

## Bring Forth the Blushers!

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Eighteenth century literature provides readers with an array of instances in which they can observe women blush. But what about the men? Although a vast array of occasions in literature showcase women blushing, the blush of the male is much less prevalent in both literature. This paper sets out to lay a brief foundation for the examination of the male blush through Frances Burney's *Evelina; or the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World*. Despite its basis in eighteenth century London culture, *Evelina* exhibits prevalent notions of masculinity that still shape modern definitions of masculinity. Using the text as a foundation, I will attempt to shed light on blushes and what this blushing means for the owner of this blush. With a particular emphasis on men and masculinity, I argue that in Frances Burney's *Evelina*, blushing and colouring is the result of a person's gender and class intersecting with their refinement and social situation as produced by eighteenth century social norms and expectations.

### Gender Norms and Expectations in the Eighteenth Century

As a generalization, society in the eighteenth century was essentialist. They utilized essentialist ideas of gender, drawing from Aristotle and Genesis, as a way to reinforce gender norms and expectations (Shoemaker 15). The Biblical story of Adam and Eve verified the truth of the biological differences between men and women and, therefore, verification of gender differences: "[S]ocial and cultural differences were justified by grounding them in perceived biological differences" (Shoemaker 18). By focusing on the reproductive system as a method of differentiation, essentialist

minimized the biological differences between men and women, allowing for the growth of essentialist determinations of gender. The separation of men into the public sphere and women into the private sphere best exhibits essentialist ideas of gender; however, the separation of spheres was much more complicated than that. The gender norms of the eighteenth century expected men to act as "governors of their families [...] in the private sphere" and women to "have a positive moral influence on the wider society" in the public sphere (Shoemaker 30). This prevented the absolute confinement of men and women to different spheres and allowed for the liberty of participation in both the public and private sphere.

Instead of liberating each party however, this further served to cement essentialist ideas of gender, and extend them to the emotional conduct permitted for men and women, "the man is to be as the head, the woman [is] as the heart" (William Gouge qtd. in Shoemaker 24). By permitting the man the role of the head, gender dynamics expected men to exhibit a propensity for intellect and reason while assigning women the role of the heart, in which their emotions ruled them. This binary forbid men from exhibiting emotion, and women from exercising intellect, without societal repercussions. To act in the opposite sex's domain meant risking social humiliation and torment. Ironically however, men needed the "civilizing influence of female conversation in order to counteract their lack of social skills and common sense" (Shoemaker 29). Ironically, in order to maintain the social skills necessary for society, men must converse with women. This suggests that men expected women to have intellect, but not to exhibit it or act on it. To do so would

put their male conversation partner ill at ease due to the dominating quality associated with intellect. The tension between knowledge, ignorance, and blushing was tedious for women of the time because to expose oneself as a wit ran the risk of a woman being classified as improper and unrefined, but to not blush at one's awareness of knowledge also showed a lack of refinement.

Many conduct books of the time espoused advice such as this in order to advise individuals, both male and female, on the appropriate qualities of their sex (Shoemaker 21). Early in the eighteenth century, many authors wrote conduct books for a general audience prescribing traits for people of all classes. These books perpetuated the notion that "good breeding (manifested in outward behaviour) was based on inner virtue," meaning that, despite a person's class, one could still maintain the virtuous values of good breeding (Hamilton 422). However, later in the eighteenth century conduct books became "increasingly class specific" (Shoemaker 22, 35) and gendered teachings, as well as those that taught social position, became a fundamental element of conduct literature (Hamilton 423). Examples of the conduct books concerned with gendered teaching of this time include John Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, John Gregory's *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters*, and James Fordyce's *The Character and Conduct of the Female Sex and the Advantages to be Derived by Young Men from the Society of Virtuous Women*. Conduct books specifically sought to educate individuals on maintaining the propriety of their sex. For men this included emotional reserve and reliance on intellect and reason.

This meant that physical manifestations of emotion, such as blushing or colouring, were unacceptable for men of the time. Outward male emotion indicated of weakness of the mind, as well as ungentlemanly

behavior due to its neglect of another's feelings. This outlook expected gentlemen to exemplify of the politeness and propriety of the time by moderating their own emotions. Social propriety in the eighteenth century ensured social distinctions between groups of people, particularly class. While beneficial for those participating in the higher class, social propriety prevented social movement and created a hierarchy between groups. Burney's Lord Orville manifests the polite behavior that flourished early in the eighteenth century (Hamilton 417). However, through Lord Orville, Burney also reveals the stress that the system of politeness experienced in particular regard to the conception of masculinity (Hamilton 417). In "Monkey Business, Lord Orville, and the Limits of Politeness" Patricia Hamilton quotes John Brewer, an eighteenth century critic and scholar, saying:

The means of achieving this [politeness] was a manner of conversing and dealing with people which, by teaching one to regulate one's passions and to cultivate good taste, would enable a person to realize what was in the public interest and for the general good. It involved both learning a technique of self-discipline and adopting the values of a refined, moderate sociability. (418)

By Brewer's standards, Orville embodies the epitome of polite society in the eighteenth century. He maintains politeness without appearing condescending to others, even those of lower social classes. Despite his seemingly laudable and infallible character, Burney does not exempt Lord Orville from the associations of colouring and blushing generally reserved for women of the eighteenth century.

Before attempting to apply the qualities of blushing and colouring to individuals of varying classes, whether male or female, one must first necessary to establish the differences between the two terms. In relation

to gender, men colour as “an attempt to avoid the effeminacy implied in *blush*” (Hayakawa 56). Blushing is often then thought of as emasculating for men and most commonly used in reference to women. Blushing, by definition, describes “the rushing of the blood into the face of someone who is shocked or embarrassed;” which, for men of the time, was unacceptable because gender norms demanded their emotional reserve (Hayakawa 56). Blushing and colouring are not just female qualities however. Although gender related, gender is not the sole factor in whether a person blushes or colours—class also plays a part. In terms of class, blushing conveys an exhibition mostly reserved for the upper class as a show of sensitivity and refinement; whereas colouring indicates a lower class version of blushing. While colouring echoes the characteristics of the blush, colouring manifests as a more raw and crude version; eliminating the refinement associated with the upper class. Because of the differences between colouring and blushing as related to gender and class, colouring and blushing then occur based on the intersection of an individual’s class, gender, refinement, and specific situation.

### **The Paradox and Intersectionality of Blushing for Women**

In addition to the complications of gender and class, blushing itself also creates a paradox. For women, society perceived blushes as betrayals of knowledge, sensitivity, and emotion. The blush in eighteenth century life could function as “natural and involuntary signal of embarrassment, vexation, anger, or love” and blushing or colouring subjected women to embarrassment regardless of the cause of their blush (O’Farrell 128). Most often other people assumed that a woman blushed as a result of knowledge thought of as improper for women. Early in *Evelina*, the title character, often blushes from embarrassment.

Later as she develops into a more artful person, Evelina’s blush develops into a blush of refinement. In other words, she blushes from embarrassment about knowledge as a show of her newly obtained refinement. In this way, Evelina’s blush exhibits typical qualities of her time because the female blush was a showing of refinement and quality as well as a reinstatement of societal expectations: “[E]very blush is the blush of the social body, every change in color an indication of its health in giving bashful assent to social obligation” (O’Farrell 130). The context of the novel, presents true refinement as blushing due to the acknowledgement decorum is being violated. Whether an individual blushes or colours in that particular situation however, depends on the varying dynamics of that individual’s class, gender, refinement.

Evelina is also subject to an additional factor besides her sex, class, situation, and refinement—her upbringing. Although part of the upper class, Evelina does not have the artfulness that comes from growing up in this social setting. Her secluded childhood with Mr. Villars has prevented her from developing the defense of a mask for her emotions and understandings. Before she ever leaves Berry Hill, Mr. Villars says, “[s]he is quite a little rustic, and knows nothing of the world” (Burney 21). Although while Mr. Villars writes this letter Evelina herself does not realize the gravity of her sheltered life, she very quickly discovers her unpreparedness in relation to the harsh standards of society. Most frequently, Evelina’s embarrassment occurs because she is ill-equipped to deal with society. Because of this, her colours and blushes construct her entrance into the world. These moments mark her development as a person as well as her obtainment of the refinement necessary for success in polite society. As an upper-class female, Evelina should blush, instead of colour, due to her knowledge of social norms

and expectations, but due to her lack of experience and artfulness, Evelina colours more frequently than she blushes in the early pages of the novel. As the novel progresses, the amount she colours lessens and Evelina develops the refinement of her blush and her artfulness simultaneously. Despite Evelina's personal lack of experience, her companions do not suffer the same fate. Excluding Mr. McCartney and the Branghtons, all of Evelina's companions show awareness of the knowledge and artfulness required for success in polite society. Their knowledge of societal expectations and rules as well as their lifelong immersion in it. Despite their immersion in social circles, this does not mean that they exhibit the refinement that Evelina develops.

Mrs. Selwyn, despite social propriety, acts as a wit, and lacks the refinement that she of her station and upbringing. Because of the social unacceptability of female wits, Sir Clement harshly criticizes and critiques Mrs. Selwyn. Though he acknowledges her wit, he dismisses it as a bad quality: "She has wit, I acknowledge, and more understanding than half of her sex put together; but [...] she spreads a general uneasiness among all who are in her presence" (Burney 343). Burney masculinizes Mrs. Selwyn through her wit to exemplify the social expectation of men as intellectuals and women as emotionally based. Not once in the novel does Mrs. Selwyn blush. She does not exhibit any shame at her development and showcasing of her intellect although society considered it inappropriate for her sex. "Her understanding, indeed, may be called masculine [because] in studying to acquire the knowledge of the other sex, she has lost all the softness of her own" (Burney 269). By showing preference for masculine qualities, such as wit, over the qualities more appropriate for her sex, such as emotion and delicacy, Burney constructs Mrs. Selwyn as

lacking the qualities necessary for a feminine woman.

Ironically, Burney portrays the other masculinized woman in the novel, Madame Duval, quite literally, as a man in a dress. When attacked by Captain Mirvan, Madame Duval loses her wig and her physical appearance quite mimics the semblance of a man (Doody 53). Regardless of her utter humiliation and embarrassment, Madame Duval lacks the refinement to blush. Even if she had the decency to blush, she conceals the possibility beneath the layers of her rouge (Doody 60). Instead, the reader sees Madame Duval change colour (Burney 89, 139). Despite the association of colouring with both the lower class and men, Madame Duval's does not colour in this manner. Instead of a flush of red to her faced, Madame Duval pales twice as a result of her fear as related to Captain Mirvan. When Evelina first meets Madame Duval, she describes her face as "the colour of scarlett" because of her excess of rouge (Burney 87). However in situations related to Captain Mirvan, Madame Duval pales enough to counteract her massive amounts of rouge. Even though she has little in common with Mrs. Selwyn, Madame Duval is still ridiculed for her appearance and outspokenness and masculinized through her crude behavior. Since she is not a wit like Mrs. Selwyn, Madame Duval's masculinization arises through her lack of feminine refinement. She only maintains feminine social interests and "is a compound of feminine affectations" (Doody 51). In her book, *Frances Burney: The Life in The Works*, Margaret Doody Describes Madame Duval as "ignorant of the subtleties of shame" and uncaring of what others might think of her lack of refinement (52).

### **The Paradox and Intersectionality of Blushing for Men**

Although blushes for women insinuate refinement, for men it is quite the contrary. John Gregory says in reference to blushes “[t]hat extreme sensibility which it indicates may be a weakness in our sex [men], as I have too often felt; but in yours it is peculiarly engaging” (Gregory 32). For men, blushing indicates a physical manifestation of emotion, a characteristic more appropriate for women. It was also associated with more negative emotions such as anger, resentment, and frustration. According to Patricia Hamilton, a scholar on eighteenth century literature, “[o]ne’s natural passions require[d] governing, and one must cultivate both perceptiveness and selflessness in order to defer to others’ feelings” (Hamilton 419). Instead of exhibiting their own emotion, social propriety and politeness expected men to repress their own feelings and defer to others. For men, blushing or colouring acts as antithesis of the politeness expected and maintained by high society. “[C]ivility, or good breeding, [was] not the automatic result of aristocratic rank;” however, many upper class people, such as Sir Clement, fail to exhibit the politeness so closely associated with their social ranking (Davidson 426). This politeness, although at first thought exclusive to the upper class, spread to the middle class because of their desire for upward mobility (Hamilton 418). “[B]y imitating the lifestyle, manners, and morals of the gentry,” the middle class blended with high society and make the necessary connections that allowed for upward mobility (Hamilton 418).

Sir Clement, despite his gentility, does not exhibit the politeness of his class. Despite his awareness of the forms and expectations of society, he lacks the true politeness lauded by Evelina. His pride produces his colouring, an equally damnable emotion as it focuses completely on oneself and neglects the

emotions and feelings of others. Sir Clement also assumes that Evelina admires and desires him in the same fashion that he desires her. This presumption further establishes Sir Clement’s lack of refinement as a result of his pride. He is too puffed up about himself to take note of others’ emotions toward him and how his actions affect them and make them feel. When Sir Clement writes to Evelina, he refuses to take blame for signing Orville’s name in the letter to Evelina. He would “sooner [...] risk his life, than, confess his misconduct” (Burney 388). In his letter, he also says that he “should blush to be suspected of [defiance] through an indirect channel” (Burney 388). This also explicates on Sir Clement’s pride because he would not use a covert method to challenge someone, he would much rather do so directly. Sir Clement announces in saying this that he would rather challenge someone upfront that do so delicately, and yet he utilizes his letter to Evelina as a method to be covert. Although Evelina decides not to show the letter to Lord Orville, Sir Clement plainly announces that “if you shew him [Lord Orville] this letter, he may know I dare defend, as well as acuse my conduct (Burney 388). In this instance, Sir Clement shows that he feels absolutely no shame for his actions or any indication that he thinks he acted wrongly. Evelina even says, “Sir Clement is conscious that he has acted dishonourably” (Burney 388). Although Sir Clement recognizes the expectations of society, he disregards them, furthering the notion that civility does not automatically come from rank. In lacking true politeness, Sir Clement also has “neither the delicacy nor forbearance to disguise his displeasure” (Burney 388). The intersection of his gentility and masculinity does not guarantee his refinement because of his inappropriate responses to varying situations. Sir Clement’s lack of refinement stems from his inability to defer to others and to remove

himself from the situation. If he did so, then he would exhibit the true politeness of Lord Orville.

According to Evelina, Lord Orville's politeness "knows no intermission, and makes no distinction, is as unassuming and modest as if he had never mixed with the great, and was totally ignorant of every qualification he possesses" (Burney 114). For Lord Orville, his aristocratic rank does produce his civility. Burney's only indicates that Lord Orville may have coloured once. This colouring occurs when Evelina, Mrs. Selwyn, and Sir Clement are walking in the garden and come across Lord Orville (Burney 330). Despite Lord Orville's opportunity to walk away from the party, his desire to be in Evelina's company leads him to join the group. This instance shows a physical assertiveness that is not frequently attributed to Lord Orville in the novel. By walking over to the group, Lord Orville asserts himself as a viable opponent against Sir Clement in Evelina's affections. Lord Orville's show of emotion is uncertain in its characterization though because Evelina indicates that both Sir Clement and Orville "changed colour" (Burney 330). As changing colour could indicate reddening or paling, ambiguity surrounds which Lord Orville does in this particular situation. However, this marks the only indicator throughout the novel that Lord Orville may have blushed. Immediately following this incident, Evelina expounds of Lord Orville's manners. She indicates in this instance, and throughout the novel, that Lord Orville refinement prevents him from even blushing or colouring at the sight of Evelina with supposed rivals, Sir Clement and Mr. McCartney. However, in the garden scene, Lord Orville's refinement does not even prevent his emotional exhibition. Despite his lack of reddening, Burney does not allow Lord Orville a complete exemption from human error, particularity in reference to his jealousy as a physical manifestation of

his emotions. Instead of blushing or colouring though, Lord Orville utilizes words and manipulation of the eighteenth century standards of honor and propriety, exhibiting his full capacity to act artfully. For this one moment, Lord Orville demonstrates the effect that situations have on an individual's likelihood to blush. Although all of his other characteristics, such as his refinement, gender, and class, would likely trump his colouring, his situation has enough gravity to allow for the possibility of his colouring. Despite his one showing of weakness, Lord Orville in other situations "demonstrates [...] unflappability [...], showing an equal capacity to overlook Mme Duval's vulgarity as to respond good-humouredly to Mrs Selwyn's satiric jabs" (Davidson 425).

Evelina elaborates on Lord Orville's manner shortly after the scene in which both Lord Orville and Sir Clement change colour. According to Evelina, Orville has "such gentleness of manners, such delicacy of conduct, and an air so respectful," whereas Sir Clement, "*obtrudes* his attention, and *forces* mine; it is so pointed, that it always confuses me" (Burney 330). Although Evelina's focus in on her attraction to Lord Orville's good manners, Burney uses Evelina's praise as a way to recognize and expounds upon the sincerity that true politeness depends on. While Sir Clement lacks true politeness in this arena, Lord Orville exceeds her expectations of gentlemanly conduct. Despite their differences in refinement, both Lord Orville's and Sir Clement's colourings exhibit masculine qualities. Lord Orville's masculinity in his colouring is due to his refined and gentlemanly nature, and Sir Clement's colouring is masculine because of his aggressive, testosterone driven motives. Their masculine colourings contrast greatly with Burney's men with emasculating blushes—Mr. Lovel and Mr. McCartney.

Mr. Lovel, frequently called an

“egregious fop,” colours as much as the rest of the male characters combined (Burney 294). Mr. Lovel’s colouring is not an attempt to avoid the femininity implied in a blush; instead, it exemplifies his low class and lack of refinement. Mr. Lovel, although presumably wealthy, does not have the politeness necessary to allow him to move upward on the social ladder. His colouring reflects his attempt at imitating the behaviors of the upper class as a method to fit in. Mr. Lovel’s colouring most frequently occurs as a result of his lack of knowledge or how to proceed artfully in varying social situations. However, he also colours in radical exhibitions of emotion. These physical manifestations of emotion come to a shocking climax when Captain Mirvan brings Mr. Lovel’s “twin-brother,” a monkey, to Mrs. Beaumont’s house as a way to make fun of his attempts to fit in with the upperclass (Burney 399). When the monkey arrives, Captain Mirvan has him “full[y] dressed, extravagantly *à-la-mode*” (Burney 399). Captain Mirvan mocks Mr. Lovel’s atrocious attempts at being perceived as upper class through the monkey by paralleling both of their inability to fit in, regardless of effort. When confronted by Captain Mirvan, Mr. Lovel chooses to retaliate against the monkey instead of his perpetrator. The monkey then attacks and bites him after he hits it with his cane instead of hitting Mr. Mirvan—the true source of his anger (Burney 401). For Burney, this allows her a way of getting back at the men in the novel for all their cruelty towards women (Doody 65). But instead of executing this punishment onto one of the aggressive men in the novel such as Captain Mirvan or Sir Clement, Burney chooses Mr. Lovel for her victim. Although not directly aggressive like Captain Mirvan, Mr. Lovel does spend a great majority of the novel trying to make Evelina blush and making jabs at her when she does (Doody 65). As payback, Burney brands Mr. Lovel with a

blush of his own; an “external and unusually visible” blush formed by the blood that pours forth from his ear after the monkey bites him (Doody 65). Although this blush can be perceived as masculine because of the affiliation of blood with battle, here Mr. Lovel’s gushing blood is aligned with the colour red and its affiliation with passion and emotion. By affiliating him with a flowing forth of emotion, Burney feminizes Mr. Lovel and deprives him of his masculinity. Mr. Lovel is not the only emasculated character in the novel, Mr. McCartney also experiences the humiliation of effeminacy.

Margaret Doody refers to Mr. McCartney as “Evelina’s male counterpart” (62). Like Evelina, Mr. McCartney also lacks the education that would allow him to discern the proper behavior in particular social situations. As a result, Mr. McCartney experiences his lack of education in a variety of pointed ways. Most prominently, Mr. McCartney’s lack of immersion in polite society accidentally draws attention to his overly passionate nature in a several ways. Like Evelina, Mr. McCartney has not had the education of immersion to prepare himself for polite society. His lack of education of the proper behavior forces him to react in natural human form, with an emotion driven by his desire, instead of the proper form for an eighteenth century gentlemen. Being called a gentleman is even a huge stretch for Mr. McCartney because he has very few, if any actions considerable as gentlemanly and refinement. Burney first presents Mr. McCartney passionate nature when Evelina intervenes with his attempted suicide (Burney 183). Later when the reader learns of Mr. McCartney’s love affair and duel with his father, they are reminded of Mr. McCartney’s rampant passions. Mr. McCartney’s actions show that, frequently, his “nerve giv[es] way” and his passion rules him (Doody 60). Mr. McCartney’s effeminacy does not result from his actions which, in terms of dueling

his father, society considered quite masculine. Instead, his effeminacy arises from his excess of emotion. The two times that Mr. McCartney colours in the novel result from his recognition of two different women, first Evelina, and second Polly (Burney 190, 320). More acutely, Mr. McCartney colours from the emotions that he associates with the two women. In different ways, both women have changed his life—Evelina saved it and his relationship with Polly brought him face to face with his father. Although his physical manifestations of emotion are colourings and not blushings, they still indicate his lack of refinement and his focus on emotional aspects of relationships rather than a masculine attempt to avoid feminization. By focusing on the emotional parts of relationships, Mr. McCartney breaks through the politics of propriety used to establish class differences. His familiarity with two women that he is not married or engaged to also shows his lack of refinement and knowledge of societal expectations and norms. Since he was not raised in polite society, but rather in Scotland by a destitute mother, Mr. McCartney does not distinguish the line between gender roles and class roles clearly. By not deferring to the emotions of others and allowing his own emotions to rule his life, Mr. McCartney exhibits a lack of refinement different from that of Mr. Lovel. He is then feminized through his excess of passionate emotion and its unsuitability for men.

### Conclusion

In addition to the differences between Mr. Lovel and Mr. McCartney, some larger overarching differences between male and female blushing and colouring present themselves. Most often blushing or colouring exhibits an individual's improper presentation of traits more appropriate for the other sex. For women, this blushing or colouring references knowledge, the domain

reserved for men. However, women were also expected to blush as a sign of their delicacy. This creates a double bind for women in which to blush shows knowledge and not to blush shows a lack of refinement. For men, colouring or blushing exhibits of emotion, the domain reserved for women. This presents the emasculation that men risked by blushing or colouring, regardless of how masculine their reasons. In most cases, blushing emasculates for men whereas changing colour runs less risk of feminization. Most often, when the word "colour" is used, Burney contextualizes it in the context of changing colour. Changing colour does not necessary imply reddening, it could imply either blood rushing to the face, or it could imply the blood rushing away from the face. This emasculation still very much depends on the particular man's class, refinement, and situation because of the fact that blushing and colouring occurs at the intersections of these factors. These varying intersections affect not only if a man blushes or colours, but also its reception in society. This perception still affects modern definitions of masculinity today because of the foundation laid by polite society in the eighteenth century. Though modern society no longer revolves around the lauded proprietary, politeness, and gender norms of the eighteenth century, the effects of its assumptions about gender are still relevant in modern constructions of masculinity and what is perceived as appropriately male.

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