In considering the presence of French characters in British literature, the way in which they are represented and perceived, not only reveals a lot about the relationship between the Britons and the French in its specific historical context, but also about the way in which British national identity is constructed through the confrontation with the 'other.'

My research is limited to a selection of texts composed of four novels and one travel book: Frances Burney's *Evelina* (1779), Maria Edgeworth's *Leonora* (1806), Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), W. M. Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1848), and Frances Trollope's *Paris and the Parisians in 1835* (1836). The choice of the texts is motivated by several reasons. First of all, the purpose of this thesis is to analyse, on the one hand, texts that are not extremely popular nowadays like, for example, *Evelina*, and, especially, *Leonora*, which apparently has sunk into oblivion, and, on the other hand, very popular texts like *Jane Eyre* and *Vanity Fair*, which have been widely analysed, but not so extensively as far as the national origin of some of their characters is

concerned. Secondly, texts that deal explicitly and specifically with the French Revolution, as, for example, the famous novel *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) by Charles Dickens, are left out for the main reason that they have been thoroughly analysed in the academic field with respect to their French characters. In contrast, this thesis concerns aspects that are less evident to the reader and less stressed in the field of academic criticism. In addition, *A Tale of Two Cities* establishes a clear contrast in particular within the French characters, namely between revolutionaries and non-revolutionaries, and between the aristocracy and the peasantry. Therefore, the British perspective concerning the French is quite complex and interconnected with the political ideas concerning the Revolution, a subject that would need to be explored separately and in detail. For the same reason, other texts like Edgeworth's tales *Mademoiselle de Panache* (1801) or *The Good French Governess* (1801) are not included since the theme of the French governess, just alluded to in my analysis, would necessitate and deserve specific research focused on this figure in all her diverse aspects. Finally, the books selected date back to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, and thus have a similar political and cultural background. Therefore, the analysis of the texts is divided in two chapters (Chapter 3 and Chapter 4), where two novels are compared—*Evelina* and *Leonora*, *Jane Eyre* and *Vanity Fair*—which are chronologically very close and show consistent stereotypical character traits.

Evelina and *Leonora*, which are analysed in the second chapter, are two interesting examples of epistolary novels, which can be compared because of the fact that both present a secondary character who is not really French, but pretends to be, and since in both novels these characters are in strong contrast with the British protagonists, whose identity is finally revealed in opposition to that of the Frenchwoman. Furthermore, the choice of *Leonora* also aims at renewing interest in a novel that has been mostly criticised as plain. As regards *Jane Eyre*, some critics have analysed some secondary figures like, for instance, the Creole Bertha Mason in the field of postcolonial studies. However, not many works focus on the minor character of the half-French Adèle, which seems to me not only to be an effective example of a stereotypical representation of French femininity, but also an effective basis for comparison in the delineation of the main character's identity. Lastly, *Vanity Fair* is the only novel, among those chosen, where the character with French origins is the protagonist, and the aim of my analysis is

to discover whether the same type of representation is used for her that is used for the secondary characters in the other novels.

As far as travel writing is concerned, the choice of Trollope's *Paris and the Parisians in 1835* is motivated by a specific interest in the comparison between British and French female identity and in the figure of the women travellers, since almost all the characters analysed in this thesis are female. For this reason, significant books such as, for instance, Thackeray's *Paris Sketch Book* (1840) have been excluded. Travel has been very often a male prerogative in the past, and Trollope's account of her French sojourn offers a singular perspective, where the author points out a considerable contrast between the role of the woman in Britain and France.

Finally, a remark needs to be made concerning the choice of the adjectives 'British' and 'English' as they are used in contrast with the adjective 'French'. As the authors of *That Sweet Enemy: Britain and France, The History of A Love-Hate Relationship* also explain in their Introduction, "[t]he idea of 'the French' seems to pose no problem [since] [t]hey know who they are, and so does everyone else" (Tombs 2), whereas the appellation 'the British' "is more of a problem" (Tombs 2). In fact, "'The Three Kingdoms' (England and Wales, Scotland and Ireland) became in stages 'The United Kingdom' as a direct result of war with France" (Tombs 2). In this thesis the term 'British' is preferred, for it is more comprehensive, and since England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland, which were divided in many ways throughout history, were actually united in their opposition to France. In short, the contrast with a different nation led them to find a common national identity. Another reason to use the term 'British' is then that the author Maria Edgeworth was Irish, although she was integrated in English society, whereas Thackeray was born in India, thus in the British Empire. The term 'English' appears in my analysis when quoting or paraphrasing an author's thought or statement in which he or she explicitly uses this adjective rather than the adjective 'British.'

To conclude, my research concerns an aspect of the texts selected which has not been widely investigated. Moreover, the theme of national stereotypes in literature is crucial from a cultural point of view, especially given the power of literature to construct and spread meanings, very often in subtle ways.

2. National Stereotypes in Literature

2.1. Imagology

2.1.1. Definition and Brief History of the Approach

Imagology, as Beller and Leerssen define it in *Imagology: The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters*, is “the critical analysis of national stereotypes in literature” (Foreword xiii). Dealing with literary texts as the primary source of its investigation, this approach is also often more specifically referred to as literary imagology. This discipline has its roots “in Comparative Literary Studies,” but it is also situated “in the broader interdisciplinary field of the human, cultural and social sciences” (Beller and Leerssen, Foreword xiii). Indeed, the relevance of imagology, according to Beller and Leerssen, “transcends the field of literary analysis, and its findings are of interest to wider circles in the human and social sciences” (Foreword xv).

Imagology, as it is known nowadays, originated in the first half of the twentieth century, but its “archeology,” as Leerssen refers to it, goes back to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

The archeology leads us to the cultural criticism of early-modern Europe which began, in the tradition of Julius Caesar Scaliger (1484-1558), to sort European cultural and social patterns into national categories, thereby formalizing an older, informal tradition of attributing essential characteristics to certain national or ethnic groups. This classificatory urge of aligning cultural differences with ethnic stereotypes was to lead to the systematic of early-modern ethnography and anthropology as illustrated, for instance, by the Austrian *Völkertafel* or ‘Tableau of Nationalities’ (Stanzel et al. 1999). This national-characterological systematization of ethnic stereotypes and anecdotal knowledge concerning ‘manners and customs’ was to remain intellectually dominant into the Enlightenment – witness the national-psychological investment of Montesquieu’s *Esprit des lois*, of Hume’s essay “Of National Characters”, of Voltaire’s *Essai sur les mœurs* and even of Vico’s *Scienza Nuova* (Hayman 1971). (Leerssen, “Imagology: History and Method” 17-18)

Later, in eighteenth-nineteenth century France, Mme de Staël’s essay *De l’Allemagne* offers a significant contribution to the development of “a special interest [...] concerning the changes and changing influences of the image of Germany and the

Germans” (Beller 8). The interest in images of other countries and people, which Mme de Staël’s essay contributes to develop, is precisely the focus of imagological studies. However, it is only in the twentieth century that the effective beginning of modern imagology can be dated back to, in the sense of as “a *deconstructive* and *critical* analysis of the rhetoric of national characterization” [emphasis added] (Leerssen, “Imagology: History and Method” 18). In particular, the “anti-essentialis[m]” and “constructivis[m]” as fundamental characteristics of the approach emerged after the Second World War, when people seemed to have stopped believing “in the ‘realness’ of national characters as explanatory models” (Leerssen, “Imagology: History and Method” 21). Indeed, at that time, as proposed in Guyard’s essay *L’étranger tel qu’on le voit* (1951), nationality began to be studied, not “*per se*, but [...] ‘as seen’, as a literary trope [or topos]” (Leerssen, “Imagology: History and Method” 22), as “a convention, a misunderstanding, a construct [...]; something which could be therefore analysed in its subjectivity, variability and contradictions” (Leerssen, “Imagology: History and Method” 22).

Literary imagology (or simply imagology) thus deals, in Beller’s definition, “with attitude and judgments between nations as fixed in texts” (qtd. in Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology* 432), and it focuses its analysis especially on “the *origin* and *function*” of national stereotypes “particularly in the way in which they are presented in works of literature, plays, poems, travel books and essays” (Beller 7). In fact, as Beller points out,

[L]iterary texts reduce the complex of various characteristics of an individual to a small number of noteworthy, salient aspects and characteristics. With collectives, which we subsume into one concept as groups, peoples, or races, these emerge in the formulaic form of stereotypes. (7)

Furthermore, for Fausett literature not only “plays a role along with other forms of communication” in that “process by which cultures are constructed or demarcated,” and of which “[s]tereotyping is one manifestation,” but it also “often makes this process [...] its explicit [...] theme” (133). The reason why literary texts are such a fruitful source of national stereotypes is, then, that they “are often written under a fictionality convention, requiring a reader’s ‘willing suspension of disbelief’ [...], and so facilitating the presentation of national commonplaces [...]” (Leerssen, qtd. in Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology* 354). Functioning as a vehicle of production and

communication of meanings, literature thus proves “a privileged genre for the [“formulation” and] dissemination of stereotypes” (Leerssen, “Imagology: History and Method” 26). As Beller and Leerssen do not fail to stress, the “subjectivity [and the] rhetoric and schematic nature” (Foreword xiii-xiv) of literary texts, where national stereotypes are propagated and possibly assimilated by some readers, “must not be ignored, explained away or filtered out, but must [instead] be taken into account in the [imagological] analysis” (Foreword xiii-xiv). In this respect, the notion of ‘perspective’ proves particularly useful as far as national images are concerned. Indeed, Beller states that “[i]mages of a given nation (the ‘spected’[...]) will vary according to the various points of view of the other nations (the ‘spectants’)” (qtd. in Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology* 395), and that “[w]hat is believed or represented concerning a given nation is perspectively determined, refracted through the subjectivity of the spectant” (qtd. in Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology* 397). In brief, since the way in which other nations are represented in literary works is subjective, “national characterizations are [to be considered as] commonplace and hearsay rather than [as] empirical observation or statement of fact” (Beller and Leerssen, Foreword xiii-xiv).

As to the aim of imagology, it is that of describing “the origin, process and function of national prejudices and stereotypes, to bring them to the surface, analyse them and make people aware of them” (Beller 11-12). In order to reach this purpose, imagologists follow a specific method, which has been listed by Leerssen in eleven “methodological assumptions” (“Imagology: History and Method” 27). These can be summarised as follows: (I) the imagological perspective is “a theory of cultural or national stereotypes, not a theory of cultural or national identity” (27); (II) Imagology aims at understanding “a discourse of representation rather than a society” (27); (III) Imagologists must not ignore the subjectivity of their sources (27); (IV) “Imagology addresses a specific set of characterizations and attributes [,]those outside the area of testable report sentences or statements of fact [,...] called *imagined*” (27); (V) “[T]he intertext of a given national representation [has to be established] as a trope” (28); (VI) “The trope must also be contextualized within the text of its occurrence,” so it is necessary to know “the theory and methodology of literary studies” (28); (VII) The “historical contextualization [of the text] is also necessary [since I]literary texts cannot be interpreted in a timeless, aesthetic never-never-land” (28); (VIII) “[A] pragmatic-functionalist perspective,” thus an

interest in the “text’s target audience” is required (28); (IX) “[C]ertain constants and variables” in “the long-term history of national clichés” need to be considered (28-29); (X) “[...N]ational self-images have a specifically diachronic dimension [...] in the identitarian process of maintaining a sense of selfhood across time” (29); (XI) Imagology is, “in and of itself a *comparative* enterprise [since] it addresses *cross-national relations* rather than national identities” [emphasis added] (29).

2.1.2. Image, Sterotyping, and Representation

As easily inferable, the term imagology derives from the term image, to which Leerssen refers as “[t]he mental or discursive representation or reputation of a person, group, ethnicity or ‘nation’” (qtd. in Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology* 342). Beller further defines “the term *image* as the mental silhouette of the other, who appears to be determined by the characteristics of family, group, tribe, people or race,” (4) and claims that what is known is not “the real thing, but only its simulacrum in the form of mental images” (4). Moreover, as already mentioned among the methodological assumptions, the “characterizations and attributes [... which] lie outside the area of testable reports or statements of fact” are all called “*imaginated*” (Beller and Leerssen, Foreword xiv) and, therefore, a “nationality, country or society” (Leerssen, qtd. in Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology* 342) is also called *imaginated*, when described in relation to “national character rather than [to] testable fact” (Leerssen, qtd. in Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology* 342). *Imaginated* discourse acts in two ways:

Generally, *imaginated* discourse (a) singles out a nation from the rest of humanity as being somehow different or ‘typical’, and (b) articulates or suggests a moral, characteriological, collective-psychological motivation for given social or national features. *Imaginated* discourse offers characteriological explanations of cultural difference. (Beller and Leerssen, Foreword xiv)

Such images are influential since they have the power of “rul[ing] our opinion of others and control[ing] our behaviour towards them” (Beller 4). Fundamental in this respect, is, then, Anderson’s definition of the nation as “an *imagined* political community” (6). What is meant by that is not that nations do not exist at all, but rather that they exist as such only “when a significant number of people in a community consider [or imagine] themselves to form a nation, or behave as if they formed one” (Seton-Watson, qtd. in Anderson 6). In fact, rephrasing Seton-Watson, Anderson asserts that “the members of

even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members,” and “yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (6). In brief, the idea of nation is an image that is culturally constructed.

Then, as further explained by Leerssen, a distinction also needs to be made between “*auto-image* (or ‘self-image’)” (qtd. in Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology* 342) and “*hetero-image*” (qtd. in Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology* 342). Whereas the auto-images refer to the way in which a certain group perceives and depicts itself at a characteriological level, hetero-images indicate the way in which a group sees and represents another. Paradoxically, a constant of images is their changeability, as Leerssen clarifies as follows:

Much as images are mobile, so too they are changeable, both in valorization and in substance. [...] Such changes (which are often driven by a complex combination of cultural taste and political circumstance) can also affect the very substance of the characteristics imputed to a given nation: over time, images may spawn their very opposite *counter-images*. (qtd. in Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology* 343)

In this regard, an example which Leerssen reports is that of “the image of the refined Frenchman, [which] acquires pejorative connotations around the same time: those of artificiality, pretentiousness, untrustworthiness” (qtd. in Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology* 343). Another characteristic of images, which might appear at first in contradiction to their feature of changeability, is that of their fixity. Indeed, as Stanzel argues,

[i]n the development of historical awareness [...] political conflicts and even wars sink into oblivion more easily than the images of others and [...] foreigners, which apparently are locked up from an unconscious inventory of images and generalized prejudices about the other. (qtd. in Beller 11)

The fixity of the images of other people in the course of history has also been remarked on by Beller, who speaks of a tendency to define foreigners “in terms of a limited number of foregrounded attributes” (qtd. in Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology* 429), which are usually inferior to the ones used to define “oneself or one’s own group” (qtd. in Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology* 429). More precisely, perceptions of other nations have been modified by “dramatic changes in relative power” (Tombs 447) and, according to Crouzet, “[a] sense of inferiority produces stronger feelings, both of admiration and of resentment” (qtd. in Tombs 446).

The notion of ‘image’ is very close to that of stereotype. Indeed, as Leerssen, explains,

[s]ince images tend to invoke generally current commonplaces and reduce the complexity of historical contingency to the invariance of ingrained [...] topoi and [...] clichés, they are often considered a form of [...] stereotype. In practice, images are mobile and changeable as all discursive constructs are. (For this reason, some scholars have preferred, in the past, the term *imagotype* to that of ‘stereotype’). (qtd. in Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology* 343)

The term stereotype, Pickering explains, originally derives from the “vocabulary of printing and typography” (9), where it “referred to text cast into *rigid* form for the purpose of *repetitive* use” [emphasis added] (9). Later, the term started to be used metaphorically, and, as Pickering points out, “the analogy” (9) between the first and the actual meaning “still applies” (9). Furthermore, many different definitions of the term have been given in the various “specialisms dealing with it” (Beller, qtd. in Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology* 432). Whereas, for example, Lippman “uses the word to refer to the fixed ‘pictures in our heads’” (qtd. in Beller, qtd. in Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology* 429), thus linking the term to that of image, Quasthoff defines stereotype as “the *verbal* expression of an opinion concerning social groups or concerning individuals as representatives of such groups” [emphasis added] (qtd. in Beller, qtd. in Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology* 431). For Aronson the term denotes “a generalization about a group of people in which incidental characteristics are assigned to virtually all members of the group, regardless of actual variation among the members” (qtd. in Beller, qtd. in Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology* 429), and “[o]nce formed,” he argues, “stereotypes are resistant to change on the basis of new information” (qtd. in Beller, qtd. in Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology* 429). “National stereotypes,” as Robert and Isabelle Tombs claim, “are based on observation, if usually at second or third hand” (446), and “books [...] have always been crucial” to their diffusion and acceptance (446). Lastly, according to Brenner, “the formation of stereotypes is strictly speaking a *mental* and cognitive rather a literary process” [emphasis added] (qtd. in Beller, qtd. in Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology* 429). However, imagological analysis “concentrates on *verbally* and *textually* codified images [or stereotypes]” [emphasis added] (Beller 4).

A difference between “*stereotyping*” and “*typing*” (qtd. in Hall 257) is then introduced by Dyer. Whereas a “*type*,” in his definition, is “any simple, vivid,

memorable, easily grasped and widely recognized characterization in which a few traits are foregrounded and change or ‘development’ is kept to a minimum’’ (qtd. in Hall 257), a “*stereotype*” “reduce[s] everything about a person to those traits, *exaggerate*[s] and *simplif*[ies] them, and *fix*[es] them without change or development to eternity” (qtd. in Hall 258). In addition, Dyer claims that the process of stereotyping “*excludes everything which does not belong*” (qtd. in Hall 258) and, as such, it contributes to “the maintenance of social and symbolic order” (qtd. in Hall 258). A further distinction is then made by Pickering between the notions of stereotype and category. If, he argues, both “operate as a way of imposing a sense of order on the social world” (3), their fundamental difference lies, however, in the fact that “[c]ategories are not fixed for all time,” whereas stereotypes are (3). Being fixed, Pickering adds, “[the process of] stereotyping creates the illusion of precision in defining and evaluating other people” (4), and it does so by “establish[ing] an attributed characteristic as natural and given in ways inseparable from the relations of power and domination through which it operates” (5). In a similar way, Hall defines “stereotyping” as “a set of representational [or signifying] practices [...which] reduces people to a few, simple, essential characteristics, which are represented as fixed by Nature” (257). In brief, “*stereotyping reduces, essentializes, naturalizes and fixes ‘difference’*” (Hall 258).

The concept of representation, as expressed in Hall’s definition of stereotyping, proves extremely important in the understanding and analysis of national stereotypes. In his fundamental essay *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices* Hall starts by generally denoting the concept of representation in linguistic terms, as what links “meaning and language to culture” (15). In other words, representation is defined as “the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language” (Hall 17). It is, in fact, the connection “between concepts and language which enables us to *refer* to either the ‘real’ world of objects, people or events, or indeed to imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people and events” (Hall 17). The relationships between real things and mental concepts and between these concepts and the “*signs*” used to express them, constitute, according to Hall, two “systems of representation,” i.e. two ways of producing meanings (17-18). In short, according to Hall, representation is “[t]he process which links [“‘things’, concepts and signs”] together” (19). As far as national stereotypes are concerned, it must be particularly kept

in mind that “we also form concepts about things we never have seen [...] and about people and places we have plainly made up” (17). Furthermore, Hall applies a constructionist approach to representation, by arguing that things are not meaningful *per se*, but rather that meanings are *constructed* through the use of “concepts and signs” (25). Foucault’s way of explaining representation is, then, as reported by Hall, strictly connected to the notion of ‘discourse’, by which Foucault means “a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment” (qtd. in Hall 44). Discourse is, thus, in his words, “about the production of knowledge through language” (44). Foucault also asserts the importance of the “*specific historical context*,” outside which things would acquire a different meaning (qtd. in Hall 46), while Pickering claims that “struggles over the meanings and definitions of social representations [...] are being fought between different interest groups and value systems in society, in and over time” (xiv). The historical contingency, already stressed by Leerssen in his method VII, is thus a basic assumption in the studies of representation and stereotypes.

Representation, “[a]s a category of cultural analysis [...] designate[s] the ways in which texts [...] provide images of the world” (Rigney, qtd. in Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology* 415), and it differs from the notion of discourse “in its emphasis on the relationship between text (as a discourse) and the reality or experience of which the text purports to offer an image” (Rigney, qtd. in Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology* 415). When analysing a text according to the imagological approach, the specificity of the source must also be particularly taken into account. In this regard, O’ Sullivan argues that

[i]n the intra-textual sphere [...] the stereotype’s *function* is linked to its deployment and its *aesthetic and rhetorical effect*, and it must be asked “whether an author goes along with them to fulfill expectations, whether he contradicts them or plays with them” [...]. The last-mentioned option (the playful deployment of stereotypes) indicates that literary and artistic analysis of stereotypes may have the specific challenge also to address an element of creativity [emphasis added]. (qtd. in Beller, qtd. in Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology* 432)

Finally, stereotypes, being constructed “in a discursive and rhetorical environment,” “are representative of literary and discursive conventions, not of social realities” (Beller and Leerssen, Foreword xiv) and, as such, they primarily refer “to an intertext [...] of other related textual instances” (Leerssen, “Imagology: History and Method” 26).

2.1.3. National Character

The concept of ‘national character’ in imagology is linked to that of ‘stereotype’. However, whereas for Stanzel the two terms have practically always the same meaning (12), according to Leerssen national character, or “the nation’s essence,” as he otherwise calls it, is “wholly determined by ingrained and widely-current stereotypes and ethnic images” (“Imagology: History and Method” 19). Thus, it could be argued that national character is what derives from the sum of all stereotypes, of determined and fixed characteristics, attributed to a nation. More specifically, as Fyfe points out, national character “makes many people attribute to all the individual members of a nation the vices or virtues—more usually vices—which are supposed to be that nation’s especial peculiarities” (19). So, in this perspective every member of a nation is supposed to impersonate his/her nation’s character.

Concerning the history of the concept, in the seventeenth century nations were divided and listed according to certain specific characteristics (Leerssen, “The Poetics and Anthropology of National Character (1500-2000)” 64); it is only in the eighteenth century, which can be “regarded as the heyday of the debate on national character” (Zacharasiewicz 31), that the notion of national character prevails, in the context of the Enlightenment. In fact, in the “taxonomy of nationalities,” “[c]ommon factors, common vices and manners, cease to be of importance” (Leerssen, “The Poetics” 69) and “[n]ations will come to see their character, their individuality, in those aspects in which they *differ* most from others” [emphasis added] (Leerssen, “The Poetics” 69). Furthermore, as explained by Leerssen, during the Enlightenment “the [...] anthropological ‘study of mankind’ gives a ‘philosophical’ endorsement to racial and national stereotypes as these had been categorized and systematized in the previous century” (“The Poetics” 70). Among the philosophers of the time who contributed to the rational study of national character, the Frenchman Montesquieu and the Englishman David Hume stand out (Leerssen, “Imagology: History and Method” 19). In particular, Hume ascribed national character to “moral causes,” and exactly “in this respect” he asserted the superiority of English people “to all others” (qtd. in Pickering 94). In opposition to the Enlightenment thinkers, critics like Johann Gottfried Herder, on the other hand, “proposed a cultural model based on the celebration of difference”

(Leerssen, “The Poetics” 71), where the “nation’s sense of identity” was considered to be “based on the way in which that nation stands out from humanity at large” (Leerssen, “The Poetics” 73). It is, however, to the nineteenth century that the notion of national character owes its huge diffusion, as explained by Pickering:

The idea of ‘national character’ was typical of the kind of essentialist thinking applied to categories of association and identity in the nineteenth century. Being English or French distilled a defining racial essence, given by nature and taken as hereditary. In some ways this may be seen as an anxious assertion of symbolic boundaries in a period when colonization and expanding trade and economic organisation were leading to increased contact between people and cultures across the world, particularly during the later nineteenth century. It was no accident that nationalist and racist stereotyping intensified at this time, and that the critical term for it soon came into being. National character was a form of positively stereotyping a collective ‘we’ through an imagined personification of this identity in its ideal essence. (Pickering 95)

In the Romantic period, then, “the idea of national character [...] shifts into the mode of the *Volksgeist* or *Volksseele*, the nation’s spirit or soul” (Leerssen, “The Poetics” 73), and “culture” thus begins to be “seen as the manifestation of [the nation’s] true identity,” the expression of the nation’s soul (Leerssen, “The Poetics” 75). Indeed, the culture of a nation was perceived “to be a priori different from other cultures and single[d] out by the nations’ underlying characteristic individuality” (Leerssen, “Imagology: History and Method”19).

The term character, as referring to the single individual, is defined by Leerssen as “that fundamental part of our personality which motivates our behaviour” (“The Poetics” 68). As the character of each individual is thought to be responsible for his or her attitude towards other individuals, so national characters, considered as an extension of the character of the single members of a certain nation, have been for a long time thought responsible for the way in which nations behave towards each others. Indeed, Fyfe argues that the idea of national character “has been one of the most dangerous and most potent of the elements making for war” (2), and he successfully tries to demonstrate that national characters are just mere illusions (2). In this regard, he not only claims that “[a]ll types are found in all nations” (106), but also that, since the characteristics attributed to the members of other nations are always different, even opposite, depending on the relations between the two nations in certain historical periods, “the idea of national character is an absurdity” (19).

Although the nature of national character has been proved to be illusory, a cultural construct rather than an essential reality, the use of this notion to define and refer to other nations has been a powerful means by which people have tried to define themselves. Together with that of national character, the concept of national identity is a powerful one, since, as Pickering claims, it works by “differentiating a nationally defined ‘us’ from contrasting forms of national identity while simultaneously providing a compulsive substitute for *the cultural need to belong*” [emphasis added] (89).

To conclude, the notions of national character and stereotype are essential for the imagological approach, thus for understanding the ways in which foreign people are represented in literary texts. The idea of national character is extremely useful when looking at the dynamics between different nations, at the way in which they define their national identity in opposition to others and in the analysis of the representation of other people as they appear in texts from different historical periods. The following subchapter will focus on the complex historical relation between Britain and France, and an overview of the most common stereotypes attributed by British to French people throughout history will be given.

2.2. Stereotypes about the French in a Historical Overview

The relationship between France and Britain is very long and complex, “one of the most intense, most troubled, and most significant of modern times” (Tombs 1). France and Britain have been great enemies and allies; they fought against each other in significant wars and exchanged their culture in moments of peace. As far as Britain’s idea and depiction of France and French people are concerned, many stereotypes developed in such a long shared history, which find their origin and cause precisely in this history. These stereotypical images of France, as it is typical of stereotypes, changed throughout time, including negative as well as positive connotations. In this respect, Fyfe claims that “[u]p to 1904 [the year of the second *entente cordiale*] most of the English had regarded the French with suspicion, with self-righteous disdain, as immoral, flighty, frivolous” (19), and “[s]uddenly they were told to reverse their opinions” (19). In the two Tables of Nationalities (LS and VT)¹ the French appear as carriers of vices and

¹Leopold-Stich (LS), Augsburg, 1719-1726
Völkertafel (VT), Steiermark, circa 1730-1740 (see Stanzel 40-41)

diseases, and of weaknesses that were usually ascribed to southerners (Zacharasiewicz 81). Among many attributions, French are also classified as careless, childish and religious. In addition, particularly relevant is their changeability in terms of clothes (Stanzel 40-41), which will remain a permanent feature of the French in the following centuries, and which will also come to signify political instability. Finally, some of the most recurrent characteristics attributed by the British to the French from the Restoration to the end of the Victorian period are the following: love of fashion, elegance and taste, femininity and foppishness, sexual depravity and immorality, easiness of costumes, vanity and arrogance, superficiality, artificiality, Catholicism and atheism, dedication to intellectual rather than physical activity. Some of these stereotypes are restricted to either women or men, some concern both genders.

An important date in the modern history of Anglo-French relations is 1660, which dates the Restoration of the monarchy with the return of Charles II from his exile in France. This period, first with Charles II and then with James II as kings, was characterised by French political and cultural influence. In fact, as reported by Robert and Isabelle Tombs, “[m]any at home and abroad assumed that the Stuarts’ power depended on the support of Versailles” (11) and of the French absolutist monarch Louis XIV (11). A sentiment of Francophilia was thus typical at the time, but was not shared by everyone. In fact, a significant role in the relation between the two absolutist monarchies was played by the Catholic religion, which was always connected to the Stuarts in a positive or negative sense, depending on the perspective. In February 1685 James became Catholic king of a country that was de facto predominantly Protestant, and wanted to legalise Catholicism. Many opposed the Stuart kings as “‘Popery’” and “[r]ebellions against James broke out in Scotland and in the West Country” (Tombs 12). The Restoration period ended with the Glorious Revolution in 1688 when the Protestant William of Orange ascended to the throne, but “[t]he pro-Stuart ‘Jacobite’ opposition to the new monarch and his successors would persist for half a century in England, for longer in Scotland, and longer still in Ireland” (Tombs 20). The Stuarts and their followers, the ‘Jacobites’, thus remained identified with Catholicism and affinity to France, and as such were opposed by the majority of Britons. In the eighteenth century many British Catholics, indeed, who were not free to practice their religion, took refuge in France. In this respect, Eagles claims that “beef-eating liberality was limited in its

scope to those who were willing to conform to Hanover and Anglicanism” (99). Furthermore, the Catholic religion, together with the “lack of respect for traditional authority,” (qtd. in Simmons 66) was also considered by some, like the novelist Walter Scott, one of the causes of “France’s lack of manliness” (qtd. in Simmons 66).

In the eighteenth century Britain was governed by the Hanoverian dynasty and, under the reign of George III (1760-1820), the nation was involved in a long period of conflicts, from the Imperial Wars and the American Revolution, to the Napoleonic Wars. In the Seven Years War (1756-1763), fought to obtain the control of the American colonies, Britain won against Bourbon France and Spain. After this conflict, “[t]he French monarchy [...] had been weakened” and “[d]efeats had exposed Louis XV as a nonentity,” whereas Britain increased its financial power (Tombs 143). The Treaty of Paris in 1763, which put an end to the conflict, has been considered “Britain’s greatest-ever victory, and France greatest defeat” and “[i]t confirmed Britain as a global power” (Tombs 143). However, in both countries war had left a huge debt, and taxes were increased as a solution that led to discontent and resistance.

The period between 1776 and 1783 coincides with the second war for America and the American Revolution. The conflict broke out in Massachusetts in April 1775 and culminated in the Declaration of Independence on 4 June 1776, and in this context France sided with the Americans, recognising their independence (Tombs 160-161). The struggle went on until 1783 and it “enhanced the sense of ‘Britishness’ in Great Britain and Ireland” (Tombs 171). Britain was now united and Catholics were welcomed to join the army thanks to the Catholic Relief Act (1778). However, this “caused a radical pro-American backlash among Protestants, who accused the government of flirting with ‘popery’ to undermine liberty” (Tombs 171) and led to the Gordon Riots against the Catholics in 1780 (Tombs 171). Finally, the Treaty of Versailles (1763) left Britain without most of the American colonies and France with a severe financial condition. In 1786, then, the Eden Treaty particularly damaged French economy and led to a recession. As a consequence, taxes increased, causing huge popular protests. Furthermore, whereas “Britain could raise more tax and had solid credit [,] the French monarchy was insolvent” (Tombs 187). In 1789 the financial situation in France was deteriorating, and the increasing popular discontent eventually

led to the Revolution on 14 July, with the storming of the Bastille. The reactions of British people to the French Revolution were initially positive and “[m]any [...] assumed that the French, a century after the Glorious Revolution, would adopt a perfected version of the British constitution” (Tombs 188). Great supporters of the Revolution were “religious Dissenters and the opposition Whigs, led by Charles James Fox” (Tombs 194), who “saw the defeat of the Bourbons as another blow against ‘despotism’” (Tombs 194). In his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) Edmund Burke appeared as the defender of the “‘third option’, between the ‘despotism of the monarch’ and the ‘despotism of the multitude’” (qtd. in Tombs 197), and his ideas “made him a godfather both of conservatism, through his praise of tradition and loyalty, and of liberalism, through his acceptance that change was necessary for survival” (Tombs 200). On the opposite side, in *Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) and *Vindications of the Rights of Women* (1792) Mary Wollstonecraft reacted to Burke’s conservatism by “assert[ing] that Godgiven reason was the only source of legitimate authority” (qtd. in Tombs 199). The Revolution finally reversed the idea of Britain standing for “change and modernity” (Tombs 193) and of France for “monarchical power and social hierarchy” (Tombs 193). Indeed, if now Britain “came to symbolize stability and tradition” (Tombs 193), France “represented rejection of the past, democracy and upheaval” (Tombs 193). However, the reactions to the events in France after the Terror (1792) proved quite unanimous and changed the idea of French people in British imagination. In fact, as Robert and Isabelle Tombs argue, “[t]he killings were particularly shocking as they contradicted the conventional image of the French people as lighthearted, gentle and deferential” (202). This new idea of the French was further reinforced by the execution of Louis XVI in 1793, and in this context, the francophobe image of the *sans-culotte*, with “long bagged hair and the fiddle” (Tombs 203), which had been used before the Revolution to mock French frivolity, came to symbolize “capricious political cruelty” (Tombs 203). As regards fashion during the Terror, France influenced Britain with “plain clothes and natural hair combed casually forward” (Tombs 205), which “became associated with radical chic” (Tombs 205). Besides, Florack stresses the link between politics and manners by arguing that “[d]uring the Revolution, the ‘typically French’ fickleness, [...], served to explain the turbulent social and political changes” and that “‘passion’ [...] discredits the

Revolution as an expression of French immorality” (qtd. in Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology* 156).

According to Eagles, in eighteenth century Britain, not only Protestant mercantilism and aversion to France, but also Francophilia, meant as “an admiration for France and things French” (12), played a significant role in shaping the British national character. The aristocracy, indeed, was continental in its views and was highly influenced by French culture. As for the middle class, in its attempt to imitate the manners of the *élite* with the hope of entering fashionable society, it was also indirectly influenced by the continent. In fact, Eagles explains how the “John Bull mercantilism” (11), which was supposed to represent British national character, was “most evident in wartime for those without foreign acquaintance, or social standing, unable to enjoy the delights of continental living in spite of the state of hostilities” (11). In his opinion, it was precisely during the Napoleonic wars that “Englishmen” look at John Bull rather than at the aristocracy, “whose very national allegiance was held in great suspicion” (Eagles 11). War against France thus led Britain to a strong, mercantile-based national identity, while for the aristocracy “[t]here was no such understanding of national differentiation [...], no such concept of race” (Eagles 153). In one way or another, either for affiliation or for opposition, France was influential in the definition of “English culture” (Eagles 13).

The Revolution was followed by many years of war, and in 1794 “British goods were embargoed [and] British subjects were ordered to be arrested” (Tombs 213). During the period of the Directory, after the Terror, war over the control of the Low Countries intensified, and Bonaparte started planning the invasion of Britain. The war ended only in 1801 with France as winner, and the Treaty of Amiens in 1802 brought a moment of peace between Britain and France for the first time after 1688. However, Eagles claims that the Treaty “was a bitter disappointment to those such as Fox, who had hoped the Consul Bonaparte might prove a man with whom the Whigs could ‘do business’” (91). In 1804 Napoleon was then proclaimed Emperor of the French and prepared the invasion of Britain, leaving its inhabitants in constant fear. Robert and Isabelle Tombs explain how British were afraid of a French invasion at that time.

The constitution protected the rights of rich and poor alike, whereas a Napoleonic conquest would deprive the poor of everything: roast beef and even bread and cheese would be replaced by black bread and *soup-maigre*. French law and language would be imposed. The revolution, even under Napoleon, was an enemy of Christianity. Invasion would bring pillage and rape – a reiterated fear[.] (Tombs 249)

Concerning French eating habits, Frenchmen, “who dined on frogs and soup,” (Morgan 121) were considered “effeminate,” and for Lamont ““too many eggs, and frogs, and vegetables’ and the absence of English roast beef” caused the ‘grown persons [to] have a very dried-up look” (qtd. in Morgan 121). Moreover, Fyfe asserts that “[c]hildren were told at the beginning of the nineteenth century that Napoleon was an ogre who would eat them alive” (13). As reported by Varouxakis, in 1859 the thinker John Stuart Mill believed, regarding French national character at the time of Napoleon, that there was a defect in it, which he identified in “a desire to impose French rule on other peoples” (154). The economist Nassau William Senior, then, considered pride and ambition two of the most striking French characteristics (Varouxakis 135). On 21 October 1805 the British won their historical battle at Trafalgar and, five weeks later, at Austerlitz. Finally, with the Congress of Vienna (1814-1815) and the restoration of the monarchy, and with the final defeat of Napoleon in the Battle of Waterloo (18 June 1815), peace was reestablished in Europe while Napoleon was sent into exile to St. Helena. France and Britain “were now seen as the two great liberal states whose mission was to defend and propagate freedom” (Tombs 311), and France was also restoring its leading role in the world in matters of fashion and pleasure, as it used to be before the Revolution (Tombs 311). At that time tourism across the Channel increased and, for Eagles, the British people who belonged to fashionable, Francophile society could finally “re-acquaint [...] themselves with all that was best” (38), namely with French culture and lifestyle.

With the July Revolution in 1830 Louis Philippe, the son of the Duke of Orleans who supported the 1789 Revolution, ascended to the throne as the King of the French, and a constitutional monarchy was established. The relationship between France and Britain became even more peaceful, since the monarch had anglophile inclinations and the elite brought to power had Britain as a political model (Tombs 332). Louis Philipp and his secretary Guizot aimed at gaining the respect of other states and wanted to make

France “a bulwark of liberty and peace” (Tombs 340). The French king and Queen Victoria had also good relations, and in 1843 Louis Philippe spoke of ‘cordiale entente’ between the two states, but things then went wrong because of a diplomatic problem in the colony of Tahiti (Tombs 341). Moreover, after the insurrection in 1848, Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte, later called Napoleon III, gained power in 1851 through a coup d’état, and established a dictatorship. France and Britain seemed, thus, destined to be enemies again, and Francophobia spread among British people. At that time the stereotypes about the French underwent a remarkable change. Indeed, if before the July Revolution they had been negatively defined by their “foppish mannerisms, skinniness [and] dandified appearance” (Tombs 352), during the dictatorship “the commonest symbols of Frenchness became army uniform and the fashionable military moustache and goatee” (Tombs 352). Moreover, as Varouxakis reports, “from the early Victorian period onwards” (132) the French were seen, as far as their international behaviour is concerned, as:

warlike; volatile; easily excitable; easily susceptible to being seduced by leaders promising them glory abroad; vindictive and envious *vis-à-vis* the English; unfair and impervious to considerations of justice; not respectful of international treaties, law and conventions; overambitious; inordinately vain [and] touchy. (132)

Under the reign of Queen Victoria, another important event—the Crimean War (1853-1856)—took place, which saw Britain and France fighting as allies against Russia. However, this last significant event in the history of the relationship between the two countries, as well as all the events happening later in the nineteenth and twentieth century, is not relevant to this research, since the latest text analysed, Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair*, dates back to the 1847-1848.

The story of this relationship involves notions of Francophobia and Francophilia, of conflict and contact, and in any case, reciprocal fear and admiration. In brief, according to and Colley, France, “Britain’s historic ‘natural enemy,’ [...] presented a touchstone by which Britain could at least negatively define itself” (qtd. in Simmons 8).

2.3. National Stereotypes in Travel Writing

2.3.1. Travel Writing and the Age of Travel

In the broad panorama of literary texts which can be the object of imagological studies, travel writing (or travel literature) offers a particular field of investigation. The definition of “[t]ravel writing’,” as presented by Meier, “include[s] narrative and descriptive texts, both non-fictional” (qtd. in Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology* 446), like for instance, “travel guide[s]” and “fictional,” like the “travel novel” (qtd. in Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology* 446). In some cases “travel writing is [also] accompanied by illustrations, which complete the text and shape the reader’s concepts of [...] foreign people and landscape” (Adams, qtd in Meier, qtd in Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology* 446), and its “central form is the travel account which typically narrates in chronological order the sequence of events that are experiences by one or more travellers between departure and arrival/return” (Adams, qtd in Meier, qtd in Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology* 446). As for the peculiar nature of the genre, Meier claims that this “depends on its individual mix of informative and poetical components” (qtd. in Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology* 446). Therefore, though it generally presents plausible facts about real places, travel writing is nonetheless a work of fiction, and this has to be always taken into account in its analysis. As Meier clarifies,

[t]ravel writing, *qua* writing, always contains a poetic function and is therefore never restricted to convey hard facts. It necessarily contradicts material reality and retains, at least partially, its autonomy as *textual construct* [emphasis added]. In addition, the depiction of a journey is usually written after it has ended; as a reiteration, it is one step further removed from the reality it describes. Any valid judgment on the authenticity of travel writing therefore necessitates attention to its poetic form. Its power to generate images has traditionally been heightened by a tendency among readers and critics to read the texts naïvely as an unrefracted reflection of reality – confusing representation with fact. The question of the empirical validity of a piece of travel writing, i.e. the correctness of its depiction of a visited area or culture, cannot be resolved conclusively by confronting it directly with the reality to which it refers. The poetic autonomy of a travel text is further strengthened by the historical relativity of its content and by the subjectivity of the traveller or author. Travel writing often reveals much more about the traveller than about the depicted areas, thus conveying hetero- and auto-images alike. [...] Travel account can, then, be viewed as historical sources of a double, but uneven expressiveness: the information on the visited areas remains precarious; of far greater value (in terms of the history of mentality and imagology) is the fact that these accounts reflect the changes in

the conditions influencing the perception of self and other. (qtd. in Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology* 446-447)

As also pointed out by Albrecht, in travel writing “[t]he projection of other nations [...] highlights the interdependence of (national) images of the foreign and those of one’s own self” (qtd. in Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology* 327). The description of foreign places and people offered by an author of travel literature is, thus, always seen through his/her individual and cultural perspective. In fact, “the traveller can only perceive what he [already] knows” (Meier, qtd. in Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology* 449). So, travel writing not only fulfills an informative function, by providing “new knowledge” for the reader, but also, and most importantly, for an imagological analysis, it constructs “otherness” by referring to “what is already known” (Meier, qtd. in Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology* 446). This means that, by constructing foreign nations and people as other, a nation also defines its own identity. Finally, in the past, given the difficulty for the majority of people to visit other countries, travel literature constituted for many the only source of travelling and seeing different places. For this reason, since most readers had no direct experience of what they read, this literary genre “could [easily] convey its images of the foreign all the more stereotypically” (Meier, qtd. in Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology* 449), and constituted an “authoritative body of imagined conventions” with great influence on the “subsequent travellers” (Meier, qtd. in Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology* 449).

Important in understanding and contextualizing travel writing is, of course, the phenomenon of travel and tourism. Though the terms are sometimes used with the same meaning, the difference between travel and tourism, according to the World Tourism Organization, lies in the latter being a moving around only “for a pre-determined and limited period of time” (Bonadei and Frediani, qtd. in Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology* 444). Concerning this difference, Morgan asserts that in the Victorian period “travellers” (14) considered themselves as “independent spirits” (14), able to experience foreign countries actively, as opposed to the “denigrated ‘tourists’” (14), depicted, on the contrary, as “passive, dependent followers and entrepreneurs” (14). Besides, for Morgan “travel is very *liberating*, in that it permits one to engage with the ‘Other’ and to forsake the strictures at home” (11-12). Travellers or tourists, British people in France were a considerable and constant presence starting from “the second

half, and particularly the last quarter of the eighteenth century” (Eagles 141). In fact, it has been reported that “40 000 English tourists travel[ed] in France biennially in the 1760s” (G. Chaussinand-Nogaret, qtd. in Eagles 98), while during the 1780s “the French were faced with the prospect of almost 100 000 British invading their territory each year” (G. Chaussinand-Nogaret, qtd. in Eagles 98). In particular, by referring to the Howard Letters from the Duke of Richmond to the Duke of Norfolk, Eagles points out that “the escalation in travelling post-1760 was inextricably tied with the reaction of the Whig élite to George III, the dullness of his court, as well as his perceived autocratic ambitions” (162). Moreover, he asserts that the middle class was influenced and inspired by the aristocracy and its habit in visiting the continent, as also reflected in guide books, but “the middling sort adventurer [...] was unlikely ever to infiltrate fully fashionable society abroad, although this was precisely the dream that lured him to Paris” (150). For Robert and Isabelle Tombs, then, the number of people in Europe travelling abroad increased considerably already from the third decade of the eighteenth century, approximately to the beginning of the French Revolution, and this mobility was caused, first of all, by an increased economical wealth, and secondly, by the curiosity and cosmopolitanism typical of the Enlightenment (66). Not only a mere means of pleasure and entertainment, visiting other places and confronting oneself with other ways of living gave also a considerable contribution to the formation of British national identity. Indeed, if travelling was increasing everywhere, “cross-Channel travelling, especially by the British, increased most” (Tombs 66). In particular, it has been observed that the number of British people crossing the Channel rose considerably, as it may not surprise, in periods of peace between the two nations, namely in the 1720s, the early 50s, the mid 60s, the 80s, and in 1802 (Tombs 66). Differently from the French, who never went to Britain to enjoy themselves, the principal reason for the British visiting France seemed to be just pleasure and entertainment, rather than education. In fact, “even when education was on the agenda, [for the English in France] fun was never far behind” (Tombs 67). In the second half of the eighteenth century many travel books and guides were written which provide “amusing or shocking anecdotes” (Tombs 67) together with “practical information” (Tombs 67), and nonetheless abounded in “political and social commentary” (Tombs 67). One popular example of this genre during the 1760s is John Millard’s “anonymously published” (Tombs 70) *Gentleman’s*

Guide in his Tour through France, a travel guide where the author, besides giving useful practical information, warns the readers to be cautious with the French, defining them as “vain[,] superficial” (qtd. in Tombs 70) and full of vices, and finally exhorts his fellow countrymen not to spend too much time “in the Country of our natural enemy” (qtd. in Tombs 70).

Furthermore, whereas earlier the people used to travel for specific purposes, during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries they started travelling just for pleasure and entertainment, and it is precisely at this time that travel writing reached its highest point (Meier, qtd. in Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology* 447). According to Morgan, then, in the Victorian period “[a] desire to boost social value and prestige also sent people to the Continent [, t]hat is, they crossed the Channel to acquire the manners, dancing steps and foreign phrases for shining in polite society at home” (11). The Victorian period, Morgan points out, was indeed “the age of the first standardized travel guidebooks, packaged tours and travellers’ cheques” (7) and travelling abroad was becoming possible also for “the middle, [and] in some cases, even the working classes” (7).

Some of the common ideas British travellers had of the French in the Victorian period are about manners and social attitudes, physical disposition, and liberty, especially for women. Concerning manners and sociality, some travellers reported a “casualness about bodily functions” (Morgan 134) and “a love of ease conducive to ‘a thousand little slovenlinesses most revolting to an English eye’” (Morgan 134), which was ascribed to “the warmer Continent climate” (Morgan 134); others spoke of the French easiness and liberty in “talking [and] laughing frolicking” (Morgan 149) in contrast to their lack of easiness in matter of elegance and furnishing (Morgan 149). As for physical disposition, some British travellers were convinced that the “English looked healthier than peoples elsewhere,” since they had sporting rather than intellectual inclination (Morgan 139). French girls especially, as reported by Miss Betham-Edwards, were not accustomed to practice physical exercises, not even to “regular walking out of doors” (qtd. in Morgan 139), because “recreational exercise” was considered “masculine, unwomanly, and eccentric to a feminine French mind” (qtd. in Morgan 139). Lastly, the notion of liberty during the Victorian period constituted a

“central component of British people’s collective identity” (Morgan 157) and British women considered themselves more free to move than their French counterparts.

2.3.2. Frances Trollope: Paris and the Parisians in 1835 (1836)

Frances Trollope (1779-1863) was an English author particularly famous for her travel accounts, like, for instance, *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832), and the following *Paris and the Parisians in 1835* (1836). Trollope started her tours in Europe and America around the late 1820-30s, and she was travelling in France exactly at the time in which, as pointed out on p. 19-20, the relationships between Britain and France were more cordial after the ascension to the French throne of the anglophile Louis Philippe in 1830. When Trollope started travelling “the travelbook genre was well established” (Heineman 121), but her books differed strongly from the “multitudes” of the time, since they were not “mere report[s] of scenery and events” (Heineman 122-123), but “the product of a unique observer” (Heineman 122-123) who “travelled with her own set of values, strong opinions, and beliefs” (Heineman 122-123). Moreover, as Heineman points out, although “other travelers with equally strong personalities had even more exciting adventures” (123), Trollope, thanks to her “novelist’s instinct, made people prominent in a genre where landscape, place, and exposition usually dominated” (123). Frances Trollope, a Tory as far as her political opinions are concerned, though “pretty vague” (Glendinning xii), had a “true radical” temperament (Glendinning xii). An independent and educated woman, indeed, “she was considered by the largely male critical establishments at her time as distressingly unfeminine, and condemned as ‘vulgar’, as lacking ‘good taste and decorum’ (Glendinning xii). Moreover, Cotugno argues that “Trollope’s political opinion never adhered strictly to any political platform” (242), but what is most significant is “the fact that during each episode of her life and writing she was trying to make sense of the relationship between governance and the possibility of stability for individuals and nations” (242).

Paris and the Parisians in 1835, published in 1836, is a travel account constituted by two volumes and an amount of seventy two letters which the writer addresses to a “dear friend” (Vol. I, I). Some images of places and people also appear occasionally to support the author’s descriptions. The historical background of the book is, as mentioned by Trollope, that of “Young France,” as it was at that time “the fashion to

call it” (Vol. I.), the period after the July Revolution of 1830 under the constitutional monarchy of the Citizen King Louis Philippe. As reported by Heineman, “[t]wenty-five years of Napoleonic war had whetted the public appetite for information and sketches of places so recently famous” (121).

In the Preface of *Paris and the Parisians*, Trollope states that “TRUTH, immortal TRUTH has been the object of ostensible worship to all who read and to all who listen” (Preface v), and in the first letter of the first volume she claims that her intention while visiting the French capital was to “describe what [she] saw and heard there, and to do this as faithfully as possible” (Vol. I., I.). Furthermore, she quite humbly adds that “though it is sufficiently easy to see and to hear, [she] feel[s] extremely doubtful if [she] shall always be able to understand” (Vol. I., I.). Although the book starts with a strong emphasis on the importance of objective truth, Trollope immediately declares that what the reader is going to read is the account of what *she* saw and heard, and that she will *try* to be faithful. In the Postscript, then, she warns that “the foregoing letters were written” “in this spirit of purely superficial observation.” Thus, the author does not present her work as totally objective, and throughout the book Trollope also uses dialogues to let the reader take part in her own reflections about some controversial themes, like for instance the condition of women on the two sides of the Channel. Lastly, if she confirms some stereotypes about the French, very often she negates the veracity of others, and in general she shows a positive and enthusiastic attitude towards France and French people.

Under the reign of Louis Philippe France’s, as Trollope reports, “ancient greatness” (Vol. I., I.) is gone, and the author declares that “as an Englishwoman, [she] ha[s] certainly no particular call to mourn over the fading hours of [her] country’s rival” (Vol. I., I.). None the less, in Letter II she argues that “so much that is admirable in Paris owes its origin to [Napoleon]”. Although France is “grow[ing] young again” (Vol. I., I.), for Trollope “Paris is still Paris” (Vol. I., I.), and by that she means that the “capital of the ‘Great Nation’” (Vol. I., I.) is still an enchanting place where people, many of them British, come to amuse themselves. In fact, Trollope says she shall “only think of amusing [her]self; a business never performed anywhere with so much ease as at Paris” (Vol. I., I.). Paris is thus described as a “gay, bright, noisy, restless city;—the city of the

living” (Vol. I, I.); its “air of gaiety [...] makes every sunshiny day look like a fête,” and “the cheerful tone of voice, the sparkling glances of the numberless bright eyes [...] produce an effect very like enchantment” (Vol. I, VI.). Then, concerning the Parisians, whose “temper” “the most careless observer may expect to see” as “genuine”, Trollope does not fall into stereotypes, and instead argues:

The genuine temper of the people?—Nay, but this phrase must be mended ere it can convey to you any idea of what is indeed likely to be made visible; for, as it stands, it might intimate that the people were of one temper; and anything less like the truth than this cannot easily be imagined. (Vol. I, II.)

As for French manners, Trollope strongly asserts that “[g]reat and important improvements in our national manners have already arisen from the intercourse which long peace has permitted,” but that “we have much to learn still,” “for the general tone of our daily associations might be [...] farther improved, did the best specimens of Parisian habits and manners furnish the examples” (Vol. I, VI.). In fact, for the author Parisian people enjoy companionship “with a degree of pleasant ease—an absence of all pomp, pride, and circumstance, of which unhappily we have no idea” (Vol. I, VI.), and for this ease French manners are thus considered “infinitely more agreeable than [British ones]” (Vol. I, VI.). Then, although French people are usually considered “victims of affectation instead of sorrow” (Vol. I, XXII.), and although their “manner of lamenting in public” during a mourning “seems so strange to [the British]” (Vol. I, XXII.), Trollope concludes that “they feel quite sincerely as ourselves [,] though they have certainly a very different way of showing it” (Vol. I, XXII.). As for their “superabundance of vanity” (Vol. I, VI), she assures her readers that the French “certainly show infinitely less of it in their intercourse with their fellow-creatures than we [British] do” (Vol. I, VI.). Finally, to those people who consider the morality of the French “so much less strict than our own” (Vol. I, VI.), Trollope answers in this way:

More scrupulous and delicate refinement in *the tone of manners* can neither be found nor wished for anywhere; and I do very strongly suspect, that many of the pictures of French depravity which have been brought home to us by our travellers, have been made after sketches taken in scenes and circles to which the introductions I so strongly recommend to my countrywomen could by no possibility lead them. It is not of such that I can be supposed to speak. (Vol. I, VI.)

Elegance was another peculiarity usually attributed to the French, which Trollope confirms in her accounts. In fact, she claims that taste in France is part of the national character (Vol. I., XXXVIII.), and of French women she says that

it is very rare to see a woman outrageously dressed in any way; and if you do, the chances are five hundred to one that she is not a Frenchwoman. An air of quiet elegant neatness is, I think, the most striking characteristic of the walking costume of the French ladies. (Vol. I., XIV.)

French ladies are, in Trollope's viewpoint, elegant and "indescribably attractive" (Vol. I., XXV.), and even the way they move, their "carriage," is "very singular" and "so impossible to imitate" (Vol. II., XLIII.). However, British women tried to imitate their counterparts beyond the Channel, and Trollope argues that "what is necessary for the wardrobe of a French woman of fashion, is necessary also for that of an English one" (Vol. II., XLIII.). In fact, as it emerges also from the Tables of Nationalities, the French cared much about their appearance and are leaders in matter of fashion and elegance, and in this respect Trollope reports:

Personal appearance, and all that concerns it, is, however, a very important feature in the daily history of this showy city; and although in this respect it has been made the model of the whole world, it nevertheless contrives to retain for itself a general look, air, and effect, which it is quite in vain for any other people to attempt imitating. Go where you will, you see French fashions; but you must go to Paris to see how French people wear them. (Vol. II., XLIII.)

If French women were leaders in manners and appearance, what was then their influence and role in society, and what about their freedom? This is a pretty controversial theme, on which Trollope reflects abundantly in her accounts, and she always does so by comparing the situation of women in France and Britain. In French society, she argues, "the women play a very distinguished part" (Vol. II., LI.) exactly like British women do, but "the women of France" (Vol. II., LI.), she thinks, "have more power and more influence than the women of England" (Vol. II., LI.). Indeed, Parisian women could converse more freely than the British about various topics, politics included (Vol. II., LI.). Then, as for marriage and women's personal freedom, Trollope finds things to be very different across the Channel, and the topic occupies the whole Letter XLII (Vol. I.). The substantial difference seemed to be that, while French women enjoyed life and freedom only once they are married, British women could do it only before becoming wives. With respect to this, Trollope comments that "[i]t should

seem as if the heart and soul of a French girl were asleep or at least dozing, till the ceremony of marriage awakened them” (Vol. I, XLII.). On the same matter, “Hugh Jerningham,” another woman traveller, “concluded while visiting Normandy” that “[i]n France marriage is the establishment of woman’s freedom” (qtd. in Morgan 177), whereas “in England, that of woman’s dependence” (qtd. in Morgan 177). Moreover, while in France the family used to choose the proper husband for the daughter and planned her marriage, in Britain women were free to accept or refuse a possible husband on their own (Vol. I. XLII.). On this point, Trollope has no doubts and she affirms that “[i]f [she] do[es] not greatly mistake the national character of Englishwomen, there are very few who could be found to exchange this privilege for the most perfect assurance that could be given of obtaining a marriage in any other way” (Vol. I., XLII.).

In the Postscript to the second volume of *Paris* Trollope openly declares and sums up her personal ideas about France at that particular time following the July Revolution. Trollope affirms to be an “*English conservative*” (Postscript) and as such she “may be supposed to feel for the popular violence which had banished from her throne its legitimate sovereign [Charles X]” (Postscript). However, as she says, the prosperity of France depends on her allegiance to the new king Louis Philippe, and France seems now to have reached a tranquil period of prosperity, which is a reason of tranquility for England and Europe as well.

[...N]ow, in this breathing-time that Heaven has granted her [France], she presents a spectacle of hopeful industry, active improvement, and prosperous energy, which is unequalled, I believe, in any European country except our own. (Postscript)

Moreover, “this superb kingdom” (Postscript), Trollope claims, “so long our rival, and now, as we firmly trust, our most assured ally, will establish its government on a basis firm enough to strengthen the cause of social order and happiness throughout all Europe” (Postscript). For her, in fact, the Revolution in France arose in a moment of “drunken enthusiasm” (Postscript), which is now finally over, and in this regard she asserts:

That love of glory which all the world seems to agree in attributing to France as one of her most remarkable national characteristics, must ever prevent her placing the care of her dignity and her renown in the hands of a mob. (Postscript)

As Cotugno also points out, for Trollope republicanism is designated “as an impracticable theory” (244-245).

Furthermore, in the Postscript Trollope also indirectly shows the illusory and contradictory nature of national stereotypes, by arguing that

[s]plendour and poverty—grace and grimace—delicacy and filth—learning and folly—science and frivolity, have often been observed among them in a closeness of juxta-position quite unexampled elsewhere; [...] I believe, that many things which by their very nature appear to be incompatible have been lately seen to exist in Paris, side by side, in a manner which certainly resembled nothing that could be found elsewhere. [...] Here a crown—there a cap of liberty. On this peg, a mantle embroidered with fleurs-de-lis; on that, a tri-coloured flag. In one corner, all the paraphernalia necessary to deck out the pomp and pageantry of the Catholic church; and in another, all the symbols that can be found which might enable them to show respect and honour to Jews, Turks, infidels, and heretics. (Postscript)

Trollope notices that some of the national characteristics and symbols attributed to France appear discordant, like, for instance, “science and frivolity” (Postscript), and that such a discordance of terms cannot be found in other countries the way it is found in France. Thus, France appears as a nation of contrasts, and if following the reasoning of Fyfe², the stereotypes themselves prove complete nonsense. However, Trollope seems quite conscious of the fallacious nature of stereotypes and of their negative consequences, and she responds very enthusiastically to the new period of peace and alliance between the two countries by claiming that

[t]he days, thank Heaven! are past when Englishmen believed it patriotic to deny their Gallic neighbours every faculty except those of making a bow and of eating a frog, while they were repaid by all the weighty satire comprised in the two impressive words JOHN BULL. We now know each other better—we have had a long fight, and we shake hands across the water with all the mutual good-will and respect which is generated by a hard struggle, bravely sustained on both sides, and finally terminated by a hearty reconciliation. (Postscript)

In this regard, Cotugno indeed claims that for Trollope “[d]evotion to any [political] theory must be made secondary to the visible comfort and stability of the majority of the people” (244).

²See 2.1.3.

Like Trollope, other travellers reported and reflected on the situation of women in France and Britain. Indeed, Morgan argues that “[a] number of travel journals drew distinctions between the liberties afforded to married and single women, whether in Britain or Europe” (177) and “[m]ost travelers concluded that married English women had fewer liberties than those on the Continent, and single women more” (177). As for the “Continental women, once married, were freer to say and do what they please than their English counterparts” (Morgan 177). The woman traveller Matilda Betham-Edwards, for instance, claimed that French girls were treated as children before being married, no matter their age (qtd. in Morgan 177). In conclusion, British women, comparing themselves with the women on the Continent, realised that, although less free at home, they were advantaged in terms of “parental control and occupational opportunities” (Morgan 177-178).

To sum up, with the increase of tourism in the nineteenth century, travel literature became a predominant and very popular genre. British travellers, many of them women, not only described new places and offered practical information to the reader, but they also observed and reflected on major differences between foreign people and their own. Finally, in this comparison with other people on the continent, sometimes adopting or constructing stereotypes, sometimes challenging them, British travellers were discovering and forging their own national identity.

3. British Ladies and their French Antagonists in Epistolary Novels: Frances Burney's (1779) and Maria Edgeworth's *Leonora* (1806)

Frances Burney's *Evelina* and Maria Edgeworth's *Leonora* are two epistolary novels that offer a significant portrayal of French people in the British context between the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century. The novels have in common the epistolary form, which gives the author the possibility of "present[ing] an intimate view of the character's thoughts and feelings" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*), and the negative representation of French characters. Besides, in both novels the young protagonists rely upon older and wise persons to be advised—Evelina on her foster father, Leonora on her mother—and, since from these parental figures both protagonists learn how to behave properly, the two novels can be defined as didactic. In addition, *Evelina* can also be considered as a novel of manners, where "the characters are differentiated by the degree to which they measure up to the uniform standard, or ideal, of behaviour" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*), while *Leonora* differs for its strong disapproval of the culture of sensibility. Moreover, whereas in *Leonora* the French characters are depicted as bad, in *Evelina* they are represented more as grotesque and ridiculous rather than as really evil. Finally, in both novels the French characters are antagonists to the British naïve protagonists, and seem to prevent their way to happiness.

3.1. *Evelina*: Madame Duval - the Artificial Woman, and her *Beau Monsieur Du Bois*

Evelina, or, A Young Lady's Entrance into the World was first published anonymously in 1778³ and it "was an instant success" (Nicolson 25). The novel, in three volumes, is actually the sequel of 'The History of Caroline Evelyn', which Frances Burney burnt in 1767, and which narrated the story of Evelina's mother. *Evelina* is the story of an orphan girl, brought up by the Reverend Mr. Villars in the safe English countryside, who tries to find her way in London society, where she goes in the company of the young Maria Mirvan and of her family. Naïve and natural, Evelina must learn how to

³ The novel was first published in 1778, but the text used by Doody "is based on the third edition of *Evelina*, which appeared in 1779 after the second edition earlier that same year" (Doody, "A Note on the Text" xlv).

behave properly in a society regulated by precise codes, and her lack of experience leads her to several embarrassing situations in the course of the novel. Finally, her good character is rewarded and the happy ending assured.

As Doody argues, “[t]he story of Frances Burney’s works is deeply involved also with the story of her life” (*Frances Burney* 9), and some facts in the author’s life might help to understand the way in which the French characters are portrayed in the novel. A first relevant element in Frances Burney’s biography is that her grandmother Sleepé (née Dubois), with whom she “spent a great deal of time” and “whom she deeply loved,” (Doody, *Frances Burney* 23) was French and a “pious Roman Catholic” (Doody, *Frances Burney* 23). The relation with her grandmother, according to Doody, “gave [Burney] a sense of dual heritage” (*Frances Burney* 23), and, therefore, “Frances was not perfectly English, or rather British, [...], for on her mother’s side she was partly French” (*Frances Burney* 23). In addition, Burney’s sisters Esther and Susanne attended a school in France in order to improve their French, whereas Frances was left in England probably for fear that “she would be too influenced by French Catholicism, being more sensitive than her sisters” (Hemlow, qtd. in Chisholm 18), and since she showed already “too great fondness for Catholicism” (Hemlow qtd. in Doody, *Frances Burney* 23). The preoccupation of Burney’s father in this respect was due to the fact that in Britain at that time Roman Catholicism was not just unpopular, but it “was still officially proscribed, and those who practiced it were subject to special disabilities in law” (Doody, *Frances Burney* 23). Unlike her sisters, since she could not properly perfect her French in France, Frances Burney was “shy of speaking French in public” (Doody, *Frances Burney* 23), exactly like Evelina in the novel, who prefers to speak with Monsieur Du Bois in English, although “his English is very bad” (Burney 217). Another important fact in Burney’s life which relates to France is her marriage, in 1793, with the French refugee General Alexandre d’Arblay, with whom she lived in France from 1802, the year of the Treaty of Amiens, to 1812. However, this event occurred long after the publication of *Evelina* and, therefore, it cannot be considered influential as far as the portrayal of the French characters in the novel is concerned. Finally, the historical context as regards the relations between Britain and France in the years preceding the publication of *Evelina* is also relevant in the analysis of the depiction of the French characters in the novel. In fact, as explained by Eagles, in 1763 the Treaty of

Paris “formed a watershed in Anglo-French relations with peace and a huge escalation in cross-Channel visiting [...] and this period of tranquility was swiftly and directly characterized as one in which the members of [British] fashionable society turned to France” (27).

The French characters in *Evelina* are Madame Duval and Monsieur Du Bois. Madame Duval is Evelina’s grandmother on her mother’s side. She is actually British and she was only a barmaid at the time when she ran off to France with Evelina’s grandfather, after whose death she married the French Monsieur Duval. Having spent such a long time in France pretending to be French, Madame Duval presents herself as a Frenchwoman and she “uses her pseudo-Frenchness as a cover for her slips in English pronunciation, diction and grammar” (Doody, Introduction xxx). However, what is important for my analysis of the character is that Madame Duval is perceived, and treated by the other characters, as if she actually was French. Furthermore, despite her humble origins, Madame Duval also pretends to belong to the genteel society. As for Monsieur Du Bois, he is her “*cicisbeo* and presumably her lover” (Doody, Introduction xxx).

Madame Duval makes her appearance in the novel first in Letter XIV, but her name is actually the first to appear in the first letter, which Lady Howard writes to the Reverend Mr. Villars. The words used by Lady Howard, which introduce us to the character of Madame Duval, are that “she is totally at a loss in what manner to behave” (Burney 11), and that “she seems desirous to repair the wrongs she has done, yet wishes the world to believe as her blameless” (Burney 11). Madame Duval makes her indirect entrance in the novel as a negative and dubious character. The wrongs she has done refer to the fact that Madame Duval abandoned her daughter, who was pregnant with Evelina at that time, and now she wants to repair her errors by taking her grandchild with her to Paris in order to give her a polite education. Madame Duval, as described by Lady Howard, cannot behave properly, she has an “unnatural behaviour,” and she is “vulgar and illiterate” (Burney 12). Besides, Mr. Villars asserts that Madame Duval is “by no means a proper companion or guardian for a young woman,” since “she is at once uneducated and unprincipled[,] ungentle in her temper, and unamiable in her manners” (Burney 13). Lastly, she is defined as a “wretched woman” (Burney 13).

Evelina first meets Madame Duval in Letter XIV. While waiting for the coach outside the theatre, Evelina tells the Reverend, “a tall elderly woman brushed quickly past us” (Burney 57) and, having lost her company, she looked for help. After being insulted, the woman finally declares to be “no common person” (Burney 57), but “a person of fashion,” that is Madame Duval (Burney 57). This letter is rich in negative connotations referring to Madame Duval’s character and her supposed Frenchness. Evelina, for instance, says that “there was something foreign in her accent, thought it was difficult to discover whether she was an English or a French woman” (Burney 54), and Miss Mirvan asserts that the woman is a foreigner (Burney 55). Then, Captain Mirvan claims that “she may be a woman of the town” (Burney 55), hence a prostitute, giving already an idea of the grotesque appearance of Madame Duval. Significant is also the fact that when the Captain and his company first meet Madame Duval, they have just been to a “comedy, in *French* and Italian” [emphasis added] (Burney 54), and that Evelina refers how everyone enjoyed the show “except the Captain, who has a fixed and most prejudiced hatred of whatever is not English” (Burney 54). This affirmation introduces the Captain’s nationalist and xenophobic behaviour towards Madame Duval, which he keeps up throughout the whole novel.

Captain Mirvan’s attitude towards foreign people has also to be considered within his social position. In fact, as Chisholm points out, his “unconventional behaviour and uncouth language are excused because he is a sea captain (a noble profession in those days of constant naval engagements with France and Spain)” (51). Besides, according to Eagles, given his social position, “Mirvan is content to consider the aristocracy and the French as one and the same, and equally deserving of damnation” (Burney 59). When Madame Duval reacts to the unkindness of the Captain by saying that his countrymen are “a parcel of brutes” (Burney 55), the Captain indeed answers: “[w]ho wants you? [...] ‘do you suppose, *Madam French*, we have not enough of other nations to pick our pockets already?’” [emphasis added] (Burney 55-56). The “suspicion of other countries” (*Evelina* 461, note 90) expressed by the Captain, Doody explains, accumulated during the American wars and “included allies such as Prussia, Hanover and Austria, as well as enemies like France” (*Evelina* 461, note 90). Furthermore, the Captain calls Madame Duval “Mrs. Frog” (Burney 57), which was an offensive nickname used in Britain to refer to the French, and which derived from the French

practice of eating frogs, seen by the Britons as “a symptom of the universal poverty of France” (Doody, *Evelina* 461, note 93). Other offensive ways in which Madame Duval is referred to by the Captain are also: “*the old French hag*” (Burney 59), “the old Beldame [(witch)]” (Burney 69), “old Madam French” (Burney 71, 433, 436), “the old Frenchwoman” (Burney 152), and “Madame Fury” (Burney 95). Besides, Sir Clement Willoughby, mate of the Captain in his tricks on Madame Duval, calls her “[t]he Termagant Madame Duval” (Burney 365), which is “the name for a violent deity” (Doody, *Evelina* 496, note 49), and “the virago Madame Duval” (Burney 381), meaning “[a] man-like woman, loud and overbearing” (Doody, *Evelina* 497, note 61). The last nicknames make reference to the temperament of Madame Duval, who is described as unable to suppress her feelings and as “incapable of controlling her passion by reason” (Hamilton 438). In addition, *Evelina*, referring to Madame Duval’s reactions to the Captain’s sarcastic behaviour, speaks of Madame Duval’s rage (Burney 98) and of “her violence and volubility” (Burney 179). Furthermore, she says that “she really trembled with passion” (Burney 64), that “she was going into hysterics” (Burney 86), and even that “[f]ury started into her eyes, and passion inflamed every feature” (Burney 229). Finally, Mr. Villars refers to “the violence of her disposition” (Burney 142). This inability to control herself typical of Madame Duval might be ascribed at the time to her low origins, but also to her being, or pretending to be, French. In fact, one of the characteristics traditionally attributed to the French is their fickleness, which, as Florack explains, not only “has been frequently associated with the (supposedly) great love of fashion of the French” (156) and thus with their “inconstancy and the urge for renewal” (156), but it has also been connected, during the revolutionary period, to the notion of “‘passion’ (reminiscent of the classical concept of *furor*)” (156), which “discredits the Revolution as an expression of French immorality, especially once it radicalized” (156).

Referring to the fact that Captain Mirvan and Madame Duval meet for the first time after a theatrical performance, Doody argues that “the Captain and Madame Duval are but puppets” (Introduction xix), meaning that they “respond to the artifices imposed by nationality [and] gender [...]” (Introduction xix). Besides, they both work “at self-representation” (Doody, Introduction xx-xxi), in the sense that “Madame Duval (mis)represents herself as French and as young and beautiful – with the help of a certain quantity of rouge and a great deal of assurance” (Doody, Introduction xx-xxi), while

“Captain Mirvan [...] represents himself as Englishman and as authority” (Doody, Introduction xxi). In short, although they appear in opposition to each other, Madame Duval and Captain Mirvan can be considered similar since they “truly believe in their representation of themselves” (Doody, Introduction xxi). Furthermore, Madame Duval represents femininity “[the] (super-‘feminine’ and not quite feminine at all)” (Doody, *Frances Burney* 52), whereas Captain Mirvan represents the “ultra-‘masculine’ as to be unmanly, inhumane, not quite humane” (Doody, *Frances Burney* 52). Captain Mirvan “is proud of being English and male” (Doody, *Frances Burney* 52), and “as a true male[,] he despised old women [while] as loyal Englishman hates the French” (Doody, *Frances Burney* 52). The conflict between the Captain and Madame Duval, between masculinity and femininity, is finally also the conflict between British and French culture. In this respect, Robert and Isabelle Tombs explain that while “Britishness was masculine” (450), “Frenchness was feminine” (450), and that “[t]his distinction was commonplace as early as the eighteenth century” (450). In fact, “British culture appeared more masculine, more physical, and arguably more brutal [than French culture]” (Tombs 104). Moreover, not only national symbols (John Bull for the Britons and Marianne for the French) were gendered, but also activities. For instance, British sport and industry were considered masculine and opposed to feminine French activities like cooking and textile manufacture (Tombs 450).

One of the most evident characteristics of Madame Duval is her vulgarity and artificiality, due to her excessive attempt to prove to be what in reality she is not, namely French, aristocratic, and young. In these terms, Madame Duval appears as the opposite of Evelina, who is, on the contrary, portrayed as really young and natural in her manners. In addition, Madame Duval is often referred to as a witch and a grotesque creature, whereas Evelina, in Mr. Villars’s words, is described as “innocent as an angel and artless as purity itself” (Burney 21). In this regard, Robert and Isabelle Tombs explain that a “basic contrast was the idea, inherited from the eighteenth century, that Britain stood for nature, and France for civilization” (449). Concerning the opposition between nature and artificiality, embodied by Evelina and Madame Duval respectively, Lord Orville asserts in the novel that ““the difference of natural and of artificial colour, seems to [him] very easily discerned; that of Nature is mottled, and varying; that of art, *set*, and *too* smooth [...]” (Burney 88). Besides, Evelina mentions “the vulgarity of

Madame Duval” (Burney 381) and she refers to the artificiality of her appearance, by claiming: “what her age is, I do not know, but she really looks to be less than fifty. She dresses very gaily, paints very high, and the traces of former beauty are still very visible in her face” (Burney 59). The abundant use of make-up and her extravagant clothes characterise Madame Duval in her attempt to look young, but the result is just that of appearing artificial, thus vulgar, and ridiculous. In fact, as Robert and Isabelle Tombs point out, if “[s]ome [British visitors in France] were titillated, others were repelled, by the sophisticated artificiality of fashion” (104). An example of this repulsion is given in the novel in the episode of the ditch, when Madame Duval is brutally treated by Captain Mirvan and Sir Clement. On this occasion, Evelina reports how the woman appears to her eyes, in a depiction that, stressing the artificiality and extravagance of Madame Duval’s look, makes her appear almost a monstrous creature.

Her head-dress had fallen off; her linen was torn; her negligee had not a pin left in; her petticoats she was obliged to hold on; and her shoes were perpetually slipping off. She was covered with dirt, weeds, and filth, and her face was really horrible, for the pomatum and powder from her head, and the dust from the road, were quite *pasted* on her skin by her tears, which, with her *rouge*, made so frightful a mixture, that she hardly looked human. (Burney 165-166)

Furthermore, Doody argues that Madame Duval “[...] opts for the perfection of the artificial [and that h]er own affectation is then shown up by the forced application of smelling-salts which painfully afflict her biological and unredeemably physical nostrils” (Introduction xxix). Finally, Doody points out that Madame Duval, “vain-overdressed, highly painted, simpering, and rude” (*Frances Burney* 50), has the typical characteristics of a dame of the stage, or pantomime dame, and that, having “only ‘feminine’ interests (dress, parties, gossip), [...] she is a compound of ‘feminine’ affectations” (*Frances Burney* 50).

Apart from her affectation and eccentricity, what seems particularly shocking about Madame Duval in the other characters’ view is that she behaves as if she was much younger than she actually is. Her make-up, her obsessive interest in fashion, her passion for dance, and her attitude towards men, are all the more unpopular because Madame Duval is an old woman. First of all, she is extremely vain and cares a lot about clothes. When Captain Mirvan tells her during their first encounter that she “would much sooner be taken for a wash-woman” (Burney 56), Madame Duval asks him: “did you ever see a

wash-woman in such a gown as this?" (Burney 56) Then, when she describes how she and Monsieur Du Bois fell into the mud while he was holding her in his arms, she says: "I can't think how it happened, for I'm not such great weight" (Burney 72), showing a great self-confidence in her physical appearance. After this episode, Madame Duval's first preoccupation is her new Lyons negligee, which is spoilt, and Evelina reports how she "lamented, very mournfully, the fate of her Lyons silk, and protested she had rather have parted with all the rest of her wardrobe, because it was the first gown she had bought to wear upon leaving off her weeds" (Burney 74). Madame Duval cries about all her things being spoilt and exclaims pathetically: "[...]of all the unluckinesses, that ever I met, this is the worst! For, do you know, I bought it but the day before I left Paris?—Besides, into the bargain, my cap's quite gone; [...]" (Burney 171). Madame Duval's obsession with clothes and appearance is perceived as quite odd in a woman of her age, and, in this regard, Evelina says: "I should have thought it impossible for a woman at her time of life to be so very difficult in regard to dress. What she may have in view, I cannot imagine, but the labour of the toilette seems the chief business of her life" (Burney 173). According to Florack, one of the characteristics of the Frenchwoman, as she was traditionally perceived, is precisely her use of fashion and cosmetics to display herself (qtd. in Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology* 157). Furthermore, in seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe vanity was considered one of the negative sides of French civilization and manners, being associated with absolutism and the court, together with "showiness, arrogance, frivolity, superficiality and dishonesty" (Florack, qtd. in Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology* 155).

In matter of fashion and customs, Madame Duval is convinced of the superiority of the French, and she is proud of maintaining certain French habits even when they are in evident contrast to those used in Britain. Indeed, as explained by Robert and Isabelle Tombs, until "some of the French elite began from the 1760s onwards to wear English clothes in France" (90), "French fashions had dominated in both countries, and continued to do so for highly formal occasions" (90). An example of Madame Duval's belief in French superiority is given by her discussion with Captain Mirvan about the British habits of wearing hats in public places. For British ladies, indeed, "a bare-headed woman was considered totally immodest" (Doody, *Evelina* 462, note 100), but "the same custom did not apply in France" (Doody, *Evelina* 462, note 100). Madame

Duval affirms that this habit gives the ladies “a monstrous vulgar look” and that “[t]here’s no such a thing to be seen in Paris” (Burney 65). Another example of Madame Duval’s obstinacy towards British rules is her habit of receiving “guest of both sexes in the bedchamber, a custom which grew in the French literary coteries of *précieuses* in the seventeenth century” (Doody, *Evelina* 463, note 116). In this regard, Evelina tells Mr. Villars that she “found Madame Duval at breakfast in bed, though Monsieur Du Bois was in the chamber” (Burney 74). As explained by Doody, indeed, “[v]ery few English ladies of reputation found it appropriate to receive parties while abed” (*Evelina* 463, note 116). This French habit, therefore, “so much astonished [Evelina], that [she] was, involuntarily, retiring” (Burney 74), and Madame Duval “laughed very heartily at [her] ignorance of foreign customs” (Burney 74). As these examples show, Madame Duval does not respect British habits and rules, and for Doody, she “has broken through a lot of prohibitions and regulations, in the process forfeiting all claims to recognition in English society” (Introduction xxx).

Madame Duval is an old woman and old women in Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth century did not play an active role in society, nor could enjoy they the same pleasures as young and unmarried women. As Trollope also points out in *Paris and the Parisian in 1835*, the situation was quite different in France, where married and old women had more advantages than young and unmarried girls. Having spent such a long time in France, Madame Duval finds the social position of old women in Britain absurd, and thus she refuses to adapt to the customs of “*so beastly a nation*” (Burney 74), as she defines Britain. During one of her numerous quarrels with Captain Mirvan, Madame Duval claims that in France they don’t distinguish old from young women as they do in Britain, and the Captain replies that the French are fools (Burney 65). Moreover, an old woman in Britain is not supposed to dance or enjoy the company of men, but Madame Duval does not care about these cultural restrictions, and, in consequence, her behaviour seems to the British improper and ridiculous. With respect to this, Doody states that “[Madame Duval] has defied society’s strictures and all the contemporary formulae that decree that a woman past childbearing years has no value, and must have neither sexual desires nor satisfaction” (Introduction xxx). When Madame Duval’s nephew, young Branghton, is informed that she is going to the Hampstead ball with Evelina and Mr. Smith, the thing causes wonder and incredulity.

‘To a ball!’ cried, ‘Why, what, is Aunt going to a ball? Ha, ha, ha!’
 ‘Yes, to be sure,’ cried Madame Duval, ‘I don’t know nothing need hinder me.’
 ‘And pray, Aunt, will you *dance* too?’
 ‘Perhaps I may; but I suppose, Sir, that’s none of your business, whether I do or not.’ [emphasis added] (Burney 246)

The Branghtons are ignorant of good manners and in the middle class, to which they belong, “young men and young women go out together unsupervised,” whereas “in the upper classes young ladies going to balls were always accompanied by mother or chaperone” (Doody, *Evelina* 484, note 110). So, the reaction of young Branghton is both due to the fact that Madame Duval is accompanying Mr. Smith and Evelina to a ball, and to the fact that she wants to dance. Madame Duval desires to amuse herself and nothing seems to stop her, despite other people’s opinions. She does not want to go to the ball as a chaperone, and she “declar[es] her intention to dance the two first dances with [Mr. Smith]” (Burney 248). Evelina comments on the fact by admitting that “[she] was quite astonished, not having had the least idea [Madame Duval] would have consented to, much less proposed, such an exhibition of her person” (Burney 248). As far as dancing is concerned, Doody argues that “[Madame Duval] insists upon defying English custom, which dictates that an older woman should not dance” (*Evelina* 484, note 110). In fact, in Britain at the time “[c]haperones were expected to look on, or to play cards [and] a woman of thirty or even twenty-five might be considered as too old to dance” (Doody, *Evelina* 484, note 110). The dismay felt by Evelina in seeing the old woman dancing is expressed in a way that stresses the oddity and vulgarity of Madame Duval, but which also makes us feel pity for her: “[s]he danced in a style so uncommon; her age, her showy dress, and an unusual quantity of *rouge*, drew upon her the eyes, and, I fear, the derision of the whole company” (Burney 248). The ridicule which Madame Duval provokes with her passion for dancing makes Captain Mirvan exclaim at the Pump-room that ““this would be a most excellent place for old Madame French to dance a fandango in!”” (Burney 436). Finally, the Captain only hopes that Madame Duval comes to Evelina’s wedding in order to make fun of her by “purpos[ing] to dance a new-fashioned jig [...]” (Burney 434).

Madame Duval is the antagonist of Evelina in the sense that she appears as the one who tries to thwart Evelina’s serenity with the plan of bringing the young girl to Paris and separate her from the people she loves. Evelina says that Madame Duval “talked

very much of taking [her] to Paris, and said [she] greatly wanted the polish of a French education” (Burney 74-75). In fact, at that time France represented the centre of polite society and “salons organized by and around women were the centres of cultural activity” (Tombs 77). Madame Duval is depicted as a person who cannot be dissuaded from her plans. For Mr. Villars, in fact, she is “so little inured to disappointment” (Burney 180), and, as reported by Evelina, she is “never to be dissuaded from a scheme she has once formed” (Burney 274). Evelina’s concern due to Madame Duval is probably the same Frances Burney felt in her life about her stepmother. According to Doody, in fact, Madame Duval would represent the caricature of Frances’s Burney unwanted stepmother, Elizabeth Allen Burney, who married Burney’s father after the death of his first wife and Burney’s mother Esther Sleepe (Introduction x). However, in the novel, although she feels aversion towards her grandmother, Evelina often shows pity for her. Besides, the character of Madame Duval, sometimes odious, is treated so badly by Captain Mirvan and Sir Clement that in some circumstances the reader may even side with her. At any rate, Madame Duval plays an important role in the novel and, for Doody, she “represents something deeply important to Burney” (Introduction xxxi). In fact, it has to be noticed that “the author’s own beloved grandmother Sleepe was born Dubois [exactly like Madame Duval’s lover], and was genuinely the French or half-French woman the heroine’s grandmother pretends to be” (Doody, Introduction xxxi).

Madame Duval not only uses rouge and dances in public places, but she also has a French lover, Monsieur Du Bois, whom she is not ashamed of taking with her everywhere—“I never go no-where without him” (Burney 62). The French gentleman is first mentioned by Evelina in Letter XVI, when Madame Duval takes him with her to tea to Mrs. Mirvan. The Captain “looked very much displeased” (Burney 62) at his presence, and said to Madame Duval: “[p]ray who asked you to bring that there spark with you” (Burney 62). Captain Mirvan calls Monsieur Du Bois throughout the novel by several derisory nicknames—like “*French beau*” (Burney 71), “*grand-mama’s beau*” (Burney 82), “*Monseer French*” (Burney 82), “*Monseer Slippery*” (Burney 154), “the French lubber” (Burney 184)—and expresses his xenophobia by telling him: “[d]o you know, *Monseer*, that you’re the first Frenchman that I ever let come into my house?” (Burney 62). Monsieur Du Bois does not speak English and bows as if he had received a compliment, which makes him, probably, appear even more of a fool in the

Captain's eyes. Captain Mirvan shows the same lack of respect towards the Frenchman that he shows towards Madame Duval, and considers the French superficial and not patriotic. When Madame Duval says that the English are not polite since, unlike the French, they speak about religion and politics, the Captain indeed says that “‘it’s a sign they take no more care of their souls than of their country, and so both one and t’other go to old nick’” (Burney 66). Captain's Mirvan further provokes the Frenchman by asking him: “‘But *what, what* do they do, these famous *Monseers*?’ [...] ‘can’t tell you us? do they game?—or drink?—or fiddle?—or are they jockies?—or do they spend all their time in flumming old women?’” (Burney 66) The French are thought by the Captain to be people who spend their time gaming and flirting. As Eagles points out, “[t]he prevalence of gaming was[, as sexual licence,] laid at the door of French amoral behaviour” (Burney 33). In addition, when Madame Duval claims that the Captain should go abroad and that he would be changed by the experience, the Captain expresses his contempt by saying: “[w]hat, I suppose you’d have me learn to cut capers?—and dress like a monkey?—and palaver in French gibberish?—hay, would you?—And powder, and daub, and make myself up, like some other folks?” (Burney 67), and “‘as to your hair-pinchers and shoe-blacks, you may puff off their manners, and welcome’” (Burney 67). The Captain recurs to some popular stereotypes about the French, namely their passion for dance and fashion, their habit of using make-up, and that of talking nonsense. As far as the last habit is concerned, in eighteenth century “[s]alons gave French culture a characteristic sociability, organized round conversation,” but some critics argued that, in the art of conversation, for the French “style was more important than substance” (Tombs 77).

Captain Mirvan enjoys himself by playing dirty tricks on Madame Duval and on her lover, as, for instance, when Madame Du Bois falls into the mud with Madame Duval. Monsieur Du Bois is sure that the Captain has something to do with the incident, otherwise, he thinks, he would have helped him, but the Captain reacts to Monsieur Du Bois's suspicion by recurring to a stereotypical image which Madame Duval has about his own countrymen: “[...] do you suppose I had forgot I was an *Englishman*, a filthy, beastly *Englishman*?” (Burney 82). The Captain also refers to this image of his own people when he says to Madame Duval: “[...] I know your opinion of our nation too well, to affront you by supposing a *Frenchman* would want *my* assistance to protect

you. Did you think that *Monseer* here, and I, had changed characters, and that he should pop you into the mud, and I help you out of it? Ha, ha, ha!” (Burney 83). If it is for Madame Duval a negative side of British culture, the lack of gentility towards women appears here to be a source of pride for the Captain, probably indicative of his masculinity, which he expresses and constructs in his opposition to the Frenchman. On this occasion, Captain Mirvan tells Madame Duval that her lover could have played her a trick on purpose, and he explains this by mocking the French as good dancers.

‘O’ purpose! Ay, certainly, who ever doubted that? Do you think a *Frenchman* ever made a blunder? If he had been some clumsy-footed *English* fellow, indeed, it might have been accidental: but what the devil signifies all your hopping and capering with you dancing-masters, if you can’t balance yourselves upright?’ (Burney 83)

Dance, indeed, played an important role in French society and “French ladies and gentlemen were schooled by dancing masters into what Chesterfield praised as ‘an habitual genteel carriage’” (Tombs 74), but the British “mocked French (and French-style) pretentiousness, foppishness and the careful pose taught by the dancing master” (Tombs 100). However, Monsieur Du Bois is sure, in reason, of the Captain’s guilt in pushing him into the mud, and argues in French that “he did not come from a nation of brutes, and consequently, that to willfully offend any lady, was, to him, utterly impossible” (Burney 84). France is here defended, in opposition to England, as the nation of gentility and respect towards women, which Captain Mirvan definitely lacks. Courtesy was also among the characteristics attributed to the French, but if some Britons considered it “‘charming’” (Tombs 446), others thought it was “‘affected’” (Tombs 446).

Another stereotypical characteristic attributed to the French, women and men, was superficiality. In respect to this, a dispute arises at the Cox’s Museum, where jewels are exposed, which is for Madame Duval “[...] the grandest, prettiest, finest sight that ever [she] see[s], in England” (Burney 85). The Captain says that this could be in Madame’s French taste, but that for him “[...] it’s all *kickshaw* work” (Burney 85), “a trifle, something unsubstantial” (Doody, *Evelina* 465, note 133), and asks her: “‘will you tell me the *use* of all this? For I’m not enough of a conjurer to find it out” [emphasis added] (Burney 85). Madame Duval replies: “‘Lord, if every thing’s to be useful!—” (Burney 85), and Captain Mirvan answers back by arguing that “[...he’s] no

Frenchman, and should relish something more *substantial*” [emphasis added] (Burney 85). The superficiality of the French was in contrast to British pragmatism, which is embodied by Captain Mirvan. Indeed, as explained by Robert and Isabelle Tombs, “the British valued the ‘practical’” whereas “the French [valued] ‘the elegant’” (449). If “[t]he British were ‘bulldogs’,” “the French (in British imagery) [were] ‘poodles’, decorative, unnatural and impractical” (Tombs 449). Furthermore, also the politeness considered typical of the French was dismissed by critics “as mere external show” (Tombs 105).

In the quarrel concerning the utility of jewels, Captain Mirvan says to Madame Duval that “[her] person of taste must be either a coxcomb, or a Frenchman; though, for the matter of that, ‘tis the same thing” (Burney 85). Therefore, not only Frenchwomen, as in the case of Madame Duval, but also Frenchmen were considered by British men as vain, and thus extremely feminine. As pointed out by Robert and Isabelle Tombs, “Frenchmen dressed more elaborately, and so class resentment as well as xenophobia was a potential cause of hostility” and “[t]he French feared being insulted in the London streets” (75). In the Captain’s view, Frenchmen are not real men, and, in this respect, he claims:

‘The truth is [...] that in all this huge town, so full as it is of folks of all sorts, there i’n’t so much as one public place, beside the play-house, where a man, that’s to say, a man who *is* a man, ought not to be ashamed to shew his face. T’other day they got me to a ridotto; but I believe it will be long enough before they get me to another. I knew no more what to do with myself, than if my ship’s company had been metamorphosed into Frenchmen. Then, again, there’s your famous Ranelagh, that you make such a fuss about,—why what a dull place it that!—it’s the worst of all.’ (Burney 122-123)

Some British men, “the fashionable francophile ‘macaronis’” (Tombs 75) were also influenced by French fashion and were largely criticised, and, according to Eagles, “[t]he fact that English fops and Frenchmen were seen to be indistinguishable is [particularly] important” (27). Indeed, the contempt felt by the Captain towards the Frenchmen, as far as their femininity is concerned, is the same felt towards his countrymen fops, such as the “Frenchified beau” Mr. Lovel (Eagles 41), who not by chance uses many French expressions. The Captain tells him that “[...] the men, *as they call themselves*, are no better than monkeys” [emphasis added] (Burney 125). Moreover, “Mr. Lovel is asked by Captain Mirvan whether he has a brother, having just

seen his spitting image in the street [...and] the ‘brother’ turns out to be no more than an ape ‘full dressed, and extravagantly a-la-mode’” (Eagles 30). Monkeys and apes were a popular symbol of mockery indicating the “imitativeness” typical of Frenchmen—“too polite, too contrived and enslaved to convention and fashion” (Tombs 100)—, and referring generally to “anything that originated in France” (Eagles 31), or imitative of French fashion, as in the case of Mr. Lovel. Furthermore, as Eagles points out, “the possibility that it was not just the élite, but professionals and even the lower orders that were vulnerable to the French advance added to the fear of the phenomenon [of the Frenchified British fops]” (27). The Captain is indeed afraid that even the sailors will be soon effeminate like the French and claims:

‘[...] I’m almost as much ashamed of my countrymen, as if I was a Frenchman, and I believe in my heart there i’n’t a pin to chuse between them; and, before long, we shall hear the very sailors talking that lingo, and see never a swabber without a bag [(bagwig)] and a sword.’ (Burney 125)

Captain Mirvan represents what, in his own idea, is the true English man, as opposed to the Frenchman or the British ‘macaronis’. The Captain’s contempt of these fashionable men, is due to the fact that “[i]n both Britain and France, fears that ‘effeminacy’ was corrupting male ‘republican’ virtues led Patriots to denounce the cultural and social mores of a degenerate aristocracy” (Tombs 104). When Monsieur Du Bois takes a seat in the Captain’s coach, which he has settled to be used only by the women of the company, the reaction of the Captain proves quite violent, indeed. He says to Monsieur Du Bois that “[...]he’ll make bold to shew [him] an English [fashion]” (Burney 131), and when Mrs. Mirvan tries to intervene to stop an eventual fight, the Captain tells his wife, vaunting his masculinity: “‘what the D—l, do you suppose I can’t manage a Frenchman?’” (Burney 132), implying that Frenchmen are not so good at fighting as real men should be. Then, addressing Madame Duval, Captain Mirvan exclaims: “[w]hat, do you think, then, that my horses have nothing to do, but to carry about your sniveling Frenchmen? [...]” (Burney 133), and refers to Monsieur Du Bois as to “[...] one of [Madame Duval’s] smirking French puppies [...]” (Burney 133). Concerning his wife, Captain Mirvan finally warns Madame Duval: “[...]as to Molly, she’s fine lady enough in all conscience; I want none of your French chaps to make her worse” (Burney 133). An excess of refinement is thus perceived by the Captain as something negative.

The xenophobia shared by Captain Mirvan and Sir Clement is definitely shown in the brutal trick of the ditch. Madame Duval, trying to go and assist Monsieur Du Bois, who she thinks has been accused of treason against the British government, finds herself trapped in a ditch with her feet “tied together with a strong rope” (Burney 164-5). The pretense of Monsieur Du Bois accused of treason appears credible to Madame Duval since, as Doody explains, “[t]he war with the American colonies involved a war with France, and the government was very suspicious of foreigners and French spies” (*Evelina* 473, note 4). In this circumstance, Evelina feels pity for her grandmother and she is “irritated with the Captain, for carrying his love of tormenting,—*sport*, he calls it,—to such barbarous and unjustifiable extremes” (Burney 168). When Sir Clement and Captain Mirvan plan their trick and tell Madame Duval about “a poor Frenchman, who had got into a scrape which might cost him his life” (Burney 153), Sir Clement says that he feels pity for the poor man, who can’t speak English and thus defend himself, but he also affirms that “[...he] by no means approve[s] of so many foreigners continually flocking into our country” (Burney 153). In addition, when Sir Clement tells Captain Mirvan that the Frenchman in question has been “roughly handled” (Burney 154), the Captain reacts by exclaiming with excitement: ““So much the better! So much the better [...] an impudent French puppy!—I’ll bet you what you will he was a rascal. I only wish all his countrymen were served the same”” (Burney 154).

In brief, Madame Duval is depicted as a very stereotypical character, which embodies only the negative characteristics of French femininity like, for instance, vanity and fickleness. Moreover, Madame Duval only shows the negative sides of those characteristics which were actually considered as ambivalent, both attractive and repulsing, like elegance and aesthetic care, which are altered in her persona in a grotesque way. As far as Monsieur Dubois is concerned, he represents the Frenchman in his traditional stereotypical image both as effeminate and weak, and as a skilful lover.

3.2. *Leonora*: Olivia - the Affected Seductress, and her Friend Madame de P—

Leonora, published by Maria Edgeworth in 1806 and her “only epistolary novel” (Harden 140), tells the story of a young and naïve girl who tries to defend her domestic happiness from the menace of the charming and deceitful Olivia, whom she at first considers a dear friend. Thanks to the help of her wise mother, Leonora is finally able to understand that affected manners are not to be trusted as a sign of goodness. She bears her pain in silence and proves to be the only winner of her husband’s heart.

As far as Maria Edgeworth’s life is concerned, what is important to consider for the analysis of the French characters in *Leonora* is her first travel to France in 1802, which seems to have given her ideas for the publication of some novels, among them *Leonora*. As argues by Colvin, in fact,

French scenes, French ideas, and French people are integral to the plots of four of the tales which Maria Edgeworth wrote between her two visits abroad—*Leonora*, *Madame de Fleury*, *Émilie de Colaunges*, and *Ormond*—[which] provide information about French social life supplementary to that given in the letters. (Introduction xxv)

In addition, Butler claims that “meeting so many people in Paris helped Maria’s fiction” (200). In 1802, after the Peace of Amiens, many British tourists crossed the Channel, whose main object was sightseeing and who usually lived with their countrymen and “went little into [French] private society” (Colvin, Introduction ix). As Colvin points out (Introduction ix), General B— in *Leonora* reports the attitudes of the British tourists in France, from whom he distances himself, when he says:

I have not, like some of my countrymen, hurried about Paris from one *spectacle* to another, seen the opera, and the play-houses, and the masked balls, and the gaming-houses, and the women of the Palais Royal, and the lions of all sorts; gone through the usual routine of presentation and public dinners, drunk French wine, damned French cookery, and ‘come home content.’ (Edgeworth 264)

The Edgeworths, on the contrary, “went abroad for cultural reasons” (D.J. Garat and M.A. Pictet qtd. in Colvin, Introduction ix), and “to frequent French intellectual society” (D.J. Garat and M.A. Pictet qtd. in Colvin, Introduction ix), of which they give an account in their family letters. Maria’s father could speak French fluently and had many acquaintances in France in scientific circles (Colvin, Introduction xiii), but “in

1803 he was suddenly ordered to leave Paris, and this was not entirely, as he supposed, because of his relationship to the Abbé Edgeworth de Firmont [...], but because of indiscreet talk, possibly criticism of Napoleon's policy towards the Swiss" (J. G. Alger qtd. in Colvin, Introduction xiii). In addition, Butler reports that "[a]t that time everyone believed that Bonaparte himself had expelled Edgeworth" (196). Besides, according to Maria Edgeworth's father, British "[s]ociety [was] not only a century behind French society, but it never [could] be so agreeable" (Butler 207). Concerning *Leonora*, Colvin argues that the following words, pronounced in the novel by General B—, "may be taken as Maria Edgeworth's own description of the circles in which she and her family spent most of their time in 1802-03, even if it underrated the public distinction of some of their friends" (Introduction xiv-xv):

I [...] had the good fortune to be admitted into the best *private societies* in Paris [...] composed of the remains of the French nobility, of men of letters and science, and of families, who, without interfering in politics, devote themselves to domestic duties, to literary and social pleasure. (Edgeworth 264)

Furthermore, Maria Edgeworth was influenced by Madame de Staël in writing *Leonora*, and the Edgeworths "shared [Madame de Staël's] interest in differences of national character and background, even if her emphasis on the emotions was alien to their more rational *philosophe* point of view" (Colvin, Introduction xxiv). Indeed, *Leonora* was conceived as "a story which was to be a strong, clear, pure reply to Mme de Staël[']s *Delphine*" (Butler 200-201), which Maria Edgeworth found "'immoral'" (Butler 200-201) and "which gave Maria much of her material for the seductress Olivia and Olivia's friend, Mme de P—, and probably decided her to stick to the letter-form" (Butler 318).

The French characters in the novel are the aristocratic Olivia and her friend Gabrielle, or Madame de P—, with whom she exchanges numerous letters. Olivia's servant Josephine, who plays but a minor part in the novel, is also French. Actually, Olivia, like Madame Duval in *Evelina*, is English, but she is portrayed as French. In fact, her friend Mme de P— says of her: "[y]ou, who have lived so long at Paris, who speak our language in all its shades of elegance; [...] you, who are absolutely a French woman, and a Parisian [...]" (Edgeworth 365). Moreover, Olivia's cult of sensibility is presented, and criticised, in the novel as typically French. Olivia is the first character

appearing in the novel, as the writer of a letter to Leonora, where she describes her difficult condition in pathetic tones. Olivia explains to Leonora that she “married early, in the fond expectation of meeting a heart suited to [her] own” (Edgeworth 245), but that, since “[her] love was extinguished” (Edgeworth 245), she wanted to separate from her husband. However, Olivia tells that the “the tyranny of English laws” (Edgeworth 245) did not permit divorce and so she left her husband and “sought for balm to [her] wounded heart in foreign climes” (Edgeworth 245), namely in France. When she writes to Leonora, Olivia is in England, where she aspires to get divorced and rejoin her new lover. In this plan, the good hearted Leonora should help her to be accepted in society again after the scandal Olivia has created. Indeed, as Leonora explains to her mother, “[s]candal, imported from the continent, has had such an effect in prejudicing many of her former friends and acquaintance against her, that she is in danger of being excluded from that society of which she was once the ornament and the favourite” [emphasis added] (Edgeworth 247). Olivia’s behaviour has made her unpopular in good society, and from Leonora’s words, it can be inferred that scandal is a peculiarity of the continent, which, like a contagious disease, is imported and spread on the island. From the first letter, Olivia characterises herself by her affected and theatrical tone in perfect heroine’s style, which is negatively perceived by the other characters—“Separated from my husband, without a guide, without a friend at the most perilous period of my life, I was left to that most insidious of counselors—my own heart—my own weak heart” (Edgeworth 246); “When shall I be happy? since even love has its torments, and I am thus doomed to be ever a victim to the tenderness of my soul” (Edgeworth 346).

Leonora’s mother, the Duchess of—, despises Olivia and her sentimental manners and admits that she feels terror “at the idea of [her] daughter becoming the friend of one of these women” (Edgeworth 255). In her opinion, in fact, “Olivia’s letters are [...] in true heroine style; and they might make a brilliant figure in a certain class of novels” (Edgeworth 255). Her negative reaction to Olivia’s affected and romantic style characterises the Duchess as the exponent of the culture of enlightened reason as opposed to that of sensibility. As Todd clarifies, “[t]he fate of sensibility in England is allied to the political situation” (130). In fact, “[i]n the closing years of the eighteenth century, the English reacted not only to the French Revolution and its aftermath but also to the political and social situation at home” (Todd 130). Moreover, sensibility was

linked to France by the fact that “[m]any supporters of the early French Revolution were rhetorically sentimental, although its radical theorists were far less so” (Todd 130). According to Barker-Benfield, then, “[t]he stereotypes of false, merely fashionable sensibility [...] remained characteristic of nineteenth-century [British] fiction” (395).

The Duchess is a wise, maternal figure, and, in her criticism to the culture of sensibility, embodies the pedagogical purpose of the novel. Indeed, as Butler explains, Edgeworth firmly believed that “at best the fiction could never be more than a supplement to the educational work” (200), and, according to Harden, “[t]ogether [Leonora and her mother] delineate the Edgeworths’ theory that an individual’s sense of duty takes precedence over his rights or privileges” (142). Furthermore, “‘rational mother-teachers...helped keep alive enlightened notions of female education in the reactionary period of the French Wars’” (Myers qtd. in Murphy). For Leonora’s mother, Olivia “exhibits all the disordered furniture of a ‘diseased mind’” (Edgeworth 255) and is an expert in superficial conversation. The Duchess, indeed, attributes to real eloquence something more than just “‘the art of speaking with fluency and elegance’” (Edgeworth 255), at which Olivia is so good. Besides, Mrs. C— (Helen), a dear friend of Leonora, has the same opinion on the matter and argues, referring to Olivia, that “[m]ost ladies talk more than they act,” whereas Leonora “acts more decidedly than she talks” (Edgeworth 393). Like in *Evelina*, the typical conversation of French salons, which Olivia has learnt in Paris, is considered in *Leonora* unsubstantial, superficial and artificial. As Colvin explains,

[i]n London in the early nineteenth century [...] there was no real counterpart of the French *salon*, nor is there to be found in English memoirs and letters of the period that sense of the value of style and elegance in conversation to which the French attached so much importance. (Introduction xx)

The Edgeworth family also “experienced in 1802-3 ‘the characteristic charms of Paris conversation, the polish and ease which in its best days distinguished it from that of any other capital’” (Colvin, Introduction xix). However, unlike her father Maria Edgeworth “commented that the Parisians were not such good listeners as the English and ‘set more value on wit and less upon eloquence in conversation—far from wishing to go—or to see others go to the bottom of any subject in conversation [...]’” (Colvin, Introduction xx). In this regard, then, “the Utilitarian Étienne Dumont [...] remarked that at Paris wit

was treated as an end in itself, whereas in London it was an instrument of reason” (qtd. in Colvin, Introduction xx).

Olivia shows her feelings without reserve and Leonora thinks she has a good heart and honest feelings. However, the Duchess explains to her daughter that affected manners do not signify true and spontaneous sentiments, but that they are only an example of artificiality. Therefore, the Duchess warns Leonora against Olivia and her manners: “[w]ith whatever confidence [sic!] she makes the assertion, do not believe that she has a heart capable of feeling the value of yours. These *sentimental, unprincipled* women make the worst friends in the world” [emphasis added] (Edgeworth 258). Leonora’s mother argues that the sentimentalists like Olivia are only “egotists—the most selfish creatures alive” (Edgeworth 256), and she attacks them by claiming that “[t]hey want exitation for their morbid sensibility, and they care not at what expense it is procured” (Edgeworth 257). Olivia, in fact, seduces Leonora’s husband only “to amuse [her]self” and “satisfy [her] curiosity” (Edgeworth 316). In this respect, La Rochefaucauld’s definition of the coquette resembles Olivia’s behaviour perfectly: “coquets are those who studiously excite the passion of love, without meaning to gratify it” (King and Schlick 17). The Duchess totally condemns the culture of sensibility and their followers, and argues that

[a] taste for the elegant profligacy of French gallantry was, I remember, introduced into this country before the destruction of the French monarchy. Since that time, some sentimental writers and pretended philosophers of our own and foreign countries, have endeavoured to confound all our ideas of morality. (Edgeworth 249)

Gallantry is described as typically French. William Pitt reported that the French “enjoyed much social freedom” (qtd. in Tombs 81) and Robert and Isabelle Tombs point out that at the end of the eighteenth century gallantry was a part of this social freedom which was considered risky (81). In fact, they clarify, “[a]s for gallantry, young men hoped to be initiated by experienced women, not only or even mainly sexually, but in the manners of elegant flirtation” (Tombs 81). Moreover, for Diderot “[g]allantry [was] associated with passion and sensuality, and [led] to ‘the most important and widespread of pleasure’ that is to sexual consummation” (qtd. in King and Schlick 19). In short, gallantry was dangerous for the British idea of morality, which was connected to true virtue and duty. Indeed, the sentimentalists mentioned by the Duchess were

thought to seduce people with their insubstantial ideals and to cultivate sentiments more than principles.

The opposition between sensibility and sense reflects an ideological opposition between French and British culture. In fact, as Robert and Isabelle Tombs point out, whereas “[t]he British valued ‘facts’, the French [valued] ‘theory’” (449). The Duchess particularly despises theoretical speculations, and argues:

These orators [...] exhibit criminal passions in constant connexion with the most exalted, the most amiable virtues [...]. Eternally talking of philosophy or philanthropy they borrow the terms only to perplex the ignorant and seduce the imagination. They have their systems and their theories, and in theory they pretend that the general good of society is their sole immutable rule of morality, and in practice they make the variable feelings of each individual the judges of this general good. Their systems disdain all the vulgar virtues, intent upon some beau ideal of perfection or perfectibility. No matter: their doctrine, so convenient to the passions and soporific to the conscience, can never want partisans; especially by weak and enthusiastic women it is adopted and propagated with eagerness; then they become personages of importance [...] and they can read,—and they can write,—and they can talk,—and they can *effect a revolution in public opinion!* I am afraid, indeed, that they can; for of late years we have heard more of sentiment than of principles; more of the rights of women than of her duties. (Edgeworth 250)

Olivia is a perfect example of these “orators” and she herself refers to her ability in conversation by saying: “I was surrounded by an admiring audience, and my conversation of course was sufficiently general to please all, and sufficiently particular to distinguish the man whom I wished to animate” (Edgeworth 301). In one of her letters to the family, Edgeworth herself considers sentiments unworthy of interest or importance, when she writes to her aunt, Mrs. Ruxton: “[b]ut you would rather have facts than sentiments perhaps” (qtd. in Colvin 37). Furthermore, it is important in this respect to consider that “Edgeworth’s father was very much an Enlightenment rationalist” (Murphy 12).

Olivia cultivates her sensibility by reading sentimental novels, which she also quotes in some of her letters, and by improvising philosophical argumentations with the help of some famous maxims, like those of the Duke de la Rochefoucault (Edgeworth 329). In addition, Mr. L— refers to Olivia’s “sentimental metaphysics” (Edgeworth 393), whereas his friend and correspondent General B—mentions her “absurd novels”

(Edgeworth 395). Finally, Leonora's mother argues that women like Olivia "indulge in promiscuous novel-reading" (Edgeworth 257), which "destroys all vigour and clearness of judgment" (Edgeworth 257), and she asserts to be happy that her daughter is not "conducting herself like one of these novel-bred ladies" (Edgeworth 357). Edgeworth, as argued by Murphy, "places a singular emphasis upon reading, and the didactic message of her writing is that care should be taken so that women in particular are only exposed to appropriate books," among which romances are not included (70). In fact, Edgeworth's ideal woman is "the rational literary lady" (Murphy 70), who "will necessarily contribute to the stability of the existing (patriarchal) social order" (Murphy 70). Also in *Mademoiselle Panache* (Edgeworth 1801) "[t]he most dangerous aspect of the governess' influence over Augusta [...] is represented by her choice of reading material" (Murphy 59), which includes "'one of the very worst books in the *French* language, a book which never could have been found in the possession of any woman of delicacy, of decency'" [emphasis added] (Edgeworth qtd. in Murphy 62).

The conflict between the naïve and good-hearted Leonora and the affected Olivia can be related, as in the case of Evelina and Madame Duval in *Evelina*, to the dichotomy nature/art⁴, considered to be British and French characteristics respectively. The Duchess claims that Leonora's husband, General L— has been deceived by Olivia. Indeed, she speaks of the "artifices of coquettes" and says that "the *art* of love is beneath her" (Edgeworth 357). In the end, then, Leonora says that "[her husband] has triumphed over [Olivia's] *arts*" [emphasis added] (Edgeworth 403). However, the Duchess is not afraid of Olivia's artifices and she is sure that General L— will be able "to distinguish true and false sensibility; between the love of an Olivia and of a Leonora" (Edgeworth 357). Olivia also refers to the opposition nature/art when she compares Leonora to a Polish Princess, Anastasia, and says that "[a]ll the gestures and attitudes of Anastasia are those of taste and sentiment [whereas] Leonora's are simply those of nature. *La belle nature*, but not *le beau ideal*" (Edgeworth 266). Moreover, she writes to her friend Madame de P— that Leonora "has charmed [her] by the simplicity of her manners and the generous sensibility of her heart" (262-3). Finally, Mrs. C—, referring to an occasion when Leonora blushed, claims that "Lady Olivia cannot blush

⁴ See p. 37

for herself” (Edgeworth 277), and this reminds one again of the artificial Madame Duval.

According to the Duchess, women like Olivia are also despicable since they do not care about virtue but only about their notoriety (Edgeworth 249). Moreover, they pursue the ideal of personal and social pleasure instead of that of domesticity. As Robert and Isabelle Tombs claim “the British favoured domesticity [while] the French, sociability” (449). Besides, Murphy clarifies that

[t]he didacticism of Edgeworth’s writing declares that women should not be deprived of the means to cultivate their reason[(as also expressed by the Duchess in her criticism towards the culture of sensibility)], but it also stresses that the ultimate aim of their rational education is to prepare them for the domestic sphere. (16)

Moreover, “[i]n their preoccupation with mothers and mothering, Edgeworth’s works [...] trace the crucial role that the domestic woman plays in ensuring national stability and facilitating the spread of the empire” (Murphy 16). The opposition between social and domestic sphere is expressed in the conflict between Leonora and Olivia, and it also reflects a substantial diversity between French and British culture. The fact that Olivia wants to obtain divorce and that she aims at marrying her lover (Edgeworth 277) is indeed considered unacceptable among Leonora’s acquaintances, and the Duchess claims that Olivia “is neglecting to perform the duties of a daughter, a wife, and a mother” (Edgeworth 254). In contrast, Leonora “is well-educated, but gentle, modest, domestic; [...] a wife and mother, the hub of a secure and happy family” (Butler 54). British society at the time was centred on the concept of female virtue, of a sense of duty and domesticity and, as already mentioned by Trollope, married women had not so much freedom as their French counterparts. Thus, Olivia’s ideas about marriage are quite revolutionary. In fact, she exclaims: “[t]o promise to love one person eternally! What a terrible engagement!” (Edgeworth 318). Besides, Olivia is astonished at Leonora’s jealousy, and she admits that “[m]atrimonial jealousy is a new idea to [her]” (Edgeworth 317). Then, as far as the British domestic ideal and British wives are concerned, Olivia claims that

[t]hey can have no *society* in our sense of the word; of course they must live shut up in their own dismal houses, with their own stupid families, the faithful

husband and wife sitting opposite to each other in their own chimney corners, yawning models of constancy. And this they call virtue! (Edgeworth 300)

On this matter, General B— has a completely different opinion from Olivia and he expresses his absolute contempt for divorce. In fact, he asks Leonora's husband: “[d]o you envy France this blessing? Do you wish that English husband and wives should have the power of divorcing each other at pleasure for *incompatibility of temper!*” (Edgeworth 286). Besides, he claims that “[n]ext to polygamy, [divorce] would prove the most certain method of destroying the domestic happiness of the [female] sex, as well as their influence and respectability in society” (Edgeworth 287). As far as divorce in Britain is concerned, Eagles points out that in the last three decades of the eighteenth century “[t]he concomitant problem of growth in the number of divorce cases was also seen to have been owing to the influence of France, a peril which was heightened by the new revolutionary state passing divorce legislation in 1792” (159).

As far as the role of women in the two countries is concerned, Olivia speaks of “the different *organization* of French and English society” (Edgeworth 266) and argues that “[i]n Paris the insipid details of domestic life are judiciously kept behind the scenes, and women appear as heroines upon the stage with all the advantages of decoration, to listen to the language of love, and to receive the homage of public admiration” (Edgeworth 266). From this statement French women appear, therefore, superficial and interested only in being adulated by men, whereas the British women seem to fully dedicate themselves to their domestic duty. Moreover, Olivia points out, that “[i]n England, gallantry is not yet *systematized*, and our sex look more to their families than to what is called *society* for the happiness of existence” (Edgeworth 267). As for the Englishmen, she says that “to an Englishman's ears, there is some magic in the words *home* and *wife*” (Edgeworth 360), and her friend Gabrielle adds that these two words “have ridiculous but unconquerable power over their minds” (Edgeworth 368). However, as far as motherhood is concerned, Olivia expresses her disappointment at the way in which British ladies take care of their children, that is, in her opinion, only for a sense of duty and not for real affection. In fact, she says that

[...] the affection of mothers for their children does not appear to be so strong in the hearts of English as of French women. In England, ladies do not talk of the sentiment of maternity with that elegance and sensibility with which you expatiate upon it continually in conversation. They literally are *des bonnes*

mères de famille, not from the impulse of sentiment, but merely from an early instilled sense of duty for which they deserve little credit. (Edgeworth 266-267)

While British women are represented as dutiful mothers, their French counterparts, on the other hand, are for Olivia more sensitive and affected with their children. In fact, De Bellaigue clarifies that “[p]edagogues like Maria Edgeworth emphasized the importance of educating girls who [...] can assist [their husbands] in the important and delightful *duty* of educating their children; who can make their family their most agreeable society and their home the attractive centre of happiness” [emphasis added] (16). On the other hand, French mothers, although more sensitive than the British for Olivia, appear also more superficial, as it emerges from her own words: “it would be a blessing to society if English children were as inaudible and invisible [as French children]” (Edgeworth 267).

Another characteristic of Olivia which distinguishes her from the other characters is that she has spent a long time in another country, and “[f]rom living much abroad [...] she] has acquired a certain freedom of manner, and latitude of thinking, which expose her to suspicion” (Edgeworth 309). In contrast, Leonora and her friend Mrs. C— have never left Britain and, as Olivia reports, they shocked her “with the same nationality” (Edgeworth 273), meaning that their attitude and way of thinking is perceived by Olivia as typically and negatively British. Besides, like Madame Duval does with Captain Mirvan in *Evelina*, Olivia complains about the narrow mind of those who never left Britain, and when Mrs. C— argues that she “did not wish divorce could be as easily obtained in England as in France,” Olivia replies that this is the proof that she “ha[s] never been out of England” (Edgeworth 271). Then, referring to Leonora, Olivia claims that “[s]he’s *too English*—far too English for one who has known the charms of French ease, vivacity, and sentiment” (Edgeworth 265). Olivia appears a free and independent woman, and therefore she is seen with suspicion in British society. Instead of being a dutiful mother and wife, she left her child and she wishes to divorce. In contrast to Leonora, who is considered “an angel” by Mrs. C— (Edgeworth 358), Olivia is defined in several negative ways as: a “foolish woman” (Edgeworth 277), a “sentimental coquette” (Edgeworth 396), a “*Frenchified coquette*” (Edgeworth 336) an “unprincipled woman” (Edgeworth 355), and “a good-for-nothing mistress” (Edgeworth 315). Finally, Harden argues that “Olivia, the principal antagonist in the novel” (142), “typif[ies] the unprincipled segment of French society at the close of the Revolution”

(142) and is “undisciplined, aggressive, cunning, skillful in her ways with men, [and] adept in her pursuit of Mr. L.” (142).

Coquetry is exemplified in *Leonora* as typically French (Edgeworth 315). A ‘coquette’, defined as “a woman who frequently tries to attract the attention of men without having sincere feelings for them” (Longman Dictionary), “is both verbally and sexually aggressive rather than acquiescent, active rather than subordinate, victor rather than vanquished” (King and Schlick 21). Olivia knows the art of seduction and claims that love affairs are “managed better in France” (Edgeworth 332). Being a coquette, she is perceived as dangerous and malicious (Edgeworth 341), as a “cruel wretch” (Edgeworth 348) and Leonora’s “cruel enemy” (Edgeworth 350). Besides, for General B—, “England is not a country fit for *such* women” [emphasis added] (Edgeworth 422). As De Bellaigue clarifies, in nineteenth-century Catholic France the conception of womanhood emphasised “weakness and corruptibility,” whereas “in England [...] Protestant emphasis on the home as a sanctuary meant that the idea that women were endowed with a superior morality had more fully supplanted earlier negative views of women, and had fostered a desexualized conception of femininity” (164). Furthermore, Payne, who considers female reactions to Pope’s poem *The Rape of the Lock* (1712) as possibly influenced by “sermons and essays, as well as ladies’ magazines aimed at shaping women’s moral conduct” (qtd. in King and Schlick 24-25), claims that in eighteenth century “a coalition of women readers from a range of classes united in condemnation of the coquette, who had come to symbolize a morally debased aristocratic court culture, endorsing instead bourgeois sentiment virtue” (qtd. in King and Schlick 25). In contrast, for Leonora’s husband General L—, Olivia positively differs from Leonora because she is a woman “who has a soul capable of feeling, not merely what is called conjugal affection, but the passion of love” (Edgeworth 339), since she does not love him only in order to fulfill the duties of a wife (Edgeworth 338). In addition, Olivia considers Leonora “too cold to feel the passion of love” (Edgeworth 300). In this regard, Robert and Isabelle Tombs state that British women were often regarded as cold by the French, since they “lacked charm, confidence, conversation and flirtatiousness” (103).

As was thought typical of French women, Olivia is elegant and charming, but also vain, frivolous. Leonora, indeed, says that “no one could be more charmed than [she] was, with her [(Olivia’s)] fascinating manners and irresistible powers of pleasing” (Edgeworth 299). Whereas French women were considered elegant and charming, Robert and Isabelle Tombs argue that in nineteenth-century French cartoons about British ladies, “English girls [might] be shown as pretty, but [were] insipid, gawky and charmless” (315). However, General B— has a negative idea of women like Olivia and compares Parisian women to the Roman ladies by arguing that “these modern belles,” like their ancient Roman counterparts, are “generous in the display of their charms to the public” (Edgeworth 264).

As far as fashion and elegance are concerned, many are the references to clothes in the novel. For example, Madame de P— tells Olivia that she will send her “by the first opportunity, [her (Olivia’s)] Lyon’s gown, which is really charming” (Edgeworth 327), and that she will manage to “send [her] the first advices of Paris fashions,” with which “[she] will be the model of taste and elegance!” (Edgeworth 367). Olivia, like Madame Duval in *Evelina*, is very vain, and concerning her passion for dance, she boasts to her friend: “you know the sensation I was accustomed to produce at Paris; you may guess then what the effect must be here, where such a style of dancing has all the captivation of novelty” (Edgeworth 302). Then, on the occasion of the party organised for Leonora’s birthday, Olivia claims that she “was undoubtedly the most elegant woman present” (Edgeworth 301) and that “one likes to observe the sensation one produces amongst new people” (Edgeworth 301). Finally, as reported by King and Schlick, narcissism, which characterises Olivia in the novel, was a quality “assigned to female coquetry, fixated as it is on oneself rather than on a beloved other” (18).

Like Madame Duval in *Evelina*, also Olivia is not very young, but she refuses to renounce pleasure. In fact, she asserts that “the age of women has nothing to do with the number of their years” (Edgeworth 324) and that “[m]any a woman in England, ten, fifteen years older than [she is], has inspired a violent passion” (Edgeworth 313). However, not everybody is convinced of this, like for instance Leonora’s servant. In fact, on one occasion Olivia’s French servant Josephine says that Leonora “might possibly be handsome if she was dresses in the French taste; *mais que’elle étoit bien*

Angloise, and would be quite another thing if she had been at Paris” (Edgeworth 312). At this point, Leonora’s servant replies to Josephine that Olivia “had indeed learnt in perfection at Paris *the art of making herself up*, which was quite necessary to a beauty *un peu passée*” (Edgeworth 312). Olivia, though charming and successful in her art of seduction, appears to Leonora’s servant a bit old and quite unnatural, since she uses make up, thus artificiality, to appear younger, just like Madame Duval does.

A further characteristic of Olivia which was considered typical of the French, is her fickleness. If at first she behaves with elegance and charm, her passionate and affective character finally leads her to an uncontrollable rage when she feels she cannot supplant Leonora’s place in the heart of Mr. L—. In this respect, Leonora’s husband complains, in fact, that Olivia’s “temper, which formerly appeared to me all feminine gentleness, is now irritable and violent” (Edgeworth 390), and exclaims: “[w]hat a spectacle is a woman in a paroxysm of rage!—a woman we love, or whom we have loved!” (Edgeworth 399). Olivia, in typical theatrical style, even attempts to commit suicide, and Mr. L— reports that “there was nothing to be heard but exclamations the most violent and noisy” (Edgeworth 402). Finally, referring to her temperament, General B— defines Olivia as a “romantic termagant” (Edgeworth 396), exactly like Sir Clement defines Madame Duval in *Evelina*.

As regards Olivia’s friend Madame de P—, she is represented as frivolous, scheming, and deceitful. In fact, while Olivia is flirting with Leonora’s husband, Madame de P— flirts with Olivia’s lover. According to Harden, Madame de P— “typifies the seventeenth-century Cavalier concept of love in a nineteenth-century French society: she thrives on inconstancy, whimsicality, and peevishness” (142-143). Besides, as far as her frivolity is concerned, Madame de P— argues that it “is an excellent, because an unsuspected mask, under which serious and important designs may be safely concealed” (Edgeworth 365). A good depiction of the character is offered by General B—, who states that

[i]n her manners and conversation there is an odd mixture of frivolity and address, of the airs of coquetry and the jargon of sentiment. She has the politeness of a French Countess, with *exquisite* knowledge of the world and of *les convenances*, joined to that freedom of opinion which marks the present times. In the midst of all inconsistencies, it is difficult to guess what her real character may be. At first sight I should pronounce her to be a silly woman,

governed by vanity and the whim of the moment: but those who know her better than I do, believe her to be a woman of considerable talents, inordinately fond of power, and uniformly intent upon her own interest, using coquetry only as a means to govern our sex, and frivolity as a mask for her ambition. (Edgeworth 279)

When, after discovering that she has been deceived by her dear friend, Olivia breaks her relationship with her, Madame De P— criticises her as a fake Frenchwoman.

And this Olivia fancies that she is a perfect French woman! There is nothing we Parisians abhor and ridicule so much as these foreign, and always awkward, caricatures of our manners. With us there are many who, according to a delicate distinction, lose their virtue without losing their taste for virtue; but I flatter myself there are few who resembles Olivia entirely—who have neither the virtues of a man nor of a woman. (Edgeworth 383)

The way in which Olivia is described by the French Madame de P— reminds one of the grotesque character of Madame Duval, who is not a real French woman either. While both Madame Duval and Olivia embody, for the British characters, what were thought to be the worst characteristics of the Frenchwoman, Olivia is despised by Madame de P— since, in her pretension to be French, she falsifies the image of the Frenchwoman.

In short, Olivia and Madame de P— represent the typical idea of the Frenchwoman in its negative and positive sides. In fact, as Robert and Isabelle Tombs argue, “French (particularly Parisian) women were accepted on both sides of the Channel as embodying the best and worst of French civilization: elegance, wit, sociability, charm and sophistication; but also superficiality, luxury, fickleness, immorality” (450).

To conclude, Burney’s *Evelina* and Edgeworth’s *Leonora* offer two examples of negative representations of French characters in a British context. Both Madame Duval in *Evelina* and Olivia in *Leonora* are portrayed as artificial women in their extravagant behaviour and physical appearance. Moreover, in their attempt to behave like Frenchwomen, they both exaggerate some characteristics considered typical of the Frenchwomen in Britain and the result is a reinforcement of those stereotypes. Finally, the minor characters of Monsieur Du Bois and Madame de P— are two good examples of a stereotypical, simplistic representation of the Frenchman and the Frenchwoman in Britain at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth century.

4. The Daughters of French Opera-Dancers: Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair: A Novel Without a Hero* (1848)

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* date back almost to the same year. Brontë started writing *Jane Eyre* in October 1847, while Thackeray started publishing *Vanity Fair* monthly in January 1847, and published the entire novel in 1848. These dates are to be considered since the second edition of Brontë's novel (1848) is dedicated to the author of *Vanity Fair*. Indeed, it has been reported that "Brontë ardently admired the work of William Makepeace Thackeray" (Newman, "A Critical History" 448) and, "[h]aving learned from her publisher that Thackeray had praised *Jane Eyre* as the best novel to appear in English in many years, she dedicated the second edition to him and prefaced it with a flattering tribute to him" (Newman, "A Critical History" 448). As an explanation of her dedication to Thackeray, Brontë was accused by *The Quarterly Review* of being inspired, in writing her novel, by a rumor concerning the author of *Vanity Fair*, and, on that occasion, Brontë reported in one of her letters to W.S. Williams that "'Jane Eyre' was written before the author had seen one line of 'Vanity Fair'" (qtd. in Dunn 454). Thus, Brontë's dedication to Thackeray seems to have been inspired only by the great esteem she felt towards the novelist, whom she defined as "that greatest modern Master, Thackeray" (qtd. in Dunn 444).

The reviewer Elizabeth Rigby Eastlake wrote in *The Quarterly Review* in December 1848 that "*Jane Eyre*, as a work, and one of equal popularity, is in almost every respect, a total contrast to *Vanity Fair*" (qtd. in Dunn 451). However, *Jane Eyre* and *Vanity Fair* can be compared as far as two of their characters are concerned; not the two female protagonists, but the minor character Adèle Varens and the main character Rebecca Sharp, also known as Becky, respectively. These two characters are both half French on their mother's side and the mothers of both were opera-dancers. Moreover, Adèle and Becky have some characteristics in common, which, in nineteenth century Britain, could be attributed to their French origin.

4.1. *Jane Eyre*: Adèle Varens - The Vain “Little Parisienne,” and her mother Céline

Charlotte Brontë’s popular novel *Jane Eyre* is the story of a poor and plain governess who happens to be the teacher of the little girl Adèle at Thornfield Hall, where she finally falls in love with the master Mr Rochester. The character of the half French Adèle, though secondary, appears important not only on a narrative level, for it motivates Jane Eyre’s arrival at Thornfield, but also as it reveals the British perspective towards French femininity, a perspective that is further stressed by several references to Adèle’s mother Céline, an opera-dancer.

The way in which Adèle in *Jane Eyre*, as well as other French characters in some Brontë’s novels like, for example, *Villette* (1853) and *The Professor* (1857), is depicted, can be analysed and explained by referring to the novelist’s relationship to the Continent in the course of her life, both at a cultural and literary, and at a personal level. As far as the influence of French culture and literature on Charlotte Brontë is concerned, Duthie, who thoroughly analyses the novelist’s controversial connection to the Continent in the essay *The Foreign Vision of Charlotte Brontë*, argues that “the young Brontës’ approach to France is not conditioned entirely by recent history, but that echoes of French literature and culture have penetrated to the parsonage” (4). Moreover, Duthie points out that “Charlotte herself is not indifferent to the cultural attractions of Paris” (Duthie 4). The novelist Mary Ward, then, attributed a significant role to French novels in “Charlotte Brontë’s intellectual development” (qtd. in Lodge 27-28). With respect to this, Ward claimed that, even though “Charlotte Brontë’s main *stuff* is English, Protestant, law-respecting, conventional even” (qtd. in Lodge 28), “the influence of contemporary French novels, which challenged social and moral conventions, seeped unconsciously into Charlotte’s work and ‘for all her revolt from them [...] they fertilised her genius’” (qtd. in Lodge 28). Furthermore, Politi claims that “revolution and the other forms of troubling excess in the novel [are located] in the realm of the foreign” (qtd. in Lodge 100), whereas “English values are identified as those of order, restraint, and self-discipline” (qtd. in Lodge 100). Revolution, as Politi defines it, is “that aberrant state in which an individual, a class or a nation went ‘beside’

itself [...], a condition indelibly linked in the English mind with the frenzy and irrationality of the French Revolution” (qtd. in Lodge 101).

It is exactly the reading of French novels of her time that fosters Charlotte Brontë’s interest in France (Duthie 15), and, writing to Ellen Nussey in 1840, the novelist refers to some French books in these terms: “I have read about half – they are like the rest *clever wicked sophisticated and immoral* – the best of it is they give one a through view of France and Paris – and are the best substitute for French Conversation I have met with” [emphasis added] (qtd. in Duthie 15). Charlotte Brontë’s idea of France appears ambivalent and her attitude towards the continental country, as well as towards its literature, results in a dichotomy (Duthie 15). In other words, for Brontë French education is not only the cause of “[a]n exaggerated emotionalism” (Duthie 15), but it also produces “the more desirable qualities of social flair and wit” (Duthie 15). In brief, as Duthie summarises, “[...] France, which had been the chief adversary of Britain in the Napoleonic Wars, still seems to stand, in Charlotte Brontë’s mind, as a synonym for both the best and the worst in continental culture” (117).

The principal reason which moved Charlotte Brontë towards French language and literature was practical. A good knowledge of the French language was indeed fundamental in her profession as a teacher (Duthie 15). Furthermore, it was precisely this reason which finally motivated Brontë to go the Continent, to Brussels precisely (Duthie 17), where she “went [...] in 1842 to study at the Pensionnat Heger, specifically to become proficient in French [...]” (Newman, “Introduction: Biographical and Historical Context” 6). This first experience across the Channel, as Newman argues, “transformed [Brontë], though not entirely in positive ways” (“Introduction” 6). In Brussels, in fact, the author of *Jane Eyre* found herself “[m]iserably homesick and alienated as an English Protestant in a predominantly Catholic country” (Newman, “Introduction” 6). Furthermore, as Duthie points out, quite significant is the fact that Brontë “was nearly twenty-six when she crossed the Channel for the first time,” and, in consequence, she “brought with her the opinions she had imbibed, from childhood onwards, in the Tory atmosphere of Haworth parsonage” (105). In particular, one of these opinions was “the conviction of British superiority” (Duthie 105), which increased

after the “triumph of her hero Wellington in the Peninsula and at Waterloo” and which “was not likely to go unchallenged in a continental environment” (Duthie 105).

As regards her attitude towards French politics, Brontë was convinced of “the injustice of Napoleonic aggression” (Duthie 109) and proud of Wellington (Duthie 109). Moreover, the revolutionary events of 1848 in Europe, and in France specifically, makes the novelist fear that a future violence could eventually have some consequences in Britain, a feeling that has been interpreted by Duthie as “closely connected with [Brontë’s] persistent skepticism with regard to the French” (111). As Barker remarks with regard to Brontë’s attitude towards the revolutionary events, it should not be forgotten that she was “a Tory and an Anglican [and thus] she was emphatically neither a Chartist⁵ sympathizer nor a revolutionary” (qtd. in Davies, Introduction xvi). A different opinion is then expressed by Davies, who argues that, as it was also mentioned in the reviews of the time, those revolutionary events are present in *Jane Eyre* in the form of female emancipation (Introduction xv). However, as Duthie points out, “politics only enter into Charlotte Brontë’s novels in the proportion in which they entered into her own experience” (111), since the novelist’s “chief concern [...] is not with wars and revolutions – which she increasingly distrusted – but with the world in which her characters live their everyday lives, a world which has been shaped by historical events but which is normally an uneventful one” (Duthie 111). Actually, in *Jane Eyre* no direct mention is made about any political event of the time, and besides, “the novel is set in an earlier period, chiefly in the 1820s” (Davies, Introduction xx). Therefore, as far as the character of Adèle is concerned, this has to be analysed both in terms of the author’s individual attitude towards the French as connected to her personal experience and in terms of the cultural differences between France and Britain, differences which, although originating within a broad historical spectrum, did not come into being as a direct consequence of a particular political event at that specific time.

Adèle is Jane’s pupil and lives at Thornfield Hall. As *Jane Eyre* reports in Chapter XV, the child “was the daughter of a French opera-dancer, Céline Varens, towards

⁵ Chartism: “British working-class movement for parliamentary reform named after the People’s Charter, a bill drafted by the London radical William Lovett in May 1838. It contained six demands: universal manhood suffrage, equal electoral districts, vote by ballot, annually elected Parliaments, payment of members of Parliament, and abolition of the property qualifications for membership” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*).

whom [Rochester] had once cherished what he called ‘*a grande passion*’” (Brontë 165), and who claimed that Rochester is the father of the child. Rochester tells Jane that Adèle might be his daughter, “though [he] see[s] no proofs of such grim paternity written in her countenance” (Brontë 169-170). According to Duthie, the character of “Adèle Varens is the only foreigner of any importance in *Jane Eyre* apart from the Creole [...]” (130). In fact, as Duthie clarifies, the character of “Madame Pierrot, who has the doubtful honour of teaching French at Lowood, is mentioned briefly as ‘a strange foreign-looking elderly lady’ who comes from ‘Lisle, in France’” (130), whereas “Sophie, Adèle’s nurse, appears and remains a completely colourless figure” (Duthie 130). Adèle’s mother is also mentioned in the novel, though only in Rochester’s and the child’s recollections. The figure of Céline Varens is worthy of attention not only because Adèle’s attitudes are attributed by Rochester to her influence, but also because, like and more than her daughter, Céline is depicted in the novel as a well delineated negative example of a Frenchwoman.

Whereas the character of Adèle appears secondary to those of Jane and Rochester, and actually does not have a large space in the novel, it plays, however, an important role in the development of the story. In fact, as Duthie points out, “[...] life at Thornfield Hall, when [Jane] first arrives there[,] centres round Adèle Varens” (Duthie 128). Besides, in analysing the character of Adèle Duthie argues that “[i]t is as governess to Adèle that Jane comes to [Rochester’s] house” and that, even though “[t]he governess-pupil relationship is ancillary and subordinate to Jane’s relationship with Rochester [...]” (129), “[...]without the continued presence of Adèle, an essential theme would be missing from the symphony into which the central part of the novel develops” (129). Adèle is mentioned for the first time in the novel in Chapter XI, and Jane only refers to her quite coldly as “this little girl” (Brontë 113). Later, Miss Fairfax calls her “Miss Varens” (Brontë 115) and explains to Jane that “Varens is the name of [her] future pupil” (Brontë 115). Miss Fairfax always and only calls the child Adela, in the English translation; a sign not only of the fact that the housekeeper cannot speak French, but also of a certain cultural laziness. As Adèle indeed says, “Madame Fairfax is all English” (Brontë 120). Unlike Miss Fairfax, Jane can speak French, and, thanks to this, she “wins the approval and confidence of Adèle” (Duthie 130). In this regard, when she first meets the child, Jane reports:

Fortunately I had had the advantage of being taught French by a French lady; and as I had always made a point of conversing with Madame Pierrot as often as I could, [...] I had acquired a certain degree of readiness and correctness in the language, and was not likely to be much at a loss with Mademoiselle Adela. (Brontë 120)

As far as the French language is concerned, Duthie asserts that “there is a link [...] between Brussels and Thornfield” (131), which is established through “the language spoken by Adèle, of which for seven years Jane has learnt a portion by heart daily, whose accents are a constant reminder of the intrusion of the Continent into the seclusion of Thornfield Hall” (131).

The entrance of the character of Adèle in the novel coincides with the first time in which Jane actually sees the child, who is described as follows:

[... A] little girl, followed by her attendant, came running up the lawn. I looked at my pupil, who did not at first appear to notice me. She was quite a child – perhaps seven or eight years old – slightly built, with a pale, small-featured face, and a redundancy of hair falling in curls to her waist. (Brontë 119)

The little girl begins to speak French, and, when Jane asks Miss Fairfax whether she and her nurse are foreigners, the old lady clarifies for Jane Adèle’s origins: “The nurse is a foreigner, and Adela was born on the Continent; and, I believe, never left it till within six months ago. When she first came here she could speak no English; now she can make shift to talk it a little. I don’t understand her, she mixes it so with French” (Brontë 119-120). From the first encounter with Jane, Adèle already shows some attitudes which characterise her throughout the novel and which, in nineteenth century Britain, were considered as typically French.

First of all, Jane notices the child’s vivacity, also expressed through “her large hazel eyes” (Brontë 120), her lack of restraint, and her ability to converse. As Jane reports, as soon as Adèle finds that Jane can speak French, “she suddenly commenced chattering fluently” (Brontë 120) and starts telling her the whole story of her life. Later in the novel, Jane says that “[her] pupil was a lively child, who had been spoiled and indulged, and therefore sometimes wayward” (Brontë 128), and mentioned her “gay prattle” as one of her typical characteristics (Brontë 128). Moreover, when Adèle is opening a present which Rochester has given her, Rochester warns her not to bother him, orders her to complete her operation in silence, and finally tells her: “tiens-toi tranquille,

enfant” (Brontë 152), stressing the vivacity of the child. Then, Rochester asserts that “[he’s] not fond of the prattle of children” (Brontë 152) and that “[...]t would be intolerable to [him] to pass a whole evening *tête-à-tête* with a brat” (Brontë 152). On that occasion, Jane also reports how “everything was still, save the subdued chat of Adèle (she dared not speak loud)” (Brontë 153). Jane is actually the only person with whom Adèle is allowed to talk at that moment, and it seems that the child cannot stop herself from conversing. Also Miss Fairfax complains about Adèle and tells Jane: “[...] I sent to you for a charitable purpose. I have forbidden Adèle to talk to me about her presents, and she is bursting with repletion; have the goodness to serve her as auditress and interlocutrice; it will be one of the most benevolent acts you ever performed” (Brontë 152-153). Finally, although it could be argued that Adèle’s talkativeness is only due to her being a child, the fact that this characteristic is so particularly stressed in the novel in addition to other characteristics which mark her as typically French, and the frivolous content of her talk, cannot but appear attributable to her French origin.

Another characteristic of Adèle is her passion for dancing, singing, and acting, and she explains to Jane how she learned these accomplishments: “Mamma used to teach me to dance and sing, and to say verses. A great many gentlemen and ladies came to see mamma, and I used to dance before them, or to sit on their knees and sing to them: I liked it” (Brontë 121). Then, the child asks Jane wishfully, if she wants to hear her sing (Brontë 121). Adèle’s performance is described quite in detail, and this stresses the theatrical attitude and ability of the child, which she learned from her French mother and which Jane does not seem to approve completely.

Descending from her chair, she came and placed herself on my knee; then, folding her little hands demurely before her, shaking back her curls, and lifting her eyes to the ceiling, she commenced singing a song from some opera. It was the strain of a forsaken lady, who, after bewailing the perfidy of her lover, calls pride to her aid; desires her attendant to deck her in her brightest jewels and richest robes, and resolves to meet the false one that night at a ball, and prove to him, by the gaiety of her demeanour, how little his desertion has affected her.

The subject seemed strangely chosen for an infant singer; but I suppose the point of the exhibition lay in hearing the notes of love and jealousy warbled with the lisp of childhood, and in very bad taste that point was – at least I thought so. (Brontë 121)

As far as dance is concerned, Langford claims that “Englishwomen [...] were dismayed by the overt sexuality expected of French girls learning to dance” (162), and so appears

also Jane with respect to Adèle's performances. Adèle enjoys performing so much that, after singing, without even asking Jane, she says: "[n]ow, mademoiselle, I will repeat you some poetry" (Brontë 121), and soon after she asks if she shall dance (Brontë 122). Jane notices the child's ability and indeed affirms that "[s]he [...] declaimed the little piece with an attention to punctuation and emphasis, a flexibility of voice, and an appropriateness of gesture, very unusual indeed at her age, and which proves she had been carefully trained" (Brontë 121-122). A critical tone seems to emerge from Jane's statement with regard to the fact that the child has been taught to perform like she does, highly probably by her mother.

In addition to her stage skills, Adèle resembles her French mother in her vanity and frivolity, which shows in her extreme interest in fashion and toilette. Moreover, like her mother, Adèle is portrayed as mercenary and spoilt, since she adores receiving presents by Rochester. These characteristics are often mentioned throughout the novel, and their recurrence stresses the child's sides which are thought to be ascribable to her mother and, therefore, negatively French. As far as vanity is concerned, this was considered a trait of French national character and precisely that which "prompts [the French] to be the first nation in the world" (Lord Palmerston qtd. in Bourne qtd. in Tombs). Adèle tells Jane during their first encounter that Mr. Rochester in Paris "gave [her] pretty dresses and toys" (Brontë 122), and also during Jane's permanent stay at Thornfield the child receives presents. When Adèle sees "a little carton, on the table," as Jane reports, "[s]he appeared to know it by instinct" (Brontë 152), and she exclaims "'Ma boîte! ma boîte!'" (Brontë 152). At the child's enthusiasm for her present, Rochester reacts, not hiding a certain contempt, by saying: "'[y]es, there is your 'boîte' at last: take it into a corner, you *genuine daughter of Paris*, and amuse yourself with disemboweling it'" [emphasis added] (Brontë 152). Rochester's reaction is quite aggressive and shows his contempt for Adèle in so far as she is similar to her mother, whose mercenary character he has not forgotten. A "genuine daughter of Paris" (Brontë 152), Adèle is thus depicted as the perfect incarnation of the French female, who in her negative qualities is seen by Rochester as mercenary and affected. In fact, the child, in recognising her present by instinct, seems to have a nose for expensive items, exactly like her French mother, who was sustained in all her comfort by Rochester's blind generosity—" [...] and there was 'the Varens,' shining in satin and jewels – my gifts of course" (Brontë 168-169). When

Adèle appears in her new dress, she thanks Rochester for his generosity, and, making a dance step, she asks him if that is how also her mother used to do (Brontë 163). However, Rochester's affirmative answer makes reference to a different ability of Adèle's mother: "'Precisely!' [...] 'and comme cela,' she charmed my English gold out of my British breeches' pocket" (Brontë 163). The reference to the poverty of the French and the idea that they wanted to steal money from the Britons seems to be a constant, as it also appears in *Evelina* in the words of Captain Mirvan⁶. Besides, Rochester refers to himself as "the British gnome" (Brontë 165) and to Céline Varens as "the Gallic sylph" (Brontë 165), to whom he gave "a complete establishment of servants, a carriage, cashmeres, diamonds, dentelles, etc" (Brontë 165). Significantly, the sylph is "an imaginary or elemental being that inhabits the air and is mortal but soulless" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*), and the metaphor refers to Céline as a creature that is fascinating and ethereal, but also heartless and without scruple. Finally, according to Gilbert's feminist criticism, Adèle Varens represents a negative female model for Jane. Adèle, in fact, "though hardly a woman, is already a doll-like 'little woman'" (484), and, unlike Jane, "she longs for fashionable gowns rather than for freedom and sings and dances for her supper the way Céline, her mother, did, as if she were a clockwork temptress invented by E.T.A. Hoffman" (Gilbert 484). The little Adèle, "the daughter of a 'fallen woman'" (Gilbert 484), and in particular of a French dancer, might embody, in this perspective, "a model female in a world of prostitutes" (Gilbert 484).

As far as Céline Varens is concerned, like Olivia in *Leonora* she shows the signs of a passionate temperament, prone to rage and hysteria. When Rochester, betrayed by Céline, "liberated [her] from [his] protection" (Brontë 168) and "gave her notice to vacate her hotel" (Brontë 168), he indeed reports how he "disregarded [her] screams, hysterics, prayers, protestations, convulsion" (Brontë 168). Then, exactly like Olivia, Céline is scheming and knows how to dupe men, but when her deceitful nature is discovered, her sophisticated charm suddenly seems to disappear, and an uncontrollable passion explodes. Rochester also has a passionate character and constant mood swings, but this appears totally justified by the fact that he has been betrayed in his heart and pride in a way unacceptable to him. Jane indeed says that "[h]e was proud, sardonic,"

⁶ See p. 35-36

(Brontë 172) “[h]e was moody, too; [...b]ut I believed that his moodiness, his harshness, and his former faults of morality [...] had their source in some cruel cross of fate” (Brontë 172).

As regards his past, Rochester seems to attribute every fault to the French Céline, whom he despises to the point of repudiating her daughter Adèle as “a French dancer’s bastard” (Brontë 348), even though Jane argues that the child is not answerable for Céline’s and Rochester’s faults (Brontë 170). Rochester considers his story with Céline to be quite usual: “a *wealthy Englishman*’s passion for a *French dancer*, and her treachery to him, were everyday matters enough, no doubt, in society” [emphasis added] (Brontë 171). In fact, as Black explains, already at the end of the eighteenth century “showing off with famous dancers from the opera [...] was much of the fun [and p]ress comments were usually disapproving, though occasionally expressing pride at this further extension of British conquest” (qtd. in Tombs 82). The price of these British conquests, however, was often “gambling losses and venereal disease” (Black, qtd. in Tombs 82). In Rochester’s case, the price he paid for his relationship with the poor opera-dancer Céline is a loss of money and of pride, and the custody of a French little girl who, in his opinion, terribly resembles her mother. Rochester has spent his youth collecting women from different parts of the world, one of whom he even married and then locked in his own attic. However, according to his point of view, it is Céline, and never himself, who is worthy of contempt, apparently because she is a woman, she is an opera-dancer, and she is French, and for these reasons not respectable.

Rochester explains to Jane how he “took the poor thing [Adèle] out of the slime and mud of Paris, and transplanted it here, to grow up clean in the wholesome soil of an English country garden” (Brontë 170). In this description, Rochester shows himself as the good British benefactor who saved Adèle from the poverty and (moral) dirtiness of the French capital, while Adèle appears like a sick plant who, in order to grow up (morally) clean needs to be transplanted to the healthful and pure English soil. Despite the change of soil, the plant seems to be incurable, and Rochester cannot but admit that some of Adèle’s “little freedoms and trivialities [...] betrayed in her a superficiality of character, inherited probably from her mother, hardly congenial to an English mind”

(Brontë 171). Superficiality is, therefore, in Rochester's view a typical characteristic of the French, which definitely contrasts with an English resolute mind.⁷

Rochester observes Adèle in her frivolous attitudes and considers her “a curious study” (Brontë 163). The child thus appears to Rochester like a different reality to be observed at a distance, something “other” to be analysed in all its eccentricity. On the occasion of Adèle's new present, Rochester tells Jane about the child's behaviour in the following way:

[...] She pulled out of her box, about ten minutes ago, a little pink silk frock; *rapture* lit her face as she unfolded it; *coquetry runs in her blood, blends with her brains*, and seasons the marrow of her bones. ‘Il faut que je l’essaie!’ cried she, ‘et à l’instant meme!’ and she rushed out of the room. She is now with Sophie, undergoing a robing process: in a few minutes she will re-enter; and I know what I shall see – a miniature of Céline Varens, as she used to appear on the boards at the rising of—: but never mind that. However, my tenderest feelings are about to receive a shock; such is my presentiment; stay now, to see whether it will be realized.’ [emphasis added] (Brontë 163)

When the child appears, Jane reports that

[s]he entered, transformed as her guardian had predicted. A dress of rose-coloured satin, very short, and as full in the skirt as it could be gathered, replaced the brown frock she had previously worn; a wreath of rosebuds circled her forehead; her feet were dressed in silk stockings and small white satin sandals. (Brontë 163)

These two descriptions of the French child, like the one concerning her performance, are rich in details, and both refer to what Adèle has in common with her mother, the French mistress and opera-dancer. As Lodge points out, “Céline Varens [...] exhibits all the vices of France: whoredom, deception, fickleness, and theatricality. Her daughter, Adèle, shows all the feminine symptoms of being equally frivolous, vain, and worldly [...]” (101). Furthermore, these detailed descriptions, which function, on a narrative level, as a preamble to Rochester's account of his past, also stress Adèle's mother and Adèle's own Frenchness, and the difference from Jane. Indeed, comparing Jane and Adèle, the French critic Forcade identified the first as English since she “has the stoical courage to be expected of the heroine of ‘un livre tout anglais’” (qtd. in Duthie 201), whereas he recognised in the second “‘un bijou de Parisienne’” (qtd. in Duthie 201).

⁷ See Tombs p. 45

Like her mother, Adèle dedicates herself to her toilette in a way which appears quite extraordinary to the unsophisticated Jane. Besides, Jane's astonishment at the little girl's interest in fashion and toilette is quite similar to that of Evelina at the old Madame Duval's obsession for physical appearance in *Evelina*. Vanity and frivolity were stereotypes usually attributed to Frenchwomen, and several female characters of French origin are represented in other novels by Charlotte Brontë as presenting these characteristics. For instance, in *Villette* Zélie is thus described: "[t]his Parisienne was always in debt; her salary being anticipated by expenses – not only in dress, but in perfumes, cosmetics, confectionery, and condiments... She mortally hated work, and loved what she called pleasure" (Brontë, qtd. in Plasa 131). In the same novel, Ginevra Fanshawe's "taste in dress, her grace and social charm [...] owe something to continental influence" (Duthie 148). Lastly, in *The Professor*, Charlotte Brontë depicts the French Hortense as "frivolous" (qtd. in Duthie 118). In *Jane Eyre* Adèle's vanity and frivolity are shown throughout the whole novel, but they are particularly evident on the occasion of the big party organised at Thornfield Hall, in which many elegant ladies participate. Jane reports that Adèle "would have Sophie to look over all her 'toilettes,' as she called frocks; to furbish up any that were 'passées,' and to air and arrange the new" (Brontë 191). Although Jane doubts that Adèle can be introduced to the company, in order "to please her, [she] allowed Sophie to apparel her in one of her short, full muslin frocks" (Brontë 193). Furthermore, Jane talks about the child's excitement and her preparation for the evening, and reports that Adèle could only calm herself when her toilette was started. The moment is described ironically as a solemn process for the little girl.

Adèle had been in a state of ecstasy all day, after hearing she was to be presented to the ladies in the evening; and it was not till Sophie commenced the operation of dressing her that she sobered down. Then the importance of the process quickly steadied her, and by the time she had her curls arranged in well-smoothed, drooping clusters, her pink satin frock put on, her long sash tied, and her lace mittens adjusted, she looked as grave as any judge. No need to warn her not to disarrange her attire: when she was dressed, she sat demurely down in her little chair, taking care previously to lift up the satin skirt for fear she should crease it, and assured me she would not stir thence till I was ready. (Brontë 197-198)

After the process of dressing has been completed, Jane claims that Adèle "appeared to be still under the influence of a most solemnising impression" (Brontë 198), but, not

wholly satisfied, the child asks if she can have a flower to complete her toilette (Brontë 198). The reaction of Jane acquires, then, the tone of a moral reproach: “‘You think too much of your ‘toilette,’ Adèle: but you may have a flower’” (Brontë 198). Finally, Adèle “sighed a sigh of ineffable satisfaction, as if her cup of happiness were now full” (Brontë 198) and Jane reports that she had to turn her “face away to conceal a smile [she] could not suppress” (Brontë 198). Apparently, for Jane “there was something ludicrous as well as painful in the little Parisienne’s earnest and *innate* devotion to matters of dress” [emphasis added] (Brontë 198). Jane considers Adèle’s passion for fashion and appearance as something innate, a characteristic which derives essentially from her being born French. In addition, the fact that Jane calls the child “the little Parisienne” (Brontë 198) transmits a certain degree of irony but also of disapproval towards the child’s origins. In contrast, Jane does not dedicate so much time to her toilette like Adèle does, and this might be attributed to the fact that she is a governess and that she is not French. Constant references are made, indeed, about her plain style, in conjunction with the detailed description of Adèle’s rich preparations, as, for instance: “I dresses myself with care: obliged to be plain – for I had not article of attire that was not made with extreme simplicity – I was still by nature solicitous to be neat” (Brontë 117). Moreover, Jane ironically compares her style to that of the Quakers⁸, although she belongs to the Church of England, when she says: “having ascertained that I was myself in my usual Quaker trim, where there was nothing to retouch – all being too close and plain, braided locks included, to admit of disarrangement” (Brontë 151). Like Adèle, also the character of Georgiana, one of Jane’s cousins, is depicted as vain, and, seeing her for the first time after many years, Jane compares Georgiana’s dress to that of her sister Eliza, and reports that “it looked as stylish as the other’s looked puritanical” (Brontë 263). Her sister Eliza defines Georgiana with contempt as a “vain and absurd animal” (Brontë 271) and tells her: “You must have music, dancing, and society – or you languish, you die away” (Brontë 271). Georgiana is not French, but her life style and her frivolity appear definitely Frenchified.

The episode of the party at Thornfield also shows Adèle’s predisposition for society and her self-confidence in this respect. The child is really thrilled at the idea of the party

⁸As explained by Davies, “female members of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) had dressed in subdued, plain grey clothes, to demonstrate that they were ‘not of this world’” (*Jane Eyre* 544, note 6).

and “the preparation for the company and the prospect of their arrival, seemed to throw her into ecstasies” (Brontë 191). In Paris, in fact, Adèle was used to stay in the company of the ladies and also assisted to their toilette (Brontë 194), and, when she is introduced to the ladies at the party, she appears totally self assured and enjoys their attention—“You’re not suppose, reader, that Adèle has all this time been sitting motionless on the stool at my feet: no; when the ladies entered, she rose, advanced to meet them, made a stately reverence, and said with gravity – ‘Bon jour, Mesdames’” (Brontë 201). The ladies, who name her “little puppet” (Brontë 201) “had called her to a sofa, where she now sat, ensconced between them, chattering alternatively in French and broken English; absorbing not only the young ladies’ attention, but that of Mrs Eshton and Lady Lynn, and getting spoilt to her heart’s content” (Brontë 201). In conclusion, as a good talker, Adèle appears typically French. According to Robert and Isabelle Tombs, indeed, “[t]he British [...] found the French ‘forward’ and talkative” (311). As already mentioned in the analysis of *Leonora*, sociability and conversation skills were characteristics attributed to the French, as deriving from the eighteenth century culture of the salons⁹.

Jane thinks that Adèle is spoilt, and when the child insists on seeing the ladies before having been sent for, she says that “[s]ome natural tears she shed’ on being told this; but as I began to look very grave, she consented at last to wipe them” (Brontë 195). As explained by Davies, “[b]y substituting ‘she’ for ‘they’, Charlotte Brontë implies the fallen Eve in Adèle” (*Jane Eyre* 553, note 6), thus implying a certain contempt for Adèle’s attitudes. Then, Rochester says ironically that “[he] keep[s] [Adèle] and rear[s] [her] rather on the Roman Catholic principle of expiating numerous sins, great or small, by one good work” (Brontë 164). Concerning education in the nineteenth century, “that of Catholic girls was much more focused on the notion of preserving innocence and developing a kind of sensual personal piety” (Houbre and Grasser qtd. in De Bellaigue 163), for “female adolescence [was perceived] as sexualized and dangerous” (De Bellaigue 227). However, even if they fail to preserve their innocence, the Catholics can expiate their venial sins also through good works, and Rochester’s sarcasm with regard to this presumably alludes to Adèle’s mother, who, as a Roman Catholic, could be absolved from what, in his perspective, are her sins. Adèle is only a child and is not

⁹ See p. 51

responsible for her mother's "sins," nor has she done any wrong yet, but Rochester seems to be sure of the fact that she is exactly like her mother. There are also other references to religion in the novel, and to the fact that Adèle is Catholic. For example, by saying that her mother "is gone to the Holy Virgin" (Brontë 121), as Davies claims, Adèle is established as a Roman Catholic (*Jane Eyre* 545, note 11) and Jane's contempt for the child as far as some of her attitudes are concerned, may also be attributed to her aversion to Catholicism. Her opinion towards the Catholic religion is well expressed on the occasion of a conversation with her cousin Eliza, who wishes to convert to the Catholic religion: "'You're not without sense, cousin Eliza; but what you have, I suppose, in another year will be walled up alive in a French convent'" (Brontë 279). As explained by Peschier, "[t]he Roman Catholic practice of incarcerating young women in convents was believed to be one of the causes of female insanity and convents and lunatic asylum were seen as similar types of institutions by many anti-Catholic writers" (6-7). Moreover, Duthie explains Jane's position concerning Catholicism by referring to Charlotte Brontë's suspicion of "religious beliefs and practices different from her own" (115).

Whereas Adèle is represented as the miniature of her mother Céline Varens, Jane embodies a totally different model of femininity. Like Madame Duval in *Evelina*, the French Céline, in her interest in fashion and ornaments, appears artificial. On the other hand, in her sobriety, Jane is depicted, and defines herself as natural. When Rochester expresses his wish to give Jane some jewels, she indeed answers: "'Oh, sir! – never mind jewels! I don't like to hear them spoken of. Jewels for Jane Eyre sounds *unnatural* and strange: I would rather not have them'" [emphasis added] (Brontë 299). Besides, Jane does not want to be Rochester's new mistress: "'[...] Do you remember what you said of Céline Varens? – of the diamonds, the cashmeres you gave her? I will not be your English Céline Varens'" (Brontë 311). Céline and Jane are not only different kinds of women, but they also belong to different worlds. As she affirms, Jane does not want to be Rochester's English Céline, nor does she feel that she can go to France. In fact, when Rochester suggests she "shall go to a place [he] ha[s] in the south of France: a white-washed villa on the shores of the Mediterranean" (Brontë 350), Jane interrogates herself on the two different possibilities offered to her in these terms:

Which is better? – To have surrendered to temptation; listened to passion; made no painful effort – no struggle; – but to have sunk down in the silken snare; fallen asleep on the flowers covering it; wakened in a southern clime, amongst the luxuries of a pleasure villa: to have been now living in France, Mr Rochester’s mistress; [...] Whether is it better, I ask, to be a slave in a fool’s paradise at Marseilles – fevered with delusive bliss one hour – suffocating with the bitterest tears of remorse and shame the next – or to be a village school-mistress, free and honest, in a breezy mountain nook in the healthy heart of England? (Brontë 414)

In Jane’s perspective France stands for a seductive paradise, the place of attractive temptations but also of remorse and shame. In France she would feel suffocated and enslaved, whereas in England, the place where she belongs, she is honest and, above all, free. As Edwards also clarifies, “[f]or Jane, the decision is simply right: that true freedom lies in submission to her small fate is expressed in the image of ‘breezy’ and ‘healthy’ England, in contrast with ‘suffocating’ in the superficially more attractive Marseilles” (143). The contrast between France and England, as expressed in Jane’s own thoughts, is that between the artificiality of culture and nature, exemplified here by the difference between the luxury of a villa, and the freedom of a breezy mountain. Finally, “France is associated with the idea of social licence” (Duthie 130). As far as France and, in particular, Paris are concerned, Duthie states that “[Rochester’s] allusions to the Parisian background of his intrigue with Céline Varens are less convincing” (87). In fact, as Duthie clarifies, “their artificiality is only too obvious” (87) and “[h]ad Charlotte Brontë realised her wish to go to Paris, these passing references would have had a more authentic ring” (87).

Towards the end of the novel, when things settle down, Adèle is a young woman, and by growing up, she has also improved her character. When Adèle was still a child, Jane had reported that, “as she was committed entirely to [her] care [...], she soon forgot her little freaks, and became obedient and teachable” (Brontë 128). Now, Adèle has apparently forgotten her freaks completely. In fact, Jane reports that the young girl, not only “made fair progress in her studies” (Brontë 519), but, “[a]s she grew up, a sound *English education* corrected in a great measure *her French defects*” [emphasis added] (Brontë 519). As far as education is concerned, some people in nineteenth century Britain had a negative idea about the French educational system. Jules Simon, for example, “had complained that, in France ‘girls, even in the best boarding-schools,

receive a futile, incomplete education, entirely taken up with accomplishments, including nothing serious or edifying” (qtd. in De Bellaigue 11). Furthermore, “when [Adèle] left school,” Jane says that “[she] found in her a pleasing and obliging companion – docile, good-tempered, and *well-principled*” [emphasis added] (Brontë 519). The fact that Jane is happy and satisfied in seeing Adèle positively changed from being “wayward” (Brontë 128) to being docile is explained by Lodge by the fact that “[r]ebelliousness[,] which is ideologically equated with unabashed female sexuality, is alienated through association with degenerate foreign countries” (101), like France. The differences between what were thought to be the British and the French national characters were also to be found in the respective educational systems. The two different models of education, rather than being perceived as one of the possible causes of difference between the two countries, were identified as evident signs, or direct consequences of an inborn national character. As far as this matter is concerned, Robert and Isabelle Tombs point out that “[e]ducation, the matrix of culture, became one of the most thoroughly debated areas of difference (449). Whereas, they explain, “English schools were said to be modelled on the ‘natural’ institutions of home and family, and hence to encourage individual development[,] French schools were modelled on the ‘artificial’ regulated environments of the regiment of the convent” (Tombs 449). In addition, Cobbe attributes the British aversion to French female institutions to the fact that, “dangerously foreign and Catholic as they were, [these institution] were characterized as artificial and contrary to women’s domestic, familial nature” (qtd. in Beillague 18).

To summarise, the minor character of Adèle in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* represents a stereotypical image of French femininity, exemplified in the child’s vanity, in her dedication to fashion and personal care, in her sociability, and lastly in her stage skills and her mercenary character, characteristics because of which she resembles her mother Céline. Finally, the figure of Adèle’s mother, absent but recalled through the child’s and Rochester’s words, is described as a charming but deceitful and immoral Parisian opera-dancer who embodies the cliché of the Frenchwoman, attractive but dangerous.

4.2. *Vanity Fair: A Novel Without a Hero: Becky Sharp - the Charming Adventuress, and her French maid*

Vanity Fair was first published in monthly parts from January 1847 to July 1848 and it was a success “[I]onized by fashionable world” (Carey xxxiv). The novel tells the story of a girl of humble origins, the half-French Rebecca Sharp, who attempts to make her way through society by seducing wealthy men. Becky, as Rebecca is often called, proves to be very successful as a social climber, but things go wrong when the people around her finally discover her opportunist nature. Among the people close to Becky, Amelia, the second main character in the novel, plays an important role. Wealthy, naïve and good-hearted, Amelia appears opposed to Becky. Through Becky’s adventures *Vanity Fair* explores British society during a period of time covering the early years of the nineteenth century, when the protagonist is nineteen years old, until those following the Congress of Vienna (1814-1815) and the Battle of Waterloo (18th June 1815), when Becky’s son is already a young boy. As it covers a long historical period and history actually plays a crucial role in the development of the narration as well as of the characters, *Vanity Fair* has also been compared to Tolstoy’s historical novel *War and Peace* (1869), which has “the Napoleonic campaigns as its historical setting” (Carey xxvii). However, as Carey points out, “Thackeray’s disdain for patriotism and military glory contrasts with the undisguised and self-deluding chauvinism of Tolstoy [...]” (xxix). Besides, unlike in *War and Peace*, whose author’s “view of human relations is ultimately benign, even sentimental” (Carey xxix), Carey argues that “throughout *Vanity Fair* the principle behind human relationships is conflict” (xxx). In fact, Thackeray “omits the battle-scenes and shows how hostility permeates the whole of life” (Carey xxx).

Unlike the French characters in the novels analysed so far, Becky Sharp is one of the protagonists of *Vanity Fair* and, for Carey, she is also its “most complex character” (xxii). Moreover, she is the brain of the novel (Carey xxii), and “[i]n few other Victorian novels is a woman so clearly the most intelligent character” (Carey xxii). As far as the author and his relation with the character of Becky are concerned, Carey argues that Thackeray actually “created her to a large extent in his own image” (xxii-xxiii) since, “[l]ike her, he relished the company of artists and bohemians, [...] had

brilliant gifts of satire and caricature, [...] he was bored by tame domesticity and enjoyed the splendor of high society, [and, lastly], he had suffered poverty and knew what shifts it could reduce you to” (xxii-xxiii). Furthermore, some connection to France can be identified in the author’s life, as well as to the world of the theatre, to which Becky partly belongs, and to the elegant society which she is finally able to reach. MacMaster explains that Thackeray “had always been interested in and knowledgeable about France, having spent a good part of his youth there in the thirties [...] the age of the July Revolution and Louis Philippe, the Citizen King [...]” (120). In 1829-30 Thackeray spent “summer and Easter vacations in Paris” (Carey xxxiii), where he was enraptured by the ballerina Marie Taglioni, and he later settled in the French capital in 1834 (Carey xxxiv). Besides, Prawer explains that in 1829 Thackeray, who was an art student, “began sending home rapid sketches of French men and women” (13) depicting, for instance, “ballet-dancers,” fashionable gentlemen, or French teachers (13). Finally, the character of Becky Sharp could have been based on real persons like, for instance, “a disreputable ex-governess called Pauline[,] whom Thackeray [...] probably had an affair with, as a young man in Paris” (Carey xiv), or, as the Victorian critic George Henry Lewes argued, she could be connected to the historical figure of Louis Philippe, who was expelled from France precisely at the time when Thackeray was writing his book version of the text (Simmons 103). Both Louis Philippe and Becky are, according to this critical point of view, representatives of a “bourgeois world dominated by money” (Simmons 103). At any rate, as Simmons asserts, the author’s choice of associating “his fictional character with a real-life French citizen rather than with a British one” (103-104) is significant, since “[f]or many Britons, France and the French continued to provide the means of an only partly conscious self-critique presented in historical terms” (Simmons 104).

Becky Sharp is the daughter of a British artist and of “a young woman of the French nation, who was by profession an opera-girl” (Thackeray 17). In this concise definition of Becky’s mother, Frenchness is strictly connected to the female world of the opera dancers, and thus to a world characterised by immorality. As regards her mother, it is mentioned that “[t]he humble calling of her female parent Miss Sharp never alluded to” (Thackeray 17), and that she “used to state subsequently that the Entrechats were a noble family of Gascony, and took great pride in her descent from them” (Thackeray

17). In addition, Becky tells Mr Crawley that she descends on her mother's side from the "Montmorency" (Thackeray 102), apparently a noble family who migrated to Britain after the revolution. Indeed, the narrator exclaims: "[h]ow many noble emigrées had this horrid revolution plunged in poverty!" (Thackeray 102). Rebecca's true origins, on her father's but especially on her mother's side, are considered very low not only from an economic and social point of view but also from a moral perspective. Miss Pinkerton writes to Mrs Bute Crawley, who wants to inquire into Becky's past, that "her parents were disreputable (her father being a painter, several times bankrupt, and her mother, as I have since learned, with *horror*, a dancer at the Opera)" [emphasis added] (Thackeray 111). Becky's mother, "who was represented to [Miss Pinkerton] as a French Countess, forced to emigrate in the late revolutionary horrors" (Thackeray 111), was instead, as Miss Pinkerton describes her, "a person of the *very lowest order and morals*" (Thackeray 111). Furthermore, when Mrs Bute tells the old Miss Crawley, who is very fond of Becky, that "[h]er mother was an opera-girl, and [that] she has been on the stage or worse herself" (Thackeray 183), Miss Crawley "gave a final scream, and fell back in a faint" (Thackeray 183).

Having been a Parisian opera-dancer, Becky's mother is considered immoral, and her immorality appears strictly connected to her Frenchness. As regards Becky, not only is she half-French, but she also danced on the stage herself and poses for painters. In Miss Crawley's words, Rebecca appears as a synthesis of all the worst possible female characteristics: "[she] was the daughter of an opera-girl. She had danced herself. She had been a model to the painters. She was brought up as became her mother's daughter. She drank gin with her father, etc., etc. It was a *lost* woman [...]" [emphasis added] (Thackeray 214). Furthermore, Lord Steyne, being implored by Becky to prove her innocence, tells her that she is "as innocent as [her] mother, the ballet-girl [...]" (Thackeray 623). Apparently, Rebecca's origins are cause of disdain more because her mother was a dancer and her father a painter rather than for the fact that she is half-French. Besides, like Becky's father also other British characters are objects of scorn in the novel, like, for instance, Becky's husband Rawdon, who wastes his money drinking and gambling. The general sarcastic and critical tone of the novel thus seems to be directed at human immorality rather than at national differences. However, despite these considerations, it is quite significant that the negative character of Rebecca is half

French and that her mother is not simply a poor woman, but a Parisian opera-dancer. In fact, through her mother Rebecca's immorality is directly connected to French femininity.

Given her origin on her mother's side, Becky also "spoke French with purity and a Parisian accent" (Thackeray 17), and since this "was in those days rather a rare accomplishment" (Thackeray 17-18), at the age of seventeen she went to Chiswick, Miss Pinkerton's school, where it is narrated that her duty was that of talking French to the girls (Thackeray 18). At the beginning of the novel, Becky is leaving "Miss Pinkerton's academy for young ladies" (Thackeray 7) together with Amelia (Miss Sedley) and, in an act of rebellion against the teacher, she throws out of her carriage the English dictionary, and later says:

I have been made to tend the little girls in the lower schoolroom, and to talk French to the Misses, until I grew sick of my mother-tongue. But that talking French to Miss Pinkerton was capital fun, wasn't it? She doesn't know a word of French, and was too proud to confess it. I believe it was that which made her part with me; and so thank heaven for French. *Vive la France! Vive l'Empereur! Vive Bonaparte!* (Thackeray 16)

It is particularly significant that Rebecca uses her mother-tongue as "her most effective weapon" (Harden 103) in order to rebel, as well as the fact that she rejects the English dictionary. It is the French language that makes Miss Pinkerton part with Becky, as the latter says, and for this separation she thanks France and Napoleon. As Harden points out, the "little game or battle" (109) between Becky and Miss Pinkerton is "the first conflict of many in the narrative" (109). Furthermore, in her battle, as Simmons points out, Becky "has implied a sense of social superiority to those[, like Miss Pinkerton,] who do not know French and can only value the English language of Doctor Johnson: French, she suggests, is evidence of sophistication" (112). In addition, Becky's "claim that a familiarity with French is advantageous" (Simmons 112) is proved throughout the novel, since "French was[, in fact,] long unrivalled as the language of the cultural and social elites" (Tombs 150), which Becky tries, and is finally able to reach. Lastly, in this famous passage, a characteristic of Becky comes into evidence, namely her indifference towards the fate of Britain, which at that time was at war with France. By exclaiming the name of Napoleon, Becky shocks her friend Amelia, who cries "'O Rebecca, Rebecca, for shame!' [...]' 'How can you – how dare you have such wicked, revengeful

thoughts?” (Thackeray 16). As the narrator explains, “this was the greatest blasphemy Rebecca had as yet uttered; and in those days, in England, to say, ‘Long live Bonaparte!’ was as much as to say, ‘Long live Lucifer!’” (Thackeray 16).

Becky proves throughout the novel to be unpatriotic in such an important moment for the British nation. When Napoleon escapes from Elba in 1815, history enters the lives of the characters and influences their private lives:

[...T]he French Emperor comes in to perform a part in this domestic comedy of Vanity Fair [...]. It was he that ruined the Bourbons and Mr John Sedley. It was he whose arrival in the capital called up all France in arms to defend him there; and all Europe to oust him. While the French nation and army were swearing fidelity round the eagles in the Champ de Mai, four mighty European hosts were getting in motion for the great *chasse à l'aigle*; and one of these was a British army, of which two heroes of ours, Captain Dobbin and Captain Osborne, formed a portion. (Thackeray 202)

While at that time “all were filled with hope and ambition and patriotic fury” (Thackeray 203), Rebecca shows only her opportunist side. In fact, on the eve of the Battle of Waterloo, Becky is “ready for any event – to fly she thought fit, or to stay and welcome the conqueror, were he Englishman or Frenchman,” and she probably “dream[s] that night of becoming a duchess and Madame la Maréchale [...]” (Thackeray 372). In short, the unpatriotic Becky, almost siding with Britain’s enemy, although she actually just thinks about what is better for herself, reveals not to be entirely, or properly British.

Becky not only is half-French and does not show any kind of patriotic feeling, but, in the way she is represented, also appears similar to the French Emperor Napoleon. Napoleon is referred to throughout the novel in many ways, like, for instance, “the Corsican monster” (Thackeray 137), “Corsican wretch” (Thackeray 300), or “that Corsican scoundrel” (Thackeray 225). Similarly, Rebecca is often mentioned as “[t]he little sly wretch” (Thackeray 182), “[...] an abandoned wretch” (Thackeray 109, 377), or “that little clever little wretch of a Rebecca” (Thackeray 378). Another comparison can be made between Rebecca and Napoleon, namely the fact that both are connected to, or depicted as dangerous animals. In fact, Napoleon’s army is symbolised by an eagle, a bird of prey, and in the novel it is narrated that “the eagles of Napoleon Bonaparte [...] were flying from Provence, where they perched after a brief sojourn in

Elba, and from steeple to steeple [...] they reached the towers of Notre Dame [...]” (Thackeray 194). In a similar way, as argued by Harden, “[i]n the closed little cage of Chiswick, [Becky] seems like an ‘eagle,’ the predatory threatening bird of war” (103), symbol of “the battle emblems of Napoleon” (103). Moreover, Becky is also often referred to as “that little serpent of a governess who rules [Rawdon]” (Thackeray 290), or as “that little viper of a Sharp” (Thackeray 210), and, as far as her behaviour with men is concerned, Dobbin says to George that “[s]he writhes and twists about like a snake [...]” (Thackeray 325).

Furthermore, both Napoleon and Rebecca are opportunists. Napoleon is indeed called “the Corsican upstart” (Thackeray 194), whereas the “little sly scheming Rebecca” (Thackeray 161) is a social climber, “[a]n artful designing woman” (Thackeray 291), and an “odious little adventuress” (Thackeray 553) who “found a use for everything” (Thackeray 151). In this regard, Praver, who analyses the text of *Vanity Fair* in conjunction with the sketches appearing in the 1848 edition, points out that

Becky, an ‘upstart’ who has made her own way into society as Napoleon had made his into history, ‘becomes’ Napoleon after her disgrace and exile from ‘respectable’ society: the initial of Chapter LXIV shows her in the pose of Benjamin Haydon’s painting of Napoleon, gazing across from her own St. Helena to the social shores from which she has been banished. (21)

Therefore, for Praver, the historical figure of Napoleon “stands, in *Vanity Fair*, not only for the great enemy Britain had to vanquish, but also for the self-made man or woman who follows his example in a more private sphere” (21). Finally, according to Simmons, through this parallel between the French Emperor and Becky, “Thackeray’s recreated British paranoia concerning Napoleon and his ambitions” (112), and, even though “readers of 1840s might smile at their parents’ fear of French conquest” (112), none the less “the conquest of moral values perceived as French in the supposedly gentler era of Louis Philippe might be a new cause for alarm” (112).

Becky is also depicted as vain and godless. Rebecca’s “soul is black with vanity” (Thackeray 642), she is called “‘a humbug [...]’” (Thackeray), and she is considered “not worthy to sit down with Christian people” (Thackeray 642). Similarly, Napoleon, with his gigantic ambitions, seems to embody the vanity that Mill considered part “of the French national character” (qtd. in Vorauxakis 149), while, as far as religion is

concerned, “[t]he revolution, even under Napoleon, was [perceived by the Britons as] an enemy of Christianity” (Tombs 249). Both the French Emperor and the half-French governess have low origins and they try to reach popularity; Napoleon pursues military glory and Rebecca fame in society. Besides, as Napoleon is trying to deprive the rest of Europe of its economic security, Rebecca is suspected by Amelia’s housekeeper of stealing Amelia’s jewels (Thackeray 71) and her mercenary character is shown throughout the whole novel. A certain similarity can also be perceived in the nicknames by which Rebecca and Napoleon are called—Becky and “Boney” (Thackeray 225)—which reinforce the affinity between the most famous French historical figure and the protagonist of *Vanity Fair*. According to Harden, Becky is “a female Napoleon, a clever, calculating, aggressive, ruthless leader who excites great interest and certain kinds of often frantic devotion in the men around her [...]” (103). However, Harden also points out that, unlike the French Emperor, “Becky is never entirely defeated [since] she is half British also, and if she is noticeably a female Napoleon, she is also to some degree a female Wellington” (104). Finally, although they are perceived as enemies of Britain and of respectable society respectively, both Napoleon and Becky are endowed with charm, and, as the first remains even now a controversial, fascinating historical figure, the second proves to be the most interesting character in the novel. In this regard, Williams states that “Becky is an attractive character because she is refreshingly active and lively in contrast to the passive and uninteresting Amelia [...]” (61).

The patriotism of the British nation is often referred to in the novel, and it is embodied by not only by William Dobbin but also by the negative character of Amelia’s husband George Osborne, who nonetheless is credited with a “truly British soul” (Thackeray 317). After his father’s death on the battle field, Osborne’s son Georgy proclaims his contempt of the French, and says: “When I’m in the army, won’t I hate the French! [...]” (Thackeray 794). In addition, the French are portrayed as “the bearded savages [...] who curse perfidious Albion” (Thackeray 452). However, Jos Sedley’s lackey affirms to hate George, “whose insolence towards him was quite of the English sort” (Thackeray 346). As this statement shows, Thackeray appears very critical also towards his own countrymen, who are defined, in the figure of George, as arrogant. Moreover, at a certain point the author says “*we* Frenchmen and Englishmen” [emphasis added] (Thackeray 374), thus not siding with any nation, or siding with both.

According to the boastful George Osborne, who not only represents the patriotic soldier but also pretends to be a tough man, Frenchmen are weak. As in *Evelina* in the figure of Captain Mirvan, Osborne's Britishness is thus connected to his masculinity. In contrast, the French are characterised as effeminate. When Dobbin says that "[t]he French are very strong [...]" (Thackeray 259), the arrogant George Osborne indeed replies: "I suppose no Briton's afraid of any d—Frenchman, hey?" (Thackeray 259). A specific example of French effeminacy is then given by "the little French cavalier [...], who gave lessons in his native tongue [...]" (Thackeray 452), who is depicted as a "powdered and courteous old man" (Thackeray 452), and thus as quite effeminate, as Frenchmen were often mocked¹⁰. If, on the one hand, the French are considered effeminate, on the other hand, they are also portrayed, according to another stereotypical image, as heartbreakers. The French "Messieurs de Truffigny [...] and Champignac, both *attachés* for the Embassy" (Thackeray 587) are attracted by Rebecca, and "both declared, according to the wont of their nation (for who ever yet met a Frenchman, come out of England, that has not left half-a-dozen families miserable, and brought away as many hearts in his pocket-book?) – both [...] declared that they were *au mieux* with the charming Madame Ravdonn" (Thackeray 587). In short, according to Praver, the two Frenchmen not only are susceptible "to female charm" (30), but they also "exhibit a type of sexual vanity often attributed to Frenchmen in Thackeray's writings" (30).

Rebecca's charm is one of the several characteristics that distinguish her from Amelia. Whereas Becky is depicted as "enchanting" (Thackeray 353), "good-humoured and clever" (Thackeray 61), Amelia is "amiable" (Thackeray 17), and "[h]er simple, artless behaviour, and modest kindness of demeanour, won all their unsophisticated hearts" (Thackeray 304). The contrast between the naïve Amelia and the smart Rebecca reminds one of that between Leonora and Olivia in *Leonora*, according to the logic of the heroine and anti-heroine. Although *Vanity Fair* is presented as *A Novel Without a Hero* and both Amelia and Rebecca are well-rounded characters, the narrator reports that Miss Sharp "never was known to have done a good action in behalf of anybody" (Thackeray 17), while he says about Miss Sedley that she is "the heroine of this work" (Thackeray 17). In *Vanity Fair* Rebecca is indeed portrayed as the bad girl opposed to

¹⁰ See p. 45-46

the good, docile Amelia, who, not by chance, is British on both maternal and paternal sides. When Amelia reproaches her for her praise to Napoleon, Becky replies: “I’m no angel” (Thackeray 16), and so clearly reveals not to be the perfect angelic creature, which in Victorian Britain women were supposed to be.

Moreover, Rebecca is affected (Thackeray 169), whereas “Mrs Amelia [is] a natural and unaffected person” (Thackeray 314). As already discussed in the context of the other novels, the contrast between nature and culture¹¹ appears also in *Vanity Fair* in the opposition between the British Amelia and the half-French Becky. Amelia, like *Leonora*’s protagonist, “blush[es] as only young ladies of seventeen know how to blush” (Thackeray 36-37), while, like Olivia, “Miss Rebecca Sharp never blushed in her life – at least not since she was eight years old, and when she was caught stealing jam out of a cupboard by her godmother” (Thackeray 37). Furthermore, towards the end of the novel, it is reported that Rebecca “rouged regularly now” (Thackeray 752), and the use of artificial colour on her cheeks stresses the contrast with the naturalness of Amelia. When the two friends separate, Amelia’s feelings are serious, while Rebecca proves to be “a perfect performer” (Thackeray 72) showing “the tenderest caresses, the most pathetic tears, the smelling-bottle, and some of the very best feelings of the heart” (Thackeray 72). In addition, like Olivia, Becky uses a really affected style in her letters to her friend, and calls her: “My dearest, sweetest Amelia” (Thackeray 83).

Differently from Amelia and similarly to Olivia in *Leonora*, Rebecca “was always affable, easy, and good-natured – and with men especially” (Thackeray 751). She is also an expert seductress, whose “vile arts” (Thackeray 377) bewitch Rawdon Crawley and make Amelia’s husband George Osborne infatuated. Moreover, “as she was by no means so far superior to her sex to be above jealousy, [Rebecca] disliked [Captain Dobbin] for his adoration of Amelia” (Thackeray 274), even though her vanity makes her think that “[her own] figure is far better than [Amelia’s]” (Thackeray 100). When Amelia realises that there is something between Becky and her husband, she says to her: “For shame, Rebecca; bad and wicked woman – false friend and false wife” (Thackeray 354). Unlike the natural and plain Amelia, Rebecca proves to be skilful with men, and

¹¹ See p. 37

allusions to the way in which she can satisfy her husband are subtly made by the narrator, who tells that

[a]ll former delights of turf, mess, hunting-field, and gambling-table; all previous loves and courtships of milliners, opera-dancers, and the like easy triumphs of the clumsy military Adonis, were quite insipid when compared with the lawful matrimonial pleasures which of late [Rawdon] had enjoyed. [Rebecca] had known perpetually how to divert him [...]. (Thackeray 336)

According to Carey, Becky's "only means are intelligence and sex-appeal [and t]hough no unchastity is specifically pinned on [her], it is suggested that she is looser than she should be" (xxv). As far as sexuality in *Vanity Fair* is concerned, Carey argues that "[t]he novel's general attitude towards sexual pleasure is that it is something women – or the women Thackeray sympathizes with – do not experience" (xxv) and, furthermore, for MacMaster, though Thackeray "was somewhat restive under the Victorian restraints against describing sexuality," he finds his own implicit way to refer to it (128).

Rebecca has a strong character and she is not passive like Amelia. In addition, until when she is left alone by her husband, Becky is the one having the power in the marital relationship. As regards the effect Becky produces on men, Mr John Sedley is described as an "infatuated man" (Thackeray 806) who "seemed to be entirely her slave" (Thackeray 806), while Lord Steyne is actually defined as "her slave" (Thackeray 602). Because of her manners with men and her opportunism, Rebecca is considered immoral and she is often referred to as the "pretty little hussey" (Thackeray 85) or, more aggressively, as "an artful hussey" (Thackeray 109) and as the "[...] artful little minx [...]" (Thackeray 590).

Rebecca is not only a good seductress, but, like Adèle in *Jane Eyre*, as half-French and the daughter of an opera-dancer, she can also act, sing and dance very well. Besides, like Adèle, she is an expert in matter of fashion, and her elegant manners allow her to enter Parisian society and make her appear more attractive to men. At the beginning of the novel it is said that she "sang far better than her friend [Amelia]" (Thackeray 42), and, on the occasion of a party, "she sate [sic!] down to the piano, and began to sing little French songs in such a charming, thrilling voice, that the mollified nobleman speedily followed her into that chamber" (Thackeray 438). The most significant exhibition of Becky's stage abilities is showed on the occasion of a big party

where she performs in a charade, an “amiable amusement” which “had come among us from France [...] and was considerably in vogue in this country” (Thackeray 595). After the performance, where she “appeared in her Marquise costume” (Thackeray 602), “Monsieur Le Duc de la Jabotière” (Thackeray 602), as the narrator reports,

declared in public, that a lady who could talk and dance like Mrs Rawdon was fit to be ambassadress at any court in Europe [and] [h]e was only consoled when he heard that she was half a Frenchwoman by birth. ‘Non but a compatriot,’ his Excellency declared, ‘could have performed that majestic dance in such a way.’ (Thackeray 602)

The ability to converse and dance is stressed as typically French. A totally different opinion on Becky’s performance is, however, expressed by the British Sir Pitt Crawley, who “declared her behaviour monstrously indecorous, reprobated in strong terms the habit of play-acting and fancy dressing, as highly unbecoming a *British female*” [emphasis added] (Thackeray 614). Also the women of the Crawley family express their “honest indignation” (Thackeray 560) when they look in the newspaper at “[t]he particulars of Becky’s costume [...] – feather, lappets, superb diamonds, and all the rest” (Thackeray 560). Specifically, “Mrs Bute said to her eldest girl [...], ‘you might have had superb diamonds forsooth, and have been presented at Court [...b]ut you’re only a gentlewoman, my poor child. You have only some of the best blood in England in your veins, and good principles and piety for your portion” (Thackeray 560). As a parvenu and a sensual woman, Becky is considered unprincipled and immoral, and from Mrs Bute’s affirmation it can be inferred that her lack of principles is inborn and due to her French origins.

As far as fashion is concerned, many references are made in the novel to Becky’s clothes and abundant accessories that highlight her interest in her physical appearance as well as in expensive goods. Like Rochester does with his Céline Varens, so Rawdon pampers Becky and sends her “shawls, kid, gloves, silk stocking, gold French watches, bracelets and perfumery [...] with the profusion of blind love and unbounded credit” (Thackeray 177). Becky is indeed “an expert at avoiding payment” (Praver 25). In addition to the French watches, it is also mentioned that Rebecca has “the neatest French kid glove” (Thackeray 247), and both accessories reveal the influence of France as far as fashion is concerned. Besides, it is also mentioned that “of the French party were [...] the Hof-Marschall and his wife, who was glad enough to get the fashions

from Paris” (Thackeray 740). As Prawer points out, with regard to fashion the French “exert an influence that extends well beyond the frontiers of their own country” (25). Finally, Rebecca is elegant and she “had as good taste as any milliner in Europe” (Thackeray 557). When she pays a visit to her child, she appears as a “vivified figure out of the *Magasin des Modes* –blandly smiling in the most beautiful new clothes and little gloves and boots. Wonderful scarfs, laces, and jewels glittered about her. She had always a new bonnet on [...]” (Thackeray 440). As it can be inferred by the French title of the magazine mentioned by Thackeray, Becky is helped by “the French *modistes*” (Prawer 26) in creating her look, and so are also “the great ladies of Parisian society who, in the wake of Waterloo, welcome Becky into their midst” (Prawer 26). Finally, in her passion for fashion Becky is also similar to Thackeray: in this respect, Carey states that the author of *Vanity Fair* “loved expensive and beautiful commodities” and that he once wrote enthusiastically about his shopping in Paris (xix).

Becky’s manners and her fluency in the French language lead to a great “success in Paris” (Thackeray 402) where “[a]ll the French ladies voted her charming” (Thackeray 402). In fact, Becky not only “spoke their language admirably” (Thackeray 402), but she also “adopted at once their grace, their liveliness, their manner” (Thackeray 402-403), and these characteristics are here implicitly considered typically French. As was thought suitable for a Frenchwoman at that time, Becky has also a stupid husband (Thackeray 403), and the narrator comments, apparently mocking the point of view of a Frenchwoman, that “all English are stupid – and, besides, a dull husband at Paris is always a point in a lady’s favour” (Thackeray 403). As argued by Prawer, English people appear here “as ‘stupid’ in comparison with French grace and liveliness” (20) and English husbands, in particular, are implicitly represented as cuckolds (Prawer 20). The fact that Becky “spoke French so perfectly” (Thackeray 329) makes her accepted among Parisian ladies, but this is also considered a negative connotation in British aristocratic society. In fact, it is reported that “this young woman [Becky] had got up the genteel jargon so well, that a native could not speak it better; and it was only from her French being so good, that you could know she was not a born woman of fashion” (Thackeray 329-220).

Becky's excessive vanity and superficiality do not comply with her role as a mother, with regard to which she differs from Amelia, and does not conform to the British ideal of domesticity of the time. As Carey claims, Rebecca "is [indeed] blamed for failing to conform to general standards of behaviour thought proper for women" (xxiv). Whereas, for Amelia, her "child was her being [,] [h]er existence was a maternal caress" (Thackeray 416), and "[s]he enveloped the feeble and unconscious creature with love and worship" (Thackeray 416), Rebecca does not care about her child and, going back to England, she leaves "her little son upon the Continent, under the care of her French maid" (Thackeray 424). The negative opinion of the French women in their maternal role appears particularly strong when it is affirmed that "[a]fter the amiable fashion of French mothers, [Becky] had placed [her child] out at nurse in a village in the neighbourhood of Paris, where little Rawdon passed the first months of his life, not unhappily, with a numerous family of foster-brothers in wooden shoes" (Thackeray 424). Concerning this image of the French, Praver explains that "[s]ince Hogarth's time the wearing of wooden shoes had become as firmly associated, in English minds, with the French lower classes as the eating of frogs' legs had with the higher" (27). When Becky takes her child with her again, she "scarcely ever took notice of him" (Thackeray 439) and "[h]e passed the days with his French *bonne*" (Thackeray 439). Becky is also portrayed as terribly selfish and lacking in maternal feelings when "[s]he did not offer to move and go and see the [crying] child" and claims that "'he'll cry himself to sleep;'" (Thackeray 439), and soon after she goes on "[...] talking about the Opera" with Lord Steyne (Thackeray 439). In addition, Becky is so superficial that she only shows her feelings towards her child and, on one single occasion, "kissed him in the presence of all the ladies" (Thackeray 527) when she "see[s] that tenderness was the fashion" (Thackeray 527). In brief, according to Carey, Rebecca's "greatest sin is that she is not motherly" (xxiv) at a time when to be mother was considered "the highest virtue achievable by women" (xxiv). Therefore, as a superficial woman who lacks maternal instinct and domestic spirit, Becky is considered more French than British.

A French character who only occurs occasionally in the novel is Rebecca's maid, who, despite her minor role, proves interesting for the stereotypical way in which she is depicted. The role of the maid in nineteenth-century literature is very often attributed to Frenchwomen, who are usually portrayed negatively, either as evil, like in the case of

Mademoiselle Hortense in Dickens's *Bleak House* (1853), or as silly, like the protagonist of Edgeworth's tale *Mademoiselle de Panache* (1801). Following this literary tradition of negative representations, Mademoiselle Geneviève in *Vanity Fair* is represented as superficial, unreliable and opportunistic. In fact, instead of taking care of Becky's son, as she has been ordered, the French maid, "contracting an attachment for a soldier in the garrison of Calais, forgot her charge in the society of this *militaire*, and little Rawdon very narrowly escaped drowning on Calais sands at this period, where the absent Geneviève left and lost him" (Thackeray 426). Particularly significant is also the fact that her way of leaving seems to be considered by the narrator as typically French. In fact, as is clarified, "[this] is called French leave among us [British]" (Thackeray 636). Moreover, later in the novel, it is revealed that "[a] lady very like her subsequently kept a milliner's shop in the Rue du Helder at Paris, where she lived with great credit and enjoyed the patronage of my Lord Steyne" (Thackeray 637). In short, from this depiction it emerges that the French maid cannot be trusted and, as well as Becky and as Céline Varens in *Jane Eyre*, she looks for the financial support of some rich men.

In the novel there are also many explicit references to French culture and literature as far as the character of "Old Miss Crawley" (Thackeray 105) is concerned. The old British lady is indeed described by Mr Crawley's words as "[...] a godless woman of the world" (Thackeray 104), who "[...] lives with atheist and Frenchmen" (Thackeray 104). Therefore, French and atheists appear for the British religious Mr Crawley as the same thing. Also Old Miss Crawley's "[...] vanity, licentiousness, profaneness, and folly" (Thackeray 104), as mentioned by Mr Crawley, seem to be attributed to her contact with Frenchmen. Furthermore, when the old lady was young, apparently at the time of the French Revolution,

[s]he was a *bel esprit*, and a dreadful Radical for those days. She has been in France (where St. Just, they say, inspired her with an unfortunate passion), and loved, ever after, French novels, French cookery, and French wine. She read Voltaire, and had Rousseau by heart; talked very lightly about divorce, and most energetically of the rights of women. (Thackeray 105)

Among the French books read by Old Miss Crawley, the works "of the graceful and fantastic Monsieur Crébillon the younger" (Thackeray 101) also appear. Claude-Prosper Jolyot de Crébillon (1707-77) was a "French author of scandalous novels" (Carey, *Vanity Fair* 823, note 1), a kind of literature that seems to be mentioned here as

emblematic of a licentious and immoral culture. Concerning divorce, another allusion to it makes it clear that this practice is considered typically and negatively French: “Be cautious, then, young ladies; be wary how you engage. [...] Get yourselves married as they do in France, where the lawyers are the bridesmaids and confidantes” (Thackeray 201).

To conclude, Becky Sharp shows many characteristics which were considered typically French, although, unlike her maid, she is only half-French. The famous critic Elizabeth Rigby Eastlake confirmed the evidence of Becky’s Frenchness and argued that

[t]he construction of this little clever monster is diabolically French. Such a *lusus naturae* as a woman without a heart and conscience would, in England, be a mere brutal savage, and poison half a village. France is the land for the real Syren, with the woman’s face and the dragon’s claws. (qtd. in Tillotson 85)

It is interesting to note here that Becky is implicitly defined as a dangerous creature half human, half bird, the siren, whereas Céline Varens in *Jane Eyre* was compared to a sylph. Both women thus seem to appear only half human. Commenting on Eastlake’s review of *Vanity Fair*, Simmons claims, however, that the fact that Becky is only half-French is what makes her such a complex character. In fact, “Becky has both elements of appeal and discomfort” (Simmons 116), and, as Simmons clarifies, “if she were entirely French [...] and [thus] entirely ‘other,’ she would merely be amusing; but if she is simultaneously an English bourgeoisie, a reflection of the reader, there are limits beyond which she should not go” (116). Becky embodies the way in which the Frenchwoman was traditionally perceived by the British: “assertive, elegant, erotically exciting, seductive and easy” (Florack, qtd. in Beller and Leerssen *Imagology* 157). However, unlike the French maid, whose simplistic portrayal results in a cliché, and the stereotypical idea of Frenchness nurtured by the British Old Miss Crawley with her readings and her cookery, Becky, being half French and half British, proves to be a complex character, who finally escapes the logic of stereotypes.

To summarise, the characters of Adèle Varens in Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and of Becky Sharp in *Vanity Fair*, though sharing many characteristics thought to be typical of the Frenchwoman, prove to be very different. Whereas the representation of Adèle is stereotypical, and the girl is fully accepted only when she "becomes" British thanks to a proper education, that of Becky Sharp is complex, and, though she is portrayed in many aspects as typically French, the character is never flat, nor stereotypical. In contrast, the character of Becky's French maid, only occasionally referred to in the novel, remains in the background, fixed and plain like one of Thackeray's many sketches.

5. Conclusion

The way in which French characters are represented in a selection of texts from late eighteenth and early nineteenth century British literature has been discussed in this thesis. In analysing the different works, the notion of stereotype has been central, whose peculiarity is that of applying specific characteristics, usually negative, to a group of people as a whole, without consideration of individual differences. The purpose of my analysis, which made reference to the historical and cultural background, was to investigate whether the characters of the selected works are depicted stereotypically, and thus whether they can be considered well-rounded characters or just mere types, what character traits are attributed to them and why, and, lastly, if these traits are similar in all the novels or if they changed in the course of time.

The texts analysed in this thesis include, among four novels, a travel account, which in its textual nature differs from the other objects of my analysis. In fact, Frances Trollope's *Paris and the Parisians in 1835* is presented by the author as a true account, although the subjective perspective of the writer inevitably emerges throughout the work. In this case, the notions of 'point of view' and of 'perspective' have been particularly important in considering the facts and the observations that have been reported, or rather constructed, through the cultural lenses of the British observer. In the text, despite the author's agenda, some stereotypes about the French emerge as Trollope refers to the French as a whole, attributing to them general characteristics and opposing them to her own countrymen. Finally, the power of a text to spread stereotypes is stronger in travel writing since the work is presented as true and reliable; however, since travel writing is a literary genre which deals with the observation of foreign countries and habits specifically, it is also possibly easier for the reader to recognise the existence of stereotypes because they are often intrinsic in the genre itself, and, in consequence, to decide what to think about them in a more conscious way.

With regard to the novels, the result of my analysis does not appear homogeneous. A huge difference indeed emerges between the first three texts analysed, *Evelina*, *Leonora* and *Jane Eyre*, and the last text, *Vanity Fair*. Whereas the French characters in the first novels—Madame Duval and Monsieur Du Bois, Olivia and her friend, Adèle and Céline Varens—are represented stereotypically, and are thus depicted as vain,

affected, artificial, deceitful and effeminate, which are the main characteristics traditionally attributed to the French, Becky Sharp in *Vanity Fair* is a rather complex character. Despite some qualities which are considered as stereotypically French, Becky Sharp is indeed a well-rounded character, who, unlike the others, does not result in a cliché. The main reason that can be attributed to this difference is that Becky is the protagonist of the novel, whereas the French characters in *Evelina*, *Leonora* and *Jane Eyre* have a minor role. Accordingly, Leerssen's statement that "stereotypes are more likely to occur in minor 'flat' characters if only because they allow authors to use a sort of semiotic shorthand" (qtd. in Rigney, qtd. in Beller and Leerseen, *Imagology* 289) has proved to be true in my research. A further evidence of that is given by the fact that also in *Vanity Fair* a stereotypical portrayal of the French can be found, precisely as far as the secondary character of the French maid is concerned.

It could then be remarked that also the British protagonists of *Evelina* and *Leonora*, as well as the second main character in *Vanity Fair* (Amelia) are depicted quite stereotypically as extremely naïve, good-hearted and quite passively aspiring to a domestic role. However, whereas the stereotypical depictions of the foreign characters in the novels are negative and stress, by contrast, the positive qualities of the British characters, the unrealistic portrayal of the British protagonists serves the purpose of reinforcing an ideal of femininity to be followed. Finally, both the positive and negative stereotypical portrayals evince in the novels a certain common thinking, but also reinforce, construct, and propagate misleading images and stereotypes.

To summarise, in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century British literature the most current stereotypes about the French, as they emerge from my investigation, are vanity, elegance, superficiality, affectation, artificiality, and fickleness. Furthermore, Frenchwomen are depicted as particularly skillful conversationalists, whereas Frenchmen are represented, on the one hand as effeminate and weak, and on the other hand as able heartbreakers. Lastly, these stereotypes appear to be constant in the period of time covered by my research.

In conclusion, the representation of French characters in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century has proved an interesting topic. The study, however, leaves ample room for further analyses: future studies on national stereotypes in literature could focus

on more specific thematic areas such as, for example, the depiction of the French governess or the French maid, starting from works such as Edgeworth's tales *The Good French Governess* and *Mademoiselle Panache*, and Dickens's novel *Bleak House*, or they could deal more in detail with gender differentiations. Lastly, a comparative research between the depiction of French characters in British literature and that of other people, like, for instance, the Italians, might lead to interesting findings.

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Zusammenfassung

Diese Arbeit beschäftigt sich mit der Repräsentation französischer Charaktere in der britischen Literatur des achtzehnten und frühen neunzehnten Jahrhunderts. Das Thema wird anhand einer Auswahl von Texten analysiert, zu welchen drei Romane sowie ein Reisebuch gehören: Frances Burney's *Evelina* (1779), Maria Edgeworth's *Leonora* (1806), Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1848), und Frances Trollope's *Paris and the Parisians in 1835* (1836). Das Ziel dieser Recherche ist die Untersuchung, ob die Darstellung französischer Charaktere in den ausgewählten Werken stereotypisch ist, herauszufinden, welche die am häufigsten benutzten Stereotypen sind, sowie ihre Bedeutung und Benutzung in ihrem kulturellem als auch historischen Kontext zu verstehen. Um dieses Ziel zu erreichen, erweist sich das Verfahren der 'Imagology' als geeignetste Analysemethode, da es sich speziell mit nationalen Stereotypen in der Literatur beschäftigt. Die Arbeit ist gegliedert in drei Teile. Im ersten Teil wird das benutzte theoretische Verfahren vorgestellt, sowie einige wichtige Konzepte beschrieben, welche für die Analyse relevant sind, wie zum Beispiel die Begriffe 'stereotyping', 'image' und 'representation'. Daraufhin wird das Konzept des 'national character' im Detail erklärt sowie ein geschichtlicher Überblick gegeben, um die sich aus der Textanalyse herausbildenden Stereotypen in einen Kontext stellen zu können. Das letzte Unterkapitel des ersten Teils beschäftigt sich mit Reiseliteratur, für welche eine Definition zusammen mit einer Beschreibung des Zeitalters des Reisens gegeben wird, und letztendlich wird *Paris and the Parisians in 1835* (1836) als Beispiel dieser Literaturgattung analysiert. Im zweiten Teil dieser Arbeit werden die Romane *Evelina* (1779) und *Leonora* (1801) miteinander verglichen und im Detail bezüglich der Charaktere Madame Duval und Monsieur Du Bois analysiert, sowie die Charaktere Olivia und Madame de P— im zweiten Roman. Schließlich beschäftigt sich der dritte Teil mit *Jane Eyre* (1847) und *Vanity Fair* (1848), und die analysierten Charaktere sind Adèle Varens und ihre Mutter Celine, beziehungsweise Rebecca Sharp und ihr französisches Dienstmädchen. Die Ergebnisse meiner Analyse zeigen, dass sich unter den typischsten französischen Stereotypen im späten achtzehnten und frühen neunzehnten Jahrhundert Eitelkeit, Eleganz, Oberflächlichkeit, Vortäuschung,

Gekünsteltheit und Wechselhaftigkeit befinden. Weiterhin werden französische Frauen vor allem als fähig in der Kunst der Konversation und des Tanzes beschrieben, wohingegen französische Männer auf der einen Seite als unmännlich, geckenhaft und schwach, auf der anderen Seite als Herzensbrecher dargestellt werden. Schlussendlich ergibt sich aus der Untersuchung, dass während die Nebencharaktere stereotypisch dargestellt werden, der einzige Hauptcharakter, Rebecca Sharp in *Vanity Fair*, obwohl mit typisch französischen Charakteristiken beschrieben, ein komplexer Charakter und die Art und Weise ihrer Verkörperung nicht stereotypisch ist.

