“THE PRETTIEST LITTLE ACTRESS”: PERFORMANCE THEORY AND FRANCES BURNEY’S EVELINA

Johanna J. Stevens

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Approved by

Advisory Committee

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Chair

Accepted by

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Dean, Graduate School

ABSTRACT

Due to the limited mobility of the young middle-class woman in the eighteenth century, her identity was mainly the construction of the male who wielded control over her body. That control within Evelina takes the form of financial support, social standing, and matrimonial appropriateness and availability. This thesis is a close examination of the varying ways in which the male figures of the novel exercise the power of this control over Evelina. This study thus concludes due to Evelina's compulsory performances to the expectation of the male power figure that female identity within the eighteenth-century novel is the construction of the male.

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents, Martha C. Stevens and F. Dale Stevens, whose unwavering support and love leaves me speechless. Also to Robert E. Kupper for his steadfast belief in my abilities.

INTRODUCTION

Upon completing Frances Burney's Evelina: Or the History of a Young Lady's Entrance Into the World, the reader cannot but wonder at the multiple characters Miss Evelina Anville plays. Published in 1778, the work is a comedy of manners that follows at the same time that it exposes the sexist codes of conduct of eighteenth-century British society. More than just a comedy, however, Evelina also presents a startling example of the position of the eighteenth-century woman and the multiple roles that she is forced to play. In this essay I intend to explore these performances not as disingenuous lies, but as masculine creations shouldered by the female. My argument is that Evelina is so mercurial and unfixed because her identity is developed through the performances she is forced to enact for her male counterparts. The males that surround her are able to pigeon hole her because she is a "nobody" in the world. This is because she is unnamed and therefore un-owned in British society and within the critical marriage market.

In her pioneering book, This Sex Which Is Not One, Luce Irigarary explores another literary heroine's anxiety over her multitude of selves. Looking at the construction of Lewis Carroll's Alice in Through The Looking Glass, Irigarary writes as Alice: "listen to them talking about Alice: my mother, Eugene, Lucien, Gladys…You've heard them dividing me [Alice] up, in their own best interests. So either I don't have any 'self,' or else I have a multitude of 'selves' appropriated by them, for them, according to their needs or desires" (17). Irigarary offers us a way to approach Burney's earlier heroine as another example who is paradoxically both without a self and the owner of many selves.

Following Irigaray, Judith Butler too observes the multiple roles people play in her essay "Gender Imitation and Insubordination." According to Butler "gender is *performative* in the

sense that it constitutes as an effect the very subject it appears to express. It is a *compulsory* performance in the sense that acting out of line with heterosexual norms brings with it ostracism, punishment and violence" (Gender Imitation 1521 italics original). In the pages that follow I take Butler's insights a step further arguing that Burney's heroine not only performs her sexuality and sexual identity but other roles as well.

To understand some of the performances of Evelina, let us turn to John Locke's 1690 Second Treatise of Government in which he characterizes the relationship between parents and children as an exchange between both parties. Locke's paradigm indicates that both parties are alternately in debt and recompensed by the other: "parents and children [transfer] material and emotional goods in a complex and carefully calibrated exchange born out of parents' natural tenderness and children's inevitable indebtedness, a concept that provides justification for parental generosity and filial loyalty" (qtd. in Cope 64). According to Virginia Cope, this exchange was a prevalent, if not overt, theme in the conduct books of the eighteenth century.

Enormously popular, conduct books were frequently written by men and included advice on appropriate behavior in all manner of situations. Burney's diaries and letters indicate that she read many of these conduct books, which often explicated the expected and desired behavior of both men and women. In fact, Burney has Evelina mention, perhaps ironically or comically, the desire for a manual for young people that would instruct them in the ways of fashionable society.

In this essay I intend to show how the theories of gender performance, and particularly femininity as masquerade, support my interpretation of how Evelina is without a self and unable to define herself. I intend to demonstrate how although Evelina may appear to be an upward-moving, shallow, snobby actress she is only performing the roles which are available and expected of her. While some readers have stated the book to be an example of female determined

identity I would argue that the seeming determination is only to survive by any means possible.[1] Evelina clearly has desires of her own but is unable to enact them. Because of her position as a female in her time she is only able to define herself in the terms of others, particularly male figures of authority who can dictate her identity. By dividing the essay into sections devoted to each male for whom Evelina performs I hope to more clearly illuminate her necessary and multi-faceted duplicity. Within the sections I generally address the performances chronologically to expose how Evelina's performances often build on each other and complicate her existence.

[1] For example, Samuel Choi finds that Evelina is capable of self-determined identity in his article "Signing Evelina: Female Self-Inscription in the Discourse of Letters."

“MY MORE THAN FATHER”: EVELINA AND REVEREND MR. VILLARS

In her first letter of Evelina or a Young Lady’s Entrance into the World, Evelina writes to her foster father, Arthur Villars, for permission to visit London, at the request, she claims, of Lady Howard and Mrs. Mirvan. However, she also expresses a hint of her own thinly-veiled desire when she writes, “Yet I am not *very eager* to accompany them” perhaps unconsciously indicating her own wishes to see the city (Burney 18 italics original). Though Evelina wants to go to London, she will not ask directly for Villars’s permission; instead her request follows the role of “the child” in the Lockean paradigm of filial tenderness in exchange for parental generosity. She writes, “Assured, my dearest Sir, of your goodness, your bounty, and your indulgent kindness, ought I to form a wish that has not your sanction? Decide for me, therefore, without the least apprehension that I shall be uneasy, or discontented” (18). Evelina’s phrasing of this supplication demonstrates her unwillingness to overtly ask for permission. By disguising her own desires as the demands of others her request does not appear impertinent because it is framed in filial language. In this way Evelina can assure herself that even if Villars denies her request, he has no reason to deny *her* because of her appropriately daughterly behavior and submissive request. In a previous letter, Villars explains to Lady Howard that his foster child “must owe all her rational expectations to adoption and friendship” (14). Since his relationship to Evelina is not bound by the blood ties of actual fatherhood and because she is aware of her “nameless” status, Evelina realizes that in order to remain under the tenuous protection of Villars she must perform very well as his daughter.

Villars mentions the exchange quality of his relationship with Evelina to Lady Howard before his foster daughter ever speaks. He writes “I have cherished, succoured, and supported her, from her earliest infancy to her sixteenth year; and so amply has she repaid my care and

affection" (Burney 12-13). His awareness of her indebtedness perpetuates *her* awareness and thus makes her performance of his "dutiful" and "obedient" daughter compulsory. Evelina knows that children owe "filal tenderness" to their parents (Cope 66). She owes Villars even more than most children owe parents because he has no biological obligation to her. As long as he provides a name for her and a shield from her status as bastard, she must act as his belonging.

To underscore this performance, as well as to join her friends, she exaggerates her position as Villars's daughter when she seeks his consent in this first letter: "I am half ashamed of myself for beginning this letter. But these dear ladies are so pressing—I cannot, for my life, resist wishing for the pleasures they offer me,—provided that you do not disapprove them" (18). Though she clearly knows that the trip has been discussed extensively by Lady Howard and Reverend Villars, due to their abundant correspondence, she wishes to obscure her ambitious desire to see London, and even claiming "if you desire that I should" (Burney 18). Evelina's supplication to him and willingness to abide by his wishes puts her below him in the affective exchange of parental generosity and filial loyalty. Evelina's language, particularly the words "ashamed" and "provided that you do not disapprove them," paints herself as having already lost the battle. In framing her request in this way, she leaves Villars only one option appropriate to her "tender" language: put into a position of parental authority, he must allow her to go; he must pay her back for her love and attachment to him. This exchange defines her as his daughter.

To indebt herself further to Villars, Evelina signs this first letter "I am, / With the utmost affection, / gratitude, and duty, / Your / Evelina--- ---- / I cannot to *you* sign *Anville*, and what other name may I claim?" (Burney 19 italics original). Evelina's signature pronounces her relationship to him, and the affirmation of her signature identifies her as his daughter. By appearing under the signifier of "yours," the writer, in Butler's words, "constitutes as an effect

the very subject it appears to express" (Gender Imitation 1521). That is, appearing as his daughter and pledging "duty" and "gratitude," Evelina becomes his daughter. Her payment to him in the form of filial tenderness and daughterly supplication defines her as his child and thus he must provide for, protect her, and name her. Her use of his fictional name for her indicates her nobody-ness while the use of "your" begs for his protection. This is not to say that Evelina has any control over the performance that she presents to him. Irigarary explains that such a performance is compulsory because the male always defines the female, who "can only come into being as the inverted other of the masculine subject" (129). And Samuel Choi contends that Evelina's signatures "are not simply perfunctory acts randomly distributed throughout the series of letters, but are inflection points at which Evelina attempts to deflect deleterious opinions, positions, or conditions" and are "significant events of self-inscription" (260). I would agree insofar as some signatures defend Evelina against some bad opinion or statement but that they are not part of "female self-inscription" as Choi argues (259). Because each letter has a specific audience, the letters can only be performance for that almost exclusively male audience.[2]

Evelina's illegitimate status demands that she attach herself to Villars and allow him to define her for her own safety. After all, as Virginia Cope argues, Evelina knows that children "owe a perpetual debt of reverence and respect to their parents" (66). Villars has been generous enough to take her in and if she wants to remain identified by him (i.e. his daughter/ his Evelina) she must appear thankful and loving. Irigarary writes that the female "is [nothing] but *semblance*" (186 italics original). In other words, according to Irigarary, the female is only the

[2] Though the reader could be considered as a secondary audience for Evelina's performances, I contend that due to the nature of epistolary fiction that the receiver of the letter is the primary audience. It is frequently put forth in introductions to epistolary novels that the letters that follow are collected by the editor and posited as real. This does not allow for any intention to perform from the writer of the letter to the reader of the novel. This type of introduction is not present at the opening of Evelina; however, I believe that it still applies and prohibits the reader from being considered as Evelina's intended audience.

appearance of feminine virtues, attributes, and behaviors because there is no such thing as a woman, only the reflection of the male. Evelina, with her "semblance" of the obedient daughter Villars expects, sublimates her desire to travel to London and employs her feminine wiles to achieve what she wants. Years later addressing the same phenomenon, the early twentieth-century psychoanalyst Joan Riviere writes that "women who wish for masculinity may put on a mask of womanliness to avert the anxiety and the retribution feared from men" (35). Evelina does not want to be a man, but she desires the same control that men wield over their own lives. By "taking on a menial role" to Villars, Evelina is able to momentarily reflect the mirror back onto Villars and achieve his permission (Riviere 38).

Evelina's proclamation that she is his daughter makes Villars indebted to her in accordance with the Lockean filial exchange. In response to her letter, he writes "To resist the urgency of [Evelina's] entreaty, is a power which I have not yet acquired: I aim not at an authority which deprives you of liberty… To see my Evelina happy, is to see myself without a wish" (19) By permitting Evelina to go to London and by claiming her as his, Villars pays his parental debt to her and reaffirms her identity by naming her "my Evelina." According to Cope, Villars's love and affirmation give Evelina an identity in the world and keeps her safe. Evelina perfectly performs, or, as Butler would say "imitates" this obedience with her submission to Villars within the letter and the closing, which announces that she is paying a debt to Villars. The imitation of a daughter professing her "gratitude," "affection," and "duty" is compulsory because Evelina has no alternative choice at this point; there is no other male figure to whom she can "properly" attach and therefore and define herself with.

When Evelina uses "duty" and "gratitude" to pledge herself to Villars at the close of her first letter, these exact words bind her into the Lockean exchange. Even though she is not

biologically his daughter, she performs as such through her implied obedience to his decision on whether or not she should go to London. Regarding her education in Berry Hill, Villars writes to Lady Howard, "You must not, Madam, expect too much from my pupil. She is quite a little rustic, and knows nothing of the world; and though her education has been the best I could bestow in this retired place" (Burney 15). What he does not mention is the lesson of identifying herself as male-owned property that he has taught her; according to Cope, "[Evelina's] education by Villars [is] a careful tutelage in the affective economy by which she will make her way in the world. In Lockean fashion, Villars imagines her tenderness as a guarantor of Evelina's financial security" (69). Villars imagines that either her biological father will recognize the loyalty and tenderness which she has to offer and "*properly* own her" or that a suitor will be aware of such proper qualities in a young woman and take her for his bride (Burney 14 italics original). That tenderness and loyalty that Villars cultivates in Evelina and that is her contribution to the Lockean exchange is fundamental to the construction of her identity. Villars sets the boundaries for Evelina to perform within and has named her as his charge or child, and since he will soon be wielding that body or identity as her (foster if not biological) father in the marriage market, his ownership over her is still active at the novel's beginning.

As her rural and conservative father, Villars has repeatedly impressed upon Evelina his distaste for the pomp and circumstance of city manners. By describing herself as "unpolished," Evelina is actively showing him that she is "his" Evelina because she is performing a role of which he approves. Here, once again Irigarary helps us to understand Evelina's motivation for describing herself this way through the analogy of the symmetry, or the "*flat mirror*—which may be used for the self-reflection of the masculine subject in language, for its constitution as subject of discourse. Now, woman starting with this flat mirror alone, can only come into being as the

inverted other of the masculine subject (his *alter ego*)" (129 italics original). Villars previously describes her as "a little rustic" and Evelina is actively mirroring back his perception of her in order to remain his daughter (Burney 15). The fear of being ostracized or punished that Butler describes drives Evelina to describe herself as "unpolished."[3] In the context of the novel, naming implies ownership. Since Villars is the only father she has ever known, as well as the only man who seems interested in owning her, Evelina is aware that to perform outside of the norm is dangerous. Amy Pawl observes of Evelina's concern with nomenclature that, "dangerous as names are, however, there is a greater danger in not being named—or owned" (286).

Surely Evelina feels pressured to remain Villars' possession as she is aware that the denial of a name is what killed her mother. Evelina's father, Sir John Belmont "infamously burnt the certificate of their marriage, and denied that they have ever been united!" (Burney 11). Though Caroline lived long enough to give birth to Evelina, "the same moment that gave birth to her infant, put an end at once to the sorrows and the life of its mother" (11). Caroline's death was a direct result of Belmont's shameful refusal to acknowledge or name her as his wife. Evelina is fully aware of her mother's fate at the hands of her father and of her death as an example that demonstrates what happens to the unnamed female as well as what happens to the female who fails the male's expectation. With these familial (masculine) laws ingrained, Evelina forms herself to meet the necessary requirements prescribed by her fathers to be owned.

Evelina further appears to be a reflection of Villars and his desires when she meets and describes her potential romantic partner, Lord Orville, as similar to her father figure. She writes, "I could wish that *you,* my dearest Sir, knew Lord Orville, because I am sure you would love

[3] This description of Evelina is transcribed by her in the close of her second letter in the novel. She signs: "Your dutiful and affectionate, / though unpolished, / Evelina" (Burney 22). The inclusion of what appears to be an undesirable trait but one which Villars would clearly approve of, while dedicating herself to him is a performance for his benefit and hence for her benefit as well.

him…I sometimes imagine, that when his youth is flown, his vivacity abated, and his life devoted to retirement, he will, perhaps resemble him whom I most love and honour" (Burney 60 italics original). The "him" who Evelina refers to is, of course, Villars and her expectation of qualities similar to Villars in this potential mate marks her as the creation of Villars. Since he creates her identity, she will always see him as the ideal man. Evelina proclaims that Orville is like Villars, which simultaneously flatters Villars and meets an expectation that he has for her, that she will find a "worthy" man on whom he can "bestow" her (12). The similarity also allows Villars to engage her in a sexual manner, making her more of an object and less of a person.[4]

Much later in the novel when Evelina has been absent from Berry Hill and her foster father for some time, she transcribes to Villars an event intended to demonstrate her belongingness to him as his daughter performing charity on his behalf. After viewing the desperate poverty of Mr. Macartney, Evelina's cousins' boarder, she again performs for her foster father in absentia when she details her experience of helping the distressed MaCartney. Clearly, generosity is a trait that the Reverend Villars greatly values. Evelina writes to Villars, "I seized the opportunity of hastening away…I let fall my purse upon the ground" (Burney 179). The occasion could have gone unrevealed to Villars, since the money could not be a large amount considering his rural life and occupation. But Evelina purposefully chooses to describe this scene to him in hopes of affirming his approval of and ownership of her despite their distance and her current lodging situation with Madame Duval. In fact, she goes on to tell him that she needs nothing to replace this purse since she will soon be returning to Howard Grove. About this scene, Cope writes, "[Evelina's] well-chosen charity earns Villars's approbation,

[4] Now not only is she a daughter/object whom the father must sell to the highest, appropriate bidder but she is also a sexual object that he desires and so will protect more thoroughly. Evelina performs in the attachment/reaction of the Electra complex so that Villars will commit himself more to her both as father and psychic sex partner. For more on the father figure and sexual attachment to Evelina see Irene Fizer's "The Name of the Daughter: Identity and Incest in Evelina."

which he demonstrates by immediately replacing the money she has given away" (70). He writes back to Evelina praising her: "you have but done your duty" (Burney 180). In doing so he reaffirms her status as his daughter by confirming the validity of her "duty." His financial support of Evelina is furthered and rewarded when she behaves according to his expectations. When she appears beneath the signifier of "grateful and generous daughter" she reflects good qualities back onto him and her identity as his daughter is affirmed. With these dedicated actions of reward and the threat of punishment her possible ostracization like Caroline's always looms in the background. He has classically conditioned her to perform in ways that he approves of and expects. What looks like free will is actually puppeteering.

Villars has instilled in Evelina a sense of charity for deserving persons in difficult circumstances. By writing to him about the monetary gift she drops for McCartney, she is clearly trying to show him that, despite their distance, she is still his creation and performing the acts which he instilled in her as appropriate to her sex and position. Cope states: "When Evelina thanks him, she recognizes that she is being rewarded for good conduct and must continue to earn such tokens of regard by demonstrating her ability to dispose of them properly. It is her daughterly paycheque." (70). Given her classical conditioning, it is no wonder that Evelina is constantly altering her*self*, her identity, and her mode of performance. She is constantly seeking the reward and acceptance that her status as an orphan consistently keeps out of reach. Cope goes on to say that "in conduct books and fiction such as Evelina, women become the managers of this affective property, earning their keep as daughters and wives by giving and receiving tenderness" (67). Yet, I believe that they are responsible for more than just their keep; the women in fact are "earning their identity" since it is the relationship to the father or husband that is created with "tenderness." Who a woman "is" is defined by who she belongs to; it is her father

if she is unmarried and her husband if she is wed. “Tenderness” is exacted by the daughters or wives in the economy of marriage, since that market makes the female an object of economic value sold by her father and bought by her husband. Women’s identities are formed by their relationships to specific males, i.e. their fathers and husbands. The limitations of female identity are reinforced in eighteenth-century London in the same way that Butler describes the heterosexual norms of the twenty-first century. And stakes are even higher for potentially penniless orphans. Evelina must meet the status quo or be ostracized like her dead mother, Caroline

Villars, though usually generous to Evelina, occasionally gives her a glimpse of her possible punishment. Early in the novel, Evelina find herself in the awkward position of lying to avoid dancing with certain partners, and ashamed she relates the incident to Villars. He in turn writes to tell her how disappointed he is in her behavior at the ridotto: “how much more I was pleased with the mistakes of your inexperience at the private ball, than with the attempted adoption of more fashionable manners at the ridotto” (Burney 46). The pointing out of bad or unacceptable behavior endangers Evelina’s status as the property of Villars. His mention of the incident alone brings further shame and upset to her. Her apology to him is an attempt to mask her previous self as independent operator and appear as his subject. The acceptable performances are rewarded and the unacceptable ones are pointed out for her to be aware of her precariousness of identity and ownership.

As if aware of the instability of her situation, Evelina sometimes wields her own fictionalized surname to offer her some sense of identity. For example in writing to her friend Miss Mirvan: “Adieu! excuse the gravity of this letter, and believe me, / Your most sincerely / affectionate and obliged / Evelina Anville” (Burney 143). Villars has previously explained that

the surname he has given Evelina is merely an invention that is clearly a near perfect anagram of her first name. Choi writes that "by signing 'Evelina Anville' she asserts with no uncertainty her independence from Mme. Duval, and that her current circumstance of lodging indicates no acceptance of any other kind of relationship" (266). The anagram of "Evelina Anville" translates into "Evelina Evelina," showing the character's awareness of her multiple performances for several masters. By masters I mean males, particularly her multiple fathers, though at this point Evelina has not yet met with her biological father. She is aware they will meet and knows that further performances will be necessary; however, she has been in the care of Captain Mirvan whom Villars has made her temporary surrogate father in their absence from each other. I contend that the enunciation of her fabricated last name does not declare any independence, but rather shows Evelina's schizophrenic state of having to perform in both name and body for so many men. This performing causes Evelina to make mistakes which in turn endangers her ability to belong to anyone while trying to fit into each male's expectations.

The name also indicates that she is Villars's creation; she signs with the name he assigned her, anticipating Irigarary's insight that women are marked by "the proper name representing the father's monopoly of power" (Irigarary 189). Though the name is not Villars's surname, it is the name by which he owns and calls her. His manufacture of this name indicates she is his product.

The only other instance in which Evelina uses this repetitive name occurs when she writes to excuse her relations', the rude and classless Branghtons', acquisition of Lord Orville's carriage. Evelina writes to explain and apologize for her relations' inappropriate behavior; she signs her letter: "I am, My Lord, / Your Lordship's most humble servant, / Evelina Anville" (Burney 208). Concerning this apology Choi writes, "This embarrassment is an affront to

Evelina's agency and propriety. She has to respond to maintain that propriety" (266). By signing "I am, My Lord…Your Evelina Anville" to Orville, she attempts to declare herself as his in the same way that she pledges herself to Villars earlier in the work by making use of the word "yours." The employment of her pseudo-surname simultaneously declares her to be Villars's possession as well as creation, since it is he who named her "Anville." Evelina's signing of her double name to Orville shows her awareness of her multiple selves, because she has no actual name she must play her constructed self to all men. This double name and the emptiness it conceals masks her unworthiness and unnamed status.

Reflecting on Villars and Evelina's relationship, Judith Lowder Newton writes: "Men's power in Burney almost always takes the form of force or control in social situations…power is the ability to impose one's self on another or defend one's self from imposition." (Newton 11). I believe that imposing one's self, like Villars, onto Evelina forms her identity by forcing her performance. That is, in the novel, "*men act* and *women appear*. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at" (Berger qtd in Linker 61). Yet, male gaze in Evelina is more than just the action of being looked at; it is the tool of definition of self for the middle-class woman. Evelina feels the male gaze of her real and surrogate father as well as her potential partners, and her performance or identity formation in response to each of them is obvious. We see her alter her behavior according to whom she is presently with or performing for, as well as the anxiety that is produced by trying to be all things to all men. In the action of performing, women are outside of their bodies looking at themselves as men do and modeling themselves through the appropriate pleasing behaviors for their audience.

The way the male gaze defines Evelina within the community, and to herself, is an act of subtle violence. Lacking a name, she lacks identity, and can only glean one from her

surroundings, the men willing to claim her, and the way she is to be claimed is in "[watching] herself being looked at" and performing to what the audience, the fathers and later potential suitors, desires (Berger qtd. in Linker 61).

THAT OTHER FATHER: SIR JOHN BELMONT

Simultaneous to the performance for Villars, Evelina knows that she has another father, Sir John Belmont, who owes her parental tenderness and generosity; however, until she can locate him and receive his name, she must continue to perform for Villars lest he cast her out and leave her orphaned again. Evelina knows that to be under the protection of a name, even one of a lower class than the one to which she genetically belongs, is better than being unnamed. Belmont belongs to the upper class, like Lord Orville, and Evelina strives to belong to him as well as his class.

Upon Ms. Selwyn's staged introduction of Evelina to Belmont, Evelina describes the scene to Villars: "What a moment for your Evelina!—an involuntary scream escaped me, and covering my face with my hands, I sunk to the floor" (Burney 308). While Irene Fizer argues that Evelina covers her face to protect herself from Belmont's rejection and his power to possibly destroy her "true identity," I would argue that she covers her face instead to prevent the intrusion of Caroline's memory from entering into Belmont's mind (91). Since her father previously spurned Caroline, Evelina fears that her similarity to her mother might cause Belmont to reject her and leave her without a name, a father, or, most importantly, an identity. She wants to prevent the association with a "bad" signifier, Caroline. Evelina fears being confused with Caroline because "the threat in this case is not of being disowned, but of being too completely owned, reappropiated into the maternal" (Pawl 286). If Belmont too closely associates Evelina with Caroline then, besides the threat of incest, the shame of his misdeeds to Caroline will appear as an unacceptable reflection of himself, and he will shun Evelina. If he sees Evelina as somehow reflecting the anger he expects or recalling the wretched situation of the mother, he

will not recognize her as daughter, because she will appear to be performing a role outside of the Lockean exchange in judging him.

Evelina falls to her knees, becoming a blank canvas before him, on which the projection of his name and position will define her. She attempts to maintain her blank status because she needs his projection of parental ownership and identity to protect her from other virtueless men. Evelina is careful to address herself as "your Evelina" in this critical letter to Villars. At the time she writes this letter she still has not been "properly owned" by Belmont and wishes to maintain her father-daughter relationship with him as father in case Belmont does not own her.

Yet, Belmont does not scorn Evelina as he did Caroline in spite of her physical and social resemblance to her mother, his abandoned bride. He is instead moved by Evelina's behavior; she is "affected beyond measure…and embraced his knees, while yet on [her] own" (Burney 308). The purposeful placing of herself below him is the precise mirror of the first letter to Villars. By supplicating her physical presence to Belmont she is imitating her supplicant request to Villars in the first letter. Evelina has learned from the successful employment of Locke's exchange with Villars and endeavors to make her father own her and pay her the "parental generosity" due to her after submitting to him. Unfortunately Belmont is too consumed by his shameful treatment of his wife, Caroline, to continue the interview with his biological daughter.

Upon their second meeting, Belmont manipulates Evelina into performing the proper daughter role when he accuses her of attempting to humble him. He approaches her with "a sternness which at once surprised and frightened [Evelina]. 'Child,' cried he, 'hast thou yet sufficiently humbled thy father?—if thou hast, be contented with this proof of my weakness, and no longer force thyself into my presence!'" (Burney 317). With this speech he threatens to deny Evelina the shield of his fatherhood and name, essentially another threat to her identity. To be

made the outsider is dangerous. Belmont knows that, due to Evelina's bastard status, she desperately needs his recognition not to only to marry Orville, but to be deemed off limits to the wolf-like advances she has fought off throughout the novel. By setting her up to believe that she is "humbling" him, i.e. performing a masculine identity and not one of daughterly expectation, he manipulates her into placing him above herself in a place of parental power with the ability to define her. His statement accusing her of not performing her daughterly function and attempting to strip "him of authority" (Fizer 92) forces Evelina to fall to her knees and say "oh Sir, vouchsafe but once to bless your daughter, and her sight shall never more offend you!" (Burney 317). Once she has prostrated herself to his parental authority he accepts her presence and compliments her feminine virtues: "fair light," "kind," and most importantly "child" (316-17). Seeing that she has gained some ground, with her biological father claiming and naming her and creating her identity in the world, Evelina goes on to enact the Lockean system of which Burney was aware of at the publication of her novel: "'Oh, Sir,' exclaimed I, 'that you could but read my heart!—that you could but see the filial tenderness and concern with which it overflows!—you would not then talk thus,—you would not then banish me your presence, and exclude me from your affection!'" (318). Evelina is attempting to exact a relationship from Belmont and in doing so provide safety and identity for herself. Left in this nameless position due to his bad behavior, she must perform for him as his daughter even if she is of superior make because only he can redeem her delinquent status in the world and make her safe and marriage worthy.

This passage displays that Lockean concept of Evelina owing Belmont "filial tenderness" since he now owns her and will financially provide for her. In his acceptance of her affection and her reception of his generosity she is finally named and her "true identity," in terms of the novel, is revealed. While some might find that this reveals some "true" or "central" identity, I find that

it is just the culmination of sixteen years worth of imitation. In the same way that Butler contends, there is no original gender I suggest there is no original Evelina—just layers of performance or imitation enacted for the men of the novel because of compulsory societal—whether familial or social or both—norms.

It is an almost comical scene in which Belmont finally reciprocates his role as father to the performance of his daughter. Each crawls around the room on his or her knees trying to endear him or herself to the other with proclamations of devotion or apology. Evelina knows that, according to Locke, children "owe a perpetual debt of reverence and respect to their parents" (Cope 66). By falling on her knees Evelina performs as daughter to Belmont despite the fact that he has never provided for her. This submissive performance is what finally awakens the father in Belmont after Evelina says "—'Oh Sir, how thankfully would I then prove my duty, even at the hazard of my own life'…I ventured not to move form the supplicant posture" (Burney 318). Her necessary masquerade of being indebted to him creates his generosity to her—and in doing so he names and identifies her. With his earlier silence to and denial of Evelina, Sir Belmont previously remained outside the Lockean exchange, yet it is his silence that forces Evelina to state her profession of "filial tenderness." Belmont's new silence has secured and defined Evelina as his daughter and will now satisfy his side of the exchange by financially providing for her. In his acceptance of her affection and her reception of his generosity she is finally named and her most sought-after identity revealed. It is the most sought after one because it makes her attractive and valuable in the marriage market. As Cope puts it "Evelina is deserving of his estate because she is his only child, she is accomplished enough to acquit herself in the society amid which his recognition would place her, and she is amiable enough not to distress him by painful reminders of his neglect" (72). Evelina's performance as his loving

daughter and her unwillingness to publicly shame him allows him to claim her with no injury to himself.

Belmont's denial of his daughter places Evelina in the precarious position of being "of obscure birth"; his acceptance of her forces her to negotiate his world and to meet an expectation of performance equal to that of a young woman bred in his society all while maintaining a "filial tenderness" for him that pardons his behavior. Only then can the tested Evelina finally be named and acquire the status which he should have bestowed upon her at birth. In spite of his bad behavior, he has the power to define who Evelina is and will be, based on his expectations of her.

Evelina conforms to a plan hatched by Belmont, Miss Selwyn, and Orville that demands silence between father and daughter for a short while. Her quiet submission ensures her identity as Belmont's daughter because she is willing to follow his orders. She chooses to publicly protect her father rather than disclosing his siring an illegitimate son. According to Belmont, Evelina is worthy of his name because of her willingness to protect that name, as his financial support of her attests. Miss Selwyn says to Evelina "'you should appear, henceforeward, in no other light than that of Sir John Belmont's daughter…Sir John will give you, immediately, £30,000'" (Burney 313). So without ever really speaking to her father she achieves the daughter-status by covering his bad acts and putting him in her debt, a debt that he has already paid by granting her the marriage market capital of his name to obtain Orville.

In her penultimate letter in the book, to Villars, Evelina signs her name "Belmont":

> Now then, therefore, for the first—and probably the last time I shall ever own the name, permit me to sign myself,
>
> Most dear Sir,
>
> Your gratefully affectionate,

Evelina Belmont. (Burney 335)

By adopting the name Belmont, Evelina is momentarily performing as Belmont's daughter while simultaneously performing for Villars. His "fondest wish is now circumscribed by the desire of bestowing her on one who may be sensible of her worth, and then sinking into eternal rest in her arms" (Burney 12). By marrying, Evelina is completing the desired performances of Villars, which of course entail imitating the name and class of "Belmont" in order to attain Orville. Evelina simultaneously performs for Orville, her beau, with the implied near immediate occurrence of their wedding because soon she will no longer be known as or sign as Miss Belmont but as Lady Orville. Her mention of the brevity of time before she will own the name "Belmont" shows how she is becoming Orville's subject and will not bear the mark of another male. Lastly, she continues to perform as Villars's daughter by asking rhetorical permission to sign with Belmont's name and exclude his, as well as defining herself as his possession with the use of the word "your."

Certainly she does not announce herself as Belmont to hurt Villars but more to proclaim that she is worthy of Orville because of her new name/identity. Yet, this name, Belmont, like the mask at a ball, will soon be shed in favor of another, Orville. But Evelina never actually signs with her married surname and concludes her final signed letter of the book as "Evelina" alone (Burney 337). Considering she signs the last letter in the novel with just her first name, perhaps she is indicating that the other names/identities are now unnecessary. Some critics have suggested that this last surname-less inscription proclaims Evelina (the girl and the novel) as an essential feminist text.[5] While they argue that Evelina appears to only be herself at the ultimate

[5] Samuel Choi is probably the most adamant about the feminist virtue of this text in his article "Signing Evelina: Female Self-Inscription in the Discourse of Letters."

signature, I contend that she only acquired this state through the external affirmations of her identity the men within her sphere gave her, in this case Sir John.

THE DANGEROUS SUITOR

In eighteenth-century London the principal occupation of a young upper class woman's life was the search for and procurement of a husband. Accordingly, Burney has Evelina come into contact with many potential suitors during her "entrance into the world." In fact it is her first appearance in London society in which Evelina falls under the defining male gaze from a male not her father. She observes that at the ball, "the gentlemen as they passed and repassed, looked as if they though we [Evelina, Maria, and other eligible young ladies] were quite at their disposal, and only waiting for the honor of their commands; and they sauntered about, in a careless indolent manner, as if with a view to keep us in suspense" (Burney 23). The potential dance partners appear as picky housewives at the market; they are not only evaluating the wares available to be chosen but displaying *their* ability to choose. It is the prerogative of the males in society to choose the dance partners, and their close inspection as well as stress on the inspection devalues the females until they are only bodies with which to dance. The woman is no longer a person in the exchange; she is a commodity.

To further reinforce the status of woman as commodity or subhuman, Evelina finds that the rules of acceptable conduct dictate that if she refuses a partner she must sit out a number of dances before she can again become available for use.[6] Evelina determines that she will not dance with any of them and declines Lovel's request, which he never actually articulates but expects her to accept gratefully. Evelina cannot withstand the insidious pressures that the shopping males put on her to secure a mate. This is the situation of Evelina or any woman in the marriage market; she must display herself. Soon after she is approached by a more desirable partner, Lord Orville, and proceeds to dance with him. This acceptance after refusing another

[6] From A Pocket Companion to French and English Dancing: "Any lady refusing to dance with a Gentleman, if disengaged, will be under the penalty of not joining the next two dances" (36). Also to accept a partner is to accept him for at least two dances.

offer puts Evelina in peril as the irked Lovel returns to put her to the rack. He questions her in front of Orville "'I must take the liberty to observe—pardon me, Madame,—it ought to be no common one [reason for declining his offer]—that should tempt a lady—so young a one too,—to be guilty of ill-manners'" (Burney 27). Clearly he is aware of Evelina's inexperience in society but he takes the opportunity to shame her in front of another male. Lovel does this in order to damage her personality and value in the marriage market.

Evelina learns from this first dance that to deny a male partner without another to own her is dangerous. To do so risks naming her as impertinent, "ill-bred" and "mischievous" (Burney 29). Attending her second ball she is again affronted by an undesirable partner, Sir Willoughby Clement. In order to avoid dancing with him she invents a fictional male partner whom she can use as a shield to Clement's attempts to force her to dance with him. This fails, however, because of his constant torture and artfulness. So awful is his torture of her that she acquiesces and dances with him: "[Mrs. Mirvan] at last told me, I must either go down to one dance, or avoid his importunities by returning home. I hesitated which alternative to chuse; but this impetuous man at length prevailed, and I was obliged to consent to dance with him" (Burney 36). His demand for her adherence, which causes her to perform to the socially constructed rules, clearly shows how her manufactured identity is formed in response to the masculine performance before her. She even writes "thus did this man's determined boldness conquer" (Burney 36). Again Evelina finds that she is defined by male power in "the form of force or control in social situations," and Clement's "ability to impose [himself on her]" (Newton 11). Clement expects and demands that Evelina reflect his desire and when she seems noncompliant he punishes her with shame and the publication of her lie. Female compliance to the gender biased rules of conduct is clearly expected and reinforced within the social environment.

Clement forces Evelina into performing femininity. The scene neatly displays the constructedness of gender that Judith Butler articulates in Gender Trouble. According to Butler:

> the universal conception of the person…is displaced as a point of departure for a social theory of gender by those historical and anthropological positions that understand gender as a relation among socially constituted subjects in specifiable contexts. This relational or contextual point of view suggests that what the person "is," and, indeed, what gender "is," is always relative to the constructed relations in which it is determined. (Butler 14-15)

In other words, identity is only formed in relation to the constructs and expectations around the body which is performing identity. Evelina appears to be a chameleon and such a snob because she is constantly remaking herself in the image of what is necessary and expected due to the male dominated situation surrounding her. Whether that identity is the obedient child of Villars, or the blushing dance partner, or the silent cousin, Evelina is the performer desperately seeking approval and safety.

Evelina appears snobbish when she falls prey to Sir Clement, who is perhaps the most manipulative man in the novel, constantly attacking or metaphorically raping the heroine. We need only turn to the instance in which he literally kidnaps her from the opera. Evelina is trying to maintain her performance/identity of upper middle class or gentry due to her association with the Mirvans and Lady Howard by refusing to let Sir Clement to become aware of her relations, the Branghtons because of their "low-bred" class and manners:

> they gave me great reason to expect, that they would endeavor to attract his notice, by familiarity with me, whenever he should join us; and so, I formed a sort of plan to prevent any conversation. I'm afraid you will think it wrong; and so I

> do myself now,—but at the time, I only considered how I might avoid immediate humiliation. (Burney 79)

Up to this point at the opera, Evelina has been performing in accordance to Mr. Villars's expectations of her. He has told Evelina to give her grandmother "all the respect and deference due to so near a relation" (Burney 45). Due to her relationship with him, she has been forced to spend precious time with the Branghtons and Madame Duval despite the danger of disclosure and contamination that they pose to her.

Villars's warning to keep a wide berth of Madame Duval shows the heroine that her close relations reflect and define her. After being forced from her more desirable companions, the Mirvans, by Madame Duval and the Branghtons, Evelina starts at the sight of Sir Clement Willoughby obviously seeking her in the unfashionable gallery. She writes to Villars: "I was extremely vexed, and would have given the world to have avoided being seen by him: my chief objection was, from the apprehension that he wou'd hear Miss Braughton call me *cousin*" (Burney 79 italics original). Despite the fact that Evelina does not like Sir Clement, she does not want to be identified with the Branghtons. Lovel proved to Evelina earlier in the novel how quickly gossip travels and she wants to continue her association with the Mirvans because their class matches that of her biological father, Sir Belmont. She continues to Villars, "but indeed this family is so low-bred and vulgar, that I should be equally ashamed of such a connection in the country, or anywhere" (79). With this statement she assures him that she is still associating herself with him and his company. This is evidence that Evelina has not become proud or snobbish as some critics suggest but that her disdain for her relations has more to do with the threat they pose to her identity and nearly-assumed life. The Branghtons are aware of Evelina's situation as seemingly illegitimate daughter and she must keep that secret in order to protect her

potential identity as Belmont's daughter. That is to say that if Sir Clement discovers that Evelina is of obscure birth then she is in grave danger, because she will be an open target for his roguish treatment and her goal, to be owned by her biological father, will be eliminated.

Faced with exposure Evelina attempts to appear to be of the same class as Sir Clement, shuns her "low-bred and vulgar" relations to protect her unnamed identity, and falls right into his trap (Burney 79). Sir Clement takes the opportunity to use manners and gallantry to force the now isolated Evelina into his coach alone with him. When Evelina decides she can return to Mrs. Mirvan with the least damage done to herself Clement protests "'I fear it will be almost impossible to find her,' answered he; 'but you can have no objection to permitting me to see you safely home'" (Burney 80). Manners create the impossible situation Evelina finds herself in. She cannot rightly refuse the gentleman's coach for fear of seeming impertinent. Yet she should not ride alone with a man she barely knows and yet she cannot stay lest she be without any protection from the missing Mirvans or the now slighted Branghtons. Proper behavior demands that she be accommodating to his delicacy even if it is false. Newton also views the nobleman's gallantry as dangerous to Evelina's character, "once Sir Clement has fixed upon her as his sexual prey, he employs the same courtly fiction with greater earnestness to disguise his seductive intentions and to manipulate Evelina's response" (37). When Evelina attempts to avoid the offer to travel alone with him, which would paint her as his companion or worse his sex object, Sir Clement will not have it, "'Impossible!' (cried he with vehemence) 'I cannot think of trusting you with strange chairman,—I cannot answer it to Mrs. Mirvan,—come dear Madam, we shall be home in five minutes'" (Burney 81). Sir Clement's false concern for Evelina's safety would be laughable if the reader and Evelina did not sense that she is in more danger with him than "strange chairman." About this scene Marie Cutting-Gray writes: "The patriarchal model for

female virtue appears to posit innocence merely in order to assault it, so that lecherous Willoughby can silence Evelina's objections by referring to the code designed to protect her" (47). The code is the propriety of not allowing Evelina to go home with "strange coachmen." Sir Clement's seemingly reasonable inquiry for her safety is exactly what puts her in danger. He is successful in manipulating Evelina into a position by which she compromises the self that she is desperately seeking.

Once in the coach he roughly grasps her hand and refuses to let it go and it becomes clear that he has told the coachman to proceed in a direction away from Evelina's destination, the Mirvans' home. What is significant about this scene is how Evelina is forced to befriend her would-be rapist. After nearly choosing actual death to the social death deflowering signifies, Evelina is forced to accept Sir Clement's apology because no "actual" harm has been done. He applies to her "generosity" or "sensibility," both traits expected and demanded of her gender, and she writes:

> this rather softened me; which advantage he no sooner perceived, than he determined to avail himself of, for he flung himself on his knees, and pleaded with so much submission, that I was really obliged to forgive him, because his humiliation made me quite ashamed: and after that, he would not let me rest till I gave him my word that I would not complain of him to Mrs. Mirvan. (Burney 84)

By inverting the traditional male-female (power-submission) dynamic in which the female displays submission, Sir Clement extracts a vow of forgiveness and silence from Evelina. In this way he has formed Evelina's identity by forcing her to perform as first his companion and then as co-conspirator in her own abduction as well as forcing her to be the forgiving female. He forces her into accepting his false performance of devoted lover, by silencing her ability to

complain about him. Evelina performs silence and forgiveness because it is "compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence" (Butler Gender Trouble 33). Through the employment of manners he hopes that her compliant behavior enacted in response to his making her his co-conspirator will make it possible for him to take advantage of her sexually.

The entire kidnapping attempt and ensuing request for silence is simply a ruse enacted in order to force Evelina into a sexual relationship with Sir Clement. He is both a threat to her and a threat to the identity which she is desperately trying to secure, because if she is viewed as his mistress then she cannot claim Belmont's name/identity. Newton writes that "Burney's Evelina, in fact, presents us with a world dominated by the imposition of men upon women, a world in which male control takes the form of assault, and world in which male assault is the most central expression of power" (23). Sir Clement's assault on Evelina forces her to reflect his gaze, the acceptance of his help and then the forgiveness he extracts from her, and in so doing allows him to define her. She is the reflected image of his desires and unable to present a self outside of that gaze because she is in Irgiaray's terms "not One."

While some critics, such as Kenneth Graham, find that it is Evelina's "self-respect" that protects her from further attacks from Sir Clement, I disagree (406). I believe that Evelina's sense of self-preservation dictates her behavior to him.[7] Her statements in the lobby of the Opera indicating her desire to find her protectors, the Mirvans, clearly show that she is aware of the impropriety of accepting Sir Clement's offer. More than just impropriety, the desperation which Evelina expresses indicates a fear of erasure from the world which she endeavors to enter, the upper class. She even accuses Sir Clement of trying to murder her while in the carriage, though the murder she fears is not literal but social.

[7] I am using self-preservation here to mean Evelina's desire to protect her potential self and selves in the sphere of public life in London.

Evelina is desperate because she realizes her value lies in her virginity according to the male-to-male exchange circumscribed by the marriage market. Her virginity is at stake in the carriage with Sir Clement and though manners dictate that she goes along with his actions she nearly kills herself to escape him. In other words, Sir Clement would make her "no more than a vehicle for relations among men" without any of the benefits or protections of being properly owned and married (Irigarary 186). The deflowering of Evelina would ultimately remove her from the market of exchange (upper society) where she is clamoring to be sold. After all, "once deflowered, woman is regulated to the status of use value, to her entrapment in private property; she is removed from exchange among men" (Irigarary 186). While the removal from the exchange by means of marriage is not always desirable, it is Evelina's only foreseeable goal. If Sir Clement has his way in the carriage she will be removed from the exchange but her use value will not be that of motherhood and continuing the male's line but that of a body for sexual use only.

Evelina's determined silence on occasions, such as the kidnapping scene, acts as quiet protest against the performances being commanded of her. In this case, Evelina refuses to speak in an affirmative way to tie herself to Sir Clement. Though her situation as a subject without speech makes her unable to identity herself, it works in her favor in some cases. In other words, Evelina is forced to perform for Sir Clement in the carriage and yet her silence acts as a limited shield leaving her ummarked as well and available for identification by other males. The longer that she can remain unnamed or marred by other males, the more likely she is going to be to be able to attain the name of Belmont. As the blank page, Evelina has the ability to become what the viewing male desires.

In order to contextualize the male-on-female violence that Evelina suffers, we can turn to the scenes in which Captain Mirvan physically abuses Madame Duval. Of these scenes Lord David Cecil writes "the story of the courtship and the picture of the social scene are incongruously combined first of all with an unsuccessful essay in Smollettian farce—the Captain Mirvan-Madame Duval scenes—and secondly with a melodramatic romance in the manner of the novelist of sensibility" (223). I disagree; these scenes are neither incongruent nor included only for comic effect, though they might appear amusing on the surface to some readers. Captain Mirvan kidnaps, beats, soils, and finally binds Madame Duval to a tree. Evelina is never bruised or discarded like Madame Duval but the domination over her self is the same. Madame Duval offends Captain Mirvan's patriarchal authority by refusing to conform to his concept of appropriate or proper lady in society or more specifically in his home. She is vulgar and outspoken, which while not the virtues of femininity that society values, does not merit the physical abuse and mocking she incurs from him.

Of course, Burney could not act this violence on Evelina's body because as the conventional, romantic heroine she must be unscathed and perfect when she enters into marriage at the close of the novel. While the violence is not directly on Evelina's body, she is certainly aware of it and is made increasingly concerned by it which she communicates to Villars. One wonders if she is uncomfortable for her grandmother or for herself as she senses she could easily be in her place, when she applies to the Captain to stop his torment of Madame Duval. In reply he tells her "that [she] should much sooner repent than repair [her] officiousness" (Burney 126). In order to avoid his violence, Evelina does nothing to displease the Captain and conforms to his desired performance of female compliance. The descriptions of the humiliation and suffering of Madame Duval serve as lessons for Evelina. The moral is: If you do not comply to the male

authority, you will be punished, mocked, and will be seen as deserving of such treatment. Following Butler, we realize that the female must comply with the acceptable heterosexual norms or performances or be ostracized.

THE PERFECT MAN: ORVILLE

There is, of course, one performance that Evelina must manufacture to make the trajectory of her conventional romance complete: the wife. Upon her very first "entrance into the world," at the private ball in London, Evelina begins her performance towards attaining the attentions of the only male suitable for marriage within the novel, Lord Orville. Evelina appears at the ball with her hair "dressed" and in a gown very different from her clothing at Berry Hill; by doing so she is masquerading as something she is not (Burney 22). Evelina affects the guise of the "proper young lady" at the ball when she describes herself as "flurried" and "blush[ed]" (Burney 26). Describing this subterfuge Catherine Craft-Fairchild writes: "the masquerade again positions the woman as one pretending to possess what she does not have" (42). With her identity as Villars' child, Evelina does not have the class necessary to gain entrance into such affair. Evelina continues this performance for Orville's attention by enacting the modesty expected of young women through silence; "a new dance was just begun. I had not the presence of mind to say a single word, and so I let him once more lead me to the place I had left [dance floor]" (Burney 25). Silence was a trait highly valued in women in eighteenth-century England as Burney well knew, "this modesty, which I think so essential in your sex, will naturally dispose you to be rather silent in company" (Gregory qtd. in Burney 341). The exaggerated blushes and silences are examples of what Joan Riviere later defines as the "masquerade" of "womanliness," which the female enacts to avoid the violence of men. Evelina fears that if Orville knew of her imposter status he would shun or ostracize her.

Once Evelina has gained the attention of Orville, she acquires the distressing problem of keeping him interested while attempting to block the undesired attentions of other males. Orville frequently finds Evelina in the intimate company of Clement, or Mr. Macartney and he clearly

shows his disapproval in an exchange with Evelina. Evelina says, “I would give the universe for a few moments’ conversation with him [Macartney]!’ I spoke this with a simple sincerity... ‘The universe!’ repeated he, ‘Good God, Miss Anville, do you say this to *me*?...in a voice that shewed him ill pleased” (Burney 263 italics original). Orville’s response demonstrates to her that only by eschewing other male society can she make herself an acceptable target for his love. And with love comes marriage, name, and identity. Evelina continues these performances of modesty and propriety to Orville because they are compelled by coherence to social rules and expectations (Butler Gender Trouble 33).

While examining the performance manufactured for Orville’s approval by Evelina it is critical to turn to the only written correspondence to him from her in the novel. Evelina writes to Orville after her vulgar relatives, the Branghtons, have not only commandeered his carriage but also applied for his patronage; she signs “I am, my Lord, / Your Lordship’s most humble servant, / Evelina Anville” (Burney 208). The false name she signs to him is pure masquerade. The desire for propriety before him drives her to offer this name, even as she is growing closer to obtaining her biological father’s name.

While upon first inspection this act of writing him at all may seem like the action of an independent person, I would argue that it is a required performance because of the implied expectations and necessary coherence to those expectations of the audience, in this case, Orville. Evelina has yet to be named by her biological father when she writes to Orville. The act of writing is a performance in attempt to belong to Orville and thereby belong to the social class of Belmont. Orville is a bit of a stepping stone to gain Belmont’s protection. And, the use of the manufactured surname is performance for Villars as well.

About Evelina's letter to Orville, Cutting-Gray asserts, the heroine discovers her feelings for Orville in the action of writing and that this place of discovery is also a place for power (51). I believe, though, that the letter is a stage for Evelina to represent herself or "imitate" herself for Villars and Orville as an acceptable partner. Her letter to Orville is a representation and not an account of any self she might actually possess. She writes so that he will not think badly of her, instead of writing to tell him to think well of her. Evelina's greatest fear is that she will be prevented from performing for these males and perhaps attaining the measure of security that they have to offer.

Evelina does eventually attain security through real names. She is finally named by her father, Sir Belmont, but only after Lord Orville speaks to him on her behalf. Orville has previously requested Evelina's hand and he explains this proposal to Belmont before Evelina visits him for the second time. Because of Orville's interest in Evelina, Belmont owns her and names her. Through his action of fathering her, he can connect himself to Lord Orville who by means of class and wealth, improves Sir Belmont's position as well. In one exchange Evelina is named Belmont and then Orville, not because of her person, but because she acts as a conduit for these men to connect to each other. Evelina's performance makes it socially possible for the men to connect.

Evelina must finally be transferred from her "more than father," Villars, before she can wed; "When Lord Orville requests to marry her, Evelina awaits Villars' letter before agreeing, even though, as a foundling child, she technically belongs to no one" (Weets 92). This is an example of how the filial tenderness that Evelina devotes to Villars must be transferred to her fiancé in order for him to own her. She must appear to belong to Villars so that she can be proper marriage material for Orville and not a "foundling" as Tamara Weets describes. The reader

cannot forget that Evelina is defined by her "foundling" status because of the actions of her biological father, who refused her mother and hence her. Once Villars's letter arrives, the transaction begins: "granted permission to marry, Evelina turns over her ownership of the letter to Lord Orville, allowing Rev. Villars' words to 'speak both for me and itself'"(Weets 90-91). The letter from Villars to Orville acts as the final certificate of ownership over Evelina's identity. Because Villars has trained her to do so, Evelina treats herself like an "ornament" (Burney 98), who "needs to be transferred between owners" (Weets 92). She is no longer the adopted daughter of Villars or the newly claimed "Miss Belmont," but the soon to be wife of Lord Orville. The fact that Evelina dares not speak this information out loud to Orville shows that it is the men in her life that speak for her. She is only a mirror to their behavior, performing the exact facsimile of their actions. And just as the flat mirror cannot speak, neither can Evelina. Her marriage to Orville is the final transfer and identity creation that occurs in the novel and by marrying him "she reaffirms the status quo of the social system by seeking security through marriage" (Weets 91).

It is not only because Evelina recognizes herself as an object to be transferred from one man to another but also that she is an object in danger that constructs her identity. "Ultimately, though, as her breathless, final letter proves, she gives over ownership of her discourse [identity] to Lord Orville who is merely a replacement for the father-figure/spokesman Rev. Villars" (Weets 91). While it might be seductive to think that Evelina has achieved some selfhood and can appear without the name of the father/husband, I do not agree. Irigarary and Butler suggest that Evelina must get married to put an end to her "subversive multiplicity" (Butler Gender Trouble 25). She must marry to singularize her sex/performances, to reduce her monstrousness, and to restore the ability for the "masculine" to mark off the "feminine." Orville's exclamation to

Evelina at the end of the novel, "'you are now' (said he, in a low voice) 'all my own,'" destroys her multiplicity and in so doing he gains mastery over her sex.

CONCLUSION

Frances Burney's 1788 novel Evelina underscores that female identity in the eighteenth century is a construction based on the male. Since Evelina performs actions in response to and to in order to satisfy the male's, whether Belmont's, Villars's, or Orville's expectations, she is less than Other; she is Nobody. The titular heroine is actually merely a body reflecting his gaze back to the male and in doing so producing a self that pleases him. Because her identity is based on the males' Evelina responds to the male gaze in order to continue her foray into higher society.[8] As the mirror image of males in the novel, Evelina receives information and reflects it back to the male in order to be owned. This performance appears to give her a sense of independence, when in fact it is quite the opposite. While Choi and Graham find some sense of Evelina's independent identity, I believe such a perception is illusory. Evelina knows she must fulfill male expectations or she will be cast out and left without protection or name.

Because Evelina does not exist without the masculine desire to shape her, Gallagher writes, "Evelina's social insubstantially looks all but inevitable; her lack of social status, even social identity, is both an extension and obfuscation of her fictionality" (207). The lack of social status hides her bastard condition which allows her to continue her limited movement towards identity. Evelina knows of the demise of her mother, Caroline, who is bodiless because of the lack of recognition or owning culminating in her death from the male. This knowledge drives Evelina to behave in the expected and reinforced patterns of daughter and lover in order to avoid the more dire bodilessness of her mother.

Keeping in mind how the male authority figure formulates female identity within her novel, Burney's dedication of Evelina is very revealing. About it Gallagher posits "the author-

[8] Keeping her status as reflection in mind if we consider the mirror stage in development we find that "the mirror stage offers the child an illusionary sense of unity, self-mastery, and coherent identity" (Craft-Fairchild 26).

daughter [Burney] asserts that her status as her father's work, and therefore as his representation, makes it impossible for her to claim her own work, which must belong ultimately to him. To name herself is to name her father and thereby to interfere in his *self*-representations" (212 italics original). Because nothing can belong to the female, even her writing is the reflection of the male, and in the case of father must not reflect poorly on him.

The chronic situation of the eighteenth-century female's position as selfless is not surprising considering the pressure we know that Burney felt from her family to marry early. Irigarary writes "The circulation of women among men is what establishes the operations of society, at least of patriarchal society" (184). In other words, the passing off of women from father to suitor creates the only meaningful relationships in patriarchal society: those among men. We as readers constantly see Evelina fretting over how she appears, sometimes scandalously, to connect various men to one another. This circulation, or rather, controlling this circulation was a contentious issue in the eighteenth- and more so in the nineteenth-century novel. It is what makes Elizabeth Bennett such a crucial character in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice, published in January of 1813. Bennett's desire and attempt to control her "circulation" among men will cause her to be seen as impertinent and masculine. We see this minor exertion in her denial of her first marriage proposal. Adored by today's feminists and strongly criticized in Austen's era, Bennett's ability to exist at all is perhaps made possible by the publication of Evelina. While I do not prescribe to the view of Evelina as a prototype for feminist writing, I do find that Burney exposes the problematic situation of woman as object forced into roles prescribed by men in order to be named. Evelina Anville Belmont Orville makes room for the Elizabeth Bennetts of the nineteenth century, and in doing so Frances Burney procures her position as one of the "mothers of the novel."

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