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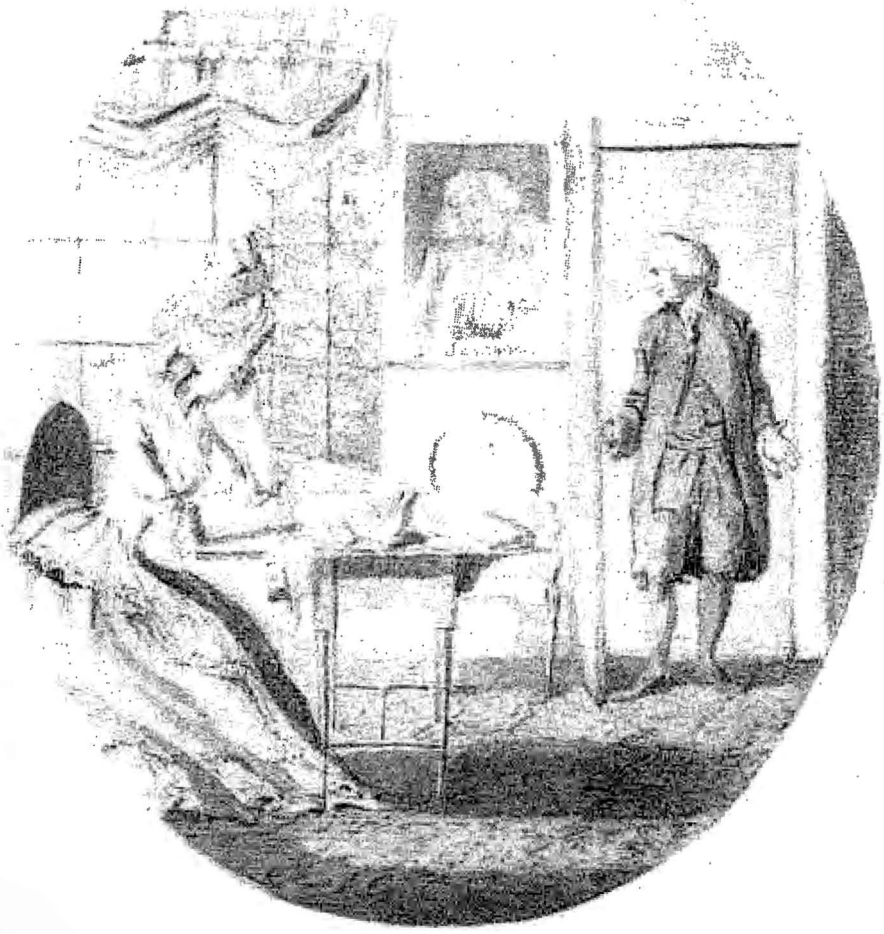

Illustration by Edward Burney for Volume II of Evelina

Two Edward Burney Illustrations for *Evelina*, Known and Unknown

HESTER DAVENPORT

The unknown illustration involves a personal story. In late February 2000, at the Olympia Spring Antiques Fair, I spotted a small black and white watercolour being offered as a "Period Piece of the 1770s," and was caught by its charming if rather strange design. The picture shows two figures, a woman leaning on her arms at her work-table, and a man entering the room and gesturing as if about to speak. Yet the eye is principally drawn to another figure, a central portrait of Dr. Johnson. Indeed the couple seem posed so as to incline their heads to it in reverence. I was then close to publishing my study of Fanny Burney at the court of King George III, and haunted by an image redolent of the time of *Evelina* and Fanny's admiration of the great doctor, I ended by buying the picture.[1]

It was sold as by John Collet (c.1725-81) and the dealer drew attention to the initials I.C. as the artist's signature. There was no apparent connection between the painting and the Burneys. But examining the picture more closely I recognised the Johnson portrait as a copy of the one commissioned by Henry Thrale from Sir Joshua Reynolds for Streatham Park.[2] Could the two figures possibly represent Hester and Henry Thrale? I studied portraits of the pair, sent a copy of the painting to Professor Lars Troide in Montreal, and took it to the National Portrait Gallery and to the British Museum in London. The consensus was that the figures *might* be the Thrales. However, Kim Sloan, Curator of the British School in the Department of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum, quickly dismissed the attribution to

John Collet. Ignoring the initials, she offered her "hunch" that the painter might be Edward Burney and advised sending a copy to Professor Patricia Crown at the University of Missouri, the authority on his work. It was at this stage that my book went to press; the painting was included, with tentative identifications. Since I had discovered from the NPG that Edward had painted a copy of the Reynolds' portrait for Dr. Burney, a claim that he was the artist had some justification.[3]

Professor Crown's reply was informative and positive. She was sure that the painting had been cut down to an oval from a rectangle, and intended as an illustration for a book or play. She wrote that "the drawing style has many points in common with Edward Burney's work circa 1780, before he had developed certain clear characteristics... I think the work might well be by Burney, something he did for the Burney circle, something that was meant to be copied and distributed within that circle." By good fortune she was coming to London and kindly offered to meet me. She also suggested that the I.C. initials might stand for Isaac Cruikshank (1764-1811), the Scottish caricaturist (father of the more famous George) who painted illustrative water-colours in the 1780s, and she advised me to visit the Paul Mellon Centre to look at both Burney and Cruikshank works. There, to my disappointment, I discovered that a number of the Cruikshanks were signed with sloping I.C. initials, precisely as in my painting, and there seemed some similarity of style. I must accept that I did not after all own an unknown Edward Burney.

Yet there were niggling objections: why should Cruikshank, who did not come to London till 1784, paint a woman wearing clothes which a costume expert consulted, Catherine Dolman, placed as of 1780? It was unfashionable after this date to wear elbow-length sleeves with lace trimmings, and high headdressing was out of fashion too (the man's suit, on the other hand, is of the early 1760s, suggesting an older man's clinging to the clothes of the past). Why should Cruikshank include the prominent portrait of Dr. Johnson, and why label it? Surely Johnson did not need a name-tag in the 1780s?

When consulting another art expert, William Drummond, I had been privileged to be shown sketch-books belonging to both Cruikshank and Burney. One of Edward's drawings looked to be based on Reynolds' portrait of Omai of Otaheite, the Polynesian who came to London with Captain Cook in 1774 and took it by storm. Fanny had

described for her Daddy Crisp the occasion when James Burney brought him to St Martin's Street.[4] I remembered a letter in the British Library to Fanny from her sister Charlotte, written in April 1780, which describes how Edward got himself up as Omai for a masquerade, and out of interest I looked up my transcription. The account of Edward's costume and make-up is fascinating ("so thoroughly disguised that I believe my Uncle himself would not have known him") and it confirmed that he had been to Reynolds' studio to sketch the painting. But it was what followed that rivetted me. Charlotte tells Fanny that Edward has just finished "3 stained Drawings in Miniature," designs for *Evelina.* She describes them in turn, writing at some length about the illustration for the first volume, then continues:

> The subject for the 2nd Vol: is the part where Evilina [sic] is sitting in that dejected way leaning her arm on the Table, and Mr Villars is watching her from the door before she perceives him...[5]

I read no further, pulling my copy of *Evelina* from the shelf to discover the passage. It occurs when the heroine has returned to Berry Hill after her London adventures, but is distressed by the unsatisfactory state of her relationship with Lord Orville. Writing to Miss Mirvan she tells her that on the previous day she had had a cheerful breakfast with her guardian, but afterwards Mr. Villars had been called away:

> The moment I was alone, my spirits failed me; the exertion with which I had supported them, had fatigued my mind: I flung away my work, and, leaning my arms on the table, gave way to a train of disagreeable reflections, which, bursting from the restraint that had smothered them, filled me with unusual sadness.
>
> This was my situation, when, looking towards the door, which was open, I perceived Mr. Villars, who was earnestly regarding me.[6]

If any doubt could remain about the identity of both figures and artist there was further proof. Later in her letter Charlotte says that their father has been so pleased with Edward's drawings that he has shown them to Sir Joshua and got his approval to their being hung in the Royal Academy Exhibition:

> Sir Joshua was amased [sic] that he c^{d} do anything so *original* so well, as he has seen nothing but Copies before of his doing—he said some very handsome things of them, & was much pleased with a picture (that Edward has introduced into M^{r} Villars's parlour) of D^{r} Johnson, as he thinks it very natural for so good a Man as M^{r} Villars, to have a value for D^{r} Johnson.[7]

Later investigation showed that Edward had been copying the Johnson portrait for his uncle in November 1779, not long after Sir Joshua had first become acquainted with his work. He flatteringly told Dr. Burney that his nephew's 'propensity [to painting] is *so* strong that...*I believe we must call it Genius*'.[8] No wonder that Edward subsequently paid homage to Reynolds, and no doubt Sir Joshua, one of the earliest admirers of *Evelina*, was equally pleased to find his portrait the focal point of an illustration to the novel.

By happy coincidence the initial discoveries were made on 13 June, anniversary of Fanny's birth. Next day I met with Pat Crown who listened to the story and considered the picture, then gave permission to be quoted as saying "I think it is by Edward Burney—it has the characteristics of his earliest style." She said that the older Edward, only twenty in this year, would not have "screwed up" the perspective as it is here, and would have handled the drapery of Evelina's dress differently. But Mr. Villars' figure and open-handed gesture she described as "typically Edwardian," and the skilful sketch of the Johnson portrait is also typical: the Huntington Gallery in California has a number of such thumbnail copies by Edward of paintings exhibited in the Royal Academy.[9] In addition to Professor Crown, Lars Troide also subsequently gave his full support for the picture's identity.

But why was the Johnson portrait labelled, and what about the I.C. initials? Apparently it was not uncommon for unscrupulous dealers in the nineteenth century to pass off unsigned works with the signature of a possible artist, and that remains the most likely explanation; Cruikshank's initialising would have been quite easy to forge. The fussy labelling of the portrait would have been done at the same time. But it seems unlikely that it will ever be possible to establish who carried out the forgery, or how the painting came into the forger's hands.[10]

There is no such uncertainty with the provenance of the only Edward Burney illustration for *Evelina* that was ever published, which was engraved for the title-page of the second volume of Lowndes' two-volume 1791 edition.[11] The water-colour original was handed down through the family of Fanny's brother Charles to his descendant the late John Comyn, and is now the property of his widow. This third volume illustration presents a moment in the highly emotional scene between Evelina and her father, Sir John Belmont, following his demand that she tell him whether it is possible that she does not hate him for his treatment of her mother:

> "Oh no, no, no!" cried I, "think not so unkindly of her, nor so hardly of me." I then took from my pocket-book her last letter, and, pressing it to my lips, with a trembling hand, and still upon my knees, I held it out to him.
>
> Hastily snatching it from me, "Great Heaven!" cried he, "'tis her writing—Whence comes this?—who gave it you?—why had I it not sooner?"
>
> I made no answer; his vehemence intimidated me, and I ventured not to move from the suppliant posture in which I had put myself.[12]

In the past it has been assumed that this picture is one of the three illustrations shown at the Royal Academy in 1780 which the catalogue simply lists as "Three sketches from *Evelina*." But that cannot be so, most obviously because Evelina is shown in costume and hairstyle of a later date. Here she wears her hair curled all over her head, with ringlets cascading artlessly down her back. Her robe is full-skirted, extending at the back into a train, and with a wide-ribboned sash. The wrist-length sleeves are tight-fitting and though her supplicating gesture makes it difficult to see exactly, she appears to be wearing a corset front, with a kerchief over her shoulders. These fashions belong to the second half of the 1780s. Edward's choice of costume is anachronistic to the text, but may have been a deliberate choice since his updated Evelina has a much more youthful, less sophisticated appearance than she has in 1780. As an artist Edward was very aware of the statements which dress could make; his portraits of his cousin Fanny, for example, show how he made it meaningful.[13]

In this version of the reconciliation scene, Edward also seems to have selected a different moment from that specified by Charlotte. This she describes as the one "where she is kneeling, & he in an agony is turning from her." This fits an incident earlier in the scene, when Sir John weeps in distress remembering his treatment of his wife:

> I would again have embraced his knees; but, hurrying from me, he flung himself upon a sopha, and leaning his face on his arms, seemed, for some time, absorbed in bitterness of grief.[14]

Compared with that of 1780, this illustration shows the more sophisticated, mature and assured artist revising his first choice of subject, and choosing a moment of greater emotional complexity. This he conveys in theatrical gesture and pose: the father draws his body away from his daughter, while fixing his gaze fiercely on her. Further intensity is achieved by suggesting a facial likeness between the pair, though it is of course Caroline Evelyn whom Evelina uncannily resembles.[15] The composition of this illustration is much tighter than the earlier one, fitted to the enclosing, womb-like oval; furniture, furnishings, and the drapery of Evelina's dress all expressively echo this form. Evelina is centre-stage, not at the margin of the picture, and the lightness of her dress and colouring set against a dark background carries the message of her goodness. In comparison the 1780 illustration of the heroine with her guardian appears naïve; indeed it seems as if *Johnson* fixes his gaze on the girl rather than Mr. Villars, since the inclusion of the forward-facing portrait has forced the artist to direct the guardian's look elsewhere. Nevertheless the same intelligent thinking can be seen in both pictures.

It is also exemplified in the planning of the complete series. Charlotte's letter reveals how carefully Edward chose his three subjects to reflect different aspects of his cousin's writing. Fanny's young sister seems most to have enjoyed the first, comic, illustration. Edward captured the moment when Madame Duval is about to dash the candle from Captain Mirvan's hand, after Monsieur Du Bois had, to the Captain's great glee, dropped her in the mud and ruined her Orleans silk.[16] The portrayal of "Monsieur Slippery" shivering by the fire Charlotte found "most incomparable...indeed! So miserably Triste!" The second illustration points to the contrast between youth and age and the instructional aspect of the novel, emphasised through the watchful

portrait. The focus of the third is the emotional, tear-jerking climax of the novel. The revised version of this picture also has its third-party presence in the letter from the dead wife/mother, its importance signalled by Sir John's pointing finger. Just as the Johnson portrait suggests a morally controlling force, so the letter represents the dead woman and her continuing bond with husband and daughter. Her death is likewise suggested by the background urn, and her living power in the still figure of Evelina herself, Perdita and Hermione as one.

Both pictures bear out Charlotte's declaration to Fanny that "there can't be a greater proof of Edward's having read and felt every passage in the Book than these Drawings." What happened to those 1780 designs for Volumes I and III?[17] Perhaps some day they will resurface, as mine did, and add to our knowledge of the work of the sensitive, gifted artist, Edward Burney.

NOTES

[1] *Faithful Handmaid: Fanny Burney at the Court of King George III* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing Ltd, 2000).

[2] The Streatham Johnson, in a brown coat and fingering the buttons of his waistcoat, was painted at some time between 1772 and 1778, the last date being thought most likely: David Mannings, *Sir Joshua Reynolds: A Complete Catalogue of His Paintings* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 281-82.

[3] This copy passed from Dr Burney to Fanny. It was auctioned in the Burney sale of 1922, and again by Christie's in 1939. Its present whereabouts are unknown (Mannings, 282, n.1014e).

[4] *The Early Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney*, Vol. II, 1774-1777, edited by Lars E. Troide (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp.58-63. The portrait of Omai is now at Parham Park, where the first of Edward's portraits of Fanny is also to be found.

[5] Barrett Collection of the British Library, Egerton ms 3693, f.2b.

[6] *Evelina*, edited by Stewart J. Cooke (New York & London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1998), 218.

[7] Egerton 3693, ff.3-3b.

[8] Susan Burney to Fanny, Egerton 3691, f.19. Dr. Burney had sought to obtain Sir Joshua's support for his nephew because his brother was threatening to take Edward home to Worcester. Subsequently, on 24 April 1780, Susan told Fanny that Edward was afraid "that you will expect a great deal too much from the designs for Evelina, & shall dread your seeing them" (f.102b). Then on 9 May she writes of attending the Royal Academy exhibition and seeing the Evelina drawings, which she thought though the smallest not the least pieces on show (f.124b).

[9] See Patricia Crown, "An Album of sketches from the Royal Academy Exhibitions of 1780-1784" in *Huntington Library Quarterly xliv* (1980-1), 61-6.

[10] The dealer from whom I bought the painting has not responded to requests for information about where he obtained it.

[11] The engraving, by [Joseph] Collyer, is disappointing when compared with the original. Evelina is given a very simpering expression, and a curious upstanding curl which proves to be the engraver's misinterpretation of a fold in the curtain behind her head. The original watercolour is partly reproduced in Kate Chisholm, *Fanny Burney: Her Life*, Chatto & Windus, 1998, between pp. 110 and 111; the table with urns is not shown.

[12] *Evelina*, 318.

[13] Davenport, 191-93.

[14] *Evelina*, 317.

[15] Charlotte says in her letter that the figure—far from resembling Mrs Thrale—has been taken by both her and Susan for Miss Sophie Streatfeild, the beauty who caught Mr Thrale's roving eye.

[16] *Evelina*, 54-5.

[17] There is also the possibility that Edward later redesigned his 1780 versions for Volumes I and II. However, Cynthia Comyn, who kindly searched her house, can find no original designs apart from that for Volume III.