



**HAL**  
open science

## Chapter XII. Evelina's "Pollyphony"

Anne Rouhette

► **To cite this version:**

Anne Rouhette. Chapter XII. Evelina's "Pollyphony". Polyphony and the Modern, dir. Jonathan Fruoco, London, Routledge, 2021., pp.219-231, 2021. hal-03408547

**HAL Id: hal-03408547**

**<https://hal.science/hal-03408547>**

Submitted on 29 Oct 2021

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

## Chapter XII. *Evelina*'s "Polyphony"

Anne Rouhette

My starting-point is a very 'simple' remark: Frances Burney's first novel contains three young girls named 'Polly' with whom the heroine is associated, closely or remotely – four, in fact, if one bears in mind that the first name 'Molly', like 'Polly', derives from 'Mary' or 'Maria'. Maria Mirvan, called 'Molly' by her father, must therefore be added to Polly Green, Polly Branghton and Polly Moore. Since the plot of *Evelina* revolves in a large part around the question of identity and its relationship to naming, to patronymics of course but also to first names, the recurrence of this name cannot be a coincidence<sup>1</sup>. These multiple Pollies seem to contrast with the unicity of *Evelina*'s character, whose simplicity is frequently emphasised in this epistolary novel. I wish here to interrogate this simplicity and unicity of *Evelina* and of the novel which bears her name in the light of this multiplicity by reflecting in particular on the voice or rather voices which make themselves heard in Burney's work, whose apparent univocity or monody conceals a discreet polyphony. Borrowed from the language of music, 'polyphony' etymologically means 'variety of sounds or voices' which combine to form a piece made of several harmonizing melodies. By analogy, in literature, the term refers to a superposition of voices which can lead, in a novel, to the confrontation of contradictory discourses, and it is especially used by Mikhail Bakhtin within the framework of his theory of dialogism. By dialogism, Bakhtin designates three sorts of interaction, between characters who express themselves in individuated and independent manners, between these characters and an instance of enunciation, or between the several discourses, which can be internal and external, of the same character, who may then be characterised by a variety of discourses. Although such a concept may seem very far from the apparent simplicity and unicity both of *Evelina* and of the novel which bears her name, it proves particularly operative, especially in its first and third forms, in a study of *Evelina* as polyphonic, which this essay will carry out by focusing on the genre of the novel and on its heroine, more particularly on her discourse.

Specialists of the epistolary novel usually identify three main types, classified according to the number of letter-writers<sup>2</sup>. In the monologue, or monologic form, one epistolary subject is the sole addresser, as in Guilleragues's *Portuguese Letters* (1669), in Marivaux' posthumous

---

<sup>1</sup> The questions of identity and naming in *Evelina* are dealt with for instance in Rouhette 2013, pp. 102-09.

<sup>2</sup> See for instance Altman 1982 or Calas 2007, both indebted to Jost 1966.

*Vie de Marianne* (composed between 1731 and 1741), to which Burney refers to indirectly in the preface to *Evelina*, or in Goethe's *Werther* (1774). The novels of the dialogic type, where two epistolary subjects exchange letters, are few, unlike polylogic novels, also called polyphonic (Altman 1982, pp. 194-95), with three or more addressers. 'Polyphony' is also a word used in reference to Rousseau's *Julie; Ou, La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761; Calas 2007, pp. 36-37), which Burney evokes in her preface. This type is obviously the most complex and may take on different forms: Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748) thus comprises letters penned by over twenty different characters, with two principal and two secondary addressers whose whole correspondence, letters and answers, may be given, while in *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (1771) Smollett has five epistolary subjects send letters to addressees whose answers are alluded to but never printed. In *Evelina*, the series of letters which constitute the novel is signed by four characters, Lady Howard, Mr Villars, Evelina, and Sir John Belmont, three of whom write several letters. To this may be added Caroline Evelyn's posthumous letter in Volume III, which is numbered XIII, although enclosed in Villars's letter XII, making Caroline an epistolary subject in her own right. Furthermore, a few unnumbered missives are enclosed in other letters, like Mr Macartney's in Volume II, Letter XX. The 'I's of several narrators therefore intermingle in the novel.

From this perspective, *Evelina* should be a polylogic novel; however, it lacks the multiplication of points of view which characterises *Clarissa* or *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (1782), both polyphonic novels where the reader is led to constantly re-evaluate what he or she has just read as new information from another epistolary subject comes to light. Remarkably, only Evelina's version of events is available to the readers, no other interpretation or vision is ever forthcoming, whether in agreement or in contradiction with hers, to which no counterpoint is provided<sup>3</sup>. The focalization is thus marked by its simplicity, its univocity, certainly not by its multiplicity. The ball scenes for instance are only depicted by Evelina, and no-one praises Mrs Selwyn for her role in the happy outcome of the story. Even the events which Evelina does not witness are related by her, as when Maria reports the conversation between Lord Orville, Sir Clement Willoughby and Mr Lovel in Volume I, Letter XII, or when Mrs Selwyn recounts the dialogue between Orville and Willoughby in Volume III, Letter XIV: both reporting characters soon disappear from the text and the reader is left with the dialogue in direct speech, exactly as if Evelina herself had heard it. If we bear

---

<sup>3</sup> Villars and Maria differ from the heroine as far as the interpretation of her feelings is concerned, but they never question her description of how events unfold.

in mind that *Evelina* often resembles the monologic form of a diary, or more precisely a ‘journal’ – such is the term by which both Evelina and Villars refer to her narrative (Burney 2008, pp. 106 and 116) – , and that the preface alludes to the work as ‘memoirs’ (Burney 2008, p. 10), the polylogic mode appears to be eclipsed by the monologic since Evelina’s voice largely dominates, which is confirmed by the number of pages devoted to Evelina’s narrative (sometimes over sixty in a row) and by the recurrence of the phrase ‘Evelina in continuation’ (39 times).

*Evelina* thus seemingly offers the single voice of a monody; when the heroine’s perspective is contradicted or nuanced, it is by a character seen and heard through the prism of her consciousness and from within her narrative, framed by it, and usually condemned for his or her bad manners and morals. This happens for instance when Sir Clement disparages the man the heroine loves and admires: ‘the art of Orville has prevailed;—cold, inanimate, phlegmatic as he is’ (Burney 2008, p. 358). The character’s speech is thereby discredited on a narrative level, although, as I will argue further down, it remains *heard* and cannot simply be ignored. The choice of presenting the reader with one uncontested version tends to erase the subjective nature of the heroine’s narrative and grants it the objective element of an authoritative discourse. The monologic character conveyed by this absence of contradiction largely explains why *Evelina* is considered as a conservative novel by Patricia Meyer Spacks for instance (Spacks 1976), since Evelina’s interpretation of the characters she encounters or of the events she experiences is nearly always sanctioned by her tutor Mr Villars, who shares his ward’s opinion on characters he has met, like Madame Duval and Mrs Selwyn, as well as on those he has not, like Sir Clement. As a figure of authority on two accounts, first as Evelina’s tutor and father-figure, and secondly as a ‘reverend’ and therefore a spiritual guide, Villars embodies a patriarchal order the heroine endorses and never questions. The same cannot be said in my view of the novel she belongs to, if only because Villars’s presentation of her, especially of her simplicity, is revealed to be deeply flawed.

Evelina’s simplicity is repeatedly brought forward, either by the author persona in the Preface, which presents the heroine as ‘the offspring of Nature, and of Nature in her simplest attire’ (Burney 2008, p. 10), or by characters such as Lady Howard, who describes Evelina’s character as ‘truly ingenuous and simple’ (p. 23), and most importantly and recurrently by Mr Villars. The latter thus mentions ‘the artlessness of [Evelina’s] nature, and the simplicity of [her] education’ (p. 117), ‘the artless openness, the ingenuous simplicity of her nature’ (p. 127), or entreats his ward to ‘retain thy genuine simplicity, thy singleness of heart, thy guileless sincerity’ (p. 338). In Lady Howard’s and Mr Villars’s letters, the term ‘simplicity’

associated with Evelina sounds like an encomium, praising in particular her integrity. Confronted with the duplicity of the world which surrounds her, Evelina is ‘one’, sincere, incapable of lie or concealment, as shown by her failure to keep from Villars the letter she attributes to Lord Orville: ‘I wish I had made no concealment from the beginning, since I know not how to account for a gravity, which not all my endeavours can entirely hide or repress’, she writes Maria (p. 259), a few days before revealing everything to her tutor and concluding: ‘Concealment, my dear Maria, is the foe of tranquillity’ (p. 268). Like an open book, her face reveals her sentiments in an immediate manner as her physical beauty perfectly corresponds to that of her soul. This ‘simplicity’ and the transparency it relies upon are characteristics of the ideal woman propounded by the conduct-books which were so popular in Burney’s time: ‘I wish you to possess the most perfect simplicity of heart and manners’, writes John Gregory (Gregory 1774, p. 45), while James Fordyce insists on ‘the grand principle of simplicity’ for a woman (Fordyce 1809, vol. I, p. 54), particularly on her ‘simplicity of manners’ (vol. II, p. 56). This extends to her mode of expression as Fordyce advises women to speak with ‘that easy elegance of speech, which results from clear and lively ideas, expressed with the simplicity of nature, somewhat aided by the knowledge of books’ (vol. I, p. 153), construing feminine discourse as being simple by essence.

One of the problems raised by Lady Howard and Villars’s characterisation of Evelina as ‘simple’ or the conduct books’ presentation of the ideal woman as such is that this word is far from being always positively connoted. To put it otherwise, the very definition of simplicity in *Evelina* is complex if not multiple, in keeping with the various sub-entries in Johnson’s dictionary for the adjective ‘simple’: 1/ plain, artless, unskilled, undesigning, sincere, harmless; 2/ uncompounded, unmingled, single, only one, plain, not complicated; 3/ silly, not wise, not cunning (cunning is here taken in its positive sense of ‘instructed’ or ‘skilful’)<sup>4</sup>. Resolutely negative connotations are juxtaposed to more positive ones, even within the same sub-entry 1, which associates ‘sincere’ and ‘unskilled’. If Mr Villars and Lady Howard seem to take the adjective in its laudatory sense, Evelina herself uses it twice to mock Mr Brown, called ‘simple Mr Brown’ (Burney 2008, p. 201) or ‘simple swain’ (p. 205). This only bears out her description of the character in the same letter as a ‘silly young man’ (p. 203), a phrase situated between the two occurrences of ‘simple’. She also applies the term to herself self-deprecatingly: ‘how will he be provoked, thought I, when he finds what a simple rustic he has

---

<sup>4</sup> Johnson 1755, page 1838, last modified: December 6, 2012, available online on <https://johnsonsdictionaryonline.com/page-view/&i=1838>.

honoured with his choice!’ (p. 32), or again: ‘I was extremely disconcerted at this grave, and but too just accusation, and I am sure I must look very simple’ (p. 349), which Vivien Jones in her notes to the edition used here glosses as ‘foolish’.

The pejorative sense of the term, which Evelina appears to favour, is actually inherent in the praises which Villars lavishes upon her. He considers her unable to understand the complexity of other people, as the suffix *-less* or the prefix *-un*, recurrent in the definitions from Johnson’s dictionary given above and in the adjective ‘artless’ so often used to describe Evelina, clearly become the signs of a lack, which is here of an intellectual nature. ‘[G]uileless yourself’, explains Villars, ‘how could you prepare against the duplicity of another?’ (p. 268). Evelina’s simplicity or here ‘guilelessness’, synonymous with ‘artlessness’, prevents her from perceiving what is duplicitous, multiple and complex. That is at least what Villars implies, which the less than complimentary phrases he uses elsewhere to describe Evelina to Lady Howard corroborate: ‘You must not [...] expect too much from my pupil. 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’ (p. 21). The paternalistic tone conveyed by ‘pupil’ and ‘little’ corresponds to an infantilisation of women built in the demand for ‘child-like simplicity’ which weighs upon them, in James Fordyce’s words (Fordyce 1809, vol. II, p. 120). Lord Orville echoes Villars further down when he doubts Evelina’s ability to detect and withstand Sir Clement’s manipulations: ‘she is too young for suspicion, and has an artlessness of disposition that I never saw equalled’ (Burney 2008, p. 346), suggesting that she is too simple, i.e. too gullible to perceive the baronet’s bad intentions. Thus the two men who matter the most for Evelina see her as a child or as a young innocent whose simplicity represents an intellectual limitation; the third meaning of ‘simple’ in Johnson’s dictionary is not really distinguishable from the first in the way they perceive the heroine. Their ‘praise’ cuts both ways. In this light, the esteem in which they hold her, due precisely to the simplicity that they attribute to her, relies on a misunderstanding of who Evelina really is. If Orville cannot ask the heroine directly what she thinks of Sir Clement, Mr Villars on the other hand has had access to the young girl’s letters, as has the reader. Villars knows, or ought to know, that she is perfectly capable of perceiving Sir Clement’s ruses as well as the double language he makes use of: ‘if you did not talk in one language, and think in another’, says Evelina to the baronet (p. 99). She also immediately sees through Lady Louisa’s affectation and Mr Lovel’s hypocrisy: Evelina’s simplicity does not prevent her from discerning someone else’s duplicity.

More importantly perhaps, as far as Evelina's discourse is concerned, Villars seems to disregard entirely his ward's use of voices. Like Burney herself, who was famous in her family for her gifts as an imitator, Evelina shows a real talent for ventriloquism and quotes extensively from the speeches of other characters who express themselves in distinct, sometimes sub-standard varieties of English, and occasionally in another language: M. Du Bois's French, Madame Duval and the Branghtons' grammatically and syntactically incorrect English, Captain Mirvan's nautical phrases, Lady Louisa and Mr Lovel's speech mannerisms, etc. Burney's novel is 'many-voiced' indeed, as Vivien Jones points out in her introduction to the edition used here (Burney 2008, p. xxxiv); as Jeffrey Hopes among others remarks, all these voices contrast sharply with the heroine's silences, which 'other voices fill out' (Hopes 2013, p. 315) – a direction I will not pursue as I am not concerned here with the diegesis of the novel but with its use of discourse. Strikingly, *Evelina*'s heteroglossia is entirely owing to Evelina, not to the other epistolary subjects. Lady Howard refuses to quote directly from Madame Duval's letter, offering instead a summary: 'The chief purport of her writing I will acquaint you with; the letter itself is not worthy your notice' (Burney 2008, p. 13), she writes on the first page of the novel. *Evelina* thus opens with the control exerted by one character over another one's discourse, which is erased. As for Villars, he refuses to relate Madame Duval's words to Lady Howard unless in highly doctored reported speech: 'I will not trouble your Ladyship with the particulars of this disagreeable conversation' (p. 164). Madame Duval's written and spoken words are censored by two of the novel's main epistolary subjects, who endorse a monolingualism endowed with an ideological value analysed particularly in Davidson 2016<sup>5</sup>.

Christina Davidson argues that Burney subscribed to an 'ideology of standardisation' (Davidson 2016, p. 35)<sup>6</sup>, an ideologically conservative conception of a common language. This is strongly reminiscent of Bakhtin's definition of a 'unitary language' or 'system of linguistic norms':

Unitary language constitutes the theoretical expression of the historical processes of linguistic unification and centralization, an expression of the centripetal forces of

---

<sup>5</sup> See also, by the same author, 'Conversations as Signifiers: Characters on the Margins of Morality in the First Three Novels of Frances Burney'. *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* 8: 2 (June 2010), pp. 277-304.

<sup>6</sup> Davidson borrows the phrase from James Milroy and Lesley Milroy (*Authority in Language: Investigating Language Prescription and Standardisation*, 3rd ed., London: Routledge, 1999, p. 17).

language. A unitary language is not something given but is always in essence posited – and at every moment of its linguistic life it is opposed to the realities of heteroglossia. But at the same time it makes its presence felt as a force for overcoming this heteroglossia, imposing specific limits to it, guaranteeing a certain maximum of mutual understanding and crystalizing into a real, although still relative unity – the unity of the reigning conversational (everyday) and literary language, “correct language.”

A common unitary language is a system of linguistic norms. But these norms do not constitute an abstract imperative; they are rather the generative forces of linguistic life, forces that struggle to overcome the heteroglossia of language, forces that unite and centralize verbal-ideological thought, creating within a heteroglot national language the firm, stable linguistic nucleus of an officially recognized literary language, or else defending an already formed language from the pressure of growing heteroglossia. (Bakhtin 1981, pp. 270-71)

If Evelina followed in Villars and Lady Howard’s footsteps, it would be difficult to disagree with Christina Davidson’s contention that *Evelina* testifies to Burney’s conservative ideology, at least insofar as language is concerned. But such is not the case, precisely because of the heroine’s discourse: simply put, Evelina’s polyphonic writing contradicts her conservative values. She does not enforce the norms she claims to abide by, does not defend a standard version of English against ‘the heteroglossia of language’. Whether or not Burney was a conservative in political, social or linguistic matters, her novel certainly is not, relying as it does on a conception of language that is anything but conservative or unitary. Far from seeking to write always in a ‘correct’ language ‘guaranteeing a certain maximum of mutual understanding’, in Bakhtin’s words, *Evelina* reproduces words or phrases whose meaning eludes her like Captain Mirvan’s ‘sea-terms [...], which are to [her] quite unintelligible’ (Burney 2008, p. 141), but which she writes down nonetheless, just as she writes down Madame Duval’s incorrect speeches, confronting her fictitious reader, Villars, with types of language he does his best to repress.

In her narrative, *Evelina* does not censor the ‘vulgar’ or divergent voices, like Madame Duval’s or, on another level, those of the satirical Mrs Selwyn or even of Sir Clement when, in the passage quoted above, he expresses about Lord Orville an opinion with which *Evelina* disagrees but which is shared by a certain number of readers. Whether she quotes Madame Duval to criticize or mock her eventually matters little; she *quotes* her, often at great length, and thus introduces a disturbing voice into the novel, providing a counterpoint to the ideologically dominant discourse, especially Villars’s, the discourse of the father and of the



spiritual authority he represents as a reverend. This prescriptive discourse is at times barely distinguishable from that found in conduct books: Villars's 'nothing is so delicate as the reputation of a woman; it is at once the most beautiful and most brittle of all human things' (p. 166) sounds like an echo of Fordyce's 'Remember how tender a thing a woman's reputation is, how hard to preserve, and when lost how impossible to recover' (Fordyce 1809, vol. I, p. 32). In Evelina's letters, Burney gives voices to those which patriarchal society would like to silence, as Captain Mirvan silences the women around him. Both Madame Duval and Mrs Selwyn, of whom Villars and Evelina disapprove for different reasons, are thus quoted by the latter, not in the reported speech which would mark control over their discourse, but in their 'own words' (Burney 2008, pp. 151 and 284).

Those voices are clearly differentiated from Evelina's, if only because they are most often accompanied by the usual markers of direct speech, inverted commas, or italics for shorter speeches. But the boundary between voices becomes blurred when the heroine skilfully resorts to free indirect speech, as in the following example, which occurs very early in the novel:

[...] in hopes of changing the discourse, and preventing his further inquiries, I desired to know if he had seen the young lady who had been conversing with me?  
No; □but would I honour him with my commands to see for her?  
'O by no means!'  
Was there any other person with whom I wished to speak?  
I said no, before I knew I had answered at all.  
Should he have the pleasure of bringing me any refreshment?  
I bowed, almost involuntarily. And away he flew. (p. 33)

Two voices are heard in the same utterance and mingle, Lord Orville's, who pronounces the reported sentences, and Evelina's, who relates them. Two discourses are superimposed, justifying the appellation of polyphony or polyvocality often given to free indirect speech<sup>7</sup>. Even more remarkably, the supposedly simple Evelina proves to be a mistress of irony, a mode of expression often associated with free indirect speech<sup>8</sup>; this is more striking since this

---

<sup>7</sup> There appears to be no general agreement amongst linguists regarding the status of voice in free indirect discourse. For a detailed analysis of the question, see Fludernick 1995, which sums up and prolongs the debate between Ann Banfield and Oswald Ducrot.

<sup>8</sup> For an overview of the subject and further references, see Oltean 1993, p. 696.

time the two voices belong to one and the same character. Far from the simplicity and spontaneity required of woman in Evelina's society, the ironist is a person who wears a mask, an 'ironic mask' according to Vladimir Jankélévitch (Jankélévitch 1950, p. 52, my translation), a metaphor taken up by Philippe Hamon when he refers to the ironist as a 'hypocrit', 'someone who speaks from behind a mask to unmask the deceits of society' (Hamon 1996, p. 110, my translation). Evelina thus denounces Captain Mirvan's behaviour when she writes: 'he was so civil as to immediately take possession of the vacant seat in his own coach, leaving Madame Duval and Monsieur Du Bois to take care of themselves' (Burney 2008, p. 64), her real meaning being of course that he completely lacks courtesy. A type of discourse whose meaning is not that of the words actually pronounced or written, relying on the distinction between an implicit and an explicit meaning, irony is conspicuous for its lack of simplicity – this takes us rather far from the prescriptions found in conduct books quoted above, according to which women should express themselves with simplicity. The associations of irony with wit are also to be avoided by the young female readers of such books, as Fordyce explains:

[...] need I tell you that men of the best sense have been usually averse to the thought of marrying a witty female? [...] we cannot be easy, where we are not safe. We are never safe in the company of a critic and almost every wit is a critic by profession. (Fordyce 1809, vol. I, p. 147)

Evelina's image as the ideal woman takes a serious blow from her use of irony. Linguists and literary critics differ as regards voice in an ironic utterance; some hear one voice delivering a double discourse, others, like linguist Oswald Ducrot (Ducrot 1984), describe irony as polyphonic since two voices are heard at the same time; others still distinguish between the perspectives, that of the ironist and that of his or her audience and even his or her victim. For Jankélévitch for instance, irony is 'univocal' for the ironist and 'equivocal' for the person who is the butt of this irony (Jankélévitch 1950, p. 49, my translation). Philippe Hamon on the other hand supports a polyphonic vision of irony, writing: 'The ironical utterance is double-voiced, with a low voice and a high one' (Hamon 1996, p. 111, my translation). This has several consequences. First, this double message raises the question of interpretation and the possibility of a misunderstanding, since irony is not always detected – is Mr Villars aware of Evelina's irony? He never gives the slightest suggestion that he is. The 'low' voice may be stifled by the 'high' one, as when Mr Smith does not immediately understand that he is being

mocked by Sir Clement at Vauxhall (Volume II, Letter XV). Secondly, Evelina's ironical utterances emphasise that polyphony is not merely exterior to the character: it also comes from within her, as different voices make themselves heard within her discourse, whether she is aware of it or not, whether she plays with it or is played by it.

For if the examples given hitherto all show Evelina's control over those different voices, hers and those of others, a distance is sometimes created between the reader and her narrative. This introduces a blurring in the authoritative discourse, to which a discreet counterpoint is then provided. It is for instance perfectly acceptable to entertain about Mrs Selwyn, Mrs Mirvan, Lord Orville or Mr. Villars an opinion differing from the heroine's, which numerous critics have done. More precisely, on a discursive level, Evelina's irony sometimes backfires on her. When she contemptuously calls Mr Brown a 'simple swain' (Burney 2008, p. 205), using 'simple' in its negative sense and making her meaning even more forceful thanks to the alliteration, she ridicules the young man by transforming him into the hero of a pastoral in quest of his lady, Polly Branghton, in Vauxhall Gardens: he has indeed been 'looking for a lady', as Mr Smith points out on the same page. By antiphrasis, the implicit meaning (the 'low' voice) is that Mr Brown shares no common point with the heroes of medieval romances which the archaic noun 'swain' hints at – the term recurs several times in *The Faerie Queene* for instance<sup>9</sup>. But unlike Mr Smith or Tom Branghton, the simple Mr. Brown rushes to help Polly, a damsel in very real distress in the dark and dangerous alleys of Vauxhall, which, within the context of a novel where chivalrous virtues are constantly ignored or trampled upon, as in the footrace between the two old women, likens him to Lord Orville, albeit on a very humble scale. Besides, his intentions towards his Polly are honourable, which is more than can be said for Sir Clement's towards Evelina, and he eventually marries her. The chivalrous connotations which Evelina uses to ridicule Mr Brown thus have an adverse effect when considered in the light of the novel as a whole, and a third type of discourse, or a third voice, emerges, whose origin is difficult to locate as the reader understands or hears something which Evelina had no intention of saying but which she says nonetheless.

---

<sup>9</sup> The word may be applied to a knight, as in Book III, Canto VII, st. xxix : '[...] it chaunst a knight/ To passe that way, as forth he trauelled;/ It was a goodly Swaine, and of great might,/ As euer man that bloody field did fight,' which describes 'the good Sir Satyrane' (st. xxx) (Spenser 1966, p. 101).

In the same line of thought, the reader perceives very early on that Evelina is in love with Lord Orville, although she denies it. This might be expressed through her choice of words:

The conversation of Lord Orville is really delightful. His manners are so elegant, so gentle, so unassuming, that they at once engage esteem, and diffuse complacence. Far from being indolently satisfied with his own accomplishments [...], he is most assiduously attentive to please and to serve all who are in his company, and, though his success is invariable, he never manifests the smallest degree of consciousness.

I could wish that you, my dearest Sir, knew Lord Orville, because I am sure you would love him; and I have felt that wish for no other person I have seen since I came to London. (p. 74, emphasis added except for 'you')

At first sight, Evelina is describing Orville's intellectual, social and moral qualities, while some adjectives like 'gentle' or 'delightful' are ambiguous, to say the least, and may pertain to the sensuous or even erotic fields (Blanchemain-Faucon 2010, p. 126), which is confirmed by the verb 'engage' and especially by the displacement of Evelina's own feelings onto Villars in the following paragraph, accompanied by a litotes ('I could wish' and not 'I wish'). Or the young girl is betrayed by her own syntax:

I hope, too, I shall see Lord Orville no more [...]. As a sister I loved him;—I could have entrusted him with every thought of my heart, had he deigned to wish my confidence: so steady did I think his honour, so feminine his delicacy, and so amiable his nature! [...]: but I will talk,—write,—think of him no more! (p. 262)

The postposition of the negation ('see... no more', 'think of him no more') results in a double reading: first the sentences read as 'I hope I shall see Lord Orville' and 'I will [...] think of him' before the negative phrase alters the meaning. The effect produced differs widely from the structures Evelina uses to speak of Captain Mirvan for instance, when she writes: 'I do not like him' (p. 40). The impression conveyed by such a passage as a whole is that Evelina's feelings are first expressed and then qualified or negated. Her readers, fictitious like Villars or real, understand an entirely different message there: 'I hope, too, I shall see Lord Orville [...]. I loved him; I could have entrusted him with my heart; I will talk,— write,—think of him.' To take up the musical metaphor, the counterpoint to Evelina's melody is provided by Evelina's voice, suggesting that alterity comes from within the self. Something eludes the

heroine, undermining her control over her discourse and questioning her monologic discourse of authority and through it, arguably, that of the entire novel.

Evelina's 'simplicity', her 'unicity', and through her, those of the feminine model promoted by the conduct books are proven to be myths which the novel interrogates. Evelina is already plural, bearing her mother and grandfather's patronym in her first name, being the physical image of her mother, if not her reincarnation to her father: 'does Caroline Evelyn still live', Belmont exclaims when he sees her (p. 372), before conjuring her : 'Oh dear resemblance of thy murdered mother [...], all that remains of the most-injured of women [...], thou representative of my departed wife, speak to me in her name' (p. 385). To Belmont, the daughter speaks with the mother's voice. Furthermore, he indirectly underlines the mirror effect between the two women when he mentions the 'dreadful [...] *reflections*' (p. 386, emphasis mine) which his daughter awakens in him and when he repeats twice certain terms or phrases such as 'representative' and 'most injured of women' (pp. 384 and 385 respectively); he also resorts twice to the motif of the 'dagger' (pp. 385 and 386). These doublings point out his assimilation of mother and daughter and consequently the daughter's dual nature. The mirror effect is also conveyed by each of the novel's 'Pollies', who reflect the heroine in a more or less distorted manner. Maria Mirvan, her chosen sister, is thus her 'second self' (p. 123), while Polly Moore is held up to her by Madame Duval as a model to follow (p. 69) and her cousin Polly Branghton, like her pretty and 'good-natured' (p. 70), also likes the opera and eventually marries her 'swain'. More fundamentally, Polly Green functions as the heroine's *alter ego*. Also described as 'pretty' and 'mild and good-humoured' (p. 315), the usurper occupies Evelina's rightful place as Belmont's daughter and makes her entrance into the world (at least, into the novel) by dancing at Bristol with Lord Orville, as Evelina did in London, before marrying Evelina's brother and thus becoming her sister. Surprisingly, even though Evelina watches Polly Green dance, the two 'Miss Belmont' never meet nor speak, which reinforces the impression that the two girls are but two sides of the same character. This is brought out by the singular used by Mrs Selwyn when she alludes to 'both the real and the fictitious *daughter*' (p. 377, emphasis mine), reminding us that the same signifier, 'Miss Belmont', refers to two signifieds, Evelina and Polly Green – one singular for a plural reality, a multiplicity underneath the unicity of a subject and of a novel which finally turn out to be poly/pollyphonic, and so anything but simple.

## References

- Altman, J. G. (1982) *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form*, Columbus, Ohio State University Press.
- Bakhtin, M. (1981) 'Discourse in the Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, Austin, University of Texas Press.
- Blanchemain-Faucon, L. (2010) *L'Imagination féminine chez Frances Burney*, Toulouse Presses Universitaires du Mirail.
- Burney, F. (2008) *Evelina; or, A Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (1778), ed. Edward A. Bloom, intr. and notes Vivien Jones, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Calas, F. (2007) *Le Roman Épistolaire*, Paris, Nathan.
- Davidson, C. (2016) "'To Speak as Others Speak": Privileged and "Vulgar" Voices in *Evelina*, by Frances Burney', *Women's Writing* vol. 23. n° 1, pp. 33-52.
- Ducrot, O. (1984) *Le Dire et le dit*, Paris, Éditions de Minuit.
- Fludernik, M. (1995) 'The Linguistic Illusion of Alterity: The Free Indirect as Paradigm of Discourse', *Diacritics*, vol. 25. N° 4 (Winter), pp. 89-115.
- Fordyce, J. (1809) *Sermons to Young Women* (1766), 2 vols, London, available online on [https://archive.org/details/bub\\_gb\\_5gjjoyYJiogC/page/n3](https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_5gjjoyYJiogC/page/n3) (volume I) and on [https://archive.org/details/bub\\_gb\\_hEfsFHa-UsQC/page/n3](https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_hEfsFHa-UsQC/page/n3) (volume II) [Accessed 25 Aug 2019].
- Gregory, J. (1774) *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters*, London, available online on [https://romantic-circles.org/editions/contemps/barbauld/poems1773/related\\_texts/gregory](https://romantic-circles.org/editions/contemps/barbauld/poems1773/related_texts/gregory) [Accessed 25 Aug 2019].
- Hamon, P. (1996) *L'Ironie littéraire. Essai sur les formes de l'écriture oblique*, Paris, Hachette.
- Hopes, J. (2013) "'She Sat like a Cypher" : Discursive Ventriloquism in *Evelina*', *RSÉAA XVII-XVIII* vol. 70, pp. 309-22.
- Jankélévitch, V. (1950) *L'Ironie ou la bonne conscience*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France.
- Johnson, S. (1755) *A Dictionary of the English Language. A Digital Edition of the 1755 Classic by Samuel Johnson*, ed. Brandi Besalke, available online on <https://johnsonsdictionaryonline.com/page-view/?i=1838> [Accessed 25 Aug 2019].

- Jost, F. (1966) 'Le Roman épistolaire et la technique narrative au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle', *Comparative Literature Studies* vol. 3. n° 4, pp. 397-427.
- Oltean, S. (1993) 'A Survey of the Pragmatic and Referential Functions of Free Indirect Discourse', *Poetics Today* vol. 14. N° 4, (Winter), pp. 691-714.
- Rouhette, A (2013). *Correspondences: Frances Burney's Evelina*, Paris, Fahrenheit.
- Spacks, P. M. (1976) 'Dynamics of Fear: Fanny Burney', in *Imagining a Self, Autobiography and Novel in 18<sup>th</sup> Century England*, Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press, pp. 158-92.
- Spenser, E. (1966) *Faerie Qveene, Book Three* [1590]. *The Works of Edmund Spenser, A Variorum Edition*, ed. Edwin Greenlaw, Charles Grosvenor Osgood, and Frederick Morgan Padelford, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press.

