

EVELINA

FRANCES BURNEY



EDITED BY STEWART J. COOKE

A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

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Frances Burney
EVELINA,
or,
The History of a Young Lady's
Entrance into the World



AUTHORITATIVE TEXT
CONTEXTS AND
CONTEMPORARY REACTIONS
CRITICISM

Edited by

STEWART J. COOKE

MCGILL UNIVERSITY

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Preface

The author of *Evelina* learned of its publication accidentally, when her unsuspecting stepmother read aloud at the breakfast table the following advertisement:

This day was published, In three volumes, 12 mo. price seven shillings and sixpence sewed, or nine shillings bound, EVELINA; Or, A YOUNG LADY'S ENTRANCE into the WORLD. Printed for T. Lowndes, No 77, in Fleet street.

(*London Evening Post*, 27–29 Jan. 1778)

Among those present, only Charlotte and Susanna Burney were aware of the significance of the event, but even they could have had no inkling how much and how quickly it was to transform their sister's life. Burney's "frolic" — the clandestine writing of the novel in a feigned hand and the cloak-and-dagger negotiations with the publisher Thomas Lowndes — could not remain a secret for long once "the Literary World was favoured with the first publication of the ingenious, learned, & most profound Fanny Burney," as she playfully phrased it in her journal. The critics were unanimous in their praise of the anonymous novel, and the reading public was captivated. Edmund Burke, the statesman and writer, could not put it down and stayed up all night to finish it; Sir Joshua Reynolds, the painter, offered £50 for the identity of the author; Richard Brinsley Sheridan, the playwright, thought its author should write a comedy for the stage; and the Great Cham of literary society, Samuel Johnson himself, compared it favorably to the novels of Samuel Richardson and Henry Fielding. Within months, it was considered unfashionable not to have read the book or have met the twenty-six-year-old author.

Burney's stock dropped off considerably in the following century, occasioned perhaps by her rather self-serving publication of her father's *Memoirs* and the critics' myopic and hostile response to her fourth novel, *The Wanderer* (see below, p. 369). Nonetheless, if nineteenth-century critics are less kind in their reception of Burney's work, one need look no further than Jane Austen's fiction to see how profound was her influence on subsequent novelists. In both subject matter and style, Burney is one of the important links between the eighteenth-century novel and the nineteenth-century novel, and it is fitting that the merit

and importance of her novels have once again come to be recognized.

By the end of 1779, *Evelina* (for which Burney received only 20 guineas plus £10 for the third edition) had gone through four editions with a fifth pirated edition appearing in Dublin. After reading the proofs, Burney had sent Lowndes a list of changes and corrections, which were printed as an errata sheet in the first edition and incorporated, with further changes, into the second and third editions, published on 26 October 1778 (though with the imprint date of 1779) and 26 February 1779 respectively. This text is based on the third edition, which incorporates all of Burney's changes and is the first to use the expanded subtitle "The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World." It attempts to reproduce Burney's text exactly, except for the occasional obvious misspelling, duplicated word, or punctuation error, which have been silently corrected. It makes no concessions to consistency.

I am indebted to past editors of *Evelina*, particularly Margaret Anne Doody and Edward A. Bloom, whose annotations were always informative and useful, even those with which I disagreed. I should also like to thank Mariopi Spanos for many hours of photocopying and proofreading and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh for guiding me to the relevant dance manuals. Finally, I wish to dedicate this book to my late wife, Ruth Neufeld, who helped me prepare the proposal. Without her tireless devotion, this edition would never have gotten on the drawing board, least of all off it.

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The Text of
EVELINA



To ————¹

Oh author of my being!—far more dear
To me than light, than nourishment, or rest,
Hygieia's² blessings, Rapture's burning tear,
Or the life blood that mantles in my breast!

If in my heart the love of Virtue glows,
'T was planted there by an unerring rule;
From thy example the pure flame arose,
Thy life, my precept—thy good works, my school.

Could my weak pow'rs thy num'rous virtues trace,
By filial love each fear should be repress'd;
The blush of Incapacity I'd chace,
And stand, recorder of thy worth, confess'd:

But since my niggard stars that gift refuse,
Concealment is the only boon I claim;
Obscure be still the unsuccessful Muse,
Who cannot raise, but would not sink, thy fame.

Oh! of my life at once the source and joy!
If e'er thy eyes these feeble lines survey,
Let not their folly their intent destroy;
Accept the tribute—but forget the lay.

1. To Dr. Charles Burney (1726–1814), Frances Burney's father.

2. Personified health in Greek mythology, usually said to be the daughter of Asclepius, the god of healing.

TO THE AUTHORS OF THE MONTHLY AND CRITICAL REVIEWS.¹

GENTLEMEN,

The liberty which I take in addressing to You the trifling production of a few idle hours, will, doubtless, move your wonder, and, probably, your contempt. I will not, however, with the futility of apologies, intrude upon your time, but briefly acknowledge the motives of my temerity: lest, by a premature exercise of that patience which I hope will befriend me, I should lessen its benevolence, and be accessory to my own condemnation.

Without name, without recommendation, and unknown alike to success and disgrace, to whom can I so properly apply for patronage, as to those who publicly profess themselves Inspectors of all literary performances?

The extensive plan of your critical observations,—which, not confined to works of utility or ingenuity, is equally open to those of frivolous amusement,—and yet worse than frivolous, dullness,—encourages me to seek for your protection, since,—perhaps for my sins!—it entitles me to your annotations. To resent, therefore, this offering, however insignificant, would ill become the universality of your undertaking, though not to despise it may, alas! be out of your power.

The language of adulation, and the incense of flattery, though the natural inheritance, and constant resource, from time immemorial, of the Dedicator, to me offer nothing but the wistful regret that I dare not invoke their aid. Sinister views would be imputed to all I could say; since, thus situated, to extol your judgment, would seem the effect of art, and to celebrate your impartiality, be attributed to suspecting it.

As Magistrates of the press, and Censors for the public,—to which you are bound by the sacred ties of integrity to exert the most spirited impartiality, and to which your suffrages should carry the marks of pure, dauntless, irrefragable truth—to appeal for your MERCY, were to solicit your dishonour; and therefore,—though 'tis sweeter than frankincense,—more grateful to the senses than all the odorous perfumes of Arabia,—and though

It droppeth like the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath,——²

1. For their respective reviews of *Evelina*, see below, pp. 359–61.

2. Should be “droppeth as”; Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice* (4.1.185–86).

I court it not! to your justice alone I am entitled, and by that I must abide. Your engagements are not to the supplicating author, but to the candid public, which will not fail to crave

The penalty and forfeit of your bond.³

No hackneyed writer, inured to abuse, and callous to criticism, here braves your severity;—neither does a half-starv'd garretteer,

Oblig'd by hunger—and request of friends,—⁴

implore your lenity: your examination will be alike unbiassed by partiality and prejudice:—no refractory murmuring will follow your censure, no private interest be gratified by your praise.

Let not the anxious solicitude with which I recommend myself to your notice, expose me to your derision. Remember, Gentlemen, you were all young writers once, and the most experienced veteran of your corps, may, by recollecting his first publication, renovate his first errors, and learn to allow for mine. For, though Courage is one of the noblest virtues of this nether sphere, and, though scarcely more requisite in the field of battle, to guard the fighting hero from disgrace, than in the private commerce of the world, to ward off that littleness of soul which leads, by steps imperceptible, to all the base train of the inferior passions, and by which the too timid mind is betrayed into a servility derogatory to the dignity of human nature; yet is it a virtue of no necessity in a situation such as mine; a situation which removes, even from cowardice itself, the sting of ignominy;—for surely that courage may easily be dispensed with, which would rather excite disgust than admiration! Indeed, it is the peculiar privilege of an author, to rob terror of contempt, and pusillanimity of reproach.

Here let me rest,—and snatch myself, while I yet am able, from the fascination of EGOTISM,—a monster who has more votaries than ever did homage to the most popular deity of antiquity; and whose singular quality is, that while he excites a blind and involuntary adoration in almost every individual, his influence is universally disallowed, his power universally condemned, and his worship, even by his followers, never mentioned but with abhorrence.

In addressing you jointly, I mean but to mark the generous sentiments by which liberal criticism, to the utter annihilation of envy, jealousy, and all selfish views, ought to be distinguished.

I have the honour to be,

GENTLEMEN,

Your most obedient

Humble servant,

* * * * *

3. Changed from "my bond"; *The Merchant of Venice* (4.1.207).

4. Alexander Pope, *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* (44).

Preface

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 which the votaries are more numerous but less respectable.

Yet, while in the annals of those few of our predecessors, to whom this species of writing is indebted for being saved from contempt, and rescued from depravity, we can trace such names as Rousseau, Johnson,¹ Marivaux, Fielding, Richardson, and Smollet,² no man need blush at starting from the same post, though many, nay, most men, may sigh at finding themselves distanced.

The following letters are presented to the public—for such, by novel writers, novel readers will be called,—with a very singular mixture of timidity and confidence, resulting from the peculiar situation of the editor; who, though trembling for their success from a consciousness of their imperfections, yet fears not being involved in their disgrace, while happily wrapped up in a mantle of impenetrable obscurity.

To draw characters from nature, though not from life, and to mark the manners of the times, is the attempted plan of the following letters. For this purpose, a young female, educated in the most secluded retirement, makes, at the age of seventeen, her first appearance upon the great and busy stage of life; with a virtuous mind, a cultivated understanding, and a feeling heart, her ignorance of the forms, and inexperience in the manners, of the world, occasion all the little incidents which these volumes record, and which form the natural progression of the life of a young woman of obscure birth, but conspicuous beauty, for the first six months after her Entrance into the world.

Perhaps were it possible to effect the total extirpation of novels, our young ladies in general, and boarding-school damsels in particular, might profit from their annihilation: but since the distemper they have spread seems incurable, since their contagion bids defiance to the medicine of advice or reprehension, and since they are found to baffle all the mental

1. However superior the capacities in which these great writers deserve to be considered, they must pardon me that, for the dignity of my subject, I here rank the authors of *Rasselas* and *Eloise* as Novelists. [Burney's note]
2. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78), author of *La Nouvelle Héloïse, ou Julie* (1761); Samuel Johnson (1707–84), author of *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia* (1759); Pierre Carlet de Chamblain de Marivaux (1688–1763), author of *La Vie de Marianne* (1731–41) and *Le Paysan parvenu* (1735–36); Henry Fielding (1707–54), author of *Shamela* (1741), *Joseph Andrews* (1742), *Jonathan Wild* (1743), *Tom Jones* (1749), and *Amelia* (1751); Samuel Richardson (1689–1761), author of *Pamela* (1740–41), *Clarissa* (1747–48), and *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753–54); Tobias Smollett (1721–71), author of *Roderick Random* (1748), *Peregrine Pickle* (1751), *Ferdinand Count Fathom* (1753), *Sir Launcelot Greaves* (1760–62), and *Humphry Clinker* (1771).

art of physic, save what is prescribed by the slow regimen of Time, and bitter diet of Experience, surely all attempts to contribute to the number of those which may be read, if not with advantage, at least without injury, ought rather to be encouraged than contemned.

Let me, therefore, prepare for disappointment those who, in the perusal of these sheets, entertain the gentle expectation of being transported to 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. The heroine of these memoirs, young, artless, and inexperienced, is

No faultless Monster that the world ne'er saw,³

but the offspring of Nature, and of Nature in her simplest attire.

In all the Arts, the value of copies can only be proportioned to the scarceness of originals: among sculptors and painters, a fine statue, or a beautiful picture, of some great master, may deservedly employ the imitative talents of younger and inferior artists, that their appropriation to one spot, may not wholly prevent the more general expansion of their excellence; but, among authors, the reverse is the case, since the noblest productions of literature are almost equally attainable with the meanest. 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 copy.

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, however I may feel myself 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 humour of Smollet, 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.

The candour of my readers, I have not the impertinence to doubt, and to their indulgence I am sensible I have no claim: I have, therefore, only to entreat, that my own words may not pronounce my condemnation, and that what I have here ventured to say in regard to imitation, may be understood, as it is meant, in a general sense, and not be imputed to an opinion of my own originality, which I have not the vanity, the folly, or the blindness, to entertain.

Whatever may be the fate of these letters, the editor is satisfied they will meet with justice; and commits them to the press, though hopeless of fame, yet not regardless of censure.

3. Changed from "A faultless monster, which the World ne'er saw"; John Sheffield (1647-1721), Duke of Buckingham and Normanby, *An Essay on Poetry* (1682).

VOLUME I

Letter I.

LADY HOWARD TO THE REV. MR. VILLARS.

Howard Grove, Kent.¹

Can any thing, my good Sir, be more painful to a friendly mind, than a necessity of communicating disagreeable intelligence? Indeed, it is sometimes difficult to determine, whether the relator or the receiver of evil tidings is most to be pitied.

I have just had a letter from Madame Duval; she is totally at a loss in what manner to behave; she seems desirous to repair the wrongs she has done, yet wishes the world to believe her blameless. She would fain cast upon another the odium of those misfortunes for which she alone is answerable. Her letter is violent, sometimes abusive, and that of *you!* — *you*, to whom she is under obligations which are greater even than her faults, but to whose advice she wickedly imputes all the sufferings of her much-injured daughter, the late Lady Belmont. The chief purport of her writing I will acquaint you with; the letter itself is not worthy your notice.

She tells me that she has, for many years past, been in continual expectation of making a journey to England, which prevented her writing for information concerning this melancholy subject, by giving her hopes of making personal inquiries; but family occurrences have still detained her in France, which country she now sees no prospect of quitting. She has, therefore, lately used her utmost endeavours to obtain a faithful account of whatever related to her *ill-advised* daughter; the result of which giving her *some reason* to apprehend that, upon her death-bed, she bequeathed an infant orphan to the world, she most graciously says, that if *you*, with whom *she understands* the child is placed, will procure authentic proofs of its relationship to her, you may send it to Paris, where she will properly provide for it.

This woman is, undoubtedly, at length, self-convicted of her most unnatural behaviour: it is evident, from her writing, that she is still as vulgar and illiterate as when her first husband, Mr. Evelyn, had the weakness to marry her; nor does she at all apologise for addressing herself to me, though I was only once in her company.

1. Kent is a maritime county in the southeast of England; Howard Grove is fictional.

Her letter has excited in my daughter Mirvan, a strong desire to be informed of the motives which induced Madame Duval to abandon the unfortunate Lady Belmont, at a time when a mother's protection was peculiarly necessary for her peace and her reputation. Notwithstanding I was personally acquainted with all the parties concerned in that affair, the subject always appeared of too delicate a nature to be spoken of with the principals; I cannot, therefore, satisfy Mrs. Mirvan otherwise than by applying to you.

By saying that you *may* send the child, Madame Duval aims at *confering*, where she most *owes* obligation. I pretend not to give you advice; you, to whose generous protection this helpless orphan is indebted for every thing, are the best and only judge of what she ought to do; but I am much concerned at the trouble and uneasiness which this unworthy woman may occasion you.

My daughter and my grandchild join with me in desiring to be most kindly remembered to the amiable girl; and they bid me remind you, that the annual visit to Howard Grove, which we were formerly promised, has been discontinued for more than four years.

I am, dear Sir,
with great regard,
Your most obedient friend and servant,
M. HOWARD.

Letter II.

MR. VILLARS TO LADY HOWARD.

Berry Hill, Dorsetshire.¹

Your Ladyship did but too well foresee the perplexity and uneasiness of which Madame Duval's letter has been productive. However, I ought rather to be thankful that I have so many years remained unmolested, than repine at my present embarrassment; since it proves, at least, that this wretched woman is at length awakened to remorse.

In regard to my answer, I must humbly request your Ladyship to write to this effect: "That I would not, upon any account, intentionally offend Madame Duval, but that I have weighty, nay unanswerable reasons for detaining her grand-daughter at present in England; the principal of which is, that it was the earnest desire of one to whose Will she owes implicit duty. Madame Duval may be assured that she meets with the utmost attention and tenderness; that her education, however short of my wishes, almost exceeds my abilities; and I flatter myself, when the time arrives that she shall pay her duty to her grand-mother, Madame Duval will find no reason to be dissatisfied with what has been done for her."

1. Dorset is a maritime county on the south coast of England; Berry Hill is fictional.

Your Ladyship will not, I am sure, be surprised at this answer. Madame Duval is by no means a proper companion or guardian for a young woman: she is at once uneducated and unprincipled; ungentle in temper, and unamiable in her manners. I have long known that she has persuaded herself to harbour an aversion for me—Unhappy woman! I can only regard her as an object of pity!

I dare not hesitate at a request from Mrs. Mirvan, yet, in complying with it, I shall, for her own sake, be as concise as I possibly can; since the cruel transactions which preceded the birth of my ward, can afford no entertainment to a mind so humane as her's.

Your Ladyship may probably have heard, that I had the honour to accompany Mr. Evelyn, the grandfather of my young charge, when upon his travels, in the capacity of a tutor. His unhappy marriage, immediately upon his return to England, with Madame Duval, then a waiting-girl at a tavern, contrary to the advice and entreaties of all his friends, among whom I was myself the most urgent, induced him to abandon his native land, and fix his abode in France. Thither he was followed by shame and repentance; feelings which his heart was not framed to support: for, notwithstanding he had been too weak to resist the allurements of beauty, which nature, though a niggard to her of every other boon, had with a lavish hand bestowed on his wife; yet he was a young man of excellent character, and, till thus unaccountably infatuated, of unblemished conduct. He survived this ill-judged marriage but two years. Upon his death-bed, with an unsteady hand, he wrote me the following note:

"My friend! forget your resentment, in favour of your humanity;—a father, trembling for the welfare of his child, bequeaths her to your care. O Villars! hear! pity! and relieve me!"

Had my circumstances permitted me, I should have answered these words by an immediate journey to Paris; but I was obliged to act by the agency of a friend, who was upon the spot, and present at the opening of the will.

Mr. Evelyn left to me a legacy of a thousand pounds, and the sole guardianship of his daughter's person till her eighteenth year conjuring me, in the most affecting terms, to take the charge of her education till she was able to act with propriety for herself; but in regard to fortune, he left her wholly dependent on her mother, to whose tenderness he earnestly recommended her.

Thus, though he would not, to a woman low-bred and illiberal as Mrs. Evelyn, trust the conduct and morals of his daughter, he nevertheless thought proper to secure to her the respect and duty which, from her own child, were certainly her due; but, unhappily, it never occurred to him that the mother, on her part, could fail in affection or justice.

Miss Evelyn, Madam, from the second to the eighteenth year of her life, was brought up under my care, and, except when at school, under