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Cecilia and the Eighteenth-Century Breakfast

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Abstract:
This article explores the tonal, structural and conceptual importance of the breakfast table scene within Frances Burney's second novel, *Cecilia* (1782). Building on Sarah Moss's work exploring ambivalent attitudes to food within Burney's life writing, I show that within Burney's fiction the breakfast table scene often operates as a site of discomfort, anxiety and entrapment. Moreover, I suggest, in dialogue with other recent readings of Cecilia that have highlighted key scenes as particularly crucial to the novel's structure, that the breakfast scene acts as a "hinge" (to re-purpose Arnold Palmer's term), which opens the door on a new character, development, or section of the plot; it is a narrative signal that an important shift is about to take place.

This article explores the tonal, structural and conceptual importance of the breakfast table scene within Frances Burney's second novel, *Cecilia* (1782). Building on Sarah Moss's work exploring ambivalent attitudes to food within Burney's life writing, I show that within Burney's fiction the breakfast table scene often operates as a site of discomfort, anxiety and entrapment. Moreover, I suggest, in dialogue with other recent readings of Cecilia that have highlighted key scenes as particularly crucial to the novel's structure, that the breakfast scene acts as a "hinge" (to re-purpose Arnold Palmer's term), which opens the door on a new character, development, or

section of the plot; it is a narrative signal that an important shift is about to take place.

My arguments are built upon the historical scholarship that identifies breakfast as an evolving and contingent ritual during the long eighteenth century. Before the seventeenth century, breakfast was near non-existent in the upper levels of society (Vogler 16). But by the end of the eighteenth century, it had become a common sociable event in the day of the genteel; in Cecilia (1782) it functions as a recurrent setting with its own atmosphere and etiquette, forming the backdrop to several key scenes. Though the Oxford English Dictionary dates the origin of breakfast as a verb meaning "provide with breakfast, entertain at breakfast" to 1793 ("Breakfast," v2), eleven years after the publication of *Cecilia*, the novel suggests that it was already a common social practice among genteel society. Though "breakfast" as a verb only appears once in Burney's novel, it appears frequently in its noun form, as people are said to be "at," "during" or to have an "hour of" breakfast (*Cecilia* 31, 128, 153).

All the breakfast scenes in Cecilia take place in the home, which had become, according to Sasha Handley, "the nucleus of sociability […] across eighteenth-century England" (163). Despite the ease that could be expected from entertaining in one's own private space, these scenes imbibe some of the discomfort and tension which may originate from Burney's own experience of the meal, or the dining table in general; an anxiety which, as Sarah Moss first suggested and several scholars have presumed since, could stem from what we would now recognize as *anorexia nervosa* (Moss 51). Literary critics have sometimes found positive peacefulness within Burney's home settings: Arnold Palmer states that Burney "brought to the novel

a domestic atmosphere, quietly realistic" (7) while Cassie Childs explores how during Burney's period of forced separation from her husband, her letters used gastronomic scenes to enhance their feeling of connection, creating a "metaphorical domestic space […] with food at the center" (132). In contrast, this article builds on Moss's investigation of Burney's life writing to find discomfort and tension within the gastronomic scenes in her fiction.

Specifically, it provides a case study of the role of breakfast in one novel. Throughout *Cecilia*, the breakfast table serves as a setting for multiple key scenes – from the introduction of vital characters, to confrontations which define the course of the narrative – establishing its importance and validity as an event with its own atmosphere, etiquette and subtext that can be appropriated to certain narrative events. The meal is also manipulated by certain characters, most notably the Harrels and Mrs. Delvile, as a way to perform their sense of status through its timing and routines, using it to cultivate a fashionable public image, but one that is always revealed to be a façade.

Critics such as Chloe Wigston Smith and Elizabeth Porter have recently shown the value of approaching *Cecilia* by foregrounding key scenes of interest, respectively prioritizing those which draw out the themes of small trade and urban Gothic. Both scholars find evidence that is compelling beyond the scope of just Burney's novel, illuminating aspects of eighteenth-century life and literary history and bringing attention to topics that deserve more research both within Burney's works and more widely. Porter's argument is especially relevant to my own, due to her focus on the relationship between a scene of frantic motion and the protagonist's feelings

of entrapment and anxiety. For Porter, "[m]otion dominates […] yet provides no sense of progress or closure" for Cecilia as she rushes around London in search of her new husband (236). Conversely, I find that the dining table forces stillness and stasis which can be just as oppressive because it demands that characters be vulnerable to the scrutiny of others through fixed proximity. Cecilia and others are trapped in a ritual laden with stifling etiquette which prohibits the release through movement, often resulting in characters who attempt to expend their nervous energy in other ways - such as Mr. Harrel's fidgeting, which I examine below.

I furthermore argue that throughout *Cecilia*, breakfast acts as a significant narrative setting, often opening doors to new characters, settings, or sections of plot. According to Arnold Palmer, the eighteenth-century breakfast acted as "one of the two main hinges of the day," separating it into three parts: "before breakfast, between breakfast and dinner, and after dinner" (18). In this way, it acted as a transitional marker, moving the household from the quiet privacy of the morning, spent in constructing correspondence or strolling about the garden to the more sociable, publicly active remainder of the day (Palmer 183). It is fitting in this context, then, that the first meal serves a very similar narratological purpose in *Cecilia*. Key breakfast scenes – the opening one at the Monckton's, the first and last ones at the Harrel's and the introductory one at the Delvile's, all of which I will examine below – work as narrative hinges, closely followed by an alteration in Cecilia's mood or location. Breakfast in Burney's second novel, therefore, is not only a site of discomfort, anxiety and entrapment, but is also a narrative signal that a shift is about to take place.

I: The Eighteenth-Century Breakfast

During the medieval and early modern periods, only laborers regularly ate breakfast, with health guides recommending the meal solely for the vulnerable or infirm (Purkiss 11-12). In the wake of the Reformation, however, an increase of nocturnal activity towards the end of the seventeenth century forced dinner and supper later in the day, making an early meal essential for the genteel as well as the laboring classes (Vogler 17; Handley 150). In the sixteenth century, dinner tended to be eaten around ten or eleven o'clock, but as the meal moved later in the day supper was eventually, as Pen Vogler claims, "shunted overnight into the next morning" to create breakfast (16). These changes, as Palmer states, "are rarely abrupt," especially in this early period (4). During the eighteenth century, however, the rate of change increased to the extent that by the end of the century, genteel households might not dine until seven or eight in the evening; late enough to sustain them through a night of revelry which may extend well into the next morning (Mennell 130; Handley 163-4). The ability to keep these late hours was, as Handley remarks, "an expression of power, wealth and status" as it made obvious to one's peers that one did not need to rise for work in the morning and could indulge in pleasurable activities as late as desired (152). This led to breakfasts becoming more of a staple feature in genteel timetables, with breakfast parlors appearing in fashionable households from the mideighteenth century (Vogler 21).

In both town and countryside, Palmer asserts that by

1780 it was usual "to defer the first meal of the day till 10 o'clock" despite the fact that the majority of people would already have been up for two or three hours before (10). The first hours before breakfast were spent dealing with correspondence, walking, shopping or simply, as James Boswell reports as part of his routine in 1763, lying "in bed indulging indolence" (183; see also Vogler 21; Palmer 19). James Woodforde, in contrast, displays his productivity by often recording tasks carried out before breakfast in his diaries, such as on 12 December 1781 when he purchased "6 yds of printed linen for [his] under Maid" before the first meal of the day (335). Woodforde even reports one morning in 1763 – the same year as Boswell's lazy indulgence – going hunting before his breakfast (16). The contrast between these two eighteenth-century men's accounts of the first section of their day shows the variation that could occur between classes and professions, which was especially diverse during an era when the definition and atmosphere of breakfast were still flexible.

Nowhere is this variation more evident in the early and mid-eighteenth century than in breakfast's incorporation into travelling. "Exploratory travel" increased in popularity from the 1690s (Handley 156), both encouraged by and encouraging the rapid developments that took place in roadbuilding and coach-making, and the great number of inns that were established throughout the eighteenth century, making travel "routine, unproblematic and unremarkable" across social strata (Maudlin 37-38). While fashionable genteel breakfasts at home came to consist mostly of sweetmeats like Bath buns, French bread and muffins, in what Vogler calls the "era of the enriched dough and the toasting fork," on the road it was still usual for a more meat-based breakfast to be had, with a far less sophisticated setting

and less complicated contents (18). Timings could also vary: Woodforde breakfasted at six o'clock on one trip in 1767 but on another in 1775 he travelled over fifty miles from Bath to Burford before stopping for breakfast (31, 79).

However, by the end of the century, a breakfast in one's own home would usually take place around ten o'clock and had become a sociable point for the family and any guests to meet in the morning. Tea and coffee formed a central part of the meal (Vogler 17; Maudlin 73). Moss attributes the tendency to write letters before breakfast, a habit popular across society (Palmer 19) to the fact that once everyone has "met for the first time at the table, their activities become public" and finding the "quiet and privacy" required becomes more difficult (Moss 56). Palmer claims that within the eighteenth-century daily structure, the first and third sections – before breakfast and after dinner – would, for much of the year, be spent indoors (17-18), which also aids a sense of privacy and seclusion that facilitates letter writing. Breakfasts could last for hours and tended to be alive with conversation; a particularly spectacular one appears in Boswell's diary in 1762: "In the morning, I went to Lord Eglinton's where was a breakfast, a concert, and a most elegant company" (77); this "company" included the Prince of Mecklenburge and numerous dukes, lords and ladies. Boswell in particular writes frequently and fondly of breakfasts, stating in the entry for 21 January 1763: "We had a genteel breakfast, which I think the most agreeable meal, in ease and plenty" (163).

II: Burney's Breakfasts

Frances Burney's own experience of breakfast was not

so idyllic. Breakfast is often a sociable meal as she represents it in her diaries and letters, but it can also be a site of discomfort or embarrassment. Awkward encounters throughout Burney's journals and letters give the first meal of the day an uncomfortable tinge alongside its pleasantry; a famous example involves a tense call from Thomas Barlow in 1775 after his repeated amorous attentions to a young Burney have been rebuffed and a letter left unanswered. Her embarrassment leads her to feign illness so well that "he himself afterwards took notice how bad my Cold was – though in fact I have none at all" (*EJL* 2: 127).

Another difficult breakfast takes place in 1782, the same year that *Cecilia* was published; at that breakfast, Burney was "detained" by Dr. Johnson, who "kept prating a flashy sort of comical nonsense" and evading her "effort to escape" (*EJL* 5: 148-49). Moss sees Burney as having a difficult relationship with food throughout her early life writings, "her appetite and 'shape'" becoming "a major preoccupation of her adolescence and early adulthood" and something on which her male friends and acquaintances comment (51). Though this fascination diminishes somewhat after this point, it does reappear later in the author's life, especially during the childhood of her son Alexander, when his body becomes "the ground of battle between his mother and his illnesses," leading her to almost obsessively document his eating habits (Moss 59).

Moss argues that this discomfort around food may have contributed to what she sees in Burney's novels as a sense that "commensality is sinister and mealtimes are a fight for survival" (45). She also points out that in Burney's fiction "there are many tables" but "not much food," with little to no description given of the items making up each meal and the food itself only

appearing when it is of use to characters as a prop or distraction (44). Throughout Burney's novels, according to Moss, her heroines "come dutifully to the table three or four times a day, and at periods of crisis flee it in distress almost as frequently" (44).

III: Breakfast in *Cecilia*

Building on these general observations, I now move to the specific task of examining the functions that the breakfast scene plays in *Cecilia*. From the novel's opening scene, in which the protagonist is faced with a room full of fashionable strangers, to the tense private meals in which Mr. Harrel attempts to exhort or manipulate her, breakfast is never an entirely pleasant prospect for Cecilia. This discomfort is related to the structural role that breakfast plays as what I call a "hinge" (re-purposing Arnold Palmer's observation about its function in the eighteenthcentury day) that moves the characters and plot from one phase to another. The novel's opening scene is a large, sociable breakfast, which removes Cecilia from her rural retirement and sends her on her way to London society. Her arrival in town is also marked with a breakfast, the first at the Harrels' house, in which her countrified early hours draw attention to her difference from the fashionable, late-rising society she is entering. At the other end of her stay with the Harrels, a final breakfast with her hosts acts again as a "hinge" between her time with them and her stay with the Delviles, though this time hampered by Mr. Harrel's manipulative and ultimately successful attempts to detain Cecilia until the fateful visit to Vauxhall. It is not only locational changes that are marked with breakfasts, but also emotional shifts or changes

in perspective, as Cecilia's first meeting with Mrs. Delvile demonstrates, wherein she discovers that her future mother-in-law is not as haughty and unpleasant as she has been led to believe – or is she? When brought together, the key breakfast scenes in *Cecilia* characterize the meal as a place of anxiety and a moment of transition, the anticipation of which only heightens the unease.

i. Breakfast at the Moncktons'

The most striking example of a sociable breakfast is the opening scene, in which Cecilia attends a breakfast at the Moncktons' on the morning that she leaves her childhood home for London. Handley remarks how the trend for entertaining within the home "thickened the web of social, professional and political relations" and "allowed deeper bonds of friendship to be forged" than within a purely public set of spaces (163). The breakfast at the Moncktons' acts as an instance of such narratorial "thickening", as Burney uses it to establish the web of characters that will populate the novel. Lady Margaret is addressed first – as may be expected from polite convention as the lady of the house – receiving Cecilia "with a coldness that bordered on incivility" (*Cecilia* 10). She is described as "irascible by nature and jealous by situation" and the reader is made aware of the fact that her bitterness towards the heroine originates from this jealousy and fear of her husband's partiality for Cecilia, something of which the heroine herself is ignorant (*Cecilia* 10). A concise, summative paragraph is given on each of the remaining relevant persons, informing us that Miss Bennet is "low-born, meanly educated, and narrow-minded," that Mr. Aresby is a rakish young man who wears his cockade solely

"to mark his devotion to the ladies" and that Mr. Morrice is a scheming flatterer who has learned "the surest way of making friends" is "becoming useful to them" (*Cecilia* 11).

A more in-depth study is made of Mr. Belfield, "the principal figure in the circle" with a face that was "all animation" (*Cecilia* 11) and eyes that "sparkled with intelligence" (*Cecilia* 12); Belfield is revealed to be erratic and flitting with his occupation, as "united with prudence," his talents "might have raised him to the head of his profession," but "being unhappily associated with fickleness and caprice, served only to impede his improvement" (Cecilia 12). In these words, it is possible to detect an omniscient but invested narrator. The extended length and depth of Belfield's introduction, and the hints about tragedy that it contains, betrays the fact that he will have a key role going forward and makes him memorable enough that when he reappears, he is firmly established in the mind of the reader.

As is often the case in Burney's novels, the narrator gives no details about the actual food, but primarily focuses on the conversation (Moss 61). The only time that the meal is directly referenced is when Cecilia, while Belfield and the captain gush over her beauty, "quietly began her breakfast" (*Cecilia* 12). In this moment Cecilia uses food as a prop to avoid an uncomfortable conversation. While maintaining and excusing her silence through her mouthfuls, Cecilia also sidesteps a shallow and selfindulgent element of the fashionable society to which her admirers belong: the use of mealtimes as an opportunity for networking and performance. The duplicity present in such a performance by Belfield and the captain echoes the much larger duplicity of their host Monckton, whose ability to perform and deceive is a key factor throughout the novel.

ii. Breakfast at the Harrels'

The chosen hour of breakfast is, in itself, a meaningful aspect of the meal's presentation in *Cecilia*. By the later eighteenth century nocturnal sociability had become highly fashionable in metropolitan elite circles, to the extent that sleep deprivation, according to Handley, "acquired modish overtones" and new words such as "lychnobite" emerged to describe people who conducted their business or pleasure at night (155-58). Waking later, and therefore eating later, were part of this display of a fashionable lifestyle, "the timetable of the day" having, as Stephen Mennell suggests, "connotations of rank which could be felt painfully" (130) and the times at which meals appeared, according to Moss, indicating "the hostess's actual or desired social standing" (46). Mrs. Harrel leans more towards a desired social standing than an actual one: the novel portrays her as desperate to present herself and her husband as fashionable members of society, even in the face of ruinous debt; a priority she exemplifies in her claim that "one must live a little like other people" (*Cecilia* 194). A vital part of Mrs. Harrel's character is her need to perform for society and her breakfast timetable forms a part of this.

On Cecilia's first morning in London, she rises "with the light" and "hasten[s] to the breakfast apartment" but is taken aback "upon finding the fire just lighted, the room cold, and the servants still employed in putting it in order" (*Cecilia* 28). Used to the earlier timings of the country, she has misjudged the late hours of town, a moment which Palmer sees as suggesting "a dewy innocence" on the part of the heroine (10).

It is ten o'clock when she tries again, this time finding "the room was then better prepared for her reception, but still it was empty" (*Cecilia* 28). When leaving the parlor after this instance, Cecilia is met by Mr. Arnott, who "expressed his surprize at her early rising, in a manner that marked the pleasure it gave to him" (Cecilia 28). The "pleasure" he receives from finding her up early suggests that he may be an adherent to the controversial yet popular contemporary belief that earlier hours equated to purer morality (Handley 161), which is perhaps intended to color the reader's perception of the heroine or of Mr Arnott himself. Though it is never stated at what time the Harrels do eventually breakfast, this first morning suggests they are attempting to heighten their fashionable appearance by extending it past the usual time of ten.

Cecilia's confusion at the Harrels' hour of breakfast ties her strongly to her country upbringing, where it is unlikely that the slow suffusion of fashions from London had yet reached (Mennell 128). As she becomes more adjusted to the town timetable, however, specific mentions of it become fewer and she seems shocked when, at the Harrels' rout at the beginning of the third volume, Mr. Briggs exclaims: "where's the supper? see nothing of the supper! Time to go to bed" (*Cecilia* 325). By this point, Cecilia has lived in London long enough to be in the fashionable rhythm; while she is probably outraged mostly at Briggs' rudeness, it is possible that she is also embarrassed by his enquiry after supper when "the Concert is not over yet" (*Cecilia* 325). This interaction hints at Cecilia's naturalization into the world of late hours subsequent to her first breakfast, and the moral danger she might be in accordingly.

The slow-rising Harrels do eventually make their appearance at breakfast, and one instance of their behavior in

this setting provides the apex of Cecilia's discomfort in the early sections of the novel. This is, of course, the breakfast scene at which Mr. Harrel attempts to manipulate Cecilia into providing him with a second loan. Upon entering the breakfast parlor, Cecilia is "somewhat surprised to see Mr. Harrel seated there, in earnest discourse with his wife"; her surprise reflects Harrel's usual disengagement with his wife and ward during the first part of the day (*Cecilia* 190). The intimacy of the breakfast table is a perfect environment for the attempt at extortion Harrel is about to make. After he loudly laments "the extra-interest [he] must pay one of those extortioners," Cecilia "without noticing these hints, began her breakfast," using the meal to avoid providing a response as she has done before (*Cecilia* 191). Between the following exclamations with which Mr. Harrel attempts to persuade her, he butters "some dry toast" and proceeds to say that he "would take his tea with them" in order to extend his presence (191). Diane Purkiss suggests that toast in the eighteenth century was a symbol of wealth, requiring good quality bread and excess labor, and points to the Harrels' "breakfast of toast and tea" as a display of luxury that contrasts with "the gruel of the miserly Mr. Briggs" (14). The food and drink of the breakfast table serve, therefore, as a prop for Mr. Harrel to create an appearance of financial security and attempt to retain an image of calm and normality amidst his desperation and building anger at his rising debts and Cecilia's noncompliance. Harrel gives his anxiety an outlet through fidgeting, even while etiquette and necessity keep him pinned to the breakfast table. We see him "tossing down a dish of tea" and "humming an air" as he attempts to recover "his usual unconcern" (*Cecilia* 191). Eventually his staged dialogue with a servant and his wife, hinting at the unscrupulous hands into

which he means to place himself, has the desired effect: Cecilia once again advances him money.

The first breakfast, anticipated with excitement by Cecilia and passed in lazy indulgence, contrasts starkly with the third and final breakfast seen at the Harrels' house. As with the previous scene, Cecilia arrives to find only Mr. Harrel and his wife at the table, seeming "mutually out of humour and comfortless" (387). Sitting with them, Cecilia "the whole time was planning how to take her leave," and desperate to escape and remove herself to the Delviles' house: a direct contrast to her eager rushing downstairs on her first morning in London (387). As the meal passes, "nothing hardly was spoken, and little was swallowed" though Mr. Harrel "was civil," which conveys the sense that the company eat solely to avoid conversation, as Cecilia has done on previous occasions (387). Mr. Harrel waits until "the tea things were removed" to ask whether Cecilia is "quite determined" on her removal (388). This may show a change in his attitude from the earlier example, as he no longer uses the calm and intimacy of the meal itself to disguise his persuasive intentions but instead waits until it has finished. Alternatively, the end of the meal may signify the retreat of the servants, which allows him to keep the fact of Cecilia's removal more secret in order to prevent it from reaching his creditors. Either way, this last breakfast at the Harrels' again provides the necessary environment for Mr. Harrel to persuade Cecilia to change her plans, instead coercing her into agreeing to spend the day with them. This coercion denies the narrative structure its natural progression through the breakfast's "hinge" that has been established by this point in the novel and ultimately leads to Cecilia's presence at his suicide. Once more, the privacy and intimacy of the breakfast table places Cecilia in a position in

which she does not feel able to refuse Mr. Harrel, with terrible consequences.

Cecilia's poignant final breakfast in their house draws a direct comparison to the first, enhancing the progression from fashionable members of society – or at least the façade of that, which Cecilia was initially unable to penetrate – to the crisis in which they now find themselves. Overindulgence and an urge for fashionable display has led the Harrels to this point, and the aggression and discomfort of the private breakfasts reveal just how false and draining this public persona is for them. In his desperation to uphold it, Mr. Harrel even disrupts the routine narrative structure, in which breakfasts often lead to a change in location, which forces Cecilia to remain with them for just one more (fatal) day. Overall, Cecilia's experience of breakfasts at the Harrels', from large public affairs to tense, private moments in the daily routine, gives both her and the reader a set of parameters within which to understand her hosts and their fashionable set. Image and display, whether in the food itself or the timing of meals, is tantamount, as individuals attempt to craft their perception as genteel members of society, covering up flaws and inadequacies that creep out in more private moments and adhering to trends so fervently that anyone who attempts to enter their world without a full knowledge of their ways immediately becomes marked as an outsider.

iii. Breakfast at the Delviles'

Though in some respects leading a less extravagant way of life than the Harrels, Augusta Delvile's household has a strikingly similar attitude towards the timing of breakfast. When Cecilia arrives in St. James' Square "between nine and

ten o'clock," she finds "nobody immediately ready to receive her" and ends up passing an unquantified length of time with Mr. Delvile and then his son (*Cecilia* 151). Cecilia apologizes to young Delvile for having "so much mistaken [their] hour of breakfast" and suggests finding "a book, or a news-paper, or something to fill up the time till Mrs. Delvile honours [her] with a summons," suggesting there is a significant portion of time to be filled (*Cecilia* 153). Delvile responds to this by relating that he "breakfasted long ago" and has already been to visit Mr. Belfield that morning, which is another example of Burney's desire for her reader to equate early hours with good morals (153).

When the time does come for breakfast with Mrs. Delvile, it is another example of Burney's use of the meal as a setting for introductions. The style is similar to the breakfast held at the Moncktons', with a paragraph dedicated to describing Mrs. Delvile, whose complexion "kept the traces of its former loveliness" and whose "lofty and commanding" carriage is tempered by "good sense, and… happily blended with politeness" (155). This is in opposition to Cecilia's expectation, since she has heard much of Mrs. Delvile's vaunted pride; a preconception which, when she "came into her presence immediately vanished" (154). The intimacy and privacy of an introduction at breakfast allows the pair to connect directly without concern for other members of society: "so much was Cecilia delighted with her visit, that though her carriage was announced at twelve o'clock, she reluctantly concluded it at two" (160). This breakfast lasts well past the usual ending time of eleven (Palmer 11), exceeding the routine length even if Mrs. Delvile came to the table later than the usual ten o'clock, and thus shows the extent to which the two women enjoy each

other's company.

It is significant that, in contrast to previous breakfast scenes, very little is reported either of the conversation or of the foodstuffs. Once Mr. Delvile and Mortimer have left, only a summary of Cecilia's enjoyment of the visit is given, allowing her and Mrs. Delvile to retain their privacy even from the reader. This heightens the sense of closeness between the pair – which only increases throughout the narrative until the marriage plot alters their relationship – and leaves a sense of mystery around what they may have discussed. This lack of information grants Mrs. Delvile a level of respect not afforded to previous characters because the narrator does not intrude into her private conversations, foreshadowing the intelligence and dignity Mrs. Delvile will display later in the narrative. The bond between Mrs. Delvile and Cecilia is a core relationship for the protagonist, and the setting of their first meeting at an intimate breakfast so private that even readers do not know what is discussed firmly establishes the importance of the bond that they forge throughout the novel.

Nonetheless, there are warning signs embedded within this scene, which thecontemporary reader might well know how to read. Augusta Delvile is a deeply attractive character in many respects, but her pride and snobbery are also immensely damaging to Cecilia and Mortimer's happiness and are the cause of the most important and painful conflicts within the later narrative. Such ambivalence is foreshadowed in the breakfast scene at which she is first introduced; the hour of which provides an uncomfortable echo of the Harrels' routine, even while the content is much more pleasant.

Conclusion

In this article I have shown that, throughout *Cecilia*, breakfast repeatedly functions as a key point of narrative transition, as well as often being imbued with feelings of anxiety, discomfort and unease. Just as Palmer claims breakfast was a "hinge" in the day of the eighteenth-century gentry, so too does it function as a hinge in *Cecilia*'s narrative, moving beyond mere set dressing to mark an emotional shift or change in direction for the plot. It also becomes evident through the novel that the routines and rituals of breakfast are often deployed by characters for show, becoming a way to perform morally suspect fashionable behaviors. The timing of meals is especially key to this.

My analysis of only one mealtime in one novel yields initial insight into Burney's methods of utilizing everyday gastronomic routines and behaviors for the purposes of narrative progression and social commentary. Much may be gained, therefore, by approaching Burney's other fiction and drama with a similar lens. A more wide-reaching study could create a broader and much more detailed picture of this author's relationship and engagement with food, not restricted to her life writing but extending into the fictive and dramatic worlds that she built. As well as engaging the historical scholarship that identifies breakfast as an evolving and contingent ritual during the long eighteenth century, such an investigation might also make a valuable contribution to such a field of enquiry.

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