

A Study of Fanny Burney's Cecilia

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I

Although Fanny Burney is remembered today, when remembered at all, as the author of Evelina, her own age preferred her second novel, Cecilia or The Memoirs of an Heiress. Its success was immediate, and too universal and prolonged to owe more than its first days to the popularity of Evelina. Dr. Johnson and Burke applauded it; Gibbon professed to have read the whole five volumes in a day,¹ and its appeal to milliners and to their customers in high life was equally strong.² Jane Austen called it a "work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humor, are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language."³ Her description of a young lady ashamed of being caught with it (or Camilla or Belinda) and condemned as a frivolous novel reader does not sound as if it had become an old fashioned piece reserved for the discriminating. Macaulay, writing in 1843, after her death, declared that "she lived to be a classic" and that her early works were still widely read.⁴

Cecilia is almost wholly neglected now, perhaps because of the ponderous scenes which were considered its

most touching beauties in 1782. To modern taste, it is a less even performance than Evelina, but unfortunately, its barren chapters have buried delightful comic scenes which were never equalled in the earlier account of a young lady's entrance into the world.

Evelina was published in January, 1778. The conventional framework of its plot was developed from one of the juvenilia which Fanny burned in the garden of the Poland Street house, when, at fifteen, she tried to squelch her ungenteel love for writing.⁵ The story concerned an unfortunate heroine, Caroline Evelyn, forced by an unsympathetic mother into marriage with a rake, who later burned the license and repudiated his wife and her child. The new novel was an account of this child as a young woman and would have been dull enough if limited to developments of the original plot, culminating in Evelina's reunion with her repentant father. However, Fanny introduces the unwise mother - the only interesting character of the book who had originated in the Caroline Evelyn story - as a divertingly vulgar grandmother, and makes much of her heroine's embarrassment between the old woman's crude connections and her own well bred friends. She wrote the novel secretly, and confided only to her sisters the project of having it published anonymously. For fear that her handwriting should

be familiar to composers from her work as her father's amanuensis, she affected a dissimilar, upright hand in making her fair copy. She first wrote an unsigned letter to Dodsley (the answer to be addressed to the Orange Coffee House and called for by her brother Charles), offering him the novel; but he refused to accept it from an anonymous author. Arrangements were finally made with Thomas Lowndes, a bookseller in the City, who paid Fanny twenty pounds.⁶

Although she has been accused of mock modesty, Fanny Burney's hatred of publicity or marked attention was too long continued and too unpleasant to herself to be anything but genuine. Even the praises which she later received from Dr. Johnson were painful delights. Although she felt it a duty to tell her father of her book before its publication, she blushed over the confession and begged him not to ask to see the manuscript.⁷ She especially dreaded discovery by her stepmother, Elizabeth Allen Burney, whose hints had prompted the conflagration in the Poland Street garden. "She knows how severe a critic I think her," wrote Fanny to her father, "and therefore I am sure cannot wonder I should dread a lash which I had no other hope of escaping from, but flight or disguise."⁸ However, Dr. Burney was delighted with the book, thinking it in some respects better

than Fielding's;⁹ he himself read it aloud to Mrs. Burney,¹⁰
 and he could not resist telling Mrs. Thrale that the author
 was his daughter.¹¹ Engaged several years before as music
 master for their eldest daughter,¹² he had become the personal
 friend of the Thrales, and had the opportunity at tea with
 Mrs. Thrale and Dr. Johnson to interest her in Evelina with-
 out giving Fanny away.¹³ Mrs. Thrale enjoyed the book and
 after she found that Dr. Johnson admired it, her praises
 were rapturous.¹⁴ In a passage of her diary written before
 she lent Evelina to Dr. Johnson, she called "pretty enough"
 and "flimsy" compared with Richardson, Rousseau, Charlotte
 Lennox, Fielding and Smollett. After this judgment is a
 later addition crowded in at the bottom of the page: "John-
 son said Harry Fielding never did anything equal to the
 2nd Vol of Evelina." She introduced Fanny at Streatham,
 her country home, which, as Dr. Johnson reigned there with
 more than usual good humour, was noted for its excellent
 company and conversation. Her friendship with Dr. Johnson
 and her success with the Streatham circle are described at
 length in her journalizing letters to her sister, Susan,
 and her friend, "Daddy" Crisp. Mrs. Thrale spread her fame
 as the author of Evelina; Dr. Burney was too proud to keep
 the secret and the facts were soon widely known.

It was generally expected that Fanny's next produc-
 tion should be a comedy for the stage. Mrs. Thrale was

apparently the first to suggest this, for in a letter to Dr. Burney, dated July 22, 1778, (just after she had finished the novel) she wrote "I cannot tell what might not be expected from Evelina, was she to try her genius at Comedy."¹⁵ "You must set about a comedy and set about it openly; it is the true style of writing for you," she told Fanny on her first visit to Streatham.¹⁶ Although she was not yet ready to confide her plans to her new friend, Fanny had already taken her advice. Earlier, in Fanny's account of the same visit, is this passage:

"Mrs. Thrale then returned to her charge, and again urged me about a comedy; and again I tried to silence her, and we had a fine fight together; till she called upon Dr. Johnson to back her.

" 'Why, madam,' said he, laughing, 'she is writing one. What a rout is here, indeed! She is writing one upstairs all the time. Who ever knew when she began Evelina? She is working at some drama, depend upon it.'

" 'True, true, O king!' thought I."¹⁷

Mrs. Thrale was still ignorant of the project in November of the same year, but Fanny received a letter of advice on the subject, dated December 8, from her Daddy Crisp.

Samuel Crisp had been Dr. Burney's friend since he met the younger man as a boy in his teens at the house of

Burney's patron, Fulke Greville.¹⁸ He was at this time rather a solitary country gentleman, intelligent, well read, and in spite of the failure of his one tragedy, Virginia a good judge of the productions of others. Fanny had been a favorite of his for some time and corresponded with him regularly. When he heard of the new venture, he wrote her two cautioning letters. A brisk comedy, he warned her, often contained rather free expressions and scenes, at which a lady might innocently laugh, without wishing to own them as her creations. The difficulty was to steer between this sort of thing and the popular tearful comedy, avoiding, at the same time, the detail dear to the novelist, but deadly on the stage.¹⁹ In the second letter, he advised her against too helpful friends. "I am very glad you have secured Mrs. Montagu for your friend; her weight and interest are powerful; but there is one particular I do not relish; though she means it as a mark of favour and distinction; - it is, where she says, 'If Miss Burney does write a play, I beg I may know of it, and (if she thinks proper) see it.'

"Now Fanny, this same seeing it (in a professed female wit, authoress, and Maecenas into the bargain) I fear implies too much interference - implies advising,

correcting, altering, etc. etc. etc.... Now d'ye see, as I told you once before, I would have the whole be all my own - all of a piece; and to tell you the truth, I would not give a pin for the advice of the ablest friend who would not suffer me at last to follow my own judgment without resentment."²⁰ In spite of all these admonitions, Crisp had no doubt that if any one could produce a play at once lively and delicate, Fanny could.

She continued with the comedy, receiving the most flattering encouragement from other sources. At Mrs. Cholmondeley's*, she saw Sheridan, who offered to accept unseen anything that she sent him for Drury Lane.²¹ Arthur Murphy, an old friend of the Thrales, met her at Streatham and offered any assistance which his long experience and knowledge of the theatre could give.²² She consulted Johnson, who gave her good advice: to keep the play a secret, raise no expectations, and have it produced anonymously while the public was still ignorant that it existed.²³

In Mrs. Thrale's diary is this entry, dated 1 May 1779:

*Sister of Peg Waffington, a prominent female wit, and one of the first admirers of Evelina.

"Fanny Burney has read me her new Comedy; nobody else has seen it except her Father, who will not suffer his Partiality to over-bias his Judgment I am sure, and he likes it vastly. -- but one has no Guess what will do on a Stage, at least I have none; Murphy must read an Act tomorrow, I wonder what he'll say to't. I like it very well for my own part, though none of the scribbling Ladies have a Right to admire its general Tendency." ³⁵

On May 4, Fanny wrote Crisp, telling him that the play was completed. The next journal entry describes Murphy reading and approving the first act;²⁵ while his stay at Streatham was too short for him to go further, he soon rejoined the family at Brighton and continued his reading and his praises.²⁶ This applause did not make Fanny over confident when preparing to send the manuscript by her father to Daddy Crisp. "Oh, my Dear daddy, if your next letter were to contain your real opinion of it, how should I dread to open it ... I should like that your first reading should have nothing to do with me - that you should go quick through it, or let my father read it to you - forgetting all the time, as much as you can, that Fannikin is the writer, or even that it is a play in manuscript and capable of alterations; - and then, when you have done, I should like to have three lines, telling me as nearly as you can trust my candour, its general effect."²⁷

Dr. Burney and Crisp wrote her a joint opinion which condemned it forever. This "hissing, groaning, catcalling epistle"²⁸ is not preserved in the Diary and Letters, but the next letter after that quoted above is addressed from Fanny to her father and begins: "The fatal knell, then, is knolled, and 'down among the dead men' sink the poor Witlings --forever, and forever, and forever!"²⁹ This is the first mention of the unfortunate comedy's name.

In Mrs. Thrale's own notes on her diary, she gives as Crisp's objection to the play a fear that it would offend the influential Blue Stocking Club or female wits.³⁰ However, a note in Fanny's handwriting, attached to the letter to Dr. Burney, explains that it was thought too like Moliere's Femmes Scavantes, (which Fanny, as it happened, had never read) and so liable to damning comparisons.³¹ Very little is told in the letters of its story except that it chiefly concerned Mr. Dabbler, Lady Smatter, Mrs. Sapient, Mrs. Voluble, Mrs. Wheedle, and Mr. Censor,³² with a subplot about the loss and restoration of an heiress' fortune. These characters were involved in a club, which Fanny later proposed to cut out of the play,³³ possibly because it suggested Philaminte's academy in the earlier comedy. Probably, the resemblance lay more in the whole theme of under-educated women affecting erudition than in the details of the plot.

The inherent weakness of The Witlings is hit in one of Crisp's subsequent letters:

"The play has wit enough and enough -- but the story and the incidents don't appear to me interesting enough to seize and keep hold of the attention and eager expectations of the generality of audiences."³⁴

The change in Dr. Burney from the enthusiasm mentioned by Mrs. Thrale is not explained. Perhaps the Doctor, who was always inclined to extreme fatherly pride in Fanny's work, was cooled by his old friend's more clearheaded judgment.

Fanny was shocked at the condemnation of the play as a whole; she had expected any number of particular flaws, but not a general failure. She accepted the verdict of her advisers without question and with sincere humility and gratitude. Mrs. Thrale suggested that The Witlings should be reworked;³⁵ and after Sheridan had urged Fanny not to scrap it, she began some half hearted changes, rewrote the fourth act, and outlined in a letter to Crisp some revisions which might improve the plot and lessen the resemblance to Moliere.³⁶ He replied that while the changes were for the best, he did not see how the action could go on with such extensive omissions as were necessary.³⁷ The play was dropped, without much apparent regret on Fanny's part. She had never been much interested in the revisions.

Through all her account of The Wittings is the feeling that she was writing it mainly because it was expected of her. She felt a natural distress at the sorry end of her Wittings; "however worthless, they were mes enfans, and one must do one's nature," she wrote to her father.³⁸ Yet in the same letter, she gives a hint of her attitude throughout the whole Witting affair. "But my mortification is not at throwing away the characters, or the contrivance; -- it is all at throwing away the time, -- which I with difficulty stole, and which I have buried in the mere trouble of writing."³⁹

The real importance of The Wittings is that one of its characters developed into the heroine of Fanny's next novel. In answering the "catcalling epistle", she mentions to Crisp a list of the play's characters, and a Cecilia is one.⁴⁰ One of the revisions which she proposed was a new version of the loss and restoration of Cecilia's fortune, so she was, like her successor, an heiress.⁴¹ A few weeks earlier she had sent Crisp a sketch for a heroine,⁴² and he later inquired for more particulars about her. She was to be an "unbeautiful, clever heroine, beset all around for the sake of her great fortune".⁴³ Here is Cecilia's situation, except that she emerged as conventionally beautiful. No more is heard of any new work until February, 1781, when Fanny wrote to Mrs. Thrale: "I think I shall always hate

this book, which has kept me so long away from you."⁴⁴

The next mention of the new novel is in a letter from Mrs. Thrale to Fanny at Chesington, dated November 22, 1781. "I'm glad the little book or volume goes on; my notion is that I shall cry myself blind over the conclusion -- it runs in my head -- 'tis so excessively pathetic."⁴⁵ By February, 1782, Fanny had finished the actual composition and was almost prostrated with the physical work of copying. "My work is too long in all conscience for the hurry of my people to have it produced. I have a thousand million of fears for it. The mere copying, without revising and correcting, would take at least ten weeks, for I cannot do more than a volume in a fortnight, unless I scrawl short hand and rough hand, as badly as the original."⁴⁶ Dr. Burney and Mrs. Thrale were allowed to see the completed first volume and complimented it highly, although the doctor did not expect it to be as successful as Evelina.⁴⁷ Apparently, Fanny had sent the first draft of this volume to Crisp as soon as she was done copying it, or before, for a letter with the same date (February 25) shows that he had read a "rough copy" and had been obliged to read it in haste.⁴⁸ A reply of Fanny to a letter of Crisp which does not appear indicates that by March 15, he had read as far as the quarrel between Mortimer Delville and his mother. This also was read in the first copy, and was perhaps included in the first material that

he read, for Fanny spoke of his asking for the two last volumes and declared, "I am still actually at work on the second."⁴⁹ If the first part of this version included the quarrel scene, with two volumes to follow, the latter part must have been considerably abridged before the publication; in the final form, the scene comes near the middle of Volume IV. There is some evidence that the novel was revised after Crisp had seen and approved the fair copy, for after he reread it in the published version he wrote:

" . . . The sum total amounts to this -- a full, unlimited confirmation of my warm approbation of the whole work together, and a positive declaration of the improvement it has received, beyond all expectation: -- greatly and judiciously compressed; long conversations curtailed; several incidents much better managed, and the winding up beyond all compare, more happy, more judicious, more satisfactory."⁵⁰

He could not have seen the winding up in the first draft, unless Fanny altered her determination not to lessen the effect of her work by letting him read it under such a disadvantage. He had given his approval of the book as a whole before it was published.⁵¹

Mrs. Thrale was also allowed to read it in manuscript. She wrote Fanny two rapturous letters of praise, during the reading. Though most of her praise was probably quite sincere, it is interesting to compare the letters and her diary, which was no journalising letter like Fanny's, but

almost distressingly personal and private. On April 30, she wrote to Fanny:

"Such a novel! Indeed, I am seriously and sensibly touched by it, and am proud of her friendship who so knows the human heart...If I had more virtue than Cecilia, I should have fear the censures of such an insight into the deepest recesses of the mind".⁵²

On May 15, she noted in her Journal that Cecilia was little more than an accurate picture of fashionable life, and compared it harshly with Clarissa.⁵³

The new novel was not published by Thomas Lowndes, but by Payne and Cadell. Fanny had been satisfied with the amount paid for Evelina, but her father was "quite enraged" that Lowndes had given her no more.⁵⁴ He and Crisp now had the direction of her affairs, and the change was probably their suggestion. The Payne family was already known to the Burneys; Fanny had been well acquainted with the bookseller's two daughters since 1775,⁵⁵ and in 1785, her brother James married one of them. In Charlotte Burney's diary for 1782, is this entry:

"Fanny's Cecilia came out last summer, and is as much liked and read I believe as any book ever was. She had L250 for it from Payne and Cadell. Most people say she ought to have had a thousand."⁵⁶

This is the only record of the amount paid. Crisp and Dr. Burney planned to buy Fanny an annuity with this sum, to which her father should add enough to make it even,

investing the whole at three percent until the annuity could be obtained.⁵⁷ The diary does not tell whether or not this was actually done.

Lowndes thought himself much misused because Cecilia had not been offered to him. He wrote an aggrieved letter to Dr. Burney, with a detailed account of his honest dealing regarding Evelina, the great expense at which he had procured elegant illustrations for the third edition, and the knavish motives for which Cadell, "with unbecoming art" had got the new book away from him. For his trouble, he received the following note from Fanny:

"The author of Evelina is much surprised that Mr. Lowndes should trouble himself to enquire any Reason why he did not publish Cecilia. She is certainly neither under Engagement or Obligation to any Bookseller whatever, and is to no one, therefore, responsible for chusing, and changing as she pleases." ⁵⁸

Cecilia appeared on June 12, 1782. Although Fanny had tried to keep it a secret until the actual publication, her new venture was generally suspected in February, and early in June she wrote to Susan: "The book... to my great consternation, I find is talked of and expected all the town over."⁵⁹ Two thousand copies were printed at the first edition, instead of the five hundred usual for a novel; and yet a third edition was necessary by the next January.⁶⁰ It was not only a success with the usual novel reading public

of all classes, but was taken with most flattering seriousness by the intelligentsia, even more than Evelina had been. "There are few -- I believe I may say fairly there are none at all -- that will not find themselves better informed concerning human nature, and their stock of observation enriched by reading your Cecilia," wrote Edmund Burke, in a fine letter of congratulation.⁶¹ Daddy Crisp was delighted with the finished work. Dr. Johnson, of course, was one of its most ardent advocates. "'Tis far superior to Fielding's," he said, "her Characters are nicer discriminated, and less prominent, Fielding could describe a Horse or an Ass, but he never reached to a Mule."⁶² Gibbon declared that he had read all the five volumes in one day, although Burke considered this impossible, for "it cost me three days; and you know I never parted with it from the time I first opened it."⁶³ Mrs. Montague approved.⁶⁴ Sir Joshua Reynolds, understanding Fanny's timidity, praised her with anecdotes of the praises of others, rather than bare-faced compliments of his own.⁶⁵ Soame Jenyns distressed her almost to illness by delivering a long eulogy of Cecilia while a large company stood in silence to honor the meeting of the two wits.⁶⁶ Her most pleasant triumph was her visit to the Duchess of Portland and Swift's friend, Mrs. Delany, who, in spite of her eighty-two years and ruined eyesight, had

read the book through three times.⁶⁷ At the other extreme were Mrs. Thrale's milliner, who begged for a sight of Fanny,⁶⁸ and an old nurse housekeeper, whose favourite character was the mad philanthropist, Mr. Albany.⁶⁹

The reviews were highly favorable. The Gentleman's Magazine, which seldom noticed novels at all, commended Cecilia as "equally pleasing and instructive."⁷⁰ It was the only novel of 1782 reviewed by The Gentleman's Magazine, and the only one to merit a full length article in the Monthly Review, instead of a few paragraphs in the "Monthly Catalogue." "We are at a loss," declared the reviewer, "whether to give the preference to the design or the execution: or which to admire most, the purity of the Writer's heart, or the force and extent of her understanding".⁷¹ This was a very detailed and particular review, quoting long passages and passing judgment even on the minor characters. It pointed some flaws, but was on the whole an impressive tribute. The complimentary parts were reprinted intact in the next month's issue of The Scots Magazine, (January, 1783) although without credit to the Monthly.⁷² A synopsis of the first half, with quotations from the most sententious and affecting parts, ran serially in the Universal Magazine from March until June, 1783.⁷³ All the reviewers were interested in Cecilia's powers as a sermon; most readers considered it a valuable moral work,

especially in its treatment of charity and picture of the fall of one of Cecilia's guardians, a spendthrift and gamester. "'No book,' said Mrs. Delany, 'ever was so useful as this, because none other so good was ever so much read.'" ⁷⁴

A modern reader can hardly understand how the sentimental parts of Cecilia could have produced the enormous emotional reaction which characterized the book's success. Charlotte Burney cried herself into a headache over the quarrel between Delville and his mother. ⁷⁵ Another young lady playfully blamed Fanny for depriving her of a ball, which she was obliged to miss because she had disfigured herself with long crying over Cecilia. ⁷⁶ Lady Hales and her daughter, Miss Coussmaker, to whom Dr. Burney had read Evelina when it first appeared, described to Susan Burney what seems to have been the normal response.

"'Cecilia' sends us into people's houses with our eyes swelled out of our heads with weeping. We take the book into the carriage and read and weep...During Cecilia's delirium, anyone coming into the room would have been surprised..The children wept and sobbed aloud; my heart was bursting with agony! and we all seemed in despair." ⁷⁷

Mrs. Delany and the Duchess of Portland were similarly affected, but Mrs. Chapone could not even cry. "I was in an agitation that half-killed me, that shook all my nerves, and made me unable to sleep at nights from the suspense I

was in; but I could not cry, for excess of eagerness."⁷⁸

The central plot deals with the struggle of a young man between loyalty to a fine family name and love for an heiress bound to give up her fortune at marriage or force her own name on her husband. The merits of this case were argued with great eagerness. One noble lord, who traced his descent from Elfrida, was all for the lover's proud family, although most people condemned them.⁷⁹

"I only wish", said the Duchess of Portland, "Miss Burney could have been in some corner, amusing herself with listening to us, when Lord Weymouth, and the Bishop of Exeter, and Mr. Lightfoot, and Mrs. Delany, and I were all discussing the point of the name. So earnest we were, she must have been diverted with us. Nothing, the nearest our own hearts and interests, could have been debated more warmly. The Bishop was quite as eager as any of us; but what cooled us a little, at last, was Mr. Lightfoot's thinking we were seriously going to quarrel; and while Mrs. Delany and I were disputing about Mrs. Delville, he very gravely said, 'Why ladies, this is only a matter of imagination; it is not a fact: don't be so earnest.'"⁸⁰

Naturally, the praises were not completely unanimous. Horace Walpole thought Cecilia too long, too Johnsonian and much inferior to Evelina. "The great fault is that the authoress is so afraid of not making all her dramatis personae set in character, that she never lets them say a syllable but what is to mark their character."⁸¹ He liked some of the characters, including the miserly guardian, Briggs, and others not generally admired, but

considered most of them outrés and would have dispensed altogether with the favorite, Albany. The very friendly criticism in The Monthly Review cited several defects, which will be discussed later, in the tediousness of some characters and the exaggeration of others. Even Burke had a few trifling objections.⁸² Yet considering how widely the book was read, the number of dissenters who have left records behind them is remarkably small.

II

Cecilia Beverley, an orphan, has just lost the uncle with whom she has lived for most of her life. This uncle, the dean of an unnamed cathedral in Suffolk, has left her an estate of three thousand pounds per year, on condition that when she marries, her husband will take her family name. She has also ten thousand pounds from her parents. Her family is respectable, but not genteel, for, although her father lived as a country gentleman, all his ancestors were plain, well-to-do Suffolk farmers.

As Cecilia is not yet of age, her uncle has appointed three guardians, all strangers to her. Mr. Briggs, a rich city merchant, is to have complete charge of her fortune. Mr. Delville, a man of excellent family, is to be consulted on all questions of propriety and reputation. The third, Mr. Harrel, is only chosen because he is the husband of Cecilia's former best friend, with whom she wishes to live until the end of her minority.

Cecilia sets out for London with Mr. Harrel, stopping on the way at the home of an old friend, Mr. Monckton. He is the younger son of a noble family, a highly intelligent dissembler, who not only craves Cecilia's fortune, but is in love with herself. He is only waiting for his disagreeable rich old wife's death to marry her. Meanwhile, knowing that she would not accept attentions from a

married man, and that she is very fond of him as a benevolent family friend, he makes the most of this role.

In London, Cecilia finds that the Harrels devote all their time and income to dress, fashionable amusements and expensive entertaining. She is disgusted with the life, especially as Mr. Harrel is determined to force a marriage between her and Sir Robert Floyer, a dull, insolent man of fashion. She meets her other guardians and finds Mr. Briggs a crude miser, and Mr. Delville a pompous fool, although she admires his sensible wife and his son, Mortimer. She becomes better acquainted with the Delvilles because of her growing dislike for the Harrels, who now begin to solicit her for loans. Mr. Harrel, with excuses, pleas, and finally threats of suicide prevails on her to lend him increasingly large sums. Her legacy from her father is also diminished by various charities, including relief to the family of Mr. Belfield, an erratic young man who has been wounded in a duel with Sir Robert, of which Cecilia is inadvertently the cause.

During this time, Cecilia discovers that she is in love with Delville, Jr. She believes that he loves her, but will not declare his feelings because of a rumor that she is engaged to Sir Robert. She goes to his father, as her guardian, and denies the report in Mortimer's presence, expecting this to remove the misunderstanding. Now, however,

the son begins to avoid her.

Mr. Harrel, by a great burst of extravagance to convince the town that he is solvent, has so completely ruined himself that he must leave the country. He begs for a little more money, and Cecilia is, with great difficulty, bled of a thousand pounds, which exhausts her father's legacy. Harrell, unknown to her, makes a desperate attempt to recover his fortune by gaming, and loses all he has. He takes Cecilia and his wife to Vauxhall for a farewell party, screws up his courage with champagne, and blows out his brains.

Cecilia is now thrown on the Delvilles, and goes with them to their country house, Delville Castle. Mr. Delville has no interests apart from his ancient family name, and the only son who is to continue it. Mrs. Delville is clever, and, in spite of a tendency toward arrogant judgments, virtuous. She is unhappy in her unequal match with a stupid husband, to whom she was married against her will by her own family, a branch of the Delvilles, but she also has a full share of family pride. Her standards are too demanding to allow her many friends, but she sincerely loves Cecilia.

After the family's arrival at the castle, young Delville avoids Cecilia pointedly. Taking the hint, she avoids him as thoroughly. At last, they are forced together

in a storm, and he impulsively begins to declare his love for her. She refuses to listen, and while convinced that he is sincere, she is now afraid that he finds some immovable obstacle in the way, probably her middle class birth. She is further discouraged when his mother hints plainly that in spite of her own love for Cecilia, she does not consider her a possible wife for her son. At last, Mortimer explains his hesitation - the change of name is the obstacle, not so much to himself as to his family. Cecilia is offended at what she believes is his inherited pride, and he is certain that she does not care for him. As soon as possible, she leaves the castle.

She goes to the home of an old friend, Mrs. Charlton, to finish out her minority. After a short while, Mortimer comes to visit her, and overhears a reverie which gives her away. Delighted, he proposes an expedient which horrifies Cecilia -- a secret marriage. After much persuasion, she consents unenthusiastically and Mortimer goes to London to make arrangements. Mr. Monckton, who has always tried to prejudice her against the Delvilles, hears of the scheme and puts so black a face on it that Cecilia hurries to London to withdraw her consent. She is delayed, and, unwilling to disappoint Delville on what was to have been their wedding day, she goes with him to church. They are at the altar when a voice from the church cries out an

objection to the marriage. After this bad omen, later revealed as a device of Monckton's, Cecilia refuses to continue the ceremony.

She returns to Mrs. Charlton's and is shortly visited by Mrs. Delvile, who at last extracts from her a promise to give up Mortimer and to be guided in the affair by his mother. Then young Delvile appears, with more vows and pleas; now come the long arguments between the son and mother, once considered the finest scenes in the book, which end in Mrs. Delvile's collapse with a broken blood vessel in her head. This catastrophe forces Mortimer's consent to leave Cecilia forever.

Soon afterward, Cecilia must see Delvile, Sr., who now heartily hates her, on some business connected with her estate. He hints that he has heard unbecoming news of her, that she is said to be too intimate with Mr. Belfield, the young gentleman whose family she has befriended, and to borrow money from Jews. Although she had taken up some large sums from a usurer to lend Harrel, the transaction was supposedly known only to Harrel himself, the Jew, and Mr. Monckton, her confidential friend. She is painfully distressed, when visiting Belfield's sister, to be surprised with the brother by Delvile, Sr., who has come to pry out her connection with the family.

Cecilia is now of age, and retires to her own house in Suffolk. Nearly six months pass before she is again visited by Mortimer. He has a concession from his father. If she will resign her uncle's legacy, to which the name condition is attached, and be satisfied with her father's ten thousand pounds, Delville, Jr. may marry her. This offer is intended as an insult by the father, who knows she cannot comply and has been filling his son's head with accounts of her extravagance and light morals. When Mortimer learns the truth, he is so offended with his father that he obtains from his mother a separate permission which splits the family. Under these conditions, Cecilia privately marries him.

Young Delville sets out from the church to tell his father of the marriage. He finds that the scandalous reports about Cecilia came from Monckton, determined to secure her for himself by spoiling all possibility of a match with Mortimer. The enraged young man hurries to Monckton's home, is provoked to call him out, and wounds him, apparently mortally. Fleeing the country, he leaves Cecilia with the marriage still unannounced. A rumor of the true state of things soon reaches the next heir to the estate which she has forfeited, and she must relinquish it. In London, trying to arrange for transportation to her husband, she is found by Mortimer in a mildly compromising

situation with Belfield. A duel is imminent, and in the ensuing complications, Cecilia is lost from Delville and runs mad from strain in the streets of London. She lies near death for days in a pawnbroker's house, but at last makes a miraculous recovery. The lovers are forgiven, and their affairs arranged according to Miss Burney's rather subdued notions of human felicity.

Mrs. Thrale was mainly right in her judgment that this story contained some excellent pictures of the times and little else. Apart from a few lively characters and several fine comic scenes, its whole value is in its picture of contemporary fashionable life. Certainly, no one would go to it now for increased knowledge of the human heart. Nor is it an account coloured with much physical detail. Dress, meals, houses and furnishings, equipage are never described and seldom mentioned. No novelist (except, on occasion, Richardson) had as yet made much use of such detail, but Fanny seemed more than commonly uninterested in it. Her letters contain none of the minute observation of dress and furniture which Horace Walpole's preserve. Her sister, Charlotte Ann, and her step-sister, Maria Allen Rishton, much her inferiors as correspondents, give better accounts of their surroundings.

Fanny Burney was never much interested in dress, although she dressed well enough to please the hypercritical

and outspoken Dr. Johnson. Moreover, from financial necessity, she made many of her own clothes, spending most of her time out of company on them, as she told Crisp.⁸³ Still she seems to have taken no creative pleasure in it, but considered it a chore and rather a contemptible one. "Caps, hats, and ribbons make, indeed, no venerable appearance upon paper; -- no more do eating and drinking; -- yet the one can no more be worn without being made, than the other can be swallowed without being cooked; and those who can neither pay milliners nor keep scullions, must either toil for themselves, or go capless and dinnerless."⁸⁴ Undoubtedly, Fanny had a prudish tendency to think the physical details of life unworthy. Although she desired nothing less than the appearance of a pedant,⁸⁵ there is a consistent ignoring in her letters and novels of anything but conversations, amusements and assemblies, opinions of reading, moral generalizations, and the like, which suggests a determined bourgeois gentility with a slight intellectual cast. She did not dislike her tasks because the smallness of her father's fortune made them necessary. She was not ashamed of plain work, but she would have been ashamed to be interested in it.

All the novels, but especially those after Evelina, suffer from this artificial refinement, especially in the

scenes of everyday life, unrelieved by public places and balls. In fact, Fanny's first two novels may only be called domestic because the action takes place against a colorless background of private households. Both heroines before Camilla are orphans, and this late attempt to draw a family is woefully stiff. As for the small details of daily life, they are not much noticed in Evelina, and practically cease to exist in the other novels. Fanny Burney has been credited with a large contribution to the domestic novel of manners, but in this aspect, she did not even make use of what had already been done. There is more convincing detail in Fielding's Amelia, far more of the feeling of a live household in the early books of Clarissa.

Her peculiar excellence was the description of social situations, preferably fashionable affairs at which a diverse and incongruous group is brought together. Fanny loved what she and her sisters called "flash": clever or ludicrous conversations, individual foibles, queer fashions in manners, and the friction of odd types brought together in a comic dilemma. If she ignored pictorial detail, she minutely recorded details of manners and customs. She was almost the first to treat these incidents at length for their own sake, without furthering the plot or pointing a moral. Such scenes as the masquerades in Sir Charles Grandison and Tom Jones, and the oratorio in Amelia are

direct developments of the story in which the scene is always subordinate to the plot. While Fanny's large scale scenes of high life usually advance the plot to some extent, most of their best touches have nothing to do with the story at all. In fact, the plot has been summarized above at some length without mentioning one of them. Also, these amusements, while considered frivolous, were made out more normal and innocent in Fanny's novels than in the earlier ones, in which they usually figured as scenes of wicked intrigue.

Cecilia has fewer of these scenes than Evelina, but they are carefully selected to give a fairly complete picture of fashionable diversions, without the superabundance of the first book, in which the story often seems only an excuse to carry the heroine and her retinue to all the public places in London. Cecilia's pleasures include an opera rehearsal and performance, a masquerade, a night at the Pantheon, a large formal assembly, and Mr. Harrel's disastrous party at Vauxhall. Besides the major characters and a few good grotesques, the participants are a set of tonnish types, sharply drawn, two dimensional humors characters, with a caustic observer to comment for Miss Burney on whatever amused or offended her in current manners.

Italian opera receives almost more than its share of attention, as it was the favorite diversion of the Burneys.

Doctor Burney had no official connection with the opera house, and his family usually had to be satisfied with occasional invitations and gifts of tickets, as the opera was one of the most expensive amusements in London.⁸⁶

However, the entire family, with the possible exception of Mrs. Burney,⁸⁷ shared the doctor's absorption in music. Although Fanny did not play or sing well, she was capable of intelligent criticism of the informal home concerts to which the doctor sometimes brought the new performers, and she attended often enough to be solidly familiar with much of the repertory. She slighted the playhouse for the opera in practice as well as in the novels. "Doctor Goldsmith has just brought on the stage a new comedy, called, 'She stoops to Conquer'," she wrote in her journal, "...it is very laughable and comic; but I know not how it is, almost all diversions are insipid at present to me, except the opera..."⁸⁸

Opera rehearsals seem to have been generally open to the public and as much a fashionable diversion as regular performances. No mention is made of the price of admission, which would have been no object with Cecilia's spendthrift company, but as Fanny herself was able to go and invite guests,⁸⁹ it must have been small or nonexistent. The rehearsals began at noon and lasted until four,⁹⁰ the first hour being devoted to practicing the dances which attracted

more fashionable patrons than the music.⁹¹ Fanny speaks twice of going to the last rehearsal of an opera,⁹² which was apparently the most popular, but the one in Cecilia is not so qualified and seems to have been an ordinary rehearsal. It is not a dress rehearsal, for one observer says of the Italian chorus dangers or figuranti: "You never saw such a shabby set in your life."⁹³ As the crowd is not large, the ladies are able to find places in the subscriber's boxes.⁹⁴ In her diary, Fanny mentioned the boxes she occupied at various rehearsals.⁹⁵ Mrs. Harrel proposes that she and Cecilia subscribe for a box together, but apparently nothing comes of the suggestion, for when they appear at the opera proper, it is in the fashionable pit.⁹⁶

The opera in production is Artaserse, and the star, Gasparo Pacchierotti, a great favorite of the Burneys. Pacchierotti was the last of the great male sopranos peculiar to eighteenth century opera.⁹⁷ He came to England late in 1778 with Ferdinando Bertoni, the composer, and was introduced to Fanny when he called to thank the doctor for a gift of his History of Music. "I like him of all things," she wrote, "he is perfectly modest, humble, well-bred, and unassuming." And after a second visit, "he seems to be perfectly amiable, gentle, and good: his countenance is extremely benevolent, and his manners infinitely interesting."⁹⁸ As for his singing: "Such taste, expression, freedom, fancy, and variety, never were before joined but in Agujari."⁹⁹

*An Italian soprano whom the Burneys had admired. 79, II, Early Diary

From that time until he left England and she became absorbed in Mrs. Delany and her court connections, her diary and letters are full of friendly references to "the Pac". Her enthusiasm for him is transferred to Cecilia. "...Both the surprise and the pleasure which she received from the performance in general, were faint, cold, and languid compared to the strength of those emotions when excited by Signore Pacchierotti in particular; and though not half the excellencies of that superior singer were necessary either to amaze or charm her unaccustomed ears, though the refinement of his taste and masterly originality of his genius, to be praised as they deserved, called for the judgment and knowledge of professors, yet a natural love of music in some measure supplied the place of cultivation, and what she could neither explain nor understand, she could feel and enjoy."¹⁰⁰

Ataserse was a libretto of Metastasio's, translated by Dr. Arne and set as an English opera which was an immense favorite, performed far into the nineteenth century.¹⁰¹ However, this version was produced in Covent Garden and does not seem to have been used by the Italian company. The opera here was probably Bertoni's setting of the same libretto, from which Pacchierotti had sung "a very fine rondeau" during his second visit to the Burneys.¹⁰² Bertoni and Pacchierotti were working together

on this tour, as Bertoni had brought the singer with him especially to take the chief role in his Quinto Fabio, which was produced early in 1779 with great success.¹⁰³

This "rehearsal of a new serious Opera" takes place no later than March, 1779 and probably earlier, at the time of Pacchierotti's first success. Whether Bertoni's Artaserse was introduced as a new work at that time is not told in the diary or elsewhere, but as Sacchini had been the rage, and Bertoni just coming into temporary favor, it may well have been.¹⁰⁴ Fanny was usually accurate about anything pertaining to the opera. When she says that Cecilia's pleasure was increased by "her previous acquaintance with that interesting drama", she obviously means the story itself, as the rehearsal is the first opera performance that she has ever heard.¹⁰⁵

The next opera scene is an actual performance at the Haymarket Theatre on Saturday night. Tuesday and Saturday were the only nights on which the Italian opera company performed, as Fanny always carefully noted. Evelina's first visit to the opera was on a Tuesday. "I hope to persuade Mrs. Mirvan to go again Saturday," she writes. "I wish the opera was every night."¹⁰⁶ Arriving very late and missing as much of the opera as possible by loitering in the coffee room was fashionable. Cecilia's party does not enter the theatre until the first act is nearly over, and then only at her

insistence. It was customary to "look in" at the opera house after an evening of diversion. The heroine of a mythical "Diary of a Lady of Fashion" in The New Lady's Magazine does not reach the opera house until the performance at Drury Lane is completed.¹⁰⁷ To some of the tonnish gentry, the attractions of the opera house, in ascending order, were the music, the dancing, and the coffee room. When the place burned in 1789, Horace Walpole saw no reason to rebuild it. "The nation has long been tired of operas, and has now a good opportunity of dropping them. Dancing protracted their existence for some time! but the room after was the real support of both, and was like what has been said of your sex, that they never speak their true meaning but in the postscript of their letters. Would not it be sufficient to build an after-room on the whole emplacement, to which people might resort from all assemblies?"¹⁰⁸

The group sits in the pit, which seems to have been favoured by fashionable persons who would have taken a box at the playhouse, but, for various reasons, did not care to subscribe for an opera box for the season. The Mirvan's party in Evelina sit in a box at Drury Lane, but go into the pit at the Haymarket.¹⁰⁹ Full dress was required there. This was the custom which impressed the city misses of Evelina, Biddy and Polly Branghton, who were accustomed to the more informal theatres. "We had not sooner seated

ourselves, than Miss Branghton exclaimed, 'Good gracious! only see! -- why, Polly, all the people in the pit are without hats, dressed like any thing!'

"'Lord, so they are,' cried Miss Polly, 'well, I never saw the like! -- its worth coming to the Opera if one saw nothing else.'" ¹¹⁰

Cecilia no sooner settles herself to enjoy the music than she is disturbed by the foolish chatter and giggling of a crowd of young ladies near her. Contriving to get away from them, she finds a seat with Mrs. Harrel in a group of gentlemen who have pushed forward to see the dancing and are watching it with silent attention; but as soon as the music begins again, they start a loud whispered conversation. Not until the third act does she get into a group that will permit her to listen.

This nuisance was apparently constant, both at the opera house and the theatres, although it was probably worse at the opera, where a highly technical entertainment, grown fashionable, attracted many persons in high life who had not the slightest interest in music. "I could have thought myself in paradise, but for the continual talking of the company around me," declares Evelina, not referring to her experience with the Branghtons, but to an evening in the pit. ¹¹¹ "It were to be wished that the ladies would be pleased

to confine themselves to whispering in their tete-a-tete conferences at the opera or the playhouse, which would be a proper deference to the rest of the audience," wrote "Mr. Town" in The Connoisseur in 1754. "In France, we are told, it is common for the parterre to join with the performers in any favorite air; but we seem to have carried this custom still further, as the company in our boxes, without concerning themselves in the least with the play, are even louder than the players."¹¹² "I sat by a lady at the opera last night," said a friend of Charlotte Burney, "'a very elegant woman that talked to me for above an hour, without ceasing.'"¹¹³ This was only mentioned in passing, not as a reflection on the lady or a curiosity of conduct.

Each act of the opera was closed by the "principal dancers" and the figuranti. As Horace Walpole noted, they were all that made the opera palatable to much of the audience, but Fanny showed her contempt for this contingent by making the stupid Sir Robert Floyer one of their number. "'Not a word against dancing!' cried Sir Robert, 'It's the only thing that carries one to the opera and I am sure it's the only thing one minds at it!'"¹¹⁴ The crowding forward of the gentlemen for a better view of this ballet seems to have been accepted practice. "When the opera was over, he took leave of us," wrote Fanny of a fashionable young man,

of Durham, Sir Richard Jebb, the Earl of Sandwich, and several other peers and prominent men. Each director in turn was to select a program, and no music less than twenty years old was to be played. The early programs usually consisted of an overture (generally Handel's), two or three concerti, by Handel, Martini, Corelli, Avison, or Geminiani, several choruses and solos from Handel's oratorios, and an anthem, glee, or madrigal.¹¹⁹ Fanny does not seem to have heard any of these concerts, but Mrs. Delany mentions them several times.¹²⁰

"Abel's concert" must have been one of the highly successful concerts of Karl Friedrich Abel and Johann Christian Bach. Abel's instrument was the viol da gamba. He was chamber musician to Queen Charlotte; Mrs. Delany, describing an evening at court, wrote of a fine performance of Abel "on the Viol de Gambo (tho' I don't like the instrument)".¹²¹ When Bach came to England in 1762, Abel became associated with him, and they organized subscription concerts for Mrs. Cornelys' Carlisle House. Cecilia would have heard them at the Hanover Square Rooms, where they held concerts each season from 1775 until 1782, when Bach died. Abel tried to continue the series, but without great success, and transferred to the Pantheon.¹²²

One of the most elaborate of the fashionable scenes, considering how little it advances the plot, is the

Harrel's masquerade. It is also one of the most innocent masquerades in eighteenth century fiction. This hugely popular diversion had been highly useful to novelists, but mainly because of its possibilities for advancing sinister schemes and intrigue. The Harrel's assembly is tame compared with Fielding's and Richardson's masquerades where Lady Bellaston captures Tom Jones,¹²³ Amelia's virtue is attempted from all sides,¹²⁴ Pamela is plagued with coarse jokes and free-mannered ladies who monopolize her husband,¹²⁵ Sir Hargrave kidnaps Harriet Byron,¹²⁶ and Lovelace seduces the bold Sally Martin.¹²⁷ Yet in these scenes, the emphasis on the plot in hand -- or the moral to be drawn -- is so strong that there is no time for the trifling but typical details, the costumes, the conversations, the attempts to act in character, which Fanny gives at satisfying length.

The incident is probably based on a private masquerade, given by a London dancing master named Lalauze to which Fanny had been invited when she was seventeen. It is described gaily in the early diary,¹²⁸ and, for any evidence to the contrary, was the only masquerade which Fanny ever attended. It made such an impression on her that when she was introduced to a young man nine years later, she identified him almost at once as the brother of "the Harry Phipps that Hetty danced with at Mr. Lalauze's masquerade."¹²⁹ The fact that she had no firsthand knowledge with the great masquerades held regularly at the opera house, the Pantheon,

and various public rooms, and that her one happily remembered experience with this diversion had taken place at a private and rather small party may have led her to show Cecilia, not at the public ball, but at the private entertainment known as "seeing masks".

This was a sort of reception, with refreshments, but no dancing, held before the real masquerade and planned to allow the masquers to show off their costumes, practice the parts, if any, which they intended to sustain, and pass the time until they could make a fashionably late appearance at the ball itself. Seeing masks is mentioned in Lady Harriot Eliot's letters,¹³⁰ in Garrick's Bon Ton,¹³¹ and The New Lady's Magazine's "Diary of a Lady of Fashion."¹³² "The Duchess of Bolton ... saw masks -" wrote Horace Walpole, "so many, that the floor gave way, and the company in the dining-room were near falling on the heads of those in the parlour."¹³³ Sometimes these receptions depleted the masquerade itself. "The Masquerade at the Pantheon was rather thinnish," wrote Charlotte Burney to Fanny, "owing, as they suppose, to so many people seeing Masks."¹³⁴ The Harrels see masks before what is spoken of as a select masquerade at the Pantheon, to which five hundred persons are allowed to subscribe at three and a half guineas each.¹³⁵ If the subscription is to admit only one, the price is a

little exaggerated, for Horace Walpole tells of "the most magnificent masquerade that ever was seen" at the Haymarket, for which the subscribers received four tickets for five guineas.¹³⁶ The numbers, however, were quite normal, and rather smaller than those of most of the large masquerades that Walpole describes.¹³⁷

The decorations for the Harrel's party are stressed to point up that family's extravagance. Mr. Harrel, already being tormented by his creditors, is supervising the construction of "an elegant awning, prepared for one of the inner apartments, to be fixed over a long desert-table, which was to be ornamented with various devices of cut glass.

"Did you ever see anything so beautiful in your life?" cried Mrs. Harrel; "and when the table is covered with the coloured ices, and those sort of things, it will be as beautiful again." ...

"I have some thoughts," said Mr. Harrel, leading the way to another small room, "of running up a flight of steps, and a little light gallery here, and so making a little Orchestra."¹³⁸ Later some colored lamps "in fantastic forms" are added.¹³⁹ These are the sort of decorations which Horace Walpole reports in his descriptions of the more expensive parties; the glass lamps in particular seem to have been a standard device with those who could afford

them. "The court was illuminated on the whole summit of the wall with a battlement of lamps; smaller ones on every step, and a figure of lanterns on the outside of the house."¹⁴⁰ "The dome of the staircase was beautifully illuminated with coloured glass lanthorns."¹⁴¹ Later in story, Mr. Briggs, the miser guardian, gives his impressions of the dessert table and its contents. "Pretended to give a supper; all a mere bam; went without my dinner and got nothing to eat; all glass and shew; victuals painted all manner o' coulours; lighted up like a pastry cook on twelfth-day; wanted something solid and got a great lump of sweetmeat; found it as cold as a stone, all froze in my mouth like ice; made me jump again, and brought the tears in my eyes; forced to spit it out; believe it was nothing but a snow-ball, just set up for shew, and covered¹⁴² over with a little sugar. Pretty way to spend money!" There is a reference in Polly Honeycombe to "iced cream crimsoned with raspberries",¹⁴³ but, from Mr. Briggs description, the "ice" served at eighteenth century assemblies was not modern ice cream, but exactly the hard, flaky substance which is still known as an ice.

The company begins to arrive at eight, quite early for this set;¹⁴⁴ no one appears at the Harrel's formal assembly, later in the story, before nine.¹⁴⁵ Cecilia, the Harrels, and Mr. Arnott, Mrs. Harrel's brother, as the

hosts, do not wear fancy dress, but all the guests are masquers. "Dominos of no character, and fancy-dresses of no meaning, made as is usual at such meetings, the general herd of the company: for the rest, the men were Spaniards, chimneysweepers, Turks, watchmen, conjurors, and old women; and the ladies, shepherdesses, orange girls, Circassians, gipseys, haymakers, and sultanas."¹⁴⁶

All these were typical masquerade characters; and the costumes were probably either hired for the occasion or bought already made rather than especially ordered. When the party is over, the Harrels beg Cecilia to "send to a warehouse for a dress" and go with them to the ball,¹⁴⁷ and Miss Larolles speaks of sending for a habit at ten or eleven o'clock on the night of another masquerade,¹⁴⁸ so costumes must have been available at all times. While anything but cheap, these dresses were necessarily rather conventional and standardized, more remarkable for flash and brilliance than originality or historical accuracy. Harriet Byron's Arcadian princess costume is an example. "A white Paris net sort of a cap, glittering with spangles and encircled by a chaplet of artificial flowers, with a little white feather perking from the left ear, is to be my headdress. My masque is Venetian... A kind of waistcoat of blue satin trimmed with silver point d'Espagne, the skirts edged with silver fringe, is made to sit close to my waist by double clasps, a small silver tassel at the

end of each clasp, all set off with bugles and spangles, which make a mighty glitter. But I am to be allowed a kind of scarf of white persian silk, which, gathered at the top, is to be fastened to my shoulders, and to fly loose behind me... My petticoat is of blue satin trimmed and fringed as my waist coat." In the interest of correctness, hoops were sacrificed, but "it does not fall in with any of my notions of the pastoral dress of Arcadia," writes Harriet.¹⁴⁹

The Harrel's assembly produces none of the handsome and authentic historical costumes which Horace Walpole usually noted at the large masquerades. These were very likely made to order for their wearers and worn more than once. Walpole comments on a fine costume of Lord Delawar, copied from a portrait of Queen Elizabeth's porter in the guard room at Kensington, and six years later praises the same suit without remembering it.¹⁵⁰ Nor were there any of the real jewels which often appeared on oriental masques.¹⁵¹ Sir Robert Floyer wears a rich Turkish costume,¹⁵² but Mr. Briggs calls his jewels French beads and Bristol stones,* and, as the peer was trying to recruit his fortune by marrying Cecilia, they probably were. The "fancy-dresses of no meaning" were of the sort that Fanny herself wore to the Lalauze masquerade: "a close pink Persian vest...covered

*Transparent rock-crystals found in the Clifton limestone near Bristol.OED

with gauze, in loose pleats...a little garland or wreath of flowers on the left side of my head."¹⁵³ The most original costume at Harrel's was Mr. Briggs' -- the work cloths of a real chimney sweep which he had hired for a pot of beer. Sweep costumes were ordinary enough, but Mr. Briggs' was uncommonly realistic, and a strong smell of soot followed him through the company.

Many of the habits were completed with portrait masques which covered the whole face. The face of a masquer representing the devil was so completely hidden that only his eyes were visible.¹⁵⁴ The masque of Mr. Belfield, as Don Quixote, "depicted a lean and haggard face, worn with care, yet fiery with crazy passions."¹⁵⁵ Fanny herself had worn a black silk masque to the Lalauze ball, and the character masques seem to have been more popular with the gentlemen, although not restricted to them. Horace Walpole mentions a lady dressed as a nun, who cut the nose out of her mask because of the heat.¹⁵⁶ Edward Burney, Fanny's cousin, stained a mask to resemble Omai, the Otaheitan native brought home by Captain Cook's expedition and lionized in London; he was so successful that "one Character came up to feel of it, to be certain it was not his naytural face."¹⁵⁷ On the lowest level of masquers was a pathetic shepherd at the Lalauze's, "whose own face was so stupid that we could scarcely tell whether he had taken off his mask or not."¹⁵⁸

Although many were unable to live up to their costumes, a good masquer was supposed to act the character that he represented. The masquerade scene of Cecilia has an involved plot based on this custom. Cecilia is maneuvered into a corner and respectfully held prisoner by an unknown whose black devil costume conceals his identity. She is rescued by a Don Quixote (Mr. Belfield), and recaptured in spite of the combined efforts of a school master (Mr. Gosport, a wry critic of fashionable life), a white domino (Mortimer Delville) and Mr. Arnott. The chimney sweep, Mr. Briggs, set her free again, but the devil corners her a third time, and is only separated from her when an offensive Harlequin (Mr. Morrice) attempts to jump over the new dessert table and pulls down Mr. Harrel's investment on his head. The reader, although not Cecilia, learns that the tormenting devil is Monckton, trying to monopolize the heroine and keep her admirers away.

All this is accomplished with much elaboration of characters, especially that of the Don Quixote, who makes the devil a knight and fights a mock duel with him. There is also a good deal of byplay between Cecilia, the school master, and the white domino about the inability of most of the guests to sustain their parts. The light-headed Miss Larolles trips in dressed as Minerva.¹⁵⁹ A Mentor

disturbs the whole room with his boisterous laughter;¹⁶⁰
 a Cicero refuses to speak Latin.¹⁶¹ "'To own the truth,'
 said Cecilia, 'the almost universal neglect of the
 characters assumed by these masquers, has been the chief
 source of my entertainment this evening: for at a place
 of this sort, the next best thing to a character well
 supported is a character ridiculously burlesqued.'"¹⁶²
 Mr. Gosport explains the indifference to consistency when
 they come upon a mournful Hope, lolling on her silver
 anchor. "'...She does not assume the character...she does
 not even think of it: the dress is her object, and that
 alone fills up all her ideas. Enquire of almost any body
 in the room concerning the persons they seem to represent,
 and you will find their ignorance more gross than you can
 imagine; they have not once thought upon the subject; acci-
 dent, or convenience, or caprice has alone directed their
 choice.'"¹⁶³

This insistence on sustaining parts also went back
 to the Lalauze affair, and most of Fanny's account of it
 is devoted to the acting. She mentions "a Punch...who very
 well supported his character; the Witch...a very capital
 figure who told many fortunes with great humour...a Harle-
 quin who hopped and skipped about very lightly and gayly...
 an admirable Merlin, who spoke of spells, magick and
 charms with all the mock heroick and bombast manner which

his character could require."¹⁶⁴ Much is made of an excellent Dutchman, who smokes a pipe and speaks what Fanny, for lack of knowledge to the contrary, accepts as high Dutch, and of a voluble nun, who rails at the follies and vices of the world to an extent rather tiresome to the reader.¹⁶⁵ When Edward Burney appeared as an Otaheitan at a Pantheon masquerade, he spoke the whole night in broken English, occasionally reciting a speech in the native language which he had learned by heart.¹⁶⁶

The diversions in Cecilia seem deliberately chosen so that all the most popular types of amusement are represented in well planned scenes -- the theatre by the opera and its rehearsal, masquerading by the Harrel's reception, and public gardens by Vauxhall.

The Pantheon does not fall into any of these groups, but, with Ranelagh, it provided a universal amusement in which every one from the foplings to Doctor Johnson took part. The entertainment consisted of the concerts, tea drinking, and promenading of the public gardens, transferred indoors to elegant surroundings, and, in the case of the Pantheon, reserved mainly for the ton by a prohibitive admission fee. Ranelagh, the older by thirty years, was the link between the gardens and the Pantheon; for it had grounds, although, according

to Horace Walpole, they were not as pleasant as those of Vauxhall,¹⁶⁷ and the indoor Rotunda was apparently the chief attraction on ordinary nights. The Pantheon, in Oxford Road, was opened on January 27, 1772,¹⁶⁸ having been under construction since the spring of 1770, when Horace Walpole mentioned "a winter Ranelagh erecting" at a cost of sixty thousand pounds.¹⁶⁹ This estimate seems to have been too high, for when the building was nearly done, he changed it to fifty thousand.¹⁷⁰ The monthly "Historical Chronicle" of The Gentleman's Magazine described its first night. "Was opened for the first time the much talked-of Pantheon, to a crowded company of between fifteen hundred and two thousand people. Imagination cannot well surpass the elegance and magnificence of the apartments, the boldness of the paintings, or the disposition of the lights, which last are reflected from gilt vases, suspended by gilt chains. Besides the splendid ornaments that decorate the rotundo or great room, there are a number of statues in niches below the dome, representing most of the Heathen Gods and Goddesses, supposed to be in the antient Pantheon of Rome. To these are added three more of white porphyry, the first two representing the present King and Queen, the last Britannia. The whole building is composed of a suite of fourteen rooms, all of which are adapted to particular uses, and affording a striking instance of the splendor and profusion of modern times."¹⁷¹ The Annual Register reprinted this account in full, with one further

comment: "... the company were an olio of all sorts: peers, peeresses, honourables and right honourables, jew brokers, demireps, lottery insurers, and quack doctors."¹⁷²

Horace Walpole was immoderately fond of the Pantheon. In a hyperbolic mood, he called it "more beautiful than the Temple of the Sun",¹⁷³ and in sober earnest esteemed it "the most beautiful edifice in England."¹⁷⁴ "Imagine Balbec in all its glory. The pillars are of artificial giallo antico. The ceilings, even of the passages, are of the most beautiful stuccos in the best taste of grotesque. The ceilings of the ball-rooms and the panels painted like Raphael's loggias in the Vatican. A dome like the Pantheon glazed."¹⁷⁵ Doctor Johnson, when he visited it with Boswell soon after the opening, liked it less than Ranelagh, although he admitted that he saw it under the disadvantage of mourning.¹⁷⁶ "The truth is," added Boswell, "Ranelagh is of a more beautiful form; more of it, or rather indeed the whole rotunda appears at once, and it is better lighted."¹⁷⁷

"I was greatly struck with the beauty of the building, "writes Evelina," which greatly surpassed whatever I could have expected or imagined. Yet it has more the appearance of a chapel than of a place of diversion; and though I was quite charmed with the magnificence of the room I felt that I could not be as gay and thoughtless

there as at Ranelagh, for there is something in it which rather inspires awe and solemnity, than mirth and pleasure."¹⁷⁸ Cecilia herself declares, "I have seen no building at all equal to it."¹⁷⁹

The Harrel's party entered the "great room", built as a theatre, in which concerts were held. After the Haymarket Theatre burned in 1789, Italian opera was performed there.¹⁸⁰ The room was so large that the soprano, Agujari, was praised because her voice could not only fill the great Haymarket, but the huge Pantheon,¹⁸¹ although Horace Walpole doubted that she could be heard there "if she had a voice as loud as Lord Clare's."¹⁸³ This hall was overhung by galleries, in one of which Cecilia saw young Delville.¹⁸³ In describing a Pantheon fete, Horace Walpole spoke of the company's being shut in the galleries to look down on the supper, spread on the main floor.¹⁸⁴ Charlotte Burney wrote of seeing a party of young men playing cards in the Pantheon gallery.¹⁸⁵ Of the decorations, Fanny made one characteristic mention. Mr. Meadows, the ennuye', is struggling with his vast boredom in trying to keep up a conversation with Cecilia. Expecting a response to a question she has asked, she turns and finds him earnestly staring at the statue of Britannia.¹⁸⁶ The statues, as shown in Earlam's mezzotint,¹⁸⁷ were placed "in niches below the dome" high

up the wall, so that Mr. Meadow was, in effect staring languidly toward the ceiling.

For all the great room's elegance, the seats were backless benches like those in the theatre pits.¹⁸⁸ Mr.

Meadows writhes about and complains of being accommodated like a school boy.¹⁸⁹

Here Miss Larolles places herself on the outside edge of the forms, "for if one sits on the inside, there's no speaking to a creature, you know."¹⁹⁰ When Jane Austen's Ann Elliot, at the Bath concert, contrives to slip into an end seat for conversation with Captain Wentworth, "she could not do so, without comparing herself with Miss Larolles, the inimitable Miss Larolles."¹⁹¹

Pantheon concerts were excellent. The Burney's beloved Lucrezia Agujari, considered the finest singer in Italy, was unable to reach an agreement with Anna Maria Yates, one of the joint managers of the Italian opera house, and so contracted with the Pantheon for twelve appearances at one hundred guineas each.¹⁹² She sang only twice in each concert. "We were excessively eager to hear her sing," wrote Fanny when Agujari visited her father, "but as it was not convenient to offer her her Pantheon price of 50 guineas a song, we were rather fearful of asking that favour."¹⁹³ Later, Brigitta Giorgi sang there,¹⁹⁴ and in 1790, Pacchierotti.¹⁹⁵ Even less attention was paid

during these concerts than at the opera, the freedom of movement being greater. "No sort of attention was paid; the ladies entertaining themselves as if no Orchestra was in the room, and the gentlemen, with an equal disregard to it, struggling for a place by the fire, about which they continued hovering till the music was over."¹⁹⁶ When Mr. Meadows objects to the music as being -- with everything else -- a great bore, Cecilia retorts, "Nay, if it gives no pleasure, at least it takes none away; for, far from being any impediment to conversation, I think every body talks more during the performance than between the acts."¹⁹⁷ Evelina gives the same account. "There was an exceeding good concert, but too much talking to hear it well. Indeed I am quite astonished to find how little music is attended to in silence; for though every body seems to admire, hardly anybody listens."¹⁹⁸

Cecilia's Pantheon experiences end in the tea room. This was a rather unattractive basement -- "large, low, and underground ... a foil to the apartments above," according to Evelina.¹⁹⁹ Walpole also gives an unpleasant picture of it, in his account of the unsuccessful fete of June, 1779 -- a few months after Cecilia's supposed visit. "They (the whole company) were led into the subterraneous apartment, which was laid with mould, and planted with trees, and crammed with nosegays: but the fresh earth, and

the dead leaves, and the effluvia of breach made such a stench and moisture, that they were suffocated."²⁰⁰ The accommodations were rather primitive, consisting of long tables with backless forms, at which the patrons were provided with teapots and the materials to make their own tea.²⁰¹ If any other refreshments were served on ordinary nights, they are not mentioned here or elsewhere. In fact, considering the vaunted luxury of Ranelagh and the Pantheon, the provisions at both places were extremely simple. Although nothing was served at Ranelagh but tea or coffee and bread and butter, the admission fee, which Evelina's enemy, Lord Lovel, considered a "plebian price" was only half a crown,²⁰² but the Pantheon charged half a guinea.

Going on to Ranelagh after exhausting the Pantheon was tennish. Young Delville has to retire to change his wet clothes after throwing himself between Cecilia and an overturned teapot; the company, he says will only believe him gone to Ranelagh.²⁰³ Lady Louisa Larpent and her party amaze Captain Mirvan by setting out after ten o'clock.²⁰⁴ "It is the fashion now to go to Ranelagh two hours after it is over," wrote Horace Walpole in 1777. "You may not believe this, but it is literal. The music ends at ten; the company go at twelve."²⁰⁵ The London Magazine's censorious Harlequin was especially hard on

this custom. "The people of the true ton, who visit this dove court of delight, Ranelagh, come in about eleven, stare about them for half an hour, laugh at the other fools who are drenching and scalding themselves with coffee and tea, abuse every body, despise all they have seen, and then they trail home again to sup."²⁰⁶ And later, "You will find a woman of fashion... fly to the Pantheon to hear Agujari sing -- whisk from thence to Ranelagh, to meet dear Lord William, and adjourn with the dear creature to Vauxhall to finish the evening with a glass of burnt Champaigne..."²⁰⁷ The evening must be as prolonged as possible.

No public amusement in London figured more extensively in the literature of the times than the New Spring Gardens or Vauxhall. Vauxhall scenes, from the de Coverly papers to Vanity Fair, were unflaggingly popular, and the references to it in essays, plays, prologues and epilogues and the like would fill a thick folio. However, it was not Fanny's purpose in Cecilia to describe the typical amusements of Vauxhall. She had already done that extremely well in Evelina. In the later novel, she was more interested in the contrast and friction of a group of diverse characters, with an undercurrent of growing suspense which ends in Harrel's flamboyant suicide. Nothing is added to the history of the cascade, the music, the walks, and all the other familiar delights, which are not even mentioned. There are too many full accounts of Vaux-

hall for another to be attempted without new material. Only a few points about Cecilia's night there need to be noticed.

Whether Fanny explicitly planned the relation of characters to setting in this scene before writing it, or whether it grew on her hands out of the unlimited possibilities of Vauxhall, she could hardly have accomplished it against any other background. Only there could the tipsy Harrell have convincingly assembled Mr. Meadows, Mr. Morrice, Captain Aresby, Sir Robert Floyer, and two of his creditors from the city to sit down with his wife and Cecilia, for what is later shown to have been a farewell supper. As far as actual possibility is concerned, almost any one who could have gone to Vauxhall for a shilling could have gone to Ranelagh for 2s.6d., especially as Ranelagh did not furnish the supper which was the heaviest part of Vauxhall expenses. Yet Ranelagh was thought of mainly as a resort for the upper classes, and the city people who ventured there were noticed contemptuously if at all. Mr. Hobson, who hints persistently that he is master of fifteen thousand pounds,²⁰⁸ might have invaded it, but the cringing Mr. Simkins, who still has his way to make, would have been distinctly ill at ease. There was a tradition of universality at Vauxhall. The cit at Vauxhall was a stock figure, and he was generally granted to have as much right there as the lord. Fanny took Evelina there in the Brangh-

ton's company.²⁰⁹ Mr. Town, of The Connoisseur, described an old merchant and his family at supper there with a minimum of his usual superiority.²¹⁰ When Goldsmith's Citizen of the World visits Vauxhall, a wealthy pawnbroker's widow is prominent in his party, and only Mr. Tibbs, the pathetic would-be beau, is much disturbed at the prospect of not seeing "a single creature for the evening above the degree of a cheesemonger" and being "pestered with the nobility and gentry from Thames Street and Crooked Lane."²¹¹ In the summer of 1792, the admission was raised to two shillings, and Boswell protested in a note to his Life of Johnson: "The company may be more select; but a number of the honest commonalty are, I fear, excluded from sharing in elegant and innocent entertainment."²¹²

The 1793 edition of The Ambulator, or Pocket Companion in a Tour Round London, gives an admirably detailed account of Vauxhall, which includes this statement: "Every evening (Sunday and Friday excepted) the gardens are opened at half past six."²¹³ Since no other opening time is mentioned, the meaning seems to be, not that the hours were different on those evenings, but that the gardens were not open then at all. The date of Harrel's suicide was June 13, 1779, a Sunday.²¹⁴ Also, the Branghton's Vauxhall party took place on June 16.²¹⁵ According to Sir Frank McKinnon's

chronology of Evelina, Fanny was using the calendar for 1775 for this part of the story, and in 1775, June 16 fell on Friday. Fanny was not infallible about such matters,* although usually fairly accurate; she might have overlooked the slip in Evelina, especially as the day of the week is not noted on the letter of the next day, in which the Vauxhall night is described.²¹⁶ She would have been far less likely to mistake June 13, as it was her birthday.²¹⁷ This is one of the very few dates mentioned in Cecilia, and it is twice emphasized, by a letter dated on the day itself,²¹⁸ and one the day before.²¹⁹ It is almost impossible to believe that Fanny was not connecting this turning point in Cecilia's story with a date of significance to herself. There is an account of the day in the diary, specifically dated "Sunday, June 13", although it was not celebrated or noted as a birthday.²²⁰ Naturally Fanny was not trying to relate Cecilia's experience to her own actual birthday of 1779. If anything, she was simply using a date which had uncommon meaning to her for an important event in her story. As she wrote the scene no later than February, 1782,²²¹ and probably, from its position in the book, much earlier, she was certainly able to remember when her birthday fell in 1779. Knowing the day, she would hardly have made a mistake in anything so

*She was incorrect in the day of the week for the assembly at Bristol Hotwells in Evelina. See McKinnon's note, p.395

obvious as the nights for Vauxhall. Possibly the closing on Fridays and Sundays was an innovation of 1792, like the extra shilling and the new decorations which made it necessary.²²²

As for private entertainments, the most complete and typical in Cecilia is the Harrel's grand assembly. This expensive affair is projected by Harrel after he has borrowed seven thousand pounds from Cecilia to prevent an execution in his house, and is intended to show the town the prosperous state of his finances. It includes a concert, ball, and supper.

Private concerts were apparently a common fashionable entertainment, even with those not especially interested in music. Doctor Burney frequently gave concerts at home, but as the musicians were limited to first rate performers and the guests to those who actually wished to hear them, these concerts were more ideal than typical. When she was at Bath with the Thrales, Fanny was invited to a concert which sounds very like the Harrel's. Here the rooms are overcrowded: "The two rooms for the company were quite full when we arrived, and a large party was standing on the first-floor landing-place."²²³

At Harrel's Cecilia has difficulty in getting to a place in the music room, and Mr. Briggs has to force his way through to her.²²⁴ As for the music at Fanny's concert,

"I heard scarce a note... Such was the neverceasing tatling and noise in the card-room, where I was kept almost all the evening, that a general humming of musical sound, and now and then a twang, was all I could hear."²²⁵ So Cecilia gets into a group of young ladies, who, while they constantly exclaim "What sweet music!" hardly allow their neighbors to hear it.²²⁶ Whether she hoped to do any good by it or not, Fanny lost no opportunity in Cecilia to score the indifference of some of the ton to music and to the convenience of any music lover whom they might disturb.

8 As soon as the concert is out of the way, the dancing is organized. Fanny may have had some idea of opening this ball with minuets, which were generally the first dances at public and private assemblies,²²⁷ for the loquacious young ladies are guessing who will begin them.²²⁸ Later, however, she makes a special point of placing Cecilia and Monckton in the first dance and mentions that it is a cotillion.²²⁹ Apparently, minuets were not absolutely required for gentility, for Miss Larolles, describes an elegant assembly at which "we began with Cotillions, and finished with country dances."²³⁰ Sometimes the cotillions followed minuets and country dances, as at a private ball of the royal family described by Mrs. Delany.²³¹

These dances seem to have been introduced in the late sixties. The earliest definition in the Oxford English Dictionary is dated 1766; and in 1768, The London Magazine published a list of rule by a Monsieur Gherardi, apparently a dancing master, of Soho: "Instructions for the more ready and perfect attainment of the Cotillions or French country Dances."²³²

From these, a cotillion can be understood as a dance in two parts, the second entirely different from the first, and both figures, like the English country dances, depending on elaborate combinations of fairly simple basic steps. These steps were listed at impressive length: "Balance pas de Rigodon: Deux Chasses assemble, pas de Rigodon: Chasse a trois pas assemble, pas de Rigodon: Deux Glassades, assemble, pas de Rigodon, Contre-temps en avant, contre-temps en arriere, contre-temps en tournant; Demi contre-temps d'un pied et de l'autre; Brize a trois pas d'un pied et l'autre; Chasse a trois pas d'un pied et L'autre." They were described as "easy in the execution," but the reader was advised to get a dancing master and perfect himself before making any public attempts. Apparently, even the more practiced were sometimes confused; Gherardi remarked how often couples finished ahead of the music or after it, and suggested practicing each figure without the music before dancing it. This was the "balancing and chasing, and boring" which confounded Bob Acres.²³³

Some of the figures must have been fairly vigorous. One young lady was forced to order a pair of white dimity breeches, because of the high leaps required in the cotillion.²³⁴

In her attempt to avoid Sir Robert Floyer, Cecilia has to maneuver the custom which confounded Evelina at her first dancing assembly. This piece of etiquette is irately summarized in a letter to the editor of The New Lady's Magazine. "It is an established rule for the gentlemen at an assembly to ask a lady to dance with him; and if this lady is disengaged, the custom is, she must accept him, or sit still the remainder of the evening. If this said gentleman is ever so disagreeable to her, it makes no difference; she must not refuse him, because he asked her first, though there shall be in the room at the same time a very agreeable gentleman, whom this lady likes; and because he had not an opportunity to ask her before the other one, she is obliged to refuse him, because he did not ask her first."²³⁵ Evelina has never heard of this rule, although it is a small mystery why the finishing school at which she learned to dance²³⁶ did not instruct her in such elementary ballroom procedure. She refuses Mr. Lovel for Lord Orville and makes a permanent enemy. Cecilia, much more experienced, hunts out Monckton as a safe, married family friend, and arranges to have the first two dances with him.

Two dances, rather than one, was usually the unit for which partners were chosen. "There were four-and-twenty couples, divided into twelve and twelve: each set danced two (country) dances, and then retired into another room, while the other set took their two; and so alternately," wrote Horace Walpole of the arrangements of a successful ball.²³⁷ At a private ball described in Fanny's diary: "Mrs. Debieg told us we were to change partners every two dances."²³⁸ Mr. Smith is forced to dance the first two dances at the Hampstead Assembly with Madame Duval.²³⁹ This custom persisted at least until Jane Austen's time; it figures in Pride and Prejudice, when Mrs. Bennet gives her bored husband a list of Mr. Bingley's partners at the Meryton assembly.²⁴⁰ While partners were not taken for less than two dances, they were evidently taken sometimes for more, as Cecilia tells Monckton, "by way of excuse for the hint, that the partners were to be changed every two dances."²⁴¹ At one ball which Fanny attended, partners matched beforehand by the host were retained for the whole evening.²⁴²

Although the refreshments are understood to be in the usual lush Harrel style, the only item mentioned is lemonade, at which Mr. Briggs sneers because it contains no rum.²⁴³ Whatever the quality of the Harrels' product, the lemonade almost invariably served at assemblies had the reputation of being rather weak. A

lady of fashion at a crowded rout was described as "faint and spiritless -- as the vapid lemonade which is the only refreshment."²⁴⁴

The hour at which the ball breaks up is not mentioned, but it must have been quite late. The company does not begin to arrive until nine o'clock;²⁴⁵ the concert can hardly get under way before nine thirty or ten, must last at least an hour, and is followed by a short intermission with refreshments, so that the dancing is probably not started before eleven. Cecilia makes what seems a long evening of it, and retires "before half the company has left the house."²⁴⁶ Even the simplest private balls were extremely late. Horace Walpole wrote of country-dancing until four in the morning.²⁴⁷ Mrs. Delany mentioned fashionable balls which lasted until four or five.²⁴⁸ A small dance at a clergyman's home which Fanny describes in the early diary did not end until after five.²⁴⁹ She introduces as the height of ton Miss Larolles' account of a ball with dancing until three A. M.²⁵⁰ -- moderate enough compared with a number of her own experiences.

In the fashionable parts of Cecilia, Fanny hits at a custom which she had always hated -- formal visiting. At Lynn Regis, when she was only seventeen, she raged in her diary over the necessity of returning the visit of an unwelcome caller. "O! how I hate this vile custom which obliges us to make slaves of ourselves! -- to sell

the most precious property we boast, our time; -- and to sacrifice it to every prattling impertinent who chooses to demand it! ²⁵¹ And later: "We have nothing but visiting here, and this perpetual round of constrained civilities, to persons quite indifferent to us, is the most provoking and tiresome thing in the world; but it is unavoidable, in a country town, where everybody is known, as here." ²⁵² She adds that "restraint of this kind is much, much less practised or necessary in London than else where," but apparently a strict etiquette is maintained in the social circles to which Mrs. Harrel introduces Cecilia. She offends Miss Larolles directly by neglecting to return her first visit by the third day afterward, as is obligatory, although she has actually seen the young lady on that day at the Harrels'. ²⁵³

Cecilia would have been exempt from blame if she had sent Miss Larolles a ticket -- a visiting card with the recipient's name written on it. ²⁵⁴ Cards were much used to satisfy the demands of a large acquaintance. After Fielding's Amelia has neglected to return a visit for three weeks, her fashionable friend, Mrs. James, sends her a card, "which sure was doing more than all the friendship and good breeding in the world required." ²⁵⁵ "Tell one of my footmen that he must make some visits for me today again, and send me a list of those he made yesterday," says Lady Minikin, in Garrick's Bon Ton, "He

must be sure to call at Lady Pettitoes, and if she should unluckily be at home, he must say that he came to inquire after her sprained ankle...I am resolved not to call at her door myself, till I am sure of not finding her at home."²⁵⁶

In Murphy's The Way to Keep Him, a servant orders the family chairmen to carry the sedan chair out to make visits for their tonnish mistress. "An empty chair to pay visits!" exclaims her husband, "what polite ways people of fashion have got of being intimate with each other."²⁵⁷

Fanny was not the first to censure this time wasting. It was a popular subject with polite moralists. "Our ladies of the present age gad about from one place to another, paying twenty insignificant visits every day, mispending their time and wasting their constitutions," ranted a "Friend of the Sex" in The London Magazine.²⁵⁸ The New Lady's Magazine's fabulous lady of fashion, who incarnated all the sins of the ton, literally fulfilled this by paying twenty visits in an afternoon.²⁵⁹ Fielding rated the formalism and coldness of the system in Amelia. "Amelia soon after took her leave without the least anger, but with some little unavoidable contempt for a lady, in whose opinion...outward form and ceremony constituted the whole essence of friendship; who valued all her acquaintance alike, as each individual served equally to fill up a place in her visiting roll; and who,

in reality, had not the least concern for the good qualities or well-being of any one of them."²⁶⁰

Into all the tonnish scenes of Cecilia Fanny brings a group of characters who have nothing to do with the plot and exist simply as personifications of the chief foibles of high life. She represents each as the head of a contingent of affectation or foolishness, and makes much of these categories in the conversations of Cecilia and Mr. Gosport, a wry, slightly tedious critic of manners. The four divisions are the Volubles, headed by Miss Larolles, the Supercilious, with Miss Leeson, the Jargonists, represented by Captain Aresby and the Insensiblists, under Mr. Meadows. As characters, they are finely drawn and accurately colored paper dolls, wholly in the flat, but Fanny was not attempting more. As caricatures, they realize very well all that she intended.

Miss Leeson, from the nature of her affectation, is least interesting and admits least development. Cecilia is seated by her at an assembly, and tries every topic for conversation that she can think of, from common friends to the newest books without eliciting anything more than the shortest possible replies to all questions which cannot be answered with yes or no.

She learns later from Mr. Gosport that she has attempted one of the Supercillious sect. "Have you, then, yet to learn...that there are certain young ladies who make it a rule never to speak but to their own cronies? Of this class is Miss Leeson, and till you get into her particular Coterie, you must never expect to hear from her a word of two syllables. The SUPERCILIOUS, like Miss Leeson, are silent, scornful, languid and affected, and disdain all converse but with those of their own set."²⁶¹

Later it is Miss Leeson, with her familiars, who disturb Cecilia at the Harrels' concert, and Mr. Gosport explains this too. "Miss Leeson now is in her proper set, and therefore appears in her natural character: and the poor girl's joy in being able to utter all the nothings she has painfully hoarded while separated from her coterie, gives to her now the wild transport of a bird just let loose from a cage."²⁶² This was the type against which Doctor Johnson warned Queeney Thrale: "Never delight yourself with the dignity of silence or the superiority of inattention."²⁶³

Mr. Meadows, the Insensiblist, carries both these delights to the wildest extremes of nonsense. Throughout his extensive appearance in the book, he dutifully squelches the smallest sign of interest, politeness, consideration,

or anything which might spoil his role of world weariness and vacancy. He was not always so; an old acquaintance is disobliging enough to remember, in the middle of a stricture on dancing which suggests Mr. Darcy's, that he once wished that the night would last forever, so that he might dance endlessly. Mr. Gosport has the key to Mr. Meadows. "A man of the Ton, who would now be conspicuous in the gay world, must invariably be insipid, negligent, and selfish...He must never confess the least pleasure from anything, a total apathy being the chief ingredient of his character: he must, upon no account, sustain a conversation with any spirit, lest he should appear, to his utter disgrace, interested in what is said: and when he is quite tired of his existence, from a total vacuity of ideas, he must affect a look of absence, and pretend, on the sudden, to be wholly lost in thought."²⁶⁴ By exaggerating the current tendencies, he has put himself at the top of fashion. "Ceremony, he found was already exploded for ease, he, therefore, exploded ease for indolence; devotion to the fair sex, had given way to a more equal and rational intercourse, which, to push still farther, he presently exchanged for rudeness; joviality, too, was already banished for philosophical indifference, and that, therefore, he discarded, for weariness and disgust."²⁶⁵ In the

course of his scenes, which are monotonously alike, Mr. Meadows is drawn out on such diverse subjects as the Pantheon and public places in general, music, quiet young ladies, voluble young ladies, dancing, portraits, historical paintings, landscapes, walking, riding, sitting, standing, the country, London, and life; he expresses unqualified disapproval of all. His rudeness is not the brutal sort, but carefully absent minded. He yawns at other's remarks and breaks off in the middle of his own, affects not to hear when spoken to, lolls in the best box at Vauxhall or the best seat in the Pantheon coffee room without noticing parties of ladies who need accommodations, omits to dance at assemblies when there are more ladies than gentlemen, and always lounges into the place nearest the fire.

Although he was supposed to be the ton incarnate, rather than an individual, Mr. Meadows' type was not an especially common one, even in farces and satirical magazine articles. Most of the fine gentlemen ridiculed were either foppish, harmless macaronis, witlings, or genteel libertines of the Chesterfield sort. Mr. Meadows employs some of their more insolent mannerism, such as the use of the opera glass for examining and disparaging the charms of the ladies in public places. "The glass is another implement of most contemptuous introduction," wrote

"Harlequin" in The London Magazine, "it is unpardonable even in a man who uses it indecently from necessity; by indecently I mean, when he runs his nose in a lady's face to see her beauties with his glass."²⁶⁶ Mr. Meadows produces his at the Pantheon.²⁶⁷ He also picks his teeth in public, examining them with a toothpick glass, usually while ignoring a request for a favor.²⁶⁸ This was not thought of as a piece of open crudity; picking the teeth seems to have been quite permissible, and making a parade of it was only one of the habits of a certain type of fine gentlemen. Fanny's cousin, Richard Burney, a clever young man who affected foppish ways, picked his constantly, and described a friend who had three sizes of toothpicks for different times of the day.²⁶⁹ A quotation in The London Magazine from Melmoth's Liberal Opinions lists as one of a beau's engagements: "To pick my teeth at Modemaid's in Tavistock-street, at three."²⁷⁰ A toothpick case was a legitimate part of a gentleman's equipment, although it is generally mentioned as the possession of a fop. "The length (of the waistcoat) " ran an article on fashionable dress, in 1777, "is now so shallow, that it is better calculated to contain the understanding or the toothpick case; but as in some persons they are nearly of equal value, they may be put in either pocket indiscriminately."²⁷¹ In Sense and Sensibility, Elinor and Marianne are detained at Gray's

by a display of Mr. Robert Ferrars' fastidious taste in
toothpick cases.²⁷²

Boredom as a ruling passion did not appear in the satirized gentlemen as often as Fanny's emphasis on Mr. Meadows would make one expect. However, she was told that he was "'the best hit possible' upon the present race of fine gentlemen",²⁷³ and the tendency is shown by the coinage and popularity of the expression "bore" itself.* Describing the general reaction to Mr. Albany, Monckton says that "his friends call him the moralist; the young ladies, the crazy man, the macaronies, the bore."²⁷⁴ An article on current cant words published in The Town and Country Magazine in 1772, declared that "now we are...bored from morning to night -- in the senate, at Cox's museum, at Ranelagh, and even at church."²⁷⁵ In 1779, it was still new and annoying to the author of a "Correction of Fops and Flirt, in Respect to Conversation" in The London Magazine. "If you continue your narration for a minute and a half, another puppy turns to the monkey next him, and whispers 'What a bore! or boar!' for I don't know how they speall their nonsense; (but take it which way you will); it is intended to convey an idea of tediousness and compare the speaker to a hog or gimlet."²⁷⁶ "One can tolerate nothing! one's patience is wholly exhausted by the total tediousness of

*The first definition of "bore" in the OED, dated 1766, is: "The malady of ennui; a dull time." The more usual definition "A thing which bores; an annoyance" is dated 1778.

every thing one sees, and everybody one talks with."²⁷⁷

Captain Aresby, the Jargonist, is more inoffensive. His concession to ton is a vocabulary composed wholly of French words and elegantly cumbersome polite phrases. "He has not an ambition beyond paying a passing compliment, nor a word to make use of that he has not picked up in public places. Yet this dearth of language however you may despise it, is not merely owing to a narrow capacity: foppery and conceit have their share in the limitation, for though his phrases are almost always ridiculous, they are selected with much study, and introduced with infinite pains."²⁷⁸ He is always abimé or degouté or au desespoir. The English booby turned French fop by a short residence in Paris had been a commonplace since Sir Fopling Flutter, but Italianate macaronis were more fashionable in the seventies and the Captain is not an attempt to revive the older type. He never mentions France and its 'superiority to England and he has as much English nonsense as French. He is "reduced to despair" by an inconvenience; "makes a principle" of whatever he does, and finds anything unpleasant "petrifying to a degree." "What a concourse!" he babbles at Vauxhall, "'are you not accablé? For my part, I hardly respire. I have really hardly ever had the honour of being so obsédé before.'" ²⁷⁹

These beaux whose conversation was all made up of rags and tags of current phrases were a popular subject for ridicule. "I doubt not," began a letter to The Town and Country Magazine, "that you have observed there is a set of beings in this metropolis, without any character whatever: they are a kind of amphibious animals, between fools and wits ... They have not the invention to form any opinions of their own, and are the mere echoes of coffee-houses, news-papers, and playhouses. These gentlemen can feed upon a pun from London to Canterbury, and a new word is ammunition for them for a twelve-month."²⁸⁰

"The witless Maccaroni, who purloins
A few cant words, which some pert
gambler coins," 281

Captain Aresby is even on a lower level than these gentry, who at least tried for wit, while a vapid sort of elegance was all that he attempted.

Miss Larolles, the Voluble, is the most human of the four and a more recognizable type - the good-natured, chattering, empty-headed belle. She is absorbed in dress and rushing from one diversion to another, prattles endlessly to any one who will listen, professes the most violent emotions, but feels none for longer than a minute unless she misses an assembly or sees her newest trimming duplicated on a rival. She accepts all inconveniences of

high life as attractions, proofs of its flourishing brilliance. "It's the best Opera we have had this season: there's such a monstrous crowd there's no stirring."²⁸² "There was such a crowd, you could not move a finger... You've no idea how delightful it was, I thought verily I should have fainted with the heat... I was so monstrously fatigued, I could hardly get through the last dance."²⁸³ Fanny Burney obviously had a contempt for Miss Larolles. She is certainly a little fool, but a good-humoured one, and the only person who really enjoys the ton's amusements. Miss Leeson is too exclusive, Mr. Meadows, too busy with the requirements of his role, Captain Aresby, too flabby, Mr. Gosport too conscious of his mission as a satirist, and Cecilia too heavy and priggish for much spontaneous pleasure, but Miss Larolles finds most diversions excessive charming. "I assure you I like living of all things."²⁸⁴ Surely this is constructive, even from Miss Larolles.

Fanny was always less successful when she tried for serious characterization and treated serious problems. Yet Cecilia's moral value was asserted again and again, and not by flighty sentimentalists and uncritical moralists, but by such readers as Burke, Mrs. Delany and her friend, the Duchess of Portland. It had the appeal of any tolerable problem novel in its own day. Fanny was thoroughly serious

about this aspect of her work. She called the long scene of argument between Delville and his mother "the very scene for which I wrote the whole book"²⁸⁵ and declared that her end was "to point out the absurdity of shortsightedness of those name-compelling wills, which make it always presumed a woman marries an inferior, since he, not she, is to leave his own family in order to be incorporated into here!"²⁸⁶

How she became enough interested in this matter to write a long novel about it is not clear. There was no circumstance of the kind in her family, or even in her acquaintance which is every mentioned in the diary. Still, Fanny liked to go far afield for her serious themes; she had had as little experience with the gaming extravagance of such people as the Harrels.

The question of the name was debated violently by interested readers, but to Cecilia Mortimer, and Fanny, it is not the chief moral dilemma. Cecilia never sees it as a moral matter at all. Mortimer struggles against falling in love with her, and tries to master his feeling as long as he thinks it concerns only himself, but gives up all his reservations when he finds that she loves him. He calls the loss of the name "rather an imaginary than an actual evil...though a deep wound to pride, no offence to morality."²⁸⁹ The problem in Cecilia is filial duty opposed to inclination. Even in the great argument scene, young Delville is not so much divided be-

tween respect for his name and love for Cecilia, as between love for Cecilia and obligation to his parents.

Fanny had gone through this dilemma, or its converse, herself. When she was twenty-three, she was approached by a worthy, but dull young man named Thomas Barlow. Her sisters and Crisp favoured the match, and her father advised her not to be too hasty in refusing it, but she was unable to like Mr. Barlow and was terrified for fear her father would encourage her to accept him. "I felt the utter impossibility of resisting not merely my father's persuasion, but even his advice."²⁸⁸ Doctor Burney sensibly left the choice to her, and behaved with great kindness, but Fanny had some bad days before she could work up courage enough to ask his final opinion. "If he sided against me," she wrote Crisp, "I could not resist the stream."²⁸⁹

She was also involved in the clandestine marriage of her step-sister, Maria Rishton, née Allen. Maria was interested in a young man of whom her mother, for vague reasons, disapproved. After a long, complex affair, she was secretly married to him in France. Fanny and Susan were her confidants, and Fanny was assigned to break the matter to her high-tempered step-mother. Mrs. Burney did not forgive her daughter for years, and Maria resented her mother's attitude as strongly. Obviously, Fanny had

direct experience with the dutiful struggles of the conscientious and the family dissent caused by the rebellion of the less dutiful.

A situation in which an independent young man, of age, feels morally obligated to get the permission of his parents for every important step is such a dead matter that there is no point in comparing it with the present. What may be more interesting is to compare Cecilia and Mortimer's case, their reactions, and Fanny's attitude with conditions earlier in the century - especially as described in the classic of this problem, Clarissa.

As soon as Mortimer gives over his own objections to the name changing, he tries to think of an expedient which will secure him Cecilia without breaking any essential rule of morality or mortally offending his parents. The best that he can devise is a secret marriage, to which Cecilia strongly objects. His idea is that his parents' prejudices are too ingrained ever to be argued or reasoned away. They would never give their consent to the marriage, but if it were already accomplished, they would have enough sense to make the best of it, enough honour to receive their son's wife respectfully, and enough fondness for Cecilia herself to become reconciled to the situation without much pain. However,

if he asks their permission in advance, he will feel bound to abide by their decision. "I know not how to risk a prayer with those who may silence me with a command."²⁹⁰ Mrs. Charlton, Cecilia's friend, suggests that Delville discuss the case with his parents, then act for himself if they are unjust and stubborn, but he will not hear of this. "To mock their authority...would be more offensive than to oppose it: to solicit their approbation, and then act in defiance of it, might justly provoke their indignation. --No; if at last I am reduced to appeal to them, by their decision I must abide."²⁹¹

The only solution which will satisfy his conscience even partially is to remain officially ignorant of his parents' wishes until it is too late for them to be carried out.

The moral formula was that the child must not marry against the command of his parents, but might veto a marriage proposal of theirs which was seriously unpleasant to him. Clarissa's is a test case for the whole theory. She is almost abjectly dutiful in respecting her parents' rights, but tenaciously insists on this one right of her own. "Let me but be permitted to avoid the man I hate; and I will give up with cheerfulness, the man I could prefer... This is a sacrifice which a child owes to parents and friends, if they insist upon its being made."²⁹²

It is the forced marriage which cannot and should not be endured. Tom Jones' Sophia is in the same position. "Though there is one thing in which I can never comply with the best of fathers, yet am I firmly resolved never to act in defiance of him, or to take any step of consequence without his consent."²⁹³ "A negative voice your daughter allows you, and God and Nature have thought proper to allow you no more,"²⁹⁴ Allworthy reminds Western. In Mortimer's case, however, the negative voice is all that is in question. Mr. Delville has been searching out a rich wife of faultless connections for his son, but Mortimer's "invariable repugnance" to a marriage of interest have so far discouraged his parents from advancing one.

His parents' desires about the match with Cecilia being clear if not expressed, Mortimer's duty is obvious to the lovers. From the account in Cecilia, opinion on the rightness of obedience to parents in all things was not much relaxed since the middle of the century. Mortimer's relation to his father and mother does not seem quite so slavish as that of the second generation of Harlowes, but it is highly respectful, and in this essential matter, he declares that they are able to silence him with a command. There are a few hints of growing liberalism in this age -- Doctor Burney's refusal to influence Fanny

in favor of an apparently unexceptionable match being one. In A Father's Legacy to his Daughters by a Doctor Gregory of Edinburgh, published in 1774, there is an almost revolutionary statement on the subject. "If I live till you arrive at that age when you shall be capable to judge for yourselves, and do not strangely alter my sentiments, I shall act towards you in a very different manner from what most parents do. My opinion has always been, that when that period arrives, the parental authority ceases. I hope I shall always treat you with that affection and easy confidence which may dispose you to look on me as your friend. In that capacity alone I shall think myself intitled to give you my opinion; in the doing of which, I should think myself highly criminal, if I did not to the utmost of my power endeavour to divest myself of all personal vanity, and all prejudices in favour of my particular taste. If you did not chuse to follow my advice, I should not on that account cease to love you as my children. Though my right to your obedience was expired, yet I should think nothing could release me from the ties of nature or humanity." ²⁹⁵ Even in Cecilia, there is a slight tendency to make obedience more reasonable and less unquestioning. When Mortimer asks Cecilia if any virtue would be offended by their marriage, she replies, "'Yes; duty will be offended, since it is contrary to the will of your parents.'

'But is there no time for emancipation? Am not I of an age to chuse for myself the partner of my life? Will not you in a few days be the uncontrolled mistress of your actions? Are we not both independent? Your ample fortune all your own, and the estates of my father so entailed they must unavoidably be mine?'

'And are these,' said Cecilia, " considerations to set us free from our duty?'

'No, but they are circumstances to relieve us from slavery. Let me not offend you if I am still more explicit. When no law, human or divine, can be injured by our union, when one motive of pride is all that can be opposed to a thousand motives of convenience and happiness, why should we both be made unhappy, merely lest that pride should lose its gratification?'²⁹⁶ And while duty eventually wins, and Cecilia cannot feel satisfied to marry until she does so with the consent of Mrs. Delville, this very separate consent was a rather daring innovation. Traditionally, the father had the deciding voice in such cases. Mrs. Harlowe, who personally opposed the match between Clarissa and Solmes, was forced to urge it on her daughter by her own authority.²⁹⁷

By the time that Cecilia was written, the almost superstitious veneration of parents which motivated Claris-

sa seems to have been declining but still influential. Something of the immense importance once attached to their blessings and curses still lingered. When Clarissa is charged, on her mother's blessing, to consider Solmes, she takes the injunction as seriously as possible.²⁹⁸ When, after she has left Harlowe Place, she hears that her father has solemnly cursed her on his knees, she is appalled.²⁹⁹ Miss Howe will not allow the curse any weight, except as a sin against God on the father's part, but Clarissa cannot die peacefully until it is taken off and a formal blessing substituted.³⁰⁰ "What child could die in peace under a Parent's Curse?"³⁰¹ It is not so much sentiment or even remorse which moves her, as honest fear that the curse will come true. Mortimer does not respect his father blindly; he considers that old Delville's attempt to insult Cecilia, in proposing terms with which he knows she cannot comply, releases him from his duty. At one point, he and his father actively quarrel. Yet, when Cecilia tells him that, having his mother's consent, his father could not influence her against the marriage, he replies: "I am but too sure, that the least intimation, in his present irritable state of mind, reaching him of my intentions, would make him not scruple, in his fury, pronouncing some malediction upon my disobedience that

neither of us, I must own, could tranquilly disregard." ³⁰²

And Cecilia finds this a serious and reasonable argument.

The denunciation of extravagance and gaming, personified by the ruthless Mr. Harrel and his ^{fraudful} wife, was considered by many the finest moral effect of the book. "'If you speak of the Harrels, and of the morality of the book we shall, indeed, never give

Miss Burney her due: so striking so pure, so genuine, so instructive.'" ³⁰³

Fanny had little or no direct experience with these vices. There were no gamesters in her family or acquaintance, but she could hardly have missed the current scandals of excess or the strictures in the more serious magazines. ³⁰⁴ The latter appeared in great numbers, of which the following excerpt is typical:

"Let us turn our eyes to the gaming table; where the licentious votaries of dissipation; the fraudful sharper, and the thoughtless libertine, compose one of the most odious assemblies our metropolis affords: here we see the careful gleanings of honest industry in the hands of some unthinking novice, fall a prey to the artful collusions of successful villainy! -- constitutions debilitated! -- morals corrupted! and every vice that 'dis- ³⁰⁵graces human nature,' practices with impunity!"

Many of these essays sound as exaggerated as the more ridiculous diatribes against Ranelagh and novel reading, but they are borne out by statements of Horace Walpole and others to be almost literally true. "The young men of this age lose five, ten, fifteen thousand pounds in an

evening ... Lord Stavordale, not one-and-twenty, lost eleven thousand last Tuesday, but recovered it by one great hand at hazard: he swore a great oath, --'Now, if I had been playing deep, I might have won millions.'

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"Lord Holland has given Charles Fox a draft of an hundred thousand pounds, and it pays all his debts but a trifle of thirty thousand pounds, and those of Lord Carlisle, Crewe, and Foley, who being only friends, not Jews, may wait."

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General extravagance was in proportion.

"Everybody in all ranks and degrees live above their fortune," Mrs. Delany declared, "It is now (among a certain set of the bon ton) thought a good joke that Lady H. F. was handed out of her own house into her coach by two bailiffs."

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This was probably Lady Henrietta Foley, whose husband and brother-in-law were notorious wastrels. They petitioned the House of Lords to set aside their father's will, as he had died before raising a hundred thousand pounds to pay off their debts, on which the yearly interest was more than seventeen thousand pounds. "Poor, unfortunate children!" wrote Walpole, "before thirty, the eldest had spent an estate of twenty thousand a year."

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The three sons of the Earl of Dorchester owed seventy thousand pounds between them at the time that the eldest, the Honorable John Damer, killed himself.

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Harrel's extortion of Cecilia's

ten thousand pounds seems quite credible and almost moderate compared with real cases, of which these are only the more preposterous.

Fanny added little to the story of a spend-thrift gamester's fall that had not been reiterated by every moralist who ever treated it, but her version keeps the reader's interest until Harrel's ill-inspired brains are blown out. His stupid extravagance, his first plausible excuses for borrowing from Cecilia, his tireless scheming to marry her to Sir Robert Floyer, who had cancelled a large gaming debt in return for this cooperation, his callous treatment of decent, needy creditors who cannot fight back, his threats of suicide when an execution is imminent, his desperate shifts to save face by spending more and more money, his last attempt to exploit his ward by promising an unsuspecting suitor to use his influence with her for two thousand pounds, and his final loss of everything at a gaming house are developed with rapidity and suspense which triumphs over the dull style, the inserted moral observations and the absence of the more amusing characters from this part of the story. The feckless Mrs. Harrell receives her share of the censure. "Immersed in the fashionable round of company and diversion, her understanding naturally weak, was easily dazzled by the brilliancy of her situation; greedily,

therefore, sucking in air impregnated with luxury and extravagance, she had soon no pleasure but to vie with some rival in elegance, and no ambition but to exceed some superior in expence."³¹¹ There is a fine scene in which Cecilia tries to persuade her friend to retrench, while Mrs. Harrel assures her that "she did nothing but what every body else did, and that it was quite impossible for her to appear in the world in any other manner."³¹²

The husband is more effectively damned in Mr. Monckton's casual last estimate than in all the moral reflections. "He had not strong parts, nor were his vices the result of his passions; had economy been as much in fashion as extravagance, he would have been equally eager to practice it; he was a mere time-server, he struggled but to be something, and having neither talents nor sentiment to know what, he looked around him for any pursuit, and seeing distinction was more easily attained in the road to ruin than in any other, he galloped along it, thoughtless of being thrown when he came to the bottom, and sufficiently gratified in shewing his horsemanship by the way."³¹³

His exist may seem slightly theatrical, but here Fanny had the precedent of actual suicides almost as lurid. One of the most notorious, almost certainly remembered at the time when Cecilia was written, was that of the Honorable John Damer in 1776. After their father's refusal to pay the seventy pound debt, the two elder brothers planned, as Harrel

affected to plan, to retire to France. A few days before the time set for departure, Damer shot himself in a Covent Garden public house after a convivial night with four prostitutes and a blind fiddler.³¹⁴ As a matter of fact, he was not a gamester, although his brothers were,³¹⁵ but he seems to have been popularly accepted as such and made a horrid example. He is mentioned in this connection in The London Magazine's review of The Sylph,³¹⁶ a novel which is interesting because it has so much in common with the Harrel story, and because it was once attributed to Fanny herself.* It was published anonymously by Thomas Lowndes at the same time as *Evelina*, and advertised with it in the hope that the public would credit the same author with both works. Some did, as the friend of Sir Joshua Reynolds, who "sent for it upon suspicion."³¹⁷ Fanny was not much delighted, as The Sylph had a bad reputation; Mrs. Thrale, who was hardly prudish, called it obscene.³¹⁸ At last she had her father write Lowndes a request that he make known "in some clear and decisive manner" that there was no connection,³¹⁹ but the rumor died hard and appeared more than a year later.³²⁰ As outlined in The London Magazine's review, the plan of the story is similar to Fanny's

* It is now attributed to Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire. See The Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature, II, 548; also The London Times Literary Supplement 15 September, 1918, and 21 June, 1934.

and some of the same incidents, as the forcing of the wife to give up her marriage settlement, and the suicide, are used. It is not impossible that she was curious enough to read The Sylph, and somewhat influenced, consciously or unconsciously, in her choice and treatment of a new subject. However, she avoided questionable books,³²¹ and had heard unattractive reports of this one. The likeness is more probably a sign that Fanny used a traditional concept of a gamester's ruin like the popular history of a drunkard's fall in the last century.

The third sermon which Fanny preached in Cecilia was on charity. Cecilia's benevolence is almost a ruling passion, and whole chapters are devoted to describing her projects. She provides for the widow and children of one of Harrel's creditors, a poor carpenter, rescues a destitute London family and sets them up in business, contributes liberally to the support of the Belfields, and collects a group of pensioners in the neighborhood of her country estate. These activities, in spite of having almost nothing to do with the plot, are so much stressed that the reader would expect to find a corresponding ardour in Fanny herself. Yet, there is hardly a mention of the poor in the diary and letters. Living in London, she had not the contact with the parish poor which was a matter of course to Jane and Cassandra Austen.³²² Although "Benevolent Societies" and

the like were described in the inspirational magazine articles, it is not easy to find how many such really existed and what opportunities for charitable work a well meaning but shy young woman like Fanny could have found in town. Yet she must have seen sights and heard stories which, if she had had the sort of sensibility which she represents in Cecilia, she must have noted. Even in the country she does not seem to have had much experience with such matters.

This is not an attempt to show that Fanny was not decently and normally interested in the poor. Still the enthusiasm for charity in Cecilia is conventional. It is in exactly the vein of the many magazine articles on the subject. Fanny's increasing consciousness of herself as a moralist is in direct proportion to her emphasis on charity. In Evelina, which she wrote mainly to please herself, it is hardly treated at all. The only mention of it worth noticing is the scene in which Lord Merton and Mr. Coverley, who have each bet a thousand pounds against the other on a proposed phaeton race, are trying at the insistence of the ladies to find a less dangerous contest. Lord Orville suggests that the money be awarded to the one who finds the most deserving object with whom to share

it.³²³ Even this is primarily to show Lord Orville's superiority to most of his generation, and only incidentally instructive. In Cecilia, charity comes in with the larger intentions, the instructive plot, the heavier style, the improving observations. By the time Camilla was written, Fanny's motives for writing -- aside from finances -- were wholly didactic. Benevolence is again much in evidence. She seemed to feel that a novel which was to be taken seriously as a moral work must include some incidents of philanthropy.

In this she was probably right. Certainly, Mr. Albany, the erratic old gentleman, whom Cecilia takes for her adviser and almoner, was admired by everyone from the servants to Dr. Johnson, with the single exception of Horace Walpole. One of the final scenes, in which Albany introduces some poor children at the supposed death bed of Cecilia, is worse than Dickens at his worst, but it dissolved grown women in tears. The condensation in The Universal Magazine omitted all the amusing chapters in favor of passages which "excite the benevolent Affection" and "inculcate the most exalted Lessons of Philanthropy" -- Cecilia's relief of the Belfields and of Harrel's distressed creditor, the history of Albany. The intense

popularity of such incidents is shown in an excerpt from Sherlock's letters, published in The Gentleman's Magazine, in 1781. Three exceptional pathetic scenes from English literature are being chosen. The first two are Capulet's denunciation of Juliet, and a scene between Jaffier and Belvidera from Venice Preserved.

"The third is from Clarissa. After she has escaped from Lovelace, and is lodged at a glove-shop, King Street, Covent-Garden, she writes a letter to her nurse, Mrs. Norton, in which are these words: 'I am afraid my Poor, as I used to call the good creatures to whose necessities I was wont to administer by your faithful hand, have missed me of late. But now, alas! I am poor myself.' I do not believe any language, ancient or modern, can shew three traits equal to these."

III

Fanny was self-conscious about Cecilia before it was begun or planned. She felt that too much would be expected after Evelina. "I have already, I fear, reached the pinnacle of my abilities," she wrote to Susan in 1778, "and therefore to stand still will be my best policy... The wisest course I could take, would be to bid an eternal adieu to writing; then would the cry be ' 'Tis pity she does not go on! -- she might do something better by and by', etc., etc. Evelina, as a first and a youthful publication, has been received with the utmost favour and lenity; but would a future attempt be treated with the same mercy? -- no, my dear Susy, quite the contrary; there would not, indeed, be the same plea to save it; it would no longer be a young lady's first appearance in public; those who have met with less indulgence would all peck at any second work; and even those who most encouraged the first offspring might prove enemies to the second, by receiving it with expectations which it could not answer: and so, between either the friends or the foes of the eldest, the second would stand an equally bad chance, and a million of flaws which were overlooked in the former would be ridiculed as villainous and intolerable blunders in the latter."

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It was impossible now, as she told her father, to write without some hope of success, as she had written Evelina.³²⁸ By trying at once to live up to her reputation, improve, and expand the scope of her novel beyond her talents, Fanny introduced the element that spoiled her later books. Cecilia has more pointed comic scenes than Evelina, and some of the choking dullness of Camilla.

The plot of Cecilia is the most ambitious that Fanny ever attempted. Evelina's plot, with the old switched child device, is as simple as a fairy tale. Camilla's is a straining effort to prevent an unexceptionable marriage until the end of Volume V, mainly through the well meant meddling of a misogynist tutor*. Cecilia is more elaborate than either and far more carefully planned. It is too long, but the reader feels that there is too much story for one book, not that a trifle is being spun out to cover paper. However, Fanny was one of the novelists whose dullest characters are employed in advancing the story, and the increased emphasis on this more studied plot keeps them in the foreground. Cecilia is what Evelina might have been if Madame Duval and the Braghtons had been reduced, Mr. Villars, Sir John Belmont, Mr. Macartney, and the pathetic history of

*Jane Austen detested this old spoilsport so much that she added a footnote in her copy to the effect that he completed Camilla's happiness by dying shortly after she was married. Jane Austen's Letters, ed. R. W. Chapman, notes on Letter 4.

Caroline Evelyn amplified, the epistolary style changed to straight narrative, and homilies on the popular virtues introduced.

"To draw characters from nature, though not from life, and to mark the manners of the times" was all that Evelina purported to do.³²⁹ The very choice of subject matter in the new novel showed Fanny's attitude. It was not that she was trying for public favor by subordinating comic writing to the instructive and moral. The reception of Evelina could hardly have been bettered, and although the serious parts were very generally admired, it was the comedy which made the book's dazzling success. Nor was she attempting subjects and themes which she, personally, was not much interested in treating, because she felt obliged to make her second work more ambitious than her first. She obviously did intend to expand her range, but she was as interested in the sober scenes as in the amusing ones -- possibly more so. The argument between Delville and his mother was "the very scene for which I wrote the whole book."³³⁰ All her discussions in

the letters to Crisp and most of the conversations about Cecilia which she later reports are concerned with the sentimental in the story. She never expressed her opinion on the relative merits of her first two books, but she seems to have felt that in the second, she had accomplished what she had always admired, but had not been ambitious enough to try, except timidly, in the short serious parts of Evelina. Fanny had only "picked her way" through Fielding, but was an early and ardent admirer of Richardson.³³¹

We have already seen that Fanny had no immediate or remote experience with name-changing wills, gamesters, or most of the things with which the plot of Cecilia deals. She was more inclined to take her characters than her plots from life. However, she was a highly useful confidant in the secret marriage mentioned above of her step sister, Maria Allen. Maria was high-spirited and strong-willed, much more flighty and rather more interesting than any of the older Burney girls; she certainly does not suggest the staid Cecilia. Neither were the circumstances alike. Martin Rishton, the young man in question was supported by his guardian, a rich uncle, who does not seem to have objected openly to the match, although he sent Martin on the grand tour with the probable intention of discouraging it. The violent opposition

all came from Mrs. Burney. Her objections consisted mainly of reports she had heard of his extravagance at Oxford and a vague rumor that he had done something unworthy a gentleman;³³² they were seconded by the whole family and Crisp. Eventually, the lovers met abroad and were married at Ypres. Fanny could hardly have missed the disagreeable scenes which followed when Maria brought her husband home, and large sections obviously devoted to the affair have been prudently edited out of the early diary. Mrs. Ellis' notes suggest that while the story of Caroline Evelyn's secret marriage had already been planned, Fanny derived some new horrors from Crisp's speculations as to what might have happened if Rishton had been the cad that Mrs. Burney thought him.³³³

The sore and disrupted state of relations between Maria and her mother, which existed for years, must have suggested some of Cecilia's objections to secrecy. Her unwillingness to belong to a family which actively rejects her, even for such an impersonal reason as the will, is made almost as important as the question of filial duty. "The disdain I meet with, I pretend not to retort, but willfully to encounter were meanly to deserve it. I will enter into no family in opposition to its wishes, I will consent to no alliance that may expose me to

indignity."³³⁴ She is grieved that the step will alienate Delville from his mother, an intelligent stubborn, and irascible lady who markedly resembled Mrs. Burney herself.

This, with the ton scenes, is all that Fanny drew from her own experience for the plot of Cecilia. The rest is bookish, and among the books which influenced it are the conventional popular novels of the circulating library type. Just which of these novels Fanny had read is not known, for they are never mentioned in the diaries. Either she considered them too trivial to mention in her journal, or she had done the main part of this reading before she was sixteen, when her first diary was begun. Surely it was the source of the romances, sacrificed in the Poland Street Garden, for which the diary was a substitute. Mrs. Ellis says that Fanny was able to catch Maria Allen's references to very obscure novels,³³⁵ although she must have had unpublished letters in mind. Only one doubtful allusion of this sort appears in those published with the early diary.³³⁶

The question of filial piety opposed to inclination -- or disinclination -- had dominated so many novels, good and bad, that it was almost certain to

appear sooner or later in Fanny's. Considering its ubiquity, she did well to side step it in Evelina, and put a new face on it in Cecilia. No source can be assigned to a theme which figured in everything from Clarissa and Tom Jones to the worst trash in "Mr. Noble's circulating library", but the popular romances must have helped to impress it on Fanny as an inevitable subject for a novelist. Of eight fairly typical novels of this kind, four are wholly concerned with a marriage prevented or mismatched by the interference of a parent or guardian,³³⁷ and two more make it a subordinate complication.³³⁸

The real contribution of this type of novel to Cecilia is the love affair of Mortimer and Cecilia herself. Their scenes are stiffly conventional, relentlessly noble, and generally dull. Fanny, who was always rather wary of sensibility for its own sake, did avoid the more sugary effects of the popular writers who depended heavily on it. "How amiable is this sensibility! -- I adore it!" exclaims the excitable guardian in The History of Eliza Warwick.³³⁹ Many hack novelists agreed with him. Others, however, inclined toward a solidly virtuous and sober treatment of lovers' difficulties, and this, on the whole, was Fanny's position. The love scenes in Cecilia suggest

some of the early, friendlier encounters of Clarissa and Lovelace. With their stilted conversations and mechanical emotions, they are actually nearer to the more staid circulating library tales. Lord Orville's courtship of Evelina is much better done. It is saved by Evelina's simplicity, the rather paternal gentleness of Lord Orville, which makes his perfections bearable, and the fact that neither is allowed to be verbose. Cecilia and Mortimer are consistently wooden, especially Cecilia. Mortimer's impulsiveness almost saves him at times, but both talk like books to an unbearable extent.

The scenes in which Cecilia's love for Delvile is discovered are typical. Even the use of a spaniel named Fidel as a third person to advance the lover's understanding was anticipated in an anonymous novel of the late sixties, The Perplexed Lovers.³⁴⁰ Fanny elaborated the device; her Fidel is Mortimer's dog, to whom the heroine privately addresses a eulogy of his master. Mortimer overhears it and forces the shameful admission of her preference from the maidenly Cecilia. What follows is less a conversation than an exchange of speeches, all in the conventional novel vein, but even more formal and elaborate. When Sir Edward Balchen, hero of The Perplexed Lovers, declares himself, he

delivers a speech two pages long, and turned off in a neatly phrased style. "I have not yet, in the slightest degree, merited the good opinion which you have so long entertained of me: but I will now begin to endeavour to deserve it, and shall think my whole life though it be uncommonly lengthened, too short for the completion of all my soul's wishes for your felicity."³⁴¹ In a similar situation, Mortimer cries out: "Resent not my presumption...but let the severity of my recent sufferings palliate my present temerity; for where affliction has been deep and serious, causeless and unnecessary misery will find little encouragement; and mine has been serious indeed!. Sweetly, then permit me, in proportion to its bitterness, to rejoice in the soft reverse which now flatters me with its approach."³³⁷

Romances written in letters were strongly popular when Cecilia was written. According to Frank Gees Black, about 45 percent of the novels published in the seventies were epistolary.* Fanny's lovers often sound as though she had taken passages from the letters themselves as models for their talk. Even the more florid

* Frank Gees Black, The Epistolary Novel in the Eighteenth Century, (University of Oregon, 1940), Appendix E, 174.

spoken lines in other writers do not come up to their level, which is better suggested by such passages as this one from The Brother: "Till I beheld you, my heart was happily insensible to all your sex's attractions: but when I saw you, it sprung forward, as if to meet its kindred mind...Insurmountable obstacles oppose my wishes, and plunge me in despair. Pronounce my doom, banish me your presence, command me to fly to the extremity of the earth, and in some melancholy retreat let me end my wretched days in pining solitude."³⁴³

There is even more likeness to letters in the superior sentimental novels, such as Mrs. Brooke's Lady Julia Mandeville, which Fanny had almost certainly read.³⁴⁴

Some of the devices which are used to carry along the plot, especially the love affair, are quite forced and commonplace. Besides the Fidel incident, mentioned above, there is the set of circumstances which lead Delville to think Cecilia already attached either to Belfield or Sir. Robert Floyer. This is necessary, as he knows the conditions of the will and is attracted to Cecilia, yet must have an excuse to feel himself safe in her dangerous company until it is too late. It is managed with rather obvious mechanics, such as

having Cecilia step into a house to avoid a procession of criminals to Tyburn, and by pure chance, hit on the one in which Belfield is lodging, with Mortimer calling on him.³⁴⁵ Forcing in one last complication, when the real plot was almost resolved, was another trick which Fanny borrowed from the cheaper novels. After Cecilia and Mortimer are married, and Cecilia has been turned off her estate, she plans to join her husband on the continent, and goes to consult Belfield as her only friend in London. Mortimer, returning without notice, finds them together. A duel is imminent, and the men go off together. Cecilia, after a long pursuit with many contrived obstacles, runs mad in the street and finally falls down raving in a pawn shop. This sort of unnecessary disaster was used in such novels as The Example: or The History of Lucy Cleveland. It also suggests the conclusion of Lady Julia Mandeville; but there the catastrophe, while anything but inevitable, is a part of the main plot, rather than an attempt to wring a little more anguish out a story already told.

The delirious sickbed scene, through which Cecilia suffers in the last chapters, was almost indispensable to novelists, but here Fanny seems to have

gone directly to the source and borrowed more heavily than most. Cecilia's delirium and near approach to death in a mean room over the Three Blue Balls seems an attempt to combine Clarissa's madness, confinement in the sponging house, and deathbed in one overwhelming effect, with a happy ending patched on for good measure. Evidently the same thought had occurred to Fanny as to Doctor Johnson: "Give me a sick bed, and a dying lady, and I'll be pathetick myself."³⁴⁶

Criticism of her plot as a whole does not do justice to Fanny's technical ability. According to Baker, "Fanny understood behavior but not action; she was no dramatist, and ... when she tried to make a novel dramatic, she scamped the inherent difficulties and fell back on melodrama."³⁴⁷ Constructing a single scene, in which she could play a set of odd types against each other without growing serious was her peculiar strong point. The prize scene of Cecilia is not the great argument, but Chapter IV, Book IX, modestly called "A Wrangling". The occasion is a final settling between Cecilia and her guardians, just after her coming of age. The crude, lively, and diverting Mr. Briggs arrives first, in a truculent humor from the prospect of meeting Mr. Delville, whom he heartily hates. While he is giving Cecilia some good miserly advice, Mr. Hob-

son calls. He and Briggs are soon quarreling over the relative merits of hoarding money and investing it in solid comforts, when Albany enters to ask Cecilia for a donation. Both are horrified at what they are able to make out from his grandiloquent speeches, and he is equally shocked at their crassness. A three sided argument like an Italian opera trie begins, during which Hobson asks a question which has occurred more than once to the reader: "Was the Gentleman ever a player?...My notion was that the gentleman might be speaking something by heart."³⁴⁷

Mr. Delville now parades into the room, disliking his errand and the company. Mr. Briggs at once attacks him as "Don Pedigree" and "the Right Honorable Mr. Vampus". Delville nearly bursts when Albany rebukes his pride and Hobson suggests that "one of these gentlemen take the other by the hand." When the comic characters are dismissed the scene might be brought to a quick close, but Fanny had a final card to play. Delville chooses this moment to turn on Cecilia and accuses her of intimacy with Belfield and dealings with Jews.

This scene is not only unusually funny, but extremely well constructed. It depends on the gradual

introduction of the characters, so that the miser is set off against the well-fed, brashly prosperous citizen, the two materialists against the frantic old preacher, and all the vulgarians and oddities against the pompous Delvile. The closing passage between Delvile and Cecilia is not an anti-climax, but, considering her embarrassment and his outrage, more effective than it would have been anywhere else. Baker calls this scene "surpassing comedy."³⁴⁹ Macaulay notes the improbability of ever collecting the four in one room, "but when we have them together there, we soon forget probability in the exquisitely ludicrous effect which is produced by the conflict of four old fools, each raging with a monomania of his own, each talking a dialect of his own, and each inflaming all the others anew every time he opens his mouth."³⁵⁰

This sort of scene makes the reader wonder why The Witlings was as bad as Doctor Burney and Daddy Crisp thought it was. Like all the best scenes in Cecilia -- the Harrel's assembly, the Vauxhall scene, Briggs' first encounter with Delvile -- it could be cut down to dialogue and transferred without a change to the stage. Fanny was certainly not a writer whose charm would be spoiled with the loss of her narrative style. At best it was neutral and simple; whenever it

was conspicuous it was conspicuously bad. All she had was in the talk, and with her skill at humors characterization and her ability to build up a scene, she might have written much more amusing comedies than any being produced in her age. In The Witlings, Fanny seems to have failed all around, for Crisp says that even the separate incidents of the story are not very interesting, but it is the central plot which is most faulty. Crisp stresses "the indispensable necessity of an interesting plot or story" so heavily that hers must have been very weak indeed.³⁵¹

Fanny's plots have been criticized as mere devices for introducing outlandish characters and forcing as many as possible into the same scene. "Her plots are rudely constructed and improbable if we consider them in themselves," wrote Macaulay. "But they are admirably framed for the purpose of exhibiting striking groups of eccentric characters, each governed by his own peculiar whim, each talking his own peculiar jargon, and each bringing out by opposition the oddi-³⁵²ties of all the rest." If the reader of Evelina and Cecilia can accept a farfetched situation as the basis of the plot, all the small improbabilities fall into place rather neatly. If we can believe that an old harridan like Madame Duval ever had such genteel

descendants as Caroline Evelyn and Evelina, the presence of Sir Clement Willoughby with the Braghtons and Mr. Smith in her parlour is perfectly normal. Mr. Briggs appearance at Harrel's assembly is not surprising, for Harrel was the sort of man who would have invited any acquaintance with the least claim to birth, ton, or money. It is the condition of their acquaintance, the collection of Cecilia's three wildly dissimilar guardians that calls for a suspension of disbelief. This very obvious strategem allows Fanny to bring in almost any type of character that she can think of in the train of one guardian or another. Yet, the persons in each scene are usually provided with quite eligible reasons for being there, the basic situation allowed.

The chief criticism of Fanny's characterization in her own age and later was the narrowness and monotony of some of her humorous characters. "The great fault", according to Horace Walpole, "is that the authoress is so afraid of not making all her dramatis personae set in character, that she never lets them say a syllable but what is to mark their character, which is very unnatural, at least in the present state of things, in which people are always aiming to disguise their ruling passion, and rather affect opposite qualities,

than hang out their propensities."³⁵³ Aside from Briggs and Morrice, who he enjoyed, and Meadows, "Lady Something Something" and "Miss Something" (surely Lady Honoria Pemberton and Miss Larolles) whom he called tolerable, he branded them all as outrés. The critic of The Monthly Review, on the whole very favorable, had this to say of the ton character: "The affectation and insipidity of Captain Aresby, and the vacancy and cold indifference of Mr. Meadows are, in our view, dead weights upon the story."³⁵⁴ Macaulay admitted that "Madame D'Arblay has left us scarcely anything but humours" and for that reason denied her a place in the first rank of artists, although he added that in the second she had "few equals and scarcely any superior."³⁵⁵ His whole criticism, according to Lytton Strachey "amounts to nothing more than saying, with extraordinary cleverness, that her characters were caricatures."³⁵⁶

Fanny's humor characters fall into two classes. There are those which consist of a single affectation, a few phrases or mannerisms, repeated unchanged in scene after scene. Mr. Meadows and Captain Aresby are this sort, and to some extent Miss Larolles, although she is more real. The others are still type characters rather than individuals, but each is a complete, highly developed type, with a variety of motives, eccentricities, and jargon phrases -- not merely an animated foible.

Mr. Briggs is not always calling Mr. Delville Don Puffendorf; nor is Mr. Hobson constantly talking of hot toast and butter, nor Lady Honoria Pemberton jeering at Delville Castle as an old jail. Briggs is a notable example of these characters. He is predominantly a miser, and every speech he makes is designed to show off his penury, but with much ingenuity and in varying situations. Fanny has worked out his economies in detail -- how he scrubs with sand rather than pay for soap, combs his own wig, breakfasts on water gruel and gives it to his servants ("can't eat much of it, bob 'em there!"), mixes his ink from a few drops of shoe blacking, and carries his best coat done up in a handkerchief to Harrel's assembly to save wearing it in the street. But this is not all of Briggs. There is his sharp, crude wit, his fierce contempt for men of fashion ("don't know five farthings from two pence!"), his feud with Delville, whom he scorns as a fool and hates for his assumption of superiority on grounds which have nothing to do with money. There is also a truculent good humor when he is not crossed, and a real fondness for Cecilia. He is a fully realized humors character, while Mr. Meadows and his sort are more sketches than characters at all.

That Fanny took her best figures from life, and patched together her less convincing ones from books is a popular idea based partly on real similarities between the diary and the novels, but too much on the obvious fact that the interesting persons are lifelike and the dull ones bookish. Actually, while Fanny did draw most of her diverting characters from real life, she was as unsuccessful with a serious one taken from there as she always was with serious characters from any source. Of course, the whole conception of humors characters and their arrangement was taken directly from the earlier and greater novelists, especially in the scenes and types from low life. She never did anything as low -- or as good -- as Fielding's inn scenes, and does not seem to have been influenced by Fielding or Smollett in drawing any particular character, except, possibly, Captain Mirvan, but the technique of producing comic effects by a clash of crude and various oddities passed directly to her from them. She differed from them by a greater use of fashionable affectation, of elegant oddities as well as crude ones. This had been done for so long on the stage that it was certainly no novelty, but the major novelist had generally reserved the humors treatment for their broad char-

acters and vulgarians. Fanny herself did better when she worked in their tradition; except for the good-natured scandal-monger, Lady Honoria Pemberton, her high life characters were all of the first type mentioned above and uniformly flimsy. She was very far from producing a Lord Foppington or even a Lord Ogleby.

However, most of the low types that she used were not those that had been perfected by the great four. She made more use than any novelist had so far done of city merchants and tradesmen. In Cecilia, four of the best comic character -- Mr. Briggs, Mr. Hobson, Mr. Simkins, and Mrs. Belfield -- are from the city; the silversmith Branghton, his family, and their lodger, Mr. Smith, the Holborn beau, are, with Madame Duval, the best characters in Evelina. Fanny knew comparatively little of the country and nothing of the squirearchy; she could take nothing from Fielding's world of fox hunters, squire's hangers-on, poachers, small magistrates, and country parsons. When she tried to introduce a figure from a world still cruder, in Captain Mirvan, with his resemblance to Smollett's officers, she only struck a false note with a character that readers even in her own day found repugnant. Her oddest departure from tradition was in wholly ignoring the possibilities of comic servants. Every one of the great

four had treated them admirably. Fielding, of course, was the acknowledged master of such material, with Partridge, Mistress Honour, and Mrs. Slipslop, his backstairs wrangles and inn brawls. Smollett had Winifred Jenkins and Humphrey Clinker; Sterne made great use of Uncle Toby's household. Richardson contributed a well done maid servant who is often amusing in spite of being thoroughly obnoxious -- Clarissa's jailer, the pert Betty Barnes. In Fanny's novels, the servants never appear as persons. Cecilia has a maid, a footman named Ralph, and a complete staff at her country house. The reader knows that they exist and are appropriately faithful during Cecilia's trials, but beyond that they are perfectly blank. This is a point in which Fanny very likely influenced Jane Austen.

To see just what Fanny took from life and what from books, her characters may be analysed individually, but only the more prominent ones. There are thirty active characters in Cecilia, besides innumerable walk-on parts.

The ton contingent, intended as a criticism of current manners, was certainly taken from life. Miss Larolles and Lady Honoria have no definite originals; they are common, universal, and eternal types which

Fanny had probably encountered in innumerable sprightly females. The drab Miss Leeson has no specific model. Mr. Meadows was drawn from a class of fashionable young gentlemen who had annoyed Fanny. She speaks several times of the type, remarking that a certain young man "seemed quite free of the non-chalante impertinence of the times,"³⁵⁷ commenting that "Meadowses at balls are in crowds".³⁵⁸ He was colored to some extent, although probably not much, by the foppish performances of her cousin, Richard Burney.³⁵⁹ The chief inspiration for Meadows, however, was one of Fanny's Streatham acquaintance. William Seward, a friend and frequent guest of the Thrales, was well read, clever and agreeable on occasion, but a hypochondriac and a studied ennuye'. Mrs. Thrale identified him with Pococurante, the type of indifference in Voltaire's Candide.³⁶⁰ He and Fanny even projected a comedy to be called Everything A Bore, with a hero, Mr. Dry, modeled on himself. In the scene which they planned, Meadows' own trick of rejecting whatever is proposed appears only a little modified by Seward's sharper mind.

"How shall it begin? cried he; 'with Mr. Dry in his study? -- his slippers just on, his hair about his ears, -- exclaiming, 'What a bore is life! -- What is to be done next?'

"Next? cried II; 'what, before he had done anything at all?'

"'Oh, he has dressed himself, you know. --
Well, then he takes up a book --'

"'For example, this,' cried I giving him
Clarendon's History.

"He took it up in character, and flinging it
away, cried,

"'No, -- this will never do, -- a history by
a party writer is odious.'

"I then gave him Robertson's America.

"'This,' cried he, 'is of all reading the most
melancholy; -- an account of possessions we have lost
by our own folly.'

"I then gave him Baretti's Spanish Travels.

"'Who,' cried he, flinging it aside, 'can read
travels by a fellow who never speaks a word of truth?'

"Then I gave him a volume of Clarissa.

"'Pho!' cried he, 'a novel writ by a bookseller! --
there is but one novel now one can bear to read, -- and
that's written by a young lady'"³⁶¹

Meadows, however is no portrait of Seward, but
only an incarnation of some of his poses.

Seward was an intelligent man; although his

affectations were to some extent a parlour game, they were based upon ill health and read bitterness. Meadows was simply a fool with a love of morbid admiration as boundless as Bunthorne's.

Captain Aresby, the prattling jargonist, may be connected with two real persons, both more diverting than he. One was Mr. Rose Fuller, a simple-minded country gentleman and neighbor of Streatham, "whose trite, settled, tonish emptiness of discourse is a never failing source of laughter and diversion."³⁶²

Mr. Fuller did not use French, but his conversation was a patchwork of catch-phrases. For example, when Fanny inquired about the health of his dog, Sharp: "'Ma'am, your most humble! you're a very good lady, indeed! --quite what we call a good lady! Little Sharp is perfectly well: that sort of attention, and things of that sort, -- the bow-wow system is very well.'"³⁶³

In connection with an invitation to Streatham which he had rejected: "'So, so! -- quite the family system! Give me leave to tell you, Miss Burney, this commands attention! -- what we call a respectable invitation! I am sorry I could not come, indeed; for we young men, Miss Burney, we make it what we call a sort of a rule

to take notice of this sort of attention."³⁶⁴ Fanny does not use any of his actual expressions, which she may have thought too individual to be reproduced safely. Whether or not she first drew the idea of a jargonist from Rose Fuller, she probably embellished the type from other sources. The use of French may have been taken from General Blakelgy, a genial decayed gallant whom she met at Brighton. "His whole conversation consists in little French phrases,"³⁶⁵ usually the simpler ones. He called Fanny a "dear little charmante" and even praised a "tres bon goose."³⁶⁶

Fanny's authentic pictures of tradesmen are not so difficult to account for as many of her contemporaries thought. Although it was not a part of her history which she cared to stress later, she probably saw them at close range in the respectable, but ungentle neighborhood of The Burney's Poland Street house. A reviewer in the Cornhill Magazine, writing a hundred years after Cecilia's publication, was apparently the first to make the obvious inference from the famous story of Fanny and the wig. "In her Memoirs she dwells chiefly upon the noble patrons who admitted her father to their houses; but she had had more than glimpses of their social inferiors; and her

father's best anecdote about her describes her as playing with the daughters of his next-door neighbour, a wig-maker, and spoiling one of his wigs by immersion in a water-tub."³⁶⁷ Some of the low life characters may also be traced to Fanny's later acquaintance. Briggs is supposed to have been taken from Joseph Nollekins, the sculptor.³⁶⁸ Nollekins, a friend of Dr. Burney, is briefly described in the early diary, among the guests at a private concert. He is merely noted as "a jolly, fat, lisping, laughing underbred, good humored man as lives: his merit seems pretty much confined to his profession, and his language is as vulgar as his works are elegant."³⁶⁹ The resemblance between him and Nollekins is pointed out in Annie Raine Ellis' preface and notes to her edition of Cecilia.³⁷⁰ Her case is based on J. T. Smith's Nollekins and His Times, which I have not seen, and is considered conclusive by Austin Dobson.³⁷¹

There is no source given for Hobson in any discussion of Fanny Burney which I have read. Yet he is strikingly like John Cator, one of the executors of Mr. Thrale's will, who figures at length in the diary. Mr. Cator was a timber merchant, valued by Johnson for

his rough, independent mind,³⁷² but he impressed Fanny as an oddity. She paid him most attention for the uninvited part which he took in a violent argument between Dr. Johnson and Sir William Pepys on the former's Life of Lord Lyttelton. "He gave his opinion, quite uncalled, upon everything that was said by either party, and that with an importance and pomposity, yet with an emptiness and verbosity that rendered the whole dispute, when in his hands, nothing more than ridiculous... To give a specimen -- one speech will do for a thousand.

"As to this here question of Lord Lyttelton, I can't speak to it to the purpose, as I have not read his Life, for I have only read the Life of Pope; I have got the books though, for I sent for them last week, and they came to me on Wednesday, and then I began them; but I have not yet read Lord Lyttelton. Pope I have begun, and that is what I am now reading. But what I have to say about Lord Lyttelton is this here: Mr. Seward says that Lord Lyttelton's steward dunned Mr. Shenstone for his rent, by which I understand he was a tenant of Lord Lyttelton's. Well, if he was a tenant of Lord Lyttelton's, why should not he pay his rent?"

All this is exactly typical of Hobson, the bland assumption that his opinion is always welcome and valuable, the literal mind, even the deliberate, self-important turn of the sentences. Fanny's comments on the two are similar. "Who could contradict this?" she wrote of the speech quoted above,³⁷⁴ and after one of Hobson's harangues, spoke of "the truth of this speech palliating its obvious absurdity."³⁷⁵ Of course, the pompous citizen of Hobson's type was a favorite on the stage. There is such a one in Garrick and Colman's comedy, The Clandestine Marriage, which was a prodigious favorite with all the Burneys and much quoted by Fanny.³⁷⁶ This character may have provided some particular hints for the development of Hobson. The "hot rounds of toast and butter" which he fancies for breakfast might have been suggested by Sterling's "hot rolls and butter in July," which affronted the delicate stomach of Lord Ogleby.³⁷⁷ This reference seems to have been a kind of family joke, and so uncommonly familiar to Fanny.³⁷⁸ However, there is more uncertainty in Sterling. He is the self made merchant, trying to move into an intercourse with the gentry and not quite sure how to do it. Hobson is completely sure of himself, his position, and the

incontestable truth and sterling sense of whatever he says. "My way is this, let every man speak his maxim!"³⁷⁹ "That's my way, and let any man tell me a better!"³⁸⁰ "That's what I argue and that's my notion of things."³⁸¹

For Mr. Simkins, the ostentatiously humble tradesman, I can find no sources at all. Perhaps Fanny had actually encountered the type in the London shops. Mrs. Belfield, the foolish mother with her broad hints that Cecilia should marry her son, is also unidentified. She may just possibly have been a vulgar version of Mrs. O'Connor, the landlady and advocate of the rejected Mr. Barlow. She was as tactless as Mrs. Belfield, if more grammatical, and Fanny recorded one scene in which she pleaded Barlow's case at painful length. "This gentlewoman and I never meet without her most officiously telling me tales of his goodness, worth, and so forth, and expatiating on my cruelty, and and my own loss, and his broken heart, and such sort of stuff."³⁸³ Even this is a wild guess, especially as Fanny apparently never saw Mrs. O'Connor again after their few encounters in 1775.

The problem of accounting for Albany has puzzled

all of Fanny's critics. Baker and Mrs. Ellis both suggest that he may have been based on James Hutton, an odd Moravian bookseller.³⁸⁴ Hutton made a practice of scraping acquaintance with any of the prominent or great in whom he was interested, from the King down. He had encountered the Burneys in this way, and even corresponded a little with Fanny. Aside from his irregular comings and goings and his habit of appearing uninvited at any time, Hutton had little but good intentions in common with Albany. He was peculiar but perfectly sane and notably happy; he seldom if ever mentioned charity, at least in Fanny's hearing, and his speeches and letters which she records have an innocent, gentle quality as unlike Albany's bombast as possible. If a living model must be chosen from Fanny's acquaintances, Christopher Smart, the poet, would do at least as well. Like Albany, he had been confined for madness. Fanny noted the "great wildness in his manner, looks, and voice,"³⁸⁵ and Doctor Johnson commented on the habit of praying in public which helped to commit him to Bedlam.³⁸⁶ As for charity, one of his last letters to Dr. Burney was written to ask help for a fellow sufferer at King's Bench Prison, in which Smart

was imprisoned for debt, and mentioned that "he had himself assisted him, according to his willing poverty." ³⁸⁷

Whether or not Smart and Hutton provided Fanny with the first suggestion for Albany, most of his speeches sound as though they had been culled from magazine articles on benevolence, and the story-within-the-story, which explains his monomania, is certainly the purest invention. It seems that Mr. Albany, while a student at the university, had become engaged to a poor villager's daughter, "the fairest flower that ever put forth its sweet buds." ³⁸⁸ When recalled to his home in Jamaica to take over his estate, he left her in the charge of a trusted friend. After leading an unsavory life in the Indies, he was finally moved to remorse and returned to marry his sweetheart, but found that she had been seduced by the friend. She ingenuously confessed and begged for forgiveness, but Albany reviled and heat her. He soon repented and hurried to forgive her, but by that time, the poor girl had disappeared. After a two year's search, she was traced to a London bagnio, from which Albany carried her to a country house, hoping to recover her.

On entering the house, however, she took a vow to live for the rest of her life on the least possible dry bread and water, without sleeping, speaking or moving, as a punishment for her sins. This constructive regimen soon killed her, and Albany ran mad. Partially recovering his senses after three years, he made a complementary vow to spend the rest of his life in charitable works. A circulating library novel was not complete without at least one highly colored insertion of this kind. In Elizabeth Griffith's The Delicate Distress, possibly an extreme case, three rambling tales constitute more than a fifth of the book.³⁸⁹ The history of Mr. Macartney has the same place in Evelina.

Some of the persons in Cecilia are neither taken from life nor borrowed from books, but made to order for the requirements of the plot. Mr. Delvile is one. His character is not probable, nor is there anything in it beyond what is needed to meet the specifications of the story, but it does meet them, and it is consistent throughout. Even at the end, Mr. Delvile does not soften. He forgives the lovers and offers them a roof during Cecilia's illness, but

less from remorse or common humanity than outrage at the thought of any one named Delville lying sick in a mean room over the Three Blue Balls.

Mr. Monckton is another of these manufactured characters. His development was very much admired in 1782, both as a piece of characterization and as a warning example. The Monthly Review quoted in full the five page description of him at the beginning of Cecilia,³⁹⁰ and attached a neat moral.³⁹¹ To the modern reader, however, Monckton never quite comes off. The man whom the reader sees is the rather worldly, but honorable and wise gentleman that Cecilia knows. The ugly side is recorded in detail. Monckton's devices are clever, his motives shrewdly worked out, his emotions consistent and natural. His part of the story is carried on very convincingly, yet he is always described rather than shown and never comes alive.

I believe that the character of Mrs. Delville was based on that of Fanny's stepmother, Elizabeth Allen Burney. Fanny was very probably unconscious of using her. That there is no suggestion of such a thing in the diary and letters means nothing, as she would have been far too prudent even to hint at her

intention if she were aware of it. But Fanny's loyalty and also her well developed prudishness would have reacted violently against making a novel character of a member of the family, and impartially setting down her qualities, bad with good. However, the resemblance between them is too strong to be only chance. Both are high intelligent women. Dr. Burney described his wife as having a "cultivated mind, intellects above the general level of her sex, and ...a curiosity after knowledge insatiable to the last."³⁹² Mrs. Delvile has "strong sense" and "quick parts."³⁹³ Both are generous and warm hearted toward those whom they love and admire, but arrogant and ruthless in expressing adverse opinions. "If Mr. Delvile was shunned through hatred, his lady no less was avoided through fear; high-spirited and fastidious, she was easily wearied and disgusted, she bore neither with frailty nor folly -- those two principal ingredients in human nature! She required, to obtain her favour, the union of virtue and abilities with elegance, which meeting but rarely, she was rarely disposed to be pleased; and disdaining to conceal either contempt or aversion, she inspired in return nothing but dread or

resentment: making thus, by a want of that lenity which is the milk of human kindness, and the bond of society, enemies the most numerous and illiberal by those very talents which, more meekly borne, would have rendered her not merely admired, but adored."³⁹⁴

Cecilia is frightened at the thought of Mrs. Delville's resentment of the projected secret marriage. "The terror of the first interview never ceased to be present to her; she shrank, even in imagination from her wrath-darting eye, she felt stung by pointed satire and subdued by cold contempt."³⁹⁵ Similarly Fanny dreaded having her stepmother learn the truth about the authorship of Evelina. "She knows how severe a critic I think her, and therefore, I am sure, cannot wonder I should dread a lash which I had no other hope of escaping from, but flight or disguise."³⁹⁶ Finally, both Mrs. Delville and Mrs. Burney had notably high tempers. "What scenes we shall have!" wrote Fanny when Maria and Rishton came home,³⁹⁷ and her stepmother's performance on that occasion seems to have approached Mrs. Delville's.³⁹⁸ The likeness, of course, is not lessened by the parallel parts which the two played in confusing their children's affairs. Mrs. Burney does

not seem to have shared the undue family pride, which is so essential to Mrs. Delvile, but it is not incongruous with the character which they had in common.

Yet, though Mrs. Delvile is probably drawn from life, Fanny handled her as heavily as the serious characters that she derived from books. She is as wooden when she begins to speak and act as Mortimer and Cecilia themselves. These two are as ponderous, dull, and unconvincing as they could well be. Mortimer is slightly preferable. He is not so much the perfect hero as Sir Charles Grandison or Lord Orville, not is he as attractive as either. He talks like a book of the driest sort and makes love in balanced periods. Still he had outbursts of impetuosity and even temper which almost bring him to life. The poorest thing in Cecilia is Cecilia. "Cecilia is ...a wax figure whose refinement has become a settled affectation, whose modesty is an obsession, who blushes every time her lover's name is mentioned, who is scandalized when he proposes, and is too maidenly to be married."³⁹⁹ This description by Lytton Strachey, is, if anything, an understatement. Cecilia is the Clarissa Harlowe type of perfect heroine,

but with everything easy or natural smothered out -- an unbearable prig. Fanny certainly learned nothing from Richardson about the construction of appealing heroines, and had nothing to pass on to Jane Austen.

No critic of Fanny Burney has failed to make much of the difference in the styles of the simple, epistolary *Evelina* and the Johnsonian, narrative *Cecilia* -- the beginning of the distortion which finally spoiled Fanny's writing. The question of whether Dr. Johnson revised the second book or simply influenced it was argued from the time of its appearance. The resemblance was noted, with approval or not, at once. "It is related in a style peculiarly nervous and perspicuous," *The Monthly Review* observed, "and appears to have been formed on the best model of Dr. Johnson's!"⁴⁰⁰ On the other hand, Horace Walpole disliked it for being "written in Dr. Johnson's unnatural phrase",⁴⁰¹ and Dr. Burney's friend, Mr. Twining of Colchester thought the writing "'not the better for a little imitation (probably involuntary) of Doctor Johnson.'"⁴⁰²

Boswell included a paragraph from *Cecilia* with selections from Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* and William Robertson's *History of America* to

show how the best writers were, "intentionally or by the imperceptible effect of its strength and animation," affected by Johnson's manner.⁴⁰³ The passage which he quoted, from one of Mortimer's letters, balances admirably. "'My family, mistaking ambition for honour, and rank for dignity, have long planned a splendid connection for me, to which, though my invariable repugnance has stopped any advances, their wishes and their views immovably adhere. I am but too certain they will now listen to no other. I dread, therefore, to make a trial where I despair of success; I know not how to risk a prayer with those who may silence me by a command.'" ⁴⁰⁴

This was reproduced at greater length by Macaulay, who firmly believed that it had been "at least corrected" by Johnson himself.⁴⁰⁵

Macaulay discredited the idea, hinted in 1782, that Johnson wrote the best parts of Cecilia himself. "But we have not the smallest doubt that he revised Cecilia and that he retouched the style of many passages."⁴⁰⁶ This assertion was made in the face of Johnson's flat denial that he had done any such thing. "'Some people want to make out some credit to me from the little rogue's book. I was told by a gentleman

this morning, that it was a very fine book, if it was all her own. 'It is all her own,' said I, 'for me I am sure, for I never saw one word of it before it was printed.'"⁴⁰⁸

Any statement of this kind might be interpreted as the Doctor's generous readiness to leave all the credit for his young friend, but there is evidence that he was simply telling the truth. Hazlitt reported a conversation between Dr. Johnson and the painter, Opie, in which Johnson was asked if he had really sat up all night to finish the new novel. "'I never read it through at all,'" he replied, 'though I don't wish to be known.'"⁴⁰⁹ This story is given as true and is consistent enough with his known disinclination to read books through.

Another piece of proof, which, so far as I know, has never been mentioned in a discussion of this question, might settle it permanently. It is part of a rambling entry in Mrs. Thrale's diary. "And so says Johnson I guess Miss Burney concludes by leaving her heroine Cecilia in measureless delight."⁴¹⁰ On the contrary, Fanny was stubbornly fixed on ending the story in a mood of forced content and mixed happiness nearly as mournful as Rasselas. "The upright mind of Cecilia, her purity, her virtue, and the moderation of her wishes, gave to her in the warm affection of Lady

Delville, and the unremitting fondness of Mortimer, all the happiness human life seems capable of receiving: -- yet human it was, and as such imperfect! she knew that, at times, the whole family must murmur at her loss of fortune, and at times she murmured herself to be thus portionless, tho' an HEIRESS. Rationally, however, she surveyed the world at large, and finding that of the few who had any happiness, there were none without some misery, she checked the rising sign of repining mortality, and grateful with general felicity, bore partial evil with chearfullest resignation."⁴¹¹

She had defended this conclusion to Crisp, and was ready to argue her point with all comers, including Burke, who thought that the end should be either happier or sadder. "I should think I have rather written a farce than a serious history, if the whole is to end, like the hack Italian operas, with a jolly chorus that makes all parties good and all parties happy... Besides, I think the book, in its present conclusion somewhat original, for the hero and heroine are neither plunged in the depth of misery, nor exalted to UNhuman happiness."⁴¹²

Dr. Johnson obviously made his comment before he read the novel. Just when he made it is not clear. It is quoted in the entry for July 7, 1782 in the Thraliana, but was surely said earlier, for Cecilia appeared on June 12, and Johnson would have been one of the first to see it. However, the dates in the Thraliana mean almost nothing. It was not a systematic diary. The entries were irregular and far apart; there are none for 1782 between July 7 and May 30. The conversation which Mrs. Thrale was quoting could have taken place at any time in this interval or even before. The essential point is Dr. Johnson's complete ignorance of what he must later have approved as one of the beauties of Cecilia.

The Johnsonian style followed from Fanny's new, larger intentions, with the new emphasis on sentiment, charity, and moralizing. Johnson was the correct model for serious writers. Fanny had admired him since she encountered Rasselas at seventeen, and their close personal contact had strengthened his influence and led her to read his works intensively.⁴¹³ Even this contact may not have had as much effect as is usually thought. Miss Ellis, in her preface to Cecilia, made an unorthodox guess that Fanny derived her lumbering style from her own father. Mary Elizabeth Christie, in

The Contemporary Review, suggested that it came through Doctor Burney from the earlier Johnson. "Charles Burney was an enthusiastic admirer of the Rambler papers which were appearing at the time of Fanny's birth.

'Evelina', written at a time which she was constantly in requisition as her father's amanuensis, has its share of Johnsonianisms; and that its share is not larger is simply due to the epistolary form in which the book is cast. At the time 'Cecilia' was written, when Fanny was under Johnson's direct influence, he had left the Johnsonian style behind and was writing the 'Lives of the Poets', and reading the proof-sheets aloud at Mrs. Thrale's breakfast table."⁴¹⁴

Certainly Dr. Burney preferred the most sententious parts of Fanny's novels. Albany was his favorite in Cecilia; he delighted in Evelina's moralizing guardian, Mr. Villars, and actually cried over her reunion with Sir John Belmont.⁴¹⁶ To show the possible relation of their writing, Miss Christie quotes the first paragraph of an autobiography which the Doctor never finished. "Perhaps few have been better enabled to describe, from an actual survey, the manners and customs of the age in which he lived than myself; ascending from those of the

most humble cottagers, and lowest mechanics, to the first nobility, and most elevated personages, with whom circumstances, situation, and accident, at different periods of my life, have rendered me familiar. Oppressed and laborious husbandmen; insolent and illiberal yeomanry; overgrown farmers; generous and hospitable merchants; men of business and men of pleasure; men of letters; men of science; artists; sportsmen and country squires; dissipated and extravagant voluptuaries; gamesters; ambassadors; statesmen; and even sovereign princes, I have had opportunities of examining in almost every point of view; all these it is my intention to display in their respective situations; and to delineate their virtues, vices, and apparent degrees of happiness and misery."⁴¹⁶ This is recognizably like the puffy style in which Fanny wrote Cecilia.

IV

Cecilia's brilliant reputation and solid popularity did not fall off for years after the first success. Jane Austen, among others, admired it highly.⁴¹⁷ The later novels were regretfully contrasted with it. In a disgusted review of the egregious Wanderer, the Quarterly recalled how Fanny's Evelina, "most extraordinary instance of early talent... excited an expectation of excellence which her Cecilia almost fulfilled."⁴¹⁸ That Fanny was still rated a fairly important figure in the middle of the nineteenth century is obvious from the amount of critical attention paid to The Memoirs of Dr. Burney and The Diary and Letters of Madama D'Arblay when they appear in 1832 and 1842-46 respectively. The energy with which Croker set about disproving what Fanny had never asserted -- that she wrote Evelina at seventeen -- was not wasted on a forgotten novelist. Macaulay declared that her early works "continued to hold a high place in the public esteem"; he never treated her as a dead classic and his discussion of the novels is chiefly devoted to Cecilia.⁴¹⁹

After the middle of the century, however, Fanny's

popularity seems to have faded rapidly. Her name dropped out of the periodicals and did not reappear until the publication of Annie Raine Ellis' annotated editions of Evelina and Cecilia in 1882. By this time the books were thought of mainly as curiosities, damned as quaint, and found unreadable by many who attempted them for the first time. Miss Christie admitted that "many persons of intelligence, taste, and humour stick fast in Evelina and Cecilia...We hear continually of people who have procured the volumes in confident anticipation of amusement and have been obliged to lay them down in mortified disappointment after a vain struggle through the first chapters."⁴²⁰ Her review was simply a long synopsis of each novel, with diverting quotations, more or less admittedly planned to tempt the bored reader who had mired down in the sentiment.

Most reviewers conceded the plot to be ingenious and well worked out, if somewhat farfetched and conventional. Its structure suffered less in their irreverent summaries than the sententious treatment of emotions, the moralizing, and some of the characters which had originally been much admired. Cecilia, for some reason,

was generally accepted or tolerated, but the Delvilles and Mr. Albany were hooted. "The hero and his haughty but admirable mother, and his still more haughty but utterly contemptible father, are at all times very tiresome...Mrs. Delville is not only pompous, but utterly hateful...It would, we know, be altogether out of keeping with the character of the gentle Cecilia; nevertheless, had she for one moment forgotten her virtues and her manners and, snatching Mrs. Delville's wig off her head, had thrown it in her face*, we should have liked her none the less."⁴²¹ This critic, writing in The Saturday Review, also dislikes Albany, but was less hard on him than the reviewer for The Cornhill Magazine. "There is an old semi-lunatic in 'Cecilia' who goes about disclaiming on the virtues of the poor and the selfishness of the rich, who is evidently intended to be a striking study of half-witted benevolence. Really he strikes one chiefly as an embodiment of that vein of insincere declamation into which Miss Burney afterward diverged and which takes such comic proportion in the memoir of her father."⁴²²

The same critic hit on the essential fault in

*This picture is delightful, but inaccurate. Wigs for ladies were no more fashionable in 1782 than now.

Cecilia. "Miss Burney evidently relishes her most stilted performances best and brings in the more comic scenes, in which she condescends to be amusing, with an air of apology."⁴²³ He considered this the result of her having been overpraised for the sentimental part of Evelina -- as she certainly was. "People talked about her insight into the human heart, her extraordinary capacity for penetrating or representing character, and so forth...The weakest part of 'Evelina' is a bit with a romantic Scotchman, saved from suicide by the expostulations of the heroine, who turns out to be somebody else, whilst she herself has been more or less changed at nurse. It does not appear that anybody had the kindness to tell her that this part of the story...was rubbish, or that the elderly benevolent person who does the heavy moralizing was an old bore. She probably fancied, like most young authors, that she was at her best when most pretentiously solemn and didactic. In her next story, 'Cecilia', she accordingly takes the airs of a solemn moralist, which do not sit on her quite so easily as might be wished. She desires to be not merely the lively describer, but the judicious Mentor of society."⁴²⁴

"It is indeed a pity that Cecilia should begin so heavily," The Saturday Review commented "No less unfortunate is it that its conclusion should be so

ridiculous. Let all sentimentalists take warning from these closing scenes...The heroine's final trials which are to us unutterably wearisome and even disgusting, shattered the nerves of our great-grandmothers."⁴²⁵

On the other hand, Fanny was highly praised for her humor and her study of manners. The picture of the times was admired,⁴²⁶ although more as history than diversion. It had naturally lost the familiarity and allusiveness that recommended it in the seventeen eighties. The low class characters had kept their appeal and even increased it. Hobson had always been appreciated, but Briggs was not much liked by Fanny's contemporaries, who thought him a caricature. An age that knew Dickens now accepted him as one of the best figures in the book. The Saturday Review gave the two tradesmen more attention than all the other characters combined and declared that in picturing their type, Fanny probably had no rivals from Richardson to George Eliot. "In the low humor of the vulgar, coarse man of business, she is, we hold, unsurpassed."⁴²⁷

This was the estimation of Cecilia at its last appearance in the reviews. The current opinion of it

cannot be stated because there is none. It has passed out of all critical discussion but specialized studies of its period. Cecilia is no longer read at all. It is no more ignored by the large public than by the most literate readers with no ulterior motives of research or study. Evelina, while far from being a live classic like Pride and Prejudice or Emma, is still a standard work, with merits and reputation which can attract independent readers to it, although not in great numbers. Yet of those who read Evelina, it is doubtful if one in twenty ever opens Cecilia, and surely safe to guess that not more than one in a hundred ever finishes it.

Whoever hears of it must wonder why a book which the best minds of the age sincerely loved and admired should have faded into so much obscurity. Whoever reads it wonders why such a book was ever admired and beloved by the best minds of the age. "Neither Macaulay nor Dobson," wrote Lytton Strachey, "has indeed really solved the enigma of why it happened that writings, pronounced immortal by the greatest intellects of their own day, fell almost at once into insignificance, and eventually into nearly complete oblivion. Evelina and Cecilia were

hailed by Johnson, the greatest contemporary critic, as worthy to rank beside the best work of Richardson and Fielding; and Evelina is now read only as a quaint example of eighteenth-century literature, while Cecilia is not read at all. 'Tell them,' said Johnson of the latter volume, in a vein of ironic censure, 'how little there is in it of human nature, and how well your knowledge of the world enables you to judge of the failings in that book.' But the words are ironical in a sense undreamt of by the Doctor; for they exactly express the opinion of the modern reader, who inevitably does find in Cecilia very little of human nature, and whose knowledge of the world does enable him to judge quite easily of the failings of 'that book'. The difference is complete; and a compromise appears to be impossible. If we are right, Johnson must have been wrong; if we are wrong, Johnson must have been right. But we, ex hypothesi, are right; how then did it happen -- it is the only question left to ask -- that Johnson came to be wrong?"⁴²⁸

Partly because of the small interest in characterization which was common to the novelist and the public of the time, Strachey guesses. "'You have,' Burke wrote to her, 'crowded into a few small volumes an incredible

variety of characters; most of them well planned, well supported, and well contrasted with each other'; and it is obvious that by 'characters' Burke meant just what he should not have meant -- descriptions, that is to say, of persons who might exist. The truth is, that if we had been told that Delville pere was ten feet high, and that Mr. Morrice was made of cardboard, we should have had very little reason for astonishment; such peculiarities of form would have been remarkable, no doubt, but not more remarkable than those of their minds, which Burke was so ready to accept as eminently natural...Immediately 'humours' is substituted for 'characters' in Burke's appreciation, what he says becomes perfectly just. They are indeed, these humours, well planned, well supported, and well contrasted with each other;' Miss Burney displays great cleverness and admirable care in her arrangement of them; and this Burke, as well as Macaulay, thoroughly understood. But such, both for Burke and for his distinguished circle, was the limit of understanding; outside that limit the God of Convention reigned triumphant. Conventional feelings, conventional phrases, conventional situations, conventional oddities, conventional loves, -- these were

the necessary ingredients of their perfect novel; and all these Miss Burney was able, with supreme correctness, to supply."⁴²⁹

Strachey's explanation does not quite explain. An age which talked constantly about human nature, as Fanny's did, must have at least thought itself interested in character. Why, then, allowing a high average of sense in the readers, were her lay figures accepted so joyfully? Fanny's age was exactly like any other in having peculiar conventions which it swallowed; Frederic Henry and Catherine Barkley may finally seem as artificial as Mortimer and Cecilia Delvile. But Cecilia's love story was not only conventional; it was empty, pompous, dull, and, still, covered with the most valuable praise.

The other answer to Strachey's question -- that Doctor Johnson was right and the apathetic modern reader wrong -- is given by at least one contemporary critic, Gordon Hall Gerould. "In Cecilia Miss Burney was rivaling Richardson by means of her own, shocking though the notion of doing so would have seemed to her. Accordingly, she did not write a straightforward, dimensionally accurate novel of manners, but a story in which everything is heightened and intensified for the

sake of throwing more light on the inner life of her characters. This is true of both the action and the characters themselves. Harrel's folly, Delville's insensate pride, Brigg's sordidness, are out of drawing in much the same way as are the figures in a painting by El Greco. Not to recognize this is to misunderstand the essential quality of the book. The method justifies, among other things, the extreme sensibility with which the characters and scenes are depicted. Probably by no other means could the conflict within Mrs. Delville have been so well represented: her pride of race, her ambition for her son, her kindness, and her appreciation of Cecilia would seem less real and be much less affecting if they were not emotionally heightened....All in all, Cecilia, if read in the way it should be read, is seen as a masterpiece of fiction. Richardsonian in subtlety, it is audacious in the boldness with which events and persons are manipulated and shown in strange perspectives. Not until Dickens began to write did another English novelist appear who could use this method so effectively.^{"430} Modern readers will surely find this hard to accept. Fanny's exaggeration is not what one dislikes, but the

way she exaggerates, not so much expanding emotion as piling up speeches which convey no emotion. Strachey is too hard on the basic conception of the characters, which is usually convincing. But no one could be much too hard on Fanny's attempt to bring them to life in their talk.

One contemporary -- besides Horace Walpole -- recognized what Cecilia was. While she was reading it for the first time, Mrs. Thrale raved as floridly as any one about Fanny's "insight into the deepest recesses of the mind." Yet a few weeks later,⁴³¹ she made the following estimate in her diary: "Her new Novel called Cecilia is the Picture of Life such as the Author sees it: while therefore this Mode of Life lasts, her Book will be of value, as the Representation is astonishingly perfect: but as nothing in the Book is derived from Study, so it can have not Principle of Duration -- Burney's Cecilia is to Richardson's Clarissa -- what a Camera Obscura in the Window of a London parlour, -- is to a view of Venice by the clear Pencil of Canaletti".⁴³² Apparently she was contrasting "study" with observation, Fanny's sharp eye for external details for the ability, which Gerould concedes her, to reconstruct the mind from what she saw. If she could reconstruct it for herself,

she was not successful in her serious attempts to reproduce it for her readers.

After the worst has been said of it, Cecilia has two merits which should be fairly permanent. Its documentary interest to students of eighteenth century manners is strong. And, although they are so tangled in the main plot that they must take their chance with it and only be uncovered by the student, Mr. Hobson and Mr. Briggs are as vigourous and brash as when they disgusted or amused Cecilia's first readers in 1782.

Footnotes

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- 12 Thraliana, The Diary of Mrs. Hester Lynch Thrale, 1776-1809, ed. Katharine C. Balderston, I (Oxford, 1942), 136.
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- 14 Thraliana, op. cit., 329 and n.4.
- 15 Diary, I, 48.
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- 18 Early Diary, I, xxxv.
- 19 Diary, I, 150-2.
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- 21 Ibid., 195.
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- 24 Thraliana, op. cit., 381.
- 25 Diary, I, 215.
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- 31 Diary, I, 259.
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- 51 Ibid., 80.
- 52 Ibid., 85.
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- 54 Diary, II, 38.
- 55 Early Diary, II, 129.
- 56 Ibid., 307.
- 57 Diary, II. 99.
- 58 Ibid., Appendix I, 482.
- 59 Ibid., 88.
- 60 Ibid., 307.
- 61 Ibid., 93.
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- 63 Diary, II, 141.
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