

# ■ “I Suppose It Is Not Sentimental Enough!”: *Evelina* and the Power of Feeling\*

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## Abstract

Despite its dramatic description of weeping, fainting, nervous disorder and recovery of long-lost family members, Frances Burney's novel *Evelina* is traditionally regarded as a novel of manners and thus as a far cry from eighteenth-century sentimental fiction. The representation of feeling in this novel therefore is either dismissed as unimportant or subordinated to the discussion of propriety. This article argues that feeling in *Evelina* deserves critical scrutiny precisely because the novel is not sentimental enough. By comparing moments of intense emotion in Burney's novel and those in contemporary sentimental fiction, I would reveal Burney's disapproval and revision of the emotional paradigms popularized by sentimental novelists. While Laurence Sterne and Henry Mackenzie believe that to feel intensely means to feel spontaneously, privileging impulsive passion that fragments human interactions into moments of transport, Burney maintains that the virtue of feeling lies in its ability to cement interpersonal connections and to last through such desirable ties. This reading will refocus the issue of power in *Evelina*, not least by showing how and why feeling becomes an unexpected and unlikely source of power for both genders.

**Keywords:** Frances Burney, *Evelina*, feeling, sentimental fiction, power

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Is Frances Burney's *Evelina* (1778) an eighteenth-century sentimental novel? In the 1770s, when the adjective "sentimental" still retained its favorable sense of exhibiting refined feelings and moral virtue, the answer was an enthusiastic yes.<sup>1</sup> One anonymous early reviewer of *Evelina* positioned it firmly in the tradition of literary sentimentalism and argued that the quality of this work "would have disgraced neither the head nor the heart of Richardson" (Rev. of *Evelina* 202). Implicit in this comment is the reviewer's belief that the sentimental narratives of Samuel Richardson serve two purposes, both of which are fulfilled in *Evelina*. If Richardson consistently invests his works with moral messages that could improve "the head" of his readers, *Evelina* exudes a similar instructional spirit. With its description of the vulgarity of impertinent remarks and the attraction of good manners, the novel offers useful advice on how to navigate an increasingly commercial society. If Richardson aims at arousing readers' tearful sympathy for the misfortune of his heroines, *Evelina* works on its readers' heart as well. The same reviewer emphasized how affecting reading *Evelina* could be: "the father of a family, observing the knowledge of the world and the lessons of experience which it contains, will recommend it to his daughters; they will weep and . . . grow wiser" (202).

But modern critics of *Evelina* curiously disagree with their eighteenth-century predecessors and shy away from discussing this novel in terms of literary sentimentalism. On the face of it, this strain of reading is justified. For one thing, *Evelina* flouts some of the essential formal and thematic features that constitute sentimental fiction.<sup>2</sup> At the heart of a sentimental novel usually lies a conflict between a benevolent yet vulnerable hero and a hostile and unfeeling world. The pressure and pain this world inflicts on the hero is often so overwhelming that he has no other alternative but to quit it, either by death or self-exile. In sharp contrast, *Evelina* is about how a young lady gradually negotiates a secure niche in a fashionable society.

Moreover, a sentimental novel is fundamentally an anti-bildungsroman. The men and women of feeling that it portrays either refuse to renounce their child-like innocence and adopt adult sophistication or fail to perceive how social expectations circumscribe female subjectivity. In other words, "instead of a progress toward maturity, [a sentimental novel] deals sympathetically with the character who cannot grow up and find an active place in society" (Starr 181).

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<sup>1</sup> This adjective acquired negative connotations conspicuously and was attributed to superficial, disingenuous sentiments during the last two decades of the eighteenth century. See Barker-Benfield 287-395; Todd 141, and Ellis 190-221.

<sup>2</sup> For a summary of the defining characteristics of sentimental fiction in the eighteenth-century, see Starr 181-98.

*Evelina* once again does not fit this description. Its heroine slowly but surely grows from a timid young girl ignorant of social etiquette to a brave woman able to resist male aggression. As Betty Rizzo explains, "with all the sensibility in the world, *Evelina* sets out with no experience and little ability to judge" (83). But as the story unfolds, she acquires both autonomous judgement and "the ability to act on it" (83).<sup>3</sup> Starr's verdict on *Evelina* seems final and widely-accepted: "*Evelina* is commonly regarded not as a sentimental novel but as a kind of bildungsroman enlivened by social comedy" (196).

But if *Evelina* is purely a "bildungsroman enlivened by social comedy" of manners, how can we explain why the novel features so many scenes of weeping, fainting and nervous disorder, all of which are standard elements in sentimental fiction? How can we explain Burney's emphasis in the preface that her heroine has "a feeling heart?" (9). Recent critics have taken a closer look at the role of feeling in *Evelina*, aligning the novel with the culture of sensibility that created such influential novels as Lawrence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* (1768) and Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771). Patricia L. Hamilton draws an analogy between politeness in *Evelina* and sensibility in general and argues that both represent a corrective social force aiming at reforming male manners. Impoliteness specifically refers to an unwillingness or inability to show "deference to the feelings of others" (428). Closely analyzing the reconciliation between *Evelina* and her father, Virginia H. Cope demonstrates how the sentimental focus on filial tenderness helps *Evelina* negotiate the controversial issues of legitimate inheritance (73-78). As compelling as these readings are, they discuss the sentimental aspects of *Evelina* for the sake of other thematic concerns, subordinating the importance of feeling to politeness and properties respectively. It is as if the novel is not sentimental enough to justify a sustained analysis of its representation of feeling *per se*.

This article argues that feeling in *Evelina* deserves a more thorough scrutiny precisely because it is not sentimental enough by eighteenth-century standard. By comparing moments of intense emotion in Burney's novel and those in contemporary sentimental fiction, I would suggest that Burney disapproves of and consistently revises the emotional paradigms popularized by sentimental novelists. In particular, while Sterne and Mackenzie believe that to feel intensely means to feel spontaneously, privileging impulsive passion that fragments human interactions into moments of transport, Burney maintains that the virtue of feeling lies in its ability to cement interpersonal connections and to last through

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<sup>3</sup> For another two important discussions of *Evelina* in light of female development, see Doody 45 and Fraiman 32-58.

such desirable ties. This reading will refocus the issue of power in *Evelina*, but not in terms of gender inequality, as is often the case in existing scholarship. Although I agree with the claim of many feminist critics that women in *Evelina* represent a disempowered group persecuted by wealthy and wolfish men, I will demonstrate how and why feeling in this novel becomes an unexpected and unlikely source of power for both sexes.<sup>4</sup> Before presenting my arguments in greater length, I will first address the sentimental moment in eighteenth-century narratives of sensibility, which, I believe, is the target of Burney's revisionist energy.

### The Sentimental Moment and the Construction of Feeling

In the preface to *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* (1753), Richardson claims that all the following letters are “written, as it were, to the *Moment*, while the Heart is agitated by Hopes and Fears, on events undecided” (4, original emphasis). Richardson is deeply interested in the causes and consequences of an emotional moment, when the distress of his heroine becomes so great that it affects herself, other characters and the reader. The immediacy and affective intensity of that moment, Richardson insists, can best be registered through letter-writing. Although not every sentimental writer in the eighteenth-century subscribes to the power Richardson attributes to epistolary narratives, most of them share his interests in “the moment” and punctuate their texts with momentary ecstasy, grief, rage, compassion or swooning. As Stephen Ahern has convincingly demonstrated, this fascination with an exquisitely emotional moment infiltrates a variety of novelistic forms that falls under the banner of literary sentimentalism. In early eighteenth-century amatory fiction, this fascination translates into “a dream of union with the beloved in a moment of erotic bliss” (Ahern 38). In mid-century narratives of sensibility, it manifests itself in episodes of compassionate encounters with suffering friends. In late-century Gothic fiction, it evokes sublime terror that expands the heroine's mind or violent horror that threatens her existence (Ahern 38).

Permeating the majority of eighteenth-century novels, these moments of emotional transport conjure up two assumptions about feeling and circumscribe contemporary perception of its nature and value. First, these sentimental moments are by definition short-lived, drawing readers' attention to the suddenness

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<sup>4</sup> Influential feminist criticism of the novel can be found in Staves 371 and Fraiman 45-46.

of feeling rather than to its continuity. A sentimental hero never takes time to evaluate his feeling critically. Scrutinizing the cause of his emotional response and weighing up its consequence would immediately disqualify him as a man of feeling. As Starr aptly puts it, the focus of a sentimental novel "is not on actions, which involve choice and responsibility, but on reactions—particularly reactions so abrupt as to preclude deliberation" (188). In other words, sentimental novelists narrow the value of feeling down to transient spontaneity. The gradual evolution of feeling through time and its defiance of the eroding power of time are irrelevant to them.

This emphasis on immediate reaction to external stimuli at the expense of responsible actions problematizes the sentimental moment and reveals another assumption about feeling: that it necessarily invokes powerlessness. This assumption can be observed clearly in the general inefficacy of a sentimental hero's sympathy for the socially disadvantaged. Although tearful encounters in sentimental novels frequently expose social injustice and resultant unhappiness, they serve not so much to address the origin of that particular misfortune as to provide fleeting aesthetic pleasure for the audience of those unhappy scenes. Thus Sterne's Yorick and Mackenzie's Harley may readily sympathize and weep with heartbroken women that they meet, but forget these female victims of a patriarchal society soon afterwards. Satisfying their personal emotional need, their sympathy absolves them of social responsibility and yields little constructive attempt towards social reform. For them, "the immediate emotional response matters, in terms of the sentimental project, more than any action it might generate" (Spacks 134).

Feeling unleashed by the moment of transport is powerless not only because it fails to achieve any social good but also because it is literally associated with physical vulnerability. This dimension becomes apparent in the sentimental swoon that characterizes most eighteenth-century women of feeling. In Sarah Fielding's *The History of Ophelia* (1760), the heroine faints upon learning Lord Dorchester's decision to fight a duel for her sake. And in Elizabeth Inchbald's *A Simple Story* (1791), Miss Milner "sunk speechless on the floor" when she realized that the life of Dorriforth, whom she secretly loves, would be threatened by a duel with Sir Frederick Lawnly (67). Their fainting represents "a disadvantage for both heroines: it prevents them stopping the life-threatening event and assisting where they would be most needed" (Csengei 140). Their loss of consciousness confirms the association of feeling and weakness, suggesting that physical vulnerability and social powerlessness are two sides of the same coin.

With spontaneous reaction and powerlessness as its two constitutive elements, a typical sentimental moment militates against the formation of a lasting

connection between individuals. Because a man of feeling prioritizes immediate emotional pleasure, he is not interested in sustaining a relationship with the subject of his sympathy. When a woman of feeling faints, she literally and effectively disrupts her interaction with other characters. The dramatization of feeling in *Evelina* is not sentimental enough because it highlights how a lasting emotional bond emerges from an intensely sentimental moment and because, through this plot arrangement, it disputes the conventional association of feeling with instant gratification and vulnerability.

### Lasting Connections

Like many other eighteenth-century sentimental heroines, Evelina faints and weeps when her mind is burdened with overwhelming emotion. Unexpectedly discovering her maternal grandmother Madame Duval, she “sunk into Mrs. Mirvan’s arms,” “more dead than alive” (53). Returning to her native Berry Hill after a long stay in London, she “wept over” her guardian Villars’s hands (255). But it is important to notice that the person who arouses her strong feeling is neither a sexual predator nor a mere stranger but a family member. Why does Burney choose to make her heroine faint and weep in the presence of someone with whom her fate is intertwined? I would argue that this is because Burney wants to connect long-term relationship with powerful feeling, a connection overlooked by the preoccupation of the sentimental culture with impulsive reaction.

The compatibility between sentimental moments and long-lived affective bonds can be best observed in one particular episode of the novel, in which Evelina, for the first time in her life, disobeys Villars. After her London journey, Evelina returns to Berry Hill with a heavy heart. She has written a letter to Orville to apologize for her cousins’ taking advantage of his carriage. A rude reply, insinuating her intention to carry on secret correspondences with Orville, wounds her pride. Villars attempts to identify the cause of Evelina’s unhappiness, but Evelina tries to evade his enquiries. Tension between them builds up, culminating in a sentimental climax where Evelina, ashamed of her ungrateful reserve, explodes: “I burst into tears: with difficulty had I so long restrained them . . . ‘Say then,’ cried I, kneeling at his feet, ‘say then that you forgive me! . . . — my father! my protector!—my ever-honoured—ever-loved—my best and only friend!—say you forgive your Evelina, and she will study better to deserve your goodness!” (266). In this emotional declaration Evelina gives Villars three roles: father, protector and friend. The value of each role is predicated on sustained commitment. Indeed they are titles awarded to someone with whom

we wish to have or have already had a lasting connection. The order in which these three titles are arranged invites scrutiny. Villars has acted as Evelina's father and protector for seventeenth years. He cannot arrogate these titles to himself after Sir John Belmont fully acknowledges his paternal obligation and after Evelina marries. But Villars can always be Evelina's friend despite the change in her circumstances. Evelina's choice of words, "ever-honoured" and "ever-loved," also suggests that it is in the capacity of friend that Villars can develop a life-long connection with her. The spontaneous overflow of Evelina's powerful feeling channels her attention not to temporary aesthetic pleasure but to long-term relationships. As her feeling intensifies, she hits on the most flexible and capacious forms of interpersonal relations: friendship.

The importance of this sentimental moment lies not so much in Evelina's tearful excitement as in the affective bond it helps to secure after Evelina dries her tears. In particular, Evelina's reconciliation with Villars saves and strengthens three of her most cherished relationships. When Evelina chooses to withhold her confidence, Villars feels hurt and laments that "though Evelina is returned,—I have lost my child" (265). Gina Campbell argues that throughout the novel Villars consistently associates "child" with innocence. "I have lost my child" therefore implies that Evelina loses her chastity during her London journey, which is too severe a rebuke for Evelina's unwillingness to reveal her secrets. "Evelina's shock at the charge suggests how serious it is," Campbell thus concludes (566). However, Evelina's immediate response to this charge indicates that the cause of her shock lies elsewhere and that she takes Villars's "child" literally. "No, Sir, no," replied I, inexpressibly shocked, 'she is more yours than ever! Without you, the world would be a **desart** to her, and life a burthen" (265). Rather than defending her innocence, Evelina tries to express her gratitude towards Villars, not least by invoking what could have happened to her had Villars not adopted her after her mother's death. Evelina is shocked because she believes Villars is accusing her of a breach of filial piety. Villars's accusation in fact carries a real threat. Evelina is legally not his child and he can choose not to leave his fortune to her. Villars does not hesitate to intimate the consequence of his displeasure: "it pains . . . me you should ever remember that you have not a natural, an hereditary right to every thing within my power" (266). But Evelina's tears soften Villars's heart. After their emotional conversation, Evelina is once again "his sole joy, his only earthly hope, and the child of his bosom" (266).

This sentimental moment contributes to securing another two long-term relationships. Evelina's resentment at Orville's apparent insult nearly extinguishes her affection for him. "I will talk,—write,—think of him no more!" she declares

(262). However, her sentimental encounter with Villars obliges her to talk, write and think of Orville once more. In addition, Villars's astonishment upon hearing her stories and his attempt to excuse Orville alleviate Evelina's indignation and incline her to believe that Orville is really forgivable. Evelina concludes the account of this sentimental moment by mentioning Orville once again. Addressing her friend Maria Mirvan, she writes: "I entreat you not to acquaint even your dear mother with this affair; Lord Orville is a favourite with her, and why should I publish that he deserves not that honour" (268). Evelina's request that Mrs. Mirvan's good opinion about Orville should remain untarnished not only contradicts her previous decision not to think of him anymore. It also testifies to her continuous affection for him.

It is worth noticing that Evelina relates her sentimental experience to her bosom friend Maria. Julia L. Epstein has argued that Evelina "maintains the selective privilege of the creative artist throughout her narrative" (117). She carefully edits her letters to Villars, describing her adventures from the moral perspective of which Villars would approve. On the contrary, her letters to Maria are "direct, their style colloquial and forthright, their tone unstudied" (118). Intrigued by the contrast between these two distinct groups of letters, Epstein argues: "there is a second novel here, over which *Evelina* rests like a palimpsest—the novel that Evelina's letters and conversations with a peer, another young woman, would comprise" (119). If Evelina's respective relationships with Maria and Villars are capable of producing two different novels, the difference between them nevertheless evaporates in the very letter at the center of which lies Evelina's sentimental reconciliation with her guardian. This letter begins by linking her friendship with Maria and her filial sentiment, treating both as a good cause for letter-writing: "my dear Miss Mirvan . . . I have . . . at present, sufficient matter for a letter, in relating a conversation I had yesterday with Mr. Villars" (262). At the end of this letter, we see again that Evelina places her friend and her guardian on an equal footing: "to you, and to Mr. Villars, I vow an unremitting confidence" (268). The sentimental moment bolsters Evelina's connection with Maria in two ways. On the one hand, it provides Evelina with interesting materials worthy of communicating to her best friend. Her regular correspondence with Maria plays a key role in sustaining their friendship despite their separation. On the other hand, it allows Evelina to compare Maria with Villars and draw a fitting analogy. Both of them, she declares, deserve her "unremitting confidence" and lasting affection. Reflecting on the affecting revelation of her secrets, Evelina writes: "dear to my remembrance will ever be that moment" (266). That moment is dear to her because it does not implicate her in egoistic sentimentality but considerably improves her interpersonal relationships.

## "Dear to My Remembrance Will Ever be That Moment"

Evelina's association of long-term memory with an emotional occurrence points to another reason that Burney's novel appears not sentimental enough. Like contemporary sentimental novelists, Burney incorporates momentary transports into her narrative. But these dramatic moments reveal not so much her preoccupation with instant emotional gratification as her interest in what happens when feeling is allowed to span a longer period of time. This experimental spirit infiltrates two of the most emotional episodes in *Evelina*: Macartney's adventure in France and Evelina's reunion with her father.

Brought up in a single-parent family and designed for the church, Macartney is a poor Scottish man with apparently little prospect of prosperity. His visit to France, however, transforms his life. In Paris he falls in love with an English lady, Miss Belmont. Their affection is clandestine but honest. Miss Belmont's father, Sir John Belmont, strongly opposes their relationship and accuses Macartney of seducing his daughter. Infuriated by this unjust affront, Macartney fights a duel with and severely wounds the father of his beloved. Later Macartney finds that he nearly commits the crime of patricide and incest—his lover turns out to be his half-sister. To allay Sir John Belmont's fears about his daughter being seduced or abducted, Macartney stays in London and waits for his arrival. There he is insulted by his landlords, the snobbish Branghtons, for his inability to pay his rent. There he experiences the comfort of sympathetic benevolence when Evelina, perceiving pistols in his pocket and fearing an impending suicide, rushes into his room to stop him and offers her purse. Combining frustrated love, passionate encounter, social injustice, financial distress and the balm of sympathy, Macartney's story suggests Burney's familiarity with the paraphernalia of sentimental fiction. But, with a conventional sentimental hero, Burney in fact attempts to introduce a fresh perspective on feeling.

Macartney's unhappiness arguably starts with the discovery by Sir John Belmont of his secret liaison with his daughter. According to Macartney himself, "the sudden and unexpected return of her father . . . proved the beginning of the misery which has ever since devoured me . . . he darted into the room with the rage of a madman. Heavens! What a scene followed!—what abusive language did the shame of a clandestine affair . . . induce me to brook" (228). The interruption of a private conversation by an angry father, who, apprehensive of his daughter's honor, accuses a young man of villainy and seduction: this plot arrangement bears a striking resemblance to the Emily Atkins episode in Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling*. Seduced and abandoned by her lover during her father's absence, Miss Atkins is forced into prostitution to earn a

living. Her pitiable condition attracts Harley's attention and he visits her for a more detailed story. During their conversation, her father unexpectedly enters the room: "the door burst open, and a man entered in the garb of an officer. When he discovered his daughter and Harley, he started back a few paces; his look assumed a furious wildness! he laid his hand on his sword . . . 'Villain,' he cried, 'thou seest a father who had once a daughter's honour to preserve; blasted as it now is, behold him ready to avenge its loss!'" (Mackenzie 50). Like Belmont, Mr. Atkins resorts to a stream of invective to vent his resentment. And both fathers are ready to revenge themselves on the assumed ravisher. But the similarity between Macartney's experience and Harley's adventure stops here.

Significantly, Mr. Atkins only "laid his hand on his sword" but did not strike. His daughter intervenes and directs his anger towards herself: "strike here a wretch, whose misery cannot end but with that death she deserves" (Mackenzie 50). As a result, Mr. Atkins's anger does not bring about more dramatic action but culminates in sentimental speechlessness. "Her father would have spoken; his lips quivered, his cheek grew pale! . . . he burst into tears" (50). Mr. Atkins's tears, mingled with those of her daughter and Harley, quickly dissolve the tension between these three characters. As the emotional intensity subsides, so does the narrator's interest in further developing this event. The narrative focuses on Harley's feeling peters out: "we could attempt to describe the joy which Harley felt on this occasion, did it not occur to us, that one half of the world could not understand it though we did; and the other half will, by this time, have understood it without any description at all" (Mackenzie 52). As a result, the exquisite sympathy Harley has just felt for Emily Atkins and her father is short-circuited. Its brevity parallels the short-lived connection between Harley and his new friends. After this emotional encounter, Harley leaves them to their own device and their memory recedes in his mind. By choosing to dwell exclusively on the immediate drama that emotion produces, Mackenzie appears uninterested in discussing feeling in developmental terms. Ann Jessie Van Sant has observed that Harley is a "reduced figure" (112). Comparing Harley with Tobias Smollett's Matthew Bramble and Sterne's Yorick, she writes: "the physiological bodies of Matthew Bramble and Yorick determine the range and intensity of their experience. Harley—with virtually no body—has correspondingly little experience" (112). I would argue that Harley appears to be a "reduced figure" not only because he lacks a hypersensitive body, but also because he has a fragmented emotional life characterized by a number of unconnected sentimental moments. Chameleon-like, his feeling never concentrates on one subject for a long period of time. Or rather, his mind fails to retain his feeling.

Burney portrays her man of feeling differently. It is not tears but blood that plays a central role in Macartney's confrontation with Belmont. He fights a duel with Belmont and seriously wounds him. "At that moment I could almost have destroyed myself!" Macartney declares (228). Significantly, this overwhelming emotional moment does not mark a final climax and then fade away but haunts Macartney's mind ever since. This retention of feeling not only makes Macartney's emotional life coherent and unified but also becomes a powerful propeller of plot. Macartney's mother, for example, would not have divulged his secret parentage but for her genuine concern for his sadness after his return to Scotland. As Macartney informs us, "the miserable situation of my mind was soon discovered by my mother; nor would she rest till I communicated the cause" (229). The significance of this revelation lies in two related respects. First, it confirms Burney's preference to explore feeling in terms of long-term interpersonal connections. Second, by foregrounding the consequences and implications of Macartney's passionate encounter, it expands a sentimental moment to a sentimental process, allowing readers to witness the complication, climax and dénouement of Macartney's emotional entanglement with Belmont. After Macartney learns his parentage, he embarks on a long journey to find his father and seek paternal recognition. Before he meets his father in person, he suffers impoverishment, insult and bereavement. Indeed we do not know whether his petition will be successful for another 130 pages of the novel. In other words, Burney is not satisfied with describing Macartney's feeling simply in terms of violent outburst. She associates it with an indefinite development and demonstrates how time mellows and chastises his sensibility. For Burney, the value of feeling can best be appreciated through the drama of gradual evolution rather than sudden explosion.

Burney's interest in the intersection of feeling with time has another important dimension. She believes that feeling, when lodged in long-term memory, is one valuable part of humanity that can survive the transformative power of time. In this respect Burney markedly differs from other sentimental novelists, whose obsession with momentary effusion of emotion and whose depiction of forgetful characters imply their unwillingness to put feeling to the test of time. Once again Burney carefully engineers a sentimental moment to suggest her familiarity with and revision of the conventional rhetoric of sensibility. Upon perceiving the possibility that Macartney has committed patricide, Macartney's mother is so overpowered by horror and grief that she faints. As Macartney recounts:

"My son," cried she, "you have then murdered your father!" and she sunk breathless at my feet. Comments, Madam, upon such a scene as this, would to you be superfluous, and to me agonizing; I cannot, for both our sakes, be too concise. When she

recovered, she confessed all the particulars of a tale which she had hoped never to have revealed.—Alas! The loss she had sustained of my father was not by death!—bound to her by no ties but those of honour, he had voluntarily deserted her!—Her settling in Scotland was not the effect of choice,—she was banished thither by a family but too justly incensed;—pardon, Madam, that I cannot be more explicit! (229)

Literary historians of sensibility generally agree that the inexpressibility of emotion plays a central role in sentimental fiction.<sup>5</sup> The first three lines of the passage above, in which Macartney refrains from elaborating his feeling at the sight of his unconscious mother, shows Burney recycling the sentimental convention. The second half of the passage, however, tells a very different story. Inexpressibility is replaced by volubility: Macartney's mother relates "all the particulars" of her affair with Belmont, presumably including the ups and downs of her affection for him. In the seclusion of Scotland and separated from its object, her affection for Belmont has remained dormant for more than twenty years. But through Macartney's account, the regret, resentment, disappointment and sorrow that his mother has repressed for the sake of her son's peace of mind return with a vengeance.

Feeling does not die with time, as Harley's short-lived and ineffectual sympathy for Emily Atkins would have predisposed the reader to believe. But questions remain: why does feeling last in the first place? And what message can be inferred from its longevity? To answer these questions we need to scrutinize the relationship between Belmont and Macartney's mother. We learn very little about the twists and turns of their youthful romance. The only information we have is that their love affair ends because of parental disapproval: "she was banished . . . by a family but too justly incensed" (229). A comparison with Caroline Evelyn, the mother of Evelina, is revealing here. Belmont acts like a villain in his treatment of Caroline. He voluntarily terminates his relationship with her, by "burn[ing] the certificate of their marriage and den[ying] that they had ever been united" (17). In sharp contrast, the degree to which Belmont willingly leaves Macartney's mother is problematized by the presence of an angry family. This detail suggests that Belmont may have a stronger affection for Macartney's mother than for Caroline and that their connection could have lasted but for familial opposition. Moreover, their affection is apparently reciprocal. Macartney's mother never ascribes her misery to Belmont's perfidy. Unlike Villars who never hesitates to publicize Belmont's criminal offense, so much so that Belmont fears that Evelina is "bred to curse" him (384), Macart-

<sup>5</sup> Spacks, for instance, has identified inexpressibility as "a formal device of considerable import" in sentimental novels (133). "A crucial aesthetic of such fiction demands sparseness in the narration of emotion. . . . Both the immediate auditor and the reader must fill in the details" (135).

ney's mother tells her son that he lost his father to illness. If Villars emphasizes the abrupt annihilation of Caroline's marriage, Macartney's mother stresses her unending attachment to Belmont. She tells Macartney that she begins a continual process of mourning "upon the sudden loss of [his] father" (227). This process can hardly draw to an end partly because Macartney himself represents a constant reminder of her youthful love affair. Through constant mourning and through rearing the offspring of the man she loves, Macartney's mother self-consciously preserves her bitter-sweet memory of Belmont and mentally re-establishes her relationship with him. A retentive mind allows both feeling and interpersonal connections to last.

Burney's experiment with sentimental moments can be further explored in the two recognition scenes near the end of the novel. Critics have sought hard to explain why there are two meetings between Evelina and Belmont, when one seems enough. Susan Greenfield argues that, although in the first meeting Belmont is shocked by Evelina's physical resemblance to Caroline Evelyn, he does not "offer either woman legal recognition" (311). It is not until Evelina presents her mother's letter to Belmont that he fully "acknowledg[es] his legal relationship to both child and wife" (312). Amy Pawl also claims that it takes another interview before Belmont "own[s] her as his legal child" (292). Neither critic dwells on the sentimental aspect of these two occasions, assuming that the issue of ownership outweighs the importance of feeling.

But in fact these two scenes demonstrate how carefully Burney works on the representation of feeling in her novel. Dismissive of Mrs. Selwyn's assertion that she brings his daughter with her, Belmont is unexpectedly ushered in a room where Evelina stays:

What a moment for your Evelina!—an involuntary scream escaped me, and covering my face with my hands, I sunk on the floor.

He had, however, seen me first; for in a voice scarce articulate he exclaimed, "My God! Does Caroline Evelyn still live!"

Mrs. Selwyn said something, but I could not listen to her; and, in a few minutes, he added, "Lift up thy head,—if my sight has not blasted thee,—lift up thy head, thou image of my long-lost Caroline!"

Affected beyond measure, I half arose, and embraced his knees, while yet on my own.

"Yes, yes," cried he, looking earnestly in my face, "I see, I see thou art her child! She lives—she breathes—she is present to my view!—Oh God, that she indeed live!—Go, child, go," added he, wildly starting, and pushing me from him, "take her away, Madam,—I can-not bear to look at her!" And then, breaking hastily from me, he rushed out of the room. (372)

This passage reproduces the conventional sentimental moment in two ways. For one thing, the emotion that emerges from this moment is sudden and abrupt. Upon seeing Evelina, Belmont recognizes her resemblance to his deceased wife. Both Evelina and Belmont are immediately “affected beyond measure.” The quick succession of verbs describing Belmont’s actions reinforces a sense of knee-jerk impulsiveness. For another, the violent feeling it produces is short-lived and contributes little to forging or sustaining a lasting interpersonal connection. Belmont’s rushing out of the room and his declaration that he cannot bear to look at Evelina combine to suggest that the strong feeling the sight of Evelina excites only serves to widen the distance between him and her. It is not until this overwhelming feeling subsides, until Belmont recovers from the shock, that he is ready to confront this puzzling affair again. As Evelina suggests, the moment of transports passes very quickly: “he soon after sent his servant to enquire how I did” (373).

On the face of it, the second meeting of Evelina and Belmont simply re-enacts the sentimental excess and impulse manifest in the first.

The moment I reached the landing-place, the drawing-room door was opened, and my father, with a voice of kindness, called out, “My child, is it you?”

“Yes, Sir,” cried I, springing forward, and kneeling at his feet, “it is your child, if you will own her!”

He knelt by my side, and folding me in his arms, “Own thee!” repeated he, “yes, my poor girl, and Heaven knows with what bitter contrition!” Then, raising both himself and me, he brought me into the drawing-room, shut the door, and took me to the window, where, looking at me with great earnestness, “Poor unhappy Caroline!” cried he, and, to my inexpressible concern, he burst into tears. . . .

I would again have embraced his knees; but, hurrying from me, he flung himself upon a sofa, and leaning his face on his arms, seemed, for some time, absorbed in bitterness of grief. (382-83)

The passage of time is deliberately woven into this scene, which qualifies the emotional abruptness underlying a sentimental moment. Belmont may suddenly “burst into tears,” but Evelina’s pen directs us to see the length, not the spontaneity, of his sorrow: “for some time, [he is] absorbed in bitterness of grief.” Moreover, interpersonal connectedness informs this scene. Whereas in their first encounter Belmont literally pushes Evelina away from him, here he “fold[s] [her] in his arms.” In return, Evelina attempts to embrace his knees. If in the previous meeting Belmont stops short of admitting his paternity, here, by pronouncing “my child,” he unreservedly includes Evelina into his family circle. Furthermore, gazing at Evelina reminds Belmont of Caroline. His gaze thus imaginatively enacts a long-awaited family reunion of father, mother and

daughter. The poignancy of his memory testifies that Belmont is a man of feeling by Burney's standard. His guilt and sympathy for Caroline's suffering last for seventeen years.

The longevity of Belmont's feeling can be inferred from a sentence that smacks of sentimental excess. After Belmont reads Caroline's letter, he declares: "how willingly would I take her child to my bosom,—fold her to my heart,—call upon her to mitigate my anguish, and pour the balm of comfort on my wounds" (385). Significantly, this sentence represents not so much what Belmont wishes to do now as what he has long been yearning to do. By this point in the novel, we have already learned that Belmont wrongly acknowledged Polly Green, a nurse's child, as his own, seventeen years ago and that "he had *always* observed that his daughter bore no resemblance of either of her parents" (374, original emphasis). The emphasized "always" suggests that Belmont's paternal affection for Caroline's daughter existed long before he meets Evelina. For the past seventeen years he has been trying to treat his natural daughter with tenderness but Polly Green's lack of resemblance to Caroline has "always" prevented him from fully enjoying a gratifying father-daughter relationship. Reconfiguring emotional excess in a way that accommodates enduring affection, Burney negotiates a middle ground between regurgitating the paraphernalia of sentimental fiction and abandoning them altogether.

### Empowering Attachment

Burney does not repudiate sentimental fiction because she shares the genre's fascination with the ability to feel intensely and because she wishes to transform this ability from a liability to an asset. Among all letters in *Evelina*, Caroline's is arguably the most powerful one. It is capable of undermining patriarchal authority. After reading the letter, a weakened Belmont cries: "ten thousands daggers could not have wounded me like this letter" (385). Moreover, this letter demonstrates female narrative prowess. With it, the dead mother "writes the final version of the familial script," not least by dictating what the father should do to obtain her forgiveness (Greenfield 312). At the same time, combining maternal tenderness and references to an old romantic tie, this letter is also one of the most affectionate. It thus provides a fertile ground for investigating the link between feeling and power.

Caroline's letter rings with her anxiety about disrupted interpersonal connections. She finds no proper way to address Belmont: "shall I call you by the loved, the respected title of husband?—No, you disclaim it!—the father of my

infant?—No, you doom it to infamy!—the lover who rescued me from a forced marriage?—No, you have yourself betrayed me!” (338). Husband, father and lover: the three titles that Caroline invokes are all indicators of an affectionate and enduring relationship. The three emphatic “noes,” however, sever the tie between the indicator and its referent as abruptly as Belmont burns his marriage certificate. Lamenting her husband’s cruelty alone borders on an admission of powerlessness. But showing sentimental weakness is far from what Caroline intends to do with her death-bed letter.

I would argue that Caroline’s letter testifies to the empowering potential of feeling. Caroline’s emotional trauma and postnatal weakness could have deprived her of any strength to write a letter. As she herself admits, “hopeless, and almost desperate, twenty times have I flung away my pen” (338). But her maternal affection overrides physical frailty: “the feelings of a mother, a mother agonizing for the fate of her child, again animat[e] my courage” (338). “The feelings of a mother” does not simply invigorate Caroline but significantly contributes to establishing the father-daughter bond. Maternal apprehension prompts Caroline to write “Oh babe of my fondest affection! . . . look not like thy unfortunate mother,—lest the parent whom the hand of death may spare, shall be snatched from thee by the more cruel means of unnatural antipathy” (339). Arguably, it is this sentence that arouses and secures Belmont’s paternal love for Evelina, as this is the only sentence Belmont singles out and read aloud. “*Look not like thy unfortunate mother!*— . . . my child, my child!” (385, original emphasis).

The objects of Caroline’s tender affection also include Belmont. The last passage of her letter reads: “shall I not offer to the man once so dear to me, a ray of consolation to those afflictions he has in reserve? Suffer me, then, to tell thee, . . . that the recollection of the love I once bore thee, shall swallow up every other!” (340). This passage demonstrates that Caroline’s residual love for Belmont is strong enough to subdue her resentment. By calling Belmont “the man once so dear to me,” Caroline is implicitly granting him the three titles that he had jettisoned: husband, father and lover. By asserting that “the recollection of the love I once bore thee” is the only thought in her head before she dies, Caroline imaginatively returns to the old days when Belmont voluntarily made a life-long commitment to her and when he perfectly deserved the honor of those three titles. Her affection for Belmont empowers her in two ways. It creates an emotional bond between husband and wife despite the destruction of the marriage certificate. It liberates her from a state of victimhood and elevates her to a position of power. By the end of the letter Caroline becomes a benefactress who can offer “a ray of consolation.” Burney’s message is clear: feeling

becomes empowering when it springs from an attempt to establish an enduring interpersonal connection or an awareness of its existence.

The kind of feeling that dominates Caroline's mind in her last moments can be variously described as pity, maternal anxiety or resilient love. But I would argue that the best descriptive term is attachment because this form of feeling emphasizes the establishment of affective connections between individuals and because building up a new relationship between father and daughter and repairing an old one between husband and wife are exactly what Caroline's affectionate letter achieves. Burney's exploration of attachment, however, goes beyond one isolated incident. If Caroline's letter suggests that attachment can be empowering, elsewhere in the novel Burney demonstrates that its strength lies in its longevity.

Throughout *Evelina* Burney uses the word "attached" and its derivatives sparingly. Most of them are used to describe Evelina's interaction with another man. All of them carry emotional connotations and judgment. The unwelcome Mr. Smith "endeavoured to attach himself to [Evelina], with such officious assiduity" (195). Intent on marrying Evelina, young Branghton "would willingly have attached himself to [her]" but for her apparent displeasure (233). Describing Lord Merton's sexual harassment in the presence of his fiancée, Evelina writes: "he attached himself to me, during the walk, with a freedom of gallantry that put me extremely out of countenance" (312). It is important to notice that, although Burney uses the verb "to attach" to suggest these three men's attraction to Evelina, she refrains from using the noun "attachment" to define their feeling towards her. This is because their affection is too transient to deserve this name. Smith transfers his attention to Miss Branghton as quickly as young Branghton loses his interest in Evelina. After he recovers from his intoxication, Lord Merton tries to devote himself to Lady Louisa.

For Burney, attachment represents a form of enduring affection, one that is informed by an earnest wish to sustain a long-term relationship. This is why Macartney describes his feeling for Miss Belmont as "an attachment which I have a thousand times vowed, a thousand times sincerely thought would be lasting as my life" (228). This is why, to convince Evelina of his sincerity, Orville declares "my heart is yours, and I swear to you an attachment eternal!" (368). A comparison with another contemporary sentimental text, the Duchess of Devonshire's *Emma, or, The Unfortunate Attachment: a Sentimental Novel*, is useful here. Like Burney, the Duchess of Devonshire conceives of attachment as sustained feeling: "the two ladies soon formed an attachment as sincere as their husbands: the Inexorable Tyrant only could dissolve such band" (61). But genuine attachment in this text represents a source of profound anxiety and debility.

The heroine Emma Eggerton falls in love with her childhood friend Sidney but is obliged to marry William Walpole, an aristocrat, at the behest of her father. The thought of Sidney persists in Emma's mind, distressing and incapacitating her. Emma's attachment is debilitating because it undermines another, arguably more sacred, long-term relationship: her marriage. Emma's father once warns her: "the only chance you have to make me happy is by concealing all that has happened [between you and Sidney], from every living creature; let the remembrance die, even in your own breast" (96). This is the advice Macartney's mother would have given him, upon knowing his "unfortunate attachment" to Miss Belmont. But the fact that Burney reverses Macartney's misfortune and allows Macartney to marry his beloved, who turns out to be unconnected with Belmont, is telling. It reiterates Burney's consistent association of enduring feeling and lasting connections. Moreover, it demonstrates her belief in the power of attachment to triumph over obstacles and adversities.

Nowhere are these points better illustrated than in Orville's confrontational conversation with Sir Clement Willoughby and his subsequent marriage proposal to Evelina. Orville solemnly demands that Willoughby should explain why he persists in his courtship of Evelina despite her resistance. The latter replies: "I think Miss Anville the loveliest of her sex, and, were I a *marrying man*, she, of all the women I have seen, I would fix upon for a wife, but I believe that not even the philosophy of your Lordship would recommend to me a connection of that sort, with a girl of obscure birth" (347, original emphasis). When it comes to marriage, a life-long commitment of oneself to another, Willoughby cringes. He does not even wish to name this social institution but vaguely refers to it as "a connection of that sort." For him, marriage is an impracticable dream that can only be expressed in the subjunctive mood. Willoughby's reluctance to bind himself emotionally and permanently to Evelina prefigures the brevity of his connection with her. Soon after this admission of his flirtatiousness, Willoughby discovers that Evelina still keeps the fraudulent letter he forges in the name of Orville, flies into a rage and quits Evelina forever.

In stark contrast, Orville wishes to unite himself with Evelina emotionally, legally and even spiritually. He declares this in his marriage proposal: "you are the friend to whom my soul is attached as to its better half!" (351). His emotional declaration distances the word "attached" from its earlier association with unwelcome physical proximity, endows it with a romantic value and aligns it with Burney's understanding of attachment as sustained feeling. Stressing that it is his soul that is attracted to Evelina, Orville intimates that his affection for her never ends. Orville's attachment is empowering in two aspects. First, it prompts him to offer his hand before he fully comprehends Evelina's family

background and financial status. Considering the multiple examples of mercenary marriages in this novel, Orville's decision reflects the strength of his love for Evelina as well as the courage that springs from that love. Second, by asking Evelina to marry him, Orville is the first man to own Evelina properly and to give her a legitimate name (Fizer 97). As a result, Evelina becomes not as helpless and vulnerable as she once was. She has a shoulder to cry upon when Belmont denies her paternal care. She can rely on an honest man to sort out the embarrassing dilemma that implicates Evelina, Belmont and Polly Green. Orville is widely perceived as a feminized hero. He does not flaunt his phaeton, his sword, or his wealth to demonstrate his masculine power. Instead, his power lies in a genuine attachment that prioritizes intrinsic worth over material possession. Orville is a man of feeling, but his lasting affection for Evelina and the consequent empowerment distinguish him from the likes of Mackenzie's Harley.

## Conclusion

Disagreeing with Orville's criticism of William Congreve's *Love for Love* as indelicate for female taste, Captain Mirvan retorts: "I suppose it is not sentimental enough!" (82). This remark reminds us that the dominant theatrical taste in the 1770s was sentimental drama featuring weepy scenes of reconciliation with long-lost friends and relations. However, placed in close proximity to Mr. Lovel's comic failure to remember the name of the play he has just attended, Mirvan's comment goes largely unnoticed. There exists an intriguing analogy between this minor event and modern criticism of *Evelina*. Most critics understand that this novel was produced in an era when the popularity of literary sentimentalism reached its peak. But many of them divert their attention to how Burney discusses manners in a comic and satirical light. The implication is that Burney's novel of manners has little to do with sentimental fiction.

This diversion is a pity because Burney herself acknowledged the influence of popular sentimental novels on her literary enterprise. In the preface to *Evelina* she admitted that she was "charmed with the eloquence of Rousseau" and "softened by the pathetic powers of Richardson" (10). Intriguingly, Burney's admiration of her novelistic predecessors quickly segues into a modest assertion of uniqueness: "I yet presume not to attempt pursuing the same ground which they have tracked" (10). The tension between her literary debt and her claim on originality probably explains why she recycles conventional sentimental moments to produce alternative ways of appreciating and imagining feeling. These fresh alternatives, emphasizing how feeling forges long-term relationships and

how feeling survive time through such connections, distance *Evelina* from eighteenth-century sentimental fiction and render it “not sentimental enough.” But they also indicate Burney’s profound interest in exploring human psyche and in identifying where the virtue of feeling actually lies. In this respect, that *Evelina* is “not sentimental enough” in fact speaks volumes about Burney’s creative engagement with eighteenth-century literary sentimentalism.

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## 「我想這不夠傷感」： 《依芙蓮娜》與情感的力量

### 摘要

法蘭希絲·伯妮(Frances Burney)的首部小說《依芙蓮娜》(Evelina)問世於十八世紀末的英國文壇並一鳴驚人，廣受讀者的歡迎。該小說對英國仕紳階級戲謔的批判以及對倫敦流行文化鉅細靡遺的描述常讓學者認為它只是一時尚儀態小說(a novel of manners)。本文從該小說十八世紀的讀者評價出發，探討其與當時文壇盛行的情感小說(sentimental fiction)的互動關係。作者解釋伯妮在《依芙蓮娜》中重新思考情感的價值與意義。當代著名的情感小說家亨利·麥肯齊(Henry Mackenzie)與勞倫斯·史騰(Lawrence Sterne)提倡情感的即刻性，認為性情中人著重的應是當下的自我情感享受，不受時間的考驗與記憶的約束。在此模式之下，情感逐漸演化成虛弱與自私的代名詞。伯妮在《依芙蓮娜》中改寫了當代盛行的情感模式，她認為情感真正的價值在於其能維繫長久的人際關係，能抵擋時光的洪流而歷久彌新，能帶給弱勢的女性希望與信心。以十八世紀情感小說的標準而言，伯妮的《依芙蓮娜》並不够「傷感」，然而這正是作者的用意。伯妮希望塑造一個新的情感故事，一部讓讀者重新檢視感情力量的小說。

**關鍵字：**法蘭希絲·伯妮，《依芙蓮娜》，情感，情感小說，力量