Bastards and Foundlings

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BAYES: There's a blust'ring verse for you now.
SMITH: Yes, Sir; but why is he so mightily troubled to find he is not a Fishermans Son?
BAYES: Phoo! that is not because he has a mind to be his Son, but for fear that he should be thought to be no bodies Son at all.

—George Villiers, 2nd Duke of Buckingham, *The Rehearsal*, 1671

Though, while legally the son of one Earl, and naturally of another, I am, nominally, nobody’s son at all.

—Samuel Johnson, *An Account of the Life of Mr. Richard Savage, Son of the Earl of Rivers*, 1743

The captain . . . said, “Tho’ the Law did not positively allow the destroying such base-born children, yet it held them to be the *Children of no-body*; that the Church considered them as the Children of no-body; and that at the best, they ought to be brought up to the lowest and vilest Offices of the Commonwealth.”

—Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, 1749

But why do I talk of parentage? alas! I am the son of nobody. I was, indeed, begotten by my valiant father, Gregory Gooby, Esq. upon the body of my chaste mother, Ellen Glen . . . , but it was a clandestine affair, for which my valiant father had no canonical warrant.

—Robert Bage, *Hermsprong; or, Man As He Is Not*, 1796
Illegitimacy, infanticide, and, after 1739, the London Foundling Hospital were indelible features of the mental landscape of the eighteenth-century writer. The published fictional impressions of that landscape assumed many forms, both covert and overt, ranging from Richard Steele’s reworking of Terence’s plot of fornication and exposure into an immaculately polite foundling comedy (*The Conscious Lovers*, 1722); and John Shebbeare’s inserting a story of one Miss Standish, forced to send her bastard child to the Foundling Hospital, into his novelized catalogue of seductions and elopements (*The Marriage Act*, 1754); to Samuel Richardson’s ambivalent positioning of bastards as both a threat to and a casualty of upper-middle-class familial bliss (*The History of Sir Charles Grandison*, 1753–54). Writers participated in the infanticide prevention campaign and responded to that campaign in their fiction without necessarily framing their actions in terms of “participation” in or a “response” to a phenomenon with identifiable social boundaries; instead, the concern about bastardy and about the abandonment and murder of the illegitimate children of the poor, the debates about the policies of the Foundling Hospital, and the awareness of the titillating new topicality of the old foundling trope constituted an integral part of everyday life for the eighteenth-century British intellectual.

And so the infanticide prevention campaign was part of everyday life for Frances Burney. People in her immediate social circle were either directly involved with the Foundling Hospital or had relatives who were. Dr. Johnson had kept a wary eye on the Hospital since his 1757 spat with Jonas Hanway about the presumed lack of proper religious tutoring for the Hospital’s children. Dr. Jennings, known as “a great friend of Mrs. Thrale and Miss Burney,” was the brother of Juliana Dodd, a hardworking and influential inspector of the Hospital. In 1774, Frances herself assisted her father, prominent musicologist Charles Burney, in drawing up a plan for turning the Foundling Hospital into a public school of music, an “English Conservatorio,” as she called it in her 1832 *Memoirs of Doctor Burney*.

The alumni of the Foundling Hospital were known to complain that its protective atmosphere had left them unprepared for the challenges of the real world outside its walls. For Charles Burney, however, the social encapsulation of the young foundlings—their upbringing “in complete and unsuspicous ignorance of evil” (*Memoirs*, 236)—was the main argument for establishing the first national music school on the basis of the Hospital. Generally, although Dr. Burney felt very strongly the need for fostering native talents instead of importing musi-
cians "from foreign shores," he recoiled at the thought of taking "promiscuously the children of the poor, merely where they had an ear for music, or a voice for song, [because it would mean] running the risk of gathering together a mixed little multitude, which, from intermingling inherent vulgarity, hereditary diseases, or vicious propensities, with the finer qualities requisite for admission, might render the cultivation of their youthful talents, a danger—if not a curse—to the country" (ibid.). What would happen, mused Burney, "should a single one of the tribe go astray"? The "popular cry against teaching the arts to the poor would stain the whole community with a stain indelible. . . . The institution itself might be branded with infamy" (ibid.), and—a consideration absent from but easily read into Burney’s worst-case scenario—the reputation of the instigator of the scheme would suffer a terrible blow. A “conservatorio” opened in the Foundling Hospital, however, would be a very different matter. Its institutional grounding would ensure a comfortable division of labor between Burney and the governors of the Hospital. The former would supervise the teaching of music, and the latter would take it upon themselves to insure that their charges “breathed their infantine lives . . . in innocence” (ibid.). In this case, should any of the Hospital’s students of music “go astray,” nobody would blame Charles Burney and his harebrained scheme of teaching art to the poor because, after all, bastards may turn out badly with or without a musical accompaniment.

This latter consideration remained, of course, unspoken, and when in July 1774 Dr. Burney sounded Sir Charles Whitworth, the governor of the Hospital, about the scheme, Sir Charles “thought it proper, feasible, desirable, and patriotic” (236). Encouraged, Dr. Burney drew up a formal plan for the music school, but to his mortification and Whitworth’s disappointment, the next meeting of the Hospital’s governors and guardians, convened exclusively to deliberate upon the plan, gave rise to a series of “perplexing” discussions. Frances Burney reported with a measured sarcasm:

It was objected that music was an art of luxury, by no means requisite to life, or accessory to morality. These children were meant to be educated as plain but essential members of the general community. They were to be trained up to useful purposes, with a singleness that would ward off all ambition for what was higher, and teach them to repay the benefit of their support by cheerful labour. To stimulate them to superior views might mar the religious object of the charity, which was to nullify rather than extinguish all disposition to pride,
vice, or voluptuousness, such as, probably, had demoralized their culpable parents, and thrown these deserted outcasts upon the mercy of the Foundling Hospital. (Memoirs, 237–38)

Dr. Burney did not give up his idea without a struggle. He wrote back to the governors that the Foundling Hospital had never been conceived as “a seminary, predestined for menial servitude, and as the only institution of the country where the members were to form a caste, from whose rules and plodden ways no genius could ever emerge” (Memoirs, 238). Furthermore, he argued, the Hospital represented a uniquely suitable setting for a social experiment involving the musical pre-professionalization of a large group of children because these children are all orphans; they are taken from no family, for by none are they owned; they are drawn from no calling, for to none are they specifically bred. . . . Were it not better, then, where there are subjects who are success inviting, to bestow upon them professional improvement, with virtuous education? since, as long as operas, concerts, and theatres are licensed by government, musical performers, vocal and instrumental, will inevitably be wanted, employed and remunerated. . . . And where, if not here, may subjects be found on whom such a national trial may be made with the least danger of injury? (Memoirs, 238–39; emphasis added)

Although many of the Hospital’s officials seemed persuaded by Dr. Burney’s arguments, his plan was ultimately rejected. Frances tells us that her father’s “pride was justly hurt” (Memoirs, 239) by the petty tenor of the deliberations (the governors gave more weight to the complaints of the Hospital’s neighbors, who were afraid of noise issuing from the music school, than to Burney’s patriotic exhortations about the wasteful practice of importing musical talents instead of fostering them on native ground), and he dissociated himself from the project. By the late 1780s, a “plan, in many respects similar . . . [was] put into execution,” and the Hospital began drawing a steady income from its children’s Chapel singing, but, as Frances observes, nobody acknowledged Dr. Burney’s role as “the original projector” of this endeavor (234).

Looking back at Charles Burney’s debates with the Hospital’s administration, it is impossible to reconstruct the exact genesis of the phrase that he used to characterize the unique social position of the foundlings: “for by none are they owned” (ibid.). Did he come up with it himself, or was it Frances who coined it when, as her father’s secre-


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tary, she assisted him in drawing up the plan for the music school and in devising arguments that should placate the doubts of his opponents? Whichever is the case, it appears that the expression “owned by none” summed up succinctly in the father and daughter’s mind and in the public mind the situation of the young inmates of the Hospital. This expression both reflected that, having saved the children from likely death, the Hospital was not accountable to their parents for whatever experimental “professional involvement” it could devise for them, and it evoked the old legal precept that the bastard is *filius nullius*—“the son of nobody.” Throughout the eighteenth century such appellations as “nobody,” a “child owned by none,” and a “son of nobody” were used in a variety of contexts—including works of fiction (see the epigraph to this chapter)—to denote illegitimacy, so it was only fitting that the Burneys adapted one such appellation for their argument.

Published in 1778, four years after the aborted “English Conservatorio” proposal, *Evelina* echoes that proposal’s rhetoric of *filius nullius* via frequent references to the title heroine’s “nobodiness.” “I hardly know myself to whom I most belong,” says Evelina sadly to Lord Orville, and she is painfully sensitive to other people’s characterizing of her as “nobody” and making remarks that could be construed as pointing to her presumed bastardy. Evelina’s “nobodiness” has been a topic of fruitful discussions by such scholars as Margaret Anne Doody, Joanne Cutting-Gray, Kristina Straub, Catherine Gallagher, and, most recently, Susan Greenfield, whose interpretations range from reading Evelina’s self-nugatory rhetoric as indicative of her adolescent female angst to exploring Burney’s marketing savvy of writing “for, about, and from the point of view of ‘Nobody.’”

My position is nearly aligned with Greenfield’s, who observes that the language used by William Blackstone in his *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, in which the bastard is defined as “kin to nobody,” is “so close to some of the novel’s descriptions of Evelina that it almost seems to have influenced them.” I suggest that when it comes to Evelina’s pained admissions of “belonging to no one” and being “nobody,” Burney indeed appropriates her culture’s lexicon of illegitimacy, the same lexicon that the father-daughter duo drew upon to defend Dr. Burney’s ill-received music school scheme. I further argue that she does so in response to a very particular set of challenges faced by an author writing a respectable novel about the supposed illegitimacy of a daughter of a nobleman for a predominantly middle-class audience at the time when aristocratic and middle-class attitudes toward bastardy were quite different.
Evelina’s “bastard” troubles are twofold. First, she is in danger of being taken for a natural daughter of a baronet who is not in a hurry to “properly own her” (19). As Irene Fizer observes, though an heiress, Evelina “is recognized only as a bastard daughter.” Significantly, in her description of this particular aspect of Evelina’s predicament, Burney tacitly replaces a typical aristocratic perspective of bastardy with that calculated to appeal to her middle-class readership. As I will demonstrate, the real-life daughter of an eighteenth-century baronet would not discuss her illegitimacy in the debasing terms adopted for this purpose by Evelina and her guardian. If anything, their over-humbled language is more reminiscent of that foisted on the inmates of the Foundling Hospital by benefactors anxious to keep the children aware of their modest social position.

Further complicating Evelina’s position as a “bastard heiress” is the possibility that she will lose her inheritance altogether in favor of Polly Green, the daughter of Evelina’s wet nurse, a “little usurper,” substituted in infancy for Evelina and brought up by her unsuspecting father as his own child. As a variation on the age-old “changeling” motif, the “substituted child” scenario was relatively common in eighteenth-century fiction, responding to a variety of cultural anxieties, one of which had to do with the socioeconomic realities of bastardy. Because Evelina’s father is a reformed libertine, a story in which “the lawful child is neglected, [and] another is adopted” (316) functions as a literary stand-in for a familiar real-life situation in which a fitful or guilt-ridden patriarch damages his legal child’s prospects by providing for his natural offspring. Again, as in the case of the improbably groveling rhetoric used to denote Evelina’s horror of being perceived as illegitimate, the fear that a bastard impostor would siphon her legal sibling’s inheritance was much more pertinent to Burney’s middle-class readers than to members of the aristocratic class, to which Evelina supposedly belongs.

Burney had to be quite careful in allowing her novel to articulate the familiar anxiety about the distribution of the family resources among legitimate and illegitimate children. Too explicit a concern about the repercussions of bastardy would have rendered her book vulgar, at the very least, or even scandalous, whereas, as Gallagher points out, “Evelina and the novel were both good because they were not scandalous.” Still, because of the competing class consciousnesses animating Evelina, it remains a doubly haunted novel. Bastardy is both present and absent on its pages as are the shadows of the rejected “English Conservatorio” and its “innocent” (but also dangerous) pupils.
Rewriting Class in Evelina

Could I but say I was descended from honest, tho’ mean parents, I would not murmur at my fate, but I have none,—none to own me;—I am a nothing,—a kind of reptile in humanity . . .

—Eliza Haywood, The Fortunate Foundlings, 1744

Joanna: I am nobody; the child of nobody; a branch lopped off and cast away; that might have grown, but that could find no root.

—Thomas Holcroft, The Deserted Daughter, 1795

Evelina’s ambiguous standing as a “bastard heiress” is explained on the first pages of the novel when her guardian, Mr. Villars, invites us to “consider . . . the peculiar cruelty of her situation.” Evelina, as he points out, is “[the] only child of a wealthy baronet, whose person she has never seen, whose character she has reason to abhor, and whose name she is forbidden to claim; entitled as she is to lawfully inherit his fortune and estate, is there any probability that he will properly own her? And while he continues to persevere in disavowing his marriage with Miss Evelyn [Evelina’s mother], she shall never, at the expense of her mother’s honour, receive a part of her right, as the donation of his bounty” (19). In other words, a wealthy baronet can acknowledge his illegitimate child and provide for such a child financially—as Sir John Belmont indeed does when he discovers that he has a natural son, one “J. Macartney”—but such a provision alone would not satisfy Evelina’s guardian, who demands the acknowledgment “in the face of the world . . . [of] the legitimacy of her birth” (366). Evelina has to be established as a “lawful successor” (339; emphasis added) to her father’s riches and not as yet another bastard recipient of the repentant libertine’s bounty. In the latter case, “the birth of . . . Evelina will receive a stigma, against which honour, truth, and innocence may appeal in vain! a stigma which will eternally blast the fair fame of her virtuous mother, and cast upon her blameless self the odium of a title, which not all her purity can rescue from established shame and dishonour” (337).

Mr. Villars’s dark warning about the “stigma” that could be cast upon Evelina by the “odious” title of bastard comes late in the novel, but it is clear that Evelina does not need this warning, having internalized the fear of such a stigma much earlier. How else can we explain that, untutored in the way of the world as she appears at her
“first entrance” into London society, she is painfully attuned to any remark that could be interpreted as hinting at her illegitimacy? Witness, for example, Evelina’s reporting to her guardian that she was deeply distressed by her grandmother’s “gross” (52) way of speaking about the circumstances of her birth: “The manner in which Madame Duval was pleased to introduce me to this family, extremely shocked me. ‘Here, my dears,’ said she, ‘here’s a relation you little thought of: but you must know my poor daughter Caroline had this child after she run away from me,—though I never knew nothing of it, not I, for a long time after; for they took care to keep it a secret from me, though the poor child has never a friend in the world besides’” (68). Madame Duval’s speech reflects unjustly on Mr. Villars, but it is clear that what shocks Evelina most are the intimations of her illegitimacy contained in that speech, which is borne out by her strong physical reaction—she literally runs out of the room—when Miss Branghton announces, “Lord, Polly, only think! Miss never saw her papa!” (69).

Students of eighteenth-century culture should take issue with the novel’s tacit assumption that Evelina’s supposed illegitimacy automatically spells her social annihilation—“shame and dishonour,” as her guardian puts it. Ruth McClure has pointed out that the period’s aristocracy viewed illegitimacy with tolerance, siring and marrying bastards, and advancing them to high office. John Habakkuk describes the situation in more detail:

The system could also accommodate the illegitimate offspring of landed families so long as paternity was acknowledged and the parent was prepared to pay a portion large enough to compensate. Where there were only illegitimate children and they were well endowed they could make very good marriages. All three daughters of Sir Edward Walpole, Sir Robert’s second son, married into the aristocracy with the full panoply of settlements. Ann Newcomen, illegitimate daughter of Sir Francis Wortley, married the second son of the first Earl of Sandwich. Rachel Bayton, illegitimate daughter of John Hall, married the eldest son of the Earl of Kingston. Anne Wellesley, the natural daughter of the Marquess Wellesley, married in 1806 Sir William Abdy, baronet of an ancient family. (153–54)

At the same time, as Habakkuk admits, some marriage treaties might have stalled because of the bride’s illegitimacy:
In 1769, Edward Mann projected a match between his illegitimate daughter Mary and cousin-german, a promised to give her £20,000, plus another £20,000 if her (illegitimate) brother died. But the projected bridegroom “grew cold,” ostensibly because of scruples about marriage to a cousin but more probably, Mann suspected, “from pride and from her being a natural daughter.” Horace Walpole commented that Mann “may now be tempted to scrape all he can together, in order to match his daughter more highly.” Jean Mary Browne, illegitimate daughter and only child of Charles, fifth Duke of Bolton, and heiress to the greater part of the Bolton’s estates, after the failure of the male issue of his brother (which was virtually certain in 1778), despite her prospective wealth, made in 1778 a socially modest match to Thomas Orde, the second son of a Northumbrian gentry family.16

We may never be able to establish beyond reasonable doubt that Edward Mann’s daughter’s bastardy was indeed the reason that her cousin “grew cold.” In fact, as Habakkuk observes in his discussion of treaties in which all the parties were legitimate, the disapproval of a prospective bride or groom could arise from many “highly personal causes,” such as “religious differences,” a family’s “bad reputation,” “personal disinclinations,” and the “disparity of fortune so great that the possibility of an equal bargain was virtually ruled out from the start.”17 The illegitimacy of a young aristocratic woman, in other words, was one of several factors (but by no means the decisive factor) that could, but just as often did not, endanger her marital prospects. With this in mind, both Mr. Villars’s passionate conviction that the Baronet’s financial generosity could never make up for the everlasting “shame and dishonour” of bastardy and Evelina’s corresponding anguish at being perceived as illegitimate appear overstated and in need of further explanation. Villars’s choice of terms seems, in fact, to be more reminiscent of the psalms sung by the charges of the Foundling Hospital (“In Guilt I was conceiv’d and born / The Heir of Sin and Shame”) than of any sentiment that a real-life daughter of a rich baronet and a wealthy gentlewoman would ever encourage in those around her or express herself.

One possible interpretation of Mr. Villar’s language is suggested by Habakkuk’s example of the fate of Jean Mary Browne. If the illegitimacy of a rich heiress could indeed confine her to a match more “socially modest” than she could have aspired to otherwise, Evelina’s

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guardian may feel downright hysterical at the mere thought that as a wealthy bastard, Evelina would not make as good a match as she would have made as a legitimate child. Such interpretation, however, would render Mr. Villars profoundly hypocritical, for we learn early on that he apprehends “nothing more than too much raising [Evelina’s] hopes and her views,” especially because, as he observes melancholically, “a youthful mind is seldom free from ambition” (107). Furthermore, the scenario suggested by Mr. Villars’s rhetoric—Evelina’s father’s acknowledging her as his daughter but not as his legal heiress (his “lawful successor”)—is not even applicable to Evelina’s actual situation. The singularity of Evelina’s position—made possible by the “substituted child” device—is such that as soon as her father recognizes her as his daughter, she automatically becomes his only legitimate child.18

But if Mr. Villars’s hypertrophied anxiety about Evelina’s legal status reflects only very superficially (or not at all) the challenges faced by a real-life natural daughter of a wealthy nobleman and a rich gentlewoman, or even Evelina’s actual situation, what does it reflect? To begin to answer this question, we should first look at the works of eighteenth-century literature featuring unquestionably illegitimate female protagonists19 and inquire into the ideological stakes of conceptualizing such protagonists as “unfit” for polite discourse, just as Evelina is conceptualized by her guardian as unfit for any social existence unless her legitimacy is reaffirmed “in the face of the world.”

Eliza Haywood’s 1744 novel, The Fortunate Foundlings, centers on a set of bastard twins, Louisa and Horatio, who, after completing the obligatory route of breathtaking adventures and discovering that although noble and rich, their parents had never been married, settle into happy and prosperous marriages of their own. William Warner has argued that the “sexy and egotistical [novels] of amorous intrigue” (Licensing Entertainment, 326) produced by such writers as Aphra Behn, Delariviere Manley, and Haywood, were destined to be driven from the literary market by the newly respectable novels authored by Henry Fielding and Samuel Richardson. Haywood’s “formula fiction,” as Warner suggests, glorified the “licentious sexuality of the upper class”20—precisely the ideological stance that Pamela and Joseph Andrews insisted on problematizing. And indeed, Louisa’s bastardy acquires a certain glamour as the secret of her aristocratic parents’ love affair unfolds on the final pages of the novel against a background of French castles and monasteries punctuated by royal name dropping. It is true that unlike her equally illegitimate brother, Louisa is given to passionate outbursts about her origins—“Could I but say that I descended from
honest, tho’ mean parents, I would not murmur at my fate, but I have none . . . I am nothing, . . . a kind of reptile in humanity” (178)—but her bastardy by no means hinders her from marrying her devoted aristocratic suitor, Monsieur Plessis. Haywood thus did pay some lip service to the literary tradition correlating the chastity of brides with the chastity of their mothers, but at the same time she remained quite nonchalant about the piece of paper—the parents’ marriage certificate or its equivalent—that would obsess the presumably more morally astute authors of other eighteenth-century foundling fictions, such as Frances Burney, Charlotte Smith, and Agnes Maria Bennett.

Here is a detail, however, that complicates our readiness to view Louisa’s chic bastardy in the context of Haywood’s cowed adulation of the sexual mores of the rich and ranked, an adulation, that, as Warner argues, ultimately rendered her novels problematic for a polite audience. The Fortunate Foundlings may be as formulaic and pleasure-driven as the majority of her novels, but its take on the position of the aristocratic female bastard is in part more historically accurate than the one espoused by Burney’s Evelina. Louisa’s story faithfully reflects the fact that in real life, aristocratic female bastards could and did marry well. If at times they felt somewhat handicapped by their family history, that feeling had less to do with the consideration of their personal unworthiness (a sentiment blown out of proportion in Louisa’s melodramatic “I am a reptile” speech) and more with the awareness of their expensiveness, that is, the realization that their parents would have to “scrape” more money “in order to match [them] more highly.”

Published shortly after The Fortunate Foundlings, Richardson’s Clarissa touches upon the social disadvantages faced by natural children and appears to counteract precisely the casual view of aristocratic bastardy that The Fortunate Foundlings endorses, but in doing so it inevitably reveals its author’s biases and anxieties. Trying to talk Lovelace out of his “darling scheme” of cohabiting with Clarissa and getting her pregnant with twins, no less, Jack Belford confesses that he cannot understand why a man of Lovelace’s social standing would want to “bastardize” his children, especially if he does plan to eventually marry their mother:

Why should he wish to expose them to scorn and insults of the rest of the world?—Why should he, whether they are men or women, lay them under the necessity of complying with proposals of marriage, either inferior as to fortune, or unequal as to age?—Why should he deprive the children he loves, and who are themselves guilty of no
fault (if they have regard to morals, and to legal and social sanctions), of the respect they would wish to have and deserve?—and of the opportunity of associating themselves with proper, that is to say with reputable company? (614)

Belford’s letter is typical for the peculiar mesh of upper- and middle-class sentiments that will come to populate many late-eighteenth-century novels depicting children whose legitimacy can be questioned. His argument does acknowledge that aristocratic parents of bastards sometimes had to bring more money to the table while negotiating their children’s marriages than did the parents of legitimate parties, and that if they did not, their children might have to comply with “inferior” proposals of marriage. At the same time, Belford’s claim that the bastard children of rich nobleman—or even of well-to-do middle-class parents—though “guilty of no fault” themselves, would be typically barred for life from associating with “reputable” company is highly tendentious. This claim reflects Richardson’s position as somebody who has seen enough conflicts about the distribution of resources between legitimate and illegitimate children in middle-class families to be eager to use the affective powers of fiction to condemn extramarital sex. Belford would certainly be aware of the lenience with which aristocrats generally treated bastardy, but, carried away by a good cause, he glosses over important differences between the attitudes and social practices of nobility and those of the middle class.

Similarly, Mr. Villars’s and Evelina’s conviction that illegitimacy would unquestionably doom Evelina’s social aspirations mirrors not so much the heartfelt belief of the hypothetical real-life daughter of a rich baronet, who would almost certainly not think in these self-abasing terms, but rather the subjectivity of the author writing for middle-class audiences and understanding too well their financial worries. The “purchasers of novels [and] the subscribers to circulating libraries,” observed an early reviewer of Evelina, were “seldom in more elevated situations than the middle ranks of life.”23 These “purchasers” and “subscribers” did not share the nobility’s cavalier attitude toward bastardy, indeed could not afford an attitude that implied providing generously for both the legitimate and the illegitimate offspring. This audience would thus be most susceptible to reading the new code of moral respectability into the obligatory legitimacy of the fictional foundling—and to see that code as woefully lacking in Haywood’s novel.

We witness here, in other words, the workings of the process by which the eighteenth-century “middling classes [adopted] and then
substantially [modified] notions of aristocratic gentility to suit their own middling class agenda.” On the one hand, the foundling’s alignment with nobility, either by birth or by marriage, continued to afford readers the pleasurable identification with their “betters.” (Did the anonymous writer from the 1778 issue of Critical Review truly “wish that [Evelina’s] husband had not been a lord, and that her father had been less rich”?) On the other hand, although the obligatory legitimacy of the fictional female foundling seemed to express primarily the imperatives of a new polite discourse informed by the old double standard in which the morals of the heroine’s mother were supposed to vouch for her own chastity, it also responded to the economic anxieties of middle-class readers.

We can thus say that the foundling narrative’s considerations of gender reflected most trenchantly the class-bound concerns of the audience precisely at those times when they seemed to supersede such concerns. Mr. Villars claims that unless Evelina’s father acknowledges her as his only legitimate child, “the fair name of her virtuous mother” will be eternally blasted and Evelina herself will have to endure “shame and dishonour.” His clamorous avowals, however, smuggle in the economic anxieties of the middling classes under the guise of class-transcending concerns about female chastity.

Tobias Smollett’s Peregrine Pickle offers yet another important literary correlative for Mr. Villars’s and Evelina’s illegitimacy jitters. Smollett’s novel includes the “Memoirs of a Lady of Quality,” whose protagonist, the “celebrated Lady V.,” gives birth to a bastard daughter. The infant dies quickly, leading her mother to observe sadly that the “circumstances of [the child’s] birth would have been an insurmountable misfortune to her thro’ the whole course of her life, and rendered her absolutely dependent on [Lady V.’s] love and protection” (468). The history of Lady V.’s affair makes clear that the father of the infant, one “Mr. S.,” would not have been in a position to protect and benefit the child had she lived and reached maturity. As Lady V. observes at one point, “my lover . . . had no fortune to support me; and for that reason I was scrupulously cautious of augmenting his expense” (468). Taking into account Habakkuk’s explanation that an aristocratic bastard could marry well “so long as paternity was acknowledged and the parent was prepared to pay a portion large enough to compensate,” we can see why Lady V.’s daughter would have indeed been at a serious disadvantage in the marriage market.

The story of Lady V.’s illegitimate daughter stands in complicated relationship to the rest of Peregrine Pickle. With its sympathetic discus-
sion of the titillating details of Lady V.’s love affair, “Memoirs of a Lady of Quality” is carefully bracketed off as a report of social mores and mentality alien to that of the novel’s middle-class lovers, Peregrine and Emily. Had Emily Gauntlet fallen for Peregrine’s artful seduction and gotten pregnant, she would have disqualified herself from being a heroine of a respectable narrative and Peregrine’s future wife. Lady V., by contrast, is portrayed as deeply admired both by Peregrine and by her sophisticated company and is commended for the “thousand acts of uncommon charity” (538) that she modestly glosses over in her Memoirs. In other words, what Smollett attempts to do in his novel is combine a breathless Haywood-style account of the illicit adventures of aristocrats, such as Lady V. and her lovers, with an assiduous, near-Richardsonian panegyric to the upright morals of middle-class women, such as Emily Gauntlet. The upper-class romance, bastardy and all, continued to sell books (indeed, several readers confessed to buying Smollett’s novel “merely for the sake of reading” the Memoirs27), while the middle-class romance provided the moral grounds for the critique of Peregrine’s promiscuity and for his future reformation, and thus could have been hoped to redeem the novel as a whole.

The eighteenth-century readers’ reaction to such representational two-timing was often suggestively aligned with class. Richardson called the Memoirs “the very bad Story of a wicked woman,” which was hardly surprising given his passionate sermonizing on illegitimacy in Clarissa, and his friend Mrs. Delany considered it “wretched stuff.” Thomas Gray went even further in his sarcastic claim that Peregrine was simply used as a “vehicle,” and a “very poor one with a few exceptions” for “that miracle of tenderness and sensibility . . . Lady Vane.” By contrast, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu thought that the “memoirs contained more Truth and less malice than any I ever read in my life.”28

Burney’s Evelina thus inherited a rather contradictory literary tradition that both titillated its readers with the stories of unrepressed sexuality of aristocratic women and increasingly coded female bastards as nonexistent—literally dying out, as in the case of Lady V.’s infant daughter. If the story of Evelina’s virtuous mother is a class-adjusted revision of the story of Lady V., then Evelina’s legitimacy is truly the only guarantee of her social and physical survival, as the desperate language used by her guardian has seemed to imply all along. Reflecting the economic and social concerns of an eighteenth-century middle-class audience, concerns that directly shaped the period’s “polite” dis-
course, fictional female bastards, even those born to aristocratic parents, were obligated either to die or to abandon any hopes for marital happiness and social fulfillment.

“Innocence” and the Plot of Divided Bastardy

Burney’s correspondence highlights her attention to the legitimacy (i.e., birth circumstances) of people around her. In a 1776 letter (two years before the publication of *Evelina*), she describes to her good friend Samuel Crisp the visit of a celebrated operatic soprano from Italy, and she casually informs him about the singer’s illegitimate origins. “La Signora Agujari,” writes Frances, “has been nicknamed, my father says, in Italy, from some misfortune attendant upon her birth—but of which she, at least, is innocent—La Bastardella. She is now come over to England, in the prime of her life and her fame, upon an engagement with the proprietors of the Pantheon, to sing two songs at their concert, at one hundred pounds a night!” (*Memoirs of Dr. Burney*, 2:21). Signora Agujari’s bastardy is really irrelevant for both Frances and Mr. Crisp, and yet, in a culture obsessed with illegitimacy—and particularly within a social class as sensitive to the economic repercussions of illegitimacy as the eighteenth-century middle class—the implicit reckoning of bastards goes on in the thick of everyday interaction, even when there seems to be no observable payoff to such vigilance.

Signora Agujari, as Burney notes offhandedly, is “at least . . . innocent” of the “misfortune” to which she owes her fascinating nickname. The term *innocent* comes up frequently in eighteenth-century references to bastard children, connoting a particular set of implicit beliefs and anxieties. It evokes a representational system that fluctuates between condemning illegitimate children as evil outsiders poised to wreak havoc on legal families and pitying them as innocent (or “at least innocent”) victims of their parents’ indiscretion, first disenfranchised by society and then demonized for trying to redress their socioeconomic disadvantages. If we attempt to articulate the psychological motivation behind such a fluctuation, it could be as follows: The bastard pays a high price for the obligation she herself did not incur (i.e., she is innocent), and so she must be bitter and angry, seeking to vent her anger on her more fortunate legitimate siblings and to take by force or stealth what has been unjustly denied to her. And for that, she is to be condemned, her own usurping actions—no longer her parents’ sins—now
are to be the foundation for punishing and excluding her. What happens then is that within a socioeconomic system grounded in the disenfranchisement of illegitimately born children, every such child—even in infancy—could be perceived, however unselfconsciously, by those around her, as bound to rebel at some time in the future against paying somebody else’s sexual debts, and by rebelling to incur her own social debts. And if so (the psychosocial reasoning informing illegitimacy is inevitably circular), it becomes so much easier to demonize her even as a newborn (hence, the perpetuation of the myth of the inherently evil bastard) and thus to make her pay for her future debts now.

Though unspoken, this kind of reasoning informs the polemics surrounding the Foundling Hospital (including Charles Burney’s plea for an “English Conservatorio”) and the fictional writings of such authors as Richardson (who tacitly takes for granted the nasty nature of Thomasine’s “cubs” in Clarissa). It is in the context of this vexed double view of illegitimate children that the very appellation of “innocence” acquires ominous overtones in Burney’s first novel. Evelina is “shocked” by her grandmother’s “gross” expostulation on the circumstances of her birth, but her shock mounts to agony when her well-meaning cousin, Miss Polly Branghton, attempts to soften the impact of Madame Duval’s tactlessness by observing that Evelina “to be sure, . . . is not to blame for her mama’s undutifulness, for she couldn’t help it” (68). Evelina is not to blame just as the Italian Bastardella is “at least innocent” of the “misfortune attendant upon her birth”—the very terms on which Evelina is acquitted of “blame” could imply her illegitimacy and propensity for deviance in the eyes of eighteenth-century readers. Evelina’s reaction to her tenderhearted cousin’s remark (and to her grandmother’s subsequent tirade on Caroline Evelyn’s having gone “astray”) is literally inexpressible. We get only a faint reflection of Evelina’s feelings via Mr. Branghton’s proposal to “talk o’ something else, for Miss looks very uneasy-like” (69), but the pitch of her discomfort is forcefully underscored by the fact that even the obtuse and callous Mr. Branghton is aware of it and takes pity on her.

Innocence is thus a loaded term in the context of the culture of illegitimacy—the young charges of the Foundling Hospital are “innocent” and so is La Bastardella—and Burney responds subtly to this ambiguous meaning by transposing, at a crucial moment, the appellation of innocence from Evelina to one of her “bastard” doubles, Polly Green. Throughout the novel—and while her position as the legitimate daughter of a baronet remains in question—Evelina’s innocence is repeatedly invoked by Mr. Villars, Lady Howard, Lord Orville, Evelina’s late
mother, Mrs. Selwyn, Evelina herself, her cousin Polly, and Madame Duval. The moment, however, that Evelina is pronounced a “lawful successor” to her father’s estate, the proclamations of her innocence cease altogether and give way to similar avowals about Polly Green. Echoing the earlier sentiment of Lady Howard, who notes that Evelina’s upbringing was conducive to “inexperience and innocency” (21), Evelina observes that Polly was “brought up in as much retirement as myself,” and immediately goes on to inquire if “this innocent daughter” of Dame Green “was yet acquainted” with the story of her origins (375; emphasis added).

Once the dubious privilege of “innocence” is transferred from Evelina to Polly, the novel begins to retroactively bastardize this lower-class pretender to the Belmont family’s property. Polly Green is portrayed as simultaneously innocent and evil, a casebook scenario of the conventionally conflicting conceptualization of bastards. Evelina’s sympathetic exclamations, such as “Poor unfortunate girl! how hard is her fate!” (376) peter out in the wake of Mrs. Selwyn’s harsh harangues on the most expedient method of getting the “fictitious daughter” (377) out of everybody’s way. Sir John Belmont, as Mrs. Selwyn informs Evelina,

is willing to save the little impostor as much of the mortification of her disgrace as is in his power: now if you immediately take her place, according to your right, as Miss Belmont, why not all that either of you can do for her, will prevent her being eternally stigmatized, as the bantling of Dame Green, wash-woman and wet nurse of Berry Hill, Dorsetshire. Now such a genealogy will not be very flattering, even to Mr. Macartney [infatuated by the spurious Miss Belmont], who, all-dismal, as he is, you will find by no means wanting in pride and self-consequence. . . . Though compassion may make us wish to save the poor girl the confusion of an immediate and public fall, yet justice demands that you should appear, henceforward, in no other light than that of Sir John Belmont’s daughter. Besides, between friends, I, who know the world, can see that half this prodigious delicacy for the little usurper, is the mere result of self-interest; for while her affairs are husht up, Sir John’s, you know, are kept from being brought further to light. (378; emphasis added)

Mrs. Selwyn’s speech is remarkable on several counts. First, it accomplishes the transposition of Evelina’s former anxiety about illegitimacy onto Polly. Mr. Villars used to worry about the “stigma” threatening
Evelina if her father did not publicly acknowledge his marriage to her mother (337); now Sir John Belmont wants to move quickly to save Polly from being “eternally stigmatized, as the bantling of Dame Green.” Second, as far as the readers of Burney’s novel are concerned, this stigmatization is already a fait accompli. Not many would bother to check whether or not Polly’s mother was married to Polly’s father (in fact, it appears that she was), and so Polly registers as indeed the “bantling”—the bastard—of Dame Green, the true “nobody” of the story despite being actually legitimate. Third—and most important—Polly is actually blamed for having taken Evelina’s place. Called “the little impostor” and then, in case we missed it the first time, “the little usurper,” Polly is implicitly made responsible for having been brought to Sir John Belmont as an infant. So the “immediate and public fall” is about the right punishment for the presumptuous “bantling,” and the only reason she is “spared” that richly deserved “disgrace” is the “prodigious”—and, as Mrs. Selwyn implies, self-interested—“delicacy” of her adoptive father. Polly is as innocent of Dame Green’s crime as the typical bastard is of her mother’s sexual trespass; neither is “to blame for her mama’s undutifulness” (68), but since both are made to bear the social cost they themselves did not incur, they become fair game for demonizing.

And, as it turns out, the ground for portraying Polly as an evil lower-class impostor is laid down quite early in the novel via the figure of Evelina’s vulgar grandmother, Madame Duval, and her déclassé relatives. A long time before we learn that the presumed daughter of Sir John Belmont has been educated in a French convent and, “though English at birth, [can] scarcely speak her native language” (227), we are introduced to Madame Duval, whose native English is hopelessly corrupted by her long sojourn in France. Similarly, the revelation that the false Miss Belmont’s mother is a Berry Hill “wash-woman” echoes Captain Mirvan’s earlier claim that Madame Duval could be easily “taken for [Lady Howard’s] wash-woman.” Madame Duval’s exulting response to the Captain’s insult—“Her wash-woman, indeed!—Ha, ha, ha!—why you han’t no eyes; did you ever see a wash-woman in such a gown as this?” (51)—foreshadows the novel’s forthcoming intimation that, in the absence of the right pedigree, all that stands between Polly Green and the washbasin is a rich “gown” purchased for her by Sir John Belmont. Her very name signals Polly’s dubious social standing since she shares it with Madame Duval’s good-natured silly niece, Polly Branghton. In other words, in the doublespeak of the novel, Polly could be “innocent” (375) and “pretty,” and look “mild and good-

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humoured” (316)—this is Evelina describing her first impression of the false Miss Belmont—but she is also an “impostor” and “usurper,” aligned, ominously, not just with one but with several presumptuous “wash-women.”

Calibrated to respond to the psychosocial particularities of the eighteenth-century culture of illegitimacy, the novel’s ambiguous view of Polly still shapes our reading of Evelina today. Literary critics tend to acquiesce to Burney’s implicit elevation of Evelina as the foundling of the story without realizing that this elevation is necessarily achieved by ignoring her lower-class double. Consider Margaret Anne Doody’s argument about Evelina’s indebtedness to the romance of antiquity, particularly to Ethiopian Romance. Doody argues that “Burney [was] enabled to write Evelina because . . . a novelistic tradition [had conveyed] a strong and serviceable myth to her,” and she outlines the similarities between the adventures of Charicleia, the foundling from Ethiopian Romance, and Evelina:

Charicleia . . . grew up in ignorance of her parentage—her very name is wrong, the name of her adoptive, not her true father. . . . Charicleia, like Evelina, has the guardianship of a good priest, her spiritual “father,” to rely upon, though Burney’s heroine, unlike her predecessor, does not have to endure the bereavement of this “father.” In Heliodorus’s novel, as in Burney’s, the heroine has to wait for recognition until the end of the novel. . . . Evelina has to rely on her father’s perception and intuition as well as the mother’s words that speak for her; like Charicleia she keeps her history and identification in the secret private writing that is also the mother’s story.

Similarly, Martha Brown situates the story of Evelina in the context of the “typical romance plot, beginning with the Greek prose romances of Heliodorus, Longus, and Tatius.” She points out that, like the hero of such a story, “abandoned . . . or ‘exposed’ . . . by his parents, rescued and reared by a kindly shepherd, . . . Evelina [is] forced on [her] journey or [quest] by the dubious circumstances of [her] birth and by [her] right to inherit.”

It is time to ask on what grounds Polly Green is left out of the influential critical exploration of the “genetic inheritance” of Burney’s novel. After all, Polly’s qualifications for the title of foundling are stronger than Evelina’s. In a striking reprise of the myth of Moses, the infant Polly is brought to a powerful man (Sir John Belmont) by her mother, who pretends to be her nurse, and is raised under his name,
with no intimation of her real identity whatsoever. Evelina, by contrast, knows well who her parents are—the level of informedness going well beyond anything we encounter in the ancient foundling narrative. Brown points out that in the “typical romance plot” of antiquity, when the “child reaches maturity [and] falls in love, the romance . . . is blocked, often by the mystery surrounding the hero’s birth.”36 No insuperable obstacles block Evelina’s romance with Lord Orville (in fact, Burney ensures that he proposes to Evelina before the mystery of her birth is cleared up); Polly, on the other hand, is indeed prevented from marrying Mr. Macartney because of their supposed consanguinity, and it is not until the truth of her birth is revealed that she can be reunited with him. It appears, then, that in establishing the heroine’s literary-historical lineage critics implicitly rely on factors other than immediate parallels between her adventures and those of the protagonists of the ancient romance. That Polly has, so far, remained beyond the pale of scholarly inquiry into the ancient origins of Burney’s novel shows how easily we buy into the class-bound sensibility attendant upon the eighteenth-century focus on legitimately born foundlings as the true protagonists of a saga of landed property. As a daughter of a washwoman, the legitimately born Polly is stigmatized as the “bantling” of the novel and continues to serve as a pale foil for its properly pedigreed real foundling, Evelina.

It would not do, however, to simply grant Polly her hitherto denied membership in the club of the eighteenth-century female foundlings who embody the continuity between the ancient and early modern literary traditions. We should also ask why Burney needs to bastardize Polly when the novel already features one unquestionable bastard, Mr. Macartney. Doody has observed in a different context that Evelina has a “male counterpart” in Mr. Macartney: “both are apparently illegitimate, both adolescent, both without fixed social identity.”38 How many bastards or almost-bastards does a novel require in order to reassure us of the protagonist’s unquestionable position as the only legitimate child, the sole “lawful successor” to her father’s name and estate?

I suggest that Burney deploys the repetitive transposition of Evelina’s illegitimacy—onto the “bad” foundling Polly and onto the bastard Mr. Macartney—to weaken the unavoidable association of Evelina with a real-life natural child, appearing as if out of nowhere (from the point of view, that is, of the legal family) and positioning herself, in her dangerous innocence, as completely dependent on her father’s bounty. On the one hand, Evelina does literally force herself into her father’s sight, and, subsequently, his will; on the other, by doing so, she turns
out to have displaced the illegitimate usurper, Polly Green, and thus reasserts the privileged socioeconomic standing of legal children. Furthermore, unlike the indigent Mr. Macartney or any real-life illegitimate child, Evelina does not really need her father’s money (even though she gets it anyway) because of her marriage to Lord Orville.

The rhetoric accompanying this double dissociation of Evelina from the dark figure of the real-life bastard is both coy and revealing. Could it be possible, asks the shocked!—shocked!—Evelina, upon first encountering the pretended Miss Belmont in Bristol, “that, while the lawful child [i.e., Evelina] is neglected, another is adopted?” (316). Yes, Evelina, one feels compelled to intone, had it not been possible and had the eighteenth-century middle-class reading public been less apprehensive about just this exact scenario, the story of Evelina-as-a-foundling would not have been written in the first place. Little Polly Green becomes the token “bantling” of the novel, thus allowing the better-born, better-connected, more eloquent in her “native language” Evelina to put aside her initial worries about being perceived as illegitimate, and, furthermore, allowing eighteenth-century readers to relive, in the safe setting of a novel, their anxieties about the moral and socioeconomic repercussions of bastardy as an institution. By carefully distinguishing among several different pretenders to a family fortune, such as the innocent “natural son,” who can also be quite dangerous (Mr. Macartney nearly murders his father in a duel); the truly innocent legitimate “foundling,” Evelina; and the usurping, dangerous, lower-class, practically foreign, yet also tantalizingly innocent, “bantling,” Polly, Burney’s novel functions as a compensatory fantasy for a culture groping for, but not necessarily finding, a moral justification for a deeply troubled status quo according to which the unhallowed sexuality of parents (excluding aristocrats) led to the socioeconomic exclusion of children.

Now, perhaps, we can also understand why the novel’s sprawling list of the capital’s sightseeing attractions—featuring Drury Lane, Covent Garden, and Samuel Foote’s play-houses, the Haymarket Opera-House, Ranelagh, the Pantheon, Portland Chapel, Buckingham House, Kensington Gardens and Palace, Pall-Mall, Vauxhall, the Cox Museum, Bedlam, Hampstead, the Tower of London, the Monument to the Great Fire of London, Paul’s Church, the White-Conduit House, Bagnigge Wells, etc.—does not include the London Foundling Hospital. This is a significant omission, considering that the Hospital remained a must-see for tourists through the second half of the century. One possible reason for its absence from the pages of Evelina is that, writing in
the immediate aftermath of Dr. Burney’s frustrating failure to talk the Hospital’s governors into converting their institution into the “English Conservatorio,” Frances did not want to remind the dedicatee of her novel of his recent disappointment. Moreover, a visit to the charity whose mission, according to its charter, was to save the “exposed and deserted children,” the children “owned by none” (Memoirs of Dr. Burney, 238)—or even a thought of such a visit—would have inevitably prompted Evelina to reflect upon her own status as a “deserted child” (19) hardly knowing to whom she belongs (353), thus giving free rein to the association of the novel’s token foundling with real-life illegitimate children, precisely the association that Burney wanted to keep under control via her plot of repeatedly divided bastardy.39

**Multiplying Foundlings of Late-Eighteenth-Century Novels**

Burney appears to have inaugurated a tradition of using a plot of divided bastardy to sever a foundling heroine’s association with her real-life illegitimate counterparts. Ten years after the appearance of Evelina, Charlotte Smith published her novel Emmeline, The Orphan of the Castle, featuring a young woman who is thought to be illegitimate for most of the story only to be established at the end as the legal heir to a large estate. This discovery spells a significant financial drawback for her uncle/guardian. He now has to give up the estate (which he inherited by default, as his brother, Emmeline’s father, was thought to have died without legitimate children) and has to pay Emmeline the arrears for the years the property has been in his possession. As a typical eighteenth-century foundling, Emmeline, of course, does not really need her newly found wealth because not one but several well-off suitors, undeterred by her humble status, have been vying for her hand in marriage. Still, to diffuse any potential embarrassment over the similarities between the story of Emmeline and that of a real-life bastard, Smith shifts the loci of illegitimacy and introduces, in the middle of the novel, a *real* natural child, the son of Emmeline’s “unfortunate” friend, Lady Adelina (283).

To make the little boy function as the legitimately born Emmeline’s bastard double, the novel simultaneously fosters and undercuts the identification between the two characters. Thus at the time when Emmeline still thinks that she is illegitimate, she is shown to “give vent to her full heart by weeping over the little infant, whose
birth, so similar to her own, seemed to render it to her a more inter-
esting and affecting object. She lamented the evils to which it might be
exposed; tho’ of a sex which would prevent it’s encountering the same
species of sorrow as that which had embittered her own life. Of her
friendless and desolate situation, she was never more sensible than
now” (273).

Of course, as Emmeline will discover soon, the boy’s birth is
not at all “similar to her own.” Moreover, her laments about the “evils”
to which as a female bastard she is liable to be “exposed” have not
been borne out by the events of the novel. Her presumed illegitimacy
did not stop any of her ardent suitors from wishing to marry her; if any-
thing, it might have saved her from heartless fortune hunters (for, as in
other such narratives, legitimacy confers wealth). The parallels
between the boy and Emmeline are further complicated by their
shared surname, Godolphin. Emmeline becomes “Mrs. Godolphin”
upon marrying the boy’s uncle, her happy marriage crowning the dis-
covery of her legitimate origins. By contrast, the boy’s emergence as
“William Godolphin, Jr.” only underscores his mother’s transgression
(had she forbore having sex out of wedlock, her son would not have
had to assume the name of her brother) and reaffirms his status as the
designated bastard of the story.

The tradition of providing the foundling heroine with one or sev-
eral bastard doubles or else contrasting her—a “good,” proper
foundling—with a “bad” foundling (e.g., Polly in Evelina) continued with
a vengeance in Agnes Maria Bennett’s novel The Beggar Girl and Her
Benefactors (1797). With a plot liable to confound any reader who lets
her attention flag even for a moment, Bennett’s novel features two legit-
imately born foundlings, Horace and Rosa, routinely described as
“base” or “bastards” by different characters. At the end, of course,
Horace turns out to be a peer of realm and the heir to several splendid
estates, but in the process of establishing his parentage, he has to dis-
place and dispossess several bastard claimants to his fortune, such as
the illegitimate children of the former steward—turned—Member of
Parliament, Solomon Mushroom.

Rosa’s situation is even more complicated. The legitimate child of
a countess, Lady Denningcourt, she is switched as an infant with the
daughter of her wet nurse, Mrs. Wilkins, and thus begins her life as a
“little beggar,” abused by the alcoholic caretaker who cannot see her
without feeling guilty about the fraud she had committed. Meanwhile,
Mrs. Wilkins’s own daughter, called Elinor Bawsky (the novel’s Polly
Green figure) is raised in the household of Dr. Croak and his mistress
Mrs. Bawsky, who are generously paid for their efforts by one of the countess’s relatives, who, for a reason of his own, wants to persuade Lady Denningcourt that her daughter had died in infancy.

Rosa is saved from her inevitable demise by Colonel Buhanun, who adopts her shortly before going back to the army, thus setting in motion Rosa’s peregrinations from one benefactor to another, a journey that ends only when, by accident, Rosa finally reaches the house of Lady Denningcourt. Shortly before Rosa’s arrival, Lady Denningcourt is told that her daughter is alive, and she retrieves Elinor (her supposed child) from Dr. Croak, only to become increasingly heartbroken over the girl’s inferior mental capacities, which appear even more lacking as the countess compares the hopelessly common Elinor to the accomplished Rosa.

Elinor is miserable to the point of going mad amidst the riches and sophistication that she is supposed to inherit and is never so happy as when she is allowed to wait on Rosa, assuring this indigent object of her mother’s charity that she “would be content to play [Rosa’s maid her] whole life” (5:178). The blood will out, Bennett quietly assures her readers. The clearly undeserving Elinor finally elopes with her old flame, the son of Dr. Croak, a low-bred, if kind, young man, leading the countess to observe sadly that even though “nothing . . . can ennoble a plebeian soul, [her] child is the only instance [she] ever knew of real good principles and integrity of heart, on which confidence and indulgence could make no impression” (5:266). A series of startling discoveries follow, revealing that Rosa is the real daughter of Lady Denningcourt and her former husband, Colonel Buhanun, and that Elinor is an “innocent . . . impostor” (5:313). As in Evelina, the loaded appellation of “innocence” is transferred from the long-suffering real heiress to the fake one the moment their respective true identities are established.

Predictably, Rosa’s transformation from a beggar girl to the daughter of a countess is accompanied by a drastic reshuffling of wills. Thus both of the novel’s foundlings, Rosa and Horace, though appearing out of nowhere as illegitimate pretenders to family wealth typically would, are, in fact, shown to displace a whole panoply of wrong heirs, such as the “bad” foundling Elinor and the bastard Mushrooms. The legitimate foundlings thus become both the symbols and the agents of the status quo, keeping out unworthy claimants to rank and fortune.

To return, then, to the important critical project inaugurated by scholars, such as Doody and Brown, of reconstructing the distinguished literary pedigree of such heroines as Evelina, Emmeline, and Rosa and
The Children “Owned by None”

thus acknowledging the indebtedness of Burney’s, Smith’s, and Bennett’s stories to the foundling romances of antiquity, we should also remember that all those writers relied on the novelistic presence of bastard doubles to shield their heroines from the topical indignities of the Enlightenment’s culture of illegitimacy. We may profitably compare Evelina Belmont with Heliodorus’s Charicleia because Burney conveniently offers up Polly Green as the personage most readily associated with that real-life anonymous illegitimate correspondent of the *Universal Spectator*, whose relatives considered him as “a Robber who . . . unjustly deprived them of a small Estate [his father] settled upon [him].”\(^{40}\) The writer who disrupted this tradition of contrasting “bantlings” with “good” foundlings and who daringly elevated a bantling into a romantic heroine in her own right is the subject of the concluding chapter of this book.