



Woman as Nobody and the Novels of Fanny Burney

Joanne Cutting-Gray

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Cutting-Gray places Burney's eighteenth-century view of Woman alongside those views of such contemporary theorists as Kristeva, Irigaray, and Arendt and discovers that Burney dismantles both the old social order and any new order that dictates resistance to male authority. Neither alternative explains the gaps that occur when Burney's heroines resort to madness, sickness, or fits of hysteria to make themselves heard. "Nobody" shifts the perspective away from revolution and becomes a source of political power in itself.

Burney, considered Jane Austen's literary mother, shaped both the tradition of women novelists and the novel of manners. Cutting-Gray devotes a chapter to a postmodern reading of each of the novels. In *Evelina* she explores the ways in which Evelina conceals her sexual and verbal power; in *Cecilia and Camilla* outbursts of feeling register as hysteria and madness to a patriarchal culture. Burney's growing concern with female namelessness becomes explicit in *The Wanderer*, a novel about a woman who refuses to name herself. Cutting-Gray analyzes this novel's central figure, "Incognita," rendering a playful figure of speech into a philosophical thesis about the identity of women. By the close of the book, "Nobody" replaces "author" and converts the entity "Fanny Burney" into a multivoiced community.

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