Gambling with virtue: The moral ramifications of female gaming in the early novels of Frances Burney

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GAMBLING WITH VIRTUE: THE MORAL RAMIFICATIONS OF
FEMALE GAMING IN THE EARLY NOVELS OF
FRANCES BURNEY

by

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Bachelor of Arts
Armstrong Atlantic State University
1997

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Master of Arts Degree
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College of Liberal Arts

Graduate College
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Gambling With Virtue: The Moral Ramifications of Female Gaming in the Early Novels of Frances Burney

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ABSTRACT

Gambling With Virtue: The Moral Ramifications of Female Gaming in the Early Novels of Frances Burney

by

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Gambling has always been an influential factor in literature; the importance of gaming to social entertainment in the eighteenth-century is inextricable from both historical and literary studies of the period. In the novel, gaming functions as a tangible social vice; the financial perils and moral recriminations suffered by literary characters is an essential part of their personal development.

Frances Burney uses gaming as a fundamental element in her early novels; the trials her heroines experience during their forays into society all include the presence of gaming in some form. The proximity of gaming, as well as the social and moral implications of indulging in such behavior, negatively influence each of Burney's heroines in some way. The women must learn to navigate through society's intricacies while protecting their moral characters, ultimately securing the esteem and affection of their respective love interests.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Let frailer Minds take Warning: and from Example learn, that Want of Prudence is Want of Virtue (Moore 271)

By the 1750’s, the popularity and regularity of social gaming had become a tangible concern for moralists, including the dramatists and poets of the time. As the above excerpt from Edward Moore’s *The Gamester* shows, failure to guard against unwise behavior, specifically the failure to resist the temptation of gambling, signaled a lack of virtue in an individual. Absence of prudence and virtue in an individual, tantamount to an irreligious disrespect for life, ranked among the most shameful behavior possible to the moral minds of the mid-eighteenth century. Although Moore’s play is among the first British works to openly condemn this type of behavior, several other literary works followed suit. Despite the predominance of central male characters in popular drama, the prevalence of female gamesters certainly existed and became cause for concern in the later eighteenth century. Yet this concern differs from that of male gamesters; the inclination toward gaming in a woman signaled something far worse. Wagering and indulging in card play carried for woman a stigma of promiscuity unparalleled by any moral censure men’s similar behavior incurred. Two questions arise from this phenomenon: Why did women suffer a different and harsher censure for their behavior
than their male counterparts? When does the literature of the time begin to reflect this concern for moral degeneracy in women?

The antigambling literature of the period returns again and again to the figure of the gambling woman, who was, if anything, more problematic than her male counterpart. As Gillian Russel summarizes the situation, addiction to gambling was represented as profoundly unnatural for a woman, a betrayal of social responsibilities and public reputation as in the case of men, but also of her body, her very femaleness (Russel 484). Russel supports this viable claim by citing a notorious eighteenth-century gamester, George Hanger, who claimed that the hours and feverish atmosphere of deep play not only destroyed female beauty but also inhibited a woman's fundamental duty—the production of children. Hanger's comment illustrates the unequal critiquing of female behavior that lies at the center of Russel's argument, and that is also crucial to the close reading of Burney's novels presented here. Female gambling was much more profoundly threatening to the social order in that it seemed to represent a rejection by women of their domestic responsibilities as wives and mothers, reproducers of the patriarchal line (484). It is this mindset to which I wish to draw attention and explore. With the rage for games of change pervading all social strata in England by the 1770's, gaming was naturally condemned as a sign of moral degeneracy and irresponsibility. Women, however, suffered far more than men for indulging in popular leisure activities.

The threat to female moral character through extravagance excites less notice than the more tangible menaces like rape and abduction in the eighteenth-century novel. The ramifications of gaming upon character have been denied sufficient attention from historical and feminist literary critics despite its continuous presence. Frances Burney's
novels are among the first literary works to attribute significant weight to the prevalent danger gaming posed to women from their social environment. In each of Burney's early novels, *Evelina*, *Cecilia*, and *Camilla*, different aspects of gaming take narrative shape; from simple foolhardy betting to serious card playing and die throwing, gaming is a constant, threatening presence. By exposing her heroines to the perils of social gaming, Burney conveyed the importance of young ladies avoiding all forms of gaming if they wished to maintain irreproachable characters. Although an author comfortable using considerable satire and wit in her novels, these particular literary devices do not detract from the seriousness of the issue Burney addresses. From her personal correspondence it is clear that Burney's disapproval of gaming in all forms (that involved betting) was quite serious. Her use of gaming as a literary device can be seen in several different lights; the stern portrayal of character defamation deserves to be taken in earnest and treated as a very real social concern.

While Burney herself studiously avoided the gaming tables despite their popularity, her in depth awareness of wagers can only have come from first hand knowledge. Indeed, her notes on characters and thematic structures reflect her interest and concern for the prevalence of gaming. Drawing on the society around her, Burney earnestly portrayed the undermining social effects of gaming on the female person. The inherent good nature and moral strength of a woman did not guarantee an unblemished reputation; guilt by association with dangerous company could become a significant threat to character. Social pressures, condoned habitual pastimes, and perilously naïve judgment all contributed to the rigors of survival for upper class young ladies.
The equation between loose feminine morals and card play stretches further back into literary history. Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* incorporates this very notion with unmistakable (although farcical) clarity; a young, single woman indulging in gaming (however innocent) risked her moral virtue. Belinda understands the rules, but not the nature, of the game. Her desire to play, to risk her gold and challenge the male players, is rewarded with an inglorious victory. Although Belinda wins the card game, she loses a lock of hair, a symbol of her vanity and virtue. Pope's treatment of feminine virtue at risk from gaming is poignant, yet for more than a century following his poem women remain relatively unimportant in the moral dramas penned by English authors.

The suggestion of sexual imperilment is further seen in early eighteenth-century stage productions. As Beth Kowaleski Wallace suggests in "A Modest Defense of Gaming Women," several early plays, including *The Basset Table* (1706), *The Lady's Last Stake* (1721), and *The Provoked Husband* (1728) deal with female reputation and gaming. (Wallace 22). Even though Wallace is more interested in aristocratic contexts of gaming and "a class-bound anxiety about the derivations, disseminations, and ultimate destination of wealth," her exploration of the portrayal of female gamesters is valuable because it shows the continuation of Restoration moral concerns (22). Although the female characters in the aforementioned plays are married women, or women tricked into marriage through their reckless play at the tables, the threat to their reputations is still a viable concern.

If gaming was viewed as a form of dissipation early in the century, the later eighteenth century saw another, more concrete reformation. In England reformers sought to guide society away from the urbanity, cosmopolitanism, deism and polite sociability of the
early eighteenth century and towards the earnestness, sobriety, moral strictness, self-discipline and domesticity of the nineteenth century (Roberts 118). Gaming stood at the center of these recognized dissolute habits; the common social practice and acceptability of gaming threatened the very civility of the genteel classes. The natural response to this return to moral values saw a wave of reformist style literature entered the English literary marketplace. Philosophical texts abounded, concentrating on morality and politics, beliefs and authority, and critiqued the contemporary existence and often misapplied practice of these ideals. The novel took on a new, purposeful task: instructing contemporary society on acceptable, reformed social behavior, and demonstrating through example the perils of licentious and immoral living. The movement was paralleled by a similarly motivated reformation in France.

The French and English literature of morality, specifically in the dramatic and novel forms, show some remarkably similar concerns from the late 1750’s onward. Although various sorts of deviant behaviors were condemned, drinking and gaming came under especially heavy attack, as did the social venues that promoted these activities. These idle habits, generally indulged in by the middle and upper social castes, entailed significant financial losses. Accordingly, the portraits of the genteel classes suffered more from the pens of contemporary writers. Plays, poetry, and novels alike condemned and ridiculed the freewheeling and wasteful attitudes of the aristocracy. The first literary work dedicated solely to exposing the moral degeneration of a gambler is Edward Moore’s *The Gamester*, published in 1753. The play opens with the main character, Beverley, lamenting the financial ruin and social scandal immediately pending his foolish behavior at the card tables. Moore focuses on the shame and pecuniary discomfort Beverley throws
his family into rather than glamorizing the excitement of play. When the reader meets Beverley, he has just finished a long night of gaming that has put him beyond tolerable discomfort; the tragic hero thinks exile or suicide as the only possible solutions to his predicament. As Beverley exclaims in Act 1,

This night has stung me to the quick—Blasted my Reputation too—I have bound my Honour to these Vipers; play’s meanly upon Credit, ‘till I tir’d ‘em; and now they shun me to rifle one another . . . It is my Shame—the Poison that enflâmes me (Moore 238).

A French adaptation of Moore’s play by Bernard-Joseph Saurin reflected the same rising voices against gaming and wasteful living. In Beverlei, the central character follows a similar path, loosing untold amounts of money by gambling them away, and stricken with remorse and shame for the social and familial repercussions of his obsession with cards. When confronted with his impending ruin, Beverlei exclaims:

à ma femme, à ma soeur je n’ose me montrer . . . j’ai tout trahi, l’amour,
l’amitié, la nature . . . la honte et le remords me suivent en tous lieux . . . o du jeu passion fatal! Ou, plutot, vil amour de l’or (Saurin 11). 2

The notoriety and deprivation associated with gaming in these mid-century works clearly signal the dawn of popular social condemnation for male gamesters indulging in a nefarious pastime.

Cards and gaming unequivocally formed an essential core of the social structure in the eighteenth-century. Their rising popularity took on multitudinous forms, yet their single purpose quickly streamlined into the thrill of the win. High stakes and reckless play became a drug to the players. With the resurgence in religious values and the restructuring of social mores, gaming haunted the moral guardians of society. The theme
of gambling began to be used by writers as the most eloquent device in order to prove the moral degeneration of their hero (Mihram). At some point, this commodious genre diverged into two analogous streams: male and female gamblers.

Despite the different attitudes about male and female gamesters, most heroes of eighteenth-century literature tended to be male. The usual morality tale detailed the perilous consequences that reckless love of gaming wrought among otherwise noble and upright characters. Frances Burney expanded this literary norm to include women as central figures. Young women entering society without proper guidance also stood in danger of moral degeneracy and ruin, not just in the traditional sense of physical virtue, but through close proximity to gaming and dabbling in games of chance that most upper classes patronized for entertainment. It is fair to say that this model of budding virtue sidestepping or falling into vice was a new creation, and ventured into previously unexplored literary venues.

Traditional novels of experience, made popular by authors Defoe, Richardson and Radcliffe often outline the physical perils of their heroines, centering the danger to young women in unscrupulous men themselves (and by extension their actions). Although Defoe certainly incorporated gaming and its detrimental influence in *Roxana* and *Moll Flanders*, the heroines themselves were not impressionable girls but rather fallen women struggling for survival. While these novels were moderately feminist in their portrayal of social indignities and oppressions committed against the female sex, they by no means meant to portray realistic scenarios encountered by well-bred young women. Along different lines, Richardson’s *Pamela* paints an exemplary model of virtue in his heroine, but the strength of her character is only challenged by her Master’s sexual intimidation.
His Clarissa fares far worse, obliged to throw herself on the mercy of the man who ruins her, and rewarded for her experience with death. Radcliffe’s gothic style, although toyed with in Burney’s novels, is merely a stylistically popular backdrop to the more diverse and suspense riddled perils that confront her heroines.

Conversely, modern studies of gambling in literature tend to focus on the economics of gaming in society, its direct connection to French social and literary traditions, and its contribution to the rise of Victorian morals and social mores. Contemporary studies, including Thomas Kavanagh’s exploration of gaming as social practice in *Enlightenment and the Shadows of Chance* (1993), focus primarily on issues like monetary circulation and the influence of passion over the exercise of reason in French culture. In Liz Bellamy’s *Commerce, Morality and the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (1998), the center is on the consideration of luxury as a vice in the context of increased wealth and economic strength in England. Neither devote attention to the connection between morality, gaming, and the decline of personal reputation in literature.

For a direct treatment of gaming and its contribution to the degeneracy of character in literature, we are limited to the abundant but decidedly narrowly focused anti-gambling literature produced during the later eighteenth-century: the male narrative. Numerous dramas written between 1760 and 1795 outline moral, financial, and physical perils of the rampant gambling that enjoyed widespread popularity in eighteenth-century English life and theatre. Yet these plays absolutely confine themselves to the actions of the male central character, ignoring the wider effects of reputation and hardship on the men’s families, specifically the wives and daughters who ultimately bear the brunt of the financial and moral burden. Thomas Holcroft’s *The Road to Ruin*, Edward Moore’s *The
Gamester, and Frederick Reynolds' Notoriety all explore the infestation and degeneracy that gambling causes among decent families (Young). The protagonists here are exclusively male, and while the reality of the female gamester is well documented in later critical studies, notably Russel’s Faro’s Daughters, her appearance in the popular novels and dramas in Burney’s time is scant.

Exactly when the shift in attitude, perceiving gaming as irresponsible behavior to moral licentiousness began is difficult to pinpoint, but condemnation of gaming females is clearly evident by the 1770’s. By the time Burney entered society, the prevalence and notoriety of gaming women had earned an independent space within the English social realm. Richard Sheridan’s The School for Scandal, published in 1776, painted the reckless behavior of the Duchess of Devonshire and her cohorts in no uncertain terms; the habits of these wealthy women had become both scandalous and epic. As early as 1779 the debts of the Duchess and her high stakes playing friends were causing outrage; by 1792 the Duchess herself owed some 62,000 pounds (over 6 million dollars) in gaming debts (Russel 484). Such losses were unrivaled and created new concerns for the characters of gamesters. In 1792 a royal proclamation testifies to the rampant and disreputable reputation gaming had earned; George III’s “Proclamation Against Vice” was issued as a result of the general alarm high stakes gaming raised (489).

Within eighteenth-century society, expectations regarding the social carriage of young ladies clearly did not look favorably upon social gaming. Within a male dominated social structure women were forced to conform to conservative and emphatically domestic roles, or else be ostracized as disreputable and immoral. Several female authors tackled these constraints on behavior. Mary Wollstonecraft dealt primarily with social
inequalities and moral decay; Mary Hays broached the less palatable reality of moral and physical violations by man and society against women. Meanwhile, by making concessions to polite taste in her references to current cultural events and personalities, Burney reached a much wider audience (Kraft 144). Burney shaped the feminine centered "novel of experience" into a viable literary contender by incorporating unexplored venues of female social behavior. Not only is Burney among the first female authors of the time to address moral issues and behavior in unorthodox social situations, but she was absolutely the first to incorporate gaming issues under the guise of the ladies' novel. Extending her view to the social disapproval and moral licentiousness associated with female gamesters, Burney exposes a new and genuine pitfall for young women in society.

The love of cards, therefore, came to signify something far more malignant than reckless passion for play in women; it translated into a licentiousness and wanton behavior that branded the female player as a morally adulterated being (Russel 484). Men indulged in gaming at institutions such as White's and Brook's, which enjoyed sanction as legitimate entertainment because of their status as unofficial social clubs of Parliament. This luxury was not available to women, however, who gambled in private houses, often under the pretext of a musical concert or an evening of amateur theatricals (484). In addition to cards, various social games of chance enjoyed popularity in everyday life; raffles, drawing straws, and horse or carriage racing, although not viewed with the same disapproving tone, involved the same principles and thrill of chance and potentially rewarding financial speculation that card tables offered.

Frances Burney took this social norm and subtly introduced it to the woman's literary realm, following its evolutions and potential corruptions in novels where women were the
central figures. Young women entering society without proper guidance stood in danger of moral degeneracy and ruin, not just in the traditional sense of physical violation, but through close proximity to gaming and dabbling in games of chance that most upper classes patronized for entertainment. It is fair to say that the idea of tainted moral virtue, by no means a stranger to literary heroines, ventured into previously unexplored territory through the adventures of Burney's heroines. Although Burney's heroines never flagrantly indulge in these pastimes but rather are lured to them through mistaken judgment or careless association, they are the first heroines to narrate their perilous journey into society and show by their own faulty judgment the proper way to avoid unpleasant predicaments.

In Burney's first novel *Evelina*, published in 1778, women are relegated to watching men gamble from the sidelines. Betting is a frequent conversation topic among the gentlemen, often the solution to a disagreement or speculation. In fact, the Book of Betting at White's shows the startling range of wagers made between gentleman. From the death of a Dowager Duchess to the time before an exchange of fire between French and British ships would occur, nothing appears to have been regarded as taboo. *Evelina* was written solely from caricatures that Burney sketched from familiar acquaintances and friends, and reflects the very real state of affairs during her own youth. Burney claimed to strive to show "the accidents & adventures to which a 'young woman' is liable" in her first novel (Burney 1). Yet at the same time Burney cleverly exposes the ridiculous behavior of the ton. Evelina's credulousness subjects her to some unorthodox situations, from which she must protect herself without offending social customs or further risking
her moral reputation. It is her close proximity to betting and games of chance that endanger her reputation more than anything else.

Despite her concern for propriety, Evelina is exposed to some undesirable company, and is witness to some extravagant betting. Because the company one kept influenced reputation, the activities indulged in by Evelina’s company reflected on her character as well as theirs. She must separate her personality from those around her and stand apart without offending them. Evelina must learn to share the proper, refined condescension practiced by Lord Orville (her potential suitor) in order to set herself apart from the fashionable town set. The outcome of the novel, which turns around an elaborate courtship-plot as all Burney’s early novels do, is effected by the heroine’s successful performance in society. Her ability to survive the rigors of social life and to maintain her moral virtue is rewarded with a well mannered, wealthy husband.

Burney’s second novel *Cecilia* presents a more developed character fully appreciative of the hazards of society. Although Cecilia is an heiress with an independent fortune, she must also learn through error and circumstance the evils of gaming. Despite her aversion to these habits, the larger part of society she encounters plays card games on a daily basis. Cecilia is forced to live among them during the six months preceding her majority. Burney’s criticism of this set is illustrated through Cecilia’s hard treatment, despite her incorruptible character. She watches her guardians, a girlhood friend and her husband, ruin themselves financially and socially through gambling debts and bad management. She also suffers personal disappointment and social censure for her innocent connection to them. Cecilia’s struggles are a more pointed example of the dangers to reputation of which young ladies were susceptible.
Cecilia’s primary deficit is her generous and trusting nature, which is repeatedly abused through the hands of trusted friends. Her guardians are engrossed with their dissipating lifestyle. Obliged to accompany the Harrels into society during her short residence with them, she suffers a loss of reputation by direct influence. She realizes she must separate herself from the imprudent living situation, however, during the time it takes her to complete this breach she is fleeced for a veritable fortune. Her attempts to save her friends involve her with a moneylender, and consequently her reputation is tarnished as she is assumed an extravagant spender.

Her love interest, Mortimer Delvile, expresses disbelief and disapproval when her actions come to light, and subsequently doubts her worthiness as a future wife. The importance attached to her fortune is a bitter disappointment for Cecilia, particularly when the bulk of it is lost. Yet the manner in which it is lost is of paramount importance; when Delvile believes she freely contracted a moneylender to provide her with spending funds, he is convinced that her character has been irrevocably altered by her residence with the Harrels. Only after the exposure of the Harrel’s debts does Delvile realize the true cause of Cecilia’s financial situation. By being unprepared for these hazards her reputation suffers; bad management is not excused by a generous nature, and her deprivation of fortune and estate is attributed to want of guidance. Cecilia’s troubles suggest that despite intelligence and modesty, the protection of a husband or father is a young lady’s only hope against society’s exigencies.

The synthesis of Burney’s experiments with gaming and moral peril is evident in her third novel, *Camilla*. This work broadens the dangers to the heroine’s moral worth by involving her in consistently bad financial situations. Unlike her predecessors, Camilla
has the benefit of living parents and ample family from which to draw advice and support. Her forays into refined society differ from those of Evelina and Cecilia. Despite a protective and loving family, Camilla is easily susceptible to the whims and frivolities of her companions. The barrage of social situations she encounters present gaming in several covert ways that lead Camilla into dire financial straits. Her inability to resist persuasion and outright cajoling by those around her make her moral reputation vulnerable. It is not the literal cost of these mistakes that is weighed. Her behavior among those more socially experienced, and her seeming to conform to the fashionable set is counted against her eligibility as a bride. In order to maintain her worth and secure a husband, Camilla struggles to steer her reputation clear of that of the company she keeps. At every turn, however, her ‘polite participation’ is required to maintain her status and respectability in society.

The first example of social ‘games of chance’ occurs fairly early in the form of a raffle for a locket. Initially Camilla shies away from the raffle; she is convinced to try her luck by her companions, the first of many such instances. Although Camilla feels that this type of social entertainment is morally wrong she allows herself to be influenced. Her attempts at good sense are thwarted by the connivance of chance and good intentions. The first lottery is followed by a second, and Camilla’s extraordinary luck at winning both the necklace and a pair of expensive earrings create a temporary, childish thrill for her. The prizes she collects outshine the doubts she had about participating, and lessen the guilt she would have felt if she hadn’t won.

While Camilla’s halfhearted engagement in these lotteries is certainly not in itself worthy of moral censure, her friendship with Mrs. Berlinton exposes her to some more
pernicious vices. As Camilla is introduced into this higher social set, the petty games of chance give way to more extravagant types of betting. The Faro tables bring excitement into her friend’s house, and her unconcerned attitude about monetary losses, as well as a disregard for gossip and propriety, contribute to Mrs. Berlinton’s declining social reputation. Although Camilla only observes these games, she participates in the hopes and disappointments of the players. Her reputation suffers by her residence in the house and presence at the Faro tables. Edgar Mandelbert, suitor and possessor of Camilla’s heart, is severely disappointed at Camilla’s choice of company. He assumes her behavior in society is indicative of her unworthiness as a bride and releases Camilla from their engagement.

Only through Radcliffian dramatics, a life threatening fever brought on by despair over her actions, is Camilla freed from the guilt that oppresses her. Her crimes are small when contrasted to those of her friend Mrs. Berlinton and even her brother Lionel, whose scandalous behavior at school bring disgrace and pecuniary hardship on the family. The lesson, however, serves as a forceful one to contemporary readers because of the realistic threat it presents. Exposure to social disgrace, finally forgiven by family and lover, Camilla is restored to life having thoroughly learned to despise gaming and social excesses.

Burney’s novels enjoyed relatively widespread readership upon their publication. *Evelina* was more than well received; a writer for the *Critical Reviewer* claimed that *Evelina*’s moral and literary merit ‘would have disgraced neither the head nor the heart of Richardson,’ and not only could but *should* be brought into the home (quoted in Gonda 111). Horace Walpole stated in a letter to Hannah More that *Cecilia* and *Evelina* were
inimitable, despite the frequent attempts of aspiring authoresses to produce similar work. Popular nineteenth-century authors like Jane Austen and George Eliot continued to draw on the world of gaming, which saw an explosion of condemnation in Victorian literature. The moral incrimination of gaming remained unchanged, as did popular disapproval. Although these later novels continue to emphasize the importance of behavior through example, disreputable moral behavior and gaming addictions is confined to men. Burney remains a paradigm in the feminine literary world for exposing a social peril that endangered women’s reputations as well as their fortunes.

Endnotes

1 For the purposes of this study, gaming and gambling are used interchangeably, as the terms are likewise used interchangeably throughout contemporary literature.

2 "I betrayed everything, love, friendship, nature... shame and remorse follow me everywhere. Fatal love of game! Or rather, mean love of gold!"

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CHAPTER 2

EVELINA: MODESTY REWARDED

_The mind is but too naturally prone to pleasure, but too easily yielded to dissipation: it has been my study to guard her against their delusions, by preparing her to expect—and to despise them_ (Burney, _Evelina_ 7)

Evelina is the first Burney heroine thrust into the pleasure-seeking atmosphere that constituted the refined _haut monde_, and her “lessons of experience” serve as a model for young readers on how to behave in society. Evelina is the product of two generations of imprudence; she cannot claim her father’s name or fortune, but is forced to make her own way without the protection of a legitimate family name. Sheltered by her guardian, possessing no social position, Evelina is both wary of society and reluctantly drawn into it by friends of her deceased mother. Mr. Villars, her guardian since birth and a generous man, is called upon to surrender her to the hands of Lady Howard (friend of the deceased Carolyn Belmont, Evelina’s mother) and later through extended family. Her experiences and actions model the morally prudent conduct expected from well-born ladies during this era. Despite being confronted with many improper and offensive situations, Evelina maintains a dignified front and is rewarded with both name and husband at the end.

Evelina herself is honest, artless, and innocent; there is no reproach to be made on any aspect of her character (Thompson 159). Although this might otherwise make for a rather lackluster heroine, it is precisely her lack of tangible experience with economy and expenditure that makes her interesting. Burney is already experimenting with gaming and
the various social settings in which innocence must fend off dissipation and idle pleasures; her comic incarnations of society humor the reader to no small extent.

Elizabeth Kraft cites Burney’s style as evidence of a trend in the attention to moral seriousness and elevated sentiment that characterized a number of novels published during 1777 and 1778. Kraft lists several other works that, like Burney’s first novel, attempted to try to combat the rising popularity in social gaming (Kraft 142). Jim Thompson has examined Evelina in relation to her struggle for identity and to gain the acknowledgement of her real father, claiming that her namelessness is the real social danger that threatens her happiness (Thompson 168). While Burney certainly employs comic overtures and pointed social barriers (legitimacy) in her story, she also carefully devotes attention to Evelina’s entrance into the public sphere and the social dangers for a proper young woman. This is a prevailing theme in all of Burney’s works, and it makes an appreciable statement in Evelina, where gaming is consistently present in some form or another.

When Evelina reaches her maturity her maternal grandmother, Madame Duval, requests that her granddaughter be sent to her in France. Villars and Lady Howard suffer trepidation and hesitancy based on Madame Duval’s reputation. Clearly the value placed on propriety of character is paramount. Evelina quickly discovers that her grandmother is an eccentric person; filled with admiration for herself and scorn for those wealthier than herself, Madame Duval shows little regard for social conventions. An example of this is her obvious affair with her French butler, whom she takes everywhere. It is this libertine attitude that exposes Evelina to some uncomfortable and rather improper situations.
Madame Duval has grand plans for the disposal of Evelina’s fortune, which first necessitates forcing Mr. Belmont to acknowledge his paternity. These plans quite contradict the predestined courtship plot between Evelina and Lord Orville, a respected landowner among the acquaintance of Villars and Mrs. Howard. While Evelina’s character is certainly worthy of Orville’s hand, the imprudent company she is exposed to cause some concern for her moral reputation. Evelina’s proximity to wagering and racing is not least among these. When confronted with her grandmother’s proposal to introduce Evelina to society, Mr. Villars (Evelina’s father figure and guardian) expounds to his friend and confidant Lady Howard the concern that Madame Duval lacks any semblance of respectability beyond her fortune. As Villars writes to Lady Howard,

Madame Duval is by no means a proper companion or guardian for a young woman: she is at once uneducated and unprincipled; ungentle in temper, and unamiable in her manners . . . I can only regard her as an object of pity! (Burney 3).

Denied her request to have Evelina sent to her, Madame Duval returns to London and insinuates herself into Evelina’s life, citing her privilege of relation. In due course Evelina is introduced to more relations, including the Branghtons. Although the Branghton family is generally accepting of Evelina and disposed to be of social assistance, they are less refined and imposing than the small circle of Evelina’s friends. Burney shows the difference in breeding and mannerisms early on by contrasting these long-desired and evidently disappointing relations with Evelina’s own expectations. “I am sure,” says Evelina, “I shall not be very ambitious of being known to any more of my relations, if they have any resemblance to those whose acquaintance I have been introduced to already” (59).
Despite her personal distaste for her relations and her guardian’s own apprehensions, Evelina accompanies Madame Duval to London for a month. The latter hopes to contrive a way to force John Belmont (Evelina’s natural father) to acknowledge Evelina as his daughter and make her his heir. It is among such dubious company that Evelina makes her unassuming entrance into London society. With fatherly concern and even anguish for Evelina’s moral inviolability, Villars separates from her and imparts caution in a goodbye note.

You cannot too assiduously attend to Madame Duval herself; but I would wish you to mix as little as possible with her associates, who are not likely to be among those whose acquaintance would reflect credit upon you. Remember, my dear Evelina, nothing is so delicate as the reputation of a woman; it is at once the most beautiful and most brittle of all human things (150).

Armed with caution and fear of the dangers society poses to her innocence, Evelina enters the world.

As improper and raucous as Madame Duval and her relations prove to be, the worst danger Evelina suffers under their care is being continuously pursued by only quasi-respectable suitors. Her journey with Mrs. Selwyn, in the interest of Evelina’s own poor health, takes her to Bristol Hotwells, a fashionable retreat for invalids. Evelina renews her acquaintance on the journey with some rather showy and questionably honorable gentlemen, and is exposed to their foolish and fanatical behavior. Their betting and racing is frequently among the topics in Evelina’s descriptive epistles home. She is also thrown into company with more refined company, including Lord Orville, who hovers secretly around Evelina presumably to monitor her progress in society. Mrs. Selwyn, however,
proves a trustworthy and guarded companion. She preserves Evelina from undesirable company and provides a highly moral example to fortify Evelina’s resolve against being swayed by improper behavior.

Burney paints the surrounding male characters at Hotwells as ridiculous and wasteful. Nevertheless, they serve as poignant examples of the idle upper classes Burney sought to critique. Their actions and wagers border on ludicrous behavior (however humorous the wagers may be). The first example of such preposterous behavior stems from a discussion about a phaeton accident. Since gentlemen prided themselves on the style and speed of their carriages, mocking a man’s phaeton was considered a grievous insult. Evelina witnesses an outbreak of indignant behavior over just such a topic, and the following wagers made shock her. Mr. Coverley apologizes for being late to lunch, and describes an accident that resulted in his vehicle overturning. Lord Merton, playing on the insipid terror of Lady Louisa, makes disparaging remarks regarding Mr. Coverley, who responds angrily that Lord Merton satisfy him with a race (thereby proving which gentleman possesses the faster carriage) and the bet is made.

“O,” cried he, “never mind Jack Coverley; for he does not know how to drive.”

“My Lord,” cried Mr. Coverley, “I’ll drive against you for a thousand pounds.”

“Done,” returned the other; “name your day, and we’ll each choose a judge” (268).

Although the two men here are undoubtedly serious, they are ridiculed by the more sensible Mrs. Selwyn. “These enterprises,” said Mrs. Selwyn, “are very proper for men of rank, since ‘tis a million to one but both parties will be incapacitated for any better employment” (269).
The intention of Lord Merton and Mr. Coverley to race is a dangerous one, since the phaetons were generally unstable at high speeds. Despite the obvious risks, both men are determined to prove their superiority. Realizing their earnestness, Lord Orville (the gentlemanly voice of reason that both younger men notably lack) suggests an alternative to the dangerous venture. Although the suggestion is made earnestly, Lord Orville does not dissuade them from betting completely. This reflects the legitimacy with which betting was regarded as a means of satisfying personal insults.

“To compromise the matter,” said Lord Orville, “suppose, if both parties are unwilling to give up the bet, that to make the ladies easy, we will change its object to something less dangerous?” (269).

The hotheaded Mr. Coverley, although obliged to accept the less dangerous proposal, shows his disappointment by disparaging Orville himself by crying out, “My Lord Orville is as careful, --egad, as careful as an old woman! Why, I’d drive a one-horse card against my Lord’s phaeton for a hundred guineas!” (269).

Later relating this exchange in a letter to her guardian Villars, Evelina expresses astonished disbelief at such behavior. She feels her disapproval legitimate because she is aware that Lord Orville shares her sentiments about the gentlemen and their antics. Yet her own participation is solicited in the settling of the course of the new race. When deciding how to resolve the challenge of honor (farcical by Burney’s account), more gaming is involved. The ladies present decline to involve themselves in the ludicrous situation by offering suggestions. Unable to pry a definitive opinion from any ladies present, Mr. Lovel strives to end the stalemate by “propos[ing], with a most important face, to determine the wager by who should draw the longest straw” (274). The ladies
agree to draw straws to quicken the settling of race. At first Evelina was amused by the entire situation. Later she is dismayed when she is informed of the serious impropriety of her behavior, and admits her concern with the whole event in a letter to Villars.

I had much difficulty to forbear laughing at this unmeaning scheme; but saw, to my great surprise, not the least change of countenance in any other person: and, since we came home, Mrs. Selwyn has informed me, that to draw straws is a fashion of betting by no means uncommon. Good God! my dear Sir, does it not seem as if money were of no value or service, since those who possess, squander it away in a manner so infinitely absurd? (274).

After this humorous yet distressing day, Evelina leaves Hotwells with Mrs. Selwyn for Clifton, where she again meets Lord Orville and other acquaintances from the springs. In this somewhat more refined society headed by Mrs. Beaumont (a woman of high social status and considerable wealth), Evelina is again drawn into the leisure past times of the aristocracy. Although her constant proximity to card games does not induce her to play, or to think that such behavior on her part would be acceptable, she remains a curious and wary observer of those who occupy their time with play.

There has been company here all day, part of which I have spent most happily: for after tea, when the ladies played at cards, Lord Orville, who does not, and I, who cannot play, were consequently at our own disposal; and then his Lordship entered into a conversation with me (277).

It is during this conversation that Evelina hears about the resolution to the bet she witnessed earlier. She tells her guardian in a letter of the event.
I asked him how the bet was, at last, to be decided? He told me that, to his great satisfaction, the parties had been prevailed upon to lower the sum from one thousand to one hundred pounds; and that they agreed it should be determined by a race between two old women, one of whom was to be chosen by each side, and both were to be proved more than eighty years of age . . . (277).

Although the ridiculousness of the wager is clearly farcical, and the amount of the bet is seriously curtailed, the sum agreed upon is still an enormous amount of money by contemporary standards. Notably, the issue of dropping the wager completely is never mentioned, and the original issue moves from a “debt of honor” to pure sport. Evelina herself is not swayed by the humorous events, and openly expresses her sentiments to Lord Orville, whose opinion she greatly respects.

When I expressed my surprise at this extraordinary method of spending so much money, “I am charmed,” he said, “at the novelty of meeting with one so unhackneyed in the world, as not to be yet influenced by custom to forget the use of reason: for certain it is, that the prevalence of fashion makes the greatest absurdities pass uncensured, and the mind naturally accommodates itself even to the most ridiculous improprieties, if they occur frequently (277).

When Evelina praises Orville’s handling of the wager and his attempts to dissuade the two tempestuous men from their purpose, he tells her that he spoke openly “because I do not wish to conceal that I am no friend to gaming” (277).

This exchange holds its primary significance in the romantic plot of the novel; that is, the importance of a young lady to disdain and avoid all facets of gaming and card play if
she wishes to maintain a marriageable character. However, it is important to note the casual ease with which gaming, in multitudinous forms, makes its home in the refined social circles of society. Gaming is an ever present entertainment that appears in seemingly harmless guises (like that of drawing straws) as well as socially endorsed betting for leisure play (at the whist and faro tables).

Accompanying gaming as a vice come drink and foul language, attributes of all levels of society although only deemed "acceptable" by the lower classes that lacked the knowledge and education to engender more gentlemanly behavior. The irony of genteel society falling prey to such coarse behavior is clearly played upon by Burney when she paints the ludicrous scene in which the race (between two old ladies) comes to fruition. General mirth is present but overshadowed by the uncouth behavior on the parts of Lord Merton and Mr. Coverley and the presence of more wagering by the company at large.

For some time, the scene was truly ridiculous: the agitation of the parties concerned, and the bets that were laid upon the old women, were absurd beyond measure. Who are you for? and whose side are you on? was echoed from mouth to mouth by the whole company. Lord Merton and Mr. Coverley were both so excessively gay and noisy, that I soon found they had been too free in drinking to their success . . . Mr. Coverley was quite brutal: he swore at her with unmanly rage, and seemed scarce able to refrain even from striking her (293).

Burney clearly wishes to equate betting with unruly and inappropriate behavior, despite the playful setting and nonsensical wager itself.

The violence Burney associates with betting is again emphasized towards the end of the novel. In a conversation between Mr. Lovel and Captain Minervan, the gentlemen
dispute the legitimacy of wagering on people without their consent or knowledge. The didactic turns decidedly aggressive, half disrespectful yet half in jest. Mr. Lovel verbally expresses his abhorrence with the violence so often accompanying wagering, and is responded to by the Captain with just such a menace. Yet the threat of violence is made comical and not taken as seriously as the content of the conversation suggests it should.

"You'll allow me, at least, Sir, to take the liberty of asking how you'll prove it?"

"How?—why, by knocking them all down your throat."

"Knocking them all down my throat, Sir!" repeated Mr. Lovel, with a look of horror;

"I protest I never heard any thing so shocking in my life! And I must beg leave to observe, that no wager, in my opinion, could justify such a barbarous action" (377).

Again, the ridiculousness of the situation lightens the mood, but does not dismiss the negative behavior associated with betting of all sorts. By extension, the impropriety for young women implied in these types of social settings is clearly outlines.

In the last pages of the novel, Burney reiterates the dangers society offers to young women of marriageable age and good character through one of only two exemplary males in the novel (the other being Mr. Villars). When commenting on the general behavior of society, specifically the society they have lately kept, Lord Orville expresses his apathy for the amusements and actions of their recent company.

"The Bath amusements," said Lord Orville, "have a sameness in them, which, after a short time, renders them rather insipid; but the greatest objection that can be made to the place, is the encouragement it gives to gamsters" (377).

Burney offsets this rather serious condemnation of social gaming with a humorous objection by one of the primary offenders of propriety in the novel.
“Why, I hope, my Lord, you would not think of abolishing gaming,” cried
Lord Merton, “‘tis the very zest of life! Devil take me if I could live without it.”
“I am sorry for it,” said Lord Orville, gravely, and looking at Lady Louisa.
“Your Lordship is no judge of this subject,” continued the other; “but if once we
could get you to a gaming-table, you’d never be happy away from it!” (377)

Lord Orville marries Evelina at the end of the story, as Burney deems it necessary to
reward the young woman for resisting the temptations of society. Orville provides
everything Evelina lacks at the beginning of the novel: name, fortune, respectability, and
most importantly, moral guidance for life. Having proved her own worthiness and purity,
she is provided with a fitting and equally virtuous companion. Burney’s most important
lesson here is that only proper, modest behavior merits a successful and profitable
marriage match. To indulge in behavior showing less than exemplary thought and
breeding entails the threat of a match with an equally wasteful and foolish character.
Indulging in idle gaming, for women, is tantamount to surrendering virtue. A worthy man
would never consent to allying himself with a morally irresponsible wife. Therefore
Evelina’s character, in many ways, is an example to young women readers on how to
conduct themselves in society if they wish to avoid ruin and ridicule.

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CHAPTER 3

CECILIA: THE DANGERS OF FRIENDSHIP

Temptation is very easy of resistance in theory . . . but if you reflect upon the very great change of situation Miss Beverly will experience, upon the new scenes she will see, the new acquaintance she must make . . . you will not wonder at the anxiety of a friend for her welfare (Burney, Cecilia 17).

The success of Evelina encouraged Burney to write another novel.1 Much of this second novel was completed away from home, where, as Burney’s most prominent biographer Margaret Doody states, “consistent writing was difficult in the home of a querulous stepmother” (Doody 100). In fact, in April of 1780 Burney journeyed with her friends the Thrales to Bath, where they took a house. This acquaintance with the Thrales introduced Burney to that wider fashionable world that shares a significant role in the novel Cecilia. Doody describes this sojourn as characterized by “assemblies and evening parties produc[ing] numbers of wits, bluestockings, fashionable characters, and oddities” (100). This vividly colorful scene clearly influenced the setting of Burney’s literary work.

In Burney’s second novel, Cecilia, the dissipation and extravagance that characterized eighteenth-century society comes to the forefront. Cecilia Beverley is the heroine of this tale; an heiress of property and fortune, she must spend the remainder of her minority with a pre-designated guardian. Cecilia has all of the material fortune Evelina lacks, and unlike Evelina is independent minded and desirous of remaining single. Although she must bide her time until she comes into the bulk of her estate, she is both more mature and better informed than the typical literary heroine. Burney tells the reader that,
her form was elegant, her heart was liberal; her countenance announced
the intelligence of her mind, her complexion varied with every emotion of her soul,
and her eyes, the heralds of her speech, now beamed with understanding and now
glistened with sensibility (Burney 6).

Burney gives this character all the properties of a well brought up young lady. Cecilia is
the portrait of female delicacy, genuine Christian charity, and virtuous behavior. Armed
with these advantages, Cecilia ventures into the city to take up her brief five-month
residence with the Harrels and await her independence. As Thompson has pointed out,
debt is the primary device Burney uses to disengage her heroines from civil society.
Despite the best will in the world, her protagonists get themselves entrapped in financial
crises from which they cannot extricate themselves (Thompson 158). Cecilia is no
exception.

Mr. Harrel is one of the three guardians appointed by Cecilia’s late uncle. Unlike the
other custodians, Harrel was not chosen for his qualifications as an executor. Rather, his
household was selected in deference to the girlhood friendship existing between Cecilia
and his wife. With a view of her comfort in mind, the Harrels are entrusted with
Cecilia’s maintenance during the months before her independence. Although the first
meeting between Cecilia and Mrs. Harrel is tender and affectionate, it is quickly
interrupted. The house is full of company and Cecilia is given no chance to rest, but is
drawn into the frivolous social circle with which the Harrels intermingle. This is
Burney’s first signal that the society Cecilia has entered is structured very differently, not
at all quiet and peaceful like the rustic country life her heroine left behind. Cecilia is
shocked by the crowd gathered in the house and the obvious splendor of their setting and personal dress.

Descending to meet the company against her wishes, Cecilia was amazed to find the spacious apartment “lighted with brilliancy, and decorated with magnificence, was more than half filled with company, every one of which was dressed with gaiety and profusion (21). Such fashionable parties and people are consistently distasteful to Burney’s heroines; the lavish, wasteful lifestyle is critical of contemporary socialites. Cecilia’s natural reaction is one of disapproval and concern for her friend’s situation. Indeed Mrs. Harrel proves herself thoroughly immersed in the fashionable setting, and it is through her old friend’s own hands that Cecilia is confronted with gaming, vice, and ridiculous behavior.

The earliest mention of any sort of wager or bet in Cecilia is during this first social gathering, and its frivolousness highlights the shallow and insipid characters that make up the ton. Cecilia’s healthy, fresh appearance so surprises the city residents that they cannot agree on whether her beauty is real or artificial.

The men disputed among themselves whether or not she was painted; and one of them offering boldly that she rouged well, a debate ensued, which ended in a bet, and the decision was mutually agreed to depend upon the color of her cheeks by the beginning of April, when, if unfaded by bad hours and continual dissipation, they wore the same bright bloom with which they were now glowing, her champion acknowledged that his wager would be lost (23).

Although Cecilia herself is not privy to this puerile speculating, it sets the tone for the types of people and mannerisms that now confront Burney’s heroine.
Betting and gaming debts share popularity in *Cecilia* although they are not a temptation to Cecilia herself. Her first exposure to this vice is at an assembly hosted by Mrs. Mears, one of Mrs. Harrel’s acquaintances and part of fashionable society. As Jeffery Franklin explains, gaming was “a defining part of a traditional aristocratic ethos; the ability to win with magnanimity, to lose with dignity, and to honor gambling debts without question became one mark of a true gentleman” (Franklin 35). It is no surprise then that Burney tells us that upon Cecilia and Mrs. Harrel’s arrival downstairs, “Mrs. Harrel soon engaged herself at a card-table: and Cecilia, who declined playing, was seated next to Miss Leeson” (35). Clearly Cecilia is aware of the social popularity of card playing and gaming, yet she shows no inclination or interest, in accordance with her superior moral character. The general reaction to such a novelty, however, is astonishment.

“What,” cried Mr. Harrel, “don’t you chuse to play, Miss Beverley?”

“I flatter myself,” cried Mr. Amott, “that Miss Beverley never plays at all, for then, in one thing, I shall have the honour to resemble her.”

“Very seldom, indeed,” answered Cecilia, “and consequently very ill.”

“Oh, you must take a few lessons,” said Mr. Harrel, “Sir Robert Floyer, I am sure, will be proud to instruct you.”

“I should be a very unpromising pupil,” returned Cecilia, “for I fear I should not only want diligence to improve, but desire” (36).

Thus Burney stakes out her heroine’s safety from the corrupting vice of card playing.
Cecilia is still in danger, however, of suffering at the hands of gamesters through her naïve and generous nature. It is Cecilia's propensity to aid the troubled that contributes to her pecuniary woes.

After a short residence with the Harrels, the enormity of the wasteful and careless habits of her guardian becomes clear to Cecilia. The Harrel's lifestyle is consistent if not productive: "the mornings were all spent gossipping, shopping and dressing, and the evenings were regularly appropriated to public places, or large parties of company" (52). There are very few people of intelligent character with whom Cecilia can mingle; indeed she is quite set apart from the people with whom she socializes, and is plagued with a lack of respect for everyone she meets save Mr. Arnott (Mrs. Harrel's brother). Mr. Arnott is one in a long string of admirers, but he is not alone among other rivals for her affection. Sir Robert Floyer, Mr. Harrel's closest friend, is a constant presence at Portman Square (the Harrel's residence) and social outings. Sir Robert proves himself a more aggressive beau and an arrogant nuisance to Cecilia. Cecilia, however, is uninterested in marriage, and relinquishing her forthcoming independence to any one of the barrage of suitors that vie for her favor. She ignores her admirers equally.

Instead of seeking enjoyment or companionship, Cecilia is plagued by concern for the dangers of fashionable society and consumed with apprehension for her friend. She was, as Burney says,

far more seriously concerned for Mrs. Harrel, when she discovered that this favorite friend of her husband was an unprincipled spendthrift, and an extravagant gamester, for as he was the inseparable companion of Mr. Harrel, she dreaded the consequence both of his influence and his example (53).
Her fears quickly prove themselves grounded, and although Cecilia endeavors on numerous occasions to counsel Mrs. Harrel, the latter is clearly not interested in Cecilia's concern or good-natured advice.

The first serious anxiety Cecilia has for her own reputation occurs relatively soon after her realization that the Harrels are deeply ingrained in a frivolous lifestyle and unfit to be proper guardians. The exposure of numerous unpaid debts by Mr. Harrel and his ambivalence towards the applications on his credit alarm Cecilia and encourage her to take action. She intercepts a written supplication from a Mrs. Hill, the wife of a worker who is owed money by the Harrels. After questioning the distraught woman, Cecilia takes up on her behalf to elicit payment. When she presses Mr. Harrel to pay the woman, thinking that it is simply a miscommunication, he scorns her request. Cecilia's shock, when treated to Mr. Harrel's callous and selfish disregard for his unpaid bills, is enormous. His response was curt and dismissive, and Cecilia is puzzled at his behavior, which opened to Cecilia a new view of life; that a young man could appear so gay and happy, yet be guilty of such injustice and inhumanity, that he could take pride in works which not even money had made his own, and live with undiminished splendor, when his credit itself began to fail, seemed to her incongruities so irrational, that hitherto she had supposed them impossible (85).

Cecilia is disheartened by the conduct of the Harrels: "The meanness with which Mr. Harrel had assumed the credit, as well as accepted the assistance of Mr. Arnott, encreased the disgust he had already excited in Cecilia, and hastened her resolution of quitting his
Cecilia realizes that the Harrels cannot be saved and takes steps to move out of their house.

Cecilia’s prospects become dim, however, when she visits the homes of her other guardians. Mr. Briggs is a miserly, bitter old man who, although courteous to Cecilia, clearly does not offer comfortable accommodations. Mr. Delvile, in contrast, lives in considerable comfort but is incredibly pompous and arrogant; he too proves an undesirable alternative to the Harrels. His haughty condescension offends Cecilia instantly. Cecilia realizes that her accommodation with the Harrels could certainly be worse.

She found that her present situation, however wide of her wishes, was by no means the most disagreeable in which she could be placed; she was tired, indeed, of dissipation, and shocked at the sight of unfeeling extravagance; but notwithstanding the houses of each of her other guardians were exempt from these particular vices, she saw not any prospect of happiness with either of them; vulgarity seemed leagued with avarice to drive her from the mansion of Mr. Briggs, and haughtiness with ostentation to exclude her from that of Mr. Delvile (99).

Cecilia returns with a sense of dejection to the Harrels and adopts a new strategy to safeguard herself from the tedious and wasteful company that the Harrels society symbolizes. Determined to separate herself from amoral and extravagant living, she begins to carve for herself a new and separate existence at the Harrels, independent of their social sphere.

Her first effort towards this change was made immediately, in begging to be excused from accompanying Mrs. Harrel to a large card assembly that evening.
Mrs. Harrel, extremely surprised, asked a thousand times the reason of her refusal, imagining it to proceed from some very extraordinary cause . . . the following day, however, her trouble diminished; for Mrs. Harrel, ceasing to be surprised, thought little more of the matter, and forebore any earnestness of solicitation: and, from that time, she suffered her to follow her own humour with very little opposition (100).

With her limited means, Cecilia removes herself from the immoral lifestyle the Harrels lead and determines to wait out her majority quietly.

While Cecilia accustoms herself to her new daily routine, she does not remain ignorant of the happenings in the house. She is continuously aware of the dissipation that seems to be spiraling out of control. Burney allows us to see into Cecilia’s thoughts: “She was now no longer surprised either at the debts of Mr. Harrel, or of his particular occasions for money. She was convinced he spent half the night in gaming, and the consequences, however dreadful, were but natural” (143). It does not occur to her, however, that being merely associated with the Harrels could taint her reputation. Guilt by association, however, poses a credible threat to Cecilia’s reputation as a young woman in general, not just in respect to social gaming. In a conversation with Mr. Delvile, her guardian brings it to Cecilia’s attention in no uncertain terms. Delvile tells her, now as I consider myself concerned in your fame and welfare from regarding you as my ward, I think it is incumbent upon me to make enquiries into such of your affairs as become public; for I should feel in some measure disgraced myself, should it appear to the world, while you are under my guardianship, that there was any want of propriety in the direction of your conduct (151).
Too late, Cecilia realizes that her own irrepreschable conduct is not enough to protect her reputation. Despite the caution she exercises for the appearances of propriety, the society that surrounds her impiles aspersions on her respectability.

The crux of Cecilia's credulity is lack of a proper role model and counselor to acquaint her with unfamiliar customs of London society and make her aware of improper behavior on the parts of those around her as well as herself. Burney keeps her heroine without such guidance (one of the trials of youth, so to speak) until Cecilia has learned through experience the dangers of common acquaintances. Too late to change her actions, she can only submit to the guidance of a new and proper figure when she is fortunate enough to find such a model. Mrs. Delvile, introduced to Cecilia fairly late in this novel, serves as such a paradigm.

Mrs. Delvile is the ideal character heretofore lacking in Cecilia's new world. Every bit the refined lady, she serves as a substitute mother figure for Cecilia, who equally impresses Mrs. Delvile with her own modest countenance. Burney spares no detail of their first meeting, nor of their initial and favorable impressions of one another. Of Mrs. Delvile she says,

Her carriage was lofty and commanding; but the dignity to which high birth and conscious superiority gave rise, was so judiciously regulated by good sense, and so happily blended with politeness, that though the world at large envied or hated her, the few for whom she had herself any regard, she was infallibly certain to captivate. The surprise and admiration with which Cecilia at the first glance proved reciprocal: Mrs. Delvile, though prepared for youth and beauty, expected not to see a countenance so intelligent, nor manners so well formed as those of Cecilia: thus
mutually astonished and mutually pleased, their first salutations were accompanied
by looks so flattering to both, that each saw in the other, an immediate prepossession
in her favour, and from the moment that they met, they seemed instinctively impelled
to admire (155).

Thus Cecilia secures a proper advisor and begins to slowly extricate herself from the
Harrel's mansion, and the improprieties to which her residence there has subjected her.

The primary way Cecilia accomplishes this social removal is to accept an invitation
from Mrs. Delvile for an extended visit, in order to deepen their acquaintance. Although
this proves an effective remedy to the financial drain the Harrels impose on Cecilia's
generous nature, and an equally felicitous sojourn for both parties, it does not separate
Cecilia from the residence of Portman Square entirely. With the continued necessity for
residence with an approved guardian, she is required to return to the Harrels, and
consequently subjected to further pecuniary worry and embroiled in the theatrics that
comprise the Harrels' personal lives.

Her initial return is damped by discovery of the extent to which the Harrels have
overextended their finances through gaming and extravagant living. She never wavers
from her resolve to counsel the Harrels into prudence and moderation, and seeks the
support and influence of Mr. Arnott in her cause. Mrs. Harrel's only brother is a kind,
quiet man of good sense, and Cecilia feels sure she has an ally against vice in him. He
responds to her concerns with equal feeling and emotion.

Mr. Arnott soon shewed that example was all he wanted to declare the
same sentiments. He owned he had long disapproved of the conduct of Mr. Harrel,
and trembled at the situation of his sister . . . therefore, though fearfully, told his
sister their mutual advice. She thanked him, said she was much obliged to him, and would certainly consider his proposal, and mention it to Mr. Harrel—Parties of pleasure, however, intervened, and the promise was neglected (300).

Despite the constant stream of advice and concern for their affairs from both Cecilia and Mr. Arnott, the Harrels themselves live in perpetual denial of their sad state of affairs and unwaveringly maintain that fate will improve their situations. Mr. Harrel in particular believes that a stroke of good luck at the gaming tables will soon put him in the right. He paid unusual attention to her advice, but said she was much mistaken with respect to his affairs, which he believed he should now very speedily retrieve, as he had had the preceding night an uncommon run of luck, and flattered himself with being very shortly to pay all his debts, and begin the world again on a new score.

This open confession of gaming was but a new shock to Cecilia, who scrupled not to represent to him the uncertainty of so hazardous a reliance, and the inevitable evils of so destructive practice. She made not, however, the least impression on his mind (301).

The continuous disappointment the Harrels afford Cecilia finally despair her of preventing them from inevitable destruction. Cecilia meets the Harrel's expected catastrophe without surprise. Mr. Harrel, in dire financial distress after contracting a "larger debt of honor than he had any means to raise," decides to flee the country rather than face debtor's prison and social disgrace (364). The reality of their situation exposes a lack of respect and solidarity between Mr. and Mrs. Harrel; their mutual frustration as a couple is evident. Mrs. Harrel cannot conceive of the necessity of a life abroad, and Mr. Harrel angrily accuses his wife of being responsible for their pressing desperation.
Mrs. Harrel, wholly unused to such treatment, was frightened into violent 
hysterics; of which, however, he took no notice, but swearing at her for 
a fool who had been the cause of his ruin, he left the room . . . Cecilia, whose reason 
was stronger, and whose justice was offended, felt other sensations . . . the dreadful 
situation of the family made her forget she wanted it, but to deliberate upon what 
course she ought herself to pursue (365).

In the throes of this emotional turbulence, a further indignity is heaped upon Cecilia. Mr. 
Harrel agrees to allow his wife to remain in England without him if Cecilia hastens her 
mortgage to Sir Robert and takes Mrs. Harrel into her own house. Cecilia outrageously 
protests at the suggestion that she ever considered marrying Sir Robert. She then 
discovers that Mr. Harrel has been deceitfully encouraging her suitor with the promise of 
his hand using his authority as Cecilia’s guardian. Harrel was counting on a financial 
settlement for himself with the marriage and subsequent transfer of her fortune to Sir 
Robert. With this odious turn in events Cecilia makes haste to remove herself forever from 
the household by fleeing to Mrs. Delvile for protection.

With the Harrels in complete ruin, Burney indicts their lifestyle and behavior through 
the sermon-like condemnation of Mr. Monockton. Himself interested in Cecilia’s fortune 
and property (although encumbered by an aging wife) he keeps himself apprised of the 
Harrels disarray throughout the novel. Monockton moves expeditiously (although 
anticlimactically) to warn her of the previous night’s abuses, which engender the 
immediate disgrace and ruin of the Harrels. To explain his concern with Cecilia’s 
business and justify his interference, he tells her:

“I have taken care,” he answered, “for some time past, to be well informed of
all the proceedings of Mr. Harrel; and the intelligence I procured this morning is of the most alarming nature. I find he spent the night before the last entirely at a gaming table, where, intoxicated by a run of good luck, he passed the whole next day in rioting with his profligate intimates, and last night, returning again to his favorite amusement, he lost not only all he had gained, but much more than he could pay . . . The character of a gamester,” said Mr. Monockton, “depends solely upon his luck; his disposition varies with every throw of the dice, and he is airy, gay and good humoured, or sour, morose, and savage, neither from nature nor from principle, but wholly by the caprice of chance” (367).

Thus Burney attacks vice through the voice of a respectable, older male character and lays bare the consequences of dissipated lifestyles.

Cecilia takes to heart the moral lesson here; although the heroine herself is in no danger of succumbing to a dissolute and licentious lifestyle, she becomes an advocate against it. Finally wary where her reputation is concerned, Cecilia draws a firm line between her actions and those Harrels. When Mrs. Harrel begs Cecilia to save her from social ruin, Cecilia replies:

“With pleasure, with readiness, with joy,” cried Cecilia, “should you find assistance from me, were it to you alone it were given; but to supply fewel for the very fire that is consuming you—no, no, my whole heart is hardened against gaming and gamesters, and neither now or ever will I suffer any consideration to soften me in their favour” (381).

Her ability to maintain her stance in the face of the Harrel’s doom and strive to keep her own reputation above the scandalous events highlight Cecilia’s intelligence and good
sense. As Burney intends, her heroine shows herself as a model young woman deserving high social rank.

The unfortunate reality of her previous associations come back to haunt Cecilia, however, towards the climax of the novel. Although Cecilia removes herself from the disagreeable influence of the Harrels, Burney continues to weave in the consequences of reputation. As the courtship plot comes to a faux-end, Cecilia finds herself with in love with an upright, conscientious, and devoted man. Young Delvile, the son and heir of her pretentious guardian and favorite paradigm, asks for Cecilia’s hand. Upon seeking approval for the marriage, the shadow of her previous residence with the Harrels intrudes on Cecilia’s happiness. Mr. Delvile’s objections to Cecilia are reflections of Burney’s own disagreeable recognition of the moral ramifications that accompany associating with gamesters and lovers of play. Mr. Delvile outright rejects the wishes of his son to marry Cecilia, primarily on the basis of her unfavorable reputation. His reaction is direct;

But, at the proposal of his son, the accusation held in reserve broke out; he called Cecilia a dabbler with Jews, and said she had been so from the time of her uncle’s death; he charged her with the grossest general extravagance, to which he added a most insidious attack upon her character... and he asserted, that most of the large sums she was continually taking up from her fortune, were lavished without scruple upon this dangerous and improper favorite (807).

With this disparaging attack on her character, Cecilia realizes too late the damage her brief residence with the Harrels has caused her own reputation. With her marital hopes dashed, she can only await the outcome of fate with a distant hope that her charitable
intentions and generous nature speak for themselves against the malediction imposed on her character.

Although guilty of the charges laid at her door by Mr. Delvile, Cecilia’s virtuous nature inevitably triumphs over the aspersions on her character. As is typical for heroines in Burney’s early novels, Cecilia (devoid of fortune) secures the hand of Mortimer Delvile and the sanction and love of his mother, her moral exemplar. Her follies with money, loans, and expenditures are excused under the forgivable heading of inexperience and credulousness. Despite the implied guilt of a greedy and advantage taking society on Cecilia’s generous character, the heroine herself is amply punished for her naïve ventures. She suffers the loss of her fortune, her uncle’s estates, and her hoped for (but never realized) independence. She is compensated for her hard lesson with a loving husband and devoted mother-in-law, and is absorbed into their family despite her inauspicious beginnings in society.

Thus Burney’s lesson for young ladies of fortune becomes ambiguous, departing from the clear message in *Evelina* (behavior dictates reward). While Evelina maintains a virtuous front against the immorality she encounters, Cecilia is subjected to more tangibly damaging circumstances. Although her motives are consistently benevolent and charitable, and even go to extreme lengths, her susceptible and unsuspecting character is nonetheless punished by significant material and financial loss. The reward of a husband, even one as devoted and deserving as Mortimer himself is, seems trite compared to the humbling and overwhelmingly disappointing treatment she receives at the hands of her dissolute friends and a thrill-seeking society.
Endnotes

1 Burney wrote a play entitled *The Witlings* shortly after publishing *Evelina*; the play was too realistic and too closely related to members of the Burney's social circle. Dr. Burney, Frances' father, urged her to suppress the play and refrain from having it performed. He urged her instead to begin work on a second novel, which she began to write under entirely different circumstances than the secrecy that had shrouded *Evelina*.

2 Cecilia's other two guardians were chosen for their obvious attributes. Mr. Biggs is well known for his financial sense and consequently has control of Cecilia's fortune, and Mr. Delvile is chosen for quality of character, being of high social standing and irreproachable character. Both of these men were selected with the intent that they would provide Cecilia with economic support and counseling when needed.

3 The Delvile's son, Mortimer, is an attractive young bachelor, making Cecilia's transference there both awkward and slightly improper.

Works Cited


CHAPTER 4

CAMILLA: SOCIAL IMPRUDENCE

*Imprudence cannot but end in the demolition of that dignified equanimity, and modest propriety, which we wish to be uniformly remarked as the attributes of your character: and indulgence, by fixing, may envenom a dart that as yet may be gently withdrawn* (Burney, *Camilla* 362).

In Burney’s third, anxiously awaited novel, the author continues to explore the pitfalls of refined society for susceptible young ladies. Maintaining her position of distaste for betting and games of chance in *Camilla*, Burney expands her heroine’s world of troubles further yet. Provided with a constant and familiar moral presence through her parents Mr. and Mrs. Tyrold, Camilla has the advantage of a protected and firmly guiding home setting always nearby, which the previous two heroines lacked. With this added comfort, however, come added dangers for Camilla, who ventures into polite society armed with moral superiority aplenty, but barren of financial prudence and social awareness. These two enormous faults, overlooked by loving and devoted parents, make Camilla’s struggle through maturity somewhat more grievously lamented. The pecuniary damage engendered by Camilla’s forays into society, although far less than Cecilia sustains, are acquired at high emotional cost.

Debt is a central theme in Burney’s *Camilla*, and is presented in a more ordinary, individualized story of a young woman who gets in financial trouble by spending too much money. Burney continues to deal with decorum, female conduct, and propriety...
throughout the novel (Thompson 162). The added focus on public and private debt, however, deserves more attention. As Thompson points out, the “(male) financial debt in the public sphere is mirrored by (female) emotional excess in the private. Male characters such as Lionel [Camilla’s brother] ruin themselves through monetary extravagance, and female characters such as Mrs. Berlinton [Camilla’s friend] ruined themselves through emotional extravagance” (166). Successful characters, as Thompson observes, learn to regulate their financial and emotional economies.

As Liz Bellamy points out, however, many eighteenth-century writers hailed luxurious spending as a symptom of increasing wealth and economic strength (Bellamy 22). The development of economic morality, as we see it in Burney’s novels, attempts to fill the “ideological vacuum that resulted from the inapplicability of classical morality to the realities of a capitalist economic system” (23). Burney certainly interpolates Camilla’s reckless social spending realistically and with the larger moral dangers she faces. These dangers, based more on gender than individual action, deserve a closer examination. As Helene Moglen writes, “it was in the novel, more than in any other expressive form, that the social and psychological meanings of gender difference were most extensively negotiated and exposed.” Innovative narrative fictions demonstrated how “the ideals of masculinity and femininity were translated into social roles” and established behavioral norms (Moglen 4). Burney is clearly interested in exploring these differences in gender roles and the social effects such roles had on character.

With the increased focus on pecuniary responsibility comes an increase in the frivolous participation of social games of chance. Not only is Camilla besieged by petty debts for clothing and social events, but the social entertainment that characterized
everyday life drain her limited financial resources. Moreover, the hazardous games and
drawings that dominate the social scene are endorsed as refined entertainment, and not
considered by her parents, or others watchful of her conduct, as gaming. While Burney
prefers to focus on incurring debt and the ramifications of a young girl lacking prudent
economy, the groundwork for a moral repudiation of gaming are clearly present.

Camilla, in contrast to Burney’s preceding heroines, is part of a rather large family
consisting of a brother, two sisters, two parents, an uncle and two cousins. Brought up in
a nurturing and loving environment, strong moral guidance and social principles seem
ever present. In fact, when *Camilla* was published, Mr. Tyrold’s sermon quickly became
the best known section of the novel and was reprinted separately. Julia Epstein cites this
phenomenon as a result of the encoded social ethos in the father’s advice, “not so much
about conduct itself, but about the public interpretation of conduct” (Epstein 128). A
similar sermon appeared in Radcliffe’s 1794 *Mysteries of Udolpho*, received by the
heroine Emily St. Aubert from her father. Clearly this similarity reflects Burney’s
familiarity with contemporary works and her knowledge of the popularity of such literary
techniques.

Yet even from this close knit, loving family circle Camilla strays into the unfamiliar
world of the sophisticate. As Epstein illustrates, Burney introduces “the language of the
patriarch that Camilla must learn to translate, to speak herself, and finally, to erase. It is
the rule book and conduct manual Evelina had lacked” (129). Even having this advice,
however, Camilla is no better prepared than Evelina; indeed, Camilla’s struggles with the
economic and emotional social stresses are significantly more difficult. The ultimate
challenge, securing a marriage to a desirably wealthy and uprightly moral man, again
serves as a framework for Burney’s heroine. Camilla learns through the (temporary) loss of love and esteem of her love interest, Edgar Mandelbert, that her social behavior directly correlates to her worth as a bride.

The first example of social “games of chance” occurs fairly early in Camilla’s ventures. A raffle for a locket, set round with pearls, is the first gamble entered into by Camilla, as well as all the ladies present, each of whom threw in a half guinea. Although initially Camilla shies away from the raffle, Mrs. Arlbery convinces her to try her luck in the first of many such instances. Burney describes Camilla’s hesitation:

but Camilla hung back, totally unused to hazard upon what was unnecessary the little allowance she had been taught to spend sparingly upon herself, that something might be always in her power to bestow upon others . . . She knew not, however, till now, how hard to resist was the contagion of example, and felt a struggle in her self-denial, that made her, when she put the locket down, withdraw from the crowd, and resolve not to look at it again . . . Camilla, though secretly blushing at what she felt was an extravagance, could not withstand this invitation: she gave her half guinea (Burney 93-94).

Although Camilla feels that this type of social entertainment is morally wrong, if for no reason than the money could be more wisely spent, she allows herself to be influence by temptation.

Later Camilla has qualms about her decision, manifested by her group encountering a destitute family. Her sister Eugenia and Edgar readily gave money to the poor woman, and Camilla contributed a shilling. Upon Edgar’s questioning her mournful silence, she laments “what my dear father would have said, had he seen me giving half a guinea for a
toy, and a shilling to such poor starving people as these!” (98). Edgar, an astute monitor of Camilla’s behavior throughout the novel for motives of his own, offers to retrieve her ill-spent money, soothing Camilla’s guilty conscience for a time. With her recovered half-guinea, she happily bestows it upon the unfortunate family encountered earlier.

Neither her success in the drawing (from which Edgar did not actually withdraw her bid) nor the guilt she experienced in participating fortifies her against similar future entertainments. Mrs. Arlbery’s congratulations foreshadow the propensity for social gaming that characterizes the society Camilla moves in: “Miss Tyrold, I heartily wish you equally brilliant success, in the next, and far more dangerous lottery, in which, I presume, you will try your fate” (105). Clearly the regularity of gaming for entertainment is an ever present temptation, one that cannot be avoided with ease.

While Camilla struggles with the social obligations that burden conscience, her brother Lionel runs riot over gentlemanly behavior by embroiling the family in a scandal. Predictably this scandal involves gaming and enormous debts, as Burney sets Lionel up to be an example of bad moral behavior for her heroine. In addition to his contracting enormous debts at the gaming tables, Lionel extorts money from his ailing uncle under false pretenses to cover them. Mr. Tyrold deals sternly with his delinquent son. “Upon admitting Lionel again to his presence, he spoke forcibly, though with brevity, upon the culpability of his conduct” (257). Lionel’s consistently reprehensible behavior and spending habits, while causing his sisters (and entire family) grief, also fail to scare Camilla into form; she does not draw the parallel between his gaming and the social games of chance in which she, albeit hesitantly, indulges.
A small part of Camilla’s exposure to gaming and the consequences of behavior are connected to her brother’s antics. Lionel fails to modify his aberrant conduct, and soon applies to his sister to aid him in securing more money, presumably for gaming debts. Camilla, knowing Lionel’s previous propensity for misbehavior, agrees to solicit her uncle for some two hundred pounds that Lionel swears is of the utmost necessity. While her conscience is heavy with guilt on Lionel’s behalf, her uncle Tyrold explains away the frivolous youthful escapades.

Camilla now heartily repented being a partner in a business so rapacious, so rapacious, so unjustifiable, and so mysterious; but, kindly interrupting her apology, “Don’t be concerned, my dear,” he cried, “for there’s no help for these things; though what the young boys do with all their money now-a-days, is odd enough, being what I can’t make out. However, he’ll soon be wiser, so we must not be too severe with him” (381).

Through this speech Burney shows the unequal view society held towards a young man’s extravagance. Camilla’s own actions, related but less extreme, will later cast aspersions on her moral worth.

For a short time following the episode of the raffle, Camilla’s immediate problems center around the petty expenses she incurs attempting to remain suitably attired for the company she is residing with. She entrusts herself to the company of Mrs. Arlbery, who although well meaning, insists on Camilla’s company during shopping excursions and at assemblies. Thus in modestly attempting to clothe herself in suitable attire, Camilla is driven to yet more expense. Similarly, tickets for the Master of the Ceremonies Ball create another uncomfortable situation. While Mrs. Arlbery is lecturing a friend on duty
to provide the ladies with tickets, Camilla is uncomfortable about the obligation for companionship this favor implies. “Camilla had felt very uneasy during this contest; and now, colouring, said she did not mean to go to the ball” (415). Her friend replies:

‘Can you ever expect, then,’ said Mrs. Arlbery, ‘to have a partner at any other?

You don’t know the rules of these places. The master of the ceremonies is always a gentleman, and everybody is eager to shew him every possible respect.’

Camilla was now still more distressed; and stammered out, that she believed the fewer balls she went to, the better her father would be pleased (415).

Although Camilla understands the necessity for moderation in her financial circumstances, she is compelled, for appearance’s sake, to comply. To make matters worse, she becomes indebted to a gentleman for the price of the ticket, which implies to society his favor in her esteem and affection.

Sir Sedley was then putting up his tickets; but the Major, taking one of them out of his hand, presented it to Camilla, saying: ‘Let the ladies take their tickets now, and settle with us afterwards.’

Camilla felt extremely provoked, yet not knowing how to resist, took the ticket; but, turning pointedly from the Major to Sir Sedley, said: ‘I am your debtor, then, sir, a guinea—the smallest part, indeed, of what I owe you, though all I can pay!’ She then resolved to borrow that sum immediately of Mrs. Arlbery (415).

Thus, Camilla’s continued stay in Tumbridge Wells brings further debt and gives rise to later erroneous assumptions by Edgar of Camilla’s feelings for the Major, as well as Camilla’s own behavior throughout the situation.
Despite Camilla’s awareness of impropriety and her discomfort with the situations she finds herself in, she is powerless, by the rules of polite society, to remove herself from the path of impending disgrace. In part, the outcome reflects ill on her parents, who failed to prepare her for the various pitfalls of society. Her desire to maintain a respectable appearance is also a contributing factor to her accumulating debt. Another raffle, this one for a pair of earrings, further perpetuates the ongoing drama; although Camilla earnestly tries to refuse her participation, it is overlooked and the interference of her friend Mrs. Arlbery. Her admirer, Major Cerwood, again creates an undesirable situation that casts aspersions on her moral reputation by offering to provide Camilla with money for the lottery. The honor at stake by participating is summed up by Mrs. Arlbery:

when seeing amongst the names of Lady Alitheia Selmore and the Hon. Mrs. Berlington, she exclaimed: ‘Tis a coalition of all fashion and reputation! We shall be absolutely scouted, my dear Miss Tyrold, if we shrink . . . Let us put in together.’ Camilla answered, that she had no intention to try for them.

Major Cerwood, who joined the party during this discussion, intreated to be banker for both the ladies. Camilla positively refused any share; but Mrs. Mittin said it would be a shame for such a young lady to go without her chance, and wrote down her name next to that of Mrs. Arlbery; while the Major, without further question, put down a guinea upon the counter (449).

Camilla’s attempt at good sense is thwarted by the connivance of chance and kind intentions. To further compound matters, Camilla’s complacence to the accomplished deed, albeit with a sense of resignation, is witnessed by Edgar Mandlebert. Edgar, in the position of potential suitor, is ominously impressed with the entire transaction.
Mandelbert himself was an object of nothing less than envy. He had entered
the shop during the contest about the raffle, and seen Major Cerwood pay for Camilla
as well as for Mrs. Arlbery. Confirmed in his notions of her positive engagement, and
sick at heart from the confirmation, he walked further into the shop (450).

Cerwood’s gallantly providing money for Camilla’s “gaming whims” propagates the
rumor that he is an accepted suitor. Such behavior is undesirable to Camilla, who does
not fail to appreciate the consequences of her actions. Her understanding the basic
ramifications such an acceptance would imply is clear by her appeal to Mrs. Arlbery.
Camilla entreats Mrs. Arlbery to provide the guinea herself, rather than accept money
from Cerwood. Although Mrs. Arlbery doesn’t have her purse, she suggests Clarence
Sedley as a banker instead.

Mrs. Arlbery, surprized, answered she had really come without her purse; but
seeing her seriously vexed, added, ‘If you do not approve of the Major for a banker
until we go home what say you to Sir Sedley?’

‘I shall prefer him a thousand times!’

Mrs. Arlbery, in a low voice, repeated this to the young Baronet, and receiving his
guinea, threw it down; making the Major, without the smallest excuse or ceremony,
take back his own.

This was by no means lost upon Sir Sedley; he felt flattered . . . . he felt softened;
he thought Camilla looked unusually lovely; he began to wonder at the coldness of
Mandlebert, and to lament that the first affections of so fair a creature should be cast
away (450).
In her anxiety to relieve herself of the unwanted attentions of Major Cerwood, she makes the exact same mistake; her obvious preference for Sir Sedley as a banker suggests her general affection towards him rather than the Major. Sir Sedley, in turn, begins to develop the same misguided friendliness towards Camilla that was so repugnant in Cerwood, which later leads to another situation damaging Camilla’s character.

Mrs. Arlbery correctly deduces that Camilla’s hesitancy and constant discomfort is due to her lack of ready funds. By confiding her suspicions about Camilla’s apparent poverty in Sedley, she unwittingly encourages Sedley’s gallant behavior towards her young friend. Her distinct disapproval of the Tyrold’s failure to provide Camilla with the necessary funds for society is tinged with regret at unknowingly contributing to her distress. Mrs. Arlbery exclaims,

But how that rich old uncle of hers could suffer her to come without a penny,

I can neither account for nor forgive. I have seen her shyness about money matters for some days past; but I so little conjectured the possibility of her distress, that I have always rather increased than spared it (460).

Although this realization encourages Mrs. Arlbery herself to undertake Camilla’s comfort, the damage of implied associations has already been cemented in Edgar’s mind. Her previous behavior has branded her guilty of moral impropriety in Mandlebert’s eyes. In fact, Edgar continues to watch Camilla’s behavior at every opportunity to confirm once and for all her tainted moral virtue.

Sedley continues to provide Camilla and Mrs. Arlbery with money (upon Mrs. Arlbery’s request), further contributing to the amount Camilla owes Sedley. “Sir Sedley, little suspicious of the truth, yet flattered to be always called upon to be the banker of
Camilla, obeyed with alacrity" (459). Camilla’s innocent desire to avoid one improper situation, however, only leads to a similar and more difficultly avoided situation with Sedley. In her eagerness to show Major Cerwood that his attentions are not wanted, she devotes her conversation to Sedley instead. Her behavior is noted with confusion and resentment by Edgar.

This was not unobserved by Edgar, who now again wavered in believing she loved the Major: but the doubt brought with it no pleasure; it led him only the more to contemn her. Does she turn, thought he, thus, from one to the other, with no preference but of accident or caprice? Is her favour thus light of circulation? Is it now the mawkish Major, and now the coxcomb Clarendel? Already is she thus versed in the common dissipation of coquetry? (461).

Thus Edgar’s doubts about Camilla’s reputation are enflamed by mere circumstance and her own want of judgment. Camilla’s presence at the raffles and her taking turns at throwing the dice further compound Edgar’s misguided notions of frivolity, lack of propriety, and failure of moral character. Her extraordinary luck at winning the earrings, as with the necklace in the previous raffle, create a temporary and childish thrill on Camilla’s part. The prizes she collects shine brighter than the competition she participated in, and lessen the guilt for participating in dice and games of chance she might otherwise have felt.

While Camilla’s paltry and halfhearted engagement in these lotteries in certainly not in itself worthy of moral censure, the budding friendship with Mrs. Berlinton exposes her to some far more pernicious vices. Once Camilla is welcomed into a higher social set than previously afforded through Mrs. Berlinton’s influence, the petty games of chance
give way to far more extravagant leisure activities. Burney draws a fluent picture of the
lure of the gaming tables through the restless and melancholy behavior of Mrs. Berlinton.
Burney introduces Camilla’s new friend to the reader with a rather pointedly detailed
history;

Mrs. Norfield, a lady whom circumstances had brought into some intimacy with
Mrs. Berlinton upon her marriage, had endeavoured, from the first of her entrance
into high life, to draw her into a love of play; not with an idea of doing her any
mischief, for she was no more her enemy than her friend; but to answer her own
purposes of having a Faro table under her own direction. She was a woman of fashion,
as such every-where received; but her fortune was small, and her passion for gaming
inordinate (685).

Introduced to such behavior, and searching for some occupation to detain her from her
invalid husband’s presence, Faro becomes a favorite pastime for Mrs. Berlinton.
The general opening of her house to a special set of high-stakes playing gamesters adds
excitement and unpredictability to the monotony of her life, and quickly Mrs. Berlinton
learns to appreciate the thrill of the game. Burney describes her fascination;

Moderation was the last praise to which Mrs. Berlinton had any claim; what
she entered upon through persecution, in an interval of mental supineness, she was
she was soon awake to as a pleasure, and next pursued as a passion (686).

Although Mrs. Berlinton is at the height of the social ladder and adored by the general
populace, Burney uses her youth and unhappiness as a model for the easy infestation of
ruinous behavior. While the constant lotteries are an introduction to gaming in *Camilla*,
the card tables prove more treacherous and illustrate the center of Burney’s critique of the
lavish, wasteful lifestyles of the upper classes. Mrs. Berlinton's youth and unhappiness in marriage, presumably common denominators in eighteenth-century society, make her vulnerable to morally degenerate behavior because it offers distraction from her unsatisfactory situation. Burney outlines Mrs. Berlinton's obsession as complete;

Her beloved correspondent was neglected; her favorite authors were set aside; her country rambles were given up; balls and the rooms were forgotten; and Faro alone engrossed her faculties by day . . . She lost, as might be expected, as constantly as she played; but as money was not what she naturally valued, she disdained to weigh that circumstance; and so long as she had any to pay, resigned it with more grace than by others it was won (686-7).

Mrs. Berlinton's naïve and unconcerned attitude about the monetary losses she sustains, as well as a disregard for the moral ramifications of play, threaten her respectable social reputation. While this behavior was certainly acceptable among the very rich, the more genteel scorned such wasteful habits.

Because Camilla has previously been influenced to participate in social games of chance, it is not an impossibility that she will fall into the same degenerate vice her adored friend embraces. However, like Cecilia, Camilla instead fortifies her reserve towards card playing and manages to hold herself aloof. "That Camilla was not caught by this ruinous fascination, was not simply the effect of necessity. Had the state of her finances been as flourishing as it was decayed, she would have been equally steady in this forbearance" (687). Although Camilla is entertained with the spirit of the business, she is convinced that the principles of staking money on play are wrong, and therefore cannot
bring herself to play. Burney allows Camilla to protect herself from this vice with prudence;

She looked on, therefore, with safety, though not wholly with indifference; she had too much fancy not to be amused by the spirit of the business, and was too animated not to take part in the successive hopes and fears of the several competitors;

What she was once convinced was wrong she was incapable of practicing (687).

Despite her feelings and apprehensions of the Faro tables, Camilla nonetheless remains a sociable presence at these events, and as such her own reputation is linked at large with that of Mrs. Berlinton. Again as in Cecilia, this does not become an issue for Camilla until the damage has been done, and her purity of character must exonerate her from equal censure. At the time of her short residence with Mrs. Berlinton, however, her enjoyment at the merriment of company is only overshadowed by the realization of the substantial losses her friend suffers.

Once Burney establishes that the heroine will not succumb to the ruinous vice that surrounds her, the young lady must utilize her moral principles to attempt to influence those close to her. Thus, Camilla, once seeing the potential ruin her friend is in danger of, attempts to counsel her to reform her actions. As the narrator indirectly explains,

Upon Gaming, the first feeling and the latest reflection are commonly one; both point its hazards to be unnecessary, its purposes rapacious, and its end desperate loss, or destructive gain; she not only, therefore, held back; she took the liberty, upon privilege of their avowed friendship, to remonstrate against this dangerous pastime with Mrs. Berlinton. But that lady, though eminently designed to be amiable, had now contracted the fearful habit of giving way to every propensity (687).
As in Cecilia’s attempts to counsel the Harrels, Camilla’s prudent advice is rejected by her friend. Mrs. Berlinton continues on her destructive path, incurring substantial debt and gradually increasing her reckless behavior to try to make up for her financial losses.

While Burney is obviously setting up Mrs. Berlinton as an example of what type of behavior a young lady ought to avoid, another important lesson is the taint of association from which an innocent and naïve person might suffer. Earlier in the novel, when Camilla forms her acquaintance with the melancholy lady, Edgar warns her of an imprudent friendship. Although at this earlier stage Mrs. Berlinton has not yet acquired her dangerous love of play, the possibility that she may form dubious habits is enough for Edgar to urge Camilla to shun any close association.

‘Ah, my dear Miss Camilla,’ cried Edgar, with energy, ‘since you feel and own . . . this baneful deficiency, drop, or at least suspend an intercourse too hazardous to be indulged with propriety! See what she may be sometime hence, ere you contract further intimacy. At present, unexperienced and unsuspicous, her dangers may be yours. You are too young for such a risk. Fly, fly from it, my dear Miss Camilla! . . . as if the voice of your mother were calling out to caution you!’ (476).

Edgar also compares the behavior of Mrs. Berlinton with another socially important woman, one in possession of the more noble virtues. Lady Isabella Irby, promoted as a suitable acquaintance and role model for the young Camilla by Edgar, is a paragon of virtue. By comparing their situations and characters, Edgar exposes his concern for the damage to reputation Camilla will be exposed to through imprudent friendships. Through Edgar’s speech, Burney is illustrates the exact behavior expected from a young lady of fashion, regardless of her personal happiness. Indeed, this description is somewhat
stifling, and perhaps a sardonic mockery of the suppression society expected from all women.

How wide from all that is open to similar comment, is the carriage and behaviour of Lady Isabella! how clear! how transparent, how free from all conjecture of blemish! They may each, indeed, essentially be innocent . . . yet how far more highly is the true feminine character preserved, where surmise is not raised, than where it can be parried! Think but of those tow ladies, and mark the difference. Lady Isabella, addressed only where known, followed only because loved, sees no adulators encircling her, for adulation would alarm her; no admirers paying her homage, for such homage would offend her. She knows she has not only her own innocence to guard, but the honour of her husband. Whether she is happy with him or not, this deposit is equally sacred (476).

However severe this sounds to contemporary ears, such were the dictates of social values during the eighteenth-century. Edgar’s remonstrance towards Camilla’s future behavior conveys the heavy sense of moral worth determined by the smallest actions.

Despite Camilla’s successful navigation through the rigors of social intercourse without the guidance of her parents, her very placement in the midst of the elite offers its own danger. Camilla’s reputation is not only affected by her actions, but by the actions of those she associates with. This ‘guilt by association’ is a prevalent theme with Burney; Cecilia, too, suffers in reputation for her intimacy with the Harrels. Edgar is an ever-vigilant observer of Camilla’s character; extremely uneasy by the company surrounding her, he rejoices in the end of her residence with Mrs. Berlinton and the set that accompanies her everywhere. Edgar tells Camilla that he will not comment on his relief;
nor yet on another, and far more important topic, will I now touch, --the present evening recreation at Mrs. Berlinton's. I know you are merely a spectatress, and I will not alarm your friends, nor dwell myself, upon collateral mischiefs, or eventual dangers, from a business that in three days will end, by your restoration to the most respectable of all protections (708).

Although Camilla returns to the safety of her parents' household, the hard lessons she learnt about economy and social pressure accompany her home. These are met by the similar, although significantly larger, character failings of her brother Lionel.

Lionel's character, in concurrence with other male gamesters in Burney's novel, receives far less censure for his wasteful ways than women who practice the same vices. Gaming in men appears to have been tolerated as a necessary social evil; Edgar escapes this by residing primarily in the country. Yet the treatment of Lionel for his debts is in general far less harsh than the implication of moral licentiousness on his sister's part for want of economy in the same setting. Mr. Tyrold readily restructures the household to pay off the enormous ill-contrived debts of his only son.

These new regulations were quietly, but completely, put into practice, before he would discharge one bill for his son; to whom, nevertheless, though his conduct was strict, his feelings were still lenient. He attributed not to moral turpitude his errors nor his crimes, but to the prevalence of ill example, and to an unjustifiable and dangerous levity, which irresistibly led him to treat with mockery and trifling the most serious subjects (765).

Lionel's general debts are treated with a condoning benevolence that suggests the far range men where given to err and waste. Burney uses this event to offset Mr. Tyrold's
opinion of gaming debts and material debts, foreshadowing a far more serious
consequence for Camilla’s pecuniary misadventures. Mr. Tyrold is less willing to settle
ambiguous debt presented by individuals;

But the debts called debts of honour, met not with similar treatment. He
answered with spirited resentment demands he deemed highly flagitious, counselling
those who sent them, when they next applied to an unhappy family to whose calamities
they had contributed, to enquire first if its principles, as well as its fortune, made the
hazards of gaming amongst its domestic responsibilities (765).

Mr. Tyrold’s disdain for gaming is highlighted; although only a small part of Camilla’s
debt is related to lotteries, her actions weigh in all the more heavily because of the
damage to the family estate done by her irresponsible brother. Consequently, although
her father expects such wanton behavior from his son, the same behavior in his daughter,
however unwillingly engendered, is compounded by the inability of the family to rescue
her from her mistakes as they did Lionel.

Camilla, forced to resort to a moneylender to cover her expenses incurred traveling
with Mrs. Arlbery and Mrs. Berlinton, patiently awaits her disgraceful conduct to be
exposed in solitude and reflection. “She lived, meanwhile, wholly shut up from all
company, consigned to penitence for her indiscretions, to grief for the fate of her sister,
and to wasting regret of her own causelessly lost felicity” (808). This period of anxious
limbo for Camilla is paralleled by continued narrative of Mrs. Berlinton’s lifestyle.
Temporarily ashamed by her debts, Mrs. Berlinton sorrowfully ends her whirlwind social
life; jolted by disappointment in the elopement of her lover with another, she returns to
listless distraction and gaming. By showing the progress of dissipation in another female
character, Burney highlights the escape her heroine effected against a morose backdrop of “the other path.”

The Faro Table was now re-opened, and again but too powerfully sharpened the faculties which mortification had blunted. A company the most miscellaneous composed her evening assemblies, which were soon, nevertheless, amongst the most fashionable, as well as crowded of the metropolis. Whatever there, is new and splendid, is sure of a run for at least a season. Enquiries into what is right, or strictures upon what is wrong, rarely molest popularity, till the rise of some fresher luminary gives fashion another abode (809).

Burney emphasizes the never-ending, thrill filled lifestyle pursued by the social elite with a pointed reflection on its degenerating enticements. Conversely, she reintroduces the proper moral character of Lady Isabella to illustrate the differences in behavior necessary to maintain a respectable reputation.

Lady Isabella and Camilla are brought together again through the marriage negotiations of Camilla’s cousin Indiana. More importantly, however, is the expanding realization on Camilla’s part of the ramifications associated with her former close acquaintance. Lady Isabella, albeit later rather than sooner, exemplifies to Camilla the countenance and behavior a true gentlewoman should exhibit. Camilla recognizes her new friend’s prudence and wistfully wishes herself endowed with the same attributes.

Ah, why, she thought, while unable to reply, or to listen to what was said, why new I not this charming woman, while yet he [Edgar] took an interest in my conduct and connexions! Perhaps her gentle wisdom might have drawn me into its own path! how would he have delighted to see me under such influence! (820).
Although this friendship is formed so late in Camilla's story, it is by no means less significant. Camilla has by this time learnt the value of precise and calculated behavior in society, and does not lose the opportunity of having a second chance to benefit from this valuable acquaintance.

As they proceed to Mrs. Berlinton's house, where her cousin Indiana is temporarily residing, Camilla reflects on the implications her intimacy with the lady of the house. Lady Isabella mentions on this journey that she had never once heard of Miss Tyrold at the assemblies at Mrs. Berlinton's. Camilla "quietly replied that she had never been present at them; but a look of sensibility with which her eyes dropt, spoke more than she intended, of concern at their existence, or at least frequency" (822). Lord O'Lerney, who is accompanying the ladies, speculates on the reasons for Mrs. Berlinton's preoccupations with such habits.

"Your lovely young hostess," said Lord O'Lerney, "has entered the world at too early an hour to be aware of the surfeit she is preparing herself, by this unremitting luxury of pleasure; but I know so well her innocence and good qualities, that I doubt not but the error will bring its own cure, and she will gladly return to the literary and elegant intercourse, which she has just now given up for one so much more tumultuous" (822).

The realization that such behavior very effectively casts tangible aspersions onto a young woman's moral character frightens Camilla. "Grateful for herself, but extremely grieved for the idea that seemed to have gone forth of Mrs. Berlinton, she felt a tear start into her eye" (822). Hearing of the dissipation her friend engages in from a third party, and seen in a more prudent light, Camilla is ashamed at her association with the aforementioned
activities, and can only hope that her lack of participation saves her from the same censure.

Narrowly escaping the same cause of financial distress that Mrs. Berlinton suffers from does not exonerate Camilla. She is still forced to deal with her own debts in an equally painful circumstance. The money-lender presents his bill to Mr. Tyrold, unwilling to wait longer for repayment. When confronted with yet more of his children’s debts, Mr. Tyrold agrees to pay the sum Camilla has incurred when he is able. The wanton behavior of Lionel prevents immediate satisfaction, and Mr. Tyrold is thrown into prison for Camilla’s debts. This dramatic turn of events compounds the guilt that Camilla carries, and in an emotional confession to Lady Isabella reveals that she has dealt with the consequences of her irresponsible behavior badly.

‘Your Ladyship hears me,’ she said, in conclusion, ‘with the patience of benevolence, though I fear, with the censure of all judgment. What evils have accrued from want of consideration and foresight! My errors have all been doubled by concealment—every mischief has been augmented by delay. O, Lady Isabella! how sad an example shall I add to your powers of benign instruction! From day to day, from hour to hour, I planned expedients, where I ought to have made confessions! To avoid one dreadful—but direct evil, what I have suffered has been nearly intolerable—what I have inflicted, unpardonable!’ (831).

Only when this scenario manifests itself does Camilla realize the faulty judgment that characterized her short time in society. Yet she does learn, and repent heartily, of all her dealings with the various characters who contributed to her pecuniary discomfort. The lesson here, as Caroline Gonda points out, is a character altering one. Gonda describes
"the happy, spontaneous, warmly impulsive Camilla" as having "become a trembling victim of sensibility: her impetuous speeches must give way to a prayerful silence 'more eloquent, as well as safer than any speech,' a dumbshow of gratitude" (Gonda 136). Clearly Burney implies that the lesson of experience that Camilla learns crushes the endearing spirit that made the inexperienced heroine so charming.

This novel ends in a typical fashion; Camilla regains the love of Edgar, who wavered in the face of her independent and unwholesome adventures amongst her new friends, and marries him. Edgar's fortune is significant, and he discharges all the debts in which Camilla had any share. The heroine has learned a valuable lesson; without the guidance of those more experienced, she is vulnerable prey to society. Poignant, too, is Burney's portrayal of recreational gaming; the ease and captivation which cards and social diversions offer hide the inherent evils that accompany all forms of games of chance. A young woman entering society must guard her moral reputation carefully and choose her friends wisely, as any small mistake is enough to create ruinous obstacles to her future happiness.

Endnotes

1 Edgar Mandelbert is the ward of Mr. and Mrs. Tyrol, as well as the predestined love interest of Camilla.

2 Contained in the Berg Collection in the New York Public Library are hundreds of scraps of paper with character descriptions from Burney's various works. Among them are notes on Camilla's family, including such notations as "Harry [Lionel] turns out the scourge of his family," "the father's grief and shame," "H is in perpetual scrapes but end in false alarms," "engages in deeper schemes all concluding in having a painful suspense and surmise on their nature and design and end," "tormentor yet delight of his house, late hours, had connections. Gaming of Harry, dishart his family."
Mrs. Berlinton’s lover Bellamy abducts and forces into marriage Eugenia Tyrold (Camilla’s sister), to secure her fortune as the heiress of the Tyrold estate. This estate was settled on Eugenia irrevocably when he was disfigured by smallpox.

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CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

_It is impossible & improper to keep up an acquaintance with a Female who has lost her character, however sincerely they may be objects of Pity_ (Burney, _Letters_ 153).

The underlying lesson in all of Frances Burney’s novels is quite clear: proper behavior is essential in surviving the rigors of social life. She knew at a young age, as the above quote shows, that guarded virtue, moral and physical, was the most important and valuable assets a young unmarried woman could have. The intrinsic dangers to a young girl’s reputation were varied and often hidden behind the guise of entertainment. Social gaming proved to be a tangible threat to moral virtue. By addressing these norms Burney exposed a previously unexplored danger to reputation. Her female characters suffered from unique and pointed situations in a way quite different from other contemporary literary heroines.

Novels of instruction took on an increasingly important role during the later eighteenth-century; with a large body of women literate and eager to read, the necessity of gender-guided texts increased. Many literary forms were aimed particularly at women, like conduct books, letters, magazines, and novels; this reading constituted “an event somewhere between the private sphere and the social sphere” that shaped opinions and informed sheltered women about the ways and events of the world around them.
While men’s reading was shown to facilitate intellectual development, women’s tended to be located in the female body. Consequently it was believed to have a direct effect not only on female morals but also on the female body. Women’s reading in the eighteenth-century provided them with thumb-nail sketches of fictional female characters, sharpening contrasts between sensible and foolish, virtuous and vicious (5). Burney was no exception, and her characters show through misinformed or misguided folly the proper way to handle inappropriate social situations that threaten their moral reputations.

The issue of gaming, usually represented as a distinguishing characteristic of the upper classes, also garnered public attention through literature, newspapers, and social scandal. The “gamester” of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was as much or more someone who took part in the typically aristocratic leisure activities of field sports, private theatricals, and chivalric courtship as someone who played games of chance for stakes or money (Franklin 35). In Burney’s time gaming and extravagant wagering were ingrained and sociably acceptable past times. The predominance with which gaming appears in each of Burney’s novels signals the very real presence and threat it posed for naïve females, both on and off the pages of fiction.

_Evelina_ reflects Burney’s initial experiences in society. As Margaret Doody explains, to the extent that the novel is “about” Evelina’s growing up it may be termed a Bildungsroman, still relatively rare in the eighteenth century. A virtuous heroine cannot be a good-hearted picaro, and the scope for exhibited learning and formation is limited. The typical solution to show a heroine’s formation and development is to show her making some giant mistake and learning to repent of it (Doody 45). Evelina, as well as
Burney’s later heroines, do just that. Although Evelina’s mistakes are miniscule, Cecilia and Camilla make more ruinous choices, some of which are recoverable, some of which are not.

Evelina is wrongly identified as a “poor weak girl” by Orville in the beginning of the novel because she cannot yet arrange a social personality, a mask that will project the self she both is and wants to be. As Doody points out, the struggle toward social identity is complicated because Evelina cannot achieve this on her own terms. Her character is identified instead by the people with whom she associates. Women are defined by the men they socialize with, primarily because the male sex creates all the laws, economic arrangements, and social connections which give or withhold status (45). Thus the importance of the company she chooses and keeps is of paramount self-interest for Evelina.

While Evelina must struggle to develop her own personality, Cecilia must struggle against the friendly inclinations of hers. Although Burney’s second heroine is gifted with self-confidence and a sense of humor, she exercises decidedly poor judgment in emotional matters. From the very beginning of the novel Cecilia is blind to the dangerous repercussions of her friendships (111). The problem of how and when Cecilia should act for herself is a constant one in this novel. Cecilia’s generosity leads unequivocally to her financial ruin. While lack of parents and husband contribute greatly to Cecilia’s poor financial decisions, her friends unconsciously conspire to relieve Cecilia of her fortune and property as well. As Doody emphasizes, class and money are the ruling powers in this novel, and no one can escape their force; they dictate the original assumptions
determining an individual’s ideas as to his/her behavior, whether it is right or wrong, prudent or imprudent. People may act badly from sincere morality (119).

Burney’s third novel *Camilla*, arrived in the middle of the decade’s interests and controversies, many of them centering on the uselessness of time spend on dress and parties by young girls, and the importance of learning something useful to employ their minds (213). One of the central focuses of *Camilla* is debt, and how Burney’s heroine suffers financial embarrassment through a variety of means. Imprudence on Camilla’s part leads to several uncomfortable financial and emotional situations. Only through learning the value of male guidance (the larger lesson, although Camilla’s troubles are due largely to men) and the necessity for modesty in expenditures does Camilla become a “responsible” person. While her behavior is as guarded as it can be, the society she moves in exposes her to gaming and behavioral improprieties that tarnish Camilla’s reputation in the eyes of her family and suitor. Although she struggles to maintain a separate and irreproachable demeanor, the reality of social interaction creates conflict and consequence.

The financial problems and social power shifts that gaming gave rise to garnered serious attention in the decades following Burney’s novels. As Franklin points out, the nineteenth-century realist novel, perhaps more than any preceding or subsequent broadly disseminated cultural form, functioned as a vehicle for anti-gambling discourse (Franklin 47). Novels were simply one popular way cultural trends and societal concerns were expressed. By the 1820’s Parliament passed a series of acts outlawing participation in lotteries (foreign and domestic)—a form of gaming that enjoyed popularity in England with few interruptions since 1566. The rise in its popularity and the various forms and
extremities to which the aristocracy carried it made gaming a national concern. Franklin says that “British gambling legislation had been enacted primarily to protect aristocratic gamesters from the gamblers or ‘sharps,’ to protect aristocrats from themselves in the event of quarrels over gambling, and to limit the extent or rate of the redistribution of wealth that might occur through gambling” (47). Clearly, by this time the widespread notoriety of leisure class gaming had taken on a life of its own, and the state felt it necessary to address an issue that threatened to consume the moral character of English social life.

Burney’s first two novels were published to critical acclaim, establishing her reputation as a witty and insightful author and securing interest in future literary works. Although few contemporary reviews remain available to study, several do exist in the Barrett Collection housed in the British Library. An article in the Monthly Review, dated April 1 (1778), pronounced Evelina “one of the most sprightly, entertaining, & agreeable productions of this kind, which has of late [come to our] notice.” (Barrett Collection 3696 Vol. VII, ff. 5 - Hereafter cited as BC). Gentleman’s Magazine describes Cecilia as a novel holding up “a Minor [person] to the gay and dissipated of both sexes, in which they may see themselves, and their deformities, at full length” This review also remarks on the author [Burney] exhibiting “more knowledge of the world, or the ton, than could be expected from the years of the fair Authoress.” Commenting on the moral lesson Burney sought to impart on the dangers of social gaming, the reviewer states that if half of society were “to profit from [the novel’s] precepts & examples, & to stop short on the brink of the precipice, over which they are Fast tumbling, her [Burney’s] benevolent intentions won’d [would] be fully answered” (BC ff. 6). The author of the review urges
Cecilia upon the public with “out warmest recommendations, which of late we have seldom found occasion to give to romances.” (BC ff. 6) Clearly the general literary public were more than passably impressed with the insight and wit that characterized Burney’s first major undertakings.

In an essay on Fanny Burney by Dr. Blair appearing in Dissertations Moral and Critical, Blair exempts Burney from the censure leveled at popular novelists. He tells the reader that “from this censure, however, candour requires that I shall now exempt Evelina and Cecilia; two performances, which I had not seen when this Discourse was first printed, but have lately read with the great admiration of the genius of the fair Author.” (BC ff. 7) Blair also compares Burney’s delineations of present manners and some of her characters as not inferior to Henry Fielding himself. This is high praise for any aspiring author, and the fact that such a compliment was bestowed on a young female author, still relatively rare in the literary market place, speaks for itself. Burney’s reputation continued to build; by the time announcements for her third novel Camilla appeared in print, the subscriber list included a diverse and respectable list of names. Among the people anxiously awaiting Camilla were Dukes and Duchesses of the realm (including the infamous Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire), dozens of lower nobility, clergy, the Kendal Library, fourteen French aristocrats, and one Miss J. Austen of Steventon. Her importance in later eighteenth-century literature is indisputable, particularly in light of the widespread popularity of Burney’s works.

While these novels exhibited a wide range of social issues, gaming is a constant presence in Burney’s social fictions, reflecting the concrete reality of such hazardous
practices in society. That Burney’s heroines strive to avoid misguided behavior is not enough; Burney clearly shows readers that social situations have the ability to tarnish even the most innocent bystanders. Although the ever-present moral guardians in Burney’s novels (usually men) attempt to protect and shelter the characters, they fail miserably and actually contribute to the discomfort of both Cecilia and Camilla. While the outline for masculine protection and guidance is very “correctly” present, Burney uses it to show the failings of the social structure and the unfair standards applied strictly to women. Careful choice of company and the need for male guidance against corrupting entities in society prove visibly, but somewhat sardonically portrayed, as necessities for young women in Burney’s time.

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