

Rhetorical analysis of Frances Burney's Evelina and select journal  
entries

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the  
Graduate Faculty in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department: English  
Major: English (Literature)

Iowa State University  
Ames, Iowa  
1992

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The first issue discussed in Burney scholarship--and dealt with in this work--has to do with her importance as a novelist and as a diarist. Margaret Anne Doody notes in her Frances Burney: The Life in the Works that Burney's fame (in the twentieth century) has been "to a large extent that not of a novelist but of a diarist" (1). The novels, often similar in style and content to the journals, have been treated as less important or less impressive than the journals. Doody writes the biography partly as a way of counteracting "the popularity of the diary material" (2). "A reading of her novels as if they were diaries (rather than vice versa) is fundamentally mistaken. Burney's works have long suffered from a lack of literary reading. The novels simply need to be read as if they mattered, and as if they were novels" (3). Thus, a major issue in Burney scholarship appears: the exact relationship between the journals and novels and, by extension, the literary importance of each.

Basically, Doody's complaint is that the novels are being read and studied only in the context of Burney's life (or journals). She seems to be attacking the biographical approach to literary criticism, a position supported by literary theorist John M. Ellis. In his work, The Theory of Literary Criticism: A Logical Analysis, Ellis defines literature as being those texts "used by the society in such a way that the text is not taken as specifically relevant to the immediate context

of its origin" (42). Hence, to return the work to its original or biographical context is to use the work as something other than a literary text. Doody's complaint, then, is that the reading of Burney's novels "as if they were diaries"--or in their original, biographical context--denies the literary worth of the novels. Keeping both her view and Ellis's in mind, we must turn to another related aspect of disagreement in Burney scholarship.

This issue of literary treatment leads to another--perhaps the underlying problem in the first issue. Kristina Straub's Divided Fictions notes that "Burney's fiction, read . . . with the second wave of feminist social reform pushing at our backs, often seems awkwardly strained in opposite directions: the text presents female experience as distinct and separable from the male while at the same time deferring to patriarchal authority as the moral yardstick for judging women's experience" (1). Straub discusses this "doubleness" or "dividedness" and so does Julia Epstein in The Iron Pen. Like others, Epstein sees the doubleness in Burney's own life: she often backed down before and staunchly upheld social conventions dictating how women should act; yet she wrote and published at a time when such activities were not thought to be proper for women. Also, while she often followed her father's wishes at the expense of personal happiness, she married a Catholic French emigre despite her father's objections. "Critical attention has been lavished on the accommodations of Burney's life, an attention that has then been extrapolated for use as a strategy in interpreting her art"

(Epstein 4). Thus, Burney's life and novels present contradictions, and the contradictions in her life are brought to bear on those in her novels. It is important to note that the novels--though bearing their own contradictions--are seen as having the same types of contradictions that are found in the journals (and Burney's life).

These contradictions may explain why the novels seem to many to be extensions of the journals. Critics react to these contradictions differently. Doody believes Burney "offers . . . an examination of her society"--complete with contradictions (3). Epstein sees Burney as a "conflicted but self-conscious social reformer" (4). Straub believes the novels show "contradiction between the two opposing ideological impulses of Burney's duplicitous desires--to be human and a woman" (5). In fact, Straub finds the contradictions revealing:

. . . the writer refuses to extend her language to patch over the contradictions often implicit in cultural ideology, contradictions that tend to leave disturbing rifts in the fabric of words. Recent, theoretically sophisticated work on narrative fiction suggests that carefully reading these textual disruptions--instead of dismissing them as "flaws"--can result in interpretations that give voice to previously silenced modes of literary and cultural experience. (2)

The contradictions seem normal given Burney's struggle to be an eighteenth-century woman writer. Not all critics, however, find the contradictions normal. Katharine M. Rogers, in Frances Burney: The World

of 'Female Difficulties', believes "Burney's subduing of self in the interests of female propriety was excessive" (2). Whereas Straub sees Burney as purposefully showing societal and personal conflicts in her novels, Rogers finds the conflicts disturbing: "I cannot follow [Straub] in finding positive value in the fact that a text contradicts itself" (191). Perhaps a condensed version of the issues and problems discussed can clarify the disagreements:

1. The novels have not always received the literary reading or attention they deserve--and that the journals have received.
2. The novels and journals exhibit contradictions or "doubleness" that can be seen as positive--providing insights --or negative--hindering the effectiveness of the works.

In discussing Burney, my thesis will address these points of disagreement.

Given these focal points, I have two objectives. First, I will treat novels and journals, and will do so in a literary manner--or, as Doody suggests, "as if they mattered" (3). Second, I will try to decide whether or not the contradictions within the novels and journals provide useful ways of understanding Burney's works and life, while adding to the ways critics understand them. One qualification: since the thesis must--by definition--cover a much narrower scope than the lengthy studies already discussed, it will meet its objectives within a more limited scope and point towards areas for future study. In order to meet these objectives, this thesis limits its scope to one of Burney's

novels--Evelina: or the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World--and to select portions of her journals. In so doing, this study will only address some of the numerous contradictions and points in Burney's writings about which critics disagree. The thesis will provide a method for further inquiry, though, which could address other points of contention. Several strategies could enable this study to meet its objectives; however, one strategy appears to be most likely to succeed: rhetorical analysis.

Because rhetorical analysis encompasses choices of style and content and their relation to the writer's purpose and readers' attitudes, it is a strategy that 1) allows for the treatment of novels and journals in a literary manner--as if they matter--by treating each novel and journal entry as a narrative, and 2) provides a way to evaluate the contradictions present in these works and to determine if these contradictions can give useful insights or understandings of Burney's writings and life.

At this point, the treatment of journal entries as narratives requires explanation. Patricia Meyer Spacks, in her book Imagining a Self: Autobiography and Novel in Eighteenth-Century England, discusses autobiography and finds that the autobiographer ". . . exists on the page by virtue of [her] story, [her] shaping of the events of [her] experience; [s]he exists as a literary phenomenon. . . . Indeed, the spacious novels of the eighteenth century, offering the names of their central figures as titles, are equally preoccupied with character and

with human identity [as autobiographical writings]" (1). First, note Spacks' use of "story" and "literary phenomenon" when discussing the autobiographer. "Story" suggests "narrative." Also, she sees a link between autobiographical stories and novels--the names as titles, suggesting preoccupation with "human identity." The linkage between autobiographical writings and fiction (novels) itself suggests the validity in treating the genres similarly--as narratives which can be rhetorically analyzed. Indeed, the similarities between Burney's life and writings--discussed earlier--are not lost on Spacks, who finds Evelina more autobiographical in some respects than the journals (180-81). The similarities, though, cannot relegate one genre to a lower status than the other (i.e., the novels as less-literary than the journals or vice versa)--as Doody notes. Rhetorical analysis can provide insights into the similarities while treating each genre as literature.

Another justification for treating the journals as literary narratives appears in Lars E. Troide's The Early Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney. In the first volume's "History of the Manuscripts and Earlier Editions," Troide describes Burney's revisions of her journals and letters. He claims her concerns were "both prudential and artistic":

Her primary aim was to excise from the manuscripts any passages that might give offence to persons, or the family of persons, mentioned in them, or that might show herself or her own family in an unfavourable light. A second aim was to cut out material that she judged to be trivial. . . . A final goal, with special



regard to the early journals, was to smooth out the . . . stylistic inelegancies of her youth, clarifying the writing where it was needed, tightening or unifying the narrative for greater dramatic effect. . . . (emphasis added; xxv)

Thus, we see that Burney herself treated her journals, at least while revising or editing them, as "narrative[s]"--to use Troide's term; Burney cut out sections and changed others with an eye toward a public audience. Obviously, this act of revising with an audience in mind changes the nature of the journals and of journal writing: what was once written for "Nobody," as Burney addressed her journal at its conception, became revised for public consumption (Early Journals I:2). Troide and other editors of the journals provide as much of the original writings as can be deciphered underneath Burney's markings; however, much material remains permanently lost (xxv). Therefore, the treatment of the journals as literature which can be rhetorically analyzed seems justified.

The use of rhetorical analysis in Burney scholarship is not completely new. One critic, Mary Elizabeth Butler, uses rhetorical analysis as a means of examining Burney's Evelina. Her dissertation, The Rhetoric of Self-Consciousness and of Self-Knowledge in Moll Flanders, Evelina, Anna St. Ives and Emma, includes a chapter entitled "The Paralytic Self-Consciousness of Evelina A." In it, Butler analyzes the rhetoric of Evelina's letters and finds the young woman to be self-conscious to the point of having no control over her behavior or her life--hence, the "paralytic self-consciousness" (62-98). Butler

rhetorically analyzes the novel without bringing into discussion the journals (and, in so doing, follows Ellis's notion of literary criticism treating the work independent of its original/biographical context). My thesis, however, employs the strategy in analyzing both genres.

### Summary

This chapter has shown that Burney scholarship contains points of disagreement over the exact relationship between Burney's life and works (or journals and novels) and whether contradictions or "doubleness" should be seen as positive or negative. An important issue resulting from these disagreements concerns whether or not Burney's artistic achievement is lessened--Doody and others (like Epstein and Straub) say "no," while others like Rogers say "yes." After expanding on critics' viewpoints, I will analyze portions of Evelina and select journal entries, concluding that Burney's overall artistic achievement is not lessened--particularly when rhetorical concerns like audience and content are considered.

## CHAPTER TWO: CRITICAL OPINIONS

In reviewing scholarly views on the doubleness in Burney's works and whether or not it lessens artistic value, I will look first at critical analyses of Evelina. While they provide different viewpoints, these analyses discuss similar themes, issues, and scenes.

One important theme that many scholars find is that of a young woman's coming of age. Rogers cites Burney's own words when, in a journal entry, she describes her purpose in writing Evelina as being "' . . . to trace the accidents and adventures to which a 'young woman' is liable; I have not pretended to show the world what it actually is, but what it appears to a girl of seventeen'" (38). Thus, Rogers believes Burney meant to give a "lightly satiric view of the world through the eyes of an intelligent, naive, female observer" dealing with the everyday problems of growing up (38).

Similarly, Doody sees the novel as the "story of [Evelina's] coming-to-be" or a "struggle toward identity" (46, 45). Straub seems to agree, but she finds a "doubleness"--two somewhat contradictory ideologies--running throughout the book: the ideology of romantic love (with a sub-theme of bad marriages) and that of female powerlessness (27). This idea of powerlessness concurs with Susan Staves's thoughts regarding Evelina's intense anxiety and difficulties ("Evelina; or Female Difficulties" 374, 379). Epstein sees Evelina's difficulties as being forced upon her, while Butler feels they are often self-made because

of Evelina's excessive (in Butler's view) self-consciousness and her goal of "acquiring the veneer of social propriety" (92). Butler sees no self-knowledge in Evelina, but Epstein sees the work as a story of "private sovereignty and self-determination" (95). All these commentators recognize themes dealing with a young woman's growing up; they disagree about the seriousness of these themes (and of Evelina's problems). To summarize, Rogers and Butler view Evelina's problems as being "ultimately manageable" or resulting from the superficial goal of fitting in (Rogers 38; Butler 92); Doody, Staves, Straub, and Epstein see Evelina's goals (and Burney's) as being more complex and addressing serious societal problems (although they differ in their assessments of Burney's artistic effectiveness). Further comparison of critical opinions shows that similar issues and scenes are considered, but with differing conclusions.

Rogers, like other critics, finds social satire and comedy in Evelina; overall, she finds many positive aspects in the work (such as the exposure of patronizing men and of the ways women can contribute to men's trivialization of them). However, Rogers feels that several weaknesses lessen Evelina's effectiveness and significance. She finds the main weakness, "disproportionate punishment of a comic butt," is too violent even for farce (30). Rogers cites the scene in which the misogynistic Captain Mirvan tricks Madame Duval, Evelina's egotistical grandmother: Mirvan and his servants hold up her coach while she travels to London and, in disguise, they tie her up and throw her in a ditch (Burney 145-47). Rogers feels this scene adds nothing to the satire:

Beating an elderly woman and leaving her tied up in a ditch is not funny, nor is it an appropriate punishment for her rude self-assertiveness, nor does it throw light on the subjection of women. If Burney's point was that it was acceptable to bully women in her society, she had already made it . . . through the long-suffering Mrs. Mirvan, who spends her life accommodating to her brutish husband. (30)

Rogers goes on to note that 18th-century readers would have thought a "vulgar, selfish woman was a proper object of attack" (30). Burney, according to Rogers, expresses her own anger but loses "artistic control," and this hostility becomes more "evident than instruction or diversion" (30).

This issue is definitely problematic. Rogers cites an instance from Burney's journal in which Burney helps to poke fun at a young woman "who appears to have been mildly retarded" (31); this entry does seem to back up Rogers's point that Burney willingly participates in such pointless hostility. However, Doody tries to find a useful reason for the inclusion of the Duval/Mirvan scene. She finds it to be a "wild illustration of feminine helplessness" pointing out ". . . that women's hatred of other women is useful to the most antipathetic concerns and desires of males. A woman condemning any other woman may reflect male hatred and support masculine irrational control over all womankind" (55). This rationale seems to be a stretch, and Doody does not appear too sure of it. Given, though, that Evelina goes along with the trick and later

expresses regret for doing so, perhaps Doody's rationale may apply--if Evelina's learned from the mistake. (Future discussion will address this point.) Evelina later sees through the "pretense of appropriate punishment"--as Doody calls it (56).

Rogers feels this violence (farcical or otherwise) is uncalled for given her view of Burney's purpose--to provide a "lightly satiric view of the world" (38). (The view that the satire is to be "light" would be disputed by Epstein who sees the work as a "quiet insurrection" [95].) Yet Rogers notes that Epstein feels Burney's anger and use of violence help satirize "the cruel strictures of social propriety, particularly as they applied to women" (38). In short, Epstein and Doody feel Burney's anger is used effectively, and Rogers disagrees. Rogers also asserts that Burney uses "inappropriate pathos" and "inappropriate farce" (37). Examples that Rogers cites include the scene in which Evelina meets her real father--and reacts by screaming and covering her face (37). The scene, which Rogers calls "maudlin," was admired by several of Evelina's 18th-century readers (37). Yet the scene is overly emotional and "fails" because the emotions "are not supported by the plot and characters"; Rogers thinks that a real-life Evelina could not love to such an extent a father who abused her mother and whom she has never seen. She says that no real point is made by the extreme emotion and that "Burney, like her readers, enjoyed a good cry and thought weeping was a sign of virtue" (37). Butler agrees with Rogers and asks, "Why should she scream[, ] . . . [a]nd why should she cover her face?" (79). In Rogers's and

Butler's view, this "maudlin" scene shows a loss of artistic control. After all, a scene such as this would certainly require extenuating circumstances to justify such extreme emotion.

To other scholars, however, the use of extreme emotion is justified given the complexity of Evelina's situation. Remember, the main theme of the book, according to these critics, deals with a seventeen-year-old woman growing up. Critics such as Doody and Epstein, though, stress Evelina's unique situation: as Doody points out, Evelina is not yet a "young lady" according to society. She has been raised in a kind of isolation away from society, and she is a bastard in that her father has not (at the novel's opening) acknowledged her. Evelina's mother and guardian, Mr. Villars, decided she should not use her mother's surname--and thereby admit illegitimacy--but should instead go by the made-up name of Anville (an anagram of "Evelina"--taken from her mother's surname of "Evelyn"). Evelina lacks that "important last name which identifies gens and status. She is unfathered and unauthorized" (40). Thus, when Butler attacks Burney's purpose of wanting Evelina to "acquir[e] the veneer of social propriety" only, she fails to see the importance of that goal for Evelina. Survival in patriarchal 18th-century society--or at least the chance for contentment--depends greatly on being legitimized. The "maudlin" scene, then, may be justifiably emotional.

Patricia Meyer Spacks adds more support for the idea that Evelina's situation is indeed complex. In her article "Every Woman is at Heart a Rake," she states, "The father-daughter relationship seems to have

provided for many women a model of emotional satisfaction and safety. The effort to preserve innocence at all costs is an effort to retain the advantages of childhood, which seem to be the most a woman [in 18th-century society] can hope for" (45). Evelina does not have all of the childhood advantages in the first place; it should be understandable, then, that her need to be legitimized through her father's acknowledgement is great—as great as her emotional reaction indicates. In addition, Evelina's need for social acceptance must not be as shallow as Butler seems to think. In "The Dangerous Age" Spacks states, "Young women [between the ages of twelve and twenty-five] faced two opposed threats: seduction, which would destroy their hope of successful marriage, and social rejection. . . ." (427, 429). The latter would be particularly problematic for women since it could result in personally experiencing the "devaluation and powerlessness" faced by women over thirty (Straub 27). Epstein's remark on this need for acceptance proves relevant: "[S]elf-determination for eighteenth-century women derives first and foremost from social legitimation" (96). Thus, the long awaited recognition by her father can be seen as an occasion for much emotion.

In addition, Epstein discusses an important consideration found in no other critical work I have examined, and this consideration can, I think, justify Burney's use of "inappropriate pathos" and even counter many other charges of weakness or ineffectiveness lodged by Rogers and others. As Epstein notes, "the major clue to how Evelina understands and responds to her situation lies in the epistolary documents the novel



presents us with" (emphasis added, 95). Epstein is not the only critic to discuss the epistolary format of Evelina--Doody notes that Burney "seizes a 'masculine' mode of comedy [i.e., violent farce] . . . [and] wraps it up in the 'feminine' epistolary mode . . ." (48). But Epstein is the only Burney scholar to discuss in-depth an inherent concern of epistolary literature that must be taken into consideration when one deals with such a text: audience. All writing involves audience concerns, but an epistolary novel deals with them in unique ways. Each letter in Evelina is addressed to an audience; additionally, most letters are written by Evelina and addressed to Mr. Villars. Thus, the primary audience within the text is Evelina's male guardian. This fact is significant for several reasons. First, Evelina is a young woman in a society which requires women to defer to men's judgment, particularly when the woman is much younger than the man. Also, Evelina is illegitimate--a fact well-known to Villars--and any chance for social acceptance would be lost if she were to upset Villars (as he could reveal her illegitimacy and/or publicly denounce and ridicule her). As readers and critics, we should consider Evelina's letters in light of the power Villars has over her life.

Epstein recognizes the need to consider Evelina's writings in terms of her audience, and the insights this consideration brings:

Letter writing in Evelina is a synecdochic gesture: it stands, in miniature, for the tenuous and danger-fraught communication process between authority and its charge, between the empowered

and the powerless. A well-behaved young woman, Evelina knows, must be innocent and artless, and the 'art' of letter writing --that accomplishment for cultured ladies . . . --should reflect this. But innocence and artlessness get Evelina continually into trouble, so self-preservation demands that she replace those traits with experience. . . . (95)

Epstein notes that Villars "affects not to understand" this point; she posits that Evelina "must disguise her burgeoning intelligence of the ways of the fashionable world" (95-96). Evelina uses letters as a way of deceiving Villars; thus, her letters become "a potential arena for subversion. As a narrative form, letters pretend to spontaneity and absolute sincerity. But they can never be utterly sincere, as no crafted piece of writing can be without artifice" (96). Thus, Evelina's letters to Villars should be read with caution, and particularly with an eye toward omissions or exaggerations.

To return to the father-daughter reunion scene found to be "maudlin" by Rogers and Butler, we should take into account the fact that this scene appears in a letter written by Evelina to Villars (Burney 340). A closer examination of this scene in the form of a rhetorical analysis (appearing in Chapter Three) will show that Evelina's awareness of her audience probably influenced her account--Burney may have had Evelina include emotional reactions corresponding to decorum and feminine delicacy, and not necessarily Evelina's "real" reactions.

Thus far we have seen that Rogers's primary objections to Evelina

--disproportionate punishment, inappropriate pathos, and inappropriate farce--can be countered. The epistolary format, and its inherent concern with audience, may illuminate other critical views. Many other issues are of interest to several scholars, but I will limit this phase of my discussion to a representative example: the infamous foot-race. This scene, perhaps the book's most violent one, attracts much critical attention. Two men, Lord Merton and Mr. Coverley, decide to settle a wager by having two women over the age of eighty race. The old women run into each other and fall; the men revive them with wine and insist that they continue. Finally one of the women falls, and Evelina's attempt to assist her is halted by the men. (Remember that Evelina regrets not stepping in during the joke played on Madame Duval!) The race has to be declared over because the woman is too injured to continue (311-12).

Doody comments,

Unlike the scene of the assault on Madame Duval, the brutality here has no pretense of appropriate punishment. . . . This scene is Frances Burney's version of the fall of woman . . . . [This use of] farce develop[s] . . . expressive violence. The odds are steadily raised until the laughing reader notices discomfort, protests that things have gone, as we say, beyond a joke. . . . A practical joker is a pain-bringer. (56-57)

Violent farce, then, makes readers realize the pain inflicted through jokes--or fun and games. (Remember Rogers's failure to see a purpose

in the Madame Duval/Captain Mirvan scene.) Because both of these infamous scenes entail violence to women, they can be seen as demonstrating the serious theme of the problems faced by women--and a young woman growing up in this society. Evelina sees the treatment of elderly [and presumably single--Madame Duval is, and the two old women probably are, single] women. Within this context, Evelina's attempts to gain social acceptance (and even her marriage to Lord Orville) can be understood.

However, some critics do not agree with Doody. Rogers feels this "grim aspect of female experience" does not "touch the heroine. In the world of this book, male brutality can be avoided" (40). Rogers feels this way because this foot-race (along with other "situations that could potentially be dire[,]" ) does not "develop that potentiality" (40). Hence, Rogers sees no useful purpose for the scene and disagrees with Staves's conclusion that Evelina deals with "anxiety" due to these types of "difficulties" (369).

Returning now to Epstein's idea of the epistolary form allowing for deceit of an audience, we can see that this scene appears in a letter from Evelina to Villars. Evelina notes that the other people in the onlooking crowd do not seem bothered by the race; she calls the scene "ridiculous," the women "poor creatures," and Coverley "brutal" (311-12). She then continues relating the other day's events. The possibility exists, then, that she was deeply affected by the race--she could have avoided telling Villars about it altogether--but did not feel she could discuss her true feelings with Villars or explicitly state her opinion

of the two men. (In Chapter Three of this thesis, I will analyze sections of Evelina's letters and argue that she indeed tends to write more openly to Maria Mirvan, excluding information from Villars.) Yet, relating the incident to Villars is to make him (and Burney's audience) aware of an instance of male cruelty toward women. That in itself, I believe, is justification for including the scene in the work.

Another critic finds fault with Evelina's inclusion of the scene in her letter (or with Burney's inclusion of it). The most complete account of the historicity of foot-racing at the time, Earl R. Anderson's "Footnote More Pedestrian Than Sublime: A Historical Background for the Foot-Races in Evelina and Humphry Clinker," states that Burney could have based her account on literature--Smollet's Humphry Clinker had a foot-race between men--or on current foot-racing occurrences. It seems that a law put into effect in 1711 limited the legal limit of gambling (on any type of sport, including foot-racing or pedestrianism) to ten pounds (60). Thus, the Merton-Coverley wager of one hundred pounds was well above the limit. Also, by the 1770s, foot-racing was considered to be a distinctly lower-class form of entertainment--particularly in the rare cases of women participating in specially-arranged "smock races" (65). The "ludicrous" details in Evelina's account (old women, wine, etc.) plus Evelina's use of the term "poor creatures" when referring to the women make Anderson conclude that Evelina "reflects her sympathy . . . [and] even more . . . her consciousness of her social superiority to [the women]" (66). He feels Burney's readers would have recognized

"that these two gentlemen had made fools of themselves, . . . abused two poor old women[,] . . . and in the ludicrous details of [the foot-race], they would have recognized an expression of class-consciousness" (68). For possible refutations of Anderson's views, I turn to the concern for audience and to Straub's discussion of the scene.

Since Evelina relates the scene to Villars, I maintain the possibility that this "social superiority," if it is indeed there (which I question), could be affected for Villars's benefit. I am more inclined to believe that Evelina's remarks convey true pity and perhaps some anxiety--to use Staves's term--over the treatment of elderly women. An "expression of class consciousness," moreover, does not necessarily indicate a whole-hearted acceptance of class differences; since Anderson does not elaborate on his comments, it is difficult to tell what he thinks Evelina's thoughts really are--a belief in her actual superiority, or merely consciousness of a class system that could, should she fail in achieving legitimation, victimize her?

Straub seems to believe the latter. She finds tension throughout the book that results from conflicts between ideologies (e.g. romantic love vs. female powerlessness). "The reader is constantly tossed back and forth between the pain and loss of women 'over thirty'-- . . . the effete male brutality of a race forced by unconsciously powerful young rakes between two physically and socially helpless old women, for exampl[e]--and the Cinderella-like promise of Evelina's married happiness with Lord Orville" (25-26). Straub notes these tensions and feels Evelina

and readers must deal with them. In discussing the race, Straub notes, "While this race explicitly expresses the power that wealthy men have over working-class old women [note Anderson's "class consciousness" here], it also illustrates . . . the evils of victimization and oppression. . . . [It] underscores the powerlessness of women and the insensitivity of Burney's culture to female pain" (44). Thus, the violent farce, for Straub, serves a useful purpose. Evelina's conveying of this to Villars (and Burney's conveying of it to her readers) show there is a definite potential for "dire[ness]" in this situation—contrary to Rogers's beliefs (Rogers 39).

The last major issue regarding Evelina that concerns critics is Evelina's marriage to Orville and, thus, Burney's artistic effectiveness (particularly in terms of feminism). Straub, as noted above, sees the marriage issue as one of the two dominant societal ideologies at conflict in the book. She finds the conflict useful: Burney's artistic achievement is in exploring "ways of living with contradictions that arise from women's [situations]. . . . While we may be more comfortable discussing Wollstonecraft's 'feminism' than we are in making claims for Burney's, we lose a great deal that is important to feminist, revisionary views of literary history if we . . . place . . . Burney in reductive categories" (107-8). For Straub, Burney's artistic effectiveness should not be labeled as "feminist," but neither should it be labeled "ineffective."

Epstein tackles this issue by deciding that "Evelina does not, of

course, triumph fully over the patriarchal social order. . . . [W]hat she achieves is a measure of personal autonomy and control within the confines of 'acceptable' social behavior for women in the last third of the eighteenth century" (118). Epstein feels Evelina is a strong character who, at seventeen years of age, "manages to get . . . her rightful access to power, money, title, family, and name . . . without openly breaking any of the rules of decorum" (121). The marriage is a conventional "prize," but her "social identity [which has been shown to be truly important] is secure" (120). Evelina does not openly denounce the oppressive events and actions that surround her; Epstein feels, and I agree, that she would have lost the respect of Villars and Orville in doing so. While that in itself may not seem terrible, to Evelina it could have been devastating (118). Burney's artistic effectiveness, then, is not greatly lessened by Evelina's marriage.

Doody would agree; Staves, Rogers, and Butler, however, disagree to some extent. Staves concurs with Straub's findings of "helplessness" in women's situations at that time (380). However, she feels Burney compromises this theme by conflicting it with the romantic ideology--as if the romance is "a solution to evils for which Fanny Burney knows she does not really have a remedy" (380). Thus Burney's work is valuable, but "she [Burney] ultimately weakened her art" (381). Like Staves, Rogers--I feel--finds Burney's romantic ending disappointing. The ending of Rogers's chapter, though, proves somewhat confusing: ". . . Burney strove to express her vision through emotional effects that she could



not handle effectively. . . . Hence Evelina is more artistically effective, though less significant, than her mature novels" (40). Obviously, the emotional effects (farce, "harrowing pathos," and others) weaken or limit the book in Rogers's opinion. The marriage per se does not seem to be of major concern here, but the overall effectiveness of Evelina is presumably weakened.

Like Rogers, Butler does not find the book terribly effective. Her dissertation states that Burney's goal for Evelina is "acquiring the veneer of social propriety"; thus, Evelina "passe[s] all the tests, such as they are, and she'd [sic] ready to turn her will and her life completely over to her higher power in the shape of Lord Orville. This book is really over when we finish it . . ." (92). For Butler, the marriage weakens the artistic effectiveness of the work--although it is debatable whether Butler finds much effectiveness anyway. Throughout her rhetorical analysis, she concentrates on words and expressions that indicate Evelina's self-consciousness coupled with lack of self-knowledge. Butler does a remarkable job of counting the number of times words like "looks" or "seems" appear; yet, for someone performing a rhetorical analysis, she spends little time considering a crucial part of the work's content: Evelina is only seventeen years old. Thus, when Evelina self-centeredly wonders if or believes that Orville could be thinking about her, I feel this is a result of her being a naive, infatuated teenager--not a fatal weakness in the work. Also, Butler's analysis is faulty because it never discusses the epistolary format and/or

its inherent concern for audience--issues I would think should be standard concerns. Thus, I believe Butler's views are themselves ineffectively supported.

### Summary

This review of critical opinions regarding Evelina has shown that some scholars--Rogers, Butler, Staves, and Anderson--find flaws in Burney's artistic effectiveness. Others--Epstein, Straub, and Doody--find fewer, or less-damaging flaws. As my rhetorical analysis of Evelina will show, I support the latter group's conclusions on the basis that I find the other stance incomplete--it fails to consider the epistolary format, its inherent concern for audience, and the effects of that concern.

In addition to studying Evelina, scholars also discuss the journals. Although I find no one commenting specifically about the journals' overall artistic effectiveness, I maintain that such a concept can be applied here. I have already discussed Burney's editing of the journals and letters for public consumption (see my Chapter One); thus I believe she was highly aware of an audience. Through publication of her journals and letters, Burney uses a mode of communication that is different from, but similar to, that of her novels--particularly the epistolary Evelina.

Epstein writes of Burney's journals and letters as if they are

literary (which I believe). She points out Burney's "ironic manipulations of narrative voice" and the "split narrative persona, at once self-effacing and self-congratulatory, she portrays in her journals and letters" (27, 26). Epstein finds differences in personae, an idea which supports the view that these journals and letters should be analyzed as literary works. She cites a letter, analyzes it, and claims, "Its rhetorical deliberateness and careful pacing argue that Burney approached this letter not simply as an amusing family communication, but as a literary production. This composition reveals a writer whose skill at manipulating language is impressive indeed . . ." (29-31). Epstein sees Burney's journals and letters as literary, and the artistic effectiveness is great.

Contrary to Epstein, Rogers speaks little of the journals and letters. She does briefly discuss Burney's life:

Burney's own life supplied her with more genuine challenges than she allowed her heroines; she met them with more convincing courage and described them with more moving, because more authentic, language. . . . She rendered these fearful crises in plain language, letting the facts speak for themselves.

She described her mastectomy with clinical detail and accuracy . . . ." (180-81)

Rogers sees the journals as more artistically effective than the novels.

These two viewpoints accurately represent the most common opinions regarding Burney's journal writings (particularly in comparison to her

fiction). My analysis of journal entries and letters will try to account for Epstein's and Rogers's views; I will argue, however, that Epstein's position takes more rhetorical criteria into account. Therefore, I also feel that Burney's fiction and journal writings are artistically effective.

CHAPTER THREE: ANALYSIS OF EVELINA

Thus far I have discussed critical opinions of Evelina and of Burney's journal/letter writings; in this chapter I will analyze select portions of these works, supporting my contention that these writings are artistically effective. I will begin by analyzing scenes in Evelina discussed by the critics (and in Chapter Two of this thesis): first, the Madame Duval/Captain Mirvan scene; second, the "maudlin" reunion of Evelina and her father; third, the foot-race episode; finally, the marriage, as described by Evelina. Next, I will give a brief analysis of Evelina's language when writing to different audiences (e.g., Villars and Maria Mirvan). These analyses will show that flaws found by Rogers, Butler, Staves, and Anderson are less-damaging when examined with an eye toward audience--and any possible omissions and exaggerations.

Duval/Mirvan

Recall my earlier discussion of Rogers's views regarding this scene, in which Captain Mirvan tricks Madame Duval, then supposedly attempts to rob her, and ties her up and throws her in a ditch. Rogers finds the scene unjustifiable: ". . . nor is it an appropriate punishment for her self-assertiveness, nor does it throw light on the subjection of women" (30). Rogers also points out that 18th-century readers would

have thought a "vulgar, selfish woman was a proper object of attack" (30). Herein lies what I believe is a justification for Burney's use of this scene. Evelina's epistolary format requires two audiences: the reading public and the letters' intended (within the text) audience. This scene appears in a letter addressed to Mr. Villars, and I have already discussed the potential for omission and exaggeration in Evelina's letters to him. Therefore the inclusion of a scene demonstrating male cruelty to an old, single woman also serves to make Villars aware of an instance of such cruelty--an end valuable in itself. Based on the work's internal audience, Villars, I believe the scene is effective.

The other audience, that of the 18th-century reading public, can also be seen as justifying the scene. As Rogers says, this audience would have thought a character like Madame Duval to be a "proper object of attack" (30). By including the scene through Evelina's description of the event, Burney may be attacking this popular notion. Notice the language used: first, Evelina states (before the "robbers" appear) that she "was quite ashamed of being engaged in so ridiculous an affair" as this practical joke (143). After Evelina finds Madame Duval in a ditch, she states, ". . . it was with difficulty I forbore exclaiming against the cruelty of the Captain, for thus wantonly ill-treating her, and I could not forgive myself for having passively suffered the deception" (emphasis added, 147). We see Evelina is ashamed and that she recognizes the cruelty of Captain Mirvan's actions--a point she emphasizes later in describing the joke as "barbarous and [carried to] unjustifiable

extremes" (150). Finally, Evelina resolves to prevent any further actions against Madame Duval, noting "the cruelty of tormenting Madame Duval so causelessly" (emphasis added, 152). Thus, Evelina and Burney address their audiences by including an instance of male cruelty; I doubt Evelina omitted or even exaggerated key parts here, given what could be her and Burney's purpose: to attack the popular notion that an egotistical, elderly woman can and should be the object of such actions. My belief is supported by Evelina's later confronting of Captain Mirvan in order to prevent future practical jokes (153).

One last point should be made in regard to this scene. Rogers also notes Burney's propensity for ridiculing others (recall the journal entry describing Burney's laughing at a young, possibly retarded woman), and a reasonable question arises: why didn't Evelina step in sooner? Evelina gives some possible, and I think plausible, reasons given her precarious social position. First, she notes the need to "avoi[d] quarrels, and suppor[t] . . . dignity" (142). Also, Evelina has "the mutual fear of the Captain's resentment to me, and of her [Madame Duval's] own to him, neither of which would have any moderation" (145). Evelina seems to be following society's rules of decorum that call for an avoidance of resentment and quarrels. In addition, Evelina had no idea Captain Mirvan would carry the joke so far: "Had I imagined he would have been so violent, I would have risked his anger in her defence much sooner" (152). I believe the Duval/Mirvan scene serves to point out male cruelty to elderly women--a situation, much like the foot-race, that would

dramatically influence a naive, socially insecure seventeen-year-old young woman. Burney's overall purpose of portraying this young woman's "entrance into the world" and its complexities is supported by this scene's vivid attack upon 18th-century British society's unwritten rules regarding how women may be treated.

### "Maudlin" Reunion

Like the Duval/Mirvan scene, the reunion between Evelina and her father, Sir John Belmont, draws criticism. Remember, Rogers finds "inappropriate pathos," and Butler also wonders why Evelina screams and hides her face when meeting a man she does not know (Rogers 37; Butler 79). Indeed, Rogers feels the extreme emotion makes no real point: "Burney, like her readers, enjoyed a good cry and thought weeping was a sign of virtue" (37). Herein lies a justification for the emotion. As Rogers states, Burney's audience believed female weeping was virtuous; therefore, Evelina's actions should not have seemed extreme to 18th-century readers! Furthermore, Burney's purpose of showing how this woman must deal with her complex social situation is supported here. Evelina's situation is unique, and, as already discussed, this situation couples with the then-popular idea that women needed fatherly acknowledgement for social legitimation--a necessary goal for any young woman. On this basis, extreme emotion could be justified. Burney's



readers would have expected such a reaction, given Evelina's circumstances. Another possibility for justification appears. If Burney's readers would have expected Evelina's extreme emotion, so too would Mr. Villars, the letter's intended audience. He knows Evelina's predicament, and he knows what this reunion could mean for her. He would be willing to accept or even expect her--a young lady acting in accord with society's rules of decorum--to react in an extreme emotional manner. A look at Evelina's description shows such emotion. She ends the previous letter to Villars by describing her anticipation of the reunion:

Heaven only knows how I shall support myself, when the long-expected,--the wished,--yet terrible moment arrives, that will prostrate me at the feet of the nearest, the most revered of all relations, whom my heart yearns to know, and longs to love! (370)

Evelina is writing to her male guardian, the man who raised both her and her unfortunate mother. I believe it is possible that Evelina is writing in a way that meets his expectation--but she may or may not have really meant to fall "prostrate . . . at the feet" of her father. Likewise, her "involuntary scream . . . and covering [of her] face" while sinking to the floor may or may not have happened (372). In short, the possibility exists that, given her audience, Evelina exaggerates here. (I suppose the possibility also exists that she did act in this way, but primarily out of a sense that she should do so!) Evelina wants to gain social legitimation, and she conforms to the rules of decorum.

It is not impossible, then, to believe she would learn to write according to these rules--if not act in such accordance. After all, in order to win the game, a person must first understand the rules. Also, the rules can only be broken effectively after they are understood!

I believe this scene, though emotional and melodramatic, fits Burney's overall purpose, and audience concerns provide a way of looking at the scene as a necessary step in the plot's progression. In fact, the extreme emotion is also felt by John Belmont, who refuses to see Evelina again but arranges her marriage to Lord Orville. The plot twists (the discovery of a false Miss Belmont and the plan that allows her to marry before the discovery becomes public knowledge) unravel after this climactic emotional scene. Thus the extreme emotion fits audience expectations and leads into the plot's resolution.

#### Foot-Race

Like the Duval/Mirvan and the "maudlin" scene, the foot-race episode is interpreted differently by different critics. Recall my earlier discussion of this scene: Rogers feels the violence does not "touch the heroine" and is therefore not "dire" (40). Anderson notes Evelina's use of "poor creatures" and seems to imply that Evelina considers herself to be superior to the old women (68). Doody and Straub, however, find the scene useful in its presentation of victimization of women--something

Evelina would understandably wish to avoid. I agree with Doody and Straub and find Evelina's description to Villars full of dread and sympathy, even anger.

Anderson is correct in noting the use of "poor creatures"; it appears along with "poor women" and "poor old women" (311-12). While these uses of "poor" could certainly connote class distinctions, I believe they actually indicate true pity and, perhaps, even the wish to avoid being in the women's situation. (Note that this wish is not the same as seeing oneself as superior--I maintain there is a difference between wishing to avoid being in someone's situation and feeling inherently superior to that person.) In reading the Oxford English Dictionary's material on "poor," I noticed the definition "such, or so circumstanced, as to excite one's compassion or pity; unfortunate, hapless" (108). An example given of this usage is credited, interestingly enough, to Madame D'Arblay: in her Diary on February 26, 1787, she writes, "till his [Boswell's] book of poor Dr. Johnson's life is finished and published" (108). Although no entry exists for "poor creatures," I feel it is plausible to find Evelina showing sympathy toward these old women.

In support of this contention, I note Evelina's words. She describes the women as "feeble and frightened," while describing Mr. Coverley as "brutal" and using "unmanly rage" (312). Although she does not dwell on the women's plight after the race ends, Evelina writes enough to show that she is disturbed by the event. After all, she did not have to include the description--it is far from central to the plot. Rogers

would probably argue that it is simply cruel entertainment; I believe it shows, in a restrained manner, outrage at such an event. Evelina writes to a male guardian, and he would hardly expect her to openly denounce the men. Instead, this more subtle indication of dismay better suits Evelina's purpose and personality. As an unsure, naive seventeen-year-old, she can best indicate her feelings by including the scene and using sympathetic terms when describing the women--along with using words like "absurd," "ridiculous," and "unmanly" to describe the event and the two men.

One last note: Anderson, as discussed before, feels Burney's readers would have recognized "that these two gentlemen had made fools of themselves, . . . [and] abused two poor old women" (68). Indeed, Burney's audience would have noted the violence toward these women. I find it interesting that Burney included this scene and the Duval/Mirvan scene --taken together, these episodes show a good deal of violence toward women. I believe the inclusion of these scenes shows Burney's theme of the difficulty in growing up as a female in 18th-century society. It is obvious that she does not condone such actions or feel these women deserve what happens to them; therefore, the scenes together support her purpose of demonstrating the societal obstacles placed before a woman, particularly this young woman. And most importantly, Burney makes a crucial rhetorical choice here in support of this purpose: she uses women as the objects of the violence. Anderson notes that women rarely participated in foot-races (or "smock races") (68). Burney's conscious

decision to use women instead of men does not indicate any misogyny on her part; on the contrary, the choice to use women--when two old helpless men also would have shown Coverley and Merton to be abusive fools--indicates Burney's awareness of the power of men over women. Evelina must avoid becoming the brunt of this violent power, and Burney includes these scenes to show that such a fate could await Evelina.

### Marriage

One way to avoid such a violent fate could be to achieve a happy marriage. Of course, the paradox here lies in the fact that, with or without marriage, 18th-century women were to a large extent (if not completely) reliant upon men for their happiness (Rogers and McCarthy xv). This paradox is raised when Burney chooses to have Evelina marry Orville. Recall the previous discussion of this issue, in which I pointed out that Straub and Epstein feel the marriage does not severely weaken Evelina; Butler, Staves, and Rogers disagree. The main issue, for me, becomes a matter of whether or not this ending supports Burney's purpose, demonstrates the work's main themes, and proves effective given audience concerns. I believe the ending has its limitations and is not a strictly feminist piece (as Straub points out), but it also proves effective given concerns of purpose, theme, and audience.

Burney's purpose, according to the critics, seems to be to discuss

a young lady's (social) maturation. The work proves entertaining, as I suspect Burney wanted it to be. Yet she incorporated social criticism (as we have seen with the foot-race and the Duval/Mirvan scenes). I find Evelina, then, to be an entertaining look at the societal pitfalls that can await young women. Burney most certainly meant the novel to be entertaining (she enjoyed humor and knew her audience would, also) which makes sense--given women's situation at the time, a creative yet dutiful woman like Burney might need to laugh in order to avoid crying. Using a theme of a young woman growing up, or entering the social world, also makes sense, given Burney's young age (twenty-five at the time of Evelina's publication) and experiences living in a socially-outgoing family. Given the purpose, humor, theme, and audience, the novel's ending proves effective for several reasons.

The first reason relates to the novel's subtitle: "The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World." Not only is Evelina young, she is entering "the world"--the 18th-century middle class social environment. Rhetorically, the marriage ending fits with this subtitle. After all, Burney wants Evelina to enter, not retreat from, this world. That is why Evelina follows decorum and strives to avoid rocking the boat. Marriage is a valued institution, particularly in society's view where women are concerned. It makes sense that Evelina, once having fallen in love, would want to marry and find social legitimation in this way. (It is true that she has already found social legitimation through her father; yet, Madame Duval and the two old women may also have had

such legitimation through parentage, and look where it got them! The key here is that Evelina does not need to marry only for the sake of social status; she chooses to marry--she could have rebuked her father's wishes for the marriage, having already attained his acknowledgement. She wanted to marry Orville, and she does.) Evelina enters the world and marries her true love.

Another reason why, rhetorically speaking, the marriage ending works stems from audience concerns--particularly, the 18th-century reading public. First of all, Burney may have thought that a romance is needed for a novel to be popular; this is only speculation, but romances did sell well at the time. Second, an audience often wants the best for a work's protagonist; Burney ends the novel with Evelina telling Villars that she "united herself for ever with the object of her dearest, her eternal affection!" (406). (Note the sense of autonomy here: she "united herself"!)

Since there is no reason to suspect that she is being dishonest here, I assume Evelina is truly happy. Finally, Evelina's options for happiness (i.e., social legitimation is a primary factor) are limited, so Burney must pick the option that best fits her purpose and her audience's tastes. Her options are to marry or to remain unmarried: Staves notes the "importance of [female] delicacy" and says that "the only strictly delicate course open to Evelina--if there are any delicate courses open to female bastards--would be to remain in retirement with Mr. Villars and to die unmarried" (375-76). We know that Evelina is not considered a female bastard by the novel's end; yet

other options do not magically open to her. She may remain unmarried (and, of course, celibate), stay single but have an affair (and risk losing social legitimation), or marry. I suspect an audience would rather see Evelina marry, especially if the marriage promises to be a good one. Thus, given audience and societal concerns, it makes sense that Burney chooses to have Evelina marry.

I have maintained, as Straub does, that Evelina should not be judged solely in terms of feminism. I do so out of a sense that Burney's purpose was not to write a feminist treatise. One rhetorical concern that I believe to be more important than the question of feminist/not feminist is this idea of limited options for young women of the time. Burney picks the theme/subject matter of a young woman's maturation, so she creates a seventeen-year-old protagonist. As this woman matures and enters the social scene, she must meet young men. To me, the fact that she falls in love flows naturally from the subject matter. And, as stated before, Evelina's decision to marry the man she loves also seems natural. What else should she have done? I do not think the novel would be at all believable if Evelina instead decided against marriage. A decision against marriage would show autonomy, but at too great an expense. And if the marriage were prevented by outside forces (as by death or some other catastrophe), no autonomy would appear. I believe the marriage rhetorically shows the limitations placed on a young lady entering 18th-century society--limitations that, though possibly unique to Evelina, prove similar to those placed upon most women of the time.



Evelina's Writings to Villars and to Maria Mirvan

After discussing the ending and several scenes, I feel I need to support the idea that Evelina may omit facts and exaggerate others when writing to Villars. I have discussed the possibility of these omissions and exaggerations occurring in the foot-race and "maudlin" scenes; yet I have stated that I do not find any reason for exaggeration in Evelina's ending note to Villars (proclaiming her happiness in marrying Orville). The best way to support the contention that Evelina is less than complete in her accounts to Villars--at times--is to find an instance when she consciously leaves out facts. To do this, I need to find, given the epistolary format, a place where Evelina admits to omitting information. Such a place occurs in a letter to Maria Mirvan, the daughter of Mrs. and Captain Mirvan.

Before discussing this instance, I must point out that the novel primarily contains letters written by Evelina to Mr. Villars; of the eighty-three letters contained in the book, fifty-four are by Evelina and addressed to Villars. Others are written by Villars to Evelina or letters providing background information, as those between Villars and Lady Howard at the novel's beginning. Six letters, though, are written by Evelina to Maria Mirvan, and I will focus on these.

In the second of the novel's three volumes, Evelina first hints at the openness that exists between herself and Maria; she writes to Villars and states, "Indeed, I conceal nothing from her [Maria], she

is so gentle and sweet-tempered, that it gives me great pleasure to place an entire confidence in her" (157). Burney sets us up here for letters in which Evelina confides in Maria that she cares for Lord Orville. These letters appear later in Volume II.

The first occurs as Evelina is living with Madame Duval in Paris. She tells Maria that her memories of Lord Orville seem "now a romantic illusion" (172). Later, after Evelina has returned to live for a time with Villars, she writes to Maria of the feelings she cannot express to him. She writes that she cannot discuss her feelings with Villars, but "in your [Maria's] kind and sympathizing bosom I might have ventured to have reposed every secret of my soul" (254). "I restrain [my feelings] so much and so painfully in the presence of Mr. Villars, that I know not how to deny myself the consolation of indulging [them] to you" (255). Evelina continues by sharing the letter Orville (really Sir Clement) sent to her in response to her apology over the carriage incident. She tells Maria of her fear that she has "incurred the liberty he has taken" (257). Later, Evelina states, "Every hour I regret the secrecy I have observed with my beloved Mr. Villars" (260). It is only several days later that Evelina finally relates the incident to Villars. In telling Maria this, Evelina decides that "concealment . . . is the foe of tranquility: however I may err in future, I will never be disingenuous in acknowledging my errors. To you, and to Mr. Villars, I vow an unremitting confidence" (267-68). Thus, Evelina has concealed facts from Villars for a time and confided instead in Maria Mirvan.

I use these letters to show that Evelina is capable of concealing facts from Villars--at least temporarily. The precedent is set. Even though she vows to reveal everything to Villars henceforth--which would include telling him everything regarding the "maudlin," foot-race, and marriage scenes--the possibility still exists that she did not, or did not do so without exaggerating some facts over others.

In addition to this precedent setting scene, I believe another justification exists for the notion that Evelina could have omitted and /or exaggerated when writing to Villars: given the epistolary format, it seems impossible to believe that Evelina records every detail of everything that happened. When writing letters, people necessarily highlight some details to the exclusion of others. Even though letters in an epistolary novel are not the same as letters we write in ordinary life, we can recognize that the possibility exists that Evelina omits or exaggerates details. (Not all narrators or protagonists are entirely truthful or trustworthy!) Thus, the possibility still exists that some details given in the "maudlin" scene could be exaggerated and others omitted!

### Summary

To summarize my conclusions in rhetorically analyzing sections of Evelina, I point out that each of the scenes discussed--Duval/Mirvan,

"maudlin" reunion, foot-race, marriage/ending, and the letters to Maria--lend themselves to a favorable conclusion regarding their rhetorical effectiveness. In the Duval/Mirvan scene, Evelina sees unfair treatment of a woman by a man, and she shows denouncement of that treatment by learning to confront and stop future actions. In the "maudlin" scene, Evelina's unique social situation can account for her extreme emotional actions; also, audience concerns allow for the possibility that she exaggerates these actions. In the foot-race scene, Evelina again sees cruel treatment of women and, using careful word choice, denounces it. Her marriage, though not the ideal feminist ending, makes sense given her age, her love for Orville, and her need for social acceptance. (One important observation should be added here that supports the idea of Evelina's gaining of some autonomy: even though she usually signs letters to Villars as "your grateful Evelina," "wholly your Evelina," or something to this effect, she ends the final letter announcing her marriage to Villars with simply "Evelina"--notice the absence of "your" [131; 160; 406].) Finally, these scenes together support the theme of a young lady's entrance into 18th-century society--and all the limitations that she may encounter. The precedent for omitting details shows once more the need to consider audiences when analyzing an epistolary novel.

## CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF JOURNAL ENTRIES

Earlier, I discussed Burney's journals and her editing of them for publication. (She was, of course, Madame d'Arblay by then.) Her journals and letters often relate anecdotes or report scenes which Burney observed --scenes which can be treated and analyzed as literary works. I will rhetorically analyze select portions of these entries; like my analysis of Evelina, this analysis will show that Burney's journal writings are effective.

Many of Burney's journal entries seem to have the sole purpose of recording events and thoughts of the author. Others, often addressed to her sister Susan, add humor and are extremely entertaining. According to Rogers and McCarthy, Burney "developed her skills as a social reporter through writing journals for an appreciative family" (xviii). Audience, then, can be both Burney's family and the 19th-century (when her journals were published) public.

It is difficult to analyze entries from the period of time during which Burney composed Evelina (approximately 1775 or 1776 until its publication in 1778); "the entire journal for 1776 and half or more of . . . 1777 have been destroyed totally" (Troide I: xxv). Nevertheless, I will analyze the following portions: first, the entry Rogers discusses in which Burney writes about poking fun at a young woman; second, a lengthy episode in which a young would-be suitor repeatedly tries, and ultimately fails, to gain Burney's favor; third, the infamous "mastectomy

letter" in which Burney describes in horrific detail the mastectomy she endured at the age of fifty-nine (Epstein 73). I choose to analyze these sections because they have been analyzed and discussed by critics like Rogers and Epstein; also, these entries allow me to expand upon and clarify points I made in Chapter Three.

### Ridiculing Scene

In Chapter Two, I noted that Rogers faults Burney for using "disproportionate punishment of a comic butt" (30). In so doing, Rogers cites a journal entry in which Burney helps to poke fun at a young woman "who appears to have been mildly retarded" (31). A "Miss Waldron" is at the residence where Burney is visiting, also (Early Journals II:275). Burney describes the young woman as being "not an absolute idiot; but . . . the verriest Booby I ever knew" (275). Several people are visiting, and they continually ridicule Miss Waldron: they ask her to sing--knowing she sings poorly--and then laugh outright at her. Burney insists that Miss Waldron laughs with them and believes them when they tell her they are not laughing at her. Burney describes a Sir Herbert who sticks a spoon down the front of Miss Waldron's dress, making everyone laugh even more. In short, Burney relates several incidences in which she, and others, ridicule Miss Waldron and seem to enjoy doing so (Early Journals II:275-84). Rogers calls this account "cheap and pointless fun" (31).

In analyzing this account, I find two possible audiences: the person to whom the account is addressed, and the 19th-century reading public. The primary one is Burney's sister, Susan, to whom most of Burney's journals from 1773 to 1800 are addressed (Early Journals I:2). Given the closeness of the sisters' relationship, I believe Burney's purpose in writing the account is to provide her sister with an entertaining description of actual events. Also, it is unlikely that Burney would omit much of the facts; she may exaggerate somewhat (as we all do in tailoring our material to make our stories entertaining), but I assume she writes as honest an account as she can. When Burney writes, "I then asked her to sing to me: she immediately complied, & I squeezed in my Laughter with great decency," I assume this is exactly what happened (Early Journals II:283). In this case, I agree with Rogers's conclusion.

This account is dated July of 1777; we can assume that Burney was working on Evelina during this time period (since it was published January 1778). Remember the Duval/Mirvan scene in which Madame Duval is violently treated, and Evelina resolves to stop future ill treatment. Thus one could wonder if Burney learns anything from this real-life ill treatment of another woman. It is true that this episode differs greatly from the Duval/Mirvan scene. Concerns of the secondary audience, the 19th-century reading public, make me believe she finds much difference between the types of violence shown in these scenes.

The fact that Burney (or Madame d'Arblay) did not destroy or eliminate this account while editing her journals leads me to believe

that she did not find anything wrong with it; because she was a woman who tried to follow propriety and duty, I doubt she would have left an account that she felt showed her doing (and taking pleasure in doing) something wrong. In this instance, I feel Rogers has found the human side of Burney--she joins in the fun, following society's feeling that ridiculing a slow or perhaps retarded (even helpless) person is okay.

Despite my agreement with Rogers, I cannot agree with her use of this account. Remember, she uses it to support her contention that Burney's Duval/Mirvan scene is inappropriate--the "disproportionate punishment of a comic butt" (30). As I have stated, the scene works well in the novel; Burney's use of words like "cruelty" and "causelessly" make me believe Burney does not see this action as being justified (Evelina 152). The difference lies in the objects of ridicule. Madame Duval is an egotistical, single woman; Miss Waldron is a young, probably somewhat retarded woman. I contend that Burney speaks out against the mistreatment of the first, but not of the second. I question, then, the comparison Rogers makes. I do not find the two instances to be entirely analogous.

#### Barlow/Marriage?

The second portion I will analyze is Burney's account of Mr. Barlow, a young man who wishes to court her. From the onset, Burney wishes to



stop Mr. Barlow from pursuing her: "I took not a moment to deliberate. --I felt that my Heart was totally insensible--& felt that I could never Consent to unite myself to a man who I did not very highly value" (Early Journals II:119). Burney finds nothing wrong with Mr. Barlow, but she knows she cannot love him. Mr. Barlow, despite hearing from Burney that she wishes to remain single, persists. Burney's family and friends--with the exception of her father--side with Barlow. In fact, her aunts warn her to beware of a spinster's fate; she "assured them I was not intimidated, & that I had rather a thousand Times Die an old maid than be married, except from affection" (119). After forcing Burney to be rude--"what can be [done] when a man will not take an answer?"--Mr. Barlow finally gives up his quest, but only after Burney has called herself "singular--odd--queer" for vowing to remain single (Early Diary II:72, 66). I find this account fascinating in that Burney, who is almost twenty-three years old at this point, clearly states her intention to marry for love. It is not surprising, then, that Evelina, though much younger than Burney here, decides to marry--she loves Orville! When dealing with the theme of marriage, Burney wants the motivation for such an action to be love; her life bears this out, as well, since she married at the age of forty-one (for love). Despite the societal problems that await spinsters, young Burney chooses to forsake marriage.

Another interesting aspect of this account concerns Burney's relationship with her father. Although she claims to not worry about being a spinster, she probably has few worries since she is free to live

with her father. His opinion regarding this episode, however, is highly important to Burney. Upon receiving Mr. Barlow's letter stating his interest in her, Burney asks her father for advice. He advises her not to answer; she does not, even though she wants to respond (Early Journals II:119). After Mr. Barlow refuses to give up, Burney receives another letter from him and gives it to her father. Dr. Burney at first advises her not to deter Mr. Barlow too hastily; Burney fears she may have to consider the courtship if her father does not change his mind (Early Journals II:146-47). (Dr. Burney later tells her she is free to live with him forever if she wishes; then Burney feels free to stop Mr. Barlow's advances once and for all.)

Here we see Dr. Burney's influence over his daughter. Recall that Rogers and others find this influence damaging in that they feel it affects Burney's writing. I believe this episode supports my contention that Burney's writing should not be judged solely in terms of contemporary ideology regarding marriage versus nonmarriage. Even though feminist criticism does not concentrate on the issue of whether or not a protagonist marries, some feminist critics (like Straub) point to the issue as being one that factors into some critics' judgment of a work. Burney was not a feminist in the current understanding of the word. I think this accounts for the "doubleness" Straub finds in Burney's life and work; Burney, like Evelina, achieves much autonomy but does not desire complete autonomy. Instead of trying to make Burney fit the mold of contemporary ideology, and without denouncing her actions and writing

to the point of devaluing both, I propose labeling (for lack of a better term) her a pre-feminist. Her work is valuable as evidence of a transition period during which more women were beginning to write and publish; their novels, poetry, drama, and journals provide insight into their (female) condition. The value of their work, then, lies not only in the degree of feminist development that appears; rather, value should be determined according to the degree of rhetorical effectiveness.

### Mastectomy

The third and final journal entry I will analyze is Burney's mastectomy letter. I include it, despite its composition date being much later than those of the earlier journal entries, because it is perhaps Burney's most widely known journal/letter writing. Also, this text is discussed by both Rogers and Epstein (though by the latter at much greater length) and is mentioned in contrast to Evelina by Rogers. Recall Rogers's comment, quoted in Chapter Two, implying that the journals, in her opinion, are more artistically effective than the novels:

Burney's own life supplied her with more genuine challenges than she allowed her heroines; she met them with more convincing courage and described them with more moving, because more authentic, language. . . . She rendered these fearful crises in plain language, letting the facts speak for themselves.

She described her mastectomy with clinical detail and accuracy

. . . ." (180-81)

Rogers then contrasts the mastectomy passage with Evelina: "Because serious issues are not raised [in the novel], the idyllic romantic ending does not provoke questions. Discordant, violent and emotionally overwrought elements can easily be ignored because they are extraneous to the main theme" (181). I have already noted the presence of serious issues--for example, the fate of single, elderly women in patriarchal 18th-century society--and the questions that are, in fact, provoked. I have also discussed the centrality of Evelina's violent and emotional episodes. The interesting point here is that Rogers finds the mastectomy letter to be more effective, presumably because it lacks these elements. I grant that the violence produced during a mastectomy surpasses that occurring in Evelina; I agree that any emotion on Burney's part expressed in a description of such a harrowing experience is justifiable. I also agree that this letter is more effective than the novel. I do so, however, out of an appreciation not only of Burney's carefully crafted diction, but also of her content/subject matter, audience, and purpose concerns.

Rogers feels Burney's letter contains no "factitious working-up of her pain and fear, sentimental excess of any kind" (181). I have noted that Evelina's emotion can be understood when viewed in light of her audience (Villars), her age, and her unique social situation. As Epstein notes, the mastectomy letter (composed in March and June of 1812)

is addressed to Burney's sister Esther but includes a list of people Burney wants to read the letter (including her father and some friends). This audience suits Burney's purpose: to "confes[s] . . . an event [occurring September 30, 1811] kept secret" from her loved ones and to "presen[t] . . . a medical case history" (Epstein 61, 62). Burney's age (fifty-nine) and social situation (upper middle class, well-respected writer) also differ from Evelina's. Therefore this letter's entire rhetorical existence is quite different from Evelina's--and its greater effectiveness is understandable but does not render Evelina ineffective.

To demonstrate the letter's effectiveness, I include a small portion here. The whole letter--taken from two manuscripts, one of which was sent to Esther and another which was copied from it and later edited by Burney--appears in eighteen pages of The Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney, Volume 6. The following is what Epstein, and I, find to be the climax of the letter (the whole of which details much time prior to and even after the event). One word of caution: this account is graphic and highly disturbing--the entire letter is nearly impossible to read straight through.

. . . the dreadful steel was plunged into the breast. . . .  
 When the wound was made, & the instrument was withdrawn, the pain seemed undiminished, for the air that suddenly rushed into those delicate parts felt like a mass of minute but sharp & forked poniards, that were tearing the edges of the wound --but when again I felt the instrument--describing a curve

--cutting against the grain, if I may so say, while the flesh resisted in a manner so forcible as to oppose & tire the hand of the operator, who was forced to change from the right to the left--then, indeed, I thought I must have expired. I attempted no more to open my Eyes. . . . The instrument this second time withdrawn, I concluded the operation over--Oh no! presently the terrible cutting was renewed--& worse than ever, to separate the bottom, the foundation. . . . Oh Heaven!--I then felt the Knife <rack>ling against the breast bone--scraping it!--This performed, while I yet remained in utterly speechless torture, . . . [the doctors] again began the scraping! (Journals 6:612-13)

Burney, obviously conscious throughout much if not all of the procedure, had only "a wine cordial, possibly containing laudanum, . . . as the sole anesthetic agent" (Epstein 54). This fact, together with Burney's precise word choice ("plunged," "scraping," "cutting,"), make readers shudder. The harsh vocal stops (/k/, /t/) imitate the knife, and we feel Burney's horror. As effective as the content and word choices are, audience concerns and purpose add much to this account. Rogers finds no excessive emotion here. Given the circumstances, I would be hard pressed to call any emotional expression "excessive." Yet, one could wonder why Burney only relates two exclamations ("Oh Heaven!" and "Oh no!")--and relatively tame ones, given her agony.

I believe audience and purpose concerns make such clinical control

understandable. Such control is necessary when part of the purpose is to protect her loved ones--General d'Arblay, her father, etc.--yet inform them of an event they are sure to hear about from others if not from her (Epstein 61). By writing the account, Burney demonstrates that she has survived the experience. Also, Epstein notes a therapeutic purpose in writing the account (she "detach[es] herself" and gains some control) (Epstein 72). I find the content, word choice, audience concerns and purpose to be highly complex and effective here. I think Rogers concentrates on the complexity/horrific aspect of this episode; although it is valid and even useful to compare two accounts--fiction and nonfiction, this letter and Evelina--I believe Rogers compares the two unfairly.

Evelina contains no such horrific account. Yet few accounts could be as graphic. I have serious doubts that something comparable could work (i.e., serve a useful purpose) in Evelina. Those episodes that include violence are denounced by Rogers as being unnecessary and serving no useful purpose; how useful would a mastectomy--or something comparable --be? It is true that the novel's theme is less biting, for lack of a better word, than the letter's--that is partially why the letter proves more effective. The level of realism is higher. But I doubt anyone could achieve that level of realism without having had the experience. The author of Evelina had not yet experienced such trauma; indeed, who would even imagine it?

Summary

This chapter, in its analyses of journal/letter writings, shows that audience concerns provide additional ways of examining Burney's work—Burney ridicules a young woman and participates in an accepted practice according to her society's rules. Also, this chapter shows her wish to marry for love—establishing a rationale for the novel's ending. And the chilling mastectomy letter illustrates Burney's gift for describing an event with (disturbing) precision. All of these instances, in one way or another, demonstrate Burney's talent for effective writing.



## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

As this thesis has shown, Frances Burney's Evelina and her journal writings are both rhetorically effective. Even when we may not agree with her attitude or actions (as in the case of her treatment of Miss Waldron), we have to recognize audience concerns. Doing so helps us gain an understanding of the works' holistic meanings and complexities. To brush Evelina aside would be to deny its inherent (epistolary/audience) complexities. That is why rhetorical analysis, with its focus on purpose, theme, word choice, and audience, is so useful in examining the texts. The use of rhetorical analysis permits us to treat Evelina and select portions of Burney's journal writings as literary works--complete with themes, word choices, audience concerns, and purposes.

The concern with audience, discussed at length by Epstein, becomes a particularly important consideration in epistolary writing, since the epistolary nature of Evelina makes audience a complicating factor. Is Evelina truthful throughout the work? If not, then when, why, and to whom is she untruthful? I maintain the possibility exists that Evelina is less than completely truthful when writing to Mr. Villars. This possibility in itself adds complexity to Evelina and renders the readers' task more difficult.

My argument has supported this possibility by noting Burney's word choice. Recall the discussion of the foot-race. In relating the event to Villars, Evelina does not openly denounce it. Instead, she uses words

that convey her disgust and, perhaps, fear of experiencing similar abuse. Words such as "brutal," "absurd," "unmanly," and "ridiculous" make me believe she feels the need to refrain from open denunciation--but subtle word choices get the point across (Evelina 312). In the same way, Burney's word choice provides a justification for Evelina's marriage. Evelina tells Villars she "united herself for ever with the object of her dearest, her eternal affection!" (406). The subtle "united herself" shows a measure of autonomy; Burney could easily have chosen the words "was united" or "has been united"--passive constructions. The active voice speaks volumes here.

This issue of the novel's ending raises a concern often linked to feminist criticism: marriage, and whether or not it undercuts the effectiveness of a work (it is sometimes seen as weakening effectiveness). Let me return to my previously-stated wish that Burney not be judged solely according to current feminist standards. This does not mean that I reject applying feminist critical strategies to her work; on the contrary, Rogers's concerns point out areas that deserve examination. (Concerns over appropriate/inappropriate punishment are always valid!) The debate over Burney's feminism (or lack thereof), however, should not be the only debate--and much Burney scholarship seems to highlight this issue. The question, simply put, is this: Is Burney a feminist/feminist writer?

It may be useful to examine why she should or should not be considered a feminist, because such examination helps us refine our own

definition of feminism. But I argue for a wider scope, incorporating the question of feminism with other questions. For example, is Burney's writing rhetorically effective? I believe so. Although I often disagree with Rogers, I respect her call for recognizing the conformity to social conventions Burney often espoused. Rogers still finds much to admire in Burney's work, such as "her intense rendition of the psychological problems of women" (4). I find more to admire than does Rogers; however, I think she might agree that Burney can best be seen as a pre-feminist, rather than a feminist. (Evelina marries Orville, but she chooses to do so; Burney chooses not to marry Barlow, but she wants her father's support.) Rogers and I differ in that I find this to be artistically and rhetorically effective, where she does not. Thus my next question is, must evidence of "doubleness" (i.e., social conformity versus recognition of societal constraints/problems) be seen as ineffective, or can it be seen as a complex and accurate portrayal of humanity?

I contend that Evelina and Burney's journal entries--complete with doubleness--prove effective. My conclusion results from the complexity found in examining audience and other rhetorical concerns. Rather than an inherent weakness, doubleness can add complexity as more possibilities--in meaning and audience--prove valid. Doubleness seems to be a human characteristic; Burney's feminism and lack of feminism (pre-feminism) effectively demonstrate this. Therefore the doubleness found by Straub and Rogers--at least that found in the episodes analyzed here--renders Evelina and the journal entries rhetorically effective.

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