

Between Self and Society:
An Invitation to Openness in Frances Burney's *Evelina*, *Cecilia*, and *Camilla*

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“Kindness is the parent of kindness”
—Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*

“Dear Pan and ye other gods who dwell here, grant that I become beautiful within and that my worldly belongings be in accord with my inner self. May I consider the wise man rich and have only as much gold as a moderate man can carry and use.”
—Plato, *Phaedrus*

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An Entrance

Frances Burney, in a letter to her sister Susanna, expressed her fears of being caught between the expectations of society and how she wished to act for herself: “I am sometimes dreadfully afraid for myself, from the *very* different behaviour which Nature calls for on one side, and the World on the other”¹. This battle between the world’s modes of being and the way Burney envisioned her own life were at odds and created anxiety that in this tension she might lose herself. This work centers three of her novels — *Evelina* (1778), *Cecilia* (1782), and *Camilla* (1796) — which form a triad that investigates this very tension between the self and society. How does a woman assert her independence and autonomy in a society that seeks to deny it? Though this thesis focuses more on the novels and less on Burney’s biographical life, it is essential to note that the anxieties and frustrations that her heroines experienced were also shared and lived by her. A self, divided is a common theme throughout her novels and is shared by Burney herself. Moreover, Burney was afraid of being turned into an object of fate rather than a maker of her own fate. In her novels, she explored these questions and made critiques of the society in which she lived. She clearly displays how society fails young women, but also men and all people, because of the way it transforms humans into objects and limits human intimacy (friendship and romance). In this thesis, I investigate the ways Burney’s heroines navigate between the patriarchal structures and customs of society and their own desires.

Each of these three novels builds on one another, addressing in new ways this tension. Beginning with *Evelina*, the happiest of all the novels, is an epistolary novel about a young woman moving from a nobody in society to becoming happily married to a virtuous and aristocratic man, while also learning to speak and act for herself. *Cecilia*, the gravest and darkest

¹ See Margaret Doody p. 157, 233 and Berg MS. Diary, II, pt.2.

of the three, centers the story of an heiress and is more a story of loss, and how society and its structures can make women (and men) go mad. In my chapter on the novel, I center the wager of friendship and how Burney argues that the power of independence comes from friendship. And lastly, *Camilla* is a mix of both lightness and darkness, and is about another young woman who must navigate the game of romance which is impossible for her to win. *Camilla* is the culmination of Burney's exploration between self and society. It is the novel where she most clearly lays out the contradictions of the rules of society and envisions a possible model of selfhood that would help alleviate the unnecessary pain and suffering caused by the world. It involves thinking for oneself and opening one's eyes to the needs of others and an awareness of prejudice and lack of information in both self and others. This thesis argues that Burney's novels are an invitation to begin to reflect and open one's eyes to the places where they were once blind. To be open and autonomous means to be aware of moments where one follows scripted ways of thinking that disempower and inflict pain upon others. By beginning to look with eyes of one's own, the world can become a kinder and more benevolent place.

Chapter One: The Actualization of Selfhood: Evelina Learning to be Evelina

Frances Burney's first published novel, *Evelina* (1778), is about a young woman's entrance into the intensely chaotic, dangerous, and pressurized world of London society. Evelina enters the world with good judgment and the ability to separate right from wrong. Still, throughout the novel, there will be curious moments of silence or inaction where Evelina will need to learn to speak up or act for herself. The evildoers of this patriarchal society, such as Sir Clement Willoughby, thrive on silence and inaction, and to defeat them, Evelina will need to put her thoughts into action and speak against her attackers. Another essential aspect of Evelina is her moral vision: she seeks to be benevolent and to act in good faith to others in a world that rewards duplicitous behavior. Therefore, to maintain her delicacy, her moral virtue, she will have to act even though it may make her appear differently. By close-reading critical events in the novel, I will show that Evelina learns to take ownership over her actions and judgments, extend her moral virtue into the world, and become the determiner of her future—an actual declaration of independence.

Evelina begins her entrance into the world as a social nobody. As Mr. Villars, her kind and caring guardian, reveals, she is bereft of her parents and her true last name. Her father, Sir John Belmont, had erased any evidence of the marriage to Evelina's mother and never claimed Evelina as his own, even after her mother's death. His choices leave Evelina nameless in a world where a name defines your place in it. The whole novel could be read as Evelina's quest to both reclaim her name Belmont (her past) and determine her name Orville (her future). Names in Burney's novels are essential, as Julia Epstein argues: "Names in a Burney novel both bestow and withhold identity; they are absolute signs for the slipperiness of female selfhood and the conflicted play of female dependence and autonomy in a culture that infantilized its women"

(Epstein 96). While placing Evelina in a precarious social position, this namelessness also enables her to drive towards self-determination—an opportunity to shape herself and her reputation. Joanne Cutting-Gray argues that her namelessness is “a form of social silence,” which I believe that Evelina fills, by becoming a somebody in this society and learning to be herself (Cutting-Gray 12).

Another defining aspect of Evelina’s character at the beginning of the novel is her innocence and inexperience. In the preface, Burney describes Evelina as being “the offspring of nature, and of Nature in her simplest attire” (10). She is inexperienced in the ways of the world, having been raised safely by Mr. Villars at Berry Hill, far away from the dangerous world of London. As Mr. Villars describes to Lady Howard, she is an “artless young creature” before entering the world (20). She is completely innocent and has had an extremely sheltered life up until she makes her entrance. However, while she is inexperienced in the ways of the world, she has “a virtuous mind, a cultivated understanding, and feeling heart” (9). Evelina’s innocence of the world is not entirely a weakness; as Cutting-Gray asserts rightly, it allows for her to observe the world in complex ways, not discerning it according to the logic of the already given social code: “Evelina’s reflexive ability to read more than one possible meaning in otherwise socially correct behavior refutes any Lockean notion that innocence is a tabula rasa upon which an accumulating experience is engraved” (13). She sees the world differently from those around her who have “experience,” which allows her to judge differently and more authentically, not constricted by *a posteriori* concepts of the world.

The first dance illustrates the problems and benefits of being nameless and inexperienced. One of the first aspects that Evelina notices is that the men turn the women into objects to be at their will:

The gentleman as they passed and repassed, looked as if they thought we were quite at their disposal, and only waiting for the honour of their commands; and they sauntered about, in a careless indolent manner, as if with a view to keep us in suspense. I don't speak of this in regard to Miss Mirvan and myself only, but to the ladies in general; and I thought it so provoking, that I determined, in my own mind, that, far from humouring such airs, I would rather not dance at all, than with any one who should seem to think me ready to accept the first partner who would condescend to take me. (30)

I quote this passage at length because it reveals how much Evelina is aware of how others are viewing her and because it is a powerful example of Evelina's sense of her dignity and self-worth. I think one aspect of her character that is not discussed enough is her strength. She is not at their "disposal," begging for a man to "condescend" to her; she knows she is better than that. If she had been raised in this society, this thought might have never crossed her mind. The passage shows her skepticism at the norms of society, revealing her freedom of thought to see how this current world is wrong and she can act differently—freedom of thought.

However, Evelina backs up these thoughts with action at the ball, rejecting her first would-be partner, Mr. Lovel. Burney, throughout her novels, is always critical of the "fop" who is overly concerned with his appearances and clothes. Mr. Lovel is the fop of this novel, and Evelina sees straight through his fake manners and excessively dramatic language. One might have thought that someone young and inexperienced would have chosen to dance with someone trying to be flashy and flamboyant, but not Evelina. She sees through the appearances of his artificial nature and manner. He does not honestly care to dance with Evelina but merely wishes

to dance with someone pleasing to the eye. She wants to dance with someone who is more authentic and genuine.

Evelina changes her mind about dancing when Lord Orville approaches her and asks her to dance. She does not know anything about his title or background, just how he came towards her and asked: not with condescension but as an equal. As she describes him, it seems convincing that it is his sincerity and earnestness that convinces her to accept his request: “His conversation was sensible and spirited; his air and address were open and noble; his manners gentle, attentive, and infinitely engaging; his person is all elegance, and his countenance the most animated and expressive I have ever seen” (31). Susan Staves rightly argues that it is Lord Orville’s *delicacy* that she likes, and which comes through in this scene. Evelina writes later: “Lord Orville is the most delicate of men” (305). Staves defines delicacy as “opposed to cruelty, impertinence and boldness; it is also superior to artificial decorum. False delicacy invokes lesser conventions to ignore the real needs of others”; more broadly, delicacy is an “awareness of the sensibilities and needs of others” (Staves 372). In the beginning, what Evelina despised at the ball was that people failed to treat others as human beings with dignity, but what Lord Orville does is treat her with that respect. No one tells her how to judge the character of others; she does this all on her own. This act might have broken a social rule that she was unaware of, yet it was the morally correct decision—custom lost this time—a simple but possibly revolutionary act.

Tilting away from Lord Orville to his counterpart, the rake Sir Clement Willoughby, we find Evelina in need of standing up for herself again. After a night at the opera and a dance, Evelina tries to leave without her family, her cousins the Branghtons and her grandmother Madame Duval, but this plan does not work out the way she intends. Her “intention,” she writes, “was to join Mrs. Mirvan and accompany her home” (96); she had told Madame Duval this plan,

but before she could hear the answer, Sir Clement whisks her out of the gallery. As they descend the stairs, she notices that Sir Clement is “in high spirits and good-humour” and she thought everything was going great until she asks where Mrs. Mirvan was; he informs her that Mrs. Mirvan has left but he would *gladly* escort her home (96). Evelina’s plan turns out worse when Lord Orville sees her and Sir Clement together leaving: “I was inexpressibly distressed” (97). Lord Orville offers his coach to Evelina, seeing her frightened by the current situation, but Sir Clement will have none of it, interrupting him before the offer can be completed. Evelina tries again to get out of this situation with Sir Clement, as he attempts to grab her hand: “but I drew it back, saying ‘I can’t—I can’t indeed! Pray go by yourself—and as to me, let me have a chair’” (97). Evelina repeatedly voices her opposition to Sir Clement and physically tries to leave, but Sir Clement exploits his physical strength and the social codes of chivalrous conduct. In these instances, he continually manipulates his actions to make them fit into the socially prescribed narratives. He escorts her at the beginning of this scene because women cannot be left alone, and later, he must take her home because it is unsafe for women to travel home unaccompanied. Evelina’s reputation and innocence are at stake if she fights back too strongly, and thus, she finds herself trapped by Sir Clement’s tactics. As Mary Crone-Romanovski argues: “The scene aligns the carriage with the central paradox of conduct literature that feminine ideals like modesty, innocence, and sensibility make women vulnerable to manipulation by predatory men” (Crone-Romanovski 167). This kidnapping uses social codes as metaphorical ropes to force Evelina to get into the chariot. Evelina does object and does fight and continues to resist the actions of Sir Clement

Evelina becomes more forceful in her actions and expression against Sir Clement and his lewd behavior in the chariot. At the beginning of the ride, Evelina is silent as Sir Clement

continually harasses her about why she does not trust him and makes many other speeches. Silence in this novel is like an incubator for abusive behavior; as she stays silent, Sir Clement becomes more aggressive and impertinent. He begins physically grab her, and though she resists, it does not stop him from “(again seizing [her] hand)” (99). She then begins to become more assertive with her words: “‘Indeed,’ cried I, ‘If you did not talk in one language, and think in another, you would never suppose that I could give credit to praise so very much above my desert’” (99). She says she made this speech “very gravely,” fighting back with her own words and brutal honesty, seeing past his treacherous and designing behavior. After completing this speech and breaking her silence, she realizes that she has been stuck in this chariot for too long, and she ought to be home by now. She asks him to tell the driver that he has gone the wrong direction, but Sir Clement says: “‘And can you think me so much my own enemy—if my good genius has inspired the man with a desire of prolonging my happiness, can you expect that I should counter-act its indulgence’” (99). In this exact moment, Evelina realizes Sir Clement has ordered the man to go the wrong direction and that she is now trapped in this chariot: “the very instant it occurred to me, I let down the glass, and made a sudden effort to open the chariot-door myself, with a view of jumping into the street” (100). Evelina is willing to risk her death and physical harm to avoid being in Sir Clement’s clutches any longer. Crone-Romanovski correctly reads: “Evelina’s willingness to endanger her body to escape Sir Clement’s attention causes him to change his tactics” (Crone-Romanovski 169). But not right away—he first takes her hand and “passionately” kisses it, which is when Evelina uses her voice to make him (and the carriage) stop: “I broke forcibly from him, and, putting my head out of the window, called aloud to the man to stop” (100). The silence allowed Sir Clement to take advantage of the secrecy inside the

chariot, but once Evelina uses her voice to break out of it, he yields and is unable to follow through on his opportunistic plan.

The lesson from this frightening and cruel entrapment is that silence allows for abuse and power among evil men like Sir Clement to grow. Evelina saves herself by taking physical action, freely expressing herself, and wresting back the power in these social interactions. As Margaret Doody writes, every social interaction in Burney's novels is "the aggressive search for power," and adds that during conversation amongst people: "The totality of social power in the room is neither added nor diminished, but only transferred from one person to another" (Doody 57, 59). However, through freedom of expression and actively using her voice as a reclamation of power, Evelina stands up for herself, breaking this code of silence around the abuse at hand and freeing herself from it. And though in the end, she gives back some power in forgiving Sir Clement and keeping this a secret, possibly entrapping herself again psychologically, she breaks free from his chariot, which was the goal. She defeated the rake and returned home safely by standing up for herself and using her voice, which was always potent.

One of the strongest examples of Evelina's autonomy, benevolence, and delicacy is when she saves the life of Mr. Macartney, a stranger to her at the time. It most clearly reveals Evelina's ability to bridge and affirm another's humanity. As Staves correctly asserts about this scene:

The Macartney episodes have generally been regarded as gratuitous: they do, however, give Evelina a chance to show that her delicacy is superior to mere convention, and, since Macartney is impoverished and friendless, that she is not quite such an egregious snob as some critics would have us believe. (Staves 372)

As she sees Macartney stumble up the stairs, revealing the pistol, one can imagine the horror and fear that Evelina undergoes in this scene: “All that I heard of his misery occurring to my memory, made me conclude, that he was, at that very moment, meditating suicide...I sat motionless;—I lost all power of action, — and grew almost stiff with horror” (183). She is suspended between action and inaction: “I then trembled so violently, that my chair actually shook under me;— till, recollecting that it was yet possible to prevent the fatal deed, all my faculties seemed to return, with the hope of saving him” (183). She overcomes her paralyzing fear and compels herself into action to save this man—not for honor or glory but because it is what human beings ought to do for one another. As Staves puts it: “Evelina would be guilty of false delicacy were she to shrink from entering Mr. Macartney’s room as he is about to shoot himself” (Staves 372). This scene reveals Evelina’s true self—one of delicacy and moral strength.

One of the more interesting aspects of this scene is that once she is in the room, Evelina figures out what to do independently with no experience, just a sense of benevolence and care for another human. It is an almost impossible situation, but she handles it gracefully with the gentleness that any one of us would have wished for if it were us. Evelina sets the scene modestly as if she were not the heroine of the scene: “In a moment, strength and courage seemed lent me as by inspiration: I started, and rushing precipitately into the room, just caught his arm, and then overcome by my own fears, I fell down at his side, breathless and senseless” (183). She could have written it using words like “boldly” or “strongly” but Evelina never centers the story entirely on herself. By not writing it with “masculine” descriptors she allows for Macartney to maintain his own subjecthood, never forgetting that an actual human life is at stake.

After Evelina stops the initial attempt, she must now make it out of the room with the pistols and calm Mr. Macartney, no easy feat. She describes: “I looked fearfully at the pistols, and impelled by an emotion I could not repress, I hastily stepped back, with an intention of carrying them away” (184). Unfortunately, Macartney grabs both the pistols at the same time, but Evelina, with all her strength, grabs “hold of both his arm and exclaimed, ‘O sir! Have mercy on yourself,’” making the pistols fall to the ground. This, again, reveals a moment where expression is key to effecting change in the world. Evelina concludes this scene by using the strongest verb she will allow for herself: “I then *seized* the pistols,” and she leaves the room (184, italics added). She collapses into a chair, but he follows her, again trying to take the guns back; what stops him is her reason for her refusal: “To give you time to *think*—to save you from eternal misery, —and, I hope, to reserve you for mercy and forgiveness” (185). This is a moment where Evelina both expresses and acts outwardly to stop a terrible event from happening. She treats him not as a stranger but as someone who can be saved and healed—as a human being. She extends to him that common humanity and dignity that signifies that we are worthy of “mercy” even if we do not feel it or believe it. In a world where sometimes it feels cruelty and physical violence is pervasive, Evelina tries to combat it with kindness and her moral vision.

This scene with Mr. Macartney and Evelina, I believe, echoes significant themes and a crucial part of Rousseau’s *Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of Inequality among Men*. In the *Discourse*, Rousseau outlines how human beings went from “a state of nature” to a state of inequality, finally descending into a political society. But he is truly outlining a universal understanding of human nature. The two concepts that overlap with Burney’s novels are

Rousseau's concepts of natural pity and *amour propre* or self-love (vanity).² Rousseau introduces natural pity as "a disposition suited to beings as weak and as subject to so many ills as we are; a virtue all the more universal and useful to man as it precedes the exercise of all reflection in him" (Rousseau 152). Pity is the force that drives us to care for other human beings and animals when we witness suffering and pain. This feeling is what compels us to all positive human relations: "Even Benevolence and friendship, properly understood, are the products of a steady pity focused on a particular object" (Rousseau 153). This force guides us to come together to care for each other and extend the care that Evelina does to a stranger.

The force of this pity, however, has diminished over time, Rousseau writes, because of the morals of contemporary society, philosophy and reason:

It is reason that engenders *amour propre*, and reflection that reinforces it; reason that turns man back upon himself; reason that separates him from everything that troubles and afflicts him: It is philosophy that isolates him; by means of philosophy he secretly says, at the sight of a suffering man, perish if you wish, I am safe...One of his kind can with impunity be murdered beneath his window; he only has to put his hand over his ears and to argue with himself a little in order to prevent Nature, which rebels within him, from letting him identify with the man being assassinated. (Rousseau 153)

This scene with the philosopher is the inverted mirror of the one with Evelina and Mr.

Macartney. They both have a choice to make whether to help or not, and for some reason Evelina

² While Blaise Pascal's understanding of *amour propre* more closely aligns with what I believe Burney's understanding of it is, Rousseau's works just fine, but is different in so far as he makes a distinction between self-preservation and self-love. The former is normal, something a priori, we have a right to defend ourselves; the latter is the progeny of society resembling vanity.

does and this “philosopher” does not. Is the difference really because one has studied philosophy and Evelina has not? No! The failure is that philosophy is worthless unless it is used with benevolence and kindness that faces outwards towards others instead of inwards. The contemplative life does not lead towards a life filled with shadows and disconnections, but one filled with understanding of others and their needs. Pity and care for others requires openness and intentional action since the world has progressed so far away from these natural sentiments.

The last example of Evelina’s self-fashioning comes in volume III, when she must discern the true nature of Lord Orville’s character. The first test is when Sir Clement purloins Evelina’s letter to Lord Orville and writes back to Evelina, stealing Lord Orville’s signature. This leads Evelina to critically doubt her own judgment about whether Lord Orville is delicate and virtuous or a rake like Sir Clement. She has witnessed his benevolence and care, but now his pen has changed that: “what a world is this we live in! how corrupt, how degenerate! well might I be contented to see no more of it! If I find that the *eyes* of Lord Orville agree with his *pen*, —I shall then think, that of all mankind, the only virtuous individual resides at Berry Hill!” (278). And yet, abruptly, the first line of the following letter declares: “Oh Sir, Lord Orville is still himself! Still, what from the moment I beheld, I believed him to be, all that is amiable in man!” (278). How does this happen? Before Evelina were two images of Lord Orville, the one of appearances, and the self-inscribed in the letters, and from these two, she must discern which one is the true Lord Orville. After looking upon Lord Orville’s face, and reflecting, this feeling of anger washes away:

And indeed my dear Sir,—I know not how it was,—but, from that moment, my coldness and reserve insensibly wore away! You must not be angry;—it was my intention, nay, my

endeavor, to support them with firmness; but when I formed the plan I thought only of the letter,—not of Lord Orville;—and how is it possible for resentment to subsist without provocation? (282)

Sarah Eron argues that this scene is nothing more than forgetfulness: “In the end, the letter is ‘forgotten,’ ironically not by Orville but by Evelina who quickly and happily elides Orville’s past affront. Such forgetting poses a risk to her virtue” (Eron 178). Eron continues that this is an automatic response from Evelina; her “intention” or thoughtfulness” gives way at the sight of him: “Thoughts are not retained but transplanted here as action is founded upon the motions and mechanisms of one’s present environment” (Eron 179). In other words, Eron explains that Evelina is not thinking for herself but is allowing her impressions of the outside world to dictate her actions. But Eron is wrong on both points. First, Evelina’s virtue is only put in danger *if* her judgment of Lord Orville is inaccurate, which it is not. Second, Evelina has witnessed Lord Orville’s actions for two volumes, and the only outlier was the letter. He has been consistent in his moral virtue and kindness towards Evelina. Forgetfulness would be if she did not remember all those other times, and only looked to the letter, but she does not, she remembers him.

After this scene, however, Mr. Villars commands Evelina to stay away from Lord Orville. Mr. Villars writes to her: “You must quit him!—his sight is baneful to your repose, his society is death to your future tranquility! Believe me, my beloved child, my heart aches for your suffering, while it dictates necessity” (309). Evelina is now caught between her desire and her vision of Lord Orville and her duty to follow her guardian’s advice. At first, she immediately agrees with him writing to Mr. Villars: “Yes, Sir, I *will* quit him;—would to Heaven I could at

this moment! Without seeing him again, without trusting to my now conscious emotion” (322). She follows his advice the best she can, but she feels that it is unwarranted to act coldly to him and it also upsets her that Lord Orville begins to shun her: “and I was hurt—oh how inexpressibly hurt!—that Lord Orville not only forebore, as hitherto, *seeking*, he even *neglected* all occasions of talking with me!” (341). Albeit diplomatically, she disagrees with Mr. Villars in by realizing that her actions towards him are untoward and unwarranted, beginning a movement towards making her own judgment:

I begin to think my dear sir, that the sudden alteration in my behaviour was ill-judged and improper; for, as I had received no offence, as the cause of the change was upon *my* account, not *his*, I should not have assumed, so abruptly, a reserve for which I dared assign no reason,—nor have shunned his presence so obviously, without considering the strange appearance of such a conduct. (341)

This is a strong example of Evelina acting and judging for herself. Eron correctly points out: “this assertion arises out of a process of mental reasoning that attempts to organize memory, impression, and event in and through time” (Eron 186). Beginning from this thought, Evelina makes up her mind that Lord Orville is virtuous, and only later is it revealed that the letter was from Sir Clement. This is the culmination of Evelina’s progress to become independent and confident in her own self-expression. She disagrees with her guardian’s vision and asserts her own as the correct one. Her judgment of Lord Orville was correct from the beginning, but Evelina needed to be confident in herself and her interpretation of the world. In the end, she marries Lord Orville because she has acted for herself.

Evelina learns to break free from subscribing to the moral authority of others and from being dependent on what they think is right or wrong. She becomes the judge of her morals and confident in her decisions. She has become, as Doody writes, “a person capable of moral decision” (Doody 64). By the end of the novel, she is the source of her own morality and judgment, an independent being. Therefore, when she marries Lord Orville, we should not believe she has just substituted his moral authority for Villars’s; instead, as Eron correctly claims: “Marriage is possible because Evelina has achieved selfhood” (Eron 190). She is only able to marry because she will not lose herself. It is not quite, as Mr. Villars wrote to her at the beginning of her entrance into the world, that Evelina must “learn not only to *judge* but to *act* for [her]self,” because she was already capable of thinking for herself rather, she needed to express and act—in other words, to actualize herself (166).

Chapter Two: The Wager of Individualism and Friendship in Burney's *Cecilia* (1782)

In her second novel, *Cecilia* (1782), Frances Burney departs from the epistolary form and creates a much darker and intense world using her narrative voice. In this chapter, I center the relationship of independence and friendship in *Cecilia* and what this relationship reveals about the possibility of selfhood and autonomy. One of Burney's critiques implicit in all her novels, which she makes explicit in *Cecilia*, is that most of her characters are self-interested egoists who fail to have anything resembling human intimacy. These diversions of fashion and fetishizing of the dead lead many characters to become unthinking and almost unliving individuals. The societies of the bourgeoisie and aristocracy tend to limit the exercise of free will and independence, and therefore lead to the death of friendship and the human spirit. Without human intimacy and friendship, the self, independence, and autonomy are meaningless concepts. Friendship requires honesty and good intentions, and without that, there is no real human intimacy on a soul-to-soul level. The autonomous, independent human being requires friendship as a condition of existence. One of the reasons for *Cecilia*'s eventual madness at the end of the novel is the impossibility of true friendship.

Cecilia, herself, is a twice orphaned heiress, first by her parents and then her uncle. Her uncle's estate is much larger than her parents' and has only one restriction: "that of annexing her name, if she married, to the disposal of her hand and her riches" (5-6). Yet this little restriction will render happiness in marriage almost impossible for Cecilia. Cecilia herself is smart, benevolent, and dutiful. Though much suffering will be inflicted on Cecilia, she will attempt to the best of her ability to maintain her autonomy and live the life she envisions for herself. Burney makes it clear that whether a woman begins with a name or without one, the marriage market and

society will always present a great danger to a woman's autonomy and virtue. The society of this world will render Cecilia powerless due to prejudice, custom, and avarice. *Cecilia* is a novel about the unraveling of autonomy and reason due to the needless pressures society places upon women.

The other "restriction," though it is not called that, is whom Cecilia is allowed to live with and who oversees her as guardians. Her three appointed guardians (so called) are each men who have been ruined either morally by money or by pride in the family bloodlines. Mr. Harrel, the first guardian Cecilia lives with, is married to one of Cecilia's childhood friends. As it turns out, both he and his wife have had their capacity for human intimacy emptied out by the desire to live fashionable and social lives. This leads to Mr. Harrel's awful gambling habit, debts, extortion of Cecilia and attempting to sell her off, and concluding with Mr. Harrel's suicide at the altar of fashionable society. Mr. Briggs, another guardian, is obsessed with money, but instead of being a spender like Mr. Harrel, he is the most frugal person alive. He lives in absolute squalor, pays his servant as minimally as possible, and is extremely rude to Cecilia. The last guardian is Mr. Delvile, the father of the novel's love interest, Mortimer Delvile. He is a man of pride and prejudice and will not even for a second deign to care for Cecilia because her name Beverley has no importance to him. He is rather poor but a member of the aristocracy, making him feel superior though he lives in a dilapidated castle.

These three guardians are fundamentally unable to care for Cecilia because they have had their ability for sympathy or fellow feeling drained by their worship of false gods. These customs of the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy empty any capacity for human connection and create self-interested people that are willing to harm others and even kill to get ahead. Life becomes a game where human beings are the pawns. Other characters offer Cecilia advice and pretend to act in

good faith but are just as ruined as her “guardians.” Mr. Monkton, a man from Cecilia’s hometown, someone Cecilia believed was her friend and offered her advice, was secretly maneuvering to marry her for her money and betrays her numerous times. Mrs. Delvile, the wife of Mr. Delvile, is someone else whom Cecilia trusts in and believes is a friend, but is also acting in her own self-interest and does not really want the best for Cecilia. The world constructed by Burney is incredibly dark because it is impossible to know who is acting in good faith and who is just deceiving Cecilia. How can one love in this society? What does one earn by acting in good faith and authentically? Death, madness, and poverty are Burney’s answers (and a weak husband).

The second chapter of *Cecilia*, “An Argument,” offers a debate on the nature of independence and authority—whether one should “Pas de lieu Rhone que nous” or yield to tradition and custom. On one side of the debate is Mr. Monckton, an older man who married an older woman, Lady Margaret, for money when he was young, hoping she would die and he would inherit her wealth. He will argue on the side of English tradition and the aristocracy, because as Megan Woodworth writes:

Monckton’s aristocratic attitudes belie his tenuous claim to ruling class status. As a fourth son, he should have been more or less Belfield’s equal—required to make his own fortune—yet Monckton has achieved power and position by essentially robbing Lady Margaret of her land and fortune. For him, challenging the ancien régime status quo would jeopardize his own right to authority; therefore, Monckton allies himself with the elders in a generational conflict. (358)

On the other side of the debate is Mr. Belfield, who will argue that human beings need to be independent and revolutionary—to go against the status quo and act for themselves. Mr. Belfield was born into a middle-class family but was wealthy enough to be educated as an elite. However, while his father thought this was the best preparation for his son to take over his store, it only caused the younger Mr. Belfield to feel dissatisfied with his station in life. The narrator says of Belfield: “He had been intended by his father for trade, but his spirit, soaring above the occupation for which he was designed, from repining led him to resist, and from resisting, to rebel” (12). He tried the army and the priesthood, but neither of these suited his “inclination.” Due to his social position in English society, he is unable in some ways to live the life he chooses to live (like Cecilia). He desires to create his own path instead of having his place determined by his father and his forefathers. In doing, so he imagines a new society that is horizontal instead of vertical.

In placing this argument at the beginning of the novel, Burney centers the themes of independence, morality, and self-reliance that will unfold throughout the story. Should one be the writer of their own story or play the role given to them by society? The argument begins when Cecilia expresses concern that her old friends in Bury will forget about her, to which Mr. Monckton suggests that

to neglect old friends, and to court new acquaintances, though perhaps not yet avowedly delivered as a precept from parents to children, is nevertheless so universally recommended by example, that those who act differently, incur general censure for affecting singularity. (14)

Monckton's response is a bit ironic because he knows Cecilia would never ignore old friends to “court new acquaintances.” Cecilia’s response that she would do no such thing strikes Mr. Belfield, believing he has found a kindred soul who acts according to their own principles. He says to Cecilia: “you intend, then, madam...in defiance of these maxims of the world, to be guided by the light of your own understanding” (14). Monckton, trying to control Cecilia, inserts himself before she can respond, and gives a somewhat formulaic response: “but when he mixes with the world, when he thinks less and acts more, he soon finds the necessity of accommodating himself to such customs as are already received, and of pursuing quietly the track that is already marked out” (14). Belfield answers misquoting Jonathan Swift’s poem *Cadenus and Vanessa*:

For common rules were ne'er design'd

Directors of a noble mind. (14)

Monckton responds that not everyone is a genius and acting for oneself is not worth the risk: “experience shews that the opposition of an individual to a community is always dangerous in the operation, and seldom successful in the event” (15). Belfield counters, arguing that custom transforms human beings into machines: “The pitiful prevalence of general conformity extirpates genius, and murder originality; man is brought up, not as if he were ‘the noblest work of god’ but as a mere ductile machine for human formation” (15). These two final points are the real thrust of both their arguments: is originality and independence worth the risk of censure and possible upheaval to the structures of society? Belfield, Cecilia, and Burney believe it is a wager worth making, even if one must play the part of the greater fool.

Though I have been centering on discussions of self-reliance and independence, I want to turn to another aspect of *Cecilia* that is equally as important: the heroine's desire for human intimacy and friendship. Though these two themes might seem separate, Burney interweaves them in the novel as if instead of competing drives, they are the same. Kristina Straub writes that "the need for human intimacy" is "the locus, for Burney, of female empowerment" (Straub 125). Straub is correct in her assessment, but it deserves some spelling out given that Doody is also accurate when she writes of Cecilia: "This heroine's entrance into the world is the confrontation of the problem of when and how she should act for herself" (Doody 113). In most cases, true human intimacy requires trust, causing vulnerability, and letting go of some form of control. In contrast, self-reliance requires taking control and power. How can this work logically? Can Cecilia do both? But if we let go of this masculine logic of non-contradiction, we can see that Burney hypothesizes a new model of power that is oriented towards attaining happiness. Power is drawn from friendship to enable growth towards individuality and self-reliance.

One of the main reasons this vision for female empowerment fails as the way towards happiness is the structure of society (that women must be married) and Cecilia's suitors. In Straub's essay, she argues two competing narratives follow Cecilia's course through the novel: the "search-for-a-course-in-life plot" and the romance plot. This follows from what Doody writes: "Cecilia is setting out on her own search for happiness, that eighteenth-century quest. She is searching for friendship and for independence; she does not know (as the reader does) that she is searching for love, and in Cecilia's case, love will prove to be a bar to other hopes and plans" (Doody 111). As Straub continually stresses, the love narrative will always get in the way of Cecilia's vision for friendship and independence: "The hopes and vulnerabilities of romantic love supplant friendship and employments at the center of Cecilia's concerns in life; the love plot

gradually decenters the course-in-life plot of the novel” (Straub 131). The title of Straub’s chapter on *Cecilia* is “Love and Work,” but the title is unclear which plotline correlates to love or to work. Still, I would venture that Cecilia’s passions — friendship, reading, and philanthropy — are her love, and her work is dealing with the men who surround her.

The course-in-life plot arises when Cecilia realizes the social life the Harrels lead is inhuman, unable to interact on a deep and genuine human level, and that Priscilla Harrel is now unable to be her friend. Every day becomes the banal repetition of “gossiping, shopping, and dressing, and the evenings were regularly appropriated to public places, or large parties of company” (52). Her new friends are the “human machines” that Belfield described:

She saw nobody she wished to see, as she had met with nobody for whom she should care; for though sometimes those with whom she mixed appeared to be amiable, she knew that their manners, like their person, were in their best array, and therefore she had too much understanding to judge decisively of their characters. But what chiefly damped her hopes of forming a friendship with any of the new acquaintance to whom she was introduced, was the observation she herself made how ill the coldness of their hearts accorded with the warmth of their professions. (53)

How could anyone befriend these shallow people? Cecilia, with her warm virtuous heart and authentic soul, is disturbed by these people. It is not that she is a snob—Cecilia badly desires to befriend these people, but there is something immoral about the way these people interact and socialize that lacks any human quality. As Straub comments: “The fashionable life that Cecilia encounters in her entrance into the world is one that drains human personal and social identity of

any emotional content beyond its own trivial enthusiasms and the anxiety of fending off ruin and exhaustion” (Straub 121). The social life of the bourgeoisie in the society has become entirely void of any real human interaction, just empty gestures surrounded by excess.

These sorts of people even have names for the types of people they act as—as if every day is a masquerade. Later in a chapter entitled “A Man of the Ton,” Cecilia learns the extent of the void of individualism in the society of London she has somehow become entwined in. Cecilia is at another social function where Mr. Gosport, an older man, who like Camilla (and Frances Burney herself) likes to watch others at social events points out, “A man of the *Ton*,” someone who acts in the style or manners of the time. Mr. Gosport informs Cecilia that he is “an indifferent chronologer of the modes”; this means that he is not passionately involved the social world, which helps him be such a great ‘chronologer’ (279). These “modes” are the various forms of the machines or masks that people take on, so they do not have to act like themselves. Gosport points to the “sects” of the Insensibilists, the Volubles, the Supercilious, and the Jargons at this party. The word sect has undertones of religious groups, making these forms or manners equivalent to being a Dominican or a Franciscan. These are the true automatons of Burney’s novels, and this is what Cecilia is up against when she tries to live a rich and fulfilling life. They live their lives according to a script upon the stage of life, prancing and dancing without meaning until they die.

Priscilla Harrel is a particular example of how this society, with its enormous gravitational pull, can transform human beings and empty them of their ability for real human interaction. When Cecilia first enters their home, she is excited to renew her close friendship as adults. She discovers quickly that Mrs. Harrel is cold to her and mistakenly interprets the situation:

For she was very soon compelled to give up all expectation of renewing the felicity of her earlier years, by being restored to the friendship of Mrs. Harrel, in whom she had mistaken the kindness of childish intimacy for the sincerity of chosen affection. (54)

It is not that Mrs. Harrel does not wish to be her friend; Priscilla is unable to show affection to anyone at all. Cecilia reads her this way, I believe, because she still desires to see her as capable of friendship and good. It comes from a place of love and believing the best in your friends. But, she knows the truth, Priscilla has fallen under the spell of the fashionable life, and of her evil and lying husband, Mr. Harrel, as Cecilia observed earlier:

Long accustomed to see Mrs. Harrel in the same retirement in which she had hitherto lived herself, when books were their first amusement, and the society of each other was their chief happiness, the change she now perceived in her mind and manners equally concerned and surprised her. She found her insensible to friendship, indifferent to her husband, and negligent of all social felicity. Dress, company, parties of pleasure, and public places, seemed not merely to occupy all her time; but to gratify all her wishes...yet she had the good sense to determine against upbraiding her, well aware that reproach any power over indifference, it is only that of changing it into aversion. (32-33)

Cecilia, with her “warmest affection and most generous virtue,” continues to love her friend even though she has been hollowed out and changed by the life in this society. After Mr. Harrel’s suicide, Cecilia continues to care for her even though Priscilla had not acted that way towards

her. But it is their very lack of intimacy as friends and her own lack of interest in artificial activities that spur her scheme of happiness. As Straub excellently puts it: “Emotional intimacy suffers and dies in the fashionable waste-land of Burney’s second novel,” and everyone will become its victim, but Cecilia tries to fight back (Straub 115).

Cecilia, therefore, envisions a beautiful life that is of her own making. The narrator informs the reader:

A scheme for happiness at once rational and refined soon presented itself to her imagination. She purposed, for the basis of her plan, to become the mistress of her own time, and with this view, to drop all idle and uninteresting acquaintance, who while they contribute neither to use nor pleasure, make so large a part of the community, that they may properly be called the underminers of existence: she could then shew some taste and discernment in her choice of friends...and therefore she might have all the leisure she could desire for the pursuit of her favorite studies, music, and reading. (55)

Like the men of this world, Cecilia wants to be independent, to choose what she does, to choose her own friends. The three activities she wishes to pursue are friendship, reading, and music—all three of which, if done correctly, transcend the body and are matters of the soul. They require intimacy that is physical in appearance but transports the mind somewhere else. The parties she witnesses are purely material extravagance and are trivial in importance.

Alongside this plan, she decides she wants to begin to give back to the world since so much has been given to her in terms of wealth. The narrator describes Cecilia as having

A strong sense of DUTY, a fervent desire to ACT RIGHT, were the ruling characteristics of her mind: her affluence she therefore considered as a debt contracted with the poor, and her independence, as a tie upon her liberality to pay it with interest. (55)

Cecilia has an uncommon sense of the pain and vulnerability that people experience in their daily lives. She is drawn to philanthropy because of the ways her income can make a difference and perform good in the world. In a way, it also establishes a connection with another human being showing care and affection. In the end, what Cecilia wishes to give to the world is care and connection to make it better and more fulfilling in its humanness. She attempts to put into the world what she most wants in return. I believe this is the actual scheme for happiness—a scheme for connection and to be a part of the growing good in the world. This is one form of acting for oneself that Burney puts forward that combines both individualism and friendship. Though her sense of “DUTY and a fervent desire to ACT RIGHT” will be exploited by men and women of this society, Cecilia will still strive to do the best she can, whether it is Albany exploiting her philanthropy, Mr. Harrel threatening suicide unless she gives him money, Mr. Monckton pretending to act with her best intentions in mind, or even Mrs. Delvile pretending to be her friend, Cecilia will constantly act in good-faith to them.

In her defining work on the masquerade and carnivalesque, Terry Castle writes that the masquerade scene is “Cecilia’s own exemplary confrontation with the world of beautiful waste” (Castle 261). Cecilia enters the party as “almost the only female in common dress” (unmasked) surrounded by people dressed in conventional outfits and, at first, is embarrassed. However, Cecilia comes to love to indulge her curiosity in watching others and seeing “the variety of dresses, the medley of characters, the quick succession of figures, and the ludicrous mixture of

groups” (106). Castle argues that Burney presents the masquerade with “control”: the scene itself is controlled freedom and scripted badness. As with the modes that Mr. Gosport listed, there are also typical ways to dress for the masquerade though it is supposed to be a space of freedom and no restrictions:

Dominos of no character, and fancy-dresses of no meaning, made, as is usual at such meetings, the general herd of the company: for the rest, the men were Spaniards, chimney sweepers, Turks, watchmen, conjurers and old women; and the ladies, shepherdesses, orange girls, Circassians, gipseys, haymakers, and sultanas. (106-107)

Castle comments that though the masquerade is supposed to be a place where people are supposed to be bad, “being bad, at this point, has its requisite forms” (Castle 262). Even in a space where liberality is granted, people still fail to act with any originality or freedom—almost everyone fails to be something original or different.

At this party is the first time we meet the young Mortimer Delvile, which marks the beginning of the romance plotline of the novel. Mortimer Delvile, the son of Cecilia’s guardian Mr. Delvile, is also a victim of the structures of society. At the masquerade, he is dressed as a white domino, the ones who possess “no character at all.” This reflects reality: Mortimer himself lacks an identity, and though he is of aristocratic birth, he cannot act for himself. While I am not particularly sympathetic to Mortimer and his inability to stand up to his parents, I recognize the pressure and bind between love and parental stress. Doody defends him: “But Mortimer Delvile has been taught that his name has wondrous and magical properties...He is, as he has been taught, his name...To betray the patriarchal line—and to such an extent—would be self-

betrayal” (Doody 135). Giving up his name would also be a form of social suicide, Doody seems to be saying, but that is simply not true. The name, just like the name Beverley, has no meaning or magical powers, it is just a contrived as any other one. If he lost the name Delvile, he and Cecilia could repair the Delvile castle and live in both places happily with her inheritance. Instead, Mortimer and his family rob Cecilia of almost everything.

Tilting away from Mortimer, one of the most critical “friendships” that Cecilia forms throughout the novel is with Mrs. Delvile. Mrs. Delvile is kind to Cecilia earlier in the novel, giving her advice and helping her. However, the friendship ends when Cecilia and Mortimer begin to show signs of attraction to each other. When she suspects that Cecilia and Delvile are interested in one another, Mrs. Mortimer is cold to Cecilia. She tries to manipulate her, saying: “Not only his own, but the peace of his whole family will depend upon his election, since he is the last of his race” (499). He needs to carry the name Delvile, not Beverley, for the whole family line depends on him. They simply cannot marry though they love each other—it is untenable according to the logic of the Delvile code, and it is this code that is fundamentally, humanely unreasonable. The most damning part of the conversation comes at the end of the conference when Mrs. Delvile says:

When my solicitude for Mortimer is removed, and he is established to the satisfaction of us all, no care will remain in the heart of his mother, half so fervent, so anxious and so sincere as the disposal of my amiable Cecilia, for whose welfare and happiness my wishes are even maternal. (501)

Mrs. Delvile, herself, is also a victim of societal pressure to continue the name Delvile. She believes so fervently in aristocratic lineage that she is willing to sacrifice anything and everything to maintain it. Though she may love Cecilia, her principles will not allow her to marry her son. Mortimer himself feels this bind too as he cries to Cecilia, “Oh cruel clause! Barbarous and repulsive clause! That forbids my aspiring to the first of women, but by an action that with my own family would degrade me forever!” (512). Everyone in this situation does have a choice, to let the societal pressures win or to do something else, what we, the reader, see as the morally correct choice. But this is an impossible situation, as Mortimer describes: “O were I to paint to you the bitter struggle of a mind all at war with itself, —Duty, spirit, and fortitude, combating love, happiness and inclination” (513). This is the battle of the novel, between the world and nature, and as the pressures build, the only plausible and honest reaction is madness.

After Mortimer’s and Cecilia’s failed secret marriage Mrs. Delvile is particularly cruel to Cecilia and betrays their friendship. Friendship throughout the novel is hard to achieve, and even when it is achieved, friendship for reasons of self-interest, romance, or prejudice is exceptionally fragile. As Straub suggests, friendship is a precious part of Cecilia’s life: “Friendship, in *Cecilia*, seems the only consistent and dependable means of investing the heroine’s daily employment with personal gratification and moral value” (Straub 129). Therefore, friendship to Cecilia is essential and an activity where in good faith, she invests herself. While to people like Mrs. Delvile, friendship is always just a part of the script they are playing. They are friends until it interferes with a desire or is no longer convenient, and then there is no more friendship. In a strict definition of friendship, they were never friends at all.

As they discuss what has happened, Mrs. Delvile quickly moves to forbid Cecilia from seeing him ever again. She says to her: “Consider...the *purpose* of any further meeting; your

union is impossible, you have nobly consented to relinquish all thoughts of it: why then tear your own heart, and torture his, by an intercourse which seems nothing but an ill-judged invitation to fruitless and unavailing sorrow” (649). Cecilia’s mind is caught between reason and passion: “The truth of the expostulation her reason acknowledged, but to assent to its consequence her whole heart refused” (649). This is the moment where reason begins to break Cecilia’s selfhood and alienate her from herself. She swallows her passion, for the sake of duty and acting right—how can this be reasonable? This painful scene shows that the locus of female disempowerment is a betrayal of trust.

After more suffering and pain, Mrs. Delvile finally does allow Mortimer and Cecilia to marry, but only if Cecilia takes his name. By giving up her name and her inheritance, she loses her friendships, philanthropy, independence, and solitude — for a man who would not do the same for her. From this point, the mind of Cecilia continually descends to madness. Immediately after the marriage, Mortimer duels Mr. Monckton and must flee to France because he might have murdered him. Next, Cecilia is dispossessed of her inheritance because the next in line in her uncle’s will has heard she has forfeited the inheritance by taking another name. Thus, she is left homeless unable to go to Delvile castle, and left to fend for herself. But what drives Cecilia over the edge is when Mortimer bursts into the Belfield’s home, seeing her there with Belfield and his mother. He immediately becomes jealous and enraged and storms off while Belfield follows him, causing Cecilia to suspect another duel is about to occur. Cecilia becomes frantic:

She hesitated not a moment in resolving to follow them: she feared the failure of any commission, nor did she know whom to entrust with one: and the danger was too urgent for much deliberation. (890)

In the chase, she will go to a coffeehouse, to Delvile castle, where Mr. Delvile will refuse to admit her; she will then circle all around town until the pressure in her mind builds too high. Cecilia can no longer endure the selfishness and so-called rationality of this world anymore, so she tries something new—madness

Cecilia's madness is an entirely logical reaction to an irrational and insane world that calls itself rational and sane. As a dispute over price starts with the coachman, she wanders out of the coach onto the street while a mob begins to surround her. She attempts to make sense of the world through reason, but she is unable:

This moment, for the unhappy Cecilia, teemed with calamity; she was wholly overpowered; terror for Delvile, horror for herself, hurry, confusion, heat and fatigue, all assailing her at once, while all means of repelling them were denied her, the attack was too strong for her fears, feelings, and faculties, and her reason suddenly, yet totally failing her, she madly called out. 'He will be gone! he will be gone! and I must follow him to Nice' (896).

Cecilia has lost her mind because of the intense pressure society has applied upon her. There is no other response, as Epstein correctly states: "there is no sane response to the circumstances she finds herself in" (Epstein 167). For too long, she has lived by the rules of society and crushed her heart and governed herself by a duty that was not her own. She will begin to speak honestly and openly about her feelings, unsuppressed by social forms, as Cutting-Gray asserts: "Hence Cecilia no longer hears or regards the discourse that socially and politically constructs a persona by

constricting her feelings and desires” (Cutting-Gray 44). Truth in this novel was not created by her but by the patriarchal forms that denied her independence and autonomy. Madness was the only option left for Cecilia.

Cecilia in this state reflects that this new reason emerges from where it was buried. She begins to imagine yelling at Monckton for his betrayal and imagining her own death that “*her last remains should moulder in his hearse!*” (901). When Mortimer finally decides to find her she does not recognize him, asking: “who are you?” (906). Later she begins to become angry with him: “Cecilia now, half, rising, and regarding him with mingled terror and anger, eagerly exclaimed, ‘If you do not mean to mangle and destroy me, begone this instant’” (906). This anger and rage she feels is raw honesty, no longer suppressed. Though she will recover, and Burney does not allow her to die, this scene *is* a death. Cecilia is stripped of everything in this novel: her friends, her inheritance, her independence, her autonomy—all the aspects that made her an heiress, that gave her an identity—that made her Cecilia Beverley. New Cecilia, according to Castle, is a “docile, impoverished female, stripped of power and plenitude” — in other words, a disempowered woman (Castle 283).

Cecilia is still the heroine of her own novel. As we see, Monckton’s society and its formation of truth and power ruins lives. However, Cecilia does her best to find a narrow path to her own form of happiness through friendship, charity, and reading. The people around Cecilia let her down, and though she is never allowed to realize her own scheme of happiness, it can still be a path for others. *Cecilia* is an indictment of the structures and logic of society, but also of individuals and the way we treat one another. By creating such a dark and grim world, Burney also illuminates its opposite, the world that Cecilia envisions — a world predicated on friendship

and respecting other individuals' rights to autonomy and to be themselves. This is the quest of Burney's *Cecilia*.

Chapter Three: Learning to See and Be with the World in Frances Burney's

Camilla (1796)

Camilla (1796), Frances Burney's third novel, is a complex and paradoxical picture of youth. Like the previous two novels, Burney maintains her theme of a young woman's entrance into society but adds new variations to that theme. As we have witnessed in *Evelina* and *Cecilia*, most of the time people fail to act for themselves—they follow their prejudices and the fashion of the times (automated ways of being). The other extreme that Burney illustrates in *Camilla* is transforming the personal into a universal. Burney makes this explicit with Dr. Marchmont and his views of women and his inability to see how his way of thinking is clouded by prejudice. Camilla will display the counterexample; she will judge the world openly and show a different way of animating and enchanting it with her way of being. I use "open" as the descriptor for the way Camilla judges the world because the counterexamples of Dr. Marchmont, Edgar, Indiana, and Mr. Tyrold will demonstrate closed ways of judging the world through prejudice, materiality, and social custom—these ways of being are destructive to the happiness and sanity of others around them (and themselves). In *Camilla* Burney illuminates systematic structures of the world that compel individuals to play games with matters of the heart with severe consequences. She demonstrates, as with *Cecilia*, the only logical end of playing the game well for a woman is madness and death. In this chapter, I show how *Camilla* is the culmination of Burney's progress of probing the contrarities of the human heart, the paradoxical logic of society, the struggle of independence and autonomy for women, and offers forth a new vision of being and seeing in the world. Burney shows how people ought to be and how to see in this world—to trade in the judgmental, prejudice-filled, scripted eyes of society.

Camilla Tyrold, unlike the other two heroines, is blessed with two well-intentioned parents, the Reverend Augustus Tyrold and Georgina Tyrold. She has a brother named Lionel and two sisters, Lavinia, the eldest, and Eugenia, the youngest. They grow up in the beautiful setting of Etherington near their Uncle Hugh, a wealthy baronet and one of the main propellers of the novel with his own social plotting and financial planning. Uncle Hugh also watches over and supports Camilla's two orphaned cousins, Indiana and Clermont Lynmere. Indiana and her brother Clermont are essentially twins, both exceedingly pretty but also vapid and vain. The novel's love interest, the other child who grows up with Camilla, is Edgar Mandlebert. Edgar is an orphan, a ward of Mr. Tyrold, and the owner of the nearby estate of Beech Park. He is, however, mainly under the influence of his tutor Dr. Marchmont, who will unwisely and wrongly direct the conduct and observations of Edgar in his courtship with Camilla. While none of the principal wrongdoers in the novel have truly evil intentions like a Mr. Monckton, the advice they give out of benevolence will still lead to suffering and Camilla's eventual madness.

Before focusing on the wrongdoing in the novel (done mainly by the men), it is essential to center the heroine, Camilla. Like Evelina and Cecilia before her, she is "no faultless monster" but is still attuned to the harmonies of virtue and has a benevolent and giving soul (*Evelina*, 10). Her uncle Hugh initially intended to give his fortune to her solely (he is a generator of plans that will consistently change and fail), but that will change. However, before that, in this lovely passage, from when Camilla is only nine years old, the narrator describes what sort of heiress she would be:

The happy young heiress heard them with little concern: interest and ambition could find no room in a mind, which to dance, sing, and play could enliven to rapture...she

sometimes regaled her fancy with the present she should make amongst her friends; designing a coach for her mamma, that she might oftner go abroad; a horse for her brother Lionel, which she knew to be his most passionate wish; a new bureau, with a lock and key, for her eldest sister Lavinia; innumerable trinkets for her cousin Indiana; dolls without end for her little sister Eugenia; a new library of new books, finely bound and gilt, for her papa. (16)

Though these free indirect thoughts are from Camilla as a child, they represent the type of person Camilla will be when she is older. Not only does she wish to give people things, but the *way* she desires to give makes people love her: what she gives represents the person to whom she gives and reveals her good judgment of character (like Evelina). Lionel will always be immature, impetuous as a horse; Lavinia is dutiful and safe, just like a bureau with a lock and key; Indiana is materialistic and vain, so the trinkets will do just fine. This intentional act of caring for others to make them happy defines a central mode of Camilla's being.

However, this fortune is suddenly taken away from Camilla when Sir Hugh carelessly exposes Eugenia to smallpox at the fair, even though he knows the disease is spreading throughout the town. Sir Hugh was aware that her family did not inoculate her, but he excuses it: “she will sure have it when her time comes, whether she is moped or no; and how did people do before these modes of making themselves sick of their own accord?” (23).³ Later he will injure her on a seesaw, leaving one of her legs shorter than the other, physically deforming her for the rest of her life through his carelessness. Uncle Hugh, full of guilt, decides to give his fortune to Eugenia instead of Camilla to repay for the pain he has inflicted upon her. He begins to avoid

³ I imagine that Sir Hugh's comment is exactly what many people who are “anti-vax” have said concerning the Covid-19.

Camilla, expecting her to become angry and upset that he has decided to name another heiress. But, Camilla, wisely and maturely, is not angry at all: “Camilla, the moment she understood him, passionately clasped her hands, and exclaimed: ‘O’ if that is all! If my uncle indeed loves me as well as before all this; I am sure I can never, never be so wicked, as to envy poor little Eugenia” (32). Edgar witnesses this moment of “generous affection” and love and “thought she was grown a thousand times more beautiful than Indiana” (32). Edgar sees Camilla’s beauty and virtue in her openness and understanding of the meaninglessness of wealth relative to actual human intimacy. This scene reveals Camilla’s true nature—she is open and caring to others because she wants to love them and be loved back. She values people not for what they can provide in terms of materiality but for connection and love.

Another important earlier scene that reveals Camilla’s true character and way of seeing and being in the world is in a chapter entitled “Two ways of looking at the same Thing.” In this chapter, Camilla, Edgar, Indiana, Miss Margland (Indiana’s governess), and Dr. Marchmont arrive at a cottage of a family of a poor prisoner that Camilla had helped secure through the charity of Edgar. After an extended interplay of action for a relatively short journey, they arrive at the cottage. Indiana, who had just begun to imagine herself as being “a mistress of a fine place and a large fortune,” comments first on the cottage, “‘Dear! is this the cottage we have been coming to all this time...Lord! I thought it would have been something quite pretty’” (149, 150). Edgar responds by asking: “‘And what sort of prettiness,’ said Edgar, ‘did you expect from a cottage?’” (150). While the narrator provides no indication of tone, Edgar’s response indicates that he is a little offended by Indiana’s reaction to the cottage. Indiana, unable to see the cottage as something beautiful or worth looking at, will go on to fail to see even the family in their house and to recognize either with decency or humanity:

Indiana, meanwhile, whose confidence in her own situation gave her courage to utter whatever first occurred to her, having made a general survey of the place and people, with an air of disappointment, now amused herself with an inspection more minute, taking up and casting down everything that was portable, without any regard either to deranging its neatness, or endangering its safety. (151)

She exclaims in short phrases as she walks around the cottage, ““Crockery ware! How ugly!”” and about the woman’s gown, ““Well I would not wear such a thing to save my life!”” (151). Indiana reveals herself in this chapter (and earlier) to be vain, self-centered, and unable to empathize with others. As Cynthia Wall correctly asserts: “she cannot (she certainly will not) enter into the mind of the cottager, however much she barges into the cottage” (Wall 211). Not only does she not enter the cottager’s minds, but she fails to see them as people because of the way their things signify their worth to her. In some respects, though she goes through their things and examines the cottage, she fails to exist in the space at all.

Camilla provides the other way of seeing the same “Thing.” Her entrance into the cottage after Indiana illustrates a different way of seeing and being in the cottage:

Camilla, who followed, made an exclamation far different; an exclamation of pleasure, surprise, and vivacity, that restored for an instant, all her native gaiety: for no sooner had she crossed the threshold, than she recognized, in a woman who curtsying low to receive her, and whom Indiana had passed without observing, the wife of the poor prisoner for whom she had interceded with Mandlebert. (150)

Camilla looks around “with rapture,” seeing the husband, and even begins to cry as “she hastily snatched the little babe into her arm” (151). In Burney’s novels, kisses and embraces are rare and make this scene even more revealing of Camilla’s affective nature—to put it simply, Camilla is a lover and an embracer of others. Before the party leaves, Camilla needs to look around the cottage and see the things that Indiana thought were so ugly: “‘How neat is this! How tidy is that!’ were her continual exclamations; ‘How bright you have rubbed your saucepans! How clean everything is all round! How soon you will all get well in this healthy and comfortable little dwelling’” (152). She sees the beauty of the space. Instead of looking with judgmental or skeptical eyes, she looks with respectful and open eyes beyond the material worth that signifies the dignity of the people and their domestic space. As they leave, after Camilla has kissed both the children and given good wishes to the parents, she reaches her hand out to Edgar: “‘Enchanted, he took it, exclaiming; ‘Ah! Who is like you! So lively—yet so feeling!’” (152). Camilla has tremendous power with her affection and tremendous power of generosity to light up other people’s souls with her kindness and goodness.

We also see this affective power later in the novel with Sir Sedley Clarendel, who is at first an apathetic fop; being around Camilla, however, teaches him to care and act differently, chivalrously – he will eventually rescue her and help pay Lionel’s debts. The openness and kindness with which Camilla treats strangers and the people around her shows the way spaces can be uplifted and lighted up. While we see Indiana acting in the opposite way seeing everything with its materiality and self-centeredness—nothing is enchanting about her world. Camilla envisions and can create a world of joy and happiness for others. The tragedy, as we will see, is that the structures and systems of power in this hierarchal, patriarchal society will lead her

to madness and a sort of death-in-life. Burney again shows how the “logic” of this society, if followed all the way through, leads only to madness.

The next day, after the group excursion to the cottage, Dr. Marchmont, advises Edgar, who has fallen in love with Camilla, to watch her skeptically and with a judgmental eye. He provides the impressionable Edgar with unsound and violent logic on the nature of courtship and women. It is only revealed later that Dr. Marchmont’s views on marriage and women are poisoned by his personal experiences of failure in both his marriages. In his first marriage, he discovered his wife suddenly dead and found a notebook of hers filled with another man’s name. He saw from her inscriptions that she had never him: ““that I had never made her happy! That she was merely enduring suffering for me”” (643). The second wife also did not love him back and was led into “temptation,” away from him (644). He concluded from his experiences that all women ““are artful, though feeble; they are shallow, yet subtle”” (642). Thus, he turns his personal experience, his only evidence, into a universal truth that women are not to be trusted and men must be assiduous in examining them. In her excellent piece on *Camilla*, Kristen Pond points out that his wives were “victims of an oppressive social system” (Pond 322). Marchmont’s own pain blinds him to the fact that the larger system failed him as well. While he may have benevolent intentions to protect Edgar with his advice, it will only lead to pain and unhappiness for Camilla and Edgar. His story reveals an inability of introspection too. Maybe he was the problem in the marriages and not the women—if only we could expect such accountability from the men in Burney’s worlds.

Edgar comes to him confident and excited about his decision to commit his heart to Camilla. He says to the doctor about the previous night: ““she complied with my request, and complied with a grace that has rivetted her—I own it—that rivetted her to my soul”” (158).

Marchmont asks Edgar if she knows of “her conquest,” and Edgar responds, ““she does not even guess it,”” which will become important for Dr. Marchmont’s advice to Edgar (158). At this point, Dr. Marchmont, feeling the memory of his pain come back to him, and his toxicity boiling up in his soul, begins his lesson: “Hear me then, my dear and most valued young friend; forbear to declare yourself, make no overtures to her relations, raise no expectations even in her own breast, and let not rumor surmise your passion to the world, till her heart is better known to you” (158). Edgar responds, shocked: ““What do you mean my good Doctor? Do you suspect any prior engagement? any fatal prepossession?”” and Marchmont, says: ““I suspect nothing. I do not know her. I mean not, therefore, the propensities alone, but the worth, also, of her heart; deception is easy, and I must not see you thrown away”” (158). Edgar gives a full accounting then of the “nobleness of her sentiments and conduct when she was only nine years old” and though this seems to make the doctor happy, he still is not satisfied.

Doctor Marchmont makes it seem that his advice is rational and objective, helping to fill Edgar with confidence, but instead, it fills the young lover with doubt and makes him disbelieve his own eyes. Marchmont supplies two points for Edgar to follow:

First, That you will refuse confirmation even to your own intentions, till you have positively ascertained her actual possession of those virtues with which she appears to be endowed: and secondly, That if you find her gifted with them all, you will not solicit her acceptance till you are satisfied of her affection. (159)

Edgar continues to supply an accounting of the virtues of Camilla, but Dr. Marchmont incessantly forces his perspective into Edgar’s mind and eyes. He wants Edgar to become a

stalker, obsessive in watching her: ““Nothing must escape you; you must view her as if you had never seen her before; the interrogatory, *Were she mine?* Must be present at every look, every word, every motion; you must forget her wholly as Camilla Tyrold, you must think of her only as Camilla Mandlebert”” (160). As Pond writes, this advice is “to ignore the authority of universal moral standards and to judge Camilla’s actions according to Edgar’s own personal preference” (Pond 321) It could appear that Marchmont is instructing Edgar to think for himself about Camilla, that this is something positive; but it only instills doubt and negative feelings: “his confidence was gone; his elevation of sentiment was depressed; a general mist of clouded his prospects, and a suspensive discomfort inquieted his mind” (162). Instead of teaching him to trust himself, Mandlebert instructs him how to be “filled now with a distrust of himself and of his powers” (161). It teaches him to doubt appearances, transform Camilla into a suspicious object, and blind himself with false assumptions.

Camilla will also receive instruction on navigating passion from her father after Edgar has begun to observe her skeptically. She is put into a terrible position of having all her actions watched, manipulated, and misjudged. This causes a great divide between Camilla and Edgar; feelings of unrequited love and misapprehension permeate Camilla. Her father meets with her, asking about this, but Camilla will not say: “Speech and truth were always one with Camilla; who, as she could not in this instance declare what were her feelings, remained mute and confounded” (343). Her father, though, knows that her unhappiness is due to Edgar's perceived lack of romantic feeling towards Camilla, which causes him to write a letter to her in a chapter entitled “A sermon.” Edward and Lillian Bloom add in the notes that the letter “is the moralistic essence of the novel, setting forth an ideal of ethical conduct” and is crucial for understanding Camilla and *Camilla*. (Blooms 941). While it is put forth as the “moral essence” (I do not

disagree with the Blooms), the validity of the ideas outlined in this letter are continually questioned and probed by the novel and Burney herself. Julia Epstein points out that Mr. Tyrold's letter is precisely what Evelina wished for when she asked Mr. Villars for a book on "the laws and customs *à-la-mode*" (*Evelina*, 84). However, Epstein writes it will prove unhelpful: "It is the rule book and conduct manual Evelina had lacked; having it, however, Camilla is no better prepared than her predecessor to navigate through the world. She knows now what she has to resist. Evelina remained for a time ignorant of her powerlessness" while Camilla is told "to embrace it" by her father (Epstein 129). As he says later to Camilla, if she wishes to be happy, she must "'remember always [. . .] to make circumstance contribute to happiness, not happiness subservient to circumstance'" (383). He echoes the sentiments of *Cecilia's* Mr. Monckton on living within your place in society that Camilla's childhood dreams of happiness that light up her eyes need to be extinguished if she wishes to be happy given her place as a woman.

The main thrust of Reverend Tyrold's advice to his daughter is that being a morally virtuous woman and maintaining her delicacy means battling with oneself for self-control over her passions. It is not necessarily because it is the most reasonable thing to do, but because it best aligns with mores of society that men are expressive and women are unexpressive. He begins by writing to Camilla that she is in the throes of "the first sorrow of early youth," the pain of heartbreak and unrequited love. He then descends into a digression on the destiny of a woman and the impossibility of a proper education:

Again, if none of these outward and obvious vicissitudes occur, the proper education of a female, either for use or for happiness, is still to seek, still a problem beyond human

solution; since its refinement, or its negligence, can only prove to her a good or an evil, according to the humour of the husband into whose hands she may fall. (357)

The language at the end of “whose hands she may fall” makes clear the problem that Mr. Tyrold sees with the education of women; since women cannot choose their husband, they could marry any type of man who is out there who picks them—they have no autonomy over the matter of marriage. He and his wife educated his girls practically to accommodate the world's broad spectrum of lives possible, in other words, to fit any contingency under the assumption that women do not make their own fate.

He then moves to the heart of his sermon and his instruction to tell Camilla that she must control her heart and the expression of her passions. Mr. Tyrold writes: “We will not here canvass the equity of that freedom by which women as well as men should be allowed to dispose of their own affections” because there is no actual argument for one over the other, he concludes. But current custom dictates that it is the man who expresses his love to the woman. Therefore, since men dispose of affection and not women, he tells Camilla she needs to suppress her feelings: “Struggle then against yourself as you would struggle against an enemy” and “obtain a strict and unremitting control over your passions” (358, 359). The test to judge if she has succeeded in tempering her passion for Edgar, he claims, is if she could affirmatively answer the questions: “Could I calmly hear that this elect of my heart was united to another? Were I to be informed that the indissoluble knot was tied, which annihilates all my future possibilities, would the news occasion me no affliction?” (359). Thus, to maintain her sense of delicacy and virtue, she must “shut up every avenue by which a secret which should die untold can further escape you” (360). It is necessary that she “avoid every species of particularity” and learn to act when

around Edgar “with the same open esteem as in your days of unconsciousness” (360). He will admit a few paragraphs later, however, that his command will be difficult or borderline impossible to obey: “In a state of utter constraint, to appear natural is, however, an effort too difficult to be long sustained” (361). He concludes that this is the best for Camilla’s future; that her future husband will not be jealous of the fact she loved another man (the horror!), and if she is single forever, no one will know “it was not by your choice” (362). He goes as far as to say that not only are her parents expecting her to act this way, but the nation relies on her: “It is the bond that keeps society from disunion” (361). Pragmatic according to social custom, unrealistic according to the truth of experience, misogynistic cold reasoning is his advice for young Camilla concerning how she should handle unrequited love.

Her father’s advice has many problematic elements, and attempting to live accordingly will contribute to Camilla’s madness. However, it does not come from a place of evil; unlike in *Cecilia*, where characters gave self-serving advice (think Mr. Monckton or Mrs. Delvile), in *Camilla*, the advice is benevolent and still leads to pain and suffering. As Margaret Doody writes, the problem does not lie with his personal beliefs but “in contemporary social custom. Mr. Tyrold is sure about what is practicable and prudent for his daughter in the world as it is” (231). He cannot imagine a different way of being though he continually questions the logic of the custom. The most damaging aspect of the advice's reasoning is that he knows (whether consciously or unconsciously) it is an impossible task for Camilla to accomplish—the heart is much stronger than reason. He is also apprehensive about Camilla’s power and autonomy in the game. If she does not play the game correctly, she will lose her power leaving her in an even more dire situation than if she just tries to be happy accordingly. Mr. Tyrold believes playing the game according to the customs of society will yield the most power, no matter the impracticality

of the rules—such as one must appear natural—how does one *appear* natural without being natural? It demonstrates a failure of imagination and a lack of empathy with his daughter's lived experience. He fails to see the world from her perspective, that the social custom (think Dr. Marchmont and Edgar too) is preventing her happiness, not that she does not know how to play the game. Camilla will attempt to follow this patriarchal logic, the laws of delicacy, so far and so well, trying to suppress her true feelings, that the only outcome could be madness.

I have centered the two logics of the father figures, Doctor Marchmont and Mr. Tyrold, to better understand the societal structures that overlay the novel and create the space for Burney's revolutionary social critique. Both father figures also display in their own ways the lessons of the novel. Dr. Marchmont experienced real pain in not being loved back in his marriages and, with good faith, wishes to shield Edgar from that pain, but his whole vision of women is guided by his own prejudice that was created by suffering. It never crosses his mind that women could be any other way—it shows a lack of openness and inability to think and see the world clearly. Mr. Tyrold, in the same respect, is upset that his daughter is in pain and wishes to offer the best advice he can give to her to make it better. But he cannot imagine a world outside the structures of social custom, even though he sees the flawed logic of these rules. They both have their vision obscured, whether from prejudice or custom, which contributes to the pain and suffering of both Edgar and Camilla. It is also important to note that neither sees Camilla as Camilla but as an abstract "woman." Dr. Mandlebert, if he took the effort to know Camilla, would know she is not "artful" or "shallow"; she is affectionate and good-hearted, as was demonstrated in the beginning. Camilla, in the beginning, is "animated" to use Deirdre Lynch's term, but the sermon would transform her into something statuary and still—into a de-actualized Camilla.

Therefore, Camilla will act indifferent to or uninterested in Edgar while Edgar will constantly judge and misperceive Camilla. Doody understands *Camilla* in terms of games and particularly the courtship of Edgar and Camilla. Camilla will be under “Rule A” called “Richardson’s legacy,” and Edgar is governed by “Rule B” called “Darcy’s Act” (Doody 232).⁴ I have extensively closely read both rules, but I have been treating them as deadly serious, not a game. Doody’s argument is important though to understand the way Burney critiques the societal structures that govern courtship: “Burney does treat the courtship of Edgar and Camilla as a serious, absurd, and pernicious game, indicating the lack of fit between social controls and the hidden unutterable feelings” (Doody 233). Doody argues that Burney puts it in terms of a game to illustrate the absurdity between the social controls that feel like a game and the seriousness of the feelings of love. Both characters are forced into situations that hurt themselves for the sake of the game that society has made them play. Doody concludes that Burney demonstrates “what there is to be feared in this unnecessary and violent antagonism between Nature and the World” (Doody 233). In this battle, violence is done not only to the courtship but to the individual and the self. Camilla is instructed to go to war with herself for the sake of the game (and her nation) — how can Camilla be Camilla under these conditions? Burney illuminates that the games society plays when it comes to matters so serious as the heart only leads to suffering and the dissolution of the self.

There are many moments in the novel where Burney illustrates how the guidance from their guardians leads to suffering. One of the best examples is when Edgar and Camilla are at the “Rooms” and have planned to dance the country dances together. It begins with Edgar and

⁴Margaret Doody spends two chapters of her ground-breaking book on *Camilla* illustrating this novel’s breadth and depth of complexity and importance. My entire thesis is very indebted to her scholarship.

Camilla locking eyes, “and the smile with which she met his eye brought him instantly to her side,” and as he walks over to Camilla, he asks her if maybe “she would go down two dances with an old friend,” which Camilla gladly accepts (438). However, Edgar, with his training in watching, begins to judge Camilla as other members of the scene begin to enter: “Edgar, who had felt sensibly mortified to observe, when he retreated, that the eyes and attention of Camilla had been wholly bestowed upon what he considered merely as a new scene, was now coming forward” (441). Edgar becomes very jealous of any man that speaks to Camilla and that Camilla such as when Sir Sedley talks to her with what he perceives as “pleasant alacrity”: “Alas! Thought he, the degradation from the true female character is already begun! already the lure of fashion drawn her from what she owes to delicacy and propriety, to give a willing reception to insolence and foppery” (444). Camilla, though, is highly self-aware that Edgar is watching her and wishes him no harm. When Mrs. Berlinton, one of Camilla’s new friends, declares “she has been taking some lesson in a cotillon,” everyone in her party “wished to try one immediately” (444). Camilla, wishing to dance with Edgar, attempts to refuse but fails: “She pleaded inability of every sort, though to dance without Edgar was her only real objection” (444). At this moment, Major Cerwood, a man who takes great interest in Camilla too, seizes the opportunity to dance with Camilla, arguing that the dances with Edgar were meant for the country dances, not the cotillon (445). Camilla understands this logic but clarifies that there will be country dances, and the Major responds, ““Certainly, if anyone has spirit to begin them”” (445). But at the end of the cotillon, after her dance with Major Cerwood, no one starts the country dances: “When the cotillon was over, she saw nothing of Edgar. She looked around, mortified, disappointed. No one called for a country dance” (445). Camilla, internally very distraught, but from the outside looks

as though she has danced with another man while having already accepted an offer from Edgar. This is a typical scene from *Camilla*; one's intentions are not always readily perceived by others.

This situation leaves both Edgar and Camilla upset. We see clearly how they both follow the logic their guardians gave them and how the instruction leads to an impasse filled with misperception. But what makes this scene more interesting than other scenes of misapprehension and misunderstanding is the way the narrator centers Edgar's pain:

What was this disappointment, compared with the sufferings of Edgar? Something of a contest, and of entreaties, had reached his ears, while he had hovered near the party, or strolled up and down the room. He had gathered the subject was dancing, and he concluded he saw the major most earnest with Camilla. He was sure it was for her hand, and concluded it was for a country dance; but could she forfeit her engagement? were matter so far advanced, as to make her so openly shew him all prevailing, all powerful, not only over all rivals, but, according to the world's established customs upon these occasions over all decorum? (445)

I have continually stressed the pain Edgar inflicts upon Camilla by skeptically watching and judging her far outweighs the pain and suffering she causes him. But, at this moment, Burney focuses on the pain Edgar experiences when he misapprehends that Camilla is in love with Major Cerwood, which is why she does not dance with him. As Pond again correctly points out when the narrator switches to Edgar's perspective, the reader is now able to see that Edgar is in pain too: "When we are given the privilege of omniscience regarding Edgar, he is often just as distressed as Camilla" (Pond 330). And suppose we too quickly judge Edgar without knowing

his full state of being or even attempting to understand? In that case, Pond writes: “we are apt to misjudge Edgar just as Edgar misinterprets Camilla” (Pond 330). Therefore, instead of turning Edgar into a villain, we should remember he is just a human doing the best given his contingent circumstances. Burney believes that even Edgar is worthy of our sympathy and understanding, and while I find it hard too, it is a part of the lesson of *Camilla*. To have a self means to make your own judgments of the world instead of “according to the world’s established customs,” and to Burney, this means being open, warm, and thoughtful.

Camilla will suffer and lose more than Edgar due to custom and prejudice. Through the ever-watchful eye of Edgar and her father’s advice to declare war on herself, Camilla loses her “animation” and becomes what Deidre Lynch calls an “automaton.” In their next meeting after the Rooms, we see both “rules” at play, transforming Camilla into a silent object. The conversation comes after a moment of slippage of passion, where Camilla reveals her care and love for Edgar. Edgar, just arriving, perceives that Uncle Hugh’s beloved dog is about to be attacked by a bulldog. He rushes in and protects the dog from the jaws of the bulldog for just long enough for the dog to be called away. Camilla perceiving that Edgar might be in danger, was “roused at once from her sullen calm to the most agonizing sensibility, everything and everybody, herself most of all, were forgotten in the sight of his danger” (539). With her authentic mode of being without caring for her own danger, she dashes over to Edgar, and “she caught Mandlebert by the arm, and, in broken accents, half pronounced, ‘O Edgar! ... are you hurt?’” (539). Edgar, surprised by her care for him, still believing she loves the Major, asks: “‘Is not my safety or my destruction alike indifferent to Camilla?’” (539). Camilla, realizing that she has let her passions out, feels “[a]bashed, astonished, ashamed” and wishes to run away quietly from Edgar. But as Camilla leaves, Edgar reveals his jealousy of the Major, which now leaves

her feeling “[e]nchanted, affrighted and bewildered” (539). She spends the rest of the night wrestling with herself between this positive feeling towards Edgar and imagining him as Mrs. Arlbery sees him, as “capri[cious], insensible, and hard of heart” (541).

After dinner that night, Camilla and Edgar have a conversation that ends in their engagement (which he will go back on), but, in the build-up to that conversation, Camilla is in real pain and distress about what to do and acts unlike herself. It foreshadows the madness she will experience at the end due to the battle between the world and nature inside her. After dinner, the family receives news from their mother in Lisbon; both other girls rush in, but Camilla, against her nature, stays back: “for the first time, seemed the least affectionate of his daughters” (542). Duty-bound Camilla, no longer under the “compulsion of uninteresting discourse,” allows herself to go reflect alone under a large oak tree. Camilla, away from her pressures, releases her honest feelings: “Here her painful struggle and unwilling forbearance ended; she gave free vent to her tears, and thought herself the most wretched of human beings” (542). She found herself “more than ever devoted to Mandlebert” even though she had been desperately attempting to suppress her feelings for him and follow her father’s sermons. Even though Edgar has been “cold” and “hard-hearted,” her heart still desires him, and reason has no control.

Camilla, filled with “conflicting ruminations” and at war within herself, is approached by Edgar. He notices she is weeping and begins to ask her questions as she tries to hide to her face. As she stays silent, he reveals to her that she has power over him: “his fate [was] at her disposal, from the instant he acknowledged openly her power over his feelings” (544). There is an argument to be made that the whole point of Mr. Tyrold’s sermon was for Camilla to keep and gain power against Edgar, but now that she has it, Camilla never acts like she has won or now

has control over him. Instead, she continues to fight her ongoing interior battle that builds with pressure:

Every opposite sensation, that with violence the most ungovernable could encounter but to combat, now met in her bosom, elevating her to rapture, harrowing her with terror, menacing even her understanding. The most exquisite wish of her heart seemed accorded at a period so nearly too late for its acceptance, that her faculties, bewildered, confused, deranged, lost the capacity of clearly conceiving if she were a free agent or not. (544)

In the description above, there are two forces at work, we formerly thought of this as Camilla's passion and her duty or reason, and while those forces are still at play, it seems there is a greater war going on for Camilla's soul. The violence inflicted upon her by attempting to conform to her will to her duty (what her father has told her to do) while also wanting to conform her will to her desire. These are two separate wills at war inside her, one alien and the other alienated.

Therefore, she loses any sense of freedom or autonomy over her soul and "lost the capacity of clearly conceiving if she were a free agent or not" (544). It might have been thought that control over the passions would make one freer, but Burney clarifies that in Camilla's case, it makes her feel the opposite—powerless, without autonomy, unable to act for herself. It is the battle over not just control over her passions, but a war for her soul. The psychological violence inflicted upon her will nearly kill her, but in this scene brought to the edge, she brings herself back.

Camilla's loss of autonomy illustrates one of Burney's main critiques over custom and how the world infringes upon one's sense of power and independence to act for oneself. In Deidre Lynch's seminal work on character, an influential chapter on *Camilla* introduces the

figure of the automaton⁵. She understands Burney as being highly interested in the female machine: “since the papers she left behind at her death included a celebrated sketch of a female steam engine” (Lynch 192). Lynch describes the automaton: “Seeming to work by themselves, but not working for their selves, automatons emblemized the ambiguities built into that new insistence on conjuring identity and activity” (Lynch 192). She adds: “They displayed the vulnerability of the self-made individual—how the work of self-making could be work outside the self’s control” (Lynch 192). The automaton takes many forms, but the definition most is a person who lives their life appearing animated without actualizing the soul.

The clearest example of an automaton in the novel (other than Indiana) that Lynch points to is when Mr. Tyrold performs an “experiment” by bringing Camilla and Eugenia to watch a beautiful girl who has mental incapacities (310). The lesson that he wishes to impart on Eugenia is that she should be thankful that her mind is beautiful and “that beauty, without mind, is more dreadful than any deformity” (311). With a gate separating them, the group begins to watch this beautiful young woman as she moves upon the lawn. At first, the woman sat in the grass, then “sobbed with violence,” then “burst into a fit of loud, shrill, and discordant laughter” and then “In two minutes, the laugh ceased all at once, and the young creature, hastily rising, began turning round with a velocity that no machine could have exceeded” and began to jump (309). After she perceives them, she “dropt several low courtesies saying, at every fresh bend—‘Good day!—Good day!—Good day!’” and will continually repeat stock phrases such as “yes, please” and “here’s puss!” repeatedly (309, 310). As Lynch points out: “The girl has manners: she speaks in the requisite formulae of social interaction” and repeats these over and over again, just as they are in the novels of Burney: “these P’s and Q’s—the social necessities that are supposed

⁵ My own understanding of the novel is deeply influenced by her chapter on *Camilla* and Burney

to be repeated because characters in a novel of manners can never cease to pay their social dues—become gibberish, impertinence.” (Lynch 196). The repeated nature of *Camilla* itself, all the starts and stops, the repeated activities of Camilla’s shopping, dances, dinners, psychological and emotional abuse by Edgar, become depersonalized and alienate Camilla from herself. These conflicting scripts, one readymade and the other self-written cannot co-exist for Camilla—she cannot be Indiana with her vapid scripts. This painful spectacle makes it evident that there is a close line between being a subject and an object for human beings. Women and especially Camilla, bear a more significant attack upon the self from the dictums of the outside world, which as George Haggerty writes of the world Burney critiques: “there is no place for the autonomous self-determined female” (Haggerty 249). The self-determined female is unimaginable in the world's customs; as we saw with Mr. Tyrold’s sermon, the only role is the automaton, melancholic madness.

In the harrowing climax of the novel, Camilla experiences complete incoherence, fragmentation, alienation of her soul. Before the encounter with Death, Camilla suffers overwhelming pain: her father is imprisoned because of her debts, she discovers her uncle’s house is empty, her mother has forbidden her to come home, her sister Eugenia is imprisoned by an evil deceiving man who forced her into marriage, and Edgar has gone away. She feels that she must pay for her criminality and that all these griefs were caused by her inability to do the right thing. Her suffering strongly outweighs her minor mistakes; sins would even be too strong a characterization for her errors. She collapses into “sorrowing regret” at a small inn, too upset to eat or to sleep, begins writing letters to her family and Edgar with the direction “*Not to be delivered till I am dead*” (870). While at the inn, the dead body of Alphonso Bellamy is brought inside and set on a table and covered with a cloth. Camilla, believing she too is on death’s door,

desires to look upon the body and see what she will become: “a picture of death” (870). The sight of the body of her sister’s husband, though, resets her mind, and the voice of her conscience takes over, “and a mist was cleared away that had concealed from her view the cruelty of this egotism” (872). This new voice, which speaks at Camilla, admonishes her for being “wholly selfish” and not thinking of her family and friends (873). Camilla descends further after this voice: “her agitation became torture, her regret was aggravated to remorse, her grief to despair” and leads to her confrontation with Death.

Camilla, now completely alone in the darkness of night, enters a state of delirium and has a vision that leaves her in “perfect stillness” like a still life. Unable to discern waking or dreaming, finally

A slumber, feverish nearly to delirium, at length surprised her harassed faculties; but not to afford them rest. Death, in a visible figure, ghastly, pallid, severe, appeared before her, and with its hand, sharp and forked, struck abruptly upon her breast. (874)

Death commands her to write her name in the “Records of Eternity” and with volition not her own “grasped a pen of iron” (875). She writes on the page and it leaves no mark and again takes up the pen with a will not of her own and leaves no mark—“the paper was blank” —and suddenly “voices then, by hundreds, by thousands, by millions” surround her commanding her to “read thy eternal doom” and she awakes (876). This vision has been building throughout the novel and makes explicit the battle that Burney has been writing about throughout *Evelina* and *Cecilia* too. Camilla is made to take the iron pen, an obvious phallic sign, with a will other than her own, and cannot create a mark on the page because she is not the one making it. The page is

blank because she is compelled to live her life according to the structures of the world and the millions of voices commanding her to do something that is not of her own will. As Epstein writes in her book, *The Iron Pen*, the vision explodes the tension between “authorial self-definition” and “submission” (Epstein 20). Camilla becomes an automaton animated by wills that are not her own. She is imprisoned, as Epstein writes, “by a disembodied primal language” and language not of her own, that “usurps its user’s power to express herself” (Epstein 20). Burney paints the dark picture of what happens when the world’s customs and prejudices are followed to their extreme by a good natured and loving person such as Camilla—she is left cold, unmoving, and silent.

Even though *Camilla* has a “happy” ending and all is resolved, it still feels to some readers as if Camilla’s suffering outweighs the reward. While Edgar rescues her, Eugenia is free, debts are all repaid, and Camilla and Edgar are married, it still feels bitter and cold: Edgar *only* rescued her when he saw her lying almost as dead as a corpse. Claudia Johnson argues that there is a happy ending because the novel itself “is a testament of extravagant loyalty to dominant values rather than as a protest against them” because Burney was “equivocal” about going against them or not (Johnson 164). This reads the ending as the point of the novel, but the ending should be read as ironic; the suffering caused by the world’s games lead to pointless suffering that could have been avoided in the first place by having an open heart and mind. The dominant patriarchal society was questioned and probed throughout the novel, and what Camilla endured entitles her to happiness. The happy ending is a cruel joke, not an equivocation.

Camilla is the culmination of Burney’s novels and her progress as a female author. *Camilla* exposes, like the other novels, but more powerfully and clearly, the ways the systematic structure of the patriarchal society attempts to disempower the self-determined woman and inflicts pain on everyone, including the men. Burney stresses that both Edgar and Camilla suffer

because of custom and the teachings they receive. Moreover, Burney puts forth a new vision of being that instructs the reader to see and judge the world with an open mind and benevolent heart, that does not seek to judge one another with a closed mind. This is what Burney means by learning to think and to act for oneself—it is the ability to see the world and the people in it in multiple ways instead of judging others with cruelty. As Burney writes at the end: “What, at last, so diversified as man? What so little to be judge by his fellow” (913). The picture of youth that Burney paints shows that there are multiple ways of seeing the world—one just needs to be open and willing to look.

A Departure

To close, I turn to an episode from Frances Burney's own life that displays the type of benevolence and openness that often her heroines Evelina, Cecilia, and Camilla showed to others. From 1786 through 1791, Frances Burney spent time in the court of Queen Charlotte as the "Keeper of the Robes"; the experience made her miserable and physically ill. At the same time, King George III also had his own mental and physical health problems making him now known as "the mad King George." The King's disease inflicted much pain onto him, causing attacks that incapacitated him. Burney recounts how the King was cared for by loyal and good doctors who devised a plan of care for him that required him to be isolated and moved to Kew Gardens: "His Majesty was to be kept as quiet as possible, and see only Physicians, except for a short and stated period in every Day, during which he might summon such amongst his Gentlemen as he pleased" (Burney, 276). The most challenging aspect of their plan was the move to Kew Gardens because the King hated it and because it would entail force:

The Queen's knowledge of the King's aversion to Kew made her consent to this measure with the extremest reluctance, —yet it was not opposed [by her],— it was stated as much the best for him, on account of the Garden; as here there is none but what is public to spectators from the Terrace, or tops of houses. I believe they were perfectly right, though the removal was so tremendous[.] (278)

It was an extraordinary event to move the King against his wishes to a place he hated from "his favorite abode" (278). It was a serious matter that the doctors' plan of care be followed precisely, but Burney finds herself crossing paths with the King at Kew Gardens.

Frances Burney too needed to walk around the gardens as it was good for her health. She writes that she continued her walks, “varying my Gardens from Richmond to Kew, according to the accounts I received of the movements of the King” (280). On this day, she had asked where the King would be, and they told her “Richmond,” so she walked in Kew Garden. She made the doctor promise that if she was seen she could run away without being named since “Every body, indeed, is ordered to keep out of sight” (280). However, as she meandered around on her own, she saw what she believed were workmen — but it was in fact “the Person of his Majesty” (280). She began to run away, but the King called after her “loudly and hoarsely” (280). She explains the situation almost as if she has now become one of the characters in her novels, caught between her duty to protect the King (the doctors’ orders) and her duty to the King as a human being (not to upset him by running away):

I protest I was ready to die;—I knew not in what state he might be at the time; I only knew the orders to keep out of his way were universal; that the Queen would highly disapprove any unauthorized meeting, and that the very action of my running away might deeply, in his present irritable state, offend him. (280)

She decides to continue running, but the King himself begins to chase after her through the gardens as now the attendants and the doctors are all chasing after her. Finally, an attendant chases her down and pleads with her to stop: ““You *must*, ma’am it hurts the King to run,”” which stopped her immediately.

After she stops running, she begins a very moving and kind conversation with the King, which, while terrifying for Burney, made the King feel more human and connected. The encounter starts with him asking why she ran away from him; Burney, frightened, not knowing what to answer, turned to meet him with confidence through what she describes as “the greatest effort of personal courage I have ever made” (281). To her surprise, the King greeted her with a hug and a kiss from the cheek, which was “very extraordinary,” not his usual way of greeting (282). However, Burney writes that this is not due to his disorder, but rather “the joy of a Heart unbridled” (282). He was jubilant merely to see her, and that Burney treated him not as a person gone mad but just as a person (to whatever degree that is possible with a King). She adds that because she did not act afraid of him, he became more himself: “What a conversation followed!—when he saw me fearless, he grew more and more alive, and made me walk close by his side” (282).

They talked about everything: “He opened his whole Heart to me,—expounded all his sentiments, and acquainted me with all his intentions” (282). In this scene, Burney’s kindness and openness is reflected by how comfortable the King feels to open his soul to her. The King had been separated from everyone, and here is Frances Burney acting as his friend that he can talk to, so moved as to say to her: “*I am your friend*” (282). It is not every day a King calls you, his friend. They talk about her father, *Handel*, “his favourite theme,” and conclude with his restating of friendship with Burney (283). But just before he leaves, as the doctors are trying to pull him away, he wants to ask about his friends in the world: “I want to ask her a few questions,—I have lived so long out of the World, I know nothing” (284). This moved Burney — “This touched me to the Heart”— and thus they walked and discussed people and their friends. Burney reports to the Queen what had transpired. She was most excited that she was able “to see

him so nearly himself,” and he was almost better (285). This conversation between King George and Burney illustrates her kindness, her ability to make someone feel human and connected by being open and present without assumptions, even if that person is the King of England.

Frances Burney, in her novels, wrote about heroines who struggled, suffered, and even went mad because of the battle between the structures of society and the duty to oneself. However, all her heroines always did their best to act with decency and respect to other human beings. In their own ways, Evelina, Cecilia, and Camilla performed acts of kindness for others and made them feel cared for and connected—human. I have asserted that in *Camilla* Burney suggests a vision for selfhood that requires openness to seeing the world and the souls of others. I titled this thesis an “invitation” because Burney is not telling anyone what to think, just that if her readers wish to think, her novels open a space in which to begin. Through her literature, Frances Burney tried to open her readers’ eyes from the closed slumber of selfishness and to see others, and to embrace them with openness and kindness.

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