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“There Was Nothing She Could Teach”: The Governess Character in *Camilla*

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ABSTRACT: Miss Margland, a minor governess character in Frances Burney’s 1796 novel *Camilla*, is rarely discussed by literary critics. This article, which engages with recent critical examinations of Burney’s work in relation to *Bildung* and the marriage plot, argues that Miss Margland’s peripherality, insignificance and incompetence enable her to draw attention to the inhibitions that social and narrative conventions place upon the complex and meaningful development of women. The theories of Pierre Bourdieu are used both to highlight the governess’s particular investment in misrecognizing the economic foundations of cultural dominance, and to show how her wielding of unofficial power allows her to reveal the rules and paradoxes governing courtship and marriage. Sustained comparisons between Miss Margland and Camilla demonstrate how the governess acts as a catalyst for the heroine’s *Bildung*, and exposes the injustice of being compelled to submit to social codes and behaviors that limit women’s education and development.

Frances Burney’s novels possess an abiding interest in women’s education, growth and development in their depiction of numerous female characters’ entrance into the world. Deidre Lynch distinguishes Burney’s 1796 novel *Camilla* from earlier eighteenth-century novels for its rewriting of “character as a narrative process.” Lynch argues that Burney sets the novel’s heroine Camilla Tyrold apart from her younger sister Eugenia and her cousin Indiana Lynmere on the basis of “animation,” which references the ability of a character to move or develop (194-95). However, more recent criticism, including the work of Jason S. Farr and Sara Fernandes, has tended to attribute *Bildung* to the physically disabled and classically educated character Eugenia, rather than to the novel’s titular heroine Camilla. Farr notes that “Eugenia’s education aids her decidedly difficult maturation process” (10), and Fernandes argues that Eugenia “experiences development as an ongoing and at times unruly spectrum. Consequently, she is able to grow in a way that most other

female characters do not” (1948). Stephanie Insley Hershinow’s recent study of the novice has also called into question the extent to which development and growth are possible for Burney’s heroines, and heroines of the eighteenth-century novel more broadly. Hershinow discusses the novice as a character such as Camilla whose inexperience constitutes “a largely symbolic liminal state, a heightening of possibility that makes multiple futures more visible” (25), merely giving “us the illusion of character as process, of individuation in the making” (26). As Hershinow notes, addressing such characters on their own terms requires resisting “the pull of the *Bildung* model” by refusing “to consider the depiction of character over narrative time as coterminous with psychological maturity” (16).

Alongside these recent reconsiderations of Burney’s novels in relation to the tradition of *Bildung* sits a critical history that conceives of Burney’s work as a response to economic developments of the eighteenth century. Lynch’s readings in the economy of character stipulate that “Characters have supplied readers with the means with which to implement the work of cultural classification and stratification that Pierre Bourdieu calls distinction” (19), while James Thompson foregrounds Bourdieu’s notion that “symbolic capital is essentially economic capital that is ‘misrecognized’ or disguised in some form,” arguing that in the eighteenth-century novel, “courtship and marriage are the most prevalent occasions for the exchange of misrecognized capital” (3-4). More recently, Katherine Binhammer has positioned debates about *Bildung* in the early realist novel within the context of the eighteenth-century market economy in her reading of “sentimental stories of downward mobility.” Binhammer argues that “on the level of form, we can read the way the story of loss captures the contradictory logic of compounding growth” (10), referencing Bourdieu in her observation that “Sentimental culture plays a central role in introducing ‘disinterestedness’ as the defining feature of moral economies” (17).

In this essay, I use the character of the governess to contribute to these discussions about how Burney’s work depicts the education, growth and development of eighteenth-century women. Although the governess is more commonly discussed in relation to the nineteenth-century novel,

the character's function as an educator and companion of young women in the eighteenth-century novel means that she is positioned as a potential guide to their development, and her precarity and peripherality ensure that she is invested in the misrecognition of economic capital. Carmen María Fernández Rodríguez has observed that Miss Margland, the governess of Indiana in *Camilla*, is rarely discussed by literary critics, having "never merited individual status" (6), and the novel's narrator observes that Miss Margland is "but nominally a tutress; neglected in her own education, there was nothing she could teach, though, born and bred in the circle of fashion, she imagined she had nothing to learn" (45). According to Miss Margland, anything beyond "a little music, a little drawing, and a little dancing . . . but slightly pursued" risks endangering the status of her pupil as "a lady of fashion" (46). Looking both at what Miss Margland does and does not do, and at the uses to which she is and is not put, suggests that some of her most vital work may depend on her either not being perceived as having a meaningful function, or by her not properly fulfilling the functions that she does seem to have. The points at which the governess fails, avoids, obstructs or proves to be superfluous are instructive for how they critique and offer alternatives to simple stories of education and development. Miss Margland's peripheral placement as a minor character in the novel echoes her liminal social and economic status as a governess, and this allows her to pose alternatives to accepted trajectories of women's lives, and to question or cast shadows upon dominant narratives, including those of the *Bildungsroman* and the marriage plot.

The Governess and Women's Education

Bourdieu argues that "Culture is the site, par excellence, of misrecognition," and the governess has a particular investment in misrecognizing the economic foundations of cultural dominance. Retaining her status as a lady in spite of her work requires her to align herself with "those who have legitimate culture as a second nature," who possess "the supplementary profit of being seen (and seeing themselves) as perfectly disinterested, unblemished by any cynical or mercenary use of culture." Such people are involved "in the game which produces the game"

(*Distinction* 86). The cultural capital possessed by Miss Margland as “a woman of family and fashion” is immediately undercut in Burney’s novel by an explicit recognition of her true material circumstances, as she has been “reduced, through the gaming and extravagance of her father” and has consequently been “compelled to acquiesce in the good offices of her friends, which placed her as a governess” (45). Whereas her friends are able to exercise their cultural dominance while benefiting from the appearance of unblemished disinterest in securing her employment, Miss Margland’s acceptance of a post in Sir Hugh Tyrold’s household affirms her dependence not merely on the social capital attached to her birth, but also on the economic returns of her labor. Burney’s narrator mocks Miss Margland’s excessive “lamentation and regret” for her former status by emphasizing its interminability, as it is “stationary,” “constant” and “perpetual” (53). While her demise could invite sympathy, Miss Margland’s anxiety about her status only contributes to her excessive self-interest, as “To save her own credit . . . was always her primary consideration” (206). The economic implications of “save” and “credit” act as a further reminder that securing economic capital is just as essential as securing social capital in terms of status or reputation. As Bourdieu argues, “the term ‘investment’ . . . must be understood in the dual sense of economic investment—which it objectively always is, although misrecognized—and the sense of affective investment which it has in psychoanalysis” (*Distinction* 86).

Bourdieu suggests that the acquirement of cultural capital is often implicitly predicated on what is not taught, as “the educational institution succeeds in imposing cultural practices that it does not teach and does not even explicitly demand, but which belong to the attributes attached by status to the position it assigns, the qualifications it awards and the social positions to which the latter give access” (*Distinction* 26). In failing to teach Indiana anything of depth or substance, Miss Margland seeks to secure her status as “a lady of fashion” in “the great world” (Burney 46). However, Burney’s critical portrayal of Miss Margland and Indiana condemns a system that ultimately appears to contravene Bourdieu’s expectation that “academic qualifications are to cultural capital what

money is to economic capital” (*Outline* 187). For the women in Burney’s novel, to possess academic training is to risk exclusion from cultural capital.

This corresponds with the particular historical moment in which Burney was writing. Gary Kelly observes that the education promoted by Bluestocking feminism “was designed to endow women with a version of the cultural capital, moral self-discipline, and intellectual training acquired by boys and men in their preparation for professional and public life” (xlviii), and Harriet Guest agrees that in the mid-eighteenth century, “a part of the value of learning to women is that it gains them moral authority; it is perceived as a substantial property, analogous to landed estate in its ability to confirm the moral worth of its owner.” However, Guest argues that by the 1790s, the worth of learning was increasingly equated with it being “a professional qualification” (16). As women were excluded “from the division of labor as anything but consumers . . . the terms in which they [could] be represented [were] restricted almost completely to those of corrupt feminine desire” (287). Burney’s novel explores the implications of excluding women with learning from access to legitimate cultural capital, critiquing a society that restricts women’s involvement in intellectual life.

The experience of Camilla’s younger sister Eugenia, who is the heiress of their uncle Sir Hugh and is rejected as a marriage prospect by her cousin Clermont Lynmere partly because of her classical education, bears out Miss Margland’s fear that providing Indiana with anything more than the most superficial education will hamper her ability to acquire both economic and cultural capital through marriage, partly because of the perceived correlation between education and physical appearance. Although Sir Hugh’s plan to give Eugenia a classical education was formed in an attempt to compensate for her physical disabilities, her society’s conviction that “her education had made her such a fright” (748) is shaped by an assumption that there is something fundamentally unnatural and disfiguring about giving a man’s education to a woman. Guest observes a similar alignment of learning and infirmity in the Bluestocking Elizabeth Carter, arguing that unlike other Bluestockings, who were able to “play with ease and pleasure on the image of the slatternly bookish woman,” Carter’s learning “produces a kind of infirmity, an eccentric strangeness” (117). However,

as Margaret Anne Doody argues, giving “lovable Eugenia the traditional defects of caricatured literary ladies” constitutes “an aggressive, decontaminating reversal of a satiric trope . . . Associating the horror at learned ladies with the old vulgar outcry at a crippled body, the author makes us reject both reactions as crude, inhumane, and archaic” (243). But whereas Sir Hugh appears to be mistaken in thinking that Eugenia’s education may compensate for a lack of beauty, it emerges that Miss Margland is similarly mistaken in believing that a woman’s beauty is capable of compensating for deficiencies in her economic capital. In privileging Indiana’s beauty and “personal charms,” the education that Miss Margland imparts (or, indeed, fails to impart) leads potential suitors to conclude that “though a passion for beauty was still as fashionable as it was natural, the time was past when the altar of Hymen required no other incense to blaze upon it” (747).

Each female character in Burney’s novel is in possession of something akin to a balance sheet. Different values are given to various competencies, including their beauty, education, social rank and economic status, and it is intended that increasing the value of one form of capital will compensate for deficiencies in another. As Lynch observes, the “interlinked fates” of Camilla, Eugenia and Indiana “diagram how female faces and fortunes are sustainable objects belonging to a single system of currency. They demonstrate that those assets are incompatible (as are the desire for beauty and the desire for money) by making it axiomatic that if a woman has one she lacks the other” (171). The female characters in Burney’s novel are constantly testing out their competencies and having their values assessed. A reckoning of balance sheets and a definitive evaluation of competencies occurs when a young woman seeks a marriage partner. The role of the governess in this process foregrounds Burney’s critique of those expectations of her culture that work to impede women’s development.

The Governess’s Unofficial Power

The fact that the governess is not one of the main players in what Bourdieu refers to as the “matrimonial game” (*Outline* 58) does not mean that she is exempt from involvement in its rules and

dealings. In his work on Algerian culture, Bourdieu makes compelling observations about the function of “the persons least qualified to represent the group and to speak for it (who can therefore be disowned if need be), such as an old woman . . . a midwife, or some other woman used to moving from village to village.” He declares that such women have a role “preceding the official proposal” of marriage in conducting “the least avowable negotiations relating to areas which the official ideology tends to ignore, such as the economic conditions of the marriage, the status offered to the wife in her husband’s home, relations with the husband’s mother, and similar matters” (*Outline* 34). The governess possesses a similar status to such women in being both apparently dispensable and one of the few people truly capable of discussing the necessary details “which the official ideology tends to ignore.” The governess thus potentially has a crucial role in facilitating courtship; although, as Bourdieu observes, her power “is by definition condemned to remain *unofficial* or even clandestine and occult” as “Competition for official power can be set up only between men . . . Even when women do wield the real power, as is often the case in matrimonial matters, they can exercise it fully only on condition that they leave the appearance of power, that is, its official manifestation, to the men” (*Outline* 41).

The man who officially possesses power over marriage negotiations in Burney’s novel is Sir Hugh. However, when Ensign Macdersey approaches Sir Hugh to request permission to pay his addresses to Indiana, Sir Hugh expresses considerable confusion. He is “scarce able to understand” Macdersey “from his volubility, and the extravagance of his phrases and gestures,” declares that “he did not mean to doubt his being a proper alliance for his niece, though he had never heard of him before,” and begs “he would not be affronted if he could not accept him, not knowing yet quite clearly if she were not engaged to a young gentleman in the neighbourhood” (269). Sir Hugh’s struggles to understand Macdersey, to comprehend his eligibility as a suitor, and to even know whether his niece is already engaged, establish that although he may possess official power, the real power over these negotiations lies elsewhere:

Sir Hugh, who always at a loss how to say no, thought this would have been a good answer, now sent for Miss Margland, and desired her to speak herself with the young gentleman.

Miss Margland, much gratified, asked Macdersey if she could look at his rent roll.

He had nothing of the kind at hand, he said, not being yet come to his estate, which was in Ireland, and was still the property of a first cousin, who was not yet dead.

Miss Margland, promising he should have an answer in a few days, then dismissed him. (269-70)

In referring Macdersey to Miss Margland, Sir Hugh establishes that her power is real, if unofficial. Her immediate request for Macdersey's "rent roll" cuts through Sir Hugh's blundering uncertainty and Macdersey's volubility by openly avowing the centrality of economic conditions to marriage. By bluntly exposing Macdersey's ineligibility to make a marriage settlement, Miss Margland thus achieves something that is impossible for Sir Hugh, in spite and because of his official power.

Nevertheless, Sir Hugh presumes that he is able to assert control over marriage negotiations. He "had long planned to give Eugenia to Clermont Lynmere, and he depended upon Edgar Mandlebert for Indiana" (54). Sir Hugh also inserts Miss Margland into his plots, determining that she will accompany Indiana to London once Indiana marries Edgar. Sir Hugh's plans confirm his conviction that Miss Margland is superfluous and inconvenient, and thus similar to the women that Bourdieu describes as "least qualified to represent the group and to speak for it (who can therefore be disowned if need be)." Miss Margland is believed to be "of little or no use" to the young women of Sir Hugh's household, and "he could very well spare her" (55).

Miss Margland's dependence on others makes her seem almost devoid of plot. Her narrative is positioned as one of stagnation, as she "languished and fretted away twelve years" in the country, with "secretly nourished" hopes of escape (53). Similar notions are repeated elsewhere, in descriptions of Miss Margland's "long and weary sojourn at Cleves" (63), which is later her "long and yawning sojourn at Cleves" (748), and her "eagerness to quit Cleves, which she thought a

convent for dullness, and a prison for confinement” (755). However, according to Sir Hugh’s plans, Miss Margland’s escape will not be to freedom, but to further servitude, and this will not come in the form of her own marriage plot, but in her promotion of the marriage of her pupil. Burney’s mocking of the “secretly nourished” hopes of the governess who is “void either of taste or of resources for the country” (53) reveals a truth that the governess can only obtain some escape from a dreary life through the good graces of her employer and her pupil. If the governess does possess some use as a guide through the process of courtship, it will be impossible for the fulfilment of such a role to possess the unblemished disinterest that is the privilege of those with legitimate cultural capital, particularly given the governess’s very real investment in the successful conclusion of the novel’s marriage plots.

The Governess and the Heroine

The novel’s central marriage plot concerns Camilla and Edgar, and this plot is closely related to Camilla’s education and development. Although she is not Camilla’s governess, Miss Margland features at key moments in Camilla’s narrative and her involvement in Camilla’s plots bears out Alex Woloch’s observation that in the realist novel, particularly the *Bildungsroman*, “minor characters stand for particular states of mind, or psychological modes, that the protagonist interacts with and transcends” (29). Claudia L. Johnson argues that “As central as the Edgar-Camilla conflict has been in the plotting of *Camilla* . . . in some ways Camilla’s relations to other women are of equal if not more weight to Camilla herself” (160), and Miss Margland’s observations significantly impact Camilla’s development, such as it is.

The majority of Camilla’s education is presided over by “the pure and practical tenets of her exemplary parents” (52). The seminal document that summarizes and validates the plan upon which she has been educated is a letter from her father, which he gives to Camilla after discovering her undeclared love for Edgar. The letter, designated “A Sermon” in the chapter heading, is a conduct book set piece that was subsequently abridged and anthologized (see Doody 231, 246; Epstein 127-

28; Rogers 73). In the letter, Mr. Tyrold emphasizes that “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 humor of the husband into whose hands she may fall.” Consequently, Camilla’s father informs her that she has been brought up “without any specific expectation” and educated “with as much simplicity as is compatible with instruction, as much docility for various life as may accord with invariable principles, and as much accommodation with the world at large, as may combine with a just distinction of selected society” (357).

Although many elements of Camilla’s education appear to accord with these ideals, there is a telling awkwardness in the description of seventeen-year-old Camilla’s character that follows a request from Sir Hugh that she visit him at Cleves. It is tempting to attribute Mr. and Mrs. Tyrold’s interpretation of Sir Hugh’s request as not only unwelcome but “utterly distasteful” solely to their concerns about Sir Hugh’s proven irresponsibility as a guardian. However, the unsettling juxtapositions that comprise the description of Camilla suggest that they have significant concerns about the character of the daughter they have educated. The first hint that Camilla is not all that her parents think she ought to be is a lack of correlation between her external appearance as “attractively lovely” and her character, which “called for more attention to its developement than to its formation.” Whilst “developement” and “formation” could be used synonymously to describe the processes of *Bildung*, here they are deliberately distinguished. “Formation” suggests the shaping and molding of Camilla’s character that may have been achieved by her parents’ educational program. And, with its connotations of movement, progress, maturation and change, “developement” signifies the true testing of this character beyond the home. Positive qualities possessed by Camilla, particularly her ability to inspire affection and interest through her engaging and vivacious disposition, are treated with suspicion, being coupled with notions of “watchfulness,” “fear,” “alarm” and “solicitude”. While the concerns of Camilla’s parents prove at this stage to be unfounded, the presence of these concerns suggests anxiety about the efficacy of Camilla’s

education. A further interesting element of the description is its statement that Camilla possesses an apparently inexplicable authority: “Her qualities had a power which, without consciousness how, or consideration why, governed her whole family.” Camilla is “the first object of the house” and “her persuasion was irresistible” (51-52). Threat and danger are implied in these statements, both because Camilla is presented as unnaturally governing those who ought to be her governors, and because her power is utterly compelling and ultimately mysterious.

The stage of Camilla’s education that is approached with trepidation by her parents – the stage of “development,” which takes place beyond their constant watchfulness – is finally presided over not by her parents, but by Miss Margland. In desiring to keep Camilla “unmarried, that he might detain her under his own roof” (54), Sir Hugh intends that Camilla’s confinement will succeed the long, weary and yawning twelve-year sojourn of Miss Margland. While Camilla, as Sir Hugh’s favorite niece, undoubtedly stands in a very different relation to him than the reviled Miss Margland, the plot that he imagines for her is similar to that offered to the governess in both its confinement and its dependence. And although her motivations may be distinct from Camilla’s, Miss Margland also shares Camilla’s ability to inspire fear and alarm by asserting influence over others.

Whereas other characters tend to view Miss Margland as a nuisance or as a source of humor, Camilla is unique in seeming to fear the governess. Although Camilla reflects that “as she was only a visitor at Cleves, Miss Margland had no right to control her” (107), Miss Margland’s accusation that Camilla has seduced Edgar and thus betrayed her cousin Indiana and the expectations of her beloved uncle is the primary instigator of Camilla’s fear. She not only fears that her undeclared love for Edgar will be exposed by Miss Margland, but that this exposure will hurt her cousin and her uncle, and will ultimately hurt her, particularly if Edgar does not reciprocate her feelings. Camilla’s perception of Miss Margland’s questioning and criticism as a “sudden and violent . . . assault” and “an attack the most offensive” emphasizes the profound impact that Miss Margland’s rebukes have upon her, and this is further enhanced both by the physical constraints placed upon her as she “stood suspended,” and by the hyperbolic descriptions of “a thousand other . . . emotions” and “the

whole tide of feelings” that are awakened by these confrontations (166-67). The violence that Camilla attributes to Miss Margland’s attacks may be explained by the violence of their results, particularly as they expose and release feelings that she has endeavored to keep confined.

Burney’s representation of Camilla’s fear of Miss Margland is exacerbated by Camilla’s perception that she is being put on trial. She decides not to have Eugenia make her excuses to her uncle when she is upset, “fearing Miss Margland would attribute her absconding to guilt, or cowardice” (170). Soon afterward, Camilla refuses to relinquish a visit to her friend Mrs. Arlbery because “that cruel Miss Margland will then accuse me of staying away only to follow the counsel of Edgar” and she laments, “into what misery has this barbarous Miss Margland thrown me! Eugenia herself seems now to suspect something wrong; and so, I suppose, will my uncle; and I can only convince them of my innocence by acting toward Edgar as a monster.—Ah! I would sooner a thousand times let them all think me guilty!” (182). While Camilla frequently protests that she is innocent of deliberately luring Edgar away from Indiana, which is the crime that Miss Margland accuses her of committing, in securing Edgar’s affections she is guilty of unintentionally disrupting the plots devised by Sir Hugh and promoted by Miss Margland. In her efforts to remain compliant with these plots by repressing her feelings, Camilla comes to resemble the “barbarous” governess in acting “as a monster.”

Miss Margland increasingly becomes a monstrous figure in Camilla’s eyes, as “the horror of her reproaches and insinuations conquered every other feeling” (182). In her endeavors to enforce Sir Hugh’s plots – which imagine marriage between Edgar and Indiana, and Camilla enduring a long sojourn with her uncle at Cleves that succeeds the governess’s own – Miss Margland also circumscribes Camilla’s powerfully engaging and vivacious character. Camilla’s eloquence is abolished, being replaced with “an exclamation nearly amounting to a scream” that is followed by silence, and further physical constraints are placed upon her, as she moves “involuntarily” until she is described as having “planted herself” at a distance from Edgar (236-37). The demand that Camilla hide her true feelings for Edgar, as well as her true animosity toward Miss Margland, requires “the

most severe stretch of fortitude, her short and happy life had yet called upon her to make” (171), suggesting that this is a trial not only for the marriage plot that will ultimately unite Camilla and Edgar, but also for Camilla’s *Bildungsroman*.

Miss Margland’s enforcement of social codes and behaviors due to her keen awareness of the power attendant upon possessing cultural capital frequently appears to contribute to the curtailment of Camilla’s development, particularly as the governess’s frequent challenging of Camilla is often met by the defense of silence. For example, when Miss Margland asks Camilla how she came by a nosegay that was a gift from Edgar, “Covered with shame, she could make no answer.” This attack reinforces the limiting of Camilla’s expression as it concludes with a resoundingly silent exchange: “Miss Margland now exultingly held out her hand: the decision was obliged to be prompt; Camilla delivered up the flowers, and ran into her own room” (196-97). However, once again Miss Margland acts as an unexpected catalyst for the emergence of Camilla’s repressed feelings when the governess tells Camilla and Indiana of a conversation that she had with Edgar, during which he “had not only thought proper to acknowledge his utter insensibility to Miss Lynmere, but had declared his indifference for every woman under the sun.” Initially, “Camilla disdained to understand this but in a general sense, and made no answer” and as Miss Margland proceeds to insult Edgar for his treatment of Indiana, Camilla “breathed hard with resentment; but still was silent.” It is only when Indiana declares that “any body is welcome to him for me;—my cousin, or any body else” that Camilla feels “absolutely called upon to speak, with all the spirit she could assume.” But this compelled speech is just as repressed as Camilla’s silence, and she announces a denial of her true feelings: “With regard to me, there is no occasion to remind me how much I am out of the question; yet suffer me to say, respect for myself would secure me from forming such plans as you surmise, if no other sense of propriety could save me from such humiliation” (271-72). A “sense of propriety” and “respect for [her]self” oblige Camilla to deny all of the proofs of love that Edgar has given her because he has made no formal declaration of marriage, and they also compel her to speak without avowing her own feelings.

As Doody observes, throughout *Camilla* “Burney questions the structure of conventional courtship, displaying the illogicality of . . . enduringly intricate and rule-bound activity . . . pointing out the insistently incongruous rules and stressing the paradoxes” (230). In expressing her approval of Camilla’s apparent submission to these rules, Miss Margland declares, “I hope you will have the spirit to shew him you care no more for him than he cares for you” (273). The “spirit” that Camilla was required to assume when “absolutely called upon to speak” is required here to show Edgar that she cares no more for him than he cares for her, without openly declaring her feelings and breaking the bounds of propriety. As Julia Epstein observes, “Camilla’s difficulty places her in an absolute bind: she must communicate her loyalty and love for Edgar Mandlebert without ever declaring herself openly. Women cannot take any charge of courtship” (149). Yet it is through her insistence that Camilla avoid declaring her feelings that Miss Margland pushes her toward a greater awareness of them, and the governess acts to both confuse and complexify Camilla’s conscience. From “a curiosity irrepressible,” Camilla “painfully” enquires, “but I don’t suppose—I can’t imagine—that it is very likely he should have mentioned anything good or bad—with regard to his care for me?” Although Camilla’s words express her doubt that Edgar will have spoken to Miss Margland of the extent of his feelings for her, which may allow her to evaluate whether she cares any more or less than he does, her manner of speaking expresses her desire: her desire to know his feelings, and her romantic desire for him. In spite of the apparent fruitlessness of speaking without openly declaring her feelings, which has led Camilla to make what she deems to be “a most useless, a most causeless enquiry!” Camilla responds to Miss Margland’s comments upon the dignified behavior that young ladies ought to display with yet another enquiry: “And pray, then, what—was there any—did he make—was there any—any answer—to this—to—” (273). Camilla’s initial silence has not been replaced by eloquence and avowal, but by a stilted, fragmented speech provoked by the governess that exemplifies the limitations that the rules and paradoxes of the marriage plot place upon women’s development.

Camilla's struggles with the feelings that are exposed in her exchanges with the governess, and with the demand that she speak without openly articulating her desires, can be considered in relation to the broader context of the eighteenth century's revolution in epistemology, which Adela Pinch argues "had strange effects on how writers represented people's relations to their feelings" (7). Pinch particularly notes the significance of "questions about what, and how, women can know" and observes that for a woman in the novel of manners, "Blinded by her education, the constraints of courtship, and the constraints of form, she must wish to know feelings without knowing that she knows them" (144). The exchanges between Miss Margland and Camilla are powerful because they expose and challenge the constraints of education, courtship and form. The sparring between the heroine and the governess acts out a common recognition of the necessity and the injustice of submitting to the social codes and behaviors that sustain the prestige and desirability of legitimate cultural capital.

Stephanie Russo notes that, in this context, "Women who dared to articulate their own desires, whether sexual or otherwise, were perceived as immensely threatening to social stability at a time when women were believed to be at the center of the upheaval that was the French Revolution" (85). Epstein concurs that "For Burney, the female voice speaks only when spoken to, its words always defensive, challenged, and challenging. This vocal structure inscribes itself in Burney's writing as the graphic expression of a continuous splitting between rebellion and uncontrollable imaginative necessity" (123). Camilla's responses to Miss Margland are certainly "defensive, challenged, and challenging" as she strives to comply with the demands of propriety while articulating desires that are supposed to remain undeclared. Yet Miss Margland also possesses a female voice that is "defensive, challenged, and challenging." She relentlessly defends herself, particularly challenging those who would charge her with negligence or ineptitude, most notably when Eugenia is kidnapped and "Miss Margland prepared for the post a labored vindication to Sir Hugh of her own conduct upon this occasion" (799) and when Indiana elopes with Macdersey and she sends Sir Hugh "a very elaborate panegyric . . . of her own conduct" (818). The self-interest that

characterizes Miss Margland's speech and writing means that it risks not fulfilling its purpose, and this is exemplified in the narrative statement that as Eugenia has been "long accustomed to hear the voice of Miss Margland without profit or pleasure, her ear received its sound, but her attention included not its purpose" (62). Considering the speech of the governess in relation to that of the heroine reveals Burney's exposure of the limitations placed upon women's self-expression and development. Speech that cannot explicitly acknowledge or properly hide women's desires, or to which nobody listens, is speech that has the potential to abort growth through its stuttering and excessive repetitions.

The Governess's Alternatives

The conclusion of the plots afforded to the governess and the heroine reinforce the inhibitions placed upon complex and meaningful female development that are represented throughout *Camilla*. There is a general agreement among critics that at the conclusion of the novel, Camilla has been formed in an image determined by her uncle, parents and husband, and she is enlightened only to the necessity of accepting the containment of the powerfully engaging and vivacious character that formerly troubled her parents and Edgar. The reach of her self-expression is limited and mediated by her husband, who "by generous confidence, became the repository of her every thought; and her friends read her exquisite lot in a gaiety no longer to be feared" (913). For Patricia Meyer Spacks, "Camilla gives up art and subtlety in favor of . . . subordination of will" (30), Katharine M. Rogers argues that "she has learned only that she cannot function on her own: instead of becoming an adult, she becomes a permanent ward of her parents and Edgar" (94), and Barbara Zonitch observes that "Burney deftly employs the pattern of the bildungsroman to show how her heroine's development is not so much her journey to social and sexual maturation as her gradual subjugation to a patriarchal culture" (95). While the novel's final paragraph denotes Camilla's defects as "Imprudence" and "the natural heedlessness of youth unguided," it also lists her positive qualities as comprising "the pure innocence, open frankness, and spotless honour of her heart" (913). Her

innocence is a defect when it leads to mistakes born of ignorance, even if these errors are acknowledged to be natural, but it is denoted an asset that enhances Camilla's eligibility for marriage when it is aligned with the purity of her body, mind and feelings. As Spacks argues, Burney is fundamentally concerned with the "ambiguities of innocence," as innocence and the possession of an untouched mind is "Camilla's central problem – as well as her chief sexual asset" (29). The conclusion of the narratives that are preoccupied with Camilla as the novel's central character reinforce Burney's concerns about the implications of a general project of under-educating women. While Doody rightly observes that Burney avoids providing any "absolute statement as to what is universally recommended or reprehended in the education of either male or female" (244), the emphasis on simplicity, docility and accommodation in Camilla's education is shown to equip her no more effectively for encountering the world and developing an authentic and rounded independent character than Eugenia's unconventional classical education or Indiana's education as a lady of fashion.

The problematic status of female education is once again echoed in the problematic status of the governess, which is reinforced at the conclusion of *Camilla's* plots. Earlier determined to be "of little or no use" (55), Miss Margland's tenuous tenure as one with "nothing she could teach" (45) is certainly past its date of expiration by the conclusion of the novel, particularly as Sir Hugh had only resolved "never to part with her till Indiana was married" (46). While I have argued that the minor and peripheral governess character is more useful to the novel than she seems as her true work in the narrative partly depends on the fact that she is not understood to have a significant role, her superfluity and redundancy prove to be particularly problematic when bringing the novel to a close. The problems that the laboring yet respectable governess posed for her society find their expression in the problems that the governess character poses for the novel's generic expectation that single female characters must ideally succumb to a marriage plot.

In the final chapter of the novel, Burney once again employs Sir Hugh to propose a marriage plot that is contrived and compensatory, but ultimately misguided. In order to absolve himself of

the lingering guilt and discomfort that he feels due to the failure of his plan to have Miss Margland live with Indiana and Edgar after their marriage, Sir Hugh devises one last marriage plot, which imagines Miss Margland as the wife of the classics tutor Dr. Orkborne. Sir Hugh's dilemma is implicitly and humorously aligned with the dilemma of the novelist as the novel approaches its final pages. Although Sir Hugh could hardly be said to have created Miss Margland and Dr. Orkborne, as their employer he is like a novelist in his sense of responsibility and in his desire to craft an appropriate and satisfying send off for these characters who were dependent on him, and whose narrative and social functions have been exhausted. He seeks a happy ending according to the generic expectations of the novel that both shapes and is shaped by the expectations of late eighteenth-century society, but he does so with no reference to the compatibility of Miss Margland and Dr. Orkborne as marriage partners. Unsurprisingly, this is another of Sir Hugh's abortive plots, but Burney intimates that the primary reason that it goes nowhere is because Miss Margland has engineered an alternative plot that circumvents the convenient and comic impulse to resolve loose ends with the marriage tie.

Miss Margland is ultimately called upon to become the companion of her former pupil Indiana, who has married Macdersey and who, "when the first novelty of *tête-à-têtes* was over, wished again for the constant adulatress of her charms and endowments" (909). This plot appears to place Miss Margland merely as an adjunct to her former pupil's marriage plot, but the visual similarity between "adulatress" and "adulteress" signals the possibility that Miss Margland may be enacting a subversive version of the marriage plot. Burney's narration suggests that Miss Margland's system of education has shaped Indiana's "weak mind" in such a way that, although Indiana is a married woman, she remains dependent on the management of her former governess. While Miss Margland continues to be economically dependent on Indiana under this arrangement, the permanence of the companionship, as Indiana will be "parted from her no more," suggests that Miss Margland's reliance is implicitly aligned to that of a wife in a marriage where the husband is the primary holder of wealth, which is the case in Camilla's marriage to Edgar. But whereas Camilla was expressly

forbidden to seduce Edgar or even to speak honestly to him about her feelings during their courtship, which contributed to much of her suffering throughout the novel, Miss Margland is acknowledged to have deliberately and overtly courted her former pupil by employing the “seductive” influence of “constant flattery” (909). The conclusion of Miss Margland’s narrative thus offers a compelling alternative version of the marriage plot that reinforces the limitations inherent in the version offered to Camilla. Binhammer argues that “*Camilla*’s marriage ending constitutes one of the worst payoffs in literary history. The novel’s final accounting leaves its reader deep in the red. [...] Through *Camilla*’s maddening duration and closure, Burney marks female downward mobility as what buys its community’s happiness” (142). But whereas Camilla concludes the novel being financially, emotionally and intellectually dependent on her husband, who “became the repository of her every thought,” Miss Margland has engineered a potentially more satisfying and consensual relationship of mutual dependence with Indiana, where the former governess’s financial dependence is balanced by the emotional and intellectual dependence of her former pupil.

It is precisely because the governess in *Camilla* is minor and peripheral, seeming to possess a limited narrative and pedagogical function, that she is able to be of considerable use in drawing attention to the inhibitions that social and narrative conventions place upon the complex and meaningful development of women. The governess’s demonstration of unofficial power exposes both the economic foundations of marriage and the limitations enforced by the rules and paradoxes of the “matrimonial game.” Ultimately, the governess’s greatest use may be in highlighting that the situation of the heroine at the center of the novel is in many respects just as precarious, rule-bound and ambivalent as the place of the governess at the periphery.

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