

BOOK REVIEWS

COULOMBEAU, Sophie. 2024. *Reading with the Burneys: Patronage, Paratext, and Performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 87. ISBN 9781009532945, Hardback \$64.99. ISBN 9781009439510, Paperback \$22.

KOCHKINA, Svetlana. 2023. *Frances Burney's Evelina: The Book, Its History, and Its Paratext*. Cham, CH: Palgrave Macmillan. Pp. xxxiii + 285. ISBN 9783031177965, Hardback \$139.99. ISBN 9783031177972, eBook \$119.99.

Book history is an amorphous field that includes elements of textual studies, literary studies, bibliography, biography, reader response theory, cultural history, economics, material culture studies, etc. For that reason, various projects in book history are vastly different, and it is difficult to assess their quality. Fortuitously, two books have come out in the last year or so that offer book history interpretations around the same primary (literary) text, giving the reviewer the opportunity for some comparison. This text is Frances Burney's epistolary novel *Evelina* of 1778, which was so successful critically and commercially that it has been republished, translated, abridged, and adapted in over 100 popular and scholarly editions in the last 250 years. Sophie Coulombeau uses what she calls "3D reading" to examine, and Svetlana Kochkina employs paratextual studies to explore, the meanings of Burney's novel. Overall, both studies are impressive, but Coulombeau's speaks more to me personally.

Kochkina's *Frances Burney's Evelina: The Book, Its History, and Its Paratext* is situated in two major theoretical frameworks. For one, she embraces the ideas of Thomas Adams and Nicolas Barker, who supplement Robert Darnton's concept of the "communications circuit" with the idea of the "survival" of a book, i.e., its history *after* the original publication (ADAMS 1993; DARNTON 1982). Secondly, Kochkina relies on Gerard Genette's groundbreaking *Paratexts* (1987), which analyzes textual, iconic, and material elements *outside* the body of the work: titles, frontispieces, illustrations, formats, adaptations. Accordingly, Kochkina's book examines various versions of the title of Burney's novel, how the author's name is presented, what prefaces are included, and how images

supplement the title page and text. It builds on the methodology and conclusions of Catherine Parisian's excellent *Frances Burney's Cecilia: A Publishing History* (2012).

Frances Burney's Evelina relies on extensive quantitative data. Kochkina explains details such as the number and format of her source material: "Of the 170 examined books, I looked at 53 only in digitised copies and 27 in both digitised and physical formats" (xiv). (There are another four to which she could not gain access.) The reader learns that there have been a total of 102 editions of *Evelina*: 73 full texts in English, 23 full texts in translation, three digital editions, and three adaptations. Kochkina compares her own study favorably to Joseph Grau's *Fanny Burney: An Annotated Bibliography* (1981), noting that while Grau lists 101 editions of *Evelina*, she treats 174, 51 of which are not in Grau and 22 published after his book. Kochkina acknowledges that she has (mostly digital) resources at her disposal not available to Grau, so the comparison is perhaps a bit churlish. The book ends with a 25-page bibliography of all editions.

As impressive as this data is, the analysis is sometimes a bit thin. The book is a revision of Kochkina's dissertation, which perhaps shows in the overly taxonomic approach. The argument is organized into four main chapters with three *entr'actes*, which regularly repeat each others' insights. For instance, Burney's novel has been published with three subtitles: *A Young Lady's Entrance into the World*; *The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World*; and *History of a Young Lady's Introduction to the World*. In her first chapter, Kochkina observes that the editions by Burney's original publisher, Thomas Lowndes, present two of those titles, but then she also devotes an entire *entre'acte* to the titles. The first subtitle avoids identifying the book as a novel, which was important at the time of publication, when that genre was often still considered suspect. The word "History" in the second version of the title — the most popular overall with 74 editions — gave a hint that the text was a novel, and it "is found in various types of editions: affordable reprints, gift books, books included in popular series, and scholarly editions, published over an extended period between 1779 and 2014" (64). The replacement of "Entrance" with "Introduction" in the third subtitle reduced the agency of the eponymous title character and was used most in the Regency and Victorian periods, probably because of the gender ideology dominant then that often turned women into passive subjects. It makes sense to present similar conclusions in the chronological frame (the first chapter) as well as the section organized by topic (the *entr'acte*), and we all learn by repetition, but the

book could be more concise. In addition, the last chapter reorganizes all the same material and conclusions according to numbers and dates and types of editions.

As the subtitle changed, the presentation of the author's name also shifted over time, highlighting different meanings. When Burney published *Evelina* in 1778, being an author was somewhat disreputable, especially for women, so Burney asked Lowndes to keep the book anonymous, which he did. Other publishers used the formula "by the author of" to establish a brand and promote *Evelina*. Unusually, later novels were used to advertise the earlier book, so for instance an 1804 edition of *Evelina* was sold as "by the author of *Cecilia* [1782] and *Camilla* [1796]". When the author was called Miss Burney, it "not only underlined her femininity but also suggested an unmarried, maiden, marital status of the author and possibly a younger age", while Madame d'Arblay, her married name, was used when she was a literary celebrity (114). Finally, the first name Fanny was used for the first two thirds of the twentieth century, but with the advent of feminism it was considered infantilizing, sexualizing, and demeaning and replaced with Frances. These insights are not so much developed from the texts, though, but rather presupposed and then identified in the various editions.

Kochkina investigates the authorial and editorial paratexts of *Evelina* with similar precision. Burney included three paratexts — two dedications and a preface — in the original publication, but after the first versions by Lowndes only 67 of 161 editions kept all three paratexts — which marked those editions as targeted at middle-class, upper-class, or scholarly audiences. Since Burney's paratexts were somewhat masculine, omitting them made her novel seem lighter and more feminine. Editorial paratexts for more popular editions combined biographical sketches with information on publication history and an assessment of Burney's legacy, while scholarly editions might include "prefaces, footnotes, endnotes, appendices, postfaces, bibliographies, chronologies, and commentaries, later joined by the now requisite cover blurbs" (191).

Kochkina covers many other fascinating topics in *Frances Burney's Evelina: competing interpretations of the novel as satirical vs. sentimental or romantic, different target markets for the editions, choices for illustrations, the positioning of Evelina in the canon of literature, presentations of the novel in the fin de siècle, and digitally native editions*. There is a long section on translations into various European languages and a brief discussion of three dramatic adaptations which are interesting, but don't necessarily add too much to the argument. As a matter of fact, it is somewhat difficult to identify an overarching argument in this book;

rather, it presents various taxonomies of *Evelina*'s editions that illuminate the history of this novel as through a prism.

In contrast to Kochkina's mostly quantitative approach (supplemented with some interpretation), Coulombeau in *Reading with the Burneys: Patronage, Paratext, and Performance* embarks on what she calls "'3D reading', which unites methodological approaches from literary studies, biography, bibliography, and the history of the book to generate a deeper understanding of late eighteenth-century reading practices" (1–2). Specifically, Coulombeau examines how one reader, Burney's younger brother Charles, used her novel *Evelina*. She is able to support her arguments with evidence from a huge cache of letters by Charles as well as copies of *Evelina* that he either owned or (almost certainly) used.

In the course of this short book, Coulombeau presents three major claims. First, she argues that Charles attempted to control the reception of his sister's novel in order to rebuild his own social standing. Charles had previously attended Cambridge University, but was expelled when he was caught stealing books. In the village where Charles was banished in 1778–79 after expulsion from Cambridge, he circulated the recently published *Evelina* and simultaneously tried to suggest that he was a more knowledgeable reader and writer than his sister. He prefixed a poem of his own to his sister's text — another paratext, which Kochkina does not mention, probably because it was never published — in order to promote *Evelina*, but also to advance his own marriage prospects by associating himself with a celebrity author. Charles continued this behavior in Aberdeen and during a tour of Scotland (1779–80), either with copies from circulating libraries or with a copy supplied by Frances herself.

Coulombeau's second argument concerns what she calls "identified performance" in one place and "performed identity" in another, where individuals model their language and behavior on a literary character (6 and 26). Specifically, Coulombeau shows how "Charles's poetic style and his patterns of literary sociability were inspired by his reading of Macartney", a character in *Evelina* (49). Charles may have drawn inspiration from Macartney, who goes from rags to riches by means of his poetry. Both use a suffering, gloomy tone in their writing and call hope an illusion (at least initially). Macartney succeeds with the help of the eponymous heroine, whom Charles in turn identified with his sister Frances. Thus, Macartney triggered a sustained performance by Charles that blurred the boundaries between reality and fiction.

Because of his expulsion and banishment, Charles did not have much money, and in her third argument Coulombeau claims that his "financial

precarity made him a borrower in formal and informal loan economies by necessity rather than choice” (59). There is a good chance that Charles borrowed *Evelina* from Alexander Angus’s Aberdeen Circulating Library, so Coulombeau relates Charles’s use of books to the Conditions of that library. If he glued his prefatory poem into copies, he was defacing them, and his practice of passing borrowed copies on to other readers was probably a violation of the Conditions. Still, his behavior is interesting because it indicates “the ways in which library books of various sorts might have been registered, with their users, as subject to fluid kinds of ownership, proprietorship, or [. . .] ‘custody’” (61). The practice of subletting also suggests that the readership of circulating library books may have been much larger than previously assumed.

Thus, Coulombeau’s approach of “3D reading” (which might also be designated by Clifford Geertz’s old term “thick description”) yields both an interesting story and some broader conclusions. She writes that her study “represents a marriage between the rigour I try to practice as a scholar and the creative impulse which shapes my practice as a storyteller” (74) — and, indeed, Coulombeau is also a short story writer, essayist, and novelist. Of course, as she acknowledges, the “3D reading” approach is only possible when a substantial archive has survived: in this case, Charles’s 2,500 letters, copies of books he stole from Cambridge and copies of *Evelina* he probably used (both with markings and marginalia), manuscript versions of his prefatory poem, the Aberdeen Circulating Library catalog and conditions, etc. In addition, the author is worried about the representativeness of her study: it is impossible to know how typical Charles’s reading experience was, though books such as Jan Fergus’s *Provincial Readers in Eighteenth-Century England* (2006), Margaret Willes’s *Reading Matters* (2008), or Abigail Williams’s *The Social Life of Books* (2017) do offer some insights. But Coulombeau appropriately assuages her own concerns: even if Charles was not a typical reader, his example allows us “to consider the full range of possible experiences, and to exploit the whole range of interdisciplinary methodologies available”, not a mean feat for a slim volume presenting one case study (75).

Kochkina’s *Frances Burney’s Evelina* is published in Palgrave Macmillan’s New Directions in Book History series and comes in at xxxiii + 285 pages; Coulombeau’s *Reading with the Burneys* is in Cambridge University Press’s Cambridge Elements: Eighteenth-Century Connections series with 87 pages. As I have described, Kochkina takes more of a bird’s-eye view, surveying all editions of *Evelina* between its publication in 1778 and today; Coulombeau tells one very specific story with an

abundant wealth of detail. Of course, Kochkina also offers interesting interpretations of her data, while Coulombeau situates her story in larger historical and literary contexts. I find Coulombeau's story more interesting and compelling, but that is my personal preference for character and plot over data and analysis; other readers will certainly have different experiences. In addition, in my assessment Kochkina's book might have benefitted from less repetition in the argument. It might have worked better as an Eighteenth-Century Connections volume, since that would have required the author to be more concise, with the bibliography as a separate online resource.

But what the two books show, in the end, is that book history is a vibrant field that allows for many different interpretations, depending on the author's focus, the specific combination of theoretical and methodological approaches, and the availability of primary materials. Scholars sometimes fear that we have said everything that can be said about certain canonical texts like *Evelina*; these two books demonstrate that there is always a new and interesting angle available to shed light on a text and its histories.

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