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論柏尼《依芙萊娜》中的戲劇效果與女性的偽裝策略

Theatricality and Female Masquerading in Burney's *Evelina*



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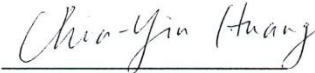
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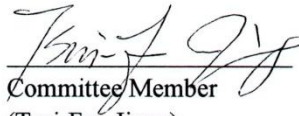
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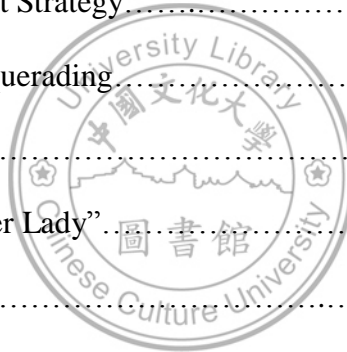
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Abstract

Frances Burney's *Evelina* is an outstanding example of the interplay between fiction and theater in the eighteenth century. Not only does it testify to Burney's wide knowledge of and her familiarity with the drama, but the world presented in this novel exactly reflects the theatricality and performativeness of the eighteenth-century British society as well. Such theatricality and performativeness in fact result from the remarkable development of the theater, conspicuous consumption and social emulation, and a social tendency which encourages eighteenth-century women to imitate the female ideal—the "Proper Lady," among which the latter particularly imposes considerable limitation and repression upon contemporary women.

This thesis aims to explore how women develop their own effective strategies to resist and subvert such a powerful and oppressive female ideal and the patriarchal system behind. Chapter One will reconstruct a specific historical context to explain how the "lady" discourse is systematically fabricated in eighteenth-century conduct books for women, whose goal is to confine women to domesticity and eventually to perpetuate male domination by re-shaping women's outer conduct and inner mind. It is only through constructing the context that readers can clearly see the dilemmas and difficulties Burney and her sex face in their daily life. The following two chapters will deal with the countermeasures developed by women to resist and subvert patriarchal oppression. In Chapter Two Burney's writing strategy will be analyzed. Under the cover of comedy, Burney not only successfully escapes social censorship but "smuggles in" her feminist criticism against patriarchy, criticizing male violence and cruelty as well as exposing female oppressed situation. More importantly, female readers may be thus fully awakened to their similar oppressed situation through reading this novel and have courage to step forth for themselves and for other women

like Evelina, which in turn will strengthen women's solidarity. Chapter Three will discuss female masquerading in this novel. Instead of directly confronting the patriarchal society, eighteenth-century women skillfully exploit the "Proper Lady" and the "lady" discourse, through which they gain themselves an opportunity to walk out of the private sphere to explore the outer world. This chapter will reveal how Evelina successfully guides and manipulates the opinions of her guardian and her future husband, two important and powerful men in her life, by strategically acting the "Proper Lady" and employing the discourse of femininity to her advantage. In conclusion, women under patriarchal oppression are not necessarily passive or manipulated. Women in fact are able to maneuver certain circuitous tactics to resist, whereby they destroy the patriarchal system from the very core and simultaneously turn the tables.



Key words: the "Proper Lady," female strategies, theatricality, female masquerading, resistance, subversion

摘要

法蘭西絲柏尼的《依芙萊娜》是十八世紀小說與戲劇巧妙融合的絕佳典範。它不僅充分顯示了柏尼本身對戲劇認知的深度與廣度；其小說所呈現的世界也正好反映了十八世紀充滿「戲劇性」色彩的社會。此戲劇性是來自於：一、戲院的蓬勃發展；二、經濟發達所帶來的炫富現象；三、一股驅策時下女性扮演「淑女」(The “Proper Lady”) 的社會風氣。其中，尤以後者為十八世紀女性身心的發展帶來了重大的箝制與壓抑。

本論文旨在探討女性如何發展出一套有效的策略顛覆、反制此一具有強大壓迫性的「淑女」形象及其背後的父權體系。第一章將會重建「淑女」論述的時空背景，以說明此一文化產物如何在行為手冊裡被有系統地建構。其目的是想藉由改造女性的外在行為與內在思維，使之「安分守己」，以延續男性的支配與統治。唯有透過此一重建，才能領略柏尼與時下女性所共同面臨的困境與難題。接下來的兩章則著重於探討女性的因應之道。第二章將分析柏尼的寫作策略。將喜劇元素納入作品中，柏尼一方面成功地躲過社會審查制度；另一方面在喜劇效果的掩護下，不僅批判了男性的暴力與殘酷，同時也暴露了女性受壓迫的處境。此一策略的重點是，希望這本小說的女性讀者們也能看見自己相同的命運；並且能像小說中的女主角一樣，挺身而出，為自己也為其他女性同胞發聲，如此以增強女性之間的團結力量。第三章則討論女性的角色扮演策略。不直接與父權對抗，十八世紀女性巧妙地挪用了「淑女」形象及「淑女」論述，使自己獲得了跨出私領域，探索外在的世界的機會。本章主要以女主角依芙萊娜為例，說明依芙萊娜如何戲扮「淑女」，如何策略性地挪用「淑女」論述，並以此成功地左右並掌控她生命中具有決定性力量的男人：如父親般的監護人及未來的丈夫。所以，即便是身處父權的壓迫，

女性並非全然被動或受到宰制的。女性其實是能夠巧妙地運用迂迴的策略,在直接破壞父權的核心的同時,也成功地扭轉了局勢。

關鍵字:「淑女」論述,女性策略,戲劇效果,女性偽裝,抵抗,顛覆



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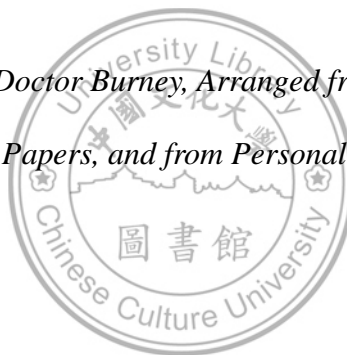
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Abbreviations

- DL* *Diary and Letters of Madame D'Arblay, II: 1781 to 1786*
- ED* *The Early Diary of Frances Burney 1768-1778*
- EJL* *The Early Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney*
- JL* *The Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney (Madame D'Arblay), IV:
West Humble 1797-1801*
- Memoirs* *Memoirs of Doctor Burney, Arranged from His Own Manuscripts,
from Family Papers, and from Personal Recollections*



Introduction

Frances Burney's first novel, *Evelina; or, The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (1778), though a great success with the late eighteenth-century readers and reviewers, had not received much attention from modern academic society until 1991, when a special issue on *Evelina* run by the journal *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* was published. Traditionally, Burney was acknowledged as a diarist: the success of *The Diary and Letters of Madame d'Arblay*, published between 1842 and 1846, established Burney's reputation as a major nineteenth-century diarist. Burney's reputation as a novelist, however, suffered a marked decline because of critics' hostility to her last novel *The Wanderer; Or, Female Difficulties* (1814). In fact, Burney added a considerable contribution to the development of the novel. She was believed to play a transitional role between the flowering mid-eighteenth-century novelists and Jane Austen by building up a literary tradition for Austen to follow and later to transcend.¹

Thanks to the rise of feminist criticism, more critical attention was called to Burney and her works in the 1970s and 1980s. The early feminist critics who re-examined the long male-dominated literary history and unearthed long silenced or even ignored women writers viewed *Evelina* from different angles. Burney criticism now focused mainly on such topics as female difficulties and rebellion, courtship and marriage, father-daughter relationship, female *Bildungsroman*, the biographical studies of Burney, etc. Among them, the issue of female difficulties and rebellion was the most discussed and controversial. Economically dependent, women in the eighteenth century in general were situated in a state of anxiety. On the one hand, they gradually craved for freedom as they had more opportunities to walk out of the home

¹ On Burney's early position as a literary predecessor of Jane Austen, see Bradbrook 94-104; Paulson 283; Watt 296, 298.

and take part in leisure activities. On the other hand, they were acutely aware that they had to seek shelter from male figures—father, brother, and husband, for physical protection and financial security. Under such circumstances, women often chose to trade their autonomy for male protection and involuntarily led a life of dependence and subordination. It stands to good reason when some feminist critics argued that Evelina’s entrance into the world was an entrance into the patriarchal world, a journey of education which in essence tended to tame a young woman by regulating both her outer behavior and inner mind, so much so that Evelina was gradually fashioned into a desirable woman—passive, silent, innocent, ignorant, and submissive.

Evelina’s education, which teaches her to please men and succumb to male power, does not make her grow into womanhood at all, but instead “[leads] her back toward childhood” (Spacks, *Female* 129). In the letters to her guardian Mr. Villars, Evelina not only identifies Lord Orville as Mr. Villars’s double (*Evelina*, 81) but also assures Villars that Orville will “guard [her] from future misfortunes” and will be “the sole study of [her] happy life” (*Evelina*, 408, 429; emphases added) after marriage. Hence, her marriage to Lord Orville at the end of the novel was thus problematic. Without expected changes, her marriage in fact only transfers her from one man’s guidance—or surveillance and domination—to another man’s. For these early critics, Burney apparently noticed the difficulties and powerlessness of her sex. Yet, they did not seem to identify Burney as a feminist writer since she did not explicitly challenge patriarchy or protest against the oppression imposed upon women.²

Another group of critics, however, disapproved of such an interpretation. In general, they saw “a growing rebellion against the restrictions imposed upon women” (Cutting 519-20) in Burney’s works. First of all, all Burney’s novels, they argued,

² See Spacks, *The Female Imagination* 129-30; Spacks, *Imagining a Self* 160-79; Staves 368-81; Newton, “Evelina” 48-56.

contained strong-willed women who refused to comply with male power. Both Madame Duval and Mrs. Selwyn in *Evelina*, for instance, not only assert themselves but undauntedly dare to challenge the male characters. Moreover, critics who explored the relationship between Burney's personal life and her novels focused on Burney's "obsession with violence and hostility" (Epstein 5), best illustrated in the scenes of male brutalities against, and sexual attacks on, female characters. Confined within the framework of the "Proper Lady,"³ *Evelina* is fashioned to be a female ideal, i.e., a docile woman—modest, innocent, silent, passive, and obedient, which unfortunately makes her vulnerable and thus a target of male violence. Her entrance into the world as such is exactly "a chronicle of assault" (Newton, *Women* 23), in which she is affronted, seized, pursued, stared, and kidnapped in public places by impertinent, unfeeling, and licentious males. Yet, in the whole process, she not only learns her lessons but sharpens her judgment and exercises criticism instead of submitting to patriarchy. In this sense, *Evelina* is a social critique. Through this novel, Burney satirizes individual follies as well as examines and criticizes her society, attacking the social rules that regulate and restrict female behavior.

When it comes to the issues of female identity and female authorship, critics tended to observe "the ideological rifts implicit in female identity" (Straub 6) and "the pain and self-division" (Doody, *Frances Burney* 5) in Burney's writings. Drawing a close parallel between *Evelina* and Burney, critics concluded that this novel itself was "an antimasculinist satire" (Doody, *Frances Burney* 65) and "the site of protest" (Newton, *Women* 11). With new lights from Burney's journals and letters, critics reasonably drew a close parallel between *Evelina* and Burney. Like *Evelina*, Burney was restricted by the notion of the "Proper Lady" throughout her life. Women by

³ The concept of the "Proper Lady" will be further explained in next chapter.

definition naturally belonged to the private sphere—or, the domestic domain, while writing and publication were exactly associated with the male and the public sphere. Like Evelina, Burney was eager to look for paternal recognition. Once commencing her entrance into the world, Evelina sets out on a journey from obscurity to an acceptable social status by retrieving her true identity—the daughter of Sir John Belmont, a baronet. For Burney, the anonymous publication of *Evelina* stood for an entrance into the male-dominated literary marketplace, with an expectation to be acknowledged by her father and male literary reviewers. So tensely tormented between the eighteenth-century female propriety and her passion for writing was Burney that she was always in conflict with herself. In other words, she suffered from split selfhood. With a strong sense of guilt for her uncontrollable writing compulsion, which was viewed as defiant, Burney hid and even once made a bonfire of all her manuscripts. Though taking great pains to maintain the “[s]urface propriety,” the suppressed writing propensity instead resulted in frustrated desire as well as “internal rage” (Epstein 5). In this sense, the scenes of tension and violence in *Evelina* function as the very “reservoirs of rage” and “defiance” (Epstein 24), exposing and protesting the social constraints Burney and her sex confronted while stepping into the eighteenth-century literary marketplace.⁴

It was not until the 1990s that Burney studies boomed. In 1991, the journal *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* published a special issue on *Evelina*, which was the journal’s first time to devote an issue to a single novel alone. This issue brought about a striking change to Burney criticism. In her concluding essay, “Beyond *Evelina*: The Individual Novel and the Community of Literature,” Margaret Anne Doody first asserts that this issue is a timely recognition of the rising literary reputation of Burney,

⁴ See Cutting 519-30; Newton, *Womwn* 1-54; Straub 1-77; Doody, *Frances Burney* 1-65. Epstein 1-84, 93-122.

a long neglected writer. The collection of *Evelina* essays definitely repudiates the old views that *Evelina* is “a lighthearted and flimsy novel” and that it is “absurd” and “ridiculous” to offer any essay on this novel (359). But Doody foresees a dead end for Burney criticism and thus calls for a new direction. If critics only focus on *Evelina* alone, Doody notes, Burney criticism will “quickly ossify” (363), and Burney as a consequence will be reduced to a “one-book little novelist” (371). To forestall such a result, Doody advises critics to study all of Burney’s works, including her plays, as a whole (371).

Responding to such a call, the publication of *The Complete Plays of Frances Burney* (1995) successfully turned critics’ attention to Burney’s plays and later to the interplay between the fiction and theater in Burney’s novels. However, the studies on such interplay in *Evelina* so far have been frustratingly small in quantity and in proportion, most of which focus on the usage of dramatic conventions in this novel or on a few specific theatrical scenes. Take Emily Allen’s “Staging Identity: Frances Burney’s Allegory of Genre” (1998) for instance. To elaborate on the issue of gender and genre, Allen shows how the novel constructs its private and female identity, which is aligned with *Evelina*’s personal growth, via its generic struggles with the theater. Taken as a figure, the theater is best personified in Madame Duval, “the novel’s arch-masquerader” (442) modeled on the eighteenth-century comic female roles played by men with the traits of heavy makeup, overdressing, vanity, and rudeness. To come out as a proper lady, *Evelina* in the first place must reject the influence of her grandmother, Madame Duval, whose exaggerated femininity, vulgarity, and outspokenness not only always make a scene and expose *Evelina* to the public eye but even invite disasters. The best example is the robbery episode, one of the novel’s most comic and spectacular scenes, in which Madame Duval experiences a brutal prank

plotted by Captain Mirvan. Having been dragged down the road from a carriage and violently shaken, Madame Duval is found “hardly . . . human” (*Evelina* 166) as Evelina comes to her aid: her hair-dress falling off; her linen torn; her shoes slipping off; her body covered with dirt, weeds, and filth; and her face a mixture of the pomatum, the dust, her tears, and her rouge. This comic scene, Allen observes, functions as a warning for Evelina and the female readers of this novel. Such an “abject” and “filthy spectacle of human degradation” (441) must shock Evelina and her sex, suggesting that any woman who dares to challenge male authority will be “punished” like Madame Duval. Accordingly, it is reasonable to equate this novel with a conduct book, which aims to fashion a female ideal by regulating a woman’s mind and behavior. However, such an assumption regrettably ignores the subversiveness lurking beneath the comic cover. As a matter of fact, this episode does not intimidate Evelina. Instead, it arouses her sympathy for Madame Duval and later impels her to courageously stand up against Captain Mirvan, asking him to stop tormenting Madame Duval.

James E. Evans, in the first part of his “*Evelina*, the Rustic Girls of Congreve and Abington, and Surrogation in the 1770s” (2011), deals with William Congreve revival in the 1770s and Burney’s refashioning of his comedy *Love for Love* in her first novel where Evelina and other characters attend a performance of Congreve’s *Love for Love* at the Drury Lane Theatre. Like most critics, Evans draws a parallel between the characters in *Evelina* and those in Congreve’s play: matching up Captain Mirvan with Mr. Ben the sailor; Mr. Lovel with Mr. Tattle the fop; Evelina with Miss Prue the ingénue (159-62). Though contributing a paragraph to roughly comparing and contrasting Evelina and Miss Prue, Evan ceases going further to explore the significance of this very episode: what is the intention of choosing this “indelicate”

comedy? What is exposed during their witty conversation? Such questions are worth thinking about and discussing.

Feancesca Saggini's *Backstage in the Novel: Frances Burney and the Theater Arts* (2012) offers a highly informative overview of the interplay between fiction and theater in Burney's novels. By constructing a literary-cultural context for Burney's writing, Saggini highlights the great permeation of the theater into Burney's novels, which consequently helps examine the close generic interweaving in Burney's novels. In the chapter devoted to *Evelina*, Saggini points out that the novel both in structure and in plot is organized into acts and interludes. According to Saggini, *Evelina*'s adventures in the cities, two in London (volumes 1 and 2) and one in Bristol (volume 3), recall dramatic acts whereas the episodes set in the countries, Howard Grove and Berry Hill, at the end of volume one and two respectively, function as interludes. Each of the acts and interludes, Saggini adds, corresponds to one of the four types of stage genres: comedy of manners, sentimental comedy, domestic drama and farce (65-67). What's more, Saggini lists certain theatrical references in the novel, suggesting that the formation of the characters to a great extent was influenced by the plays produced in Burney's day (77-80). By means of such references, Saggini argues, Burney presents contemporary debates and controversial issues. In the *Love for Love* episode, for instance, Mr. Lovel first maliciously attacks *Evelina*'s "country-breeding" and "rural ignorance" (*Evelina* 91) in sarcastic language, attempting to be revenged on *Evelina* for her refusing to dance with him and her laughing at his foppishness at a private ball held by Mrs. Stanley. Mr. Lovel's malicious attack here brings to the fore the dichotomy between the city and the country. Then, he turns to doubt *Evelina*'s rosy complexion, implying the rosiness is the effect of cosmetics. Such an implication immediately stimulates a conversation among the characters and simultaneously

brings out the traditional nature-artifice opposition. Mr. Lovel, a fop who pays much attention to his appearance, is apparently associated with the city and artifice while Evelina is aligned with the country and nature (80-82). The last part of this chapter explicates how acting conventions are applied to the emotive reconciliation scene in which Sir John Belmont eventually acknowledges Evelina as his legitimate daughter. It is the use of acting conventions, according to Saggini, that helps depict the strong emotions within the characters' minds (86-89).

In general, this chapter offers broad and useful background information on *Evelina*, which serves as a foundation to scrutinize the generic relations in this novel. Indeed, there is a strong connection between the fiction and drama in *Evelina*. Yet, upon certain points, such connection hardly goes beyond the levels of structural similarities or textual references. For example, Saggini contends that the three volumes of this novel structurally recall the acts of a play, between which two interludes are inserted. Both interludes, Saggini argues, serve to ease the mounting tension in the acts. This specific effect, nevertheless, is not well demonstrated in Saggini's discussion. While dealing with the robbery episode, the first interlude, Saggini only quotes the very passage that pictures Madame Duval's "nonhuman" look—likely inspired by David Garrick's impersonation of Lady Brute—as a climax of the confrontation between Madame Duval and Captain Mirvan (65-66). Such an image, in fact, seems to provoke more horror caused by male brutality than the release of tension. Saggini's examination of the *Love for Love* episode, in a similar fashion, reaches as far as Burney's presentation of contemporary debates and the character equivalence in *Evelina* and Congreve's *Love for Love* (83-84). As for the significance of such equivalence, it is not further touched upon. Like Congreve's Mr. Tattle, Mr. Lovel is vain and foppish. His sarcastic language, though intending to embarrass and

get back at *Evelina*, instead completely exposes his affectedness and meanness.

Evelina, on the contrary, is not a naïve Miss Prue, though both of them are brought up in the country. In Letter 20 of Volume 1, *Evelina*, as a keen observer, recounts in detail what has happened among the characters within the theater. Such exhaustive account not only lets the characters expose themselves but offers *Evelina* an opportunity to practice criticism and exert judgment.

To sum up, critics apparently have noticed and carried out researches into dramatic elements in Burney's novels. Nonetheless, most critics who touch upon such elements do not direct their attention fully to *Evelina* and thus are unable to analyze in depth the generic interplay in this very novel, only offering fragmented or brief discussions interspersed among their articles and books. Why and how does Burney knit dramatic elements into this novel? Does Burney use comedy or farce simply for laughter? If not, what lies behind the laughter? What does theatricality signify in this novel? Not fully examined as they should be, these questions will be the starting points for this thesis to explore Burney's *Evelina*.

Before that, it is necessary to construct a context so as to see clearly the close relationship of Burney, fiction, and theater. Therefore, Chapter One will focus on a specific cultural and social product in eighteenth-century Britain: conduct literature for women and its central idea—the concept of the “Proper Lady.” Relishing the fruits brought by industrialization and commercialization, the British people, particularly women, indulged in purchasing consumer goods and attending public diversions. Deeply anxious that women's growing public visibility might feminize the “masculine” public sphere, moralists and social commentators thus constructed a female ideal, the “Proper Lady,” to regulate and control contemporary women. This chapter aims to reveal how the “lady” discourse was systematically fabricated to re-shape women's

mind and behavior in an attempt to perpetuate male domination. It is only through constructing the context that readers can clearly see the exact double bind Burney and her sex were facing. The following two chapters will deal with certain strategies developed by women to resist such patriarchal constraints. In Chapter Two, Burney's comic writing in her first novel, *Evelina*, will be discussed. Aimed to evoke laughter, comic conventions could be used by eighteenth-century women novelists as a tool to escape social censorship, helping create a false impression that their novels were essentially neither serious nor aggressive. Indeed, under the cover of comedy, Burney successfully "smuggled in" her feminist criticism against patriarchy. Hence, this chapter will elaborate on how Burney maneuvers theatrical conventions in this novel to expose women's harsh situations and dilemmas in a patriarchal society and simultaneously to launch her attacks on sexist assumptions. Chapter Three will analyze female masquerading in this novel. Since the price of being labeled "unladylike" or "unwomanly" is too dear, it is truly unwise to directly fight with the patriarchal society. Under such circumstances, women develop their own countermeasures to effectively resist patriarchy. Therefore, this chapter will mainly focus on what strategies *Evelina*, the heroine of this novel, develops and how she employs those strategies to her advantage. In conclusion, though the patriarchal society never ceases to confine and control women, women still can develop certain specific tactics to resist, whereby they destroy the patriarchal system from the inside and successfully turn the tables in the end.

Chapter One

Gender Constraints

Frances Burney is generally considered a writer who constantly experienced frustration and anxiety in her literary career, always struggling between her ardent propensity to write and the heavy obligation of a dutiful daughter. It was this very conflict that compelled Burney, on the one hand, to develop certain strategies so as to get this passion fulfilled. To work on *Evelina* unobserved, for instance, Burney looked for “secret opportunity” (*Memoirs* 2: 126) to sneak away quietly after domestic tasks and stayed up till late, writing and copying the manuscript (*EJL* 2: 231-32). To avoid being identified, Burney copied the manuscript “in a feigned hand,” delegated her younger brother Charles as her agent to negotiate with the publisher Thomas Lowndes, and finally had the novel published anonymously (*Memoirs* 2: 126-27). On the other hand, Burney, long situated under such acute tension, suffered from a deep sense of guilt, which impelled her to try hard to conquer her writing passion. Hence, on her fifteenth birthday, she made a bonfire of all her writings, including “Elegies, Odes, Plays, Songs, Stories, Farces,—nay, Tragedies and Epic Poems” (*Memoirs* 2: 124), among which was *The History of Caroline Evelyn*, the urtext for *Evelina*.⁵

But, in reality, such repressed and thwarted ambition was by no means so easily eliminated as expected. It might instead turn out to be “anger” and erupt sometime to voice its protest. From her journals and novels, it is apparent that Burney had great interest in the theater. Besides adopting dramatic elements and theatrical scenes in her fiction, Burney had never desisted from writing plays, particularly comedies. Yet, unfortunately, almost all her theatrical endeavors failed because of the disapproval of her father Dr. Charles Burney and a family friend Samuel Crisp (“Daddy” Crisp) in

⁵ On Burney’s anxiety and struggle in her early literary life as well as the process of composing and publishing her first novel, see Thaddeus 9-31; Hemlow 53-104.

fear that writing for the stage would expose her to the public eye, place her female delicacy in danger, and, worst of all, bring disgrace to the whole family. Frustrated, Burney turned back to fiction and wrote her suppressed plays into her subsequent novels (Anderson 632-33, 638). Yet, the emotion of anger might grow with such suppression at the same time. In 1800 when Dr. Burney once again forced Burney to withdraw her comedy *Love and Fashion* from production, Burney wrote her father a letter to voice her protest—"I have all my life been urged to, & all my life intended, writing a Comedy" (*JL* 4: 394-95). As usual, Burney ended up succumbing to her father's insistence because she, a dutiful daughter, could not combat his "un-accountable but most afflicting displeasure" (*JL* 4: 394). But, immediately, Burney altered her tone. Not only did she assert her long thwarted ambition of writing a comedy, but she defended her work and asked for pursuing her career as well (*JL*, 4: 395). Surprisingly, Burney's case was not exceptional among her sex even though there was a remarkable increase in women writers during the course of the eighteenth century. To figure out the double bind Burney and her sex faced, it is surely helpful to scrutinize women's situation within the specific social context.

While touching upon women's issues in the eighteenth-century Britain, it is widely agreed that nothing exerted more power over women's daily lives than the concept of the "Proper Lady," which was primarily constructed in, and greatly promulgated by, the conduct book for women.⁶ Essentially didactic and prescriptive, the eighteenth-century conduct book intended to re-shape contemporary women by forming a discourse of femininity in which a female ideal, i.e., the "Proper Lady," was placed at the center. To effectively achieve this goal, conduct book writers

⁶ The eighteenth century witnessed a dramatic boom of the conduct book for women, whose great success could be measured by its constant circulation and multiple editions at the market. With the standard print run of 1,000 copies for each edition, women's conduct book was undoubtedly a large and profitable market, reaching a socially diverse readership and appearing in all reading lists for women (Francus 80; Hemlow 734; Armstrong 63; Pearson 46).

systematically defined all the aspects of women's lives, instructing women on "proper" behavior—"acceptable, desirable, and worthy of praise" (Brophy 6) and eventually making women "conscious of their sex not merely some of the time but constantly" (Tague 22). Upon the basis of biological differences, conduct book writers first embarked on defining women's nature and status, claiming that women were naturally fit for the domestic sphere due to their delicate physical constitution and soft mental qualities. According to eighteenth-century anatomy, not only were women's brains smaller, but their nervous system was more delicate than that of men as well. Women, as a result, were understood to be naturally affectionate as well as prone to nervous breakdowns and emotional excesses (Morris xxiii). Based on such an assumption, conduct book writers argued that women inherently lacked reason, unable to govern their behavior and to think rationally. In his 1748 letter to his son, for instance, the Earl of Chesterfield equated women with children, firmly asserting women's lack of reason: women as "children of a larger growth... for solid reasoning, good sense, I never knew in my life one that had it" (91). In the same vein, Hannah More at the turn of the nineteenth century similarly appealed to biological differences, emphasizing women's keen emotion and intellectual incapability in her *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799). Women, More stated, were "naturally more affectionate" and "likely both to read and to hear with a less critical spirit than men." They thus were unable "to detect errors" or "to gather improvement" (2: 35).

Obviously, biological differences here were intentionally used to construct the male superiority/ female inferiority dichotomy so as to shore up the boundary between the public and private spheres and ultimately to justify male domination. Determined by their lack of reason, women were thought inferior both mentally and intellectually to their male counterparts. It was this lack of reason, conduct book writers went on,

that made women naturally prone to indulge in, and unable to resist, any temptations. In the *Spectator* 15 (1711), Joseph Addison expressed his deep concern. Easily attracted by “Outside and Appearance,” Addison remarked, women were likely to fall prey to men who took advantage of female weakness of character. “A pair of Fringed Gloves” might easily make a woman vulnerable to a man’s deception (qtd. in Tague 68). Since women were susceptible to seduction, didactic writers asserted that it was definitely unwise for women to expose themselves to the outside world fraught with temptations and sexual dangers. “The home,” as a result, was constructed and promoted as the safe, suitable place for women to stay. James Fordyce, for example, elaborated on this point in his *Sermons to Young Women* (1765). In Fordyce’s view, a woman who “strayed” among public places for fun undoubtedly would situate herself within the zone of dangers. Once a woman stepped out of the “domestic enclosure” and “rang[ed]” through “the wide common world,” Fordyce noted, she would immediately deprive herself of male protection and be quickly regarded as “lawful game” freely hunted by “destroyers,” i.e., unscrupulous men. As a consequence, it was no surprise that an unguarded woman would soon lose her reputation (1: 55).

The Reverend Mr. Villars in *Evelina*, to a great extent, holds a similar opinion. In a letter to Lady Howard about Evelina’s trip to London, Villars explains his hesitation to consent. Partly because of his deep concern that “[t]he mind is but too naturally prone to pleasure, but too easily yield to dissipation” (*Evelina* 18-19), “to guard her [Evelina] against their delusions” (*Evelina* 19) has long been his study. So, he has deliberately educated his charge to “[know] nothing of the world” (*Evelina* 20) in a retired place, Berry Hill, to which the nearest town is seven miles away. Hence, with the assumption of women’s natural weakness, Villars seems to justify the ways he controls Evelina. By enclosing Evelina within “the home,” Villars attempts to shape

her as “innocent as an angel, and artless as purity” (*Evelina* 21).

Undoubtedly, eighteenth-century conduct literature aimed to control women. Yet, only through physical confinement could it never get this goal achieved completely. Mental manipulation, indeed, played a crucial role in it. Due to their innate lack of temperance and reason, women, “the weaker Sex” (Halifax 23), were educated to see themselves incapable of dealing with the harshness of public life. Hence, they were advised not to step into the public sphere, the very domain exclusively belonging to the male. If a woman dared to, she would risk being relentlessly labeled “unwomanly,” “unnatural,” or even “monstrous.” According to eighteenth-century conduct books, not only politics and business affairs but also intellectual development was deemed “masculine.” A learned lady, didactic writers warned, had better “keep [her learning] a profound secret” (Gregory 26), since men were uncomfortable with female pedantry. A woman who self-assertively “affect[ed] to dispute, to decide, to dictate on every subject” in public was considered “truly insufferable” (Fordyce 1: 151).

In *Evelina*, Mrs. Selwyn, a learned and economically independent widow, is the best example. Intelligent and witty as she is, Mrs. Selwyn is detested by her male counterparts for her learning. While introducing Mrs. Selwyn to readers for the first time, Evelina observes that not only may her understanding be called “*masculine*,” but her manners also “deserve[s] the same epithet.” In the process of acquiring “the knowledge of the other sex,” Evelina explains, Mrs. Selwyn gradually loses “gentleness,” a virtue deemed essential to female character (*Evelina* 300). Having a ready tongue, moreover, Mrs. Selwyn is a female character who dares to challenge and satirize her male social betters. On hearing Lord Merton, a senator, express his aversion to arguments, Mrs. Selwyn cries in sarcasm: “O fie, my Lord, a senator of the nation! a member of the noblest parliament in the world!—and yet neglect the art

of oratory!” (*Evelina* 400). Without hesitation, Mrs. Selwyn continues exerting her mocking power. She exclaims that she thought “a peer of the realm, and an able logician, were synonymous terms” (*Evelina* 400). Apparently, her intention here is to satirize those men of high rank on the scene are less logical than a woman. Unable to logically argue with Mrs. Selwyn, those embarrassed speechless Lords and Messrs then start to vehemently swipe her “unfeminineness,” attempting to gain the upper hand. Mr. Lovel cries that he has “an insuperable aversion to strength, either of body or mind in a female” (*Evelina* 401). Mr. Coverley joins him, saying that he would rather “see a woman chop wood” than “hear her chop logic” (*Evelina* 401). Lord Merton, comparing Mrs. Selwyn to “an Amazon,” declares that a woman’s value lies in her “beauty and good nature” only. Otherwise, she is “either impertinent or unnatural” (*Evelina* 401). Seeing through their intention, Mrs. Selwyn fights back at once “with the utmost contempt,” satirizing men for their unwillingness to “be connected with a woman whose understanding is superior.” In that case, she notes, it would be impossible to “accommodate all this good company” unless they should “chuse subjects from Swift’s hospital of ideots” (*Evelina* 401), a madhouse in Swift’s *A Tale of a Tub*. From this episode, readers can clearly see the bitter situation of a learned woman in the eighteenth century, when women were told to keep away from the public domain, i.e., politics, business world, and intellectual pursuit. Once a woman crossed the line, she would be mercilessly tagged “unwomanly” and badly treated. It seemed that only as witty and tough as Mrs. Selwyn could such a woman fearlessly confront malicious attacks from the male.

As the above shows, it is not hard to imagine how anxious Burney was in her early literary life. In the eighteenth century, writing and publishing, by definition, also belonged to the public sphere. It was surely a transgressive act for a woman to step

into this forbidden domain. Hence, a woman with a passion for writing must have been constantly tortured by the conflict between her writing propensity and the social expectations. On her fifteenth birthday, Burney, partly guilty of her “scribbling propensity” (*Memoirs* 2: 125) and partly afraid of her father’s discovery, burned all of her writings in hope of extinguishing “an inclination at which [she] blushed” (*The Wanderer* 8). Yet, it was definitely not easy to extirpate such a passion and thus “Evelina struggled herself into life” (*The Wanderer* 8). As a matter of fact, female authorship, particularly playwriting, was considered “improper” for eighteenth-century women. According to eighteenth-century conduct manuals, a woman of modesty, a virtue as “[o]ne of the chief beauties in a female character,” was supposed to “[avoid] the public eye” (Gregory 24). For a woman, to be looked at or talked of was quite likely to result in the loss of her reputation. Publishing, however, certainly would expose a woman to the public and thus make her an easy target. Out of “the fear of discovery, or of suspicion” (*EJL* 2: 231), Burney tried her best to hide her authorship in the process of producing *Evelina*. To keep this writing secret, Burney was “obliged to sit up the greatest part of many nights” (*EJL* 2: 232) and copied the manuscript in a feigned hand. When it was ready for print, she sent her younger brother as her agent to negotiate with the publisher. At last, terrified at the idea of public exposure, she had this novel published anonymously. All her doing in reality was avoid being identified so as not to “expose [herself] to ridicule” (*Memoirs* 124).

As to writing for the stage, it might not only destroy a woman’s personal reputation but bring about disgrace to her family. First, writing had long been regarded as a masculine occupation. A woman who dared to venture into this field would be tagged “unwomanly.” Secondly, women in the eighteenth century were

educated to stay in the home, learning the skills of house management in preparation for her future roles as a wife, a mother, and a mistress. Those who work outside the home—or, to be exact, work for money, would again be grouped under “immodesty” or, even worse, “prostitution.” As a matter of fact, it was the female playwright and her closely connected sister, the actress, who bore the brunt. In the eighteenth century, to be an actress meant making a living by exhibiting herself in the theater, a public place. In the eye of conduct book writers, such an exhibition undoubtedly was a selling of her body. With this interpretation, they consequently equated the actress with the prostitute. Linked to the actress, the female playwright was morally questionable as well. Thrusting herself into the public sphere, a female playwright not only publicly presented herself but declared that she was a “paid” writer. Furthermore, attending rehearsals was another problem for a female playwright. Causing more damage to personal reputation, frequently getting into and out of the theater for rehearsals was regarded as unladylike behavior. Besides, the drama in essence was a public genre. On the one hand, it was closely linked to morally questionable actors and actresses whose private lives had been a public concern. On the other hand, it was performed before a loud and strident audience (Saggini 96-97; Nachumi 26-32).

Apparently, the eighteenth-century society basically was hostile to women writers since they broke into the forbidden domain exclusively belonging to the male. Hence, by putting Burney back to the specific context, it is much easier to understand the dilemma Burney encountered: how she struggled between her desire to write and her fear of public exposure; why her family disapproved of her writing, particularly writing comedies; and, eventually, how she directed her comic writing into her novels. In her literary career, Burney never gave up writing comedies. But, unfortunately, nor did she succeed in publishing or producing any. The disapproval of her father, Dr.

Burney, and “Daddy” Crisp was an important reason. Surely, both of them were worried about Burney’s reputation as a woman. In a letter to Burney, Crisp clearly dissuaded her from producing a comedy: “I will never allow You to sacrifice a *Grain* of female delicacy, for all the Wit of Congreve & Vanbrugh put together—the purchase would be too dear” (*EJL* 3: 238-39). For Dr. Burney, what he was concerned deep down was more than his daughter’s reputation. Struggling for upward mobility, Dr. Burney was eager to prove that a self-made musician could raise himself to the rank of a gentleman via his musical talent, well-chosen acquaintances, and image building. Intensely cautious about his public image, Dr. Burney urged his daughter to withdraw her comedies since producing any of them was very likely to bring disgrace and thus damage her family’s honor. But, it was right her father’s suppression that pushed Frances Burney to write comedies into her novels (Saggini 48-51; Rizzo 134-35; Bilger 27-28; Anderson 632).

So far, readers can clearly discern the rhetorical strategy employed by eighteenth-century conduct book writers: the devaluation of women’s nature. Upon the basis of biological differences, these writers intended to naturalize male superiority and female inferiority. Such a theory indeed aimed to justify female exclusion from the public sphere and to contain women within the domestic domain so as to maintain the gender hierarchy. To further effectively achieve this end, another strategy was subtly planned and used: the glorification of femininity. By elevating and extolling certain qualities “exclusively” belonging to women, didactic writers encouraged the fair sex to cultivate their “natural goodness and tenderness” so as to uphold the social and moral order. Morally superior, women—“designed to soften our hearts and polish our manners” (Gregory 17) were told to shoulder an important task: exerting their reforming power to improve men’s unpleasant behavior and ultimately

to create a more moral society.

At this point, nothing could work better than the creation of a female ideal—the “Proper Lady,”⁷ or, in Nancy Armstrong’s words, “the new domestic woman” (59). By presenting the “Proper Lady,” conduct manual writers offered eighteenth-century women a model to imitate, that is, an ideal of feminine propriety characterized with womanly virtues. Foremost among these virtues was modesty, which served as a guardian of the most valuable property for eighteenth-century women—chastity. By definition, female reserve or prudence functioned as a shield to protect women from male sexual advances. In *The Ladies Library, Written by a Lady* (1739), for instance, the anonymous author asserted that “a modest Countenance” certainly would “[give] a Check to [male] Lust” (126). As a matter of fact, female chastity was central to the discourse of eighteenth-century femininity. Delicate and fragile, chastity—a woman’s most precious treasure—absolutely needed to be well guarded. Once this “jewel” was stolen, it would be lost forever and so would “every thing that [was] dear and valuable to a woman” (Charles Allen 186). In his *The Polite Lady: Or a Course of Female Education in a Series of Letters, from a Mother to her Daughter* (1760), Charles Allen richly exemplified such a dear loss: “the peace of her mind, the love of her friends, the esteem of the world, the enjoyment of present pleasure, and all hopes of future happiness” (186-87).

To help women protect their female honor more effectively, advice manual writers spilled much ink on specifying female modest behavior. In his *A Letter of Genteel and Moral Advice to a Young Lady* (1740), Wetenhall Wilkes advised women to be alert to men’s flatteries and endearments. An artful man, Wilkes pointed out, might “[fly] into Raptures, [call] you an Angel or a Goddess, [vow] to stab himself

⁷ On the “Proper Lady,” see Poovey 3-47; Armstrong 59-95; Jones 1-56; Tague 18-48; Kirkpatrick 205-22; Batchelor 97-99, 120-32; Morris ix-xxxii; Brophy 6-93, 139-97.

like a Hero, or to die at your Feet like a Slave” (162). If a woman did not shun such “baits,” she would finally end up in “Ruin and Infamy” (161). In his letters to Evelina, Mr. Villars repeatedly exhorts his ward to stay away from improper or dangerous connections since “nothing is so delicate as the reputation of a woman; it is at once the most beautiful and more brittle of all human things” (*Evelina* 184). John Gregory’s *A Father’s Legacy to His Daughters* (1774) advised women to “[avoid] the public eye . . . even the gaze of admiration” since such a gaze would make a woman “dazzled” (24). However, the stress on a woman’s chastity was not simply for the protection of female honor only. Asking a woman to be modest and chaste actually aimed to prevent her from reproducing a bastard so as to ensure that a man’s property would be safely passed to his own progeny. In this sense, female chastity in the eighteenth century served not only to protect men’s property but also to uphold social and moral order.

Also, a modest woman was supposed to be “silent in company.” Yet, silence would by no means leave her ignored. John Gregory noted that silence itself was quite communicative. The expression in her countenance would well prove that she understood the whole conversation or subject. In that case, she still could participate in a conversation without saying a word (24). Nevertheless, the true significance of female silent company did not lie in how much or how well a woman could communicate in silence. Actually, her silent company was defined as an effective means to reform men and later the nation. It was expected that through her decent company men would drop their intemperance and debauchery and behave like gentlemen. Yet, unfortunately, what is presented in *Evelina* does not answer that expectation at all. Captain Mirvan, for example, brutally treats the women around him. Sexually aggressive, Sir Clement Willoughby seizes every single opportunity either to

harass or to abduct Evelina. Apparently, female silence here does not work in accordance with conduct literature. On the contrary, it makes women stuck in unpleasant situations. In fact, eighteenth-century women were told to be silent—or, self-effacing—in all aspects, particularly in those related to the public sphere. Otherwise, she would be bluntly considered “immodest” and as a consequence her reputation would be ruined. Hence, it is quite comprehensible why Burney tried hard to hide her manuscript and authorship. Composing and publishing *Evelina*, Burney by definition did a transgressive act and broke into the public sphere. Well aware of her thrusting into the forbidden area, she anxiously did everything she could to prevent from being discovered. Once discovered, she would be exposed to the public eye and tagged “immodest,” a tag closely associated with “unladylike,” “unnatural,” or even “monstrous.” Such a connection was very likely to destroy her personal as well as her family reputation. Situated in such a society, women were confined and forced to keep silent. But, a woman like Burney would constantly try to look for a way to have her voice heard.

Besides modesty, chastity, and silence, the “Proper Lady” was also characterized with frugality, obedience, and compassion. It was widely agreed in conduct literature that women, due to their natural weakness in character, were susceptible to consumption and fashion. Once women indulged themselves in pursuing public pleasures and fashionable apparel, didactic writers warned, they would on the one hand step out of the place they were supposed to stay and thus ignore their domestic role and duties. On the other hand, spending on luxury items would seriously jeopardize household economy. A local newspaper correspondent wrote to *Newcastle Courant* in early August of 1781 to complain that “female hair-dressing” had imposed a heavy burden on him, costing him more than “land-tax, house-tax, window-tax,

paving, cleaning and lighting the streets, scavengers and watch-rates, all put together” (qtd. in Berry 198). What was worse, the love of fashion might tarnish a woman’s pure mind and even place her chastity at risk. While talking about female chastity, Wetenhall Wilkes in his *A Letter of Genteel and Moral Advice to a Young Lady* (1740) warned that “the artifice of dress” not only “[attracted] admiration” but “[stirred] up languishing desires” and “[provoked] the wanton wishes of her gay beholders” (104-05). In that case, such a woman might suffer the same fate of that one in James Fordyce’s *Sermons to Young Women* (1765) mentioned earlier in this chapter: being viewed as “lawful game” hunted by “destroyers” (1: 55).

To forestall it, didactic writers advised women to dress themselves in simplicity since women were most charming in their natural simplicity, not in fashionable attire and ornaments. Promoting plainness and simplicity, Wetenhall Wilkes contended that “Modesty and native Simplicity of Looks, triumphs over all artificial Beauties” (105). Likewise, John Gregory raised a similar point in *A Father’s Legacy to his Daughters* (1774). In his view, a woman’s physical appearance corresponded to her inner character. Gregory thus encouraged the fair sex not to confine their attention to dress but to put “neatness” into practice. “An elegant simplicity,” he stressed, was “an equal proof of taste and delicacy” (35). Burney’s first novel, *Evelina*, offers the best example. Carrying a pocket book, or an account book, Evelina is supposed to keep an accurate account of her daily expenses, which seems to prove that she is able to judiciously manage personal and later household allowances. In the conversation between Evelina and the Branghton sisters, moreover, readers can see that Evelina makes and embroiders her own caps and apron (*Evelina* 76-77). In this sense, Evelina indeed is not a money squanderer or a blind fashion chaser. But, under such an appearance of plainness and simplicity, her inner beauty is not covered at all. When

Evelina arrives at Howard Grove, Lady Howard is favorably impressed by her artlessness, innocence, gentleness, politeness, natural grace, truly ingenuous and simple character as well as excellent understanding (*Evelina* 22).

Obedience, according to conduct literature, was a virtue essential to the “Proper Lady.” Again, based on biological differences, advice writers capitalized on the theory of women’s inborn lack of reason to naturalize female natural dependence on and submission to their fathers and husbands. George Saville, Marquis of Halifax (Lord Halifax) expressly pointed out in *The Lady’s New-Year’s Gift: or, Advice to a Daughter* (1688) that there was inequality between the sexes: men, “the Lawgivers, had the larger share of *Reason* bestowed upon them” while women, “the weaker Sex,” were “prepared for the *Compliance* that [was] necessary for the better Performance of these *Duties* which seem to be most properly assign’d to it” (20). Halifax hence concluded that it was reasonable “to subject [women] to the *Masculine Dominion*” (23). In a word, female subordination was God ordained and thus natural.

Taking pains to make women willingly obey, advice writers repeatedly emphasized that women’s true happiness and even power laid in their submission to their fathers and husbands. It was reiterated in conduct literature that wifely obedience, together with soft words, would bring women a rich reward—or, a compensation: authority over the household or hopefully power over their husbands. Accordingly, submission here was successfully turned into female power which enabled women to rule their husbands. Wilkes thus encouraged women to prudently manage the “softness of a Wife” to “[subdue] all the natural and legal Authority of any reasonable Man” (173).

To have this “dream” realized, women were told to endure either male violence or even infidelity, waiting in patience for a reformed husband along with a reward for

that endurance. In the whole process, a virtuous woman, though ill-treated, had better not complain. In his *The Ladies Calling* (1673), Richard Allestree declared that patience was “duty of a wife” and that “the impatient roaring of a swine [diverted] our pity” (qtd. in Browne 48). In a similar fashion, Lord Halifax encouraged women to endure as well. In his view, it was the most glorious victory for a wife to patiently convert and reclaim her husband since he would be “subjected to her *Virtue*” (28) for good. If so, it was surely a good bargain: “her *bearing* of a time” would be “rewarded by a Triumph that will continue as long as her life” (28).

However, Burney seems to question such a sugar-coated paradox in *Evelina*. A model of female forbearance, Mrs. Mirvan, “a true feminine character” (*Evelina* 321), passively bears Captain Mirvan’s bad temper, rudeness, and vulgarity. In the meantime, she constantly tries hard to cope with the troubles and disputes caused by her husband as well. Unfortunately, all her efforts prove fruitless. As the novel comes to an end, there is no reformed husband for her. Nor does she have any power over her husband. Apparently, Mrs. Mirvan’s suffering presented in Burney’s *Evelina* contradicts the beautiful prospect pictured in conduct literature, which exactly exposes the illusiveness and paradoxicalness of that prospect.

It seems that the rhetorical strategy used by advice writers here was to allure women to willingly succumb to male domination by constructing an illusion in which women were promised domestic authority over servants as the reward of their submission and endurance. Therefore, to obtain domestic authority from their husbands, women had to stay subordinate in marriage, which served to maintain the hierarchy between the sexes.

Eighteenth-century women were anatomically held to be much more sensitive and compassionate than their male counterparts, considered susceptible to nervous

disorders and emotional excess, and even represented irrational, vain, and fragile. Yet, such a view was changed in the second half of the eighteenth century. Owing to the vogue of sensibility—including “Pity, Compassions, and Benevolence,” women’s spontaneous outflow of feelings turned out positive and was widely embraced as “the peculiar Property of the Fair” (Anonymous, *The Lady’s Preceptor* 72). In a sense, feminine qualities turned out positive when it came to defining women’s social role. Firstly, women with softer mental qualities were naturally suitable for domesticity, that is, care takers and comfort providers. Secondly, women’s softer qualities further made them good Christians. Essentially tender and compassionate, women were encouraged to perform charities in their daily lives, which in turn would contribute to “the bond and cement of civil society” (Charles Allen 254). To prevent Mr. Macartney from killing himself, for example, Evelina courageously seizes the pistols from him and later generously presents her own purse in the hope of helping him pay his debts. Knowing Evelina’s humanity and generosity, Mr. Villars immediately remits her some money as a reward for her charity (*Evelina* 202-06, 240-41).

In brief, the discourse of femininity formed in the eighteenth-century conduct literature intended to construct the dichotomies of male superiority/ female inferiority and public sphere/ private sphere on the basis of gender differences. To consolidate the borderline between the sexes, certain rhetorical strategies were used. With the help of the eighteenth-century anatomy, conduct-book writers first contended that women were intellectually inferior due to women’s smaller brain and delicate nervous system. Accordingly, women’s exclusion from the public sphere and their suitable inclusion in domesticity were thus naturalized. By creating the “Proper Lady,” moreover, advice writers launched a campaign to re-shape the contemporary women. To effectively promote this idealized image, the prescriptive conduct literature presented detailed

instructions for “female propriety,” systematically regulating every aspect of a woman’s daily life. In doing so, conduct literature indeed successfully constructed a desirable female ideal for the contemporary women to follow though such construction in reality aimed to control women physically and mentally. The extolled virtues, for example, were essentially passive. To cultivate these virtues, a woman was required to display her complete devotion, willing submission, and patient endurance in the hope of being rewarded the power over the household servants by her husband. Theoretically, female subordination and male domination would be thus maintained.



Chapter Two

Theatricality

Once published, *Evelina* won great popularity, favorably received by the contemporaries and highly praised for its entertainingness and instructiveness. The April issue of *Monthly Review* in 1778, for instance, viewed *Evelina* as “one of the most sprightly, entertaining & agreeable productions of this kind that has late fallen under our Notice” (*EJL* 3: 15). Presenting a fictive family reading of *Evelina*, the September issue of the *Critical Review* in 1778 argued that such a reading would bring pleasure and moral uplift, making the family members “weep . . . laugh, and grow wise” and “lead[ing] them . . . to improvement and virtue” (46: 202-03). Furthermore, the excellence of this novel also lay in its broadness, or in Elizabeth Montagu’s word, “*Boisterous*[ness]” (*DL* 2: 8). While recommending *Evelina* to Burney’s stepmother, Mrs. Thrale suggested that this novel was written by “someone who [knew] the *Top & the Bottom, the highest & the lowest of mankind*” with “a great deal of human Life in it, & of the manners of the present Times” (*EJL* 3: 53). As for the comic, the contemporaries seemed mostly to focus on the delightfulness the novel brought. The April issue of the *Monthly Review* in 1778 concluded that the comic parts of this novel “render[ed] the Narrative extremely interesting” (*EJL* 3: 15). In the letters from her sister Susan, Burney who stayed at Chesington for a recovery from her long illness was informed that her father and stepmother were “laughing in a most extraordinary manner” (*ED* 2: 237-38) while reading the ridotto scene. The brutal race between the two poor old women also “excited a roar of laughter” (*ED* 2: 241). Actually, these observations not only testify to Burney’s genius of comic art but manifest that Burney truly succeeds in masking or “smuggling in” her fierce criticism against human follies and patriarchy under the cover of comedy. If readers only focus

on the comic surface like Burney's contemporaries, they would fail to unearth the female protest and subversion hidden in the seemingly hilarious novel. Therefore, this chapter aims to bring those intentions to the fore by examining certain scenes: how dramatic strategies are used to expose the restrictions imposed on women while criticizing sexist assumptions.

2.1 Maneuvering Theatrical Conventions

Frances Burney's theatrical education started very early. Due to Dr. Burney's musical profession, the Burney children not only gained a good knowledge of the entertainment of London but established a special relationship to such artists and literati as David Garrick, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Samuel Johnson, Joshua Reynolds, Hester Lynch Thrale, and Elizabeth Montagu, to name a few. Frances Burney began attending the theater before she could read and showed her acute interest in and remarkable talent for the theater. Having "a great deal of invention and humor in her childish sports," her father noticed, Burney would "take the actors off, and compose speeches for their characters; for she could not read them" after seeing a play in Garrick's box (*Memoirs* 2: 168). She started trying her hand at plays as early as her adolescence and persistently struggled to have her plays produced in her literary career. Yet, unfortunately, almost all her theatrical endeavors failed because of the disapproval of her father Dr. Charles Burney and a family friend Samuel Crisp ("Daddy" Crisp) for the need to "keep up Delicacy" (*EJL* 3: 238). Every time her ambition was thwarted, she turned back to fiction and wrote her suppressed play into her subsequent novel.

In fact, critics agreed that dramatic conventions can be clearly traced in Frances Burney's *Evelina*. To begin with, this novel structurally mimics a full-length play produced in the eighteenth-century theater. Typically, an eighteenth-century playbill

included a main play, a series of dance performances and interludes inserted between the acts, and at least one short afterpiece in an attempt to draw and satisfy people from all walks of life. Feancesca Saggini points out in *Backstage in the Novel: Frances Burney and the Theater Arts* that Evelina's adventures in the cities, two in London (volumes 1 and 2) and one in Bristol (volume 3), recall dramatic acts; the episodes set in Howard Grove and Berry Hill function as interludes (65-67).

Secondly, the epistolary form allows Evelina to accurately report characters' conversations, which resembles dialogues in a play. In the ridotto episode, instead of bluntly turning down Sir Clement's invitation to dance, Evelina decides to lie in fear of violating any assembly rules again, telling him she has already been engaged. Not politely leaving her alone, Sir Clement follows Evelina around, attempting to lay bare her lie and press her to dance with him. He walks at Evelina's side and begins a conversation: "But where, Madam, can he possibly be?—has he left the room—or has not he been in it? . . . a lady to wait for a gentleman:—O fie!—careless fellow!—what can detain him?—Will you give me leave to seek him? . . . Charming creature!—and can you really bear ill usage with so much sweetness? . . . unless, indeed,—it is a partner of your own *creating*?" (*Evelina* 45). Peeved by his unpleasant manner, Evelina only responds with such short answers as "Indeed, Sir . . . I know nothing of him," "I do not, Sir . . . and I beg you not to—," and "If you please, Sir" (*Evelina* 45), intending to end this undesirable conversation as soon as possible. Unfortunately, unable to get rid of Sir Clement, poor Evelina is forced to lie again. She is pushed into identifying Lord Orville as her partner, which she immediately realizes is a mistake. Sir Clement later deliberately insinuates to Mrs. Mirvan and Lord Orville that Evelina has lied using Lord Orville's name. Facing Mrs. Mirvan's interrogation, Evelina does not know how to explain herself and finally bursts into tears in front of the whole

party, crying “No, Madam . . . —only—only I did not know that gentleman,—and so,—and so I thought—I intended—I—” (*Evelina* 52). As the above example demonstrates, the use of quotation marks, dashes, exclamation marks, and question marks, on the one hand, effectively contributes to the unfilteredness of Evelina’s letters, suggesting that Evelina faithfully records the dialogues of the characters. On the other hand, it helps dramatize this episode. Through the dialogue between Evelina and Sir Clement, readers can clearly picture in their mind how Sir Clement chases Evelina around at the ridotto and how annoyed Evelina is at his continuous harassment. Similarly, the unfinished, fragmented, and incoherent sentence spoken as Evelina bursts into tears vividly presents readers a disconcerted and helpless woman caught in a very awkward situation. Hence, these specific punctuation marks work to have Burney’s characters talk and expose their personalities as actors do in a play.

Thirdly, parentheses in *Evelina* function as stage directions in a play. Regrettably, parentheses in this novel are not paid much attention probably because they are small in proportion or because they are considered less important than the plot, the characterization, the themes, and so on. Mostly describing gestures, the parentheses are very likely to be taken simply as a device to give more information about the characters or situations and thus to enhance dramatic effects. But, certain crucial messages in fact are hidden within the parentheses. In the *Love for Love* episode, for instance, Mr. Lovel the fop speaks frankly of his goal of attending the theater:

‘I confess I seldom listen to the players: one has too much to do, in looking about, and finding out one’s acquaintance, that, really, one has no time to mind the stage. Pray,’—(most affectionately fixing his eyes upon a diamond-ring on his little finger) ‘pray—what was the play to-

night?' (*Evelina* 89)

Obviously, the parenthesis to a great extent exposes Mr. Lovel's studied nonchalance and affectation. His coming to the theater is not to watch the play at all, for he does not even know what is being performed on the stage. "To see and be seen" truly is his goal. As a fop, Mr. Lovel always pays huge attention to his attire, anxious to draw public attention and to receive public admiration. Extremely fastidious about his appearance, Mr. Lovel spends "half an hour . . . thinking what [he] should put on" since he is "often shocked to death to think what a figure [he goes]" (*Evelina* 437). For him, becoming the focus of public attention brings him great satisfaction as well as helps establish his social status and his self-esteem. In this episode, Mr. Lovel only fixes his eyes "most affectionately" on the very diamond-ring on his "little" finger, not caring about the actors at all. Such a gesture not only reflects Mr. Lovel's love of luxury objects but discloses his deliberate intention to draw and direct people's attention to that very diamond-ring. As a matter of fact, the parenthesis also carries Evelina's judgment. Though there is no bitter word in the parenthesis, the very image constructed by Mr. Lovel's narcissistic gaze, diamond-ring, and little finger implicitly reveals Evelina's criticism against his artificiality and affectation.

Also, the parenthesis in the abduction episode functions more than a stage direction. After the opera, Sir Clement manages to press Evelina into his chariot, not giving her any opportunities to decline his offer of escorting her home. Once getting into the chariot, Sir Clement lavishly showers Evelina with "fine speeches" (*Evelina* 108) about his passion and adoration for her. To win Evelina's favor, Sir Clement uses the language of courtly love and poses like the powerless lover in a medieval romance. On the one hand, by calling Evelina his "dearest life," "sweet reproacher," and "dearest angel" (*Evelina* 108, 109, 110), Sir Clement attempts to please Evelina with

compliments: “all words, all powers of speech, are too feeble to express the admiration I feel of your excellencies” and “my life is at your devotion” (*Evelina* 109, 110). On the other hand, Sir Clement complains of Evelina’s coldness: “is it possible you can be so cruel? . . . Can the sweet bloom upon those charming cheeks, which appears as much the result of good-humour as of beauty—” (*Evelina* 108). At the end of the episode, he even throws himself at her feet to plead for her forgiveness.

Although Evelina “(quite out of breath)” continually tries to withdraw her hand from his grasp, Sir Clement totally disregards her resistance— “(again seizing my hand),” and “(still holding me)” (*Evelina* 108, 109). With the parentheses, readers can see clearly how Sir Clement imitates the language and behavioral patterns of courtly love and how uncomfortable Evelina is confronting Sir Clement’s language and behavior. Through the parenthesized hints, readers may guess Evelina has probably perceived Clement’s true intention under his sweet cover.

Truly, Sir Clement must be fairly familiar with seductive skills. According to G. B. Barker-Benfield’s *The Culture of Sensibility*, women’s novels and romances in the eighteenth century provided useful skills for men, particularly for rakes, to seduce women. Due to women’s wish for sensitive men, or men of feeling, eighteenth-century rakes would first pretend sensibility by assuming an air of softness and tenderness, which consequently made them irresistibly charming. In addition, mastery of the plots and expressions borrowed from novels and romances was deemed a great help. Take Lovelace in Richardson’s *Clarissa* for example. With his knowledge of women’s novels, Lovelace stocks his library with “the books” to appeal to Clarissa. In Burney’s *Evelina*, Sir Clement’s exaggerated language exactly resembles that of romances. Frankly speaking, the goal of all these ploys—presenting oneself as a man of feeling, addressing a woman with an extreme language, and

throwing oneself at a woman's feet—was to win a woman's favor, to seduce her, and ultimately to rape her (333-35). Indeed, Sir Clement's courtly language in Burney's *Evelina* might intoxicate a woman. Yet, the parentheses in the abduction episode exactly prove Evelina's clear-headedness. Sir Clement's repeatedly seizing her hand obviously makes Evelina feel uncomfortable. More importantly, the very behavior also helps Evelina perceive the discrepancy between his courtly language and unscrupulous conduct, which in turn dawns on her that his sugar-coated compliments are all deception. His sweet talk of love and adoration in reality serves both as a cover to hide, and as a means to achieve, his sexual advances—to procure Evelina as his mistress. At this very moment, Evelina suddenly notices that the chariot is heading for a place unknown to her since she “[sees] not a human being” (*Evelina* 110). Terrified, she is aware what possible dangers she is exposed to. To save herself, she makes a sudden effort to open the door, intending to jump out of the moving chariot: “I am sure the man [the coachman] goes wrong, and, if you will not speak to him, I am determined I will get out myself . . . let me get out!” (*Evelina* 109-10). Hence, the parentheses, foregrounding the incongruity between appearance and reality, serve to help Evelina perceive and escape from Sir Clement's wicked plan.

Therefore, the parentheses in both episodes cannot be simply taken as stage directions or as neutral reports. For one thing, they reveal certain personal traits of the characters in question. Mr. Lovel's total concentration on his diamond-ring exposes his vanity, while Sir Clement's unscrupulous behavior reveals his wicked intention of sexual exploitation. For another, the parentheses prove Evelina's sharp judgment. Deliberately parenthesizing her observation of Mr. Lovel's attention on his diamond-ring, Evelina seems to criticize his superficiality and affectation. Sir Clement's improper conduct leads her to see the deceptiveness of his sweet talk of

love and adoration for her, which in turn helps her clearly distinguish between the true and the false. Thanks to that, Evelina successfully escapes from Sir Clement's sexual advances. Perceiving Sir Clement's wicked plan, Evelina thus determines not to put herself in his power again, telling herself to "take very particular care never to be again alone with him" (*Evelina* 111). Evelina learns a lesson and, as a result, gains more knowledge about the world.

Fourthly, Burney's *Evelina* is also characterized with its various dramatic references, ranging from Elizabethan to the eighteenth-century plays. In their studies of theatrical references in *Evelina*, critics have first traced Burney's character portrayal back to the plays before and in her day. Take Madame Duval, Evelina's Frenchified grandmother, for instance. A character out of the farce, Madame Duval is formed in accordance with the theatrical tradition of the cross-dressed dame role, a comic female role played by men. Accordingly, Madame Duval is equipped with all the basic features of that role: vain, overdressed, over painted, and rude (Doody, *Frances Burney* 50). The moment Madame Duval comes into sight, readers must to some extent be impressed with the "impropriety" of this "tall elderly woman" since she "dresses very gaily, paints very high" (*Evelina* 54, 59). According to conduct books, it is improper for an old woman to put on extravagant gowns, heavy makeup, or elaborate wigs (Halifax 81). In that case, Madame Duval's appearance apparently violates the dress code for old women. Like Mr. Lovel, Madame Duval is deeply fascinated with fashionable commodities. For her, luxuries are closely connected with social status and self-esteem. In their first confrontation, for example, Captain Mirvan deliberately compares Madame Duval to a wash-woman. Such a comparison without doubt provokes Madame Duval: "Ha, ha, ha!—why you ha'n't no eyes; did you ever see a wash-woman in such a gown as this?—besides, I'm no such mean person, for

I'm as good as Lady Howard, and as rich too" (*Evelina* 56-57).

Obviously, fashionable goods are everything to Madame Duval. Yet, it is these artifacts that bring comic effects. The best example is the robbery episode, one of the novel's most comic and spectacular scenes, in which Madame Duval experiences a brutal prank plotted by Captain Mirvan, who disguises himself as a robber. As Evelina comes to her aid, Madame Duval is found "hardly . . . human" (*Evelina* 166): her hair-dress falling off; her linen torn; her shoes slipping off; her body covered with dirt, weeds, and filth; and her face a mixture of the pomatum, the dust, her tears, and her rouge. Unbelievably, what she is first and most concerned about under such circumstances is her lost curly wigs: "My God! what is becomed of my hair?—why the villain has stole all my curls! . . . I can't see nobody without them [the curls] . . . if I'd know'd as much, I'd have brought two or three sets with me" (*Evelina* 166-67).

Besides her exaggerated femininity, Madame Duval's "unusual" gender performances also contribute to the comic effects of this novel. In the eighteenth century, a married or older woman was assigned the task to chaperon young ladies to balls, where she was supposed to play cards, not to dance with young men. Paying no regard to her age and not casting herself as a chaperon, Madame Duval eagerly exhibits herself at the Hampstead assembly in Letter 19 of Volume 2. Upon arriving at the assembly room, Madame Duval insists on dancing the first two dances with Mr. Smith, one of Evelina's suitors. Then, she states her intention to dance a minuet and later asks Mr. Smith to secure a good place among the country-dancers for both of them. During the whole process of the minuet, Evelina observes, Madame Duval dances in a very "uncommon" style. What's worse, "her age, her showy dress, and an unusual quantity of *rouge*" (*Evelina* 248) all make Madame Duval become the focus of the public eye and a target of ridicule as well.

Madame Duval's confrontations with Captain Mirvan similarly bring comic effects as well. Not silent and submissive at all, Madame Duval is tough, outspoken, and domineering. She is the only woman that dares to confront and challenge Captain Mirvan, a Francophobe and the most violent patriarchal character in this novel. Every time they meet, Captain Mirvan and Madame Duval immediately enter into a serious quarrel, exchanging pointed words as well as calling each other names. Excessively prejudiced against the French, Captain Mirvan intends to provoke Madame Duval by purposefully identifying her as "a woman of the town" (a prostitute) or a "wash-woman" (*Evelina* 55, 56) and by calling her "Mrs. Frog" and "old French hag" (*Evelina* 57, 59). Immediately, Madame Duval retorts that Captain Mirvan is "the ill-breddest person" among the "vulgar, unmannered English" (*Evelina* 56). Such a "low, dirty fellow," she continues, by no means has any acquaintance with Lady Howard unless he is Lady Howard's "steward" (*Evelina* 57, 56). Angered, Captain Mirvan seizes her wrists and warns her to hold her tongue. Otherwise, he will throw her out of the window. Not intimidated, Madame Duval faces him without fear: "Let me go, villain that you are . . . I'll get you put to prison for this usage; I'm no common person . . . I'll make you know it, or my name i'n't Duval" (*Evelina* 57). In a word, modeled on the cross-dressed dame role, Madame Duval to some extent is created to bring the effect of comic relief due to her insensibility to social conventions. However, from a different point of view, she is also created to defy what conduct books and English customs dictate. Her exaggerated femininity and gender performances indeed always make scenes and thus amuse readers. Yet, her resistance to be confined by the so-called "propriety" dictated in conduct manuals at the same time makes her able to challenge patriarchy.

While dealing with the dramatic references in this novel, critics also list all the

plays mentioned in this novel. Generally speaking, most critics simply point out these theatrical references, without further exploring how they intertextually and significantly interact with this novel. Take the *Love for Love* episode, one of the most discussed episodes, as an example. In Letter 20 of Volume 1, Evelina recounts her attending a performance of Congreve's *Love for Love* at Drury Lane Theatre. From the conversation between Evelina and her company before the afterpiece, critics bring to the fore certain contemporary debates, such as the dichotomies between the country and the city and between nature and artifice as well as the issues of sentimental comedy and comedy of manners. A study of the intertextuality between *Love for Love* and *Evelina* brings up the issue of character equivalence by matching up Captain Mirvan with Mr. Ben the sailor; Mr. Lovel with Mr. Tattle the fop; Evelina with Miss Prue the ingénue. However, only matching up the characters of the two works without further discussion is not sufficient to fully explain what truly signifies in such character equivalence, but simply to group Miss Prue and Evelina together under "naivete." By comparing and contrasting these two female characters, the following section aims to explore what Burney intends to expose by pairing them up.

During the interval before the afterpiece, Mr. Lovel claims that he merely comes to the theater to "meet one's friends, and shew that one's alive" (*Evelina* 89), not to watch plays. Bursting into laughter, Captain Mirvan takes this idea as the best joke he has ever heard and further compares Mr. Lovel to Mr. Tattle, a fop in *Love for Love*. Irritated, Mr. Lovel quickly makes a retort by comparing Captain Mirvan to Mr. Ben, a rough-mannered and ignorant seaman in the same play. Such a comparison definitely provokes the intolerant and violent captain, who furiously strikes his cane on the ground as a warning. Not daring to challenge Captain Mirvan any more, Mr. Lovel immediately turns to Evelina to vent his anger, asking her in a sneering tone

what she thinks of the play's young country lady, Miss Prue.

At first glance, such character equivalence seems quite right. On second thought, nevertheless, a great distinction between Evelina and Miss Prue will be discerned, through which women's dilemmas will be exposed as well. Miss Prue, a country-bred girl in Congreve's *Love for Love*, takes a journey to London in Act Two to meet her future husband, Ben, who has just returned from a lengthy journey at sea. In essence, Miss Prue's journey to London launches her into the way of the world, where she learns from Tattle, a fop notorious for his success with women, the art of deceit, or the art of being a London lady. Rustic and naïve, Miss Prue eagerly devours all the lessons Tattle instructs. The central idea of Tattle's lessons is the feigning of one's real feelings: "you are a woman; you must never speak what you think: your words must contradict your thoughts; but your actions may contradict your words . . . If I ask you to kiss me, you must be angry, but you must not refuse me. If I ask you for more, you must be more angry,—but more complying" (44). For Tattle, a woman's refusal is never sincere; it is only a disguise. Deep down, what this woman is truly saying is "yes." To test this quick learner, Tattle asks Miss Prue to kiss him, whom she first refuses and then quickly kisses him. Right after that, Tattle uses the same tactic and successfully gets them both into Miss Prue's bedchamber.

As for Evelina, she is by no means another Miss Prue. Rustic as she is, Evelina is not naïve at all. When she first comes to London, her ignorance of the London world indeed causes her trouble. But, unlike Miss Prue, she never eagerly embraces the world or turns herself into a London lady. For example, Mr. Lovel's biting sarcasm against Evelina throughout the novel originates from her laughing at his foppishness in public and her rejecting him as a dance partner at a private ball held by Mrs. Stanley. When he again sneers at her "country-breeding" and "rural ignorance"

(*Evelina* 91) by comparing her to Miss Prue in the *Love for Love* episode, Evelina feels terribly embarrassed, thinking “there ought to be a book, of the laws and customs *a-la-mode*, presented to all young people upon their first introduction into public company” (*Evelina* 92). Her intention here is not to re-fashion herself by succumbing to the social norms inscribed in that book. Instead, a book of social conventions, she believes, will guide her to avoid doing anything wrong so as to go through the world safely.

Deep down, Evelina is a critical observer throughout the novel. Not dazzled by Sir Clement’s sugar-coated courtly language, for instance, Evelina in the abduction episode exerts her judgment and thus sees through his false gallantry. In another episode, Evelina expresses her profound dissatisfaction with men’s disrespectful attitude toward women at Mrs. Stanley’s private ball. Evelina observes that the gentlemen at the ball pass and repass “in a careless indolent manner,” as if wishing to keep the ladies in suspense over whom they will choose to dance. In their eyes, Evelina and the other ladies who seem to stand passively on an auction block are “quite at their disposal, and only waiting for the honour of their commands.” Uneasy with such a situation, Evelina determines in her mind not to “[humour] such airs.” She will not dance with any one that “condescend[s]” to take her (*Evelina* 31). In the *Love for Love* episode, Evelina again exerts her critical ability. Afraid to further enrage the violent Captain Mirvan, Mr. Lovel turns to Evelina to vent his anger, sneering at her country breeding by comparing her to Miss Prue. Evelina does not say a word to retort before the whole company, but she eloquently attacks Mr. Lovel in her letter to Mr. Villars. On the one hand, she notices Mr. Lovel’s pretended ignorance of the play: although he claims he rarely listens to the players on stage, surprisingly he is able to immediately retort by comparing Captain Mirvan to Congreve’s Ben. Hence, Evelina

affirms that he did listen to the play. His ignorance is actually a studied gesture, intending to affect indifference and thus to draw public attention. In Evelina's view, such pretension is "ridiculous and foolish" (*Evelina* 91). On the other hand, Evelina berates Mr. Lovel as "weak," "frivolous," and "revengeful" (*Evelina* 92) for his malicious attack against her. As Captain Mirvan roars aloud and strikes his cane on the ground to show his anger, Mr. Lovel shrinks in fear. He then turns to Evelina to vent his spleen. Evelina thus criticizes his behavior as intolerable and cowardly: "how malicious and impertinent in this creature to talk to me in such a manner! . . . Good Heaven! that a man so weak and frivolous should be so revengeful! . . . cowardice makes him contented with venting his spleen upon me" (*Evelina* 92). Therefore, Burney's pairing these two women up does not mean to identify Evelina with Miss Prue, but to foreground Evelina's difference. Like Miss Prue, Evelina comes from the country and is rustic in essence. But, she is by no means as naïve as Miss Prue. Despite the fact that Evelina does not know how to "properly" behave due to her ignorance of the world, she is an intelligent woman who is able to judge the people she meets.

As a matter of fact, what Miss Prue and Evelina have experienced exactly reflects the dilemmas a marriageable woman must confront in a patriarchal society. To be desirable in the highly competitive marriage market, eighteenth-century women had to shape or standardize themselves—at least seemingly—according to the "perfect" image delineated by their male counterparts. Hence, Miss Prue succumbs to the art of feminine lying and disguise without hesitation. Similarly, to adhere to the "Proper Lady," Evelina has to "feign" silence and disguise herself as well. On seeing Evelina in the *Love for Love* episode, Mr. Lovel launches his attacks against her, publicly ridiculing her rusticity. However angry she is, Evelina must not talk back or

defend herself since a proper lady is supposed to be silent in public: “I said not a word” and “I made no answer” (*Evelina* 88, 91). All she can do, unfortunately, is wait for someone to rescue and protect her. Right at this moment, Lord Orville, the hero of this novel, steps forward either to stop him or to bring up a new topic. As readers may observe, the Evelina who narrates is pretty fluent and sharp in expressing her opinions and criticism. That Evelina indeed is far from being silent. This discrepancy between appearance and reality actually results from the imposition of the restrictive “Proper Lady” upon women. Hence, by juxtaposing Miss Prue and Evelina, readers are able to discern the difference between these two country-bred young women. Miss Prue blindly accepts Mr. Tattle’s instructions and completely succumbs to his manipulation. Instead of being dazzled by the gaiety and splendor of the London world, Evelina with the help of her keen observation is capable of criticizing human follies and sexist assumptions. Meanwhile, such juxtaposition also exposes what a marriageable woman confronts in the marriage market. To be “desirable,” a woman has to represent herself according to the social expectations. She is forced either to feign her feelings or to hide her true self. In that case, to be “desirable” to a great extent means to be “deceptive.”

In sum, the use of theatrical conventions and references in this novel, at one level, demonstrates Burney’s wide knowledge of and her familiarity with the plays before and in her day. At another level, those conventions and references in reality serve as Burney’s writing strategy. Besides bringing entertainment, this strategy is maneuvered to expose women’s situations and dilemmas in a patriarchal society, which in turn offers Evelina opportunities to practice and sharpen her critical ability.

2.2 Comedy as a Feminist Strategy

In the eighteenth century, women writers would encounter considerable

difficulties as they tried their hand at plays, particularly such genres as comedies and farces. But, certain women novelists, such as Frances Burney and Jane Austen, cleverly manipulated comedy in their writings and thus effectively mocked or protested against contemporary sexist assumptions. In essence, a comedy is less serious and aims to evoke laughter as its primary end. Accordingly, eighteenth-century women novelists who wrote comedy into their writings were able to create a false impression that their novels were essentially neither serious nor aggressive. At a time when feminist thoughts could destroy a woman's reputation, comedy surely offered women writers a disguise, making their radical thoughts agreeable and pleasant to the reader (Bilger 9).

The main reason why comedy can be adapted by women novelists as a useful tool to escape social censorship lies in its own distinctive features: laughter and happy ending. In a traditional comedy, everything is exaggerated and laughter is evoked as characters are caught in embarrassing or awkward situations, which basically will not cause any serious or irreversible disasters. Though social order may be constantly disrupted by people's irrational impulses and follies, such disorders are just temporary. In the end, any difficult situations or disorders which threaten the social concord will be resolved and the whole action will turn out happily, ending with marriage or a dance. Hence, it is no surprise that traditional comedy can be enlisted in the service of conservatism, helping maintain social order, existing hierarchies, and the status quo.

Yet, recent theories of women's humor point out that laughter or humor is a double-edged weapon.⁸ On the one hand, humor can be a tool to reinforce the existing hierarchy. In *Personality and Sense of Humor*, Avner Ziv elaborates on the issue of humor and power relations, stating that when someone in a superior position

⁸ See Bilger 9-11, 61-62, Bing 22-23.

tells a joke, those below him in rank are expected to laugh. According to an unspoken rule in the military, Ziv continues, all the soldiers on the spot know that they had better laugh when a higher-ranked officer jokes (Bing 23). Obviously, joking and laughing here stand for the reinforcement of the values of those in power. On the other hand, humor can also serve to challenge or subvert authority. It can be strategically utilized by subordinates as an acceptable means to “smuggle” their criticism against their social superiors and hopefully to subvert existing power relations. On defining feminist humor, Lisa Merrill in her journal article “Feminist Humor: Rebellious and Self-Affirming” argues that women’s humor functions to have women see and scrutinize their oppressed situation, empowering women to “examine how we have been objectified and fetishized and to what extent we have been led to perpetuate this objectification” (qtd. in Bing 22). Similarly, in her “From Kate Sanborn to Feminist Psychology: The Social Context of Women’s Humor, 1885-1985,” Alice Sheppard suggests that women’s humor helps evoke and strengthen women’s political solidarity. Through exploring women’s comic writing, Sheppard asserts that humor “reinforce[s] women’s shared perceptions, strengthen[s] social bonds, and itself facilitate[s] social change” (qtd. in Bilger 11). Hence, not only does women’s humor evoke women’s awareness of their oppression, but it further arouses a desire to change existing injustice as well. For women writers, such as Frances Burney and Jane Austen, comic writing indeed is a useful weapon. Under the cover of the comic, women writers are able to secretly convey their feminist thoughts: uncovering the inequality between the sexes and launching their attacks on sexist assumptions. In that case, through writing, women writers take action to fight patriarchy. Through reading these writings, female readers may thus be awakened to their oppressed situation, which in turn may strengthen female solidarity and hopefully make social change possible.

In *Evelina*, both Evelina and Mrs. Selwyn possess great insight, able to satirize and criticize the people around them. At the ball held by Mrs. Stanley, for instance, Evelina ridicules Mr. Lovel's foppishness. To choose a lady to dance with, Mr. Lovel, like the other gentlemen at the ball, passes and repasses, looking with "a kind of negligent impertinence" at the ladies (*Evelina* 31). Setting his mind on Evelina, Mr. Lovel approaches her "on tiptoe" (*Evelina* 31). As he comes near, Evelina is greatly impressed not only by his foppish attire but by his "strange" behavior. Mr. Lovel first waves his hand in the air "with the greatest conceit" and bows exaggeratedly to her "almost to the ground, with a sort of swing" (*Evelina* 31). While asking for a dance, Mr. Lovel takes Evelina's hand twice and deliberately breaks off every half moment: "Allow me, Madam . . . the honour and happiness—if I am not so unhappy as to address you too late—to have the happiness and honour—" (*Evelina* 32). Responding to such a ludicrous "performance," Evelina, probably out of courtesy, turns aside to hide her laughter. But, as Mr. Lovel presents his "silly" pauses, "affected" demeanor, and "ridiculous" speeches (*Evelina* 31, 32) again later in the same episode, Evelina can no longer refrain herself this time and bursts into laughter. Here, through Evelina's minute and vivid description of Mr. Lovel's exaggerated gestures and way of talking, readers can see how Evelina makes fun of male affectation.

Meanwhile, Evelina is also provoked by these gentlemen's arrogant manner. As the gentlemen pass and repass, Evelina and the other ladies seem to be on the auction block, observed, stared, and evaluated. Not receiving any respect from these men, Evelina determines in her mind that she would rather not dance at all than humor any of them. As a matter of fact, what is truly exposed and Evelina criticizes here is the inequality between the sexes in the marriage market. In this episode, it is very clear that men are in a superior position as they pass back and forth in a "careless indolent

manner” and as their evaluating eyes boldly travel over all the ladies at the ball (*Evelina* 31). While the men are the choosers, the ladies unfortunately are the ones to be chosen. They only passively stand there and wait for men’s “condescension.” Accordingly, as a man offers a woman his hand like Mr. Lovel does to Evelina, it exactly stands for his condescension and thus the woman is supposed to accept his offering thankfully. Actually, it is such male disrespect and the inequality between the sexes that make Evelina determine not to accept any man’s offering, or, to be accurate, any man’s condescension.

As for Mrs. Selwyn, her satire and criticism are far more scathing than Evelina’s. In Letter 3 of Volume 3, Lord Merton and Mr. Coverley decide to race each other for a thousand pounds to see who is a better phaeton driver, which is immediately objected by Lady Louisa. To settle their dispute, Mrs. Selwyn provides her idea, challenging the two gentlemen to recite by heart the longest ode of Horace. As Lord Merton and Mr. Coverley hesitate to accept the challenge, Mrs. Selwyn teases them both: “Come, Gentlemen . . . why do you hesitate? I am sure you cannot be afraid of a weak woman?” (*Evelina* 322). Then, she turns to Mr. Lovel, an MP in the House of Commons, scornfully asking him about his studies at university. Yet, his response only makes him embarrassed: “why, as to that, Ma’am—no, I can’t say I did; but then, what with riding,—and—and—and so forth,—really, one has not much time, even at the university, for mere reading” (*Evelina* 322). At one level, Mrs. Selwyn’s proposal indeed intends to embarrass the gentlemen by calling attention to their ignorance of the classics, which in turn exposes a problem of higher education. Apparently, Mr. Lovel’s response fully demonstrates that he did not make good use of the university education. For him, university education is just a privilege exclusively belonging to the upper-class men as well as a useful tool to get a seat in the House. As for women,

they are totally denied such education (Bilger 101-02). Hence, behind the humor lie Mrs. Selwyn's dissatisfaction with the inequality of educational opportunities and her mocking of men's idling. All these men are engaged in throughout this novel is pursuit of pleasure, harassment of women, or betting on trivial matters with a great amount of money.

At another level, Mrs. Selwyn's teasing foregrounds the issue of traditional gender roles as she intentionally identifies herself as "a weak *woman*" in front of the men who fail to take her challenge. As mentioned in last chapter, women in the eighteenth century were generally held to be irrational, susceptible, and weak mainly due to their lack of reason. Knowledge and public affairs in this sense were too complicated, harsh, and thus unsuitable for them. What women were supposed to and encouraged to cultivate, accordingly, was their innate soft qualities as well as their outer beauty, all of which were considered essential to feminine appeal. In this novel, the best spokesperson for this theory is Mr. Merton. In another scene, Mr. Merton greatly extols female delicacy in order to get the upper hand over the satirical and "masculine" Mrs. Selwyn, claiming that "a woman wants nothing to recommend her but *beauty* and *good-nature*; in every thing else she is either impertinent or unnatural" (*Evelina* 401; emphases added). For him, a woman's value rests entirely on her outward appearance and her "good-nature," not on her intellect. In that case, a woman like Mrs. Selwyn, who is not only learned, witty, and self-assertive but able to challenge and satirize her male counterparts, is definitely grouped under "impertinent or unnatural." Therefore, from the cases of *Evelina* and Mrs. Selwyn, it is evident that the comic is by no means to evoke laughter as its primary end. Actually, it serves as a weapon to mock men's follies and sexist assumptions and simultaneously to expose women's situation.

As a matter of fact, the scene which most exposes women's situation is the robbery episode, one of the most comic or, to be accurate, farcical episodes in this novel. A farce, by definition, is a play intended to evoke laughter by presenting exaggerated and ridiculous characters and situations, in which a victim of someone's trick is a victim of his/her own foolishness. In this episode, Captain Mirvan maliciously schemes to play a brutal prank on the "old Frenchwoman" (*Evelina* 152). He forges a letter signed by the clerk of a country justice, informing Madame Duval that her friend, Monsieur Du Bois, is imprisoned for "suspicion of treasonable practices against the government" (*Evelina* 158). In panic, she borrows a chariot from Lady Howard and rushes in company with Evelina to rescue Monsieur Du Bois from jail. In her account, Evelina says that she is quite surprised at the success of this letter since no foreigner arrested in London on suspicion of spying or treason would be sent to a country magistrate for examination. Apparently, Madame Duval does not seem to realize it. Her "violence of temper" exactly demonstrates that she is easily frightened and that she reflects little upon circumstances. Hence, Evelina concludes that Madame Duval is a victim of self-foolishness: "she is continually the dupe of her own—I ought not to say *ignorance*, but yet, I can think of no other word" (*Evelina* 158).

On their way back to Howard Grove right after they are informed that Monsieur Du Bois has "escaped," Madame Duval and Evelina encounter two masked robbers disguised by Captain Mirvan and Sir Clement. Afraid to be murdered, Madame Duval screams and resists hard, but in vain. The robber disguised by Captain Mirvan "lug[s] [Madame Duval] out of the chariot by main force . . . drag[s] [her] down the road, pulling and hawling [her] all the way . . . [shakes] [her] till he [is] tired . . . [ties her] feet together . . . and then, as if he [has] not done enough, he [twitches] off [her] cap, and, without saying nothing, [gets] on his horse, and [leaves her] in that condition"

(*Evelina* 167-68). When Evelina comes to her aid, Madame Duval is found “hardly . . . human,” “sobbing, nay, almost roaring, and in the utmost agony of rage and terror” in a ditch (*Evelina* 166, 164): her hair-dress falling off; her linen torn; her shoes slipping off; her body covered with dirt, weeds, and filth; and her face a mixture of the pomatum, the dust, her tears, and her rough. On seeing Madame Duval’s terrible appearance, the footman and coachman are “ready to die with laughter” (*Evelina* 166).

After reading this part, readers may laugh aloud, too. In the whole process, besides her gullibility and her nonhuman appearance, the words used to describe Madame Duval also contribute to evoking laughter. Afraid of being murdered, Madame Duval “scream[s] like any thing mad.” As Evelina comes to her aid, Madame Duval who is in complete disorder “redouble[s] her cries” and “roar[s] . . . in the utmost agony of rage and terror.” “Almost bursting with passion . . . and with frightful violence,” she then “beat[s] the ground with her hands” (*Evelina* 168, 164). With the help of the above description, readers are able to vividly picture Madame Duval’s looks and her violent reaction. Even Evelina finds it funny and secretly laughs as Madame Duval recounts how she is ill-treated by “the robber.”

But, at the same time, a feeling of discomfort comes with the laughing. The mixed feelings, as Janice Farrar Thaddeus argues in her *Frances Burney: A Literary Life*, exactly result from the “mixture of violence and farce,” or the mixture of terror and humor, in this novel (49). Burney’s strategic combination of violence and farce, Thaddeus observes, produces a striking effect on viewers’ emotions: a “tendency to slide from laughter through violence to pain” (49-50). It evokes laughter because Madame Duval’s appearance is so unusual, her reaction is so exaggerated, and the situation is so ludicrous. It causes terror because the Captain’s violent assault on

Madame Duval is too cruel and inhuman. Upon finding her grandmother in the ditch, Evelina is shocked and feels ashamed to be involved in the affair. Fearing that Captain Mirvan might turn on her if she did not comply, Evelina did not reveal the brutal plan to her grandmother. Feeling sympathetic, Evelina tries to comfort Madame Duval, assuring her of her present safety. Later, though Madame Duval's recounting of the whole story almost compels Evelina to laugh, a fit of anger soon surges up within her. In her letter to Mr. Villars, Evelina writes her irritation with the Captain, "for carrying his love of tormenting,—*sport*, he calls it,—to such barbarous and unjustifiable extremes" (*Evelina* 168). So irritated is Evelina that she finally decides to step forth, asking Captain Mirvan to stop "his intended exploits" (*Evelina* 170). Obviously, the feeling of terror here does not mean to bring fear or intimidation. Instead, it aims to evoke sympathy and anger from viewers, which in turn may impel people to take action against injustice. In Evelina's case, as she comes to realize that the reason why Captain Mirvan mistreats Madame Duval is just for fun, she courageously confronts the Captain, the most violent patriarchal figure in this novel, asking him to cease such cruel and intolerable behavior.

As a matter of fact, the true horror this episode exactly intends to expose is the dark side of women's life in the eighteenth century. Captain Mirvan's prank on Madame Duval definitely is not just for fun. Actually, it stands for his way to "punish" those who dare to challenge his authority. Outspoken and self-assertive, Madame Duval never fears to confront the Captain. Before Evelina's stepping forward for her, Madame Duval is the only woman that does not succumb to the Captain's power. She dares to retort, to trade insults, and even to spit in his face. For Captain Mirvan, such a fearless and tough woman without doubt needs to be "punished." As this episode shows, his way of punishment is to humiliate Madame Duval by destroying her

physically with brutal violence. In that case, Madame Duval's nonhuman appearance clearly conveys a warning to the other women around him: anyone who dares to challenge him will be "punished" like Madame Duval. Indeed, this episode not only reveals the truth that women are always under the threat of male violence but demonstrates women's powerlessness and helplessness within the existing social order. Even the fearless and unyielding Madame Duval fails to oppose and withstand the Captain's brutality, not to mention those women who are easily frightened and lack courage. As the horrible truth is revealed, another feeling comes with it. After reading this very episode, the eighteenth-century female readers of this novel might be awakened to their similar situation. All of a sudden, they came to realize that they were also constantly exposed to male violence and oppression in their daily life like the female characters in this novel. So harsh was the revelation that they might not only experience a feeling of horror but suffer a feeling of pain.

Undeniably, Captain Mirvan's brutal prank does achieve certain intimidating effect. For instance, Lady Howard, Captain Mirvan's mother-in-law, pretends not to know anything about the Captain's scheme, by which she "at once avoids quarrels, and supports her dignity" (*Evelina* 158). In a similar fashion, as Evelina asks Mrs. Mirvan to talk to her husband about ceasing his torments, Mrs. Mirvan, who does not dare to speak to her husband when he is out of humor, says that she has expostulated with him and that all her efforts unfortunately end up "fruitless" (*Evelina* 170). As for Evelina, she is unwilling to be passive any longer and decides to confront the Captain, thinking it her duty as a granddaughter to "do all in [her] power to prevent [Madame Duval] being again so much terrified" (*Evelina* 171). Yet, after Evelina requests the Captain to quit tormenting her grandmother, he makes a threat in "a sullen gloominess," saying that she "might do as [she] please[s], but that [she] should much

sooner repent than repair [her] officiousness” (*Evelina* 171). So disconcerted is Evelina that she does not attempt making any answer.

So far, readers may feel pessimistic about women’s future in this novel. Indeed, if readers only look at this very episode, they may thus jump to conclude that there seems no possibility for these women to make a change since they are easily intimidated into silence. As a matter of fact, what this episode truly intends to reveal is the ill treatment which women receive at the hands of men as well as the rigidity and stiffness of patriarchy. Under such circumstances, women might be powerless and helpless. But, it does not necessarily mean that they are hopeless.

As male violence can be distinctly noticed throughout the novel, women’s social bonds and solidarity do exist and exert great influences at critical moments. For example, Lady Howard persuades Mr. Villars to let Evelina “see something of the world” (*Evelina* 18) and thus helps Evelina gain an opportunity to walk out of the retired Berry Hill. Thenceforth, Evelina leaves Mr. Villars’s “protection” behind and begins her journey of exploring the world through Mrs. Mirvan’s help. Besides, Mrs. Selwyn also plays an important part in Evelina’s personal growth and development. As Evelina finds her feelings toward Lord Orville “all at war with [her] duties” (*Evelina* 372), Mrs. Selwyn helps her assert her own desires over Mr. Villars’s instructions. She suggests to Evelina that she can make up her own mind about Lord Orville all on her own and that she does not need any man’s guidance while making decisions. As a result, Evelina starts to listen to her heart and rethink Mr. Villars’s “female propriety” which has led her to reject Lord Orville and thus the possibility of happiness: “I begin to think, my dear Sir, that the sudden alteration in my behavior was ill-judged and improper” (*Evelina* 378). At the same time, Mrs. Selwyn is the very person that actively helps Evelina retrieve her true identity as a baronet’s

daughter. In the whole process, Mrs. Selwyn not only engages herself in investigating the matter but travels back and forth to have the father and daughter come face to face. Ultimately, it is under Mrs. Selwyn's persistence that Evelina is recognized and reclaims her rightful place as Sir John's heiress. Apparently, female social ties immensely contribute to Evelina's entrance into the world, not only helping Evelina embark on her journey of initiation and regain her social standing but pushing her into self-awareness and making her reconsider and later reject male teachings.

As for female solidarity, it is well demonstrated in women's confrontations with their male counterparts. In the robbery episode, as Evelina decides to talk to Captain Mirvan in person, Mrs. Mirvan promises to accompany her to the Captain instead of standing by or fleeing away. Though Evelina is disconcerted in their confrontation, it does not mean that she is intimidated into silence and submission thereafter. In the foot race episode, while Lord Merton and Mr. Coverley are excited about the bet on the foot race of two poor old women, Evelina worries about and feels pity for the women because they are over eighty years old and look "so weak, so infirm, so feeble" (*Evelina* 345). On seeing one of them falls and gets hurt, Evelina involuntarily springs forward to assist her, little thinking that such behavior may incur displeasure or wrath from those brutal and violent men. Mrs. Selwyn, to name one more example, always steps to aid Evelina as Evelina suffers Lord Merton's sexual harassment. On their way to the pump room in Bristol, Evelina and Mrs. Selwyn encounter Lord Merton and his companions, all of whom boldly fix their eyes on and licentiously address Evelina. In her stern and commanding manner, Mrs. Selwyn intervenes to halt their harassment: "you had better, therefore, make way quietly, for I should be sorry to give my servant the trouble of teaching you better manners" (*Evelina* 304). Hence, it is hasty to take only one episode and draw a conclusion about women's future. To gain a clear picture

of women's struggle and resistance, it is necessary to view the novel as a whole. Female solidarity in this novel, at one level, shows women's moral sense. At another level, it to some extent works to disrupt male violence or harassment. Highly elated at the success of his prank, Captain Mirvan at once engages himself in devising new ways to torture Madame Duval. But, such engagement seems to be hindered by Evelina's stepping forth for her grandmother since there is no more prank played on Madame Duval during her stay at Howard Grove. As the above demonstrates, female social bonds and solidarity indeed serve as female power to resist male violence and manipulation.

To sum up, Burney's comic writing definitely is not simply for amusement. Under the cover of comedy, Burney indeed "smuggles" feminism into this novel, not only exposing women's oppressed situation but criticizing men's violence and cruelty. Probably, eighteenth-century female readers were those that Burney intended to appeal to. Through reading this novel, hopefully contemporary female readers might be aware of their oppressed situation in a male-dominated society, realizing that they were constantly under the threat of male violence as well. But, the disclosure of the truth about women's situation did not mean to intimidate women, but to awaken them. If so, female social ties and solidarity would be strengthened. Women would thus stick together and be like Evelina to step forth for themselves and for other women against patriarchal oppression. Therefore, Burney's comedy serves to evoke women's self awareness, which in turn impels women to take action against male violence and oppression.

Chapter Three

Female Masquerading

As agriculture was gradually replaced by commerce and industry during the course of the eighteenth century, Britain witnessed enormous changes in social and economic structures, among which the rise of a new class, the middling ranks, was the most prominent. With their accumulated wealth, the middling orders were anxious to better their living standards and to raise themselves to a higher rank. For them, the most effective way was to imitate the lifestyles and behavioral patterns of their social betters. They thus indulged in conspicuous consumption and leisure as well (McKendrick, “Consumer Revolution” 9-23, “Commercialization” 37-43).⁹ Such indulgence made social surface the index of worth. Owing to Britain’s rapid economic growth, the eighteenth century developed a “superficial” visual culture, when how one looked was far more crucial than what one really was. To effectively display wealth and idleness, public places, such as shops, theaters, opera houses, assemblies, parks and pleasure gardens, were chosen for the display of extravagance. Performativeness, hence, naturally became essential to day-to-day life.

3.1 Performing Identities

In the eighteenth century, women significantly contributed to the creation of social surface. Yet, women’s participation actually encountered strong disapproval. As the nation’s economy was growing rapidly, women were no longer confined to the

⁹ As commerce and industry were booming during the course of the century, the middling orders arose and grew rapidly in population and social power. Constituted by a great variety of occupations, the middling ranks—including tradesmen, manufacturers, professionals (military men, lawyers, doctors, clerics, writers, artists, journeymen, apprentices, and so on), shopkeepers, and farmers, multiplied in number from 170,000 to 475,000 between 1700 and 1801. Mainly clustering in towns and cities, the middling sort, particularly tradesmen and manufacturers, had more opportunities to reach financial success. Petty bourgeoisie in Georgian England in general earned between £50 and £100 a year, by which they were able to enjoy better housing, clothing, and education; not to mention tradesmen and manufacturers who might earn £100,000 in a good year. Josiah Wedgwood, the twelfth son of a potter, became a great pottery and china manufacturer and left a fortune worth £500,000 (Langford 62-63, 666-67; Larsen 38-40).

home all day long to prepare food, make clothes, or do household chores. They might hire someone to manage the household and thus spend their spare time enjoying public diversions, pursuing the latest fashions, or reading novels. For conservatives, however, women's constant presence in public space not merely stood for the ignorance of their domestic duties but might blur the line between the separate spheres and even feminize the society. To prevent such consequences, the "Proper Lady" was constructed in an attempt to shore up the boundary between the separate spheres and push women back to the domestic domain again. In addition, the eighteenth century was an age which placed great emphasis upon appearance and reputation. For a woman, being tagged "unwomanly," "unladylike," or "improper" would be fatal. That is the reason why Mr. Villars repeatedly advises Evelina to closely watch her "delicate," "brittle" reputation (*Evelina* 184) and why Burney tried hard to hide her authorship. Therefore, how to appear—at least, seemingly—"proper" or how to transgress under the cover of the "Proper Lady" definitely would be a challenge for eighteenth-century women.

To develop countermeasures, the most convenient and effective strategy for eighteenth-century women was adapting the language of conduct books for their own purpose. According to conduct books, only taking care of household affairs was not good enough to win a woman the tag of "a good wife." A good wife needed to be "helpful" to her husband as well. In his *Sermons to Young Women* (1765), James Fordyce clearly claimed that wives' businesses were chiefly to "read Men" and to "make [themselves] agreeable and helpful" (1:138). The wife's helpfulness, by definition, meant trying her best to help establish her husband's "reputation," that is, to create or maintain a "decent" or even "perfect" front for her own family. Supported by a right cause, the wife successfully found herself a good reason to justify her

spending, though conduct manuals strongly advised women to be frugal and not to dress fashionably after marriage. Henceforth, it was for her husband's reputation that she put on fashionable attire and attended public places so as to see and be seen. Again, it was for her husband's reputation that she visited, gave tea parties to, and pleased her husband's friends. With all these good excuses, not only did she justify her walking out of the home and spending money; she was her own gorgeous image maker as well. In this wonderfully sophisticated way, she constructed herself as a loving wife; what she did was all for her husband.

In *Evelina*, what engages the upper-and-middle-class women in their daily life is shopping, attending balls, visiting pleasure gardens as well as going to the theater and the opera. In all of the activities, the dress, a vital symbol of one's wealth and social status, definitely plays an important role. Mrs. Mirvan, for instance, declares that it is necessary to "Londonize" (*Evelina* 28) herself as soon as she arrives in London. Her declaration, in fact, reveals both her social status and her anxiety. If she were a lower-class woman, she probably would not care so much about changing her appearance or following the latest metropolitan fashions. Actually, she is extremely concerned about her appearance because it is highly possible for her to run into her acquaintances—members of the upper class, any time in any public places. Once found not fashionable enough, she is quite likely to ruin the reputation of her husband. Rushing to the theater as soon as they reach London, Mrs. Mirvan, Miss Mirvan, and Evelina certainly have no time to get Londonized. Afraid of being identified, Mrs. Mirvan thus "sit[s] in some obscure place, that she may not be seen" (*Evelina* 28). Similarly, Madame Duval also pays great attention to her attire. On their way home from Ranelagh, Madame Duval screams and hastily jumps out of the coach, crying that she is wet through since the rain has made its way into the carriage. Actually, she

cries for her expensive silk negligee, a loose boudoir gown worn on informal or semi-formal occasions. So expensive is the negligee that the very first thing she does right after jumping out of the coach is to wipe the wet negligee in public, standing among the servants and lamenting that “it was a new Lyons silk” (*Evelina* 69). Surely, showing one’s boudoir gown in public is rather improper. Yet, through such a gesture, Madame Duval undoubtedly makes a scene and draws the public attention to that costly, high-quality negligee. In brief, fashionable attire absolutely signifies much to the rich. Not only does it reflect their wealth and social status; it also foregrounds their distinctiveness against the other inferior classes.

Putting on fashionable attire, eighteenth-century people needed places “to see and be seen.” Unquestionably, fashionable places, such as theaters, opera houses, pleasure gardens and promenades, were generally deemed the best sites of display. To meet such a demand, these places were either established or refurbished in an attempt to draw visitors, particularly people of quality who could attract more people to come and see. Ranelagh, a fashionable pleasure garden opened in 1742, consisted of a garden, a canal, a bridge, Chinese buildings, and a rotunda. Giovanni Antonio Canaletto’s *London: Ranelagh, Interior of the Rotunda* (Figure 1) portrays the



Figure 1. Giovanni Antonio Canaletto. *London: Ranelagh, Interior of the Rotunda*. 1754.

<<http://european-art.findthebest.com/1/4448/London-Ranelagh-Interior-of-the-Rotunda>>

magnificence of Ranelagh's rotunda. Having a span of 150 feet, Ranelagh's rotunda is featured with a vast domed ceiling from which hung numerous gilt and crystal chandeliers ablaze with candles. In the center are several marbled columns surmounted by gilded caryatids (Downing 6, 22, 27; Russell 116). In such a brilliantly lit space, spectators must be dazzled by the fashionably dressed people whose splendid attire and jewelry are beautifully shining under the glittering light. In that case, the rotunda itself functions as a picturesque background and the fashionable people form a major part of the spectacle. Or, it serves as a stage upon which "the beautiful people" elegantly perform themselves. In fact, while the people of quality are being watched to dine, converse, promenade, appreciate artworks, or listen to the orchestra, they are watching the others, too. For instance, as Samuel Johnson visited the Pantheon, another pleasure garden in London, with James Boswell in 1772, he found that the pleasure garden itself was like a theater and its visitors were like actors performing on stage: "there are many happy people here. There are many people here who are watching hundreds, and who think hundreds are watching them" (qtd. in Russell 104).

As Evelina visits Ranelagh's rotunda for the first time, she is stunned by "the brilliancy of the lights" which makes her almost think that she is "in some enchanted castle, or fairy palace, for all look[s] like magic to [her]" (*Evelina* 41). Evelina and Miss Mirvan then decide to walk around such a splendid space. Walking, as a matter of fact, was the most preferred form of exercise for the people of quality in the eighteenth century since it offered these people a great opportunity to display themselves. In a similar scene, Mrs. Mirvan, Miss Mirvan, and Evelina promenade in the Mall of St. James's Park, the most fashionable walk near the Palace of St. James, the day right after they arrive in London. Evelina is first impressed with the

crowdedness of this place, for she has never seen so many people assembled together before. Like Evelina and her group, these people come to see and be seen. Highly amused, Evelina concludes that the walk is very agreeable to her: “the ladies were so much dressed” that she and Miss Mirvan “[can] do nothing but look at them” while Mrs. Mirvan is conversing with her fashionable friends (*Evelina* 29). Thus, it is imaginable how theatrical public places are! Putting on fashionable attire, people are like actors displaying themselves on stage.

Performativeness can also be clearly perceived in the auditorium of the theater and the opera house. In the mid eighteenth century, most theaters and opera houses were refurbished to meet the needs of the fashionable. Usually reserved by the upper class, the boxes and the pits were the best positions to get a panoramic view of the whole theater and opera house respectively as well as the most conspicuous places to be seen. As gentlemen and ladies were dressed up elegantly and fashionably sitting in the boxes and the pits, they were the object to be gazed at and simultaneously the subject to gaze as well. In her first trip to the opera with the Mirvans, for instance, Evelina notices that everyone is “dressed in so high a style” as soon as she is seated in the pit. Attracted by these fashionably dressed ladies, she thinks that she will have “sufficient entertainment from looking at the ladies” if the performance is not good enough (*Evelina* 42). In another episode, Evelina attends the performance of Congreve’s *Love for Love* at Drury Lane Theatre with the Mirvans. No sooner do they sit in the side-box than they see Lord Orville seated in the stage box, the most expensive seating in the theater. Very soon, Lord Orville comes because he sees them from his stage box, too (*Evelina* 86). Forced to go to the opera at the Haymarket, to name one more example, Evelina sits in the cheapest one-shilling gallery with Madame Duval and the Branghtons, her vulgar cousins. Although barely seeing the

stage from the gallery, they are able to observe the boxes and the pits pretty clearly. The Branghton sisters praise the gorgeously dressed people in the pit, crying that it is worth coming to the opera. At the same time, Sir Clement, a rake who seeks every possible opportunity to harass Evelina under the disguise of gallantry, is looking around the opera house from his box or pit. Of course, Evelina sees him and believes that he will eventually find her, though her seat is high and far from his. Not surprisingly, before the opera is over, Sir Clement has stood at the gallery door waiting (*Evelina* 101-05).

Accordingly, positioned in the most conspicuous places, the box and the pit easily become the foci of the audience, and so do “the beautiful people” seated there. As the previous paragraph shows, once the audience enter the theater, they first notice the splendor of the fashionable in the box. Even though the audience may not see the stage from their bad seats, they can still see clearly what is happening in the box. Not only the fashionable attire and jewelry which glitter under the brilliant illumination of the room but the every single movement of the beautiful people are all carefully observed and discussed with great interest by the audience. For the fashionable, the box definitely is their stage upon which they, as actors, manipulate their own self-representation, conspicuously displaying their wealth and social status. Ironically, for the audience, the performance in the box may be much more entertaining than that on the stage.

Not all the audience truly come for the play or the opera. The Branghtons’ trip to the opera house mentioned above is an example. The Branghtons in reality know nothing about the opera. They do not know where to buy the tickets or how to get to their seats. Nor do they understand what the singers are singing at all. Thus, they keep talking and complaining: “What a jabbering they make”; “How unnatural their action

is”; “there’s nothing but singing!—I wonder when they’ll speak” (*Evelina* 102, 103). At last, they conclude that the tickets are “*monstrous dear*” since “there is n’t one ounce of sense in the whole Opera, nothing but one continued squeaking and squalling from beginning to end” (*Evelina* 104). During the whole process, what truly interests the Branghton sisters is the beautiful people in the pit and later Sir Clement. Upon seeing the fashionably dressed Sir Clement at the gallery door, both sisters try their best to attract the attention of this “fine gentleman” (*Evelina* 105). Apparently, their true purpose of attending the opera is by no means to appreciate the performance on the stage. Instead, they come to see and be seen. If lucky enough, they might thus get a husband.

As the above shows, eighteenth-century women successfully adapted the language of the conduct book to their advantage. To demonstrate their “helpfulness,” women shouldered the task of establishing “reputation” for their fathers and husbands. Under the cover of “helpfulness,” women justified their walking out of the home and actively participated in all kinds of activities in the outer world, through which their life experiences and horizons were enriched and broadened. At the same time, women gained themselves an opportunity to penetrate into the public sphere. The boundary between the separated spheres was thus blurred.

However, this role was very likely to be questioned as women indulged themselves in displaying wealth and social standing through conspicuous consumption and leisure. In his *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, Torstein Veblen not only criticizes the leisured woman’s lavish spending but exposes her role in such spending. Giving up any productive activities and retreating into idleness, Veblen argues, the leisured woman ends up economically dependent. Her relationship to her husband is like that of a menial to a master. Or, even worse, she is her husband’s

“chattel” (182): her only “job” is to put on expensive attire and to show her leisuredness in public so as to foreground her husband’s financial power. Serving as a “vicarious consumer” (147), the wife purchases luxurious goods, gives costly entertainments, takes expensive vacations, and performs leisuredness in public. What she does actually is to display her husband’s wealth, that is, his ability to pay for luxuries as well as his wife’s life of idleness. In the whole show of conspicuous consumption and leisure, the wife only functions as an ornament to build and enhance the pecuniary reputation of “the master” (121), i.e., the husband. In *Evelina*, to attend Mrs. Stanley’s private ball, the three women—Mrs. Mirvan, Miss Mirvan and Evelina, spend a morning shopping. After buying silks, caps, gauzes, ribbons and a suit of linen, they all have the latest headdress—towering hairdos, which are elaborate mountainous structures with pads, wire and false hair mingled with lard and powder (*Evelina* 29-31). All the items they prepare for the ball are fashionable and thus expensive. On the surface, Mrs. Mirvan shows the purchasing power of the upper class and constructs her position of economic superiority. But, in reality, it is the purchasing power of the man behind her that matters: it is her husband who pays for everything in their day-to-day life.

Indeed, Veblen’s argument is strong and powerful. In spite of the fact that women’s social roles were limited and confined in the eighteenth century, surprisingly women were able to manipulate those roles for their own purposes. Taking advantage of the identity of the “vicarious consumer” (Veblen 147), women fortunately gained an opportunity to justify their walking out of the home, which actually had not been enjoyed by their forerunning generations. They not only spent money and pursued pleasure but gained an opportunity to explore the world. In the first place, through touching, feeling, and examining different kinds of commodities, such as fabrics,

women gradually learned how to correctly choose among numerous goods and further cultivated their taste. In *Evelina*, the shopping trip for attending Mrs. Stanley's ball is an example. At the mercer's and the milliner's, the male clerks strongly recommend numerous silks, caps, and ribbons, trying to persuade the ladies to buy everything they present "with an air of so much importance" (*Evelina* 30). According to Evelina's account, her group apparently is not swayed by these clerks probably because Mrs. Mirvan has made plans about what to buy before the trip. Evelina even satirizes these "finical" and "affected" clerk in her account, wondering "how long they [have] left off wearing them" (*Evelina* 30). In this case, women are not blind purchasers or impulse buyers. Instead, they are quite clear-headed while shopping.

Secondly, walking out of the home helped women connect directly with the outer world, which in turn offered them such opportunities as developing social skills, sharing information with friends, attending cultural activities, and gaining knowledge. In a word, their horizons were greatly broadened. During her stay in London, Evelina and the Mirvans visit fashionable places almost every day. In those places, she has direct contact with the latest fashions and the most popular cultural activities, which in turn helps cultivate her taste and widen her horizons. Definitely, such rewarding experiences are precious for Evelina since they are by no means obtainable in the retired Berry Hill.

Most importantly, walking out of the home helped sharpen women's judgment. In her letter to Mr. Villars, Lady Howard strongly suggests that Evelina should come to "see something of the world." In her view, isolating Evelina from the outer world cannot completely prevent Evelina from any dangers. Instead, her "lively and romantic imaginations" may paint the world "as a paradise of which [she has] been beguiled" (*Evelina* 18). When Evelina first comes to London, her ignorance of the

London world indeed causes her trouble. But, in the process of confronting difficulties, she gains better knowledge and learns how to deal with the outer world. Able to think and judge, Evelina can successfully prevent herself from falling prey to those malicious men around her.

3.2 Exploiting the “Proper Lady”

Produced within a specific context, the “Proper Lady” was basically an anxious response to enormous social changes resulting from rapid economic growth, among which the breakdown of traditional gender roles was significant. By systematically regulating every aspect of women’s behavior, conduct-book writers clearly fashioned the “Proper Lady” and presented her as the “desirable” woman. The ultimate goal, to be sure, was to confine women to domesticity so as to solidify traditional gender roles and perpetuate male domination. To have such a female ideal duplicated among the contemporaries, Ingrid H. Tague observes in her *Women of Quality*, the most effective strategy was to create a self-regulating woman who was constantly conscious of her sex and always kept her behavior and thoughts under close surveillance. Even when she was all alone, she would behave as if someone were still around watching (22-23).

For decades, how eighteenth-century women reacted to such a female ideal has aroused the interest of scholars. Burney’s early journals, as recent studies show, reveal her constant anxiety when struggling between her passion for writing and her fear of being discovered writing. Deemed against modesty, a woman who dared to write in the eighteenth century would be labeled “unladylike” or “unwomanly,” which quite ruined her reputation. In a letter to “Daddy” Crisp in early 1779, Burney explicitly expressed her dilemma, declaring that she would “a thousand times forfeit [her] character as a *Writer*, than risk ridicule and censure as a *Female*” (*EJL* 3: 212).

Obviously, the reputation as a lady was far more important for her if she had to choose

between name and writing. On finding Burney's authorship, Elizabeth Montagu was amazed that "so delicate a Girl could write so *Boisterous* a book" (*DL* 2: 8). Here, Montagu's surprise exactly demonstrated Burney's success in hiding her talent for writing while still playing a proper lady. Before this discovery, no one would have believed such a "delicate" lady would write and even publish a novel.

As a matter of fact, Burney was not alone in experiencing the split self. Eighteenth-century women, particularly those who were concerned about their reputation, faced the same double bind as Burney. The reason which led to such a split self or discrepancy between appearance and reality, most critics agree, lay in the social expectation of female propriety. In the culture of appearance, what people thought and talked about really mattered. To boldly confront the society would be fatal since the price of being labeled "unladylike" would be too dear. Under such circumstances, a woman would choose to disguise herself as a proper lady at all costs. Through outwardly putting on the mask of modesty, a woman could successfully defend her reputation (Poovey 25; Epstein 111-12; Nachumi 130).

The theatrical nature of eighteenth-century women's daily lives can be best illustrated by the experience of Burney's *Evelina*. From *Evelina*'s letters, readers can easily discern a huge difference between the *Evelina* who narrates and the *Evelina* who is narrated. When she is first introduced, *Evelina* is described by Mr. Villars, her guardian, as innocent and artless. In his letters to Lady Howard, Mr. Villars observes that "to guard [*Evelina*] against [the] delusions [of pleasure and dissipation]" (*Evelina* 19) has long been his concern. Because of that, he has intentionally educated her to "[know] nothing of the world" (*Evelina* 20) in a retired place, Berry Hill. In his eye, she is "innocent as an angel, and artless as purity" (*Evelina* 21). More than once in his letters, he advises his charge not to be influenced by the gaieties of London life,

hoping that she is still his little angel whenever she comes back home. Even, he has planned Evelina's future, expecting to see her serve as "the *ornament* of her neighbourhood, and the pride and delight of her family" and to see her employ herself in "useful and *innocent* occupations" (*Evelina* 130; emphases added). To put it straight, all he reiterates is exactly his desire to reduce Evelina to an innocent and artless child by keeping her in the shelter of the country, which is immune to the dangerous outer world.

Seventeen-year-old Evelina is well aware of her expected role. As a charge, Evelina is economically dependent on Mr. Villars. It is Mr. Villars who has all the power to make any decision for her, such as whether she can make a visit to her friend Maria Mirvan at Howard Grove or not. Knowing about the rightful expectations on her, Evelina constructs and presents herself according to the guardian's expectations. Her success in image building is assured as she arrives at Howard Grove. Upon seeing Evelina, Lady Howard praises her as "a little angel," favorably impressed by her "complete beauty," "natural grace," "excellent understanding," "inexperience," "innocency," and "politeness" (*Evelina* 22). Even though far away in London, Evelina still has to maintain the fiction of innocence and artlessness to the guardian in her letters home. In Letter 13 of Volume 1, for example, Evelina recounts the embarrassment at the ridotto caused by her ignorance of the world. At the end of the letter, she sorrows over her awkward situation: "I am *too inexperienced and ignorant* to conduct myself with propriety in this town, where everything is new to me, and many things are unaccountable and perplexing" (*Evelina* 53; emphasis added). Instead of giving any advice in his reply, Mr. Villars is quite pleased with her embarrassment: "I am sure I need not say, how much 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” (*Evelina* 61). Obviously, Evelina is an excellent actress, successful in constructing an image of innocence and artlessness. It is through such an image that she is able to manipulate people’s opinion. But, to take a closer look at this image, readers may thus come to realize that Evelina’s excellent acting skills in reality function as a tool for survival. Since Mr. Villars has power to decide anything for her, all she can do is try to sway his decisions. For her, the most effective way is to construct herself according to Mr. Villars’s expectations and maneuver such construction to her advantage.

As a matter of fact, wherever she is, it is quite evident that the Evelina who is narrated is constantly conscious of her expected role even though she is far away from Berry Hill. But, under the cover of innocence and artlessness actually exists another Evelina. In Letter 20 of Volume 1, Evelina recounts to Mr. Villars her attending Congreve’s *Love for Love* at Drury Lane Theatre. During the play, the Evelina narrated is “perpetually out of countenance” since it is “so extremely indelicate” that she can “neither make any observations [herself], nor venture to listen to those of others” (*Evelina* 87). To the eyes of the people around her at the very moment, Evelina’s response to that “indelicate” play is considered proper behavior. But, if Evelina were really as “innocent as an angel, and artless as purity” (*Evelina* 21), she probably would not perceive the indelicacy of the play so readily. Nor would she react so strongly. Another clue that betrays the true Evelina is her comment on this play: though “provoking,” it is “exceedingly entertaining,” “fraught with wit and entertainment” (*Evelina* 87). Therefore, the true Evelina is not as innocent as her guardian thinks; she actually not only understands but enjoys the play. It is because of the awareness of her expected role that she is obliged to blush or appear innocent and modest. As for Mr. Villars, he seems to be gullible, taking in whatever his ward writes

or presents. If not, it can only be attributed to Evelina's excellent acting skills.

Frankly, the virtues essential to the "Proper Lady" may easily get women into dangerous or awkward situations. For example, female innocence and chastity by definition are needed to be protected, which unfortunately may be used by men as an excuse to turn women into their sexual prey. In the abduction episode, Sir Cement hastily pushes Evelina into his chariot after the opera, offering to escort her home. Instead of sending her home, Sir Clement orders the coachman to go a wrong way, planning to seduce and rape her. Thus, "protecting a woman home" can be used by men as a cover for their sexual advances.

However, the same virtues can be skillfully maneuvered by women to gain an advantage. After the foot race, Lord Merton in his drunkenness became extremely forward with Evelina, seizing her hand and speaking impudently. Angered, Evelina voices a wish to have a brother to protect her: "Would to Heaven . . . that I, too, had a brother!—and then I should not be exposed to such treatment!" (*Evelina* 348). Right at this moment, Lord Orville quickly steps forth and promises to act as her friend and her brother: "allow *me* to be your friend; think of me as if I were indeed your brother, and let me entreat you to accept my best services" (*Evelina* 349). Here, Evelina's declaration—"Would to Heaven . . . that I, too, had a brother!" clearly exposes her helplessness, which in turn luckily wins her *a lord's* protection and respect.

As a matter of fact, Evelina is constantly aware of her appearance and carefully constructs herself as a "desirable" woman throughout the novel. Otherwise, a woman of obscure birth is unlikely to marry a noble lord, though eventually legitimized as a baronet's daughter at the end of the novel. In the process of appealing to Lord Orville, Evelina not only foregrounds her helplessness but emphasizes her need for someone's guidance. In an earlier scene, Evelina bemoans to Lord Orville that she keeps making

mistakes, though not on purpose but because she is “*new to the world, and unused to acting for [herself]*” (*Evelina* 340; emphases added). At a loss what to do, she badly needs someone to “guide and instruct [her] upon every occasion.” “There is no young creature,” she continues, “who so greatly wants, or so earnestly wishes for, the advice and assistance of her friends, as [she does]” (*Evelina* 340). This passage fully demonstrates how Evelina rhetorically constructs herself: by shaping herself as a child, she is supposed to be unable to think and act for herself facing a world totally new and unfamiliar to her. So inexperienced and helpless is she that she really needs someone to guide her through the world. Basically, what Evelina is trying to convey is her innocence, passivity, and submission, all of which are the main virtues essential to the “Proper Lady.” Such self-representation surely is a big success. Accurately corresponding to Evelina’s wish, Lord Orville steps forward again, saying that he is “capable,—of supplying the place of such a friend to Miss Anville [Evelina]!” (*Evelina* 340).

As the above demonstrates, Evelina is not only good at image building but skilled in verbal artistry. Skillfully exploiting the image of the “Proper Lady” and the language of femininity to her advantage, Evelina is successful in guiding Lord Orville’s opinion. Like Mr. Villars, Lord Orville takes in whatever Evelina displays and says. In his eye, Evelina is innocent and artless. In his confrontation with Sir Clement, Lord Orville declares that all he does is for Evelina, who is “very young, very inexperienced” and “has an artlessness of disposition” (*Evelina* 383, 384). To such a lady who “is too young for suspicion” (*Evelina* 384), Lord Orville declares his duty to guide and protect her: “She does not . . . see the dangers to which she is exposed, and . . . [he feels] a strong desire to point them out” (*Evelina* 384).

Truly, Evelina is young. But, deep down, she is not totally ignorant of the world.

In the abduction episode, for example, as she notices that the chariot is heading for a place unknown to her, Evelina is frightened and aware of possible danger she is exposed to. Under such circumstances, she chooses to pretend innocence, instead of bluntly unveiling Sir Clement's true intention. She is afraid that the exposure of his wicked intention might impel him to carry out his plan of raping her. To save herself, Evelina suddenly opens the door, pretending to jump out of the moving chariot. Then, she tries to turn a possible case of rape into a murder, crying that if Sir Clement "[does] not intend to murder [her], for mercy's, for pity's sake, let [her] get out" (*Evelina* 110). To appease her, Sir Clement has the chariot head for Queen-Ann-Street at once. Again, readers witness how Evelina successfully wards off a possible danger by means of her apparent "innocence" and verbal artistry.

To sum up, eighteenth-century conduct books for women were produced to restore the traditional gender roles and maintain male domination by creating a passive and submissive female ideal for women to follow. But, contrary to male expectation, deceptive and uncontrollable women were produced: instead of succumbing to the rules inscribed in conduct manuals, women exploited those rules. They put on the mask of the "Proper Lady" and manipulated the language of femininity for their own purposes. In Evelina's case, though she declares that Lord Orville will be "the sole study of [her] happy life" (*Evelina* 429) after marriage, it does not mean she will necessarily succumb to Lord Orville's authority. With her skillfulness in image building and verbal artistry, it is predictable that Evelina can easily continue to manipulate Lord Orville after marriage. Through employing the "Proper Lady" and the language of femininity to her advantage, Evelina is able to easily guide and sway her guardian and future husband. Therefore, instead of helping maintain male domination, Evelina successfully destroys the patriarchal system from

the inside or, to be accurate, from the very core, and turns the tables.



Conclusion

Frances Burney's *Evelina* is an outstanding example of the interplay between fiction and theater in the eighteenth century. Not only does it testify to Burney's wide knowledge of and her familiarity with the drama, but the world presented in this novel exactly reflects the theatricality and performativeness of the eighteenth-century British society as well. Such theatricality and performativeness in fact result from the remarkable development of the theater, conspicuous consumption and social emulation, and a social tendency which encourages eighteenth-century women to imitate the female ideal—the "Proper Lady," among which the latter particularly imposes considerable limitation and repression upon contemporary women.

It has been widely acknowledged that the eighteenth century, particularly the years between 1760 and 1820, witnessed the popularity and influence of conduct books for women, central to which was the concept of the "Proper Lady." Produced within a specific context, the "Proper Lady" was exactly an anxious response to the breakdown of traditional gender roles. Due to commercialization and industrialization, Britain's economy grew rapidly during the course of the eighteenth century. As family incomes increased, women were no longer confined to the home or busy with household affairs. Instead, they enjoyed public recreations and engaged themselves in purchasing consumer goods. In the eyes of moralists, women's growing presence in public places would result in such serious problems as the ignoring of women's domestic role and duties, the jeopardizing of the family economy, and even the feminizing of the "masculine" public sphere. At the very moment, a campaign was launched to re-shape the contemporary women by constructing a female ideal, the "Proper Lady," with a purpose to shore up the boundary between the separated spheres and push women back to the domesticity.

To promote this female ideal, conduct-book writers first embarked on defining women's nature and status on the basis of biological differences. According to eighteenth-century anatomy, women, in comparison with their male counterparts, had smaller brains and a more delicate nervous system. Conduct-book writers thus argued that women inherently lacked reason, unable to govern their behavior and think rationally. In their view, the lack of reason also suggested that it was far beyond women's capabilities to deal with public affairs and develop their intellect. Apparently, this theory intended to justify female exclusion from the public sphere. Since the public sphere was too harsh and too complicated for women, the private sphere accordingly became the very domain where women should stay. What was worse, such a theory was employed to determine women's status. Again, due to the lack of reason, women were considered inferior both mentally and intellectually to their male counterparts, which was consequently taken to naturalize male domination and female subordination.

Next, conduct-book writers took pains to construct the "Proper Lady" as a female ideal by presenting detailed instructions for "female propriety." Glorifying femininity, didactic writers extolled certain qualities "exclusively" belonging to women—modesty, chastity, silence, frugality, obedience, and benevolence—and encouraged women to cultivate these virtues so as to uphold the social and moral order. Besides specifying the very virtues for women to focus upon, advice writers further prescribed to women how to perform these abstract virtues in their daily life through specific behavior. Clearly, what advice writers intended to do here was to control women mentally and physically with a purpose to standardize women as a group. As a matter of fact, the very virtues praised in conduct manuals were passive in essence. To cultivate such virtues, women became passive as well, required to display

their complete devotion, willing submission, and patient endurance. In a word, the “Proper Lady” was created to regulate and control contemporary women. Through specifically defining “female propriety,” advice writers constructed the “Proper Lady” as the “desirable” woman to re-shape women’s mind and behavior. The ultimate goal surely was to confine women to domesticity so as to maintain separated spheres and thus to perpetuate male domination.

Penetrating into every aspect of eighteenth-century women’s daily life, the “Proper Lady” principle was so powerful that it was risky for a woman to set her face against it. In the culture of appearance, what people thought and talked about really mattered. In that case, to boldly confront the society would be fatal since the price of being labeled “unladylike,” “unwomanly,” or “improper” would be too dear. Hence, how to deal with the “Proper Lady” definitely became an important issue for contemporary women, particularly for those who had independent mind like Frances Burney.

To develop countermeasures, the most convenient and effective strategy for eighteenth-century women was adapting the language of conduct books for their own purpose. According to conduct books, a good wife not only took care of household affairs but needed to be “helpful” to her husband. The wife’s helpfulness, by definition, meant trying her best to help establish her husband’s “reputation” by creating and maintaining a “decent” or even “perfect” front for her family. Supported by a right cause, wives found themselves a good reason to justify their walking out of the home and their indulging in conspicuous consumption. They thus put on fashionable apparel and attended public places so as to see and be seen. In this sense, the entire social area served as a large stage where women could gorgeously display themselves. But, for eighteenth-century women, what really signified here definitely

went beyond the winning of the reputation as a good wife. Walking out of the home actually helped bring women into direct contact with the outside world, where they gained opportunities to develop social skills, share information with friends, attend cultural activities, and obtain knowledge. Therefore, by actively exploring the world, women's horizons were thus greatly broadened.

In much the same way, Frances Burney also used the “lady” discourse constructed in conduct manuals to have her writing propensity fulfilled. In the eighteenth century, writing and publishing, by definition, belonged to the public sphere, that is, to the male. A woman who dared to step into this forbidden domain surely would encounter strong disapproval. According to conduct books, both female writing and publishing palpably violated the rule of female modesty since writing had long been regarded as a masculine occupation and publishing, worse yet, would expose the authoress to the public eye. For a woman, either being looked at or being talked of would be very likely to cause great devastation, not only fatally ruining her reputation but bringing disgrace to the whole family. Under such circumstances, the composition and later the publication of *Evelina* to a great extent would make Burney sink into a dangerous state. Fully aware of the damaging consequences of violating female propriety, Burney did her best to resist any forms of identification: copying the manuscript in a feigned hand, sending her brother Charles as her agent to negotiate with the publisher, and finally having the novel published anonymously. All these strategies, she claimed, were made to protect her modesty and avoid tarnishing her father's name as well. In the dedicatory poem to *Evelina*, Burney represented herself as a dutiful daughter who really cared about maintaining her father's reputation, stating that the “Concealment” of her authorship aimed “not [to] sink, [her father's] fame” (*Evelina* 3). In such a wise and sophisticated way, Burney successfully

managed to publish *Evelina*, which would be justified even if her authorship was discovered.

In the eighteenth century, women were advised not to write plays, particularly comedies and farces, since the drama in essence was a public genre and writing for the theater would expose female playwrights to the public more frequently. Hence, it is quite understandable why Burney's father disapproved of her writing a comedy and why Burney subsequently turned this repressed desire into her novels. For Burney, writing comedy into her novels, to some extent, fulfilled her longtime wish to write a real comedy. But, more importantly, comedy was adapted and maneuvered by Burney as a writing strategy. In essence, a comedy is less serious and aims to evoke laughter as its primary end. Accordingly, by writing comedy into her *Evelina*, Burney was able to create a false impression that this novel was neither serious nor aggressive. As a result, she would thus escape social censorship and strategically use comedy as a cover to "smuggle in" her feminist criticism against sexist assumptions.

Among the comic conventions used in *Evelina*, the most effective is Burney's strategic combination of farce and violence. By juxtaposing humor and horror, a good loud laugh may be evoked first, but feelings of discomfort, sympathy, and even anger may soon surge up within viewers, which in turn may impel viewers to take action against injustice like *Evelina*. As a matter of fact, what Burney truly intends to reveal is the very truth of women's situation that lies behind her criticism against male brutality and cruelty: women are constantly under the threat of male violence and once a woman dares to challenge male authority, she will be severely "punished" like Madame Duval. But, such disclosure does not mean to intimidate women, but to awaken them. Through reading this very novel, eighteenth-century female readers may be thus awakened to their similar situation, realizing that they are also constantly

under the threat of male violence. If so, women may hence stick together and be like Evelina to step forth for themselves and for other women against patriarchal oppression.

As for Evelina, she strategically exploits the discourse of the “Proper Lady” to her advantage. An economically dependent ward, Evelina clearly knows that she does not have any power to make any decisions for herself. Fully aware of her expected role, Evelina intentionally represents herself according to her guardian’s expectations, constructing herself as innocent, passive, and submissive. So successful is her image building that she not only gains herself a chance to walk out of the retired Berry Hill and leave her guardian’s “protection” behind but accompanies Mrs. and Miss Mirvan to London to explore the world. Her apparent innocence also works well in her relationship with Lord Orville, the hero of the novel. In their conversations, Evelina reiterates that she extremely needs “someone” to protect and guide her since she is “*new to the world, and unused to acting for [herself]*” (*Evelina* 340; emphases added). Exactly answering Evelina’s wish, Lord Orville immediately declares his willingness to be her friend, her brother, and eventually her husband to protect and guide her through life. Certainly, Evelina is a master of image building and verbal artistry. Rhetorically creating herself as inexperienced and helpless, she claims that she is unable to think and act for herself and that she really needs someone to lead her through the world. Such verbal art, obviously, secures the desired effect and she wins a lord to be her husband in the end. Therefore, by skillfully exploiting the image of the “Proper Lady,” Evelina undoubtedly succeeds in guiding and manipulating the opinions of two important and powerful men in her life—her guardian and her future husband. Instead of being controlled, Evelina is the very person that has power over the men around her.

Indeed, women never truly succumb to male domination though men never cease their efforts to control women. However oppressive the eighteenth-century discourse of femininity was, women were still able to develop their own ways to resist it. Under the cover of comedy, Burney exposes male violence and female oppression, which in turn serves to evoke women's awareness of their situation and further to impel women to take action against patriarchy. To be "desirable," moreover, women were told to internalize and imitate the "Proper Lady." Accordingly, women could be artificial and affected, but they were not necessarily weak. Skillfully maneuvering the language of femininity and playing the "Proper Lady," Evelina not only gains herself advantages but successfully manipulates the men around her. Therefore, by destroying the patriarchal system from its core, women truly resist male domination.



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