

Chair Report on Panel D *Evelina* by Dr Gillian Skinner

Sunday morning's panel on *Evelina* was a wonderfully enlightening session. It brought home beautifully the way familiar texts – texts you thought you knew so well – can be vividly re-read or re-presented from new and fascinating perspectives. Kristin Zodorow's paper, 'Narrative Tides: Epistolarity and Astronomy in Frances Burney's *Evelina*', explored the use of the idiom of cosmic influence, making us pay attention to the novel's interest in timekeeping, its situation at a historical moment when astronomy had begun to supersede astrology, and its exploitation of the contemporary popularity of almanacs. These, with their suggestion of a causal relationship between human affairs and planetary movement, attempt to account for the peculiarities of human behaviour, just as the novel itself does (both *Evelina* specifically and the form more widely). Kristin expanded first on the scene in Volume 3 in which Mrs Selwyn, in conversation with Coverley and Lovel, searches for an almanac in order to determine 'the state of the moon' and thus (comically) explain the apparently unaccountable behaviour of Evelina, Sir Clement and Lord Orville. Going on to explore broken timepieces in the narrative, and the novel's relation to other books (like almanacs, diaries and periodicals) that track time, Kristin focussed especially on the description of Mrs Beaumont by Mrs Selwyn as 'an absolute Court Calendar bigot', highlighting the way Evelina herself baffles such a system, with its mechanical attention to birth as an indication of virtue, and makes us ask, what *is* the relation between her birth and her virtue? As Kristin reminded us, some of *Evelina* was composed in Isaac Newton's old observatory at the top of the house in St Martin's Street, a detail that gave further poignancy to the topic of her rich and enjoyable paper.

Following Kristin, Svetlana Kochkina took us on a marvellous visual tour of *Evelina*'s illustrations in her paper, 'Dressing Up *Evelina*: Pictorial History and Evolution of Fashion in the Novel's Illustrations', showing how the initial focus on the novel as a vehicle of satirical commentary (depicting events such as Mme Duval's humiliation and Captain Mirvan's introduction of the monkey) metamorphosed into an emphasis on its status as a sentimental narrative, with vignettes of Evelina and her father taking precedence. French editions especially took the sentimental approach, illustrating scenes such as Evelina and Orville in the garden and Macartney with the pistols. Changing fashions also left their mark on illustrations, with Regency styles in evidence in an edition of 1822, along with its wonderful allusion to Pierce Egan's 1821 novel in its modification of the title as *Evelina, or Female Life in London!* Similarly, the yellowback edition of 1874 featured anachronistic nineteenth-century fashion, but eighteenth-century fashions were re-introduced in illustrations by Arthur Rackham in the 1898 and Hugh Thomson in 1903, illustrations that also softened Burney's satire.

Summary cannot do proper justice to either paper. Both were fascinating and fully involved a very attentive audience, all of whom learned a great deal about a novel they thought they already knew so well.