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“Injuring Her Beauty by Study”
Women and Classical Learning in Frances Burney’s Novels

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“Injuring Her Beauty by Study”:

Women and Classical Learning in Frances Burney’s Novels

Eighteenth-century author Frances Burney uses her novels as vehicles to engage in contemporary discussions about methods of self-education. Seen as inferior tools for self-education, novels were, according to Samuel Johnson, “written chiefly to the young, the ignorant, and the idle, to whom they serve as lectures of conduct, and introductions into life” (176). To such thinkers as Johnson, an education from a novel could never compete with the classical education available to the privileged men at university. However, this education was denied to women, and it was a popular belief that a classically educated woman was “injuring her beauty by study” (*Camilla* 46). Women, as both authors and readers, mostly had access to the marketplace of novels. Aware of her contemporaries’ pejorative view of the novel, Burney hesitates to even refer to her first work, *Evelina*, as a novel, fearing the rejection of male critics. Her treatment of the classics in *Evelina* reflects the dominant views of her contemporaries. The narrative voice echoes the prevailing opinion of men during this time period: classically educated women were unappealing and unfeminine. However, as Burney matures as an author, her third novel, or, as she calls it “prose epic,” *Camilla*, demonstrates a measurable shift from this point of view. The focus in *Camilla* departs from the disparaging attitude toward learned women, and instead points to the failures of the classical education for both men and women and the contrasting efficacy of the novel. An analysis of the evolution between her first and third novel, as well as her rejection of classical education, demonstrates Burney’s endorsement of the novel as an appropriate vehicle for education.

Eighteenth-century Educational Concerns

Burney's contemporary philosophers, moralists, and conduct book authors expressed concerns about the effects of novel reading, especially when it came to young women. Samuel Johnson is not alone when he claims that "[novels] are the entertainment of minds unfurnished with ideas, and therefore easily susceptible of impressions; not fixed by principles, and therefore easily following the currency of fancy; not informed by experience, and consequently open to every false suggestion and partial account" (176). In other words, novels were dangerous precisely because their audience was ignorant and easily swayed. Margaret Doody points out that Johnson's description of the novel's intended audience, including his description of "the young, the ignorant, and the idle," is most certainly aimed at young women (Johnson 176). Doody writes, "Forever a minor before the law, a woman will almost certainly be 'ignorant' in regard to Greek and Latin, and 'idle' in that she engages in no public work" (*The True Story of the Novel* 279). Thus, it is women who are reading novels, and women who are uninformed and "open to every false suggestion and partial account" (Johnson 176). Novels are dangerous for women because women are easily influenced and because they have no alternate means of education.

This concern with the gender of the novel's audience, and the dangers associated with it, is something the moralist James Fordyce also addresses. An admirer of Johnson, Fordyce is most famous for his conduct book, *Sermons to Young Women*. First published in 1765, *Sermons to Young Women* was the most popular conduct book in the second half of the eighteenth century (Hemlow 734). Fordyce employs the conduct or courtesy book to admonish young women and guide them toward correct (socially-acceptable) behavior. Joyce Hemlow explains that conduct books often "attempted to inculcate good morals. They were for the most part semi-philosophical or semi-religious; they attempted to establish first principles first, then a code of behavior based

on these principles, that is a system of *morals*” (733). For Fordyce, this meant encouraging women to avoid reading novels. His system of morals is dependent on the idea that novels are inherently flawed and dangerous. In his chapter “On Female Virtue,” Fordyce warns women that there are “very few, in the style of Novel, that you can read with safety, and yet fewer that you can read with advantage—What shall we say of certain books, which we are assured (for we have not read them) are in their nature so shameful, in their tendency so pestiferous, and contain such rank treason against the royalty of Virtue, such horrible violation of all decorum, that she who can bear to peruse them must in her soul be a prostitute” (75). For Fordyce, novels are dangerous because they cannot be “read with advantage.” For Fordyce, literature must provide constructive guidance toward proper behavior. Novels do not do this; instead, they violate the “decorum,” or system of morals and behavior Fordyce is striving to create. In other words, they do not provide proper instruction for a young woman. The portrayal of vice in such books becomes a “fatal poison to virtue” specifically because they do not educate in the way Fordyce wishes them to (73). He desires women to learn traditionally feminine virtues, like those demonstrated by Samuel Richardson’s heroine Clarissa: “we find in her character a beauty, a sweetness, an artlessness” (75). This novel is the only exception to Fordyce’s rejection of the novel because it portrays a woman behaving appropriately. He goes on to claim, “We consider the general run of Novels as utterly unfit for you. Instruction they convey none. They paint scenes of pleasure and passion altogether improper for you to behold, even with the mind’s eye” (75-6). Fordyce’s argument, like Johnson’s, is predicated on the idea that women are ignorant and easily influenced by what they read. For Johnson and Fordyce, it seemed that women could easily fall into vice simply because they read about it. And yet, any attempt by a woman to stray

from the conduct book and seek out a classical education, which would prevent her from falling victim to the dangers of the novel, was equally taboo.

The classical, or university education, was not available to women specifically because moralists and writers imagined that such an education would be detrimental to a woman's femininity. Jonathan Swift writes in his *Letter to a very young Lady on her Marriage* that a woman, because she is a woman, will never excel at learning: "after all the pains you may be at, you never can arrive, in point of learning, to the perfection of a school boy'" (qtd. in Kamm 117). Likewise, Samuel Richardson, in a letter to Lady Bradshaigh, writes that a learned woman should not be "an object of fear," but that if a woman ignores her domestic duties in order to learn, then "she is good for nothing" (qtd. in Kamm 118). That a woman's feminine duties as a wife must take precedence over learning was an opinion not restricted to men only. Even Bluestockings, a social group of highly educated women, including Lady Mary Montagu, Elizabeth Carter, and Hester Chapone, deterred other women from pursuing such a course of study or at least appearing to do so. Lady Mary Montagu encouraged her eldest granddaughter to "conceal whatever learning she attains with as much solicitude as she would hide crookedness or lameness'" (qtd. in Kamm 103). Hester Chapone warns of "The danger of pedantry and presumption in a woman . . . of her exchanging the graces of imagination for the severity and preciseness of a scholar" (196). Unlike Swift and Richardson, both of these women are concerned not with the effects of learning, but with the appearance of learning. Lady Mary does not actively discourage her granddaughter from being educated; instead, she encourages her to hide it. Hester Chapone, too, is concerned with the loss of a woman's "graces." In other words, if a woman appears educated, she becomes less eligible as a marriage partner. Burney seems to join in the concerns of these women, and when she abandons her study of Ancient Greek, she writes:

“I am sure I fag [*sic*] more for fear of disgrace than for hope of profit. . . . To devote so much time to acquire something I shall always dread to have known, is really unpleasant enough, considering how many things there are that I might employ myself in that would have no such drawback” (qtd. in Kamm 104). To Burney, the benefits of learning Greek do not outnumber the social consequences associated with such an education.

Perspectives of Novelists

Naturally, the clash between classics and novels as modes of education became an issue for novelists themselves. Many authors chose to address this through a preface to the work, which was a significant part of any eighteenth-century novel, allowing the author to appeal directly to his or her audience. Employed by such novelists as Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson, the preface gave authors the opportunity to explain the purpose of the work, as well as how it was to be read. Fordyce’s view of novels as the “fatal poison to virtue” became a widespread belief, and novelists often had to defend their works (73). A preface to a novel provided authors with the space to refute this claim and to allege the veracity and didacticism of their work. Burney follows this tradition. She opens *Evelina* with a preface, and even references the authors that have come before her when she writes “while in the annals of those few of our predecessors, to whom this species of writing is indebted for being saved from contempt, and rescued from depravity, we can trace such names as Rousseau, Johnson, Marivaux, Fielding, Richardson, and Smollet” (9). For Burney, the novel is so dangerous that it has been “saved” and “rescued” by these male authors.

Burney’s choice of authors is also significant when considering how an education from a novel relates to the classical education. She includes Fielding and Richardson, both authors

whose prefaces to their own novels addressed the relationship between the novel and the classics, specifically the role of the epic, amid the changing literary landscape of the eighteenth century. Ian Watt explores this idea by focusing on Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson. Watt explains that there were expectations for novelists in the eighteenth century: “A novelist trained in the orthodox critical tradition was bound to assume that any imitation of life in narrative form ought to be assimilated as far as possible to the rules of the epic which had proliferated since the Renaissance” (325). However, Watt recognizes that Defoe and Richardson depart from this assumption; rather, he argues that “their work strongly suggests the novel’s independence of epic theory and practice” (325). He claims that this is because Defoe did not have a thorough classical education, and that Richardson did not have one at all (325). While neither author directly rejects the epic in his preface, it is in these moments, when the author is directly speaking to his audience, that Defoe’s and Richardson’s views on both the epic and the purpose of the novel become clear. Neither man completely rejects the epic, but both assert the educational value of the novel. And it is in Burney’s preface to *Evelina* that the differences between her, Defoe, and Richardson become clear, pointing to her revolutionary view of the novel’s relationship with the epic in her later novel, *Camilla*.

For Defoe, the epic was still a useful literary form—it was not necessarily inferior to the novel. Defoe uses allusions to Greek and Roman literature throughout his works. Watt writes that Defoe’s extensive reading “was mainly used, not for literary or critical purposes, but to provide facts for his arguments, and especially to fill out his treatises to book length when invention or memory failed. Classical authors figure mainly as sources of evidence in history, theology, and thaumaturgy” (326). Having received his education at a dissenting academy, Defoe’s education differed from other men in that it was more “broad” (326). Thus, for Defoe, the classics were a

way to enter into the conversation of his contemporaries: university educated men. However important his ability to communicate with his equals was, Defoe still found that the classics were problematic when it came to the novel. Concerned that the oral tradition of the epic was inherently dishonest, simply because the stories were not written down immediately, Defoe argues that the tradition of the epic cannot replace ““those two Sovereigns of Argument . . . Reason and Truth”” (qtd. in Watt 327). Defoe does not reject the epic because it is exclusionary or not educational. Instead, he is worried that the fantastical myths of Greek and Roman literature do not contain appropriate morals, nor are they based on any honest accounts. Thus, in the preface to *Moll Flanders*, first published in 1722, Defoe stresses the morality of his novel. He writes that “it is to be hoped that such Readers will be much more pleas’d with the Moral, than the Fable; with the Application, than with the Relation, and with the End of the Writer, than with the Life of the Person written of” (Defoe 4). Aware that he is writing a work of fiction, Defoe speaks directly to his audience to let them know that his seeming dishonesty, or “Fable,” is meant to point to a larger moral. However, his readers must be astute; they must know *how* to read the novel. Defoe goes on to express confidence in the novel, arguing that the lessons his readers can learn “are fully sufficient to Justifie any Man in recommending [the book] to the World, and much more to Justifie the Publication of it” (6). Defoe feels that the morality of his work overcomes the negative connotations usually associated with novels.

Similarly, Samuel Richardson places importance on the seeming veracity of his novel in his preface to *Pamela*, first published in 1740. Like Defoe, Richardson apparently loathes the ““fighting fellows”” of the epic, and he finds that the work is successful based on its “moral purpose,” and “its effect on the reader” (qtd. in Watt 333). Unlike Defoe, however, Richardson was not educated in the classics in their original languages (333). He makes fewer classical

allusions than Defoe and seems to distrust the epic more. Richardson sees the potential didactic uses for the novel, and he claims that *Pamela* is educational. He argues in his preface that the work is meant to “Divert *and* Entertain, *and at the same time* to Instruct, *and* Improve *the Minds of the YOUTH of both sexes*” (Richardson 3). He recognizes that the novel is meant to be entertaining, but at the same time he claims that he is presenting something instructive for young people, going on to say that his purpose is “*to inculcate Religion and Morality*” (3). And, like Defoe, Richardson expresses confidence in his novel overcoming the negative connotations: “*IF these . . . be laudable or worthy Recommendations of any Work, the Editor of the following Letters, which have their Foundation in Truth and Nature, ventures to assert, that all these desirable Ends are obtained in these Sheets: And as he is therefore confident of the favourable Reception which he boldly bespeaks for this little work; he thinks any further Preface or Apology for it, unnecessary*” (4). Like Defoe’s preface, Richardson’s boldly claims that the work is worth reading, and that it will provide the reader with valuable lessons, perhaps those not found in the epic.

Burney’s preface to *Evelina* in 1778 seems to echo these two earlier prefaces. Indeed, Richardson is listed in Burney’s account of authors who have redeemed the novel (Burney 9). However, she is less bold in her preface than Defoe and Richardson. She describes herself as an author “happily wrapped up in a mantle of impenetrable obscurity” (9). Burney seems to enjoy the idea of publishing her novel anonymously, so that she will not be judged by her audience. She may be anticipating the objections of male critics, who would take issue with her being a female novelist. Like Defoe and Richardson, Burney claims to be using a work of fiction to express a moral story. Her intent is “To draw characters from nature, though not from life, and to mark the manners of the times” (9). However, Burney does not have the same confidence in the

novel that her predecessors do. She believes that the novel cannot truly teach or change individuals, as she is intent on “mark[ing] the manners of the time” rather than actively having any effect on them. She goes on to call for the “total extirpation of novels,” and claims that young women would benefit from their “annihilation” (9). She claims that novels have caused a “distemper” and have spread their “contagion” among the masses (9). Burney is expressing the commonly purported view that novels were detrimental for educational purposes. She recognizes that this is a deviation from her literary predecessors, writing, “I yet presume not to attempt pursuing the same ground which they have tracked: whence, though they may have cleared the weeds, they have also culled the flowers, and though they have rendered the path plain, they have left it barren” (10). Burney realizes that authors like Defoe and Richardson have done something revolutionary in their approach to the novel. But she notes that she cannot produce similar work, as they have already “culled the flowers.” While this may be simple flattery on Burney’s part, it also points to her different approach to the relationship between the epic and the novel, an approach that will become even more significant in *Camilla*.

Evelina (1778)

Burney’s early, conservative views on novels and classically educated women are reflected in her first novel, *Evelina*. The novel tells the story of the eponymous heroine’s quest to be acknowledged by her father. In the work, Burney expresses contemporary concerns about novels. At one point, the heroine Evelina even endorses the usefulness of conduct books: “But, really, I think there ought to be a book, of the laws and customs *à-la-mode*, presented to all young people, upon their first introduction into public company” (84). Evelina sees the conduct book, the genre most used to repudiate the educational quality of the novel, as beneficial. More importantly,

Evelina contains one classically educated woman: Mrs. Selwyn. Older, unmarried, and relentlessly sarcastic, Mrs. Selwyn is unanimously hated by the other characters in the novel, specifically because of her education. She has a fondness for the odes of Horace, and Evelina calls her “our satirical friend” (*Evelina* 284, 290). Burney, in keeping with the views of her contemporaries, portrays Evelina as feeling superior to Mrs. Selwyn because she has lost the appearance of femininity through her education. Evelina writes to one of her friends that “[Mrs. Selwyn] is extremely clever; her understanding, indeed, may be called *masculine*, but, unfortunately, her manners deserve the same epithet; for, in studying to acquire the knowledge of the other sex, she has lost all the softness of her own. . . . I have never been personally hurt at her want of gentleness; a virtue which, nevertheless, seems so essential a part of the female character, that I find myself more awkward, and less at ease, with a woman who wants it, than I do with a man” (*Evelina* 269). Evelina highlights the effect of learning on Mrs. Selwyn’s feminine appearance; she has lost her “softness” and “gentleness,” things that Evelina sees as essential for femininity (*Evelina* 269). This commentary about Mrs. Selwyn, made by the heroine of the story, endorses the concerns many had about learning the classics. Mrs. Selwyn has lost her feminine graces through her education.

Camilla (1796)

However consistent Burney’s views are with the condemnation of classically educated women in *Evelina*, she demonstrates a dramatic shift by the time *Camilla* is published in 1796. In fact, she moves from criticizing learned women to critiquing elite male forms of classical education and showing a new confidence in the novel’s educational effects. She uses the classics themselves to accomplish this, as *Camilla* is Burney’s novel that is most dependent on the

classical tradition. Even the title evokes the female warrior from Virgil's *Aeneid*, and Burney makes a direct reference to this connection, when the narrator describes that "[Camilla] 'skimmed,' like her celebrated namesake" (*Camilla* 849). This is a reference to Virgil's Camilla, whose father, when she was a baby, fastened her to a spear to send her "whizzing" over the river Amasenus in an effort to escape his town's rebellion (648-67). Camilla, the heroine of Burney's story, also has a sister named Lavinia, another name borrowed from the *Aeneid*. The novel contains thirty-seven allusions to classical Greek and Roman texts, and a large part of the plot centers on the outcome of a classical education, for both male and female characters.

This abundance of allusions to classical literature aligns with Burney's desire to write a "prose epic." In a letter to her father, Burney describes her work as being written in "*the prose Epic style*" (*Camilla*, Introduction, xiv). Referring to her work as an epic carries with it certain implications, especially when it comes to the portrayal of education. Margaret Doody argues that *Camilla* is both meant as a didactic novel and at the same time a satirization of the popular 18th-century conduct book. She writes that "[Burney uses] the simple notion of the didactic story of education as an ironic background or weft against which she wove her tale" (*The Life in Works* 218). Since Burney intended to write an epic, however, education becomes more central than an "ironic background," since Greek and Roman epic poetry had been a foundational part of education for centuries (*The Life in Works* 219). It is impossible to separate the epic from its educational objective. Thomas Maresca, in *Epic to Novel*, writes that epic poetry has traditionally served didactic purposes: "Wisdom, whether conceived as knowledge of philosophy or theology, politics or ethics, has been the core of epic from the Hellenistic allegoresis of Homer forward. Renaissance criticism and practice intensified this element by heavily emphasizing the didactic

purpose of epic and fitting it out as a tool to teach man about, and to help him obtain, felicity” (182). The epic has been used to teach young men for generations.

In fact, Burney’s choice of the *Aeneid* as her source material, instead of one of Homer’s epics, points to her educational purpose. Virgil wrote his epic with a “conscious desire to instruct” the Roman people, a desire not present in Homer’s works (Thornbury 22). Not only were Greek and Roman epics used to instruct people in antiquity, but they are at the center of the 18th-century classical education. Men at university were required to read and translate both the *Aeneid* and the *Iliad* (Clarke 53). Similarly, the 18th-century philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau uses the relationship between Telemachus and Mentor, characters from Homer’s *Odyssey*, to demonstrate the ideal education in his treatise *Emile, or on Education* (414). And yet, Burney uses the didactic function of the epic to lead not to wisdom, or felicity, but rather to a questioning of an education dependent on classical learning. In *Camilla*, she not only adapts the epic for a new didactic purpose, but she questions the utility of the vehicle itself.

Burney accomplishes this questioning through her approach to the prose epic. She writes that her work will “[be] more multifarious in the Characters it brings into action,—but all *wove* into *one*, with a one *Heroine* shining conspicuous through the Group” (*Camilla*, Introduction, xiv). Burney’s ideas are consistent with 18th-century thought on the prose epic, best explained by the founder of the genre: Henry Fielding. He argues in the preface to *Joseph Andrews* that if a literary work contains all the aspects of epic, including similar action, characters, and sentiments, and it only lacks poetic metre, then it should be considered a “prose epic.” He explains that “tho’ it wants one particular, which the Critic enumerates in the constituent Parts of an Epic Poem, namely Metre; yet, when any kind of Writing contains all its other Parts, such as Fable, Action, Characters, Sentiments, and Diction, and is deficient in Metre only; it seems, I think, reasonable

to refer it to the Epic” (Fielding 49). And yet, Fielding does not deviate from Aristotle’s original understanding of the epic; Fielding maintains that the plot should have a “unity of action” (qtd. in Thornbury 114). Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, explains that “[a] story is not a unity, as some people think it is, simply by being about a single person” (1451a 15-20). In other words, in order for an epic to have unity of action, it is dependent on several characters, instead of just one, with one overarching movement through the plot. Aristotle uses Homer’s *Odyssey* as his example, demonstrating how the different elements and characters in the epic turn “about a single action,” the action of Odysseus’ return home (1451a 25). Fielding employs this concept in *Joseph Andrews*, loosely connecting the events in the plot, and Burney does likewise in *Camilla*. For Burney, the unity of action centers on the union of the “shining conspicuous” heroine Camilla Tyrold with the hero Edgar Mandlebert, and the “multifarious” characters who are “all *wove* into *one*” play a significant role in this action (*Camilla*, Introduction, xiv).

These diverse characters working toward a unified goal are integral to the novel’s designation as a prose epic, but, surprisingly, Burney uses most of these characters to critique an education dependent on the epic: the classical education. The first of these characters is Camilla’s uncle, the well-meaning Sir Hugh Tyrold. Burney’s portrayal of Sir Hugh mocks the way a classical education is privileged among men. Sir Hugh, having neglected his studies in his youth, comes to believe that he suffers from apathy in his old age due to his lack of knowledge. The narrator comments that “he soon fancied that every earthly misfortune originated in a carelessness of learning . . . even inevitable calamities he attributed to the negligence of his education, and construed every error, and every evil of his life, to his youthful disrespect of Greek and Latin” (*Camilla* 34). Sir Hugh’s negligence has not caused a few problems in his life; it has brought about “every error” and “every evil” (*Camilla* 34). Burney deliberately exaggerates the

consequences of a man ignoring the classics, and, in doing so, she highlights the absurd level of importance often given to such an education.

Sir Hugh's overestimation of the importance of the classics takes an almost sinister turn when it comes to his niece, Camilla's sister Eugenia. After suffering an injury from a fall, as well as the ravages of smallpox, Eugenia is left physically disabled and scarred from an early age. Sir Hugh is responsible for these calamities, and he decides to make amends by giving her a classical education through a tutor, Dr. Orkborne. Refusing to let anyone tell Eugenia that she is disfigured, Sir Hugh imagines that the classics will restore to her what she has lost. And she has lost a lot—the people who observe her from a distance describe Eugenia as “[a] little lame thing,” “an ugly little bod[y],” and a person with “such a hobble in their gait” (*Camilla* 77). She has lost any chance at physical beauty. She no longer has those graces so essential to a woman. She cannot walk without a limp, and the narrator at one point comments that “Eugenia could only have served as a foil, even to those who had no pretensions to beauty” (*Camilla* 58). Eugenia is not an appealing marital option; she only serves to make other women seem more attractive. And yet, Sir Hugh believes that the classics will make her marriageable. Her knowledge of Greek and Latin will replace her beauty; Homer and Horace will mask her limp. Sir Hugh believes that this education will make Eugenia the ideal wife for his nephew Clermont Lynmere, who is himself studying the classics at Eton College. When Sir Hugh first resolves on educating Eugenia, he says, ““I shall make her a wife after his own heart”” (*Camilla* 48). Not only does this imply that Sir Hugh imagines a classical education can transform Eugenia, but it also reveals his assumption that Clermont is both interested in the classics and will find Eugenia's particular knowledge attractive, ideas that are ultimately proven wrong. The amount of

importance Sir Hugh places on the classics leads him to think that they are capable of making Eugenia marriageable, an idea that proves disastrous for Eugenia.

Burney uses this marriage plot to criticize the attitude toward classically educated women she originally perpetuated in *Evelina*. When Eugenia, after years of learning, is finally presented to Clermont, he cruelly rejects her, telling his uncle:

““what have I to do with marrying a girl like a boy? That’s not my taste, my dear sir, I assure you. Besides, what has a wife to do with the classics? Will they shew her how to order her table? I suppose when I want to eat, I may go to a cook’s shop!” (*Camilla* 592).

Again, the concern with a woman learning the classics revolves around femininity; in this case, Eugenia’s ability to provide a proper home for Clermont. He argues that she cannot perform her duty as a wife because of her learning, and, to Clermont, she is no longer even a woman: she is a “girl like a boy” (*Camilla* 592). This critique, however similar to *Evelina*’s sentiments about Mrs. Selwyn, is different because of Clermont’s character. It is no longer the heroine of the story offering these viewpoints; instead, it is the insipid, vain Clermont who reflects these views. Burney is no longer critiquing an educated woman—she is critiquing the attitude of the male character and his viewpoints.

A Historical Perspective

This critique of Clermont’s attitude introduces more of Burney’s criticism toward a classical education as she confronts the perceived benefits of a classical education for men. Historically, during this time period, the universities of Britain were questioning the same issue. At the University of Oxford, English began to replace Latin as the spoken language in class lectures. Students were supplied with an individual tutor, who was to “form not only the mind but the

man” (Evans 192). Teachers began to place more emphasis on shaping the character and behavior of their students. Some questioned whether or not a knowledge of the classics truly benefitted a person’s morality. Essayist William Hazlitt wrote that “Any one who has passed through the regular gradations of a classical education, and is not made a fool by it, may consider himself as having had a very narrow escape” (qtd. in Evans 200). Burney’s portrayal of classically educated men in her novel explores this concept, as the educated men are either socially inept or morally bankrupt. Clermont, who has been educated at Eton College, certainly mishandles his relationship with Eugenia, and his education has done nothing for his social ability (*Camilla* 44). In fact, he returns from school ready to indulge “both the natural presumption and acquired luxuriance of his character” (*Camilla* 583). The “acquired luxuriance” implies that Clermont has gained this character trait while away at Eton. Likewise, Camilla’s brother, Lionel, has developed detrimental habits while at university. His bad behavior comes directly from his “bad scrape at Oxford,” for which he requires a large sum of money (*Camilla* 225). With the encouragement of his friends, Lionel writes a threatening letter to his uncle, demanding money. Eventually, Lionel is found out, and he repents of his behavior (*Camilla* 227). And yet, he quickly reverts to his old ways, and exclaims to Camilla that “the deuce of study is, there is no end of it! And it does so little for one! one can go through life so well without it!” (*Camilla* 243). Certainly, Lionel has not benefitted from his classical education, nor does he see the value of it.

Since Burney’s novels show a classical education as being in need of replacement, it bears noticing what exactly she wanted to replace. What was the desired outcome of a classical education? In the eighteenth century the focus of the traditional university education, as far as it concerned Greek and Latin, was on grammar. Although the speaking of Latin died out, the

emphasis on well-written Latin remained. M. L. Clarke explains that in the eighteenth-century British university system “Latin became less a language for use” and that “education became less utilitarian and more purely literary. The study of Greek advanced, while in Latin the prose-writers were neglected in favour of the poets and verse-composition flourished more than ever” (48). Professors expected that students would perfect their grammar through writing verse. At Oxford, there was a rule stating that “every week the undergraduates are to write a theme or declamation or a translation” (Clarke 71). To be able to write in Latin, and especially to write well, was the hallmark of a classical education. In order to display this intellectual ability to the world, these verses and declamations were often presented at social occasions. Clarke writes that “Academic occasions were adorned with ornate Latin speeches which showed the wit and classical learning of the orator and his hearers. The art of verse-writing in the learned languages was highly valued, and the university scholar was expected to celebrate state occasions and academic functions with appropriate verses” (66). Well-educated young men were also expected to make use of their Latin verse-writing skills to celebrate royal births, deaths, and marriages. Their learning would then be displayed to the world in a way that indicated their status as a classically educated man. While the men did study “logic and moral philosophy” as a part of their university education, the classics were mostly used to learn how to write and to achieve a social status (Clarke 66). Thus they did not receive moral training from the classics, something that irritates John Locke, as he laments that people “have a strange value for words, when preferring the languages of the ancient Greeks and Romans to that which made them such brave men” (46). Men do not care to be educated by the content of the works they read; instead, the focus is on the form of the works and the language used to write them.

However much Locke values the virtues of the Greeks and Romans, he cannot deny that a knowledge of Greek and Latin is a powerful indication of social status; indeed, this was the prevailing opinion of the eighteenth century. Locke himself states, “*Latin* I look upon as absolutely necessary to a gentleman; and indeed, custom, which prevails over everything, has made it so much a part of education” (121). For Locke the social custom of a university education dictates that Latin is not just one part of a whole education, but the immediately recognizable emblem of a well-educated man. Latin, being “absolutely necessary,” is a crucial indication of social status. The key word in Locke’s comment is, in fact, “gentleman.” Locke, a critic of the classical education, still sees a knowledge of Latin as a distinguishing feature of a man of high social status. Indeed, this was the ultimate outcome of the classical education: recognition of the student as an elite gentleman. Margaret Doody argues that “Knowledge of classical languages and literature was, from the Renaissance to the nineteenth century, the passport to the world of power, sacred to the gentleman’s authority” (241). She goes on to describe Latin as “The language of power” (*The Life in Works* 241). The exclusive nature of a university education placed graduates in an elite world of authority only accessible to men with the means to afford this education. Latin, then, became the tangible evidence of this status. Thus, a classical education provided men with the appearance of superior education and status through their ability to write and speak Latin.

Improper Mentorship

A classical education for Burney’s younger male characters fails to be actually useful outside of the elevated social status associated with it. Even more importantly, Burney often portrays the older, more influential male characters in a similar light. Their failures are even more dangerous

because these men serve as mentors to younger characters. The role of the mentor has its roots in classical Greek mythology; in fact, in Homer's *Odyssey*, Mentor is the older man assigned to counsel Odysseus' son Telemachus (Cooper 113). The goddess Athena disguises herself as Mentor, and she is an essential influence for Telemachus, guiding him through the transition from childhood to manhood, and leading him to success (*Odyssey* 1.273-9). The mentor acts in a similar way as the Oxford tutor: both are meant to "form not only the mind but the man" (Evans 192). Helen Cooper writes that, in the 18th century, "the device of a mentor in a novel was traditionally a means of showing conventionally approved behavior to the heroine" (116). And yet, Burney deviates from both the classical model, as well as the model of her contemporaries, by representing the dangers of an incompetent mentor throughout *Camilla*. Camilla's father, Mr. Tyrold, is revered by those around him due to his extensive learning and his kindness. His brother, Sir Hugh, admires him exceedingly, and Mrs. Tyrold obeys his every command. Lionel, when lamenting his own study habits, exclaims, "My father, you know, is firm as a rock. He minds neither wind nor weather, nor fleerer nor sneerer: but this firmness, look ye, he has kept all to himself; not a whit of it do I inherit; every wind that blows veers me about, and makes me look some new way" (*Camilla* 241). Lionel realizes that his father has gained a moral strength of character from his studies, but that he has not passed on this knowledge to his son. Mr. Tyrold has failed to properly guide Lionel. Mr. Tyrold's deficiencies as a mentor extend even further when it comes to his advice to his daughter Camilla. When he realizes that Camilla is romantically interested in Edgar Mandlebert, but that Edgar's affections are uncertain, he advises Camilla to conceal her feelings. He tells her to "Carefully, then, beyond all other care, shut up every avenue by which a secret which should die untold can further escape you. Avoid every species of particularity; neither shun nor seek any intercourse apparently" (*Camilla* 360). This

advice, while popular enough to become part of an actual conduct book, is ultimately disastrous for Camilla (Doody 231). Edgar, based on the advice of his erring mentor, is waiting for a sign of Camilla's affection. She withholds that sign based on her mentor's guidance. The results are devastating for both characters, and the damage done by these inept mentors is only resolved five hundred and thirty-seven pages later, in the closing of the novel.

Perhaps the most damage done by a mentor in *Camilla* is perpetrated by the man most associated with classical education: the learned Dr. Orkborne. A highly educated scholar, Dr. Orkborne is obsessed with studying the classics. When first introduced as Sir Hugh's tutor, the narrator comments that "Application, operating upon a retentive memory, had enabled [Dr. Orkborne] to lay by the most ample hoards of erudition; but these, though they rendered him respectable amongst the learned, proved nearly nugatory in his progress through the world, from a total want of skill and penetration to know how or where they might turn to any account" (*Camilla* 36). In an extension of the concerns about learned women, who could lose the appearance of femininity through education, Burney presents Dr. Orkborne as appearing "respectable," while lacking any personal graces (*Camilla* 36). His classical education has prevented him from developing any social skills. In fact, he barely has any control over his own emotions. After a maid mistakenly discards a scrap of paper from Dr. Orkborne's desk, he loses his temper, and shouts, "'I wish you had been all of you annihilated ere ever you had entered my room! I had rather have lost my ears than that manuscript! I wish with all my heart you had been at the bottom of the sea, every one of you, before you had touched it!'" (*Camilla* 210). His passionate outburst is disturbing to the family, and Sir Hugh muses upon Dr. Orkborne's education, saying "'I must fairly own I don't see the great superiority of learning, if it can't keep a man's temper out of passion'" (*Camilla* 212). The classics have not helped Dr. Orkborne

learn to reign in his passions, and Sir Hugh, who prizes the classics more than anyone else in the novel, begins to question the value of a classical education. When he fails to educate Sir Hugh, Dr. Orkborne turns his attention to Eugenia, which produces even more dire consequences.

Burney uses the disastrous relationship between Eugenia and Dr. Orkborne to further highlight the dangers of an education solely dependent on the classics. Dr. Orkborne is Eugenia's tutor from a young age, and is clearly incapable of teaching her any social graces, as he does not understand them himself. The narrator describes Eugenia's artlessness: "Early absorbed in the study of literature and languages, under the direction of a preceptor who had never mingled with the world, her capacity had been occupied in constant work for her memory; but her judgement and penetration had been wholly unexercised" (271). In other words, as a direct result of Dr. Orkborne's ineffective mentoring, Eugenia has no ability to function in society. She knows her Latin grammar, but she cannot make judgements or decisions for herself. Eugenia is determined to follow her mentor's model, and she becomes so invested in her studies that her brother Lionel begins to call her "little Greek and Latin" instead of Eugenia (*Camilla* 500). While this nickname highlights Eugenia's absorption with the classics, it also echoes concerns about the classical education first voiced by the philosopher John Locke in his work *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*. Locke expresses his anxieties about the mentor-mentee relationship, saying that the mentor must value virtuous behavior over the pedantry of the classics. He goes on to address parents directly, writing, "you must confess that you have a strange value for words, when preferring the languages of the ancient Greeks and Romans to that which made them such brave men, you think it worthwhile to hazard your son's innocence and virtue for a little Greek and Latin" (Locke 46). For Locke, innocence and virtue, the admirable qualities of the Greeks and Romans, are more valuable than simply learning the languages they spoke. Burney seems to

support Locke's viewpoint when Lionel refers to Eugenia as "little Greek and Latin," since Eugenia's limited knowledge endangers her innocence and her virtue (*Camilla* 500).

Burney stresses the danger of this "strange value for words" even more when Dr. Orkborne's obsession with the classics directly places Eugenia in physical danger (Locke 46). At one point he becomes so absorbed with "a verse in one of Virgil's Eclogues," that he completely abandons Eugenia in a field with an angry bull (*Camilla* 131). He also fails to protect the women of the household when a fight breaks out, choosing rather to meditate on "the pugilistic games of old . . . the games of antiquity" (*Camilla* 668). More importantly, Dr. Orkborne is a contributing factor to Eugenia's eventual violent kidnapping by the fortune hunter Alphonso Bellamy. When Bellamy first writes to Eugenia speciously expressing his love, Eugenia has the opportunity to completely rebuff him. She writes a letter in response, and Sir Hugh insists that her mentor read it over for her. The narrator describes that "Dr. Orkborne, being called upon, slightly glanced his eye over the letter, but made no emendation, saying: 'I believe it will do very sufficiently; but I have only concerned myself with the progress of Miss Eugenia in the Greek and Latin languages; any body can teach her English'" (122). He does not give the content of the letter much consideration, only "slightly" glancing at it. Dr. Orkborne is more concerned with making a snobbish comment implying that English is inferior to Greek and Latin. In doing so, he completely ignores the fact that the letter is too kind—it is not strongly worded enough to dissuade Bellamy.

This lack of proper mentoring by Dr. Orkborne leads to Eugenia's downfall when she is finally kidnapped by the greedy Bellamy. She cannot fathom that anyone would have ill intentions, and when she is first approached by Bellamy, the narrator comments, "Having read no novels, [Eugenia's] imagination had never been awakened to scenes of this kind; and what

she had gathered upon such subjects in the poetry and history she had studied with Dr. Orkborne, had only impressed her fancy in proportion as love bore the character of heroism, and the lover that of an hero. Though highly therefore romantic, her romance was not the common adoption of the circulating library; it was simply that of elevated sentiments, formed by animated credulity playing upon youthful inexperience” (*Camilla* 315). Eugenia cannot see through Bellamy’s flowery, romantic speech. She imagines that, because he is expressing the “elevated sentiments” she understands from the classics, he must actually love her. What would be obvious to any patron of the circulating library, a common place for women to access novels, is incomprehensible to Eugenia. As a result, she is violently kidnapped and forced to marry Bellamy. Her classical studies have not prepared her for real life—she cannot recognize Bellamy’s scheme. A classical education has failed Dr. Orkborne, and he, in turn, has failed Eugenia. This moment in the novel captures both of these failures, and at the same time, endorses the novel as a useful learning tool. Burney states that, had Eugenia read novels, she would have been able to realize Bellamy’s treachery.

This moment in *Camilla* underscores Burney’s changing beliefs about classical education, for both men and women, as well as her beliefs about the role of the novel. In *Evelina*, Burney begins her novel with an apology for having written a novel. She endorses the beliefs of her contemporaries about women and classical education, and portrays Mrs. Selwyn in a negative light. Burney demonstrates more confidence as an author in *Camilla*, where she uses the classical tradition to question the benefits of a classical education. In depicting the classics as ultimately failing both male and female characters, Burney presents the reader with a new mode of effective education for the 18th century: the novel.

Female Novelists

Burney also uses *Camilla* to endorse female novelists. She does this by addressing the danger of relying on Latin as an indicator of a well-educated man through her portrayal of Eugenia. While Dr. Orkborne may be the more obvious representation of the failures of philology, it is, in fact, Eugenia whose masculine education, and, more importantly, appearance of education has a greater impact on the heroine of the story. Eugenia, much like the Oxford undergraduate, has devoted her life to the study of Latin and Greek grammar. This inspires her sisters to view her as a highly-educated person, and thus, someone who has superior wisdom. When Camilla receives a marriage proposal from Sir Sedley Clarendel, a man she does not want to marry, she immediately seeks out Eugenia's advice. In fact, she "[runs] to the house for Eugenia," which indicates just how much she relies on Eugenia's supposed knowledge (Burney 528). She does not waste a moment in receiving Eugenia's opinion. Burney continues to describe that "[Eugenia's] extreme youth was no impediment, in the eyes of her liberal sisters, to their belief nor reverence of her superior wisdom. Her species of education had early prepossessed them with respect for her knowledge, and her unaffected fondness for study, had fixed their opinion of her extraordinary understanding" (528). Eugenia, much like a university graduate, has inspired respect through her knowledge of Latin. It is her "species of education," the classical education, that leads Camilla and Lavinia to trust that their youngest sister is wiser than they are. Despite the evidence of her superior learning, Eugenia has not had any experience with the social world, and she does not have any basis for her advice to Camilla. Eugenia instructs Camilla to write a rejection to Sir Sedley, something which Lavinia immediately approves of. However, Camilla struggles with Eugenia's instruction: "Camilla, though she felt an entanglement which fettered herself, thought it by no means sufficiently direct or clear to authorise a rejection of Sir Sedley;

since, strangely as she seemed in his power, circumstances had placed her there, and not his own solicitation” (Burney 528). Eugenia’s advice goes against what Camilla herself feels is the correct course of action. But, based on Eugenia’s appearance of superior wisdom, Camilla writes to Sir Sedley, leading to a disastrous meeting between the two that affects Camilla’s relationship with Edgar, which is aggravated again by the “counsel of Eugenia” who encourages Camilla to conceal the marriage proposal from Edgar (Burney 554). Eugenia’s appearance of wisdom and authority derived from her knowledge of Latin fails Camilla.

In fact, after Eugenia’s classical education has failed both her and her sister, Eugenia realizes the dangers of relying on appearances and at the same time makes her debut as an author. Coupling these two occurrences allows Burney to comment on the falsity of the seeming wisdom derived from the classics, as well as to point to female authorship as a beneficial alternative. Eugenia weeps with joy to discover that Camilla and Edgar have finally united despite her poor advice. Immediately after this discovery, Eugenia reveals that she has begun her career as an author. She reads an excerpt of her autobiography to her family, which focuses on her loss of physical beauty:

““Ye, too, O lords of the creation, mighty men! impute not to native vanity the repining spirit with which I lament the loss of beauty; attribute not to the innate weakness of my sex, the concern I confess for my deformity; nor to feminine littleness of soul, a regret of which the true source is to be traced to your own bosoms, and springs from your own tastes: for the value you yourselves set upon external attractions, your own neglect has taught me to know; and the indifferency with which you consider all else, your duplicity has instructed me to feel.”” (*Camilla* 905)

Here, Eugenia is clearly discussing her physical appearance. She has lost her “external attractions” and has learned the value of beauty through the lack of male attention she has received. And yet, the passage also acts as a commentary on the value men place on the appearance of education. Valuing people based simply on outward appearance, for Eugenia, is something masculine. The “true source” of such vanity is the “lords of creation.” Eugenia has seen the errors that come from seeming educated to others, a belief that stems from her classical education, and she rejects the premise that outward appearance should be the result of a proper education. In a powerful moment, Eugenia writes this personal history, cementing herself as a female author, and allowing Burney to fully endorse female novelists.

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