Burney's *Evelina*, like *The Fool of Quality* and *Sandford and Merton*, is a middle-class book, and while her commentary shades over closer to social satire than social protest, her subject is much the same as theirs: the assimilation of the newly monied middle class into the traditional social hierarchy. All three books respond to the same economic change, and they share the happy sense that the change has been markedly for the best. Brooke and Day complacently explain to the aristocracy their role in the new system, but the elucidation is not for the benefit of the supposed aristocratic audience but the satisfaction of the intended readers of the books, the middle-class parents. Burney's novel, essentially a "how-to" book on easing the social transition, is directed at those same middle-class readers. As the newly rich merchant class entered into social as well as financial commerce with the aristocracy, it had to learn to imitate the behavior of the upper classes and to be aware of their social customs and social organization—all of which, as the young, middle-class Fanny Burney knew, was an education in itself.

Burney chronicles this kind of social education in *Evelina*. The seventeen-year-old Evelina comes from her rural retirement to the gay world with only her moral education and her own good sense to guide her. With the exception of small blunders, she does remarkably well. To the young woman writing the book, herself hardly older than her heroine, social success—which she never differentiates from personal fulfillment—is perfectly accessible to the wise, albeit naive, heroine. *Evelina* is written by a very young woman for whom the world
of the fashionable and near fashionable is a most exciting place. With each novel she writes, some of the bloom wears off. The four years between *Evelina* and *Cecilia* bring her to an almost bitter ending for her novel. Subsequent books, colored by her struggles to support herself, her forced “marriage” to a life at court as Queen Charlotte’s second keeper of the robes, as well as various personal disappointments, reflect an even more markedly changed outlook. The values are the same: wisdom, benevolence, and chastity, of course. But all of these no longer seem to have the power they have in *Evelina* to insure a happy ending.

Perhaps the charm of *Evelina* is the assurance of its happy ending. *Evelina*’s world is well ordered, every character ensconced in a secure niche by the end of the novel. It is a morally comfortable world; Burney makes it easy for the reader to sympathize with the good characters and to look with gentle scorn on the less pleasant types. She makes easy moral judgments about who is or is not a worthwhile human being, and conveniently it happens that the rewards indeed fall to the worthwhile. More than that, as in fairy tales, the worthwhile are princes and princesses. Although we do not learn that Evelina is an aristocrat until the end of the book, Burney is sure to let us know then, and of course Orville is always “Lord.” *Evelina* mixes the fairy-tale glow of “they lived happily ever after” with a sharply realistic picture of middle and upper-class society in eighteenth-century England. When we read her diaries, we become even more aware of how realistic Burney’s novels are in their images of eighteenth-century life. To read the diaries is to find that social engagements are indeed among the principle concerns of the young, and the not-so-young, lady’s life; having a benevolent nature and doing benevolent deeds are part of a lady’s daily consciousness; the lady is aware of her own education in terms not so much of intellectual but of personal and social growth. Of course we have to be careful: the diaries were written by a very conscious writer and revised years later by an even more self-conscious woman. Yet the reflections of the life around her that we find in Burney’s journals, and that in *Evel-
The changes that England had undergone by the 1770s in distribution of population, wealth, and power had brought a great deal of pressure to bear on established patterns of society. The industrial revolution and the consequent migration to the cities had put economic power into the hands of the mercantile class in two ways. First and most obviously, the merchants ran industry and reaped its money and power. Second and perhaps less obviously, with the workers concentrated in the cities, and not as in all earlier times on the land, England by the latter part of the century had become unable to feed herself. Thus, the power to feed the nation was under the control of the same merchant class whose power was growing so quickly by virtue of the industrial expansion. All of this economic strength demanded political expression as well. The merchant class, increasingly dominating the life and growth of the country, desired—demanded—to have a voice in the running of that country. L. B. Namier notes that already in the early years of the century, “wealth amassed in trade was laid out in landed estates and used to secure seats in the House of Commons, for both helped to lift their holders into a higher social sphere.” Later, the merchant class entered the House of Lords as well. In the 1780s and 1790s, William Pitt the younger was to harness their drive for his own purposes: to gain lasting control of the House of Lords he created over 140 new peers who were, naturally, to be loyal to him. Thus the merchant princes became members of the government, even of the aristocracy, and gained with their titles the social recognition as well as the political power they desired. By the time Evelina was published in 1778, the middle class had acquired huge economic power and was gaining more and more political power to go with it. What remained was to acquire the social graces that were necessary to be comfortable with their new status.

The newly monied classes were not looked down upon by the hereditary aristocracy; on the contrary, they were viewed as a vital force in the country’s growth. Lord Orville is not being
unusually democratic when he treats Evelina simply as a human being rather than as a member of a given social class. Namier describes the relationship in the eighteenth century among trade, class, and social rank:

Trade was not despised in eighteenth-century England—it was acknowledged to be the great concern of the nation; and money was honoured, the mystic, common denominator of all values, the universal repository of as yet undetermined possibilities. But what was the position of the trader? There is no one answer to this question. A man's status in English society has always depended primarily on his own consciousness; for the English are not a methodical or logical nation—they perceive and accept facts without anxiously inquiring into their reasons or meaning. Whatever is apt to raise a man's self-consciousness—be it birth, rank, wealth, intellect, daring, or achievements—will add to his stature; but it has to be translated into the truest expression of his sub-conscious self-evaluation: uncontending ease, the unbought grace of life. Classes are the more sharply marked in England because there is no single test for them, except the final, incontestable result; and there is more snobbery than in any other country, because the gate can be entered by anyone, and yet remains, for those bent on entering it, a mysterious, awe-inspiring gate.

He goes on to add that

In the phylogenetic history of the Englishman the Oxford undergraduate of my own time corresponded to the eighteenth-century man, and with him nearly foremost among social qualifications was that a man should be amusing. Anyone can enter English society provided he can live, think, and feel like those who have built up its culture in their freer, easier hours.

Everything Namier describes as a historian is reflected by Burney in Evelina. There are no hard and fast class lines in Evelina, but there are definitely consciousness lines. Evelina's problems throughout the book are caused by social misunderstandings; she learns, in Namier's words, how to "live, think, and feel" like the aristocrats. Once Evelina learns how to act properly, she is ready to take her place in society.

The education of a young lady into the ways of "the world"
might seem of little note except, perhaps, to the young lady herself and, possibly, to other young ladies for whom her adventures could serve as harmless entertainment. Tea table stuff, in short. But, as I have suggested, entry into society is serious societal business. The intermixing of the social classes is a prime movement of the time, immeasurably important to the participants, of course, but with a vital social function as well. Burney's chronicle, charming as it is as a novel, is equally instructive for us as a record of this melding process. Evelina makes the transition from middle class to aristocrat before our eyes; Burney makes it clear that breeding rather than rank determines the aristocrat, and Evelina works hard at becoming a lady. In a society as concerned with social movement as Burney's, this is as it must be: there has to be an earned way to become an aristocrat so that those late in the field may be accommodated. Thus, a title may be hereditary, but "aristocracy," assuming either requisite financial or hereditary background, comes with the acquisition of adequate social knowledge.

In Evelina, Burney focuses on the attempts of a young, socially inexperienced but carefully brought up young woman to learn to cope with new situations. One of the things that Evelina has to learn is to make her distinctions between people on the basis of real human value rather than on social position. Once she can make these distinctions, she can begin to function within the social forms of her milieu in a healthy, mature way; she has, at that point, come far along the way towards being a real lady. A significant signpost in the course of Evelina's education comes when she learns to distinguish between personal merit and inherited rank. Early in the novel, she is shocked to find that the vulgar Lovel is a nobleman. Evelina says that she "naturally concluded him to be some low-bred and uneducated man" and she is amazed to hear him addressed as "your Lordship." "Lordship!—how extraordinary! that a nobleman, accustomed, in all probability, to the first rank of company in the kingdom, from his earliest infancy, can possibly be deficient in good manners, however faulty in morals and principles" (p. 106). A little later, with more experience of the world, she begins to make
finer distinctions, but she still associates rank with good breeding. Notice her surprise that a lord can be uncouth: "In all ranks and stations of life, how strangely do characters and manners differ! Lord Orville, with a politeness which knows no intermission, and makes no distinction, is as unassuming and modest as if he . . . was totally ignorant of every qualification which he possesses; this other Lord . . . seems to me an entire stranger to real good-breeding . . ." (p. 113).

Evelina the character must learn these lessons; Burney the author already knows them. Evelina is surprised into equating personal merit with hereditary place only because she is young and inexperienced. She should know better, with the education she has had from Mr. Villars, and indeed she soon does learn to make better distinctions. Burney, in pointing out Evelina's mistake, records for us that eighteenth-century mentality that we have already seen described by Namier. Evelina learns that personal merit and carriage are more important than birth: to recall Namier's point, "Whatever is apt to raise a man's self-consciousness—be it birth, rank, wealth, intellect, daring, or achievements—will add to his stature; but it has to be translated into the truest expression of his sub-conscious self-evaluation; uncontending ease, the unbought grace of life." When Evelina can recognize that grace in others, and even more when she manifests it, she has become a lady. As Evelina becomes more accustomed to society and to making discriminations according to her own judgments, she stops basing those judgments on social position and instead concentrates on the value of the individual regardless of his station. Similarly, the more discriminating of her acquaintances value her for her own qualities of benevolence, charm, and intelligence, and are willing to overlook her deficiency in social education—and its attendant lack of poise. Throughout the book, Burney emphasizes that high social position and human value are not automatically concomitant. When the wise Orville introduces the newly proclaimed Belmont heiress to a rather snobbish Mrs. Beaumont, he teases her by saying "give me leave to present to you the daughter of Sir John Belmont; a young lady who, I am sure, must long since
have engaged your esteem and admiration, tho’ you were a stranger to her birth” (p. 381). Notice that he specifically refers to the distinction between worth and birth. Burney satirically describes that same Mrs. Beaumont and all those ladies like her: “She is an absolute Court Calendar bigot; for, chancing herself to be born of a noble and ancient family, she thinks proper to be of opinion, that *birth* and *virtue* are one and the same thing . . .” (p. 284).

Burney, in making her heroine appear middle class and by having her interact both with those higher and lower on the social scale, allows herself enough scope so that she can move freely among several classes of English society. In making her subject the social education of a young, middle-class woman, she addresses one of the most salient social concerns of her time. Burney’s novel, about social factors and social pressures, is concerned with external forms and forces, and leaves attempts to deal with the psychological effects of social initiations to other, later, novelists. *Evelina* is one of the earliest novels that grow out of society’s need to place the new merchant class, and it begins to answer the question of how people become culturally secure after they have become socially equal—that is, after they have made the money. The fullest examination of the problem comes almost 130 years later in 1906 with Galsworthy’s *The Forsyte Saga*, which follows an English family through all phases of its economic and social development. In *The Forsyte Saga*, times and people act on each other; institutions and perceptions of the socially appropriate evolve as the new middle class makes itself felt in society. In *Evelina*, however, there is little sense that the social norms should undergo any kind of evolution. Although Burney realizes that a man’s worth cannot be judged by his rank, she does not see anything wrong with the social institution of class. Evelina is educated to be a lady, and there is no sense that this is wrong. Burney ridicules not the concepts of “lady” or “gentleman” but the idea that money can buy gentility. Although many of the other novelists of the period, Brooke, Day, and Inchbald, for example, object to the concept of class stratification, Burney objects to the attempts of the
gauche nouveau riche to break into the upper classes by assuming a culture they do not have.

In *Evelina* Fanny Burney knows exactly which human and social values she approves. There are good traits in a human being: truthfulness, honor, reason, friendship, love,—and some that are bad: snobbishness, deceitfulness, stupidity. Through a combination of instinct and education, one learns to appreciate the good qualities, to cultivate them in oneself and in others, and to avoid those persons who are ruled by the bad. Her novel is much less concerned with social betterment than are those of many of her contemporaries: no attempts at all are made to improve or reform the less-than-virtuous characters such as Lovel and Sir Clement Willoughby, as would certainly be the case if they were in a Brooke, Day, or Holcroft novel. On the contrary, the lesson to be learned is for the positive characters and not for the reprobates, and seems to be, at least in part, how to avoid the discomfort that such unpleasant people can cause.

*Evelina* is largely a novel of education, and the object of Evelina’s education, as I suggested, is to make her a lady of discrimination and of moral and social worth. Burney emphasizes this aspect of the book in her preface:

To draw characters from nature, though not from life, and to mark the manners of the times, is the attempted plan of the following letters. For this purpose, a young female, educated in the most secluded retirement, makes, at the age of seventeen, her first appearance upon the great and busy stage of life; with a virtuous mind, a cultivated understanding, and a feeling heart, her ignorance of the forms, and inexperience in the manners, of the world, occasion all the little incidents which these volumes record, and which form the natural progression of the life of a young woman of obscure birth, but conspicuous beauty, for the first six months after her ENTRANCE INTO THE WORLD. (pp. 7–8)

*Evelina* is the most uneducated young lady possible in terms of the world; she is not only very young (seventeen) but has lived a totally secluded life. Burney, like so many contemporary novelists, carefully plots for her reader all of the significant points in
her protagonist's education. We, therefore, are given ample opportunity to watch her meet and learn from new experiences. The popular eighteenth-century values of truth, benevolence, and reason have been instilled by her guardian Mr. Villars; we are to see how these values help her to meet new and perhaps difficult situations.

Evelina is the third generation that Mr. Villars has educated. Her grandfather, Mr. Evelyn, was his first charge; the young man, dying soon after his unfortunate marriage to Mme. Duval, left to his tutor “a legacy of a thousand pounds, and the sole guardianship of his daughter’s person till her eighteenth year, conjuring [him], in the most affecting terms, to take the charge of her education till she was able to act with propriety for herself . . .” (p. 14). The terms of the request are significant: the guardian was not asked to take care of her, or to look after her, but to “take charge of her education.” This young woman, who grows up to be Lady Belmont, Evelina’s mother, entrusts Evelina to the Reverend Villars in exactly the same terms: “Lady Belmont, who was firmly persuaded of her approaching dissolution, frequently and earnestly besought me,” says Mr. Villars, “that if her infant was a female, I would not abandon her to the direction of a man so wholly unfit to take the charge of her education” (p. 126). The word “education” is used in its most general sense; Burney, in the tradition of Locke and Rousseau, stresses that the educative aspects of upbringing are primary. And thus when Mr. Villars describes the responsibility given, the terms are that the father “would not, to a woman low-bred and illiberal as Mrs. Evelyn, trust the mind and morals of his daughter” (p. 14). “Mind and morals” are significant; physical, emotional, pecuniary, and social well-being will follow from, or are at least subservient to, this foremost concern.

Evelina has been raised in seclusion by Mr. Villars. The test of the education he has given her will be how she acts in the world. Education in its more abstract sense can take one only so far; then the other kind of learning, finding out how to act in given circumstances, must be allowed to function. As Mr. Villars tells Evelina, “You must learn not only to judge, but to act
for yourself” (p. 164). For even when things seem right to others, one must make decisions on the basis of one's own good sense. Thus when Evelina is to spend a month with Mme. Duval, he tells her she “will have occasion . . . for all the circumspection and prudence [she] can call to [her] aid” (p. 164) because, even though Mme. Duval would not willingly propose that Evelina do something wrong, Evelina must judge each issue at the time it comes up and act at her own, not Mme. Duval’s, discretion. The novel is concerned in very large part with Evelina’s continuing (and sometimes rather unsuccessful) attempts to deal with situations as they arise. In this, the novel is of rather smaller scope than many contemporary works for, like the Jane Austen novels which will come later, it confines itself to a limited set of situations and problems. Burney is concerned not with reforming the world but rather with how to function within certain social—but at the same time moral—guidelines.

As soon as she is out in the world, Evelina is sorely aware of her inexperience in handling social occasions. She undergoes trials of embarrassment that seem perhaps a little colored by her own prejudices of class and rank and yet are rather justifiable. The social occasions during which she meets her more refined friends, especially Lord Orville, while in the company of her quite unrefined family of Mme. Duval and the cousins would be uncomfortable for any reasonably sensitive person. Mme. Duval and the cousins are the embodiments of the very worst traits of the nouveau riche; they are brash, loud, insensitive, and presuming. Evelina repeatedly finds herself embarrassed by the actions of her family. For example, she does not quite know what to do when, at a dance while in their company, she comes upon Sir Clement Willoughby. She writes to Mr. Villars: “I was extremely vexed, and would have given the world to have avoided being seen by him: my chief objection was, from the apprehension that he wou’d hear Miss Branghton call me cousin.—I fear you will think this London journey has made me grow very proud, but indeed this family is so low-bred and vulgar, that I should be equally ashamed of
such a connexion in the country, or any where" (p. 94). At the
time, she tries not to talk to him but later feels that she acted in
error: "I am afraid you will think it wrong; and so I do myself
now,—but, at the time, I only considered how I might avoid
immediate humiliation" (p. 94). At first her reactions do seem
rather proud, yet who would not be ashamed to be found in
such low company? When the same party goes to Vauxhall
gardens, and she is first separated from them in the lonely
groves and then annoyed by the undue attentions of a rather
common acquaintance of her cousins, Mr. Smith, she is cha­
grined that Sir Clement should find her in these situations:
"Perhaps I was too proud,—but I could not endure that Sir
Clement,—whose eyes followed him [Smith] with looks of the
most surprised curiosity, should witness his unwelcome famili­
arity" (p. 201). Evelina's discomfort shows not that she is a snob
but that her good sense makes her aware in these situations of
what decorum and delicacy call for. Her vulgar family, in con­
trast, epitomizing social ignorance, has no sense of the
appropriate.

There are a great many instances of Evelina's embarrassment
as she learns her way in the world, all of them building towards
the moment not when she will be through blundering but
when, at least, she has met the situations enough times so that
she is able to cope. When the Reverend Villars sends her off to
Mrs. Mirvan, he knows that "she is quite a little rustic, and
knows nothing of the world . . . I shall not be surprised if you
should discover in her a thousand deficiencies of which I have
never dreamt" (p. 19), and Evelina herself thinks in these
terms. For example, at her first dance she worries what Lord
Orville will think of her, "How will he be provoked . . . when he
finds what a simple rustic he has honoured with his choice! one
whose ignorance of the world makes her perpetually fear doing
something wrong" (p. 30). Her fears, of course, quickly are
justified. An unwelcome swain at her first ball is moved to ask,
"My dear creature . . . why where could you be educated?" (p.
44), and poor Evelina can only write home that she leaves Lon­
don without regret, realizing that "I am too inexperienced and
ignorant to conduct myself with propriety in this town, where every thing in new to me, and many things are unaccountable and perplexing" (p. 48). The moral to be found in these early experiences is not that she was awkward in the new situations, but that her early education had taught her how to handle such disappointments. Her reaction is entirely sensible, perhaps even too sensible for a seventeen-year-old girl. She realizes simply that her experience has not fitted her for these adventures.

She learns at each point, as all who desire entry into society must learn, what proper modes of conduct are. For there are inevitably moments when her instinctive reactions are not the best, as when she loses her way and finds herself in the very alarming company of a pair of prostitutes. As the three of them are walking along, she sees Lord Orville, and her only fear is that he shall see her—she is not aware that she needs his protection from any possible danger. No, her only thought is of her pride. When he repasses and does see her, "I thought I should have fainted, so great was my emotion from shame, vexation, and a thousand other feelings, for which I have no expressions" (p. 235). When Orville questions her on her strange situation, her first reaction is one of hurt pride, which under his kindness turns to "delight and gratitude." And yet, in the next similar situation, again her pride is foremost; by her own admission, she finds herself in trouble through her "heedlessness:" in trying not to be seen by Orville, she cautions her cousin Miss Branghton not to call attention to her, which leads to a great deal of attention indeed. Had she not been so self-conscious, there would have been no incident. Instead, Orville's coach is borrowed against her will but seemingly at her request, is slightly wrecked, and so forth. In addition to the light this incident sheds on Evelina's not-quite-polished sophistication, it allows Burney a quick comment on the view from the other side. For all along the Duval-Branghton set has been quite awed by Evelina's familiarity with the Lord Orvilles and Sir Clements. So that when young Branghton goes to apologize to Orville, he expects him to be "so proud he'll hardly let me speak" and is extremely surprised to find "he's no more proud
than I am, and he was as civil as if I’d been a lord myself” (p. 248). True breeding, then, of which Lord Orville is certainly the best specimen in the book, does not stand on distinctions of rank but treats each person as a human being of worth.

Not quite seeing the lesson, Evelina is hysterical: she is sure that the actions of her cousin have forever lost her the esteem of Lord Orville. “I was half frantic; I really raved; the good opinion of Lord Orville seemed now irretrievably lost . . .” (p. 248). It was her mistake in the first place that had led to this awkward situation; she did not know how to “know” both the refined Orville and the vulgar Branghtons at the same time. Later when she meets Mr. Macartney in the garden, she is so inadequate that she cannot keep the scene from seeming like a lovers’ rendezvous to Orville: “unused to the situations in which I find myself, and embarrassed by the slightest difficulties, I seldom, till too late, discover how I ought to act” (p. 301). Given enough time and trust, however, she learns to confess her inexperience to Orville, to stop trying to act as if she is in control, and instead to ask that his “indulgence—will make some allowance, on account of my inexperience . . .” (p. 307). She is “new to the world, and unused to acting for myself,—my intentions are never wilfully blameable, yet I err perpetually” (p. 306). Interestingly enough, she makes no further errors during the course of the book, for Evelina’s education has brought her to the point at which she feels secure enough to confess her lack of poise. In the very acknowledgment, she finally opts for simply being herself, and thus the charm that attracted Orville, Willoughby, and all the rest is now free to function without the hindrance of her attempts to cope by herself with situations that are beyond her.

Of course it is to Orville that she brings these confessions, for as Edward Bloom points out in his introductory essay, it is Orville who will be her guide after their marriage. Bloom considers that the lesson she learns is “prudence,” but that is only a small part of the awareness she picks up in the course of the book. Perhaps as importantly, she learns, as Mr. Villars in the first pages of the novel had said she must, to make decisions
and to act on her own judgment. One aspect of this new confidence is her new self-awareness; another, perhaps, is her new prudence. She has learned, too, to trust her own judgments even when they seem to go against the opinions of people she respects, such as the Reverend Villars. This is the most significant lesson of all, because it allows her to function as a free, mature individual in society. For example, when Evelina receives a letter from Orville that suggests that she has been quite wrong about him and that he is not a good man, Mr. Villars tells her to have no more to do with him. She sees that Orville’s actions do not match this verdict; in fact he is still the paragon she had thought him. Evelina, after a brief struggle, follows her own promptings and reacts not to the rules set down by Mr. Villars but to the exigencies of the reality she is experiencing. From her lament about the letter that she must find herself “in a world so deceitful, where we must suspect what we see, distrust what we hear, and even doubt what we feel” (p. 259), she learns to trust her feelings to the point of deciding to marry. The letter is a fake, and her feelings are proved to be well founded.

Other feelings also based on her education as a human being are found to be justified. These come under that popular eighteenth-century banner of benevolence: in Evelina acts of kindness are done simply, with little fanfare (in contrast to the seemingly endless examination and discussion of each benevolent act in Brooke’s, Day’s, and Holcroft’s novels) and so seem, after all, simply a part of human nature. There is no discussion in Burney’s novel about whether benevolence is natural or learned behavior. The fact that benevolence does exist, whether Evelina learned it from Mr. Villars or from her own instincts, or from a combination of the two, is what is important. Thus, Evelina’s reaction to her father’s neglect of her is pity: “I forget how much more he is the object of sorrow, than I am! Alas, what amends can he make himself, for the anguish he is hoarding up for time to come! My heart bleeds for him, whenever this reflection occurs to me” (p. 159). And when she comes upon a wild-looking Mr. Macartney holding pistols, her
immediate reaction, with no thought whatever for her own safety, is to prevent him from harming himself. What else is expressed but the spirit of eighteenth-century benevolence when she writes of the incident that “I am sure . . . you will be much concerned for this poor man, and, were you here, I doubt not but you would find some method of awakening him from the error which blinds him, and of pouring the balm of peace and comfort into his afflicted soul” (p. 184). She puts her feeling into action in ways less dramatic than the pistol episode, as when she insists on including Mr. Macartney in the company as the Branghtons prepare to go out: “and I looked towards Mr. Macartney, to whom I wished extremely to shew that I was not of the same brutal nature with those by whom he was treated so grossly” (p. 192).

Her benevolence is always the product of generosity and sensitivity—pains are always taken so that its object (unlike the beneficiaries in many other eighteenth-century novels) is subjected to as little need for acknowledgment as possible. When she suspected that Mr. Macartney needed money, she “let fall [her] purse upon the ground, not daring to present it to him, and ran up stairs with the utmost swiftness” (p. 215). She does not even talk of “benevolence,” but only of her “opportunity . . . for . . . contributing what little relief was in my power” (p. 216). For Burney, real ladies are benevolent but need not and do not advertise their own generosity. It remains for the Reverend Villars to give a name to Evelina’s actions towards Mr. Macartney and others. He considers that “you have but done your duty; you have but shewn that humanity without which I should blush to own my child. . . . O my child, were my fortune equal to my confidence in thy benevolence, with what transport should I, through thy means, devote it to the relief of indigent virtue” (p. 216). Again, Burney reflects current trends of thought—here, the familiar eighteenth-century belief that part of the education of a human being is his education in benevolence (*The Fool of Quality, Nature and Art, Anna St. Ives*) and that it is in the exercise of that benevolence that he is most truly worthy. The Reverend Villars encourages
Evelina to "be ever thus... dauntless in the cause of distress!... Though gentleness and modesty are the peculiar attributes of your sex, yet fortitude and firmness, when occasion demands them, are virtues as noble and becoming in women as in men: the right line of conduct is the same for both sexes, though the manner in which it is pursued may... be accommodated to the strength or weakness of the different travellers" (p. 217).

As in Anna St. Ives, the responsibilities of women for doing good in the world are as great as those of men. Burney, however, suggests that the means of doing good may differ, a concession that neither Godwin nor Holcroft would be likely to make. But then she makes other distinctions that they would probably find rather abhorrent: when discussing Mrs. Selwyn, Evelina says that "she is extremely clever; her understanding, indeed, may be called masculine," but she sees in her a "want of gentleness; a virtue which... seems so essentially a part of the female character" (pp. 268-69)—as if it is not a part of the male! She finds herself very uncomfortable with this strange woman who "in studying to acquire the knowledge of the other sex... has lost all the softness of her own" (p. 269). One can imagine the scorn with which the intimates of Mary Wollstonecraft would have greeted such sentiments. But Burney, although reacting against the too-masculine woman, also makes fun of those who would refuse woman a mind. Mrs. Selwyn herself ridicules such distinctions when she teases a silly fop who wonders how a woman not attending the assembly can pass her time "in a manner... extraordinary... for the young Lady reads" (p. 275). The despicable creature Lovel is made the mouthpiece for the obviously unapproved doctrine that "I have an insuperable aversion to strength, either of body or mind, in a female," an opinion which the silly Lord Merton seconds, "Deuce take me if ever I wish to hear a word of sense from a woman as long as I live" (p. 361). Burney’s view, in this as in everything else in the book, seems to be the moderate one: women have a right and a duty to exercise their minds but not to forget that they are women. It is in this sense, then, that Mr.
Villars suggests to Evelina that she has a duty to perform acts of benevolence, though those acts may sometimes be of a sort particularly suited to a woman.\textsuperscript{9}

The object of Evelina’s education is not to be supposed to be out of the ordinary; she is to grow up into a sensitive, intelligent girl, hopefully someday to be “bestow[ed] . . . upon some worthy man, with whom she might spend her days in tranquillity, cheerfulness and good-humour, untainted by vice, folly, or ambition” (p. 127). This seems such a natural course within the novel’s context that it is not until we are faced with another possibility, such as the scheme which Mme. Duval might construct, that Mr. Villar’s plan even seems like a philosophy of education. Mme. Duval is the epitome of everything that should not be imitated. She is vulgar, ignorant, and opinionated—marriage to her is such a terrible mistake for the sensitive young Evelyn that he dies soon after it is contracted. Thus, anything she says on the matter of education we may assume to be wrong. Evelina recounts Mme. Duval’s proposed course:

She talked very much of taking me to Paris, and said I greatly wanted the polish of a French education. She lamented that I had been brought up in the country, which, she observed, had given me a very bumpkinish air. However, she bid me not despair, for she had known many girls, much worse than me, who had become . . . fine ladies after a few years abroad . . . a Miss Polly Moore, daughter of a chandler’s-shop woman, who . . . happened to be sent to Paris, where, from an awkward, ill-bred girl, she so much improved, that she has since been taken for a woman of quality. (p. 67)

In other words, Mme. Duval’s idea of a proper education is based not on making a person worthwhile but on giving her the appearance of a society belle. Mme. Duval assures Evelina that she will “make quite another creature of [her]” (p. 121): Evelina is to become a fashionable lady who will “despise almost everybody and every thing [she] had hitherto seen”—she is to marry “into some family of the first rank in the kingdom” and “spend a few months in Paris” where her “education and manners might receive their last polish” (p. 121). Appearance, for Mme.
Duval, is all. Unlike Mr. Villars, who is constantly reminding Evelina to keep her hopes and expectations within the bounds of what she may reasonably expect, Mme. Duval is ready to pump her full of grandiose plans. She proposes just the sort of scheme one might expect from a woman Mr. Villars describes as “too ignorant for instruction, too obstinate for entreaty, and too weak for reason” (p. 127). Mme. Duval’s proposal is included not only as a foil to the rational and healthy plan adopted for Evelina by Mr. Villars but also as a detail in Burney’s rendering of contemporary English society; undoubtedly, there were as many foolish Mme. Duvals ready to misguide their charges as wise Mr. Villars ready to help them. Mme. Duval’s ideas would be ridiculed by any of the novelists mentioned in this study.

While for the most part accepting the societal structures of class and hereditary rank that some of her more liberal contemporaries question, Burney still agrees with them in her basic assessment of what constitutes a worthwhile human being. She agrees that the healthy adult’s development depends on the child’s education in benevolence, sensitivity, and reason. Her novel has a slant different from most others in the period in that it examines the specific problems of the rising monied classes as they attempt to mix with those of hereditary rank, but the human values she emphasizes are the same as Day’s, Holcroft’s, and Godwin’s. Evelina is not nouveau riche, but her problems are very much the same as theirs, for she must learn manners and mores. In addition, she must learn to tell the difference between true breeding and false sophistication on each occasion that they are manifested by any of the several social groups in which she finds herself. She has a great deal of natural good sense and a generally good instinctive appreciation of what is proper or graceful in society; she is a kind of natural lady and has but to learn the specific forms of manners to fulfill her social potential.

There is no anger in the book. Burney’s satire, for the most part aimed at those who would ape their betters, is a satire born not of social ire but of social incongruity. The social satire in *Evelina* is to be distinguished from the far stronger protests
found in the other novels I discuss and serves to suggest some of the range of social commentary in the second half of the century. Burney criticizes Lovel, Mme. Duval, and the Branghtons not as representatives of their class but as corruptions of an ideal. Aristocrats should comport themselves well; when they do not, it is to their personal shame. Those who behave genteelly are to be admired and emulated. Burney in Evelina did not set out to fight ideological battles or to delineate social problems but to write a book that would chronicle the education into society of a young lady of good breeding but little experience. The adjectives “frothy” and “charming,” so often used of Evelina, are not misplaced. There is none of the argumentative intellectualizing that marks many of the contemporary novels and that gives Burney’s late The Wanderer an almost comical awkwardness in its debates about the ideals of the French Revolution.

Evelina is a reflection rather than a critique of society. There is no awareness in Evelina of the poor; we are not often aware that social problems can encompass much more than avoiding the making of a faux pas at a ball. As I have noted, Evelina is too preoccupied with learning the steps of the social dance to criticize the forms themselves. Burney presents her eighteenth-century, upper-middle-class world just as she, and Evelina, perceives it. It is an oversimplified world, in some ways naive. And yet for all those 140 new peers and the countless others on their way up in mobile eighteenth-century society, the awkwardness of Evelina and the social anxieties she faces had very real correlates to their own lives. Burney’s novel affirms the growing eighteenth-century conviction that nobility of mind and spirit matters. That is, in a real sense, a democratic ideal. At one time—and that rather recently too—it had been revolutionary. Burney’s polite novel, as devoted to preservation as the novels of Holcroft and Godwin ostensibly are to change, has this very important philosophical link to them.

2. Stanley Ayling, *George the Third* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), p. 312, footnote 2. Remarking on events in the 1784 election, only six years after the publication of *Evelina*, Ayling quotes Horace Walpole: “They are crying peerages about the streets in barrows.” During the years of Pitt’s ministry the membership of the House of Lords virtually doubled.

3. Remember that the aristocratic Richard Moreland in Brooke’s *The Fool of Quality* is clearly wrong and finally recognizes his own error in supposing himself superior to a merchant merely on the score of rank; see my discussion in chapter two.

4. Namier, pp. 13–14. This tallies precisely with what we have already seen in *The Fool of Quality* and *Sandford and Merton*.

5. Burney’s preface to *Evelina* tells us that she is planning to record the first six months of an inexperienced young lady after her “ENTRANCE INTO THE WORLD.” Fanny Burney, *Evelina, or the History of a Young Lady’s Entrance into the World*, ed. and introd. Edward A. Bloom (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 8. All references in the text are to this edition.

6. Evelina, it turns out, is in fact a lord’s daughter and quite Lord Orville’s social equal. Social consciousness is a fact of social life, and even the exemplary Orville admits that he had planned to make some inquiries into Evelina’s background. Burney finds herself living in a society that would like to believe that a man or woman is valued as an individual but knows quite well that it operates by other prejudices. The Macartney marriage, for example, must take place quickly because, even though he is very much in love with the now displaced heiress, he would find it quite distasteful should it become common knowledge that the young lady is not the true daughter of Sir John Belmont but a mere servant’s child.


8. Her reaction here is also colored by eighteenth-century paternalism; the father can do no wrong. There are many examples of such devoted children, especially in the gothic novels. In Ann Radcliffe’s *The Italian*, for example, the evil cleric is not held at all accountable by his forgiving daughter.

9. In her own personal life, Burney closely approximated this ideal. Was she not self-supporting from a very early age (her father, Charles Burney, was a very successful music teacher and dinner companion but never, it seems, quite comfortably solvent), yet always girlishly obedient to the suggestions of her father and Daddy Crisp?

10. Mr. Macartney is poor, but his poverty is genteel and easily taken care of by a good marriage. This is quite different from the case of the laborers in *Nature and Art*, for example, who cannot and never shall be able to make ends meet.