# The Name of the Father: Social Identity and the Ambition of *Evelina*

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In *Evelina* Frances Burney adopts (and adapts) a narrative cliché of eighteenth-century fiction. In a position to attract sexual attentions for which there is no appropriate social expression, a worthy but low-born or disinherited protagonist nevertheless—this is the comic version of the story—acquires an appropriate social station and marries the object of desire.[1] Of course Burney's Evelina is not illegitimate, like Fielding's Tom Jones or Smollett's Humphry Clinker; lower-class, like Richardson's Pamela; or both, like Defoe's Moll Flanders. She is the daughter of a wealthy baronet whose refusal to acknowledge her sophisticates without disguising the familiar story. Burney resolves her narrative tension when Evelina wins the paternal acknowledgment that justifies the socially impeccable Lord Orville's proposal of marriage. Evelina claims her name, surrenders it for a better, and hastens on the last page "to the arms of the best of men."[2]

1 Contemporary class aspirations mark a specific variant of this archetype; see Michael McKeon on status inconsistency, *The Origins of the English Novel 1600–1740* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), and Gary Kelly on "The Novel of Manners, Sentiment and Emulation," *English Fiction of the Romantic Period 1789–1830* (London: Longman, 1989): "authentic selfhood, thematized as romantic love, is seen to conflict with 'merely' social categories such as rank and wealth" (p. 42).

2 Frances Burney, *Evelina; or The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World*, ed. Edward A. Bloom (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 406. References are to this edition.

The typical goal of this narrative project, the protagonist's self-assertion and self-discovery, is in *Evelina* a figure for the novelist's ambition. But the novel that made Burney famous is now criticized for its conventions. Even her first readers, D.D. Devlin tells us, "showed little interest in the romance interest or in Lord Orville. The talk was all of the characters and incidents." To Martha G. Brown, Burney's feminism is misread romance. To Judy Simons, a critic sympathetic to Burney's discussion of private self and public role, she is "an unsophisticated artist": "Like the heroine, [*Evelina*] appears to conform meekly to certain contemporary conventions, with a romantic plot, a banished heiress and an egregious patrician hero. At odds with this overt romantic direction, however, is a strong vein of wild and earthy comedy."[3] Although championed by Margaret Anne Doody, the violent comedy is commonly disparaged as a debt to Smollett, Devlin calling it "a mistake in direction which she did not repeat." Clive T. Probyn contrasts Burney's "awkward and gratuitous liking for grotesque comic types" with "Smollett's fiercely subversive social satire" and dismisses her plot: "As in *Tom Jones*, the trick of fate which has robbed Evelina of her patrimony and social position is a device which, when exposed and corrected, will underwrite the status quo. It is thus a fictional technique, not an opportunity to expose any radical social injustices." Linking literary conventionality with social, he also dismisses Burney's subject: "Her concern is ... for manners rather than morals, embarrassment rather than anguish."[4]

This criticism values the drama of private identity it finds more accessible in Burney's journals. Devlin admires "the art of a journal-writer": "The effect of Fanny Burney's journals and diaries was of the immediate recording of events and people and sensations even though there was ... always a gap ... between the thing and its narration; and this is the

3 D.D. Devlin, *The Novels and Journals of Fanny Burney* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1987), p. 87; Martha G. Brown, "Fanny Burney's 'Feminism': Gender or Genre?" in *Fetter'd or Free? British Women Novelists, 1670–1815*, ed. Mary Anne Schofield and Cecilia Macheski (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1987), pp. 29–39; Judy Simons, *Fanny Burney* (London: Macmillan, 1987), p. 59: cf. pp. 32–33.

4 Devlin, p. 14; Clive T. Probyn, *English Fiction of the Eighteenth Century 1700–1789* (London: Longman, 1987), pp. 176–78. Margaret Anne Doody, *Frances Burney: The Life in the Works* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1988), pp. 48–51, sees the comedy as derived from masculine stage farce: "An older generation of critics was puzzled and offended, tending to treat the material as an allusion to Smollett, or as a sign of the novelist's incompetence or inexperience." Cf. Edwine Montague and Louis L. Martz, "Fanny Burney's *Evelina*," in *The Age of Johnson: Essays Presented to Chauncey Brewster Tinker*, ed. Frederick W. Hilles (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949), p. 171, and Ronald Paulson, *Satire and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), pp. 283–91.

art and method of *Evelina*." Simons sees a private Burney thwarted by convention: "Life for Burney was to become a series of roles, public performances which concealed the true self beneath, allowing only aspects of her real personality to emerge unchecked." Katharine M. Rogers contrasts the novels' conventions with the journals' revelations: "Burney's heroines show the destructive effects of cultural stereotyping; she herself shows the triumph of natural character over stereotype."[5] If they value *Evelina*, they praise Evelina as a sensitive observer of social folly—the kind of heroine they find in later fiction and the kind of private woman they seek in the journals.[6] They dislike Evelina's subservience to social convention and reduce Burney, a comic novelist in the tradition of Smollett and Sterne, to a cliché, the sensitive soul thwarted by stultifying literary and social conventions.

Much of this debate dehistoricizes Burney's achievement. It assumes an ideology of the autonomous subject that was not yet dominant, asserting the exclusive authority of a "true self" or "natural character" allegedly visible in Burney's journals but masked by convention in her fiction. *Self*-centred critics miss the drama of a stable private self grappling with an uncertain social identity in a world where public views of identity were, though challenged, socially ascendant. They salvage the journals by savaging the novels, though the novels established the diarist's public identity. They claim that "Evelina's social status is the immediate problem, not her own identity,"[7] though the social authority of private identity is what is at issue in *Evelina*. Julia L. Epstein and other recent critics work more productively when they recover Burney's private anger by defending the self-conscious artistry of journals and novels alike.[8]

In *Evelina*, Burney asserts the authority of private identity within a public discourse that denies it. When Evelina expresses her private self

5 Devlin, pp. 87, 91; Simons, p. 4; Katharine M. Rogers, "Fanny Burney: The Private Self and the Published Self," *International Journal of Women's Studies* 7 (1984), 117; cf. Montague and Martz, p. 175.

6 See Devlin, pp. 84–87, and Simons, pp. 33, 48–50.

7 Probyn, p. 177.

8 Julia L. Epstein, *The Iron Pen: Frances Burney and the Politics of Women's Writing* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989). In "Voice and Gender in Eighteenth-Century Fiction: Haywood to Burney," *Studies in the Novel* 19 (1987), 263–72, John J. Richetti argues that *Evelina* makes original use of conventional constraints on women's speech; in "The Silent Angel: Impediments to Female Expression in Frances Burney's Novels," *Studies in the Novel* 21 (1989), 235–52, Juliet McMaster argues, against Brown, that Burney's novels embody a sustained feminist critique of those constraints.

publicly, she does so with propriety to win acknowledgment of her merit from a hierarchical society that values deference to social convention. She figures forth the unknown novelist's attempt to win acknowledgment of her originality from a literary institution that nervously demands deference to conventions of discourse. Exploring private and public identity, *Evelina* embodies a debate between rival selves whose divergence generates great cultural and personal anxiety.

As Johnson knows when he first defines *character* as "a mark; a stamp; a representation,"[9] character is not something prior to its representation, like Simons's "true self" and "real personality" or Rogers's "natural character." It is the representation itself. When Richardson's Pamela fears losing her place, she asks for "a *Character* as to [her] Honesty,"[10] and *character* in *Evelina* usually has this sense. Evelina tries "to conduct [her]self with propriety" (p. 48) because representations of her actions *are* her character—her public identity. Similarly, when academic critics begin their careers authorized by letters of reference or when they routinely assess and produce letters and gossip about others, they rely on "characters" in the eighteenth-century sense. But the academic's "character" of an aspiring student will cite evidence of private gifts—intelligence, application, skill at research—that suggest the ability to achieve an independent professional identity. In contrast, the eighteenth-century novelist's character of an aspiring heroine (or hero) like Evelina gives a public identity that evidence of private qualities will modify.

Evelina lacks a public character though her private character is distinctively meritorious. Since public character is a social fact, Burney's challenge is to negotiate public authority for the rival private identity. Locke develops a similar situation when he splits the first-person singular pronoun between the "person" (the conscious subject) and the "man" (the observable social agent), arguing that the law punishes the latter because the former cannot prove unconsciousness of, say, a crime committed

9 *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755; reprinted London: Times Books, 1979), s.v. *character*. It is also a piece of type, handwriting, or an account—"A *representation* of any man as to his personal qualities," "An *account* of any thing as good or bad" (my emphasis); even under the definition "the person with his assemblage of qualities," Johnson cites Dryden and Addison on literary representations—the "characters" in tragedy and epic.

10 *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded*, ed. T.C. Duncan Eaves and Ben D. Kimpel (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971), p. 48.

while sleepwalking.[11] Later, Austen's Emma Woodhouse snobbishly sifts gossip to determine "*who*" Mr Elton's bride-to-be is—her name, "blood" (rank), and alliances—while awaiting acquaintance to learn "*what*" she is, her personal qualities.[12] Emma's personal pronoun denotes a public identity, and when Kristina Straub explores Evelina's sceptical detachment from her socially appropriate but trivial daily activities, she recaptures something of this division between private and public characters.[13]

The ambition of private self, another kind of character,[14] opposes these social constraints. Modern readers find reunion with a father and marriage to a lord weak forms of self-assertion, calling Evelina timid, but Villars, her guardian, sees the ambition that makes her London excursion dangerous: "A youthful mind is seldom totally free from ambition; to curb that, is the first step to contentment, since to diminish expectation, is to increase enjoyment" (p. 18). Ambition, the desire for distinction, counters a traditional aim of education accepted by Villars—to reconcile her to her social station instead of raising dangerous ambitions.[15]

Lack of social character frustrates Evelina's vivacity, blinding the socially distinguished to her merit. Mrs Selwyn's account of Mrs Beaumont (p. 284) is a Theophrastan character of a snob, so readers will not be surprised that she rejects Evelina; but others too deny Evelina an identity.[16]

11 John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), II. xxvii. 20; for reactions to Locke's rejection of the substantial self, see Christopher Fox, *Locke and the Scriblerians: Identity and Consciousness in Early Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 27–78.

12 *Emma*, ed. James Kinsley and David Lodge (1971; reprinted Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 164 (vol. 2, chap. 4).

13 Kristina Straub, *Divided Fictions: Fanny Burney and Feminine Strategy* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1987), chap. 4 ("*Evelina*: Trivial Pursuits").

14 Johnson includes "Personal qualities; particular constitution of mind," tendentiously citing ll. 1–2 of Pope's "Epistle to a Lady." But "Matter too soft a lasting mark to bear" suggests that Pope's women "have no Characters at all" because their (traditional) mutability loses imprinted social identities such as that of a wife ("Epistle to a Lady," *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. John Butt [London: Methuen, 1963], ll. 1–4).

15 Coral Ann Howells, "'The Proper Education of a Female ... Is Still to Seek': Childhood and Girls' Education in Fanny Burney's *Camilla; or, A Picture of Youth*," *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 7 (1984), 191–98, discusses the tension between propriety and education in Burney. Noting that Jenny Jones was anomalously educated, readily suspected, and eventually immoral, a 1749 pamphlet by "Orbilius" attacked *Tom Jones* for linking education with rank, arguing that it can teach virtue (inform private character) in daughters of "Parents in middle and low Life" (*Henry Fielding: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Ronald Paulson and Thomas Lockwood [London: Routledge, 1969], pp. 195–96). Averse to the "character" of a writer, Burney makes Mrs Selwyn a learned lady in the tradition of Fielding's Mrs Bennet; see *Amelia*, ed. Martin C. Battestin, Wesleyan Edition (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1983), p. 255 n.

16 Samuel Butler, *Characters*, ed. Charles W. Daves (Cleveland: Press of Case Western Reserve

Mr Lovel calls her "a person who is nobody. ... For ... though I have made diligent enquiry—I cannot learn who she is," and he is not moved when Lord Orville reports that "she must be a country parson's daughter" (p. 35). In Pope's phrase, Evelina has "no character at all."

By literary and social convention, success for a woman is a socially advantageous marriage; that is, one conferring a good public character. Villars knows this is unlikely for a "nobody," and Sir Clement Willoughby echoes his reservation to Orville:

> My intentions ... are hardly known to myself. ... were I a *marrying man*, she, of all the women I have seen, I would fix upon for a wife: but I believe that not even the philosophy of your Lordship would recommend to me a connection of that sort, with a girl of obscure birth, whose only dowry is her beauty, and who is evidently in a state of dependency. (p. 347)

Willoughby holds a bluntly aristocratic conviction that birth and fortune inscribe character: though attractive, Evelina is no match for a baronet. She has neither rank nor the fortune that would justify ignoring rank. Willoughby's view, at odds with the sophisticated social narrative in which we encounter it, crassly enunciates the conventions of romance (a literary cliché) and the social attitudes that gave them point (a social cliché). In Emma's terms, he neglects "what" Evelina is for "who" she is, though, as Orville says, "she has a natural love of virtue, and a mind that might adorn *any* station, however exalted" (p. 346).

Unfortunately, such attention to private merit is rare. Evelina herself resentfully accepts her lack of identity: "I, as Mr. Lovel says, am *Nobody*" (p. 289). Young and inexperienced but at her own direction, she is also, Orville notes, "peculiarly situated" (p. 346). At one point, the well-born talk among themselves: "Not so your Evelina," writes Evelina, "disregarded, silent, and melancholy, she sat like a cypher, whom to nobody belonging, by nobody was noticed" (p. 340). She *is* a cipher—both nothing and the social puzzle that exasperates Willoughby.[17] Like a zero,

University, 1970) offers English examples and, pp. 5–12, an account of the Theophrastan tradition. See also Halifax's "Character of King Charles II" (1750): "A Character differeth from a Picture only in this, every Part of it must be like, but it is not necessary that every Feature should be comprehended in it as in a Picture, only some of the most remarkable," in *The Works of George Savile, Marquess of Halifax*, ed. M.N. Brown (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), II, 484.

17 In *Clarissa's Ciphers: Meaning and Disruption in Richardson's "Clarissa"* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), pp. 15–16, Terry Castle explores the metaphor of the cipher in a possible source; cf. Doody, p. 40: "She has a matriarchal identity which is weakness, and no named place in the patriarchy, which is strength. Her two names are unfixed, like two adjectives looking for a substantive"—or like a zero seeking a defining figure.

she changes value with context. She is embarrassed to be seen with the Branghtons, "a party at once so vulgar in themselves, and so familiar to me" (p. 206), and is indignant that Willoughby, who accepts her public character, "seems disposed to think that the alteration in [her] companions authorizes an alteration in his manners" (p. 201). But though she feels her integral value, her private character lacks social authority.

When Evelina refers to her neglected social self in the third person, Burney anticipates recent fiction that questions the subject by shifting between first and third-person narration.[18] But she is not exposing the social construction of the supposedly autonomous self, for no one supposes it is autonomous. Moving towards rather than away from social authority for private consciousness, she exposes the powerlessness of a private self without that authority. The girl passing as Sir John Belmont's daughter is heiress to more than Evelina's fortune: "The Miss Belmont, then, who is actually at Bristol, ... passes, in short, for your Evelina!" (p. 367). Evelina's name and rank *are* her social identity—one true self if not her only one. Burney is advocate for private character in a world that valorizes the public. Her goal is social recognition of private character.

Burney therefore values the social tact that attends to feeling as well as decorum. This tact distinguishes Orville's attentions to Evelina from Mr Smith's "unwelcome familiarity" (p.201) and Mrs Beaumont's civility, which Mrs Selwyn calls "too formal to be comfortable, and too mechanical to be flattering" (p. 284). Similar tact makes Evelina reluctant to judge or be judged prematurely. Her care that her actions and those of her connections are not misinterpreted is, precisely, this attention to her "character": Evelina attends to the accuracy of the public representation that governs her social reception. She also respects the characters of others, like Villars, who is "unwilling to stamp a bad impression of [Macartney's] character, upon so slight and partial a knowledge of it" (p. 217). After all, written representations also characterize their writers and so demand special tact. To protect her own character, Evelina sends Orville a note apologizing for the actions of her kin. When Willoughby intercepts it and forges a response that misrepresents her as seeking a correspondence, he tarnishes Orville's character and slurs hers. She is indignant: "I meant nothing but a simple apology, which I thought as much due to my own *character*, as to his" (p. 257; my emphasis).

18 Margaret Drabble's *The Waterfall* and Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter*, for example; it is more conventional to see Burney anticipating nineteenth-century fiction: for a fuller discussion than the usual comparisons with Austen, see Margaret Anne Doody, "George Eliot and the Eighteenth-Century Novel," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 35 (1980), 260–91.

A forgery is disturbing because publicly circulated characters have power. Evelina's confidence in Orville is shaken: "if Lord Orville himself was contented to forfeit his character, was it for me, almost at the expence of my own, to support it?" (p. 260). Villars tells her she should have expressed a "resentment [that] would at once have become *your* character, and have given him an opportunity, in some measure, of clearing his own" (p. 267). A bad character taints even illustrious rank. Evelina is shocked that Orville's sister would choose to marry "a man of so abandoned a character" (p. 278) as Lord Merton: "Mr. Ridgeway told us he was ... a man of most licentious character: that among men, his companions consisted chiefly of gamblers and jockies, and among women, he was rarely admitted" (p. 276). Repeated from the common knowledge we disparage as gossip, this character suggests the need to guard one's public representation. When Sir John Belmont later offers further to clear his wronged wife's name, even if it "should wound [his] character still deeper" (p. 372), he sacrifices one representation to another.

Private character motivates a critique of public character, notably the collective representations that inscribe social norms as essential. In Captain Mirvan and Mme Duval, Burney caricatures the English character and the French character. She also qualifies the public character of a woman.[19] Villars accepts the bland generic requirements—"gentleness and modesty are the peculiar attributes of [her] sex"—but praises Evelina's "fortitude and firmness [as] ... virtues as noble and as becoming in women as in men" (p. 217). To Orville Mrs Mirvan is "gentle and amiable, ... a true feminine character" (p. 289). To Evelina gentleness "seems so essential a part of the female character"; she finds Mrs Selwyn's understanding, which she admires, and her manners, which she deplores, "*masculine*" (pp. 268–69). Evelina represents herself within this general character, but she detaches private character from public roles when she admires Orville's "*feminine* ... delicacy" and "amiable ... nature" (p. 261) or shows "masculine" enterprise to rescue Macartney.[20]

19 On correspondents "writing under characters which they cannot support," notably men writing as women but betraying masculine experience, see Johnson, *The Rambler*, Yale Edition, vols 3–5 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), III, 110 (no. 20).

20 Doody compares Evelina with Brooke's Henry Moreland and Fielding's Man of the Hill and Tom Jones (*Frances Burney*, pp. 60–61, 63–64, and especially 399 n. 46).

Criticizing the gender constraints which give a double turn to the screw that secures public character, Burney suggests that private character evades the binary oppositions of public character. Exploiting the linguistic slippage whereby *character* has come to suggest intrinsic qualities, she also evades the binary opposition of public and private. Villars, for example, wanted to secure Evelina's fortune (and public character) but hesitated to surrender her to a "dissipated and unprincipled" father, fearing that "while [he] improved her fortune, [he] should endanger her mind." Villars was convinced that he should raise her himself "as her character began to be formed, and her disposition to be displayed" (p. 126). "Formed" as disposition is "displayed," "character" here combines inner and outer: private and public are intertwined.

Of course, private character wants to escape public constraints, even language: "Oh, Sir, ... that you could but read my heart!" (p. 384), exclaims Evelina to her father. Alert to the etymology of *character* even as he speaks from his heart, her "*more* than father" (p. 130) exclaims, "thy happiness is engraved, in golden characters, upon the tablets of my heart! and their impression is indelible" (p. 405). When Orville acknowledges Evelina's private character by proposing marriage, he too exclaims that emotions go beyond the social conventions inscribed in language:

> I esteem and I admire you above all human beings!—you are the friend to whom my soul is attached as to its better half! you are the most amiable, the most perfect of women! and you are dearer to me than language has the power of telling! (pp. 351–52)

But though the private self wants unmediated communication with such another self, language and its conventions are inescapable.

Burney's standard plot consequently serves an ideological argument. Sometimes read as just a matching private self or the easy closure supplied by "young Fanny's wish fulfillment of the ideal male lover,"[21] Orville is centrally a representative of the social order who publicly acknowledges Evelina's unique private merit. He proposes to Evelina *before* paternal acknowledgment makes her an heiress, and he proposes in the language of esteem and admiration. Moreover, Burney avoids ending with his fairy-tale proposal, delaying closure to subvert the pretence that the heroine needs no public identity but his:

21 Gerard A. Barker, *Grandison's Heirs: The Paragon's Progress in the Late Eighteenth-Century English Novel* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1985), p. 71; Orville has "few opportunities to shield the heroine" (p. 74) because Burney appropriates action to Evelina, the "nobody" he must trust.

"Oh, my Lord," cried I, "your generosity overpowers me!" And I wept like an infant. For now that all my hopes of being acknowledged seemed finally crushed, I felt the nobleness of his disinterested attachment so forcibly, that I could scarce breathe under the weight of gratitude that oppressed me. (p. 367)

This is not the language of erotic fulfilment: Evelina feels renewed dependency (infancy) and suffocation. Returning but one identity for Orville's gift of two, she bears the weight of a purely private union in a public world.

To avoid being submerged, Evelina needs the independent public character symbolized by paternal acknowledgment. Burney therefore sacralizes paternity, concealing the rift between kinds of identity:

The voice of a *father*—Oh dear and revered name!—which then, for the first time, struck my ears, affected me in a manner I cannot describe, though it was only employed to give orders to a servant as he came down stairs. (p. 371)

In what is virtually the novel's only scene of passion, Evelina speaks the sacred name—*father* itself—with a religious fervour that just avoids "in the name of the Father." Though her father is primarily her missing name, her social identity, she asserts the linguistic inadequacy that characterizes expressions of intense feeling.[22] The reunion is full of emotional exhortations: "Oh rise, rise, my beloved father ... reverse not the law of nature, rise yourself, and bless your kneeling daughter!" cries Evelina when her father kneels to her (p. 386). God and nature ratify the reunion of private character with public, of daughter with father.

But Burney, who neither invents nor gives an extreme example of these conventions of sensibility, subverts a naïve response to them.[23] Her first effusion is comically triggered by the banal patriarchal activity of giving orders to inferiors. The sacred name illuminates the failures of the fathers. Though his neglect of her is explained as ignorance, Evelina's father was "a very profligate young man" who betrayed her mother when "disappointed of the fortune he expected" (p. 15). The "unaccountably infatuated" Mr Evelyn, Evelina's maternal grandfather and source of her only name, rushed into the "ill-judged marriage" (p. 14) that leaves her prey to Mme Duval. Paternal sexual lapses create the confusions of

22 On this convention, see Richetti, pp. 266–67.

23 Discussing her manly rescue of a brother involved in an Oedipal encounter, Doody finds Evelina "no more emotional about her father than Brooke's Hammel Clement [in *The Fool of Quality*] is about his" (*Frances Burney*, p. 399 n. 46).

identity that sensibility masks with emotion. And there remains a gap between rival fathers:

> Methinks it *cannot* end to my satisfaction; for either I must be torn from the arms of my *more* than father,—or I must have the misery of being finally convinced, that I am cruelly rejected by him who has the natural claim to that dear title; a title, which to write, mention, or think of, fills my whole soul with filial tenderness. (p. 130)

Appropriately to an aristocratic culture, "father" is a name, a title. Filial devotion itself wavers between rival fathers, undercutting the idealization of paternity that social and literary conventions require.

Further ambivalent comedy ends *Evelina*. Evelina hastens "to the arms of the best of men"—not her husband but the guardian he resembles. Critics commonly find this ending more disturbing than witty. For Simons, "Even [Orville's] name suggests his appropriateness as a replacement" for Villars and Evelina's behaviour with her father and her guardian "verges on sexual hysteria" (pp. 57–58). "Only by giving her heroine such an excess of delicacy that she seems quite impervious to sexual desire," writes Jane Spencer, "did Burney avoid the incestuous implications of this relationship" between the heroine and a husband "who would take over the functions of father and guardian."[24] But these readings slight Burney's deft use of her narrative conventions. When he kneels to her, Evelina's father repeats Orville's action in the proposal that concedes the authority of her private character (p. 351). Burney aligns paternal acknowledgment with recognition of Evelina's merit. She also undermines the sanctity of paternity. An attack on the father and sibling incest appear in Macartney's story, symbolizing the social confusion that follows the undermining of patriarchal structures by paternal sexuality.[25] Sir Clement Willoughby's sexual aggression towards a heroine abandoned by her father repeats Sir John Belmont's transgressions against her mother, a woman abandoned by her family. Such episodes suggest that to read *Evelina* only in terms of the novelist's sexual fantasy is to substitute a cliché—the repressed spinster as author—for the shrewd analyst of power relations.

24 Jane Spencer, *The Rise of the Woman Novelist: From Aphra Behn to Jane Austen* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 160. Since the erotic implications were "clear to earlier women writers like Delarivire Manley," Spencer prefers Elizabeth Inchbald's erotic treatment of guardian/mentor/lover in *A Simple Story* (1791); but one historical moment's strategy does not invalidate another's.

25 Doody, *Frances Burney*, pp. 61–62.

*Evelina*'s relative sexlessness, often remarked by critics, is part of this strategy—a deliberate swerve from a conventional women's subject.[26] In *Evelina*'s world, an explicitly sexual fiction that was not a seduction tale would be an erotic fantasy or an oppressive Gothic romance, and Burney shuns "the fantastic regions of Romance, where Fiction is coloured by all the gay tints of luxurious Imagination, where Reason is an outcast, and where the sublimity of the *Marvellous* rejects all aid from sober Probability" (p. 8). Her heroine symbolizes the private self, which lacks authority, much as Richardson's Pamela, as Michael McKeon and Terry Eagleton argue, is a female figure for male bourgeois aspiration who reaffirms gender roles and so underwrites the hierarchical order her aspirations apparently threaten.[27] Appropriating the convention to a woman's social aspirations, Burney de-eroticizes it to stress the social claims of private identity without committing herself to an erotic subordination to a hierarchical marriage. Her heroine *wins* her father as well as her husband while retaining the esteem of Villars, who embodies paternal approval of Evelina's private self. An apparently childless widower and clergyman, he is a counter-father to Sir John Belmont, in whom a Lacanian reading would find a suitably phallic guardian of the symbolic order. To win both fathers, and unite them in a husband, is the heroine's triumph; that she has two to win signals the cultural rift that created the challenge.

Ambitious but notoriously deferential to decorum and her father, Burney creates a decorously ambitious heroine who figures forth her dilemma as an unknown aspirant to literary (and dramatic) fame.[28] In her Dedication and Preface, she even points out similarities. She would be noticed with propriety but is, like Evelina, "without name" (p. 3). However, she

26 Burney also decarnalizes the masquerade in *Cecilia*; see Terry Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnivalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), pp. 260–61, and cf. Richetti, pp. 166–67. Burney also adopts a mode of social analysis conventionally outside the female "character," anonymous publication allowing some to read *Evelina* as a man's novel.

27 McKeon, pp. 378–79; Terry Eagleton, *The Rape of Clarissa: Writing, Sexuality and Class Struggle in Samuel Richardson* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982), pp. 37–38.

28 Burney's relationship with her father is a major theme of Doody's *Frances Burney*. On Burney's diffidence, see Joyce Hemlow, *The History of Fanny Burney* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1958), pp. 100–101; Epstein, pp. 44–46; Spencer, pp. 95–98; McMaster, pp. 247–50. Barker notes that "Wit is suspect because for Evelina it is associated with male audacity and aggressiveness" (p. 75).

prefers her "mantle of impenetrable obscurity" (p. 7) to its alternative, publishing in the name of the father; that is, as Dr Burney's daughter—her character until she, like him, makes a name of her own. "Obscure be still the unsuccessful Muse, / Who cannot raise, but would not sink, your fame" (p. 1), claims her dedicatory ode. Like Evelina, Burney is "peculiarly situated" (p. 346), though she chooses her "peculiar situation" (p. 7) to avoid involvement in her book's potential disgrace. Blending participation with detachment, she associates herself with low connections (bad writers) who sink one's character, but she seeks distinction. Like Evelina struggling for space between vulgar kin and Orville's stiflingly brilliant character, Burney positions herself between the impropriety of self-assertion and the decorum of deference to brilliant predecessors.

The "Authors of the Monthly and Critical Reviews" demanded literary decorum. Burney appeals to these "Gentlemen" (rank and gender are both important) because these "Magistrates of the press, and Censors for the Public" (p. 3) based their strict literary propriety on social conceptions of character. Sterne's bawdy *Tristram Shandy*, for example, drew criticism because its author was a *clergyman*: "What would be venial in the farcical Author of the Minor [Samuel Foote], would be highly reprehensible from the pen of a Divine"; "we have hitherto had occasion to lament, that, while the Author was exerting his talents to maintain the humour and consistency of his characters, he himself was so much out of character [i.e., his character as a clergyman]."[29] The constraints on a woman were as severe, and she lacked the clergyman's professional authority. Queen Charlotte's remark that Burney's "character" was "too delicate to suit with writing for the stage"[30] carefully places the public character of a daughter of a successful writer himself undistinguished by birth or fortune. Burney was as dependent as Evelina, and "Daddy" Crisp urged her to accept Thomas Barlow's offer of marriage for the financial security it would offer.[31]

Burney's diffidence is not merely a personal quirk. As Johnson said of Pope's targets in the *The Dunciad*, "An author places himself uncalled before the tribunal of criticism, and solicits fame at the hazard of

29 Unsigned *Monthly* reviews by Owen Ruffhead and John Langhorne; quoted in *Sterne: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Alan B. Howes (London: Methuen, 1974), pp. 120, 141. Burney liked Foote's plays (Doody, *Frances Burney*, p. 49).

30 See Epstein, p. 45.

31 See Hemlow, p. 57.

disgrace."[32] Since fiction was a low form of writing, the novelist took especially high risks. Moreover, even the successful writer achieved an awkward social position. Richardson won prominence by writing, but tales of his awkwardness in gentle company supply cautionary examples to anyone seeking the character of a writer.[33] No woman novelist had such prestige, and Doody suggests that Burney's *The Witlings* reveals a sharp eye for the toadying of a professional writer closer to home—her father (p. 97). Burney had as much reason as her ambitious heroine for concern about her public character.

Fortunately, Burney is not Villars's "artless young creature." She artfully explores her anxieties about writing through a complex intertextuality that asserts and decorously mocks her private ambition. When she notes that a novel should be original, she asks that the claim "not be imputed to an opinion of my own originality, which I have not the vanity, the folly, or the blindness, to entertain" (p. 9). Evelina similarly protests the kneeling of suitor and father whose esteem is the point of her narrative, and Burney's definition of fiction captures her peculiarly situated ambition:

> To avoid what is common, without adopting what is unnatural, must limit the ambition of the vulgar herd of authors; however zealous, therefore, my veneration of the great writers I have mentioned, ... I yet presume not to attempt pursuing the same ground which they have tracked; whence, though they may have cleared the weeds, they have also culled the flowers, and though they have rendered the path plain, they have left it barren. (pp. 8–9)

Though she avoids the character of commonness or singularity, Burney is ambitious for originality: "In books, therefore, imitation cannot be shunned too sedulously; for the very perfection of a model which is frequently seen, serves but more forcibly to mark the inferiority of a

32 Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets*, ed. G.B. Hill, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1905), III, 241. Although accepted as an authority figure by Burney, Johnson, like her father, had risen from an undistinguished background and had an ambiguous social position; see Fredric Bogel, "Johnson and the Role of Authority," *The New Eighteenth Century*, ed. Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Brown (New York: Methuen, 1987), pp. 189–209.

33 See Carol Kay, *Political Constructions: Defoe, Richardson, and Sterne in Relation to Hobbes, Hume, and Burke* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 160–62; Kay supplies a context in Hobbes and Hume for the eighteenth-century novel's concern with reputation and approval.

copy" (p. 8). She adopts Johnson's principle: "No man ever yet became great by imitation."[34]

Ambition exposes to the public the desires of a nobody's private self: "*Here let me rest*, and snatch myself, while yet I am able, from the fascination of EGOTISM" (p. 4).[35] Such egotism motivates the pitiable hack, and Burney's comment on her distinguished predecessors echoes the complaint of Swift's egregious hack that earlier writers have left the neighbouring fields "barren and dry, affording no Sustenance but Clouds of Dust." "Burney, like most of her household," observes Straub, "was a fan of Swift," and her family intimacy with the satire of Grub Street—satire of writing from outside the traditional ruling class—suggests how directly it addressed Burney's anxieties. Doody notices that the "Sternean" Frances Burney quickly picks up an allusion to Swift's "Polite Conversation."[36] When her popular third novel met hostile reviews, her brother paraphrased Swift on the "character" he wanted from posterity: "Now heed no more what Critics thought 'em, / Since this you know—All People bought 'em."[37] In a letter about *Evelina* that quotes Swift, Burney signs herself "Francesca Scriblerus,"[38] appealing to the Scriblerians' defensively pedantic personae to justify her private devotion to scribbling, while distancing herself from social objections to her familiarity with vulgar people like the Branghtons. Her wavering between egotism and humility is itself a Swiftian trope, and when Burney quotes a line from Pope's *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*, slightly inaccurately and so perhaps from memory, she simultaneously distinguishes her motive from hunger (and lower-class incompetence), places herself with

34 Johnson, Yale Edition V, 59 (*Rambler* no. 154); with Burney on imitation, cf. Yale Edition III, 20 (*Rambler* no. 4).

35 See Castle on Cecilia's exposure at a masquerade ending with "an orgy of ovation" (*Masquerade*, pp. 270–74); cf. Epstein, p. 44.

36 *A Tale of a Tub*, ed. A.C. Guthkelch and D. Nichol Smith, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1958), p. 144; Straub, p. 91; Doody, *Frances Burney*, pp. 48–49, 398 n. 30; on Grub Street, see Pat Rogers, *Grub Street: Studies in a Subculture* (London: Methuen, 1972).

37 *The Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney (Madame d'Arblay), 1791–1840*, ed. Joyce Hemlow et al., 12 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972–84), III, 206; with this "exultant jingle" (Simons, p. 14), cf. "Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift," ll. 311–12. Edward A. and Lillian D. Bloom call it Burney's in their edition of *Camilla; or, A Picture of Youth* (1972; reprinted Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. xx–xxi; neglect of a standard Swift poem shows how readers isolate Burney from her chosen literary contexts.

38 *Diary and Letters of Madame D'Arblay (1778–1840)*, ed. Charlotte Barrett, preface and notes by Austin Dobson, 6 vols (London: Macmillan, 1904), I, 37. Epstein, p. 166, notes that the letter form forbids anonymity; but it permits a mock-signature self-consciously signalling literary affinity, as Fielding showed when he called himself H. Scriblerus Secundus (e.g., in *The Author's Farce* and *The Tragedy of Tragedies*).

importunate unknowns, and makes her bid for distinction (p. 4). Scriblerian intertexts express and chasten her eagerness to seek distinction in print.

But her ambition demands a more aggressive counter-move. Evelina engages in apparently shady meetings with Macartney, compelling Orville's trust until her heroic virtue is revealed; Burney engages in suspect writing, compelling the reader's trust until her distinction appears. Of course the novel is low:

> In the republic of letters, there is no member of such inferior rank, or who is so much disdained by his brethren of the quill, as the humble Novelist: nor is his fate less hard in the world at large, since, among the whole class of writers, perhaps not one can be named, of whom the votaries are more numerous, but less respectable. (p. 7)

Burney poses as "editor" of "the following letters," a vestigial empirical gesture defensively distancing her from her text. But she acts like any socially forward hack, deferentially presenting her labours "to the public—for such, by novel writers, novel readers will be called" (p. 7).[39] After all, even Grub Street could claim Milton as a resident of Cripplegate (Pat Rogers, p. 22), and though Burney's quarter of the republic of letters seems as crowded and undignified as the Branghtons' rooms, it is "saved from contempt, and rescued from depravity" by the presence of "such names as Rousseau, Johnson, Marivaux, Fielding, Richardson, and Smollet" (p. 7).

These are the novelists of rank, the enabling and stifling fathers whom Burney had also listed in her Preface. She avoids imitation despite "[her] veneration of the great writers [she has] mentioned, however [she] may feel [her]self enlightened by the knowledge of Johnson, charmed with the eloquence of Rousseau, softened by the pathetic powers of Richardson, and exhilarated by the wit of Fielding, and the humour of Smollet" (pp. 8–9).[40] Evelina similarly reveres the rival fathers who stifle her

39 The role of "the public" as a normative body guarding decorum appears in Ruffhead's extreme cry, "whom should'st thou reverence more than the *Public*?" (Howes, *Sterne: The Critical Heritage*, pp. 121–22).

40 Apologizing for calling Johnson and Rousseau novelists (p. 8 n.), Burney cannily lists these "fathers" of good character but omits Sterne, a favourite "too indelicate for a lady's perusal" (Doody, *Frances Burney*, pp. 36–37). Imitating Sterne and calling writing her hobby-horse, she concedes that *Rasselas* is depressing; see *The Early Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney, 1768–1773*, ed. Lars E. Troide (Oxford and Montreal: Oxford University Press and McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988), I, 15 and n.

ambition—her public father by neglecting feeling and denying her a social identity; her private father, Villars, by nurturing her private self and so resisting social distinction. Combining these fathers in Orville, Burney does express a covert desire. But it is not a desire to replace the mother in the paternal bed. In Orville, she replaces (repositions) the father's authority where competition and equality with it will be possible. The rejuvenated but de-eroticized illustrious father is an equal, a sibling who, like Burney's literary fathers, dignifies and challenges competition: "no man need blush at starting from the same post, though many, nay, most men, may sigh at finding themselves distanced" (p. 7).

Burney here expresses the distinctive ideology of the professional middle class to which she belongs. A race offers an individualistic arena structured by competition rather than a hierarchical one structured by deference. Burney names a later heroine for the famous speedster, Pope's "swift Camilla."[41] More strikingly, she includes in *Evelina* a "ridiculous," "absurd" race in which representatives of the social order bet on "two poor old women" who are "encouraged ... by liberal promises, to exert themselves" though they are "so weak, so infirm, so feeble, that [Evelina] could feel no sensation but that of pity at the sight" (p. 311). This "infamous" scene—"an odd interpolated sequence"—is a novelist's nightmare.[42] The race inverts the competition Burney strives for, substituting age for youth, weakness for strength, and abuse for encouragement. Members of the governing class (and gender), whose rank and fortune make competition pointless, parody reward of merit. Like Johnson's famous letter to Lord Chesterfield, Burney's strange race indicts aristocratic (patriarchal) neglect of merit.

The writer needs a competitive forum to be respectably self-authoring, to earn a public character—to make a name for herself. But even Johnson, an early admirer of *Evelina* who had combatively made a name for himself, slyly omits women from the field when he defines *name* in the *Dictionary*. A name can bring shame and blame as well as fame, his definitions note; roughly a synonym for *character*, it also means "person," and here a citation from Dryden (*Aeneis* 5: 980–81) asserts the macho lexicographer's ambition: "They list with women each degen'rate *name*,

41 See Doody, *Frances Burney*, pp. 239–40.

42 Epstein, p. 114; on other contexts, see Earl R. Anderson, "Footnotes More Pedestrian than Sublime: A Historical Background for the Foot-Races in *Evelina* and *Humphry Clinker*," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 14 (1980), 56–68, and Arthur Sherbo, "Addenda to 'Footnotes More Pedestrian than Sublime,'" *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 14 (1981), 313–16.

/ Who dares not hazard life for future fame" (*Dictionary* s.v. *name*). Dryden's Aeneas, father of Rome, is gathering men willing to embark for Italy and glory, contemptuously leaving the rest behind with the women. Ambition for fame is individualistically male; nonentity, generically female. No wonder Burney competes so diffidently. But the diffidence should not obscure the competition. When Burney adopts a standard plot and makes it turn on the timing of a proposal by an aristocratic sibling/lover who resembles a father, she competes with, as well as in, the name of the father, winning her public character.

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